

# The many faces of effective leaders



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A lot of people think leaders are born and not made. I disagree. I think you can become a better leader. I'm not a cook, but I've held many leadership positions. I thought this recipe for a leader sounded pretty good:

Have all ingredients at body temperature. Sift intelligence, ambition and understanding together. Mix cooperation, initiative and open-mindedness until dissolved. Gradually add ability, tactfulness and responsibility. Stir in positive attitude and judgment. Beat in patience until smooth. Blend all ingredients well. Sprinkle liberally with cheerfulness and bake in the oven of determination. When absorbed thoroughly, cool and spread with kindness and common sense.

If that seems like a long list of ingredients, it is. But good leadership won't happen if any of those items are missing.

I love to study leaders and the different ways they lead. If there ever was a need for great leadership in a company, that time is now. Taking an organization through a good economy is tough enough. When the going gets rough, the real leaders shine. Consider the challenges that faced these leaders. The military presents many opportunities to observe leaders in action. For example, President (and general) Dwight Eisenhower used a simple device to illustrate the art of leadership. Laying an ordinary piece of string on a table, he'd illustrate how you could easily pull it in any direction. "However, try and push it," he cautioned, "and it won't go anywhere. It's just that way when it comes to leading people."

The Duke of Wellington, the British military leader who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, was a great commander but a difficult man to serve under. He was a perfectionist and very demanding, who complimented his subordinates only on rare occasions. In retirement, a visitor asked Wellington what he would do differently if he had his life to live over again. The old Duke thought for a moment and then said, "I'd give people I worked with more praise."

The famous general and Macedonian king Alexander the Great led by example. As he led an army across the desert, a soldier came up to him, knelt down and offered him a helmet filled with precious water. "Is there enough there for 10,000 men?" asked Alexander. When the soldier shook his head, Alexander poured the water out on the desert sands, refusing to take even a sip.

My friend Marilyn Carlson Nelson, chairman of Carlson, wrote in her book "How We Lead Matters," "The fact is that being a leader in any field requires discipline, effort and, yes, sacrifice. It can be all-consuming. And during that time, life may not have much balance. It's been said, 'If you can't ride two horses at the same time, you should get out of the circus.' A circus is not at all a bad analogy for the swirl of demands placed on leaders at the top." Leaders are not always popular. Former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote in his book, "My American Journey," "I learned ... you cannot let the mission suffer, or make the majority pay to spare the feelings of an individual. I kept a saying under the glass of my desk at the Pentagon that made the point succinctly if inelegantly: 'Being responsible sometimes means pissing people off.'"

Ken Blanchard once told me, "The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority."

"A business leader has to keep their organization focused on the mission," says Meg Whitman, former CEO of Ebay. "That sounds easy, but it can be tremendously challenging in today's competitive and ever-changing business environment. A leader also has to motivate potential partners to join." Leadership guru Warren Bennis spent several years researching leaders for his book "Why Leaders Can't Lead." He traveled around the country spending time with 90 of the most effective and successful leaders in the nation -- 60 from corporations and 30 from the public sector. His goal was to find these leaders' common traits. At first, he had trouble pinpointing any common traits, for the leaders were more diverse than he had expected.

But he later wrote: "I was finally able to come to conclusions, of which perhaps the most important is the distinction between leaders and managers. Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right. Both roles are crucial, but they differ profoundly. I often observe people in top positions doing the wrong thing well."

Mackay's Moral: Good leaders inspire others with confidence in them. Great leaders inspire them with confidence in themselves.