

What Good Leaders Need

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I probably spend too much time looking at my news feeds multiple times a day. Sometimes I think this new habit (caused by the advent of unlimited data on my I-phone!) gets me sidetracked or going down a rabbit hole opening article after article. However, one of the benefits of this seemingly constant stream of new information being sent to me are the interesting articles on leadership that I would otherwise miss.

One of those came in today from *Inc. Magazine* - David Finkel's article "7 Leadership Qualities and Characteristics of a Good Leader." I always like to see what authors select as the most important characteristics or qualities of a good leader, since I find leadership to be a large and very complicated subject. I always tell my seminar participants that if leadership were easy, we'd all know more people who can do it well! However, it was actually his subtitle that really caught my attention – "There is always something to improve and work towards."

I spent most of my professional career in the field of leadership education. Whether it was involved in MBA, EMBA and specialized masters programs or in designing and delivering leadership development opportunities for working professionals.

My core belief is that the best work I did was with individuals who wanted to become better – better at what they do, better at how they lead, better at developing the people who work for them.

That's why I was so taken with Finkel's subtitle on this piece. Like him, I have found that the best leaders always are seeking to improve their skills and capabilities. To improve how they interact with their colleagues and staff. To improve the performance of the individuals who work for them in order to accelerate the performance and impact of their organization.

Finkel's list includes the following:

1. Focused
2. Deliberate
3. Mindful
4. Consistent
5. Strategic
6. Willing to admit you are wrong
7. Teachable

I believe this is a pretty good list (and there are many others out there), but I think his order is not quite correct. I believe we can give you tools and teach you to be more focused, deliberate, mindful, consistent and strategic. We can also help you be more open and willing to admit when you are wrong. However, we

can't teach you to do any of these six qualities or characteristics better if you are not open to learning – you have to be teachable! To me that is the necessary first step in the development of a good leader.

Nearly 40 years of experience working with leaders has taught me that once you decide you want to get better at leading, then you have to determine the best way for you to learn. The best opportunities combine multiple learning opportunities – feedback, practice, networking, application, exposure to new tools and perspectives. I believe that the best developmental learning opportunities also require you to have the time, place and space to step away so you can actually think about what you do. Otherwise, you will be overtaken by what you do and never have the time, space, facilitation and support necessary to really wrestle with the big issues. Self-awareness and reflection must be a key part of this development process.

My advice is to find a program that provides you the following:

- Concentrated time away so you can focus on your development
- Appropriate location and space for reflection
- Strong facilitation and subject matter experts
- Assessment instruments that provide you new insights
- Coaching and support to help you develop a development path forward
- Opportunities to apply what you learn
- New tools and perspectives to help you think differently and approach challenges in a new way
- Opportunities to build a strong professional support network

You must also realize that the hard work of leadership development happens after you leave a program. It takes courage, persistence, feedback, accountability and support to actually make the change you want to make.

The best leaders commit to their own development and to the development of the people who work for them. Being open to feedback and learning and willing to try new approaches is what makes you teachable. Now that you know the key, it's time for you to find the right leadership development opportunity for you.

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