

Seven characteristics of advancing leaders

I like to watch leaders.

Indeed I have observed and learned from them as far back as my memory extends. At this phase of life (late 50s) I continue to enjoy watching and learning from leaders. My son, Jess Rainer, and I did a study of Millennials that also generated a book. Our research included leadership issues related to this young-adult generation.



However, my observations are not limited to young adults. To the contrary, my research spans multiple generations and multiple vocations. I am particularly fascinated to watch those persons who are obviously on the move—those who seem to be both present and future leaders. Recently, I made an attempt to summarize seven general characteristics of these individuals, who are advancing in their organizations and in life in general. Here are the seven traits I noted. None of them should be a surprise:

The 7 characteristics

1. Strategic. Advancing leaders not only do what they are assigned, they are always thinking ahead. They take on responsibilities well beyond what their supervisors expect. While they excel at tackling today’s work, they are also thinking about what needs to be done for the future betterment of the organization.

2. Joyful. The leadership literature from 20 years or older rarely mentioned joy as a characteristic of advancing leaders. That is not the case today. Wise leaders now have devoted followers because the leader himself or herself demonstrates a joy that is contagious. As a corollary, advancing leaders tend to have fun with their work.

3. Articulate. These leaders have good communication skills, both verbal and written. If they are not particularly adept at communicating, they make their improvement a high priority in their leadership development. Advancing leaders speak well and write well.

4. Humble. Again, the leadership literature of a couple of decades ago rarely spoke of humility as a positive trait. To the contrary, some older publications implied that humility could be perceived as a weakness. Not surprisingly, confidence bordering on arrogance often surfaced among the leaders of the past. Today, advancing leaders are more likely than not to possess a humble disposition. Confident humility engenders “followship.”

5. Hard working. This trait has not changed over the years. Leadership is earned with hard work. Perhaps more today than the past, leadership is not the province of those who feel entitled to a position. Today, advancing leaders are paying their dues.

6. Grateful. If you want to see a stark contrast between an advancing leader and someone who is not, listen to their conversations. Advancing leaders are always grateful for opportunities; they rarely exhibit a sense of entitlement. Others are more likely to complain about the organization, co-workers, the government, other leaders in the organization, or someone else. Shortcomings are never their fault; someone else is to blame. To the contrary, advancing leaders typically take responsibility and express gratitude.

7. Innovative. Advancing leaders are creative and innovative. They have the ability to think outside the box. When they hit a roadblock, they just seem to find a way to move around the obstruction. I have no doubt that such leaders are formulating in their minds today many of the great ideas of the future.

Changing the world

It is indeed fun to watch these leaders as they advance in organizations and society. They are changing the world for the better in the future. Many of them are changing the world for the better today.

Which characteristics do you display in your leadership? Which ones do you need to strive to embrace? What traits have you noticed in other leaders that could be added to this list? Good leaders are always asking more questions.

Church Central Leadership Community
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