

by Craig Harrison

# Cultivating the LEADER in You

*The characteristics, qualities and values that define outstanding leadership*



Whether you are a seasoned executive, a new manager, or someone who aspires to lead others, you can cultivate the leader within you by emulating the way successful leaders think, speak and act. The principles shared by great leaders are applicable to many non-business endeavors as well, from coaching a sports team to coordinating activities at your school or church.

Here is a sampling of the 101 leadership traits included in my book, *Cultivating the Leader in You!* How many do you share?

■ Successful leaders show up. They arrive early, stay late, and are visible to others. They are accessible and accountable.

■ Prescient leaders see the diamond in the rough. They scope out potential and see the proverbial oak tree within the acorn.

■ Top leaders understand leadership isn't a popularity contest. Hard decisions must be made. Leadership is not about being loved; it's about doing what's right and making sometimes-unpopular decisions.

■ Ambitious leaders embrace continuous learning. They read voraciously and continue to build their own skills, through workshops, conferences, retreats, coaching and more.

■ Resilient leaders have thick skin. They understand criticism comes with the territory. They don't run and hide or take personal offense as the ultimate target of discontent, either within or from beyond an organization.

■ Leaders have a sense of humor, especially as it pertains to themselves. They are secure enough to be able to laugh at themselves.

■ Leaders are exceptional listeners. They hear what is said, what is unsaid, and what is implied.

■ Effective leaders are clear communicators. They don't just give instructions that can be understood – they give instructions that can't be misunderstood.

■ Leaders honor the successes of their subordinates. They are magnanimous in praising others. They recognize the importance of recognition and are not miserly with it.

■ Leaders study leadership. They learn from great business leaders, generals, and heads of state, sports coaches and managers, and the best and the brightest of their colleagues. They read books, magazines, watch movies on leadership and listen to leadership speakers.

■ Leaders delegate. It shows trust, builds skills in others, and frees them to do more important tasks.

■ Leaders have mental toughness. They are not easily swayed by public opinion, prevailing winds or the theme of the month. Their core principles guide them. They know their beliefs and stick to them, through thick and thin.

■ Leaders abhor prejudice. They take the threats of racism, sexism, homophobia, religious intolerance and other inappropriate workplace behaviors seriously. They create healthy work environments where all employees can do their best, unencumbered by prejudice and discrimination.

■ Top leaders identify what's holding key employees back and work with them to shore up their areas of weakness. Private coaching, training or counseling can make a difference.

■ True leaders build confidence in others. Tyrants intimidate. Egotists build themselves up at the expense of others. Insecure leaders are threatened by the growth of others around them. True leaders pave the way to growth for their entire team.

■ Fit leaders keep in shape. They are mentally, physically and emotionally fit. They keep their lives in balance.

■ Well-rounded leaders have big hearts. They are guided by compassion, love and care for other human beings. They play to win without ruthlessness.

■ Leaders love to lead. They don't resent it, instead of whining and complaining about it they recognize all that comes with the territory. They aren't reluctant, recalcitrant or otherwise reticent to lead. They embrace it!

■ Leaders remain cool under fire. They don't panic. They take adversity in stride and their calmness under duress reassures others.

■ Successful leaders take the high road. At times they take hits for not responding in kind when criticized. They understand as a leader sometimes it's a trap to prove to others you're right. They abstain from wars of words.

■ Leaders are dreamers. They envision what could be, not just what is. And their dreams inspire others at the same time. John Quincy Adams said: "If your actions inspire others

to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

■ Leaders persevere. Epicurean poet Lucretius noted that "drops of rain make a hole in the stone, not by violence, but by oft falling."

■ The most successful leaders are hard workers. They put the time in to generate great results. They know the harder they work the luckier they become. Success accrues to those who diligently outwork the field.

■ The best leaders don't carry grudges. It's excess baggage and interferes with future success. They're bigger than that.

■ Leaders inspire. They share visions, ideas and initiatives in ways that captivate others. They use language that captures the hearts as well as the minds of others.

■ Leaders are ambitious. Their visions are grandiose, their aim is set high, and their goals are lofty.

■ Leaders understand human nature. They understand the psychology of failure and of success, and are able to keep others focused,

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enthusied and motivated, regardless of the circumstances.

■ Leaders learn from defeat. They regroup, regroup and ultimately triumph over their obstacles. There is great learning in having fallen short.

■ Leaders employ the velvet touch. They can influence as well as dictate, persuade as well as command.

■ Leaders thrive on adversity. They are undaunted by long odds, uncharted territories and skeptics in their midst.

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# The Leader in You

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- Leaders cherish time. They're efficient and productive, using increments of time and resources strategically. They prioritize to get things done.
- Leaders are catalysts. They accelerate the action. Their leadership ignites motion, mobilizes resources and channels energies to effect a solution.
- Leaders expect to succeed. They carry themselves with confidence in pursuit of their goals. Their belief in their visions won't allow them to dwell on obstacles and naysayers.
- Leaders step up and accept the challenge. It's easy for many to say no, to shirk from challenges or do nothing. Not so for leaders. They step up, step out and on occasion, step in it, but they act! And in doing so, they shape our world.

## The Next Step

Now that you know what leaders do, what will you do? How will you lead? Where will you apply your skills, experiences and energy to make a difference in our world? □

*Excerpted from Cultivating the Leader in You (Expressions of Excellence!, 2008). To order customized versions of this mini-book, visit ExpressionsOfExcellence.com or call (510) 547-0664.*

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Excerpted from Craig's book  
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