

# CHARACTER

## Most important asset

What were the ingredients that made some of the greatest leaders of all times? First in the series on 'leadership', this article takes you through an array of real life examples to establish 'character' as the most important asset of a true leader. Read on to find out more...

Sanjeev Baitmangalkar

Leadership is the art of accomplishing more than the science of management says is possible – General Colin Powell. If asked to picture 'leadership', what would you see? How would it look? What would it wear and drive? What qualities would you find in it? What recognition would you associate with it? What name would you assign to it? For those of you who have read the Bhagwat Gita know that there is every management lesson in there. The best form of leadership this world has known and recognises, came in a frail-looking form, always wore a hand woven loin cloth, a stick for a walking companion, usually walked on God given legs and sometimes rode the third class compartment of a steam engine train. Both humble and simple to the core, his elevated level of thinking made this 5-ft something person walk tall. Not only did he liberate a nation, but also inspired many. The name is Mahatma – Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. And like him are others, like Nelson Mandela and you can make your own list. Many like to be leaders, the egoistic

like to be recognised as leaders, but what human qualities must we learn, imbibe and practice everyday to become a leader? The author takes you through a series of articles enumerating the character qualities that recognize and make a leader, using simple examples to enumerate his point. Read on to find out what they are...

I remember one particular flight in a Beachcraft plane; one monsoon day as we flew into Bombay's Santa Cruz airport and were circling, waiting for our landing clearance. The winds were gusty, it was pouring cats and dogs, the visibility was bad and we were dependant on the instrument landing system (ILS) to land us safely. All of a sudden there was a heavy gush of wind that blew us off the flight path, and we came dangerously close to colliding with a Boeing 747. It could have been history in the skies over Santa Cruz, but we were destined to live and tell you the story. It was a bad weather day and the pilot had to use all his skills to land us safely. Undertaking the flight was important, as we



had on board an important passenger who had to connect with his international flight that night. But for flying this corporate plane, he would not have made it in time for his connection. The bad weather condition was known and the pilot could have refused to fly in such unsafe conditions. Instead, he put his own life at risk to help this gentleman connect with his international flight. On board, seeing him fight to hold his flight path and land us safely, I could not but admire his character, determination, commitment and concern for those of us on board and towards his duty. Character is made of sterner stuff.

Bill Lear is hailed as the father of modern days corporate flying. He saw the potential corporate requirements of flying as early as the 1950s. Working on his dream, he flew the first Lear Jet in 1963. An year later, he began making commercial deliveries of Lear Jet planes. Not long after making quite a few deliveries, he found out that two of his jets had crashed. Unable to pinpoint the cause, he immediately asked all his customers to ground these planes until he had solved the problem that led to the crashes. He decided to fly the jet himself and simulate the failure condition. He nearly lost control of his plane on this dangerous exercise and put his own life at high risk. Luckily, he was able to control the plane and land safely. Having understood the problem, he not only came up with a solution, but also fitted new parts on all the earlier planes. Grounding the planes cost him a lot of money and also planted seeds of doubt in the minds of people. It probably affected his business as well over the next couple of years. Do you think Lear regretted his decision? No. Never. What did he display in his actions? He displayed that he was willing to risk his success, his fortune and his life to solve the mystery of those crashes – but not

his integrity, and that, takes character.

How a leader deals with the circumstances of life tells you many things about his character. A crisis doesn't make character, but certainly reveals it. "Adversity is a cross road that makes a person choose one of the two paths – character or compromise" - John Maxwell. Every time you choose character, you become stronger even if the choice brings negative consequences or results. Development of one's character is at the heart of one's development not just as a leader, but also as a human being.

Late C V S Rao remains one of Karnataka's most respected police chiefs even today. I remember him visiting us at Sainik School, taking the ceremonial salute and encouraging the boys to join the police force. His request did not go in vain, as it has produced one of the most decorated and respected police officers of today. One day, he was driving to work, for an important meeting. On the roadside, he saw a mother and son crying for help. The boy had met with an accident and was bleeding, and the helpless mother crying for help. Time was running out, and he had to rush for an important meeting. He got out of his car, put the woman and her son in it and instructed the driver to take them to the hospital and ensure that they were attended to, immediately. He took an auto rickshaw to his meeting. Later in the day, he followed up on the condition of the boy. Words are often deceptive but actions are not. 'Actions speak louder than words.' Your action is the real indicator of your character. Your character determines who you are. Who you



**Commitment  
Integrity  
Ethics  
Charisma  
Othermindedness**



**Pride  
Cynicism  
Moodiness  
Insecurity  
Perfectionism**



are, determines what you see. What you see determines what you do. That is why a leader's character is synonymous with his actions. If a leader's intentions and actions are working against one another, a look at his character will tell you why. Character is much more than just talk.

Leading an organisation, I was once confronted with the threat of closure of the factory because of absolutely 'no orders'. It was a very difficult situation. The jobs and lives of so many employees, their families, suppliers and dependants were at stake. I could either blame the marketing department on its failure to secure orders, or take charge of the situation. I chose the latter. You don't know what you can get done, until you try. Six months later, we had turned the situation around 180° and zapped every one of our problems. We may not have control over a lot of things in life. However, we can certainly choose our character. In a tough situation, what choice would you make? Would you walk away or ride it out? Would you bend the truth or stand under its credence? Would you pay the price or take easy money? You continue to create your character as you live your life making these choices. Remember talent may be a gift, but character is a choice.

Great leaders surround themselves with people who compliment their skills, both internal and external to their organisation. "Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose and also the character that inspires confidence," said Bernard Montgomery, the British field marshal. Leaders involve other people. When a leader's character is flawed, his followers will not trust him and will therefore refuse to follow him. Character brings lasting success with people.

Psychologist Steven Berglas says in his book 'The Success Syndrome', that people who achieve a great deal of success and reach great heights, but lack the foundation of character to sustain them through stress, are headed for disaster. Either one of the four

- arrogance, loneliness, destructive adventure seeking or adultery - would be the attributed cause. Each of them is an appalling price to pay. Leaders cannot rise above the limitations of their character. A leader who is sucked in by any of these four qualities must seek help. If cracks in character are unaddressed, they will worsen with time and can be detrimental to one's success.

If a leader is not struggling with any of the four negative qualities mentioned above, he must still examine his character all the time. He should seek to find out and understand whether his words and actions match all the time. When you say something, do you mean it and can you be trusted? True leaders come out genuine and forthright. Leaders stick to their convictions, walk their talk and their actions mirror their words. Character is your most important asset, and you must remember this as you lead your company or team at work, your family or neighbourhood. Allan Bernard once stated, "The respect that leadership must have requires that one's ethics be without question. A leader not only stays above the line between the right and the wrong, he stays well clear off all gray areas."

One can improve one's character by searching for cracks and looking for those areas where you might like to cut corners. Writing them down will help; thereafter, look for the patterns that emerge. Identify your weaknesses or patterns in problems that keep repeating. This will help you diagnose character issues. By facing your flaws, apologising and dealing with the consequences of your actions, you can begin the journey of your character rectification.

### Charisma

Perhaps no subject has captivated the business audience more than leadership. Within the practice of leadership, charisma is thought to be the quality that, though often considered metaphysical, represents the hallmark of inspirational leadership. If leadership has something to do with inspiring a cadre of followers to do things not only in their own interest, but also for the greater good, then we certainly need individuals who have a special talent to recruit others to work together towards a common cause. Often,

"When you set yourself on fire, people love to come and see you burn"  
Evangelist, John Wesley



such individuals have heroic qualities because they persist inspite of the odds against them.



They possess characteristics such as courage and persistence, to face and prevail against those who would resist their noble efforts.

Simply stated, 'charisma' is the ability to draw people to you (outside your official power zone). Benjamin Disraeli was said to be a charismatic leader. A woman once wrote after she had dinner with William Gladstone (four time PM of England) and Benjamin Disraeli, (twice PM of England), that when she dined with Gladstone, she felt he was the cleverest man alive, but when she dined with Disraeli he made her feel that she was the cleverest person alive. One focussed on himself, while the other focussed on a person other than himself. Disraeli had charisma, and people wanted to follow him. Dan Reiland, on the question of how you can have charisma, says, "be more concerned about making others feel good about themselves, than you are making them feel good about you." Industrialist Charles Schwab adds "I have yet to find the man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism."



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People like to have leaders who enjoy life. They certainly do not like the company of a grumpy, bitter or depressed leader. A leader with charisma will spruce life into others even in the face of great adversity, simply because they are passionate about life. They celebrate, they don't complain. "When you set yourself on fire, people love to come and see you burn" – evangelist, John Wesley.

When I was asked to lead the Bridgeport joint venture in South East Asia (the company had been in existence for five years but had failed to produce even their first machine), I

began by putting a 10 on every person's head. This brought out the best in them. It helped develop belief in themselves and helped the cause. If you can bestow gifts on others, they will not only be attracted to you, but would also be grateful. Hope is the greatest of all possessions. I gave them hope of revival and a turnaround. Six months later, they had accomplished it and created history.

Using the earlier cited example of facing the threat of closure of the factory I was incharge of; there was gloom then in the ranks. People were demoralised with the prospect of closure being voiced to them by some senior managers, but, I never believed that closure was a possibility. I had to lift their morale. I had to bring back belief. I was genuinely concerned for them. One afternoon, I gathered the men on the lawns and shared my dream and vision of the future for the company. In a nutshell, I told them that, soon we would have so many orders that their problem would be, 'how to cope with the demand'. Soon we would have a better product mix that, neither the redundancy of a product nor process could affect us, the barriers to entry that we would erect, would protect us for the next eight to ten years at least. I told them what I honestly believed in my heart. People love leaders who share themselves, their dreams as well as vision. When at their core, people know you have been honest with them, they will trust you and follow you. "When it comes to charisma, the bottom line is othermindedness. Leaders who think about others and their concerns, before thinking of themselves, exhibit charisma" – John Maxwell.

There are five negative qualities or roadblocks to charisma, that one must watch out for and avoid; such as pride, cynicism, moodiness, insecurity and perfectionism. It is possible to overcome these blocks by observing yourself in your daily interactions and seeing how much of your talk is concentrated on yourself. Change your focus from yourself, onto others. When you meet someone for the first time, try the impression game by asking positive questions about the other person. Lastly, try to add value by sharing yourself, your goals, your dreams, and resources. **MMT**

Look out for Part 2 in the February 07 issue.