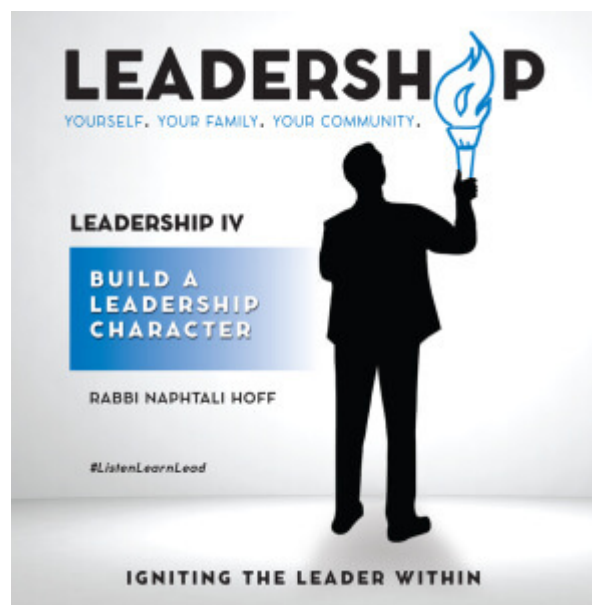


Leadership IV: Build a Leadership Character

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Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power. Abraham Lincoln –

In contemporary contexts we have increasingly come to think of leaders as well-positioned people with strong connections. These men and women are in ample possession of intellect, charisma, power, and wealth. More often than not, we judge them (and, consequently, they judge themselves,) by what they have, or what they have been able to achieve in advancing their institution's bottom line.[\[1\]](#) Rare are the leaders who we view primarily by their character and deeds, not to mention the qualitative impact that they make on others around them. Not surprisingly then, many leaders today focus more on what they can get from their positions of authority rather than on what they can give to the institutions and people that they lead.

Any attempt to define and portray leadership without discussing character is both limited and limiting. Character fundamentally shapes how we engage with others around us, what we value and care about, the things we act on and reinforce,

and how we arrive at decisions.

Research shows that the very best leaders, the ones who have been successful in elevating their organizations to the top of their respective fields, are individuals who prioritize and exemplify such qualities as selflessness, care and consideration. They are humble and willing to admit error, on top of their other core managerial competencies that they possess.

In *From Good to Great*,[\[2\]](#) author Jim Collins describes his quest to identify the qualities that made a certain high profile companies particularly successful. He and his research team began the process with a list of nearly 1500 corporations. Through the use of growth-related criteria[\[3\]](#) they narrowed the list down to a group of eleven truly “great” businesses. Additional research revealed that all eleven companies had a few particular things in common: including the fact that they were all headed by what Collins termed “Level 5 Leaders.”

These leaders were all smart, shrewd, skilled and knowledgeable of their respective products and market. They were effective at developing and managing teams within their organization, establishing a vision, setting goals and meeting performance objectives. But so were many of the leaders of the 1500 other corporations in his study. What set these Level 5 CEOs apart from so many others in their peer group was the fact that they were recognized and admired by their coworkers for their noble character.

These Level 5 leaders were humble and did not pursue success for their personal glory. Some were quiet and introverted but remained undaunted when the need arose for them to make difficult, even risky, decisions. They were caring of others, while also maintaining a burning, passionate drive, a deep desire to advance their respective cause. And because they were so exceptional in their care and concern, other leaders

within their organizations began to mimic their deeds and thinking processes, further advancing each respective company's cause.

For years, leadership programs have emphasized strength and decisiveness, believing that people wanted their leaders to be tough, courageous, knowledgeable, and self-confident. In contrast, humility, care and other similar traits were not seen as desirable leadership qualities. After all, how could modest, self-effacing, think-others-first executives motivate workers and influence change?

However, a cursory review of some of the world's most successful leaders presents character in a very different light. Many of history's greatest leaders moved mountains and shaped modern society without heated rhetoric or an inflated sense of self-importance.

Genuine humility and care are indicators of a leader's inner strength, as well as his deep knowledge and self-fulfillment. Such leaders view their roles as opportunities to serve others. They can often better **motivate others to listen and follow their example** knowing that the leader is not motivated by glory, greed and self-aggrandizement. Humble, caring leaders willingly acknowledge **errors (theirs or their organization's) and change course as needed**. It's never about them; the focus remains on getting the job done, in the best way possible. When their actions or decisions are criticized, they remain open to change and growth. These leaders take pride in their achievements, but mainly as a platform to bring their people together to do even greater things.

Few have expressed it better than legendary University of Alabama head football coach, Paul "Bear" Bryant. Bryant would often say that, "If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi-good, we did it. If anything goes really good, then you did it."

Summary:

- Leaders are often judged by their intellect and wealth, not their character.
- Character plays a crucial role in leadership.
- All of history's truly-great leaders were people of great character.

Next steps

1. To gain added clarity about the quality of your character, consider taking a self-assessment like Ken Blanchard's Trust Works. After you have completed it, ask others in your inner circle and some a bit further out to do the same.
2. Another option is to take a 360 test, though they typically ask for more than a person's character.
3. There are many great resources available to learn about the damaging impact of personal ego and strategies that will increase your humility. Take steps to shift your mindset from "me" to "we."

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*"I'M NOT HARAV MOSHE FEINSTEIN.
I'M NOT R' MOSHE SHERER.
I'M NOT MOSHE REICHMANN -
I'M JUST MOSHE.
CAN I REALLY BE A LEADER?"*



MOSHE BANE



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[1] Of course, one primary downside to this thinking, in

addition to the fact that it is fundamentally flawed, is that since few people have great charisma or these other qualities, we logically conclude that few people can provide genuine leadership.

[\[2\]](#) New York, NY, HarperBusiness, 2001

[\[3\]](#) Their goal was to find every company that had made a leap from no-better-than-average results to great results (defined as generating cumulative stock returns that exceeded the general stock market by at least three times over 15 years. The leap had to also be independent of its industry). The eleven “good-to-great” companies averaged returns 6.9 times greater than the market’s.