22 Vital Traits of Effective Leaders

Based on D.A.Benton’s How To Think Like A CEO: The 22 Vital Traits you need to be the person at the top, Warner Books, 1996, Copyright 1996 by D.A.Benton, p.33-213
The 22 Vital Traits

Approaching the Climb
*Vital Traits 1 through 8*

Bridging Gaps
*Vital Traits 14 through 22*

Putting It Into Practice
*Vital Traits 9 through 13*

Approaching the Climb
*Vital Traits 1 through 8*
## Approaching the Climb

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<th>Vital Trait # 1</th>
<th>Secure in self</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vital Trait # 2</td>
<td>In control of attitude</td>
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<td>Tenacious</td>
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<td>Vital Trait # 5</td>
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<td>Original</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vital Trait # 8</td>
<td>Publicly modest</td>
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Vital Trait # 1: Secure in Self

- Must be carried both inside the head and in the outside demeanour
- Confidence in yourself
- Self-Respect
- “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent”
- Being a “child” – children are not born with self-doubt
Vital Trait # 2: *In control of attitude*

- If you lose control, you lose
- "We smile because we want to, not because we have to"
- Success is based more on mental attitude than mental capabilities
- Until and unless you’re in command of your outlook, everyone and anyone can control you
- Switch from “Can I” to “I can” – consistently
- Change outlooks when you need to and want to
- Keep aware and in control of your bearing at all times through your physical and mental demeanour
Vital Trait #3: *Tenacious*

- Keep going until something stops you and keep going
- Persistence, determination and resolution
- Not giving up when everybody else says you should
- Not being stubborn to the level of stupidity persevere through disappointments, setbacks, frustrations and inequities
- Exceptions – *Know* when to give up, stop, walk away, let go; *Stop* if you are wrong
Vital Trait #4: Continuously Improving

• “You’ve got to be better and better, and if you don’t, you will be left behind”
• Means learning which begins with birth and ends with death
• Need to identify – what you need to know to do your job well; what would be useful to know; what would be fun to know
• Talk to people, learn from mistakes, learn from others’ experiences, emulate effective leaders, learn something new every day
• Do not learn if you’re using knowledge to hurt someone, do not flaunt your improvement to show how “smart” you are
Vital Trait #5: Honest and ethical

- Truth, integrity, being genuine, equitable, fair and frank
- Absence of fraud, deceit, and deception
- “There is no situational honesty. Honesty is honesty”
- Integrity goes along with honesty
- Without honesty there is no way to truly be a good human
- Be positively consistent in what you say, think and do
## Dos and Don’t’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t</th>
<th>Dos</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intentionally mislead or misrepresent</td>
<td>Be honest with yourself – internally and externally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Straddle the line</td>
<td>Remember how carefully you disguise the truth, someone will find out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Break promises and go back on your word</td>
<td>Remember your distrust of others will justify their distrust of you</td>
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<tr>
<td>Put a spin on it</td>
<td>Be precise, crisp and move on</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understand <em>mis</em>understanding</td>
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<td>Stop exaggeration</td>
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</table>
Vital Trait #6: *Thinking before talking*

- You are more responsible for your words and their result
- Your appear more intelligent
- You avoid repeating yourself
- “Act quickly, think slowly”
- Pre-thinking enables you to avoid saying something you wish you hadn’t
- “Don’t speak so much, don’t speak too quickly”
- Use silence
Silence

- Lets you rest your mind and hear yourself
- Keep secrets
- Avoid arguments
- Allows you to observe others
- Suggest latent power
- Can be done in any language
Vital Trait #7: Original

- The principal source of human improvement
- Be inventive, different, imaginative and original
- "Imagination is more important than knowledge"
- Watch, carefully observe what most people are doing in any situation, and don’t do that
- Find better ways of doing things
- Be open and ready for change
- Never be satisfied with maintaining the status quo
- Leadership vision is all about originality
How to be more original

• Decide to be
• Be easy on yourself
• Support others
• Keep at it
Vital Trait #8: *Publicly modest*

- Secure people can be publicly modest
- Speak with moderate estimation of their talents, abilities and value
- Does not mean being shy and undervaluing yourself
- Take credit that is deserved but share credit more than deserved
### Approaching the Climb Summary

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<td>Success is based on mental attitude than mental capabilities</td>
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<td><strong>Be tenacious</strong></td>
<td>Nothing ever happens with one letter, one telephone call, one request</td>
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<td><strong>Be continuously improving</strong></td>
<td>Take risks. Mistakes provide some of your best learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be honest and ethical</strong></td>
<td>If you are careless with the truth, your credibility will be jeopardized when you are telling the truth</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Be sure to think before you talk</strong></td>
<td>Think fast, pause, then speak purposely</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Be silent</strong></td>
<td>Listen much more than you talk. Talk little, but say a lot in the few words that you do so</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Be original</strong></td>
<td>Watch, carefully observe what most people are doing in any situation, and don’t do that</td>
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<td>Be publicly modest</td>
<td>It is better to have other recognize your abilities rather than you pointing out first. Be patient but be persistent. “Never underestimate a man who overestimates himself” FDR.</td>
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</table>
The higher you go up the mountain, the more treacherous the climb, the more important it is to slow down and think things through.

You’ll enjoy the view a lot more also!
## Putting It Into Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vital Trait # 9</th>
<th>Aware of style</th>
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<tr>
<td>Vital Trait # 10</td>
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<td>Vital Trait # 13</td>
<td>Detailed oriented</td>
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Vital Trait #9: Aware of Style

- Effective style is best defined as proper behaviour at a given time
- An ineffective is being one way all the time with everyone
- Be aware of your type
- Be aware of others’ style
- Develop new ways of behaviour and a new operating style
- Don’t guess another’s predominant style
Vital Trait #10: Gutsy/A little wild

- “Take risks, be bold, take chance”
- Being gutsy is the ability to face difficulties with a firm resolve despite criticisms, attacks and ridicule
- “Not guts, no glory”
- Doing things others are afraid to do
- True courage comes from reasoning as well as instinct
Vital Trait #11:  
**Humorous**

- You have to have (and use) sense of humour
- Humour is the great equalizer, cutting across boundaries of culture, rank and other seeming limitations
- Secure people can laugh at themselves
- People like people with whom they can laugh
Vital Trait #12: *A tad theatrical*

- Every leader uses theatrics to some degree
- Theatrics is taking on the responsibility to do all one can to effectively influence people around
- A leader have to turn to drama to demonstrate fervour
- Being a tad theatrical is not an affection
- Nothing is more ridiculous than acting like you have qualities you don’t have
- Leaders don’t act when conveying concern, care, sympathy or interest
Vital Trait #13: 
*Detailed Oriented*

- The higher you go, the more critical it is to be aware of the details
- Leaders are detailed oriented – aware of as many aspects of what’s going on as possible
- Being detailed oriented on the small things helps you achieve the focus necessary for the big things
- It does not mean nit-picking but being specific, taking full responsibility for outcomes
- It does not mean being so immersed in minutiae that you lose the big scene
- Paying attention to details saves you time that would be lost in going down the wrong path
- “Think small, it’s the details you are after”
## Putting Into Practice Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Be aware of your style</strong></th>
<th>Style does not pertain to clothes, it is what you do with the clothes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be gutsy</strong></td>
<td>List the things that scare you the most – then tackle your to-do list</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be humorous</strong></td>
<td>It takes courage to inject levity into serious situations – but somebody has to do it, so it might well be you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be a tad theatrical</strong></td>
<td>Get comfortable with the uncomfortable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Be detailed oriented</strong></td>
<td>The small things will always make the biggest difference</td>
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</table>
Act like a chief to become a chief
# Bridging Gaps

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<tr>
<th>Vital Trait #</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Good at their job and willing to lead</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Fighters for their people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Willing to admit mistakes, yet are unapologetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Straightforward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Inquisitive</td>
</tr>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Good storytellers</td>
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Vital Trait #14: Good at their job and willing to lead

- A leader must execute the job with technical excellence while relating well with people
- Being good at your job involves being both a specialist and a generalist
- Be willing to lead – willing to step out front, to take risks
- You have to be someone worth listening to, worth believing and worth following
- Leadership isn’t just learned, it’s earned
Leaders

- Set clear expectations for people
- Use physical presence
- Be an obvious presence in the organization
- Don’t communicate “ownership” of an idea too early into the problem-solving session
- Check up on yourself periodically
- Decide and plan 4 to 5 things you want done
- Ask your key people, key questions to keep them on target
Vital Trait #15: *Fighters for their people*

- If you want people to back you, back them, back them, back them
- Be loyal downward, spread credit downward
- Share the spirit and share the lead
- Leaders publicly support their people, privately they might take them aside to “correct” their thinking
Vital Trait #16: Willing to admit mistakes yet are unapologetic

- A mistake is an error, fault, misunderstanding, blunder, slip-up, flaw or faux pas
- When it happens admit it, stop it, correct it and don’t repeat it
- Only dead people don’t make mistakes
- If you are error free you are effort free
- Admitting mistakes is *not* being apologetic
- Apologizing unnecessarily is unflattering
- Admitting mistakes is not the same as frequently apologizing – the first is necessary, the second is tedious
- Justifiable apology is good manners, which is different from an apologetic attitude
Vital Trait #17: 
*Straightforward*

- Be direct, honest, frank and follow a straight course
- Don’t distort, twist, deviate or trick
- Before talking, ask yourself: *What are we talking?*, *What do I want to accomplish?*, *In what order?*
- Write from the heart
Vital Trait #18:  
Being Nice

• Does not mean being concerned about being liked
• Based on a simple value system: respect people (people who work for you and people you work for); what goes around comes around; benevolence helps you enjoy your good work
• Leaders make a decision on what’s right, not what’s popular
• Practice (if necessary) being nice
• Being nice cannot be an act
Don’t become arrogant

• Don’t treat your staff like personal servants
• Don’t try to bully or pull rank
• Don’t think your work is more important than your family
• Don’t make public spectacles attacking or embarrassing people
• Don’t think you don’t need to be held accountable for your words
Vital Trait #19:  
*Inquisitive*

- One of the single most important traits of leaders is curiosity
- You have to initiate asking, getting answers and really hearing answers
- In all situations, ask rather than assume or guess
- The key is attitude and technique
Vital Trait #20: 
*Being Competitive*

- Is a good thing for personal and professional growth
- Carefully choose among the battles that comes your way
- Seek out “test” battles if not enough come your way
- Maintain your sense of humour
- Remember the competitive version of the golden rule: *They will do to you what you’d do to them, if you had thought of it first*
- You don’t learn from success, you learn from the battle
Vital Trait #21: 
Being Flexible

- Means not being stubborn, ceremonious, rigid, unyielding or unbending
- Does not mean being wishy-washy or undisciplined
- People can and must modify their response to new circumstances
- Able to turn easily from one situation or subject to another
- Ability to rub shoulders with workers on the shop floor as well as community leaders at a social gathering
- Able to admit mistakes which can make you even more effective
Vital Trait #22:
**Good storytellers**

- Leaders use anecdotes to describe, dramatize and paint pictures to relentlessly communicate
- Make information memorable, recallable, clear, useful and appropriate
- Stories should be: true, appropriate, well-told, concise, new
# Bridging Gaps Summary

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<td>Be sure to fight for your people</td>
<td>Be loyal downward; spread credit downward</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be certain to admit mistakes</td>
<td>If you are error free, you are effort free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be unapologetic</td>
<td>Apologies are used to vindicate themselves for something they don’t plan to change anyway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be straightforward</td>
<td>Everything you say or write must be done in a plain, simple manner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be nice</td>
<td>The more power and prestige you hold the more you need to be nice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be inquisitive</td>
<td>Ask, ask, ask, and then ask more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be competitive</td>
<td>You don’t learn from easy successes, only from the hard struggles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be flexible</td>
<td>Stand out from the crowd while still fitting in with the crowd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be a good storyteller</td>
<td>Use anecdotes to make your points</td>
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Being good at your job so you can effectively lead others to be good at their jobs