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Abstract

The qualities of vision, communication, trust, and perseverance are strongly identified by leaders in the lodging and food service businesses as characterizing effective leaders. The authors report on their research into essential qualities which mark the innovative industry leader.

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The subject of leadership has a great deal of relevance to any discussion and examination of today's hospitality industry. With challenges such as the recent proliferation of product segmentation, the human resource crisis, the buying and selling of major chains, and mounting concern over governmental regulations (i.e. minimum wage, OSHA, COBRA), only the most capable leader can successfully guide a hospitality organization into the next century and beyond.

The challenges are many and varied, but what qualities and attributes are needed by the leaders who hope to overcome these obstacles? This research explores the opinions of current hospitality industry presidents and CEOs regarding essential leadership qualities. Although leadership has been categorized as situational, these findings indicate that current top level lodging and non-commercial food service executives believe there are common attributes present in effective leaders. Those qualities most strongly identified were related to vision, communication, trust, and perseverance.

While a great deal has been written about leadership in a general business context, substantially less is available about the hospitality industry specifically. In the November 1977 *Cornell Quarterly,* Nebel and Sterns reported on research they had conducted which centered on the effectiveness of leadership styles in the hospitality industry. Based on situational variables such as task structure and employee needs for interdependence, their research suggested a task-oriented (as opposed to a participative-oriented)

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leadership style was preferable for the hospitality industry. They encouraged assessment of each individual situation before selecting a leadership style.[1]

Prior to gaining notoriety for his "excellence" books, Tom Peters wrote about leadership qualities in the November 1980 *Cornell Quarterly*.[2] He cited hospitality industry examples from the 1970s, such as Ed Carlson at UAL, Inc. and John Teets at Greyhound Food Management, as individuals who demonstrated leadership attributes, including the encouragement of experimentation, persistence in shifting organizational focus, and "management by walking about."

More recently, in the August 1989 *Cornell Quarterly*, Berger, Ferguson, and Woods reported on their study of eight innovative hospitality firms.[3] They conducted interviews with top executives and managers at each organization and discovered five common characteristics among those they interviewed. The common characteristics of innovative leaders were as follows:

- ability to juggle many tasks

- high energy level

- sense of humor

- people orientation

- willingness to span job and company boundaries in search of ideas and information

The April 1988 *Management Review* included Horton's "Memo for Management - That Old Management Magic" which pointed out that fads and oversimplified solutions come and go but real strengths such as "maturity, a realistic perspective, strategic focus, tenacity and integrity" are the keys to overcoming the challenges facing current business leaders.

Studies Look At Leadership Characteristics

In their pioneer lodging industry leaders study, Cichy and Sciarini surveyed the opinion of lodging presidents and CEOs relative to characteristics of effective leaders. The results, published in the June 1990 issue of *Lodging*,[4] first identified the four foundations of effective leadership in the lodging industry. These foundations (vision, communication, trust, and perseverance) were confirmed by their current data reflecting the opinions of non-commercial food service industry presidents and CEOs.

One classic study frequently referenced in leadership-related publications was conducted by Bennis and Nanus who undertook a five-year study of 90 outstanding leaders (60 private sector, 30 public sector). Using a combination of interviews and observations, Bennis and Nanus concluded that there were four areas of competency that all of their leaders possessed. The four areas are as follows:[5]

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• **Attention through vision:** Leaders can create a sense of outcome or vision so compelling that others are drawn into a commitment to it.

• **Meaning through communication:** Leaders communicate their sense of vision with clarity and understanding. Interestingly, not all 90 leaders were exceptionally articulate. Those who were not as verbally adept substituted models, drawings, or other symbols with no apparent weakening of communication.

• **Trust through positioning:** Leaders consistently demonstrate and earn trust via their reliability, predictability, and accountability. The researchers discovered that the leader's clearly communicated vision was almost less important than remaining predictable and consistent (unless it was unreasonable to do so). Inconsistency breeds misunderstanding and distrust, obstacles that are not easily overcome.

• **Deployment of self through positive self regard:** Leaders know their strengths and constantly work to enhance them. Leaders also recognize their shortcomings and seek to compensate for them. The capacity to develop and improve upon their skills distinguishes leaders from followers. Additionally, the 90 leaders studied did not include the word "failure" in their vocabularies. Leaders focus their efforts on their desired outcomes, not on looking back and making excuses.

Bennis and Nanus suggested that leaders with these traits foster an environment that helps employees feel important. It is an environment where competence and development matter, and where employees are team members and the work is stimulating. Effective leaders shape an atmosphere where dedication to goals fuels efforts, and quality is of the utmost importance.

The topic of leadership also was discussed in the popular business magazine, *Fortune,* in which Labich compiled the opinions of consultants, academicians (business schools), and corporate CEOs to develop seven keys to leadership:[6]

• **Trust your subordinates:** Through a belief in subordinates, decision making can be driven far from the CEO's office. This results in an involved workforce, one which is committed beyond a "I'm just here to collect a paycheck" mentality that permeates far too many organizations.

• **Develop a vision:** People are more willing to follow someone who can communicate a clear sense of where he or she is going. The most effective leaders live up to their own expectations; they demonstrate the vision through personal example.

• **Keep your cool:** Nothing separates leaders from followers like a crisis. Thinking clearly under pressure inspires followers and enhances credibility.

• **Encourage risks:** Experimentation, even when the results fall short of expectations, is the rule. Fred Smith, the founder of Federal Express, is widely recognized for living this value. Labich quotes

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from the Federal Express Managers' Guide which states that "fear of failure must never be an excuse not to try something different." Again, personal example conveys the message most vividly.

• **Be an expert:** Leaders are effective because they do their homework. Followers are more likely to rally behind the leader who they believe knows what he or she is doing.

• **Invite dissent:** Effective leaders recognize and encourage an honest exchange of ideas and difference of opinion. Labich quotes Barry Rand, president of the marketing group at Xerox Corporation, who sums up this concept by saying: "The higher you get in an organization, the more important it is to have people who will tell you when you are right or wrong. If you have 'yes' people, then either you or they are redundant."

• **Simplify:** To be an effective business leader, you must clearly identify your expectations and present them to your followers in understandable, concise terms. The idea is not to look for only the quick and easy solutions, but to focus on what is important and communicate it effectively.

A unique approach to the subject of leadership was presented by Wes Roberts who used the context of the notorious Attila to examine the basics of leadership as a foundation for the development of skills needed for success in virtually any field.[7]

Through Attila, Roberts proposed that leaders possess an array of qualities that make them effective. These included many of the attributes cited by Bennis and Nanus and Labich: dependability, accountability, credibility, emotional stamina, decisiveness, and tenacity. Roberts also included anticipation, self-confidence, and stewardship (a caretaker quality that encourages confidence, trust, and loyalty).

Authors and researchers agree that there are many attributes associated with successful business leaders. But there is no consensus about exactly what constitutes the best leadership style. Effective leaders can come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and personality types. They consistently demonstrate exceptional listening and communicating skills. Leaders earn trust with their consistency and strong personal values yet, almost paradoxically, remain flexible in dealing with the often contradictory circumstances they encounter. Effective business leaders create a climate which encourages the development of their subordinates. They make available the resources, including time, information, and dollars, necessary for their followers to succeed.

Survey Involves Industry Leaders

To find out what hospitality industry presidents and CEOs think are essential leadership qualities, a survey was developed based on the attributes identified by Roberts, Labich, and Bennis and Nanus. The survey was mailed to 84 lodging industry leaders and 64 non-

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Exhibit 1
Importance of Leadership

	Level of Agreement /Importance (Mean)
Effective Leaders	
Have a strong personal value or belief system	5.5
Provide a compelling message or vision	5.4
Make their desired outcomes tangible	5.4
Recognize that the ability to adjust is a necessity	5.3
Listen, as well, if not better than they speak	5.3
Place a relatively significant emphasis on learning	5.3
Do not change their minds often	5.2
Encourage and reward risk taking	5.2
Emphasize quality over quantity	5.1
Know their strengths and nurture them	5.0
Maintain precise desired outcomes	5.0
Provide appropriate information, resources and support to allow employees to become "empowered"	5.0
Keys to Leadership	
Develop a vision	5.5
Simplify	5.4
Trust subordinates	5.4
Keep cool	5.2
Encourage risk	5.1
Invite dissent	4.9
Be an expert	3.7
Leaders Must Possess	
Dependability	5.6
Credibility	5.7
Self confidence	5.5
Accountability	5.5
Responsibility	5.5
Desire	5.4
Emotional stamina	5.4
Loyalty	5.3
Courage	5.3
Decisiveness	5.3
Competitiveness	5.3
Stewardship	5.3
Empathy	5.2
Tenacity	5.2
Timing	5.1
Anticipation	4.9
Physical stamina	4.6

commercial food service industry leaders. The lodging leaders were selected because they were the president or CEO of one of the top-50 lodging organizations, an elected officer of the AH&MA, or had attended the 1988 Presidents Academy for lodging industry leaders sponsored by the Educational Institute of the AH&MA. The non-commercial food service leaders were selected because they were president or CEO of a non-commercial food service business and a member of the Society for Foodservice Management. Better than half of each group responded.

Of the 43 lodging companies, 31 were privately owned, four were publicly held, and six were subsidiaries of a publicly-held company. Two had different ownership structures. The lodging sample was 42 men and one woman. Their hospitality industry experience averaged 25 years, with a range from 10 years to 50 years, and they had held the position of president or CEO for an average of 10 years, with a range from one to 35 years.

Of the 36 non-commercial food service companies, 24 were privately owned, seven were publicly held, and three were subsidiaries of publicly-held companies. Two had different ownership structures. The non-commercial food service leader sample consisted of 34 men and two women. Their hospitality industry experience averaged 22 years, with a range from two to 40 years. Additionally, these respondents had been a president or CEO for an average of 12 years, with a range from one to 39 years.

The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of 24 leadership attributes reported by Bennis and Nanus on a six-point scale. Using the same scale, they rated the seven keys to effective leadership listed by Labich, and the 17 qualities of effective leadership revealed by Roberts in Attila the Hun. The results are listed in Exhibit 1.

An analysis of the data indicated significant agreement of opinion between the lodging and non-commercial food service leaders with only minor differences.

Vision Is Considered Important

From the Bennis and Nanus study, the CEOs and presidents rated as most important having a strong personal value or belief system. They also placed emphasis on qualities related to vision and making desired outcomes tangible. Moreover, they valued learning, listening skills, and flexibility. Other highly-rated attributes mentioned included consistency, encouragement and reward of risk taking, quality emphasis, knowledge of one's strengths, maintenance of precise desired outcomes, and empowerment of employees.

Industry leaders agreed that six of the seven keys to effective leadership reported by Labich were, indeed, important to their leadership style. Only "being an expert" was not highly rated. Finally, they agreed that 15 of the 17 "Attila" qualities are associated with effective leaders, particularly credibility and dependability. They rated the attributes of accountability, self-confidence, and

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responsibility slightly less important. On the other hand, they did not agree as strongly that a leader needs physical stamina, and they were not convinced that anticipation of thoughts, actions, and consequences was as important as some of the other qualities in the survey.

Most of the CEOs and presidents took the opportunity to respond to the open-ended question: "If you could give one piece of advice to someone who wanted to be a leader like you, what would you say?" Such attributes as vision, communication, trust, and perseverance appeared frequently in the advice.

Regarding vision, respondents urged future leaders to "make footprints for others to follow." They advised that a clear set of goals and objectives must be based on vision. Clarity of vision encourages planning that includes a sense of the organization's direction, plus ways to articulate this vision. Respondents said a leader must believe in what he or she is doing and convince superiors and subordinates to believe in it, too. Clarity of vision describes where the organization is going and helps the leader persuade others by communicating in a variety of ways. One leader stated: "Dare to be you -- set a vision and go after it with all of your energy." Another leader advised future leaders to "believe in the stated goals ... commitment is contagious." Another respondent presented a plan for achieving goals and objectives based on the vision: "Once goals are established, time and resources can be directed toward executing the plan." This leader cautioned that it is also important to review the outcome of the plan in an effort to improve and to achieve an even better outcome next time.

Future Leaders Must Continue Learning

Education was a frequent piece of advice in this section of the survey. While education was not a focus in the quantitative portion of the survey, leaders often reminded future leaders to continue learning, to be informed, to study world leaders of the past, and to never stop wanting to learn. This is consistent with respondents rating "being an expert" as the least important of Labich's seven keys to leadership. The advice simply means that a leader can never know enough.

The learning process is particularly important as it relates to communication. New knowledge must be shared with the team. "Look, listen, learn and communicate" is what one respondent advised. Another challenged future leaders to enjoy and distribute knowledge, and not to ever waste it or hoard it. Communication skills were seen as among the most important a leader could use. Among these, listening carefully to others at all levels was a consistent piece of advice.

Respondents urged future leaders to let their actions speak for themselves. Trust is built and reinforced by supporting subordinates and encouraging decision making. They advocated the need for a high degree of integrity, empathy, and trust. These leaders encour-

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aged future leaders to be "ethical....always" and "display honesty, understanding and compassion for your fellow human beings." Relative to character, one leader wrote: "Character is much easier kept than recovered." These comments indicate that an important element of effective leadership is a scrupulous, sensitive, honest style for dealing with people. Effective leaders are role models for others in the organization.

Leaders Must Have Perseverance

The final essential quality of leadership is perseverance. Survey respondents recommended that future leaders be fully committed to their cause, have a plan, communicate it, and stick with it. Moreover, they advised aspiring leaders to be honest with themselves and stand by their personal convictions. One leader philosophized that "the enormous reservoir of energy required for success remains full when you are determined to prosper." Others challenged future leaders to "dig in, get involved, be competitive, and work to achieve."

One of the hallmarks of leadership is the ability to focus on the overall outcome while under fire. The leader's commitment kindles commitment in others in the organization. As in personal crisis, difficult times in the leader's professional life may draw others closer in a common bond that unifies and strengthens commitment to a vision.

The respondents agreed that leadership is important at most levels of the hospitality industry (See Exhibit 2). They were in accord that leadership is needed at the corporate, regional or district, and unit levels. There was less agreement about the need for leadership at the level of department head or front-line supervisor. They attached relatively little importance to leadership at the line-employee level. Perhaps these CEOs view line-level employees as followers who will develop leadership skills as they rise through the organization. If so, this creates a challenge for trainers to foster leadership skills in the various levels of the organization. It may be that companies are spending too much time teaching technical information (creating experts) and too little on developing vision, communication skills, and the ability to earn trust and persevere.

Perhaps industry leaders are doing their organizations an injustice, as these employees can be leaders in their own right. They can help generate enthusiasm, energy, and team unity. These "line/hourly level leaders" can be the ambassadors of the top-ranking leader's vision.

Furthermore, in the hospitality industry, it is the line/hourly level employees that serve the guests. It is imperative that the industry train each line/hourly employee to take initiative, to solve problems, to satisfy guest needs, and to manage the critical moments of truth.

Based on the results of this survey, effective leadership in the hospitality industry rests on four foundations: vision, communication, trust, and perseverance. These four attributes came up repeatedly in the survey and the comments made by respondents.

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Exhibit 2
Importance of Leadership

Organizational Levels	Level of Importance (Mean)
Corporate executives	5.7
Regional/district managers	5.7
General managers	5.7
Department heads	5.4
Front line supervisors	5.3
Line/hourly level	4.4

One CEO shared the following when asked to make additional remarks:

> A hospitality professional must remain knowledgeable of industry changes and have an understanding of the business. The leader must also be a people person with management skills that will motivate people to want to succeed. The future leader must have vision, the ability to draw up a plan of action to set the direction, and the ability not only to communicate, but to listen. The leader should be adaptable and willing to compromise and change.

This leader's perceptive comments summarize the four foundations of hospitality leadership.

The significance of these survey results for present and future hospitality leaders should not be overlooked. Whether it be through formal education or management development programs, the leaders in this sample suggested that anyone who aspires to lead others must develop these attributes. Schools and hospitality organizations should strive to develop curricula and programs which allow for the teaching and modeling of these behaviors and mentoring to re-enforce them.

Further research may serve to validate these findings for the hospitality industry. For example, the responses of CEOs and presidents of commercial food service systems could be compared with these samples of lodging and non-commercial food service leaders. Similarities and differences could be discovered and discussed. Conclusions could be drawn for the hospitality industry from this significant cross-section (i.e., lodging, non-commercial food service, and commercial food service).

It may also prove interesting to survey "followers," that is, various levels of hospitality industry employees other than presi-

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dents and CEOs to compare their opinions as to the qualities of effective leaders. Interesting insights may be gained from the comparison of "leader" and "follower" opinions as to what constitutes effective leadership. It would also be beneficial to know the extent to which these followers are being developed as leaders.

Research into the perceptions of leadership qualities by deans and directors of four-year hospitality management programs could also yield interesting comparisons. Additionally, surveying senior-level students in four-year hospitality management programs could result in a comparison of the perceptions of future hospitality industry leaders and the realities of present hospitality industry leaders.

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