

Leadership Definitions and Quotations

Professor John Hailey (2006)

“A process whereby an individual influences a group or individuals to achieve a common goal.”

Stephen Covey (2004)

“Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.”

Rose and Lawton (1999)

“Leadership...whatever disagreements there are about the precise definition about the term, it is indubitably about people and the extent to which they can be motivated to behave in particular ways.”

Manning and Curtis (2005)

“Leadership is social influence. It means leaving a mark. It is initiating and guiding and the result is change.”

Gareth Jones et al. (2000)

“The process by which an individual exerts influence over other people and inspires, motivates and directs their activities to help achieve group or organisational goals “

Tim Hannagan (2002)

“Leadership is the process of motivating other people to act in particular ways in order to achieve specific goals.”

Doherty and Thompson (2003)

“Leadership is not a thing. It is the ability to lead. The ability to generate ideas, communicate them and create belief in followers that the idea or mission is worthwhile.”

Leading the Way (Management & Leadership Strategy for Northern Ireland)

“Leadership develops vision, sets future direction, motivates positive engagement in strategy/planning and generates a culture of constructively challenging convention.”

Kevin Cashman

“The role of the leader is to take us on journeys to places we have never been before.”

James MacGregor Burns

“The ultimate test of practical leadership is the realisation of intended, real change that meets the people’s enduring needs.”

Mahatma Ghandi

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Daniel Goleman

“...the leader’s singular job is to get results.”

Peter Drucker

“Effective leadership is not about making speeches or being liked; leadership is defined by results not attributes.”

Kenneth Blanchard

“The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority.”

Dwight D. Eisenhower

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”

Mohandas Gandhi

“I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people.”

Norman Schwarzkopf

“Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without the strategy.”

Margaret J. Wheatley

“I believe that the capacity that any organisation needs is for leadership to appear anywhere it is needed, when it is needed.”

Max de Pree

“The signs of outstanding leadership appear primarily among the followers. Are the followers reaching their potential? Are they learning? Serving? Do they achieve the required results? Do they change with grace? Manage conflict?”

Warren G. Bennis

“The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born—that there is a genetic factor to leadership. This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That's nonsense; in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born.”

Ralph Nader

“The job of a leader today is not to create followers. It's to create more leaders.”

Rudy Giuliani

“There are three keys to leadership:

- If you are going to lead, be optimistic. If you are not, your followers can hardly be expected to be.
- If you don't love people, do something else.
- Be absolutely clear what you stand for.”

Bob Geldof (2006)

“The Bob Dylan line always appealed to me: ‘There’s no success like failure and failure is no success at all.’ It was a while before I understood it. Leaders need the ability to fail and then get up and go on. It doesn’t matter if you don’t learn from the failure. But, it does matter that you get up and get on.”

Henry Mintzberg

“Leadership, like swimming, cannot be learnt by reading about it.”

Peter F. Drucker

“Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”

George S. Patton

“Don’t tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results.”

Dwight Eisenhower

“Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.”

Napoleon Bonaparte

“A leader is a dealer in hope.”

Benjamin Disraeli

“I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?”

Elaine Agather

“The leadership instinct you are born with is the backbone. You develop the funny bone and the wishbone that go with it.”

Robert Half

“Delegating work works, provided the one delegating works, too.”

Groucho Marx

“Only one man in a thousand is a leader of men -- the other 999 follow women.”

Theodore M. Hesburgh

“The very essence of leadership is that you have to have vision. You can’t blow an uncertain trumpet.”

Theodore Roosevelt

“The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self-restraint to keep from meddling with them while they do it.”

Lao Tsu

“A leader is best when people barely know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him, worst when they despise him. But of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, ‘We did this ourselves.’”

Jesus Christ

"If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall in the ditch."

Winston Churchill

"Dictators ride to and fro upon tigers which they dare not dismount. And the tigers are getting hungry."

Dee Hock (Founder and CEO Emeritus, Visa)

"Control is not leadership; management is not leadership; leadership is leadership. If you seek to lead, invest at least 50% of your time in leading yourself—your own purpose, ethics, principles, motivation, conduct. Invest at least 20% leading those with authority over you and 15% leading your peers."

John Kenneth Galbraith

"All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of leadership."

G.K. Chesterton (to Alexander Woollcott)

"If a rhinoceros were to enter this restaurant now, there is no denying he would have great power here. But I should be the first to rise and assure him that he had no authority whatever."

Henry Kissinger

"The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been."

Peter Drucker

"No institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership composed of average human beings."

John Buchan

"The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the greatness is there already."

Dwight D. Eisenhower

"You do not lead by hitting people over the head — that's assault, not leadership."

Hesiod (8th Century BC Greek poet)

"The best is he who calls men to the best. And those who heed the call are also blessed. But worthless who call not, heed not, but rest."

General Douglas MacArthur

"Never give an order that can't be obeyed."

Admiral James B. Stockdale

"Leadership must be based on goodwill. Goodwill does not mean posturing and, least of all, pandering to the mob. It means obvious and wholehearted commitment to helping followers. We are tired of leaders we fear, tired of leaders we love, and tired of leaders who let us take liberties with them. What we need for leaders are men of the heart who are so helpful that they, in effect, do away with the need of their jobs. But leaders like that are never out of a job, never out of followers. Strange as it sounds, great leaders gain authority by giving it away."

General Colin Powell

"Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate, and doubt to offer a solution everybody can understand."

Harry Truman

"Men make history and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better."

Gary Wills (Certain Trumpets: The Call of Leaders)

"The leader is one who mobilizes others toward a goal shared by leaders and followers. ... Leaders, followers and goals make up the three equally necessary supports for leadership."

John C. Maxwell

"All Leadership is influence."

Sam Rayburn

"You cannot be a leader, and ask other people to follow you, unless you know how to follow, too."

Dag Hammarskjöld

"Your position never gives you the right to command. It only imposes on you the duty of so living your life that others may receive your orders without being humiliated."

Walter Lippmann

"The final test of a leader is that he leaves behind him in other men, the conviction and the will to carry on."

Theodore Roosevelt

"People ask the difference between a leader and a boss. The leader leads, and the boss drives."

Harold Geneen

"Leadership cannot really be taught. It can only be learned."

Max DePree

"The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between, the leader is a servant."

George Bush (Senior)

"Four rules of leadership in a free legislative body: First, no matter how hard-fought the issue, never get personal. Don't say or do anything that may come back to haunt you on another issue, another day.... Second, do your homework. You can't lead without knowing what you're talking about...Third, the American legislative process is one of give and take. Use your power as a leader to persuade, not intimidate... Fourth, be considerate of the needs of your colleagues, even if they're at the bottom of the totem pole..."

Theodore Roosevelt

"Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far."

Stephen R. Covey

"Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall."

Sir John Harvey-Jones

"How do you know you have won? When the energy is coming the other way and when your people are visibly growing individually and as a group."

Patrick Lencioni

"As a leader, you're probably not doing a good job unless your employees can do a good impression of you when you're not around."

Peter F. Drucker

"Leadership is not magnetic personality, that can just as well be a glib tongue. It is not "making friends and influencing people", that is flattery. Leadership is lifting a person's vision to higher sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations."

Mike Vance

"Leadership is the ability to establish standards and manage a creative climate where people are self-motivated toward the mastery of long term constructive goals, in a participatory environment of mutual respect, compatible with personal values."

Andrew Carnegie

"The older I get the less I listen to what people say and the more I look at what they do."

General Montgomery

"My own definition of leadership is this: The capacity and the will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character which inspires confidence."

George Orwell

"High sentiments always win in the end, The leaders who offer blood, toil, tears and sweat always get more out of their followers than those who offer safety and a good time. When it comes to the pinch, human beings are heroic."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be."

Scott Berkun

"I think leadership comes from integrity - that you do whatever you ask others to do. I think there are non-obvious ways to lead. Just by providing a good example as a parent, a friend, a neighbor makes it possible for other people to see better ways to do things. Leadership does not need to be a dramatic, fist in the air and trumpets blaring, activity."

Jack Welch

"Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others."

Carlos Ghosn (CEO of Renault-Nissan)

"I think that the best training a top manager can be engaged in is management by example. I want to make sure there is no discrepancy between what we say and what we do. If you preach accountability and then promote somebody with bad results, it doesn't work. I personally believe the best training is management by example. Don't believe what I say. Believe what I do."