



What Does It Take To Be an Ethical Leader?

A poll conducted by the Associated Press shows that 55 percent of those surveyed consider honesty, integrity and other values of character the most important qualities they look for in a presidential candidate.

Apparently, a candidate's stand on issues, their experience or intelligence plays to a lesser degree.

You know, it's not all that different in most little corners of the world. Ask most people within a profession who they most like to work with, and the answer is usually, "someone I trust." It's one of the reasons I founded my agency as one that is ethically focused. I found over the years, that most of my business came via referrals from people who "trusted" me to be honest with them both in terms of my counsel and how I ran my business.

These are usually my best clients because they are honest with me and, in turn, we have a great working relationship.

So, how do we develop ethical leaders? Are they made, or are they born? What does it take to be a trusted leader?

I believe there are several key traits often found in ethical/trusted leaders:

They communicate their position: Ethical leaders set the standards and hold others to it. They let others know their expectations for ethical behavior and they clearly communicate their position to the rank and file. Year's ago, I had a boss who would say: the fish stinks from the head. In other words, if the leader can't be trusted, the entire organization can't be trusted. He was right.

They walk the walk: The trusted leaders I've known have always been the first to raise a flag on the play, even if it's to their own detriment. True leaders acknowledge their mistakes, learn from them and move forward. They rarely blame others for their own errors in judgment. If they expect ethical behavior, they do everything in their power to model it on a daily basis.

They reward and acknowledge positive behavior: Exceptional leaders know that if you want people to behave ethically, you need to acknowledge and reward their efforts to do so, holding them up as a positive example to those around them.

They avoid bad seeds: By the same token, trusted leaders know that a cancer needs to be re-

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moved from the organization if it's to remain healthy. They are not afraid to remove those that don't tow the ethical line.

Their personal brand supersedes their corporate brand: Leaders of integrity realize that organizations come and go, but their personal brand is what carries them forward with each new opportunity. They bring that integrity with them to shape each new opportunity ... it's their added value and their competitive advantage. This type of leader rarely compromises his/her honor for the sake of job because they know the latter can always be replaced.

Heading home in the car that day, I mulled over what I could have said to get the business. Could I have been more aggressive? Could I have focused on winning the business only to fix the issue later? After thinking it over I realized that my integrity is my stock in trade and, at the end of the day, this wasn't the type of client that would have fit with our business.

Ethical leadership is never an easy road. I know first hand that it doesn't always lead to instant riches. That said, exceptional leaders find a different type of wealth in the "road less traveled."

AP/Ipsos Poll (2007): Honesty, Integrity, Trump Policies for People When it Comes to Presidential Candidates (<http://www.ipsos-na.com/news/ap/>)