

The Accepted Leader

Throughout human history people have sought good leaders, and the traits our ancestors sought in the chieftains they chose to follow are still hardwired into what we need today to fully accept someone as our leader. Folktales across different eras and cultures paint a very similar portrait of the archetypal leader.

In the leader folktales, the leader-to-be can see beyond his current situation (young, poor, etc.) to his ultimate goal (save his father, win the princess, kill the monster), and can express that vision in a compelling and inclusive way, especially to those whose help he needs to achieve it. He can hold to that vision and share it clearly even when others lose sight of it, believe it's impossible, or ridicule him for trying. He is **Far-sighted**.

Moreover, the leader-in-training doesn't just go through the motions. He is deeply committed to his quest. His every action is directed toward achieving it. Nothing dissuades him, even the inevitable setbacks and disappointments attendant on any quest. He may not be loud about it, but he is relentless. He is **Passionate**.

Throughout the story, he is confronted with difficult situations. He may be afraid and lonely; he may feel like running away, longing for the comfort and safety of home. He often faces situations that are particularly trying for him personally. But he doesn't turn aside; he doesn't (unlike others who attempt the same journey) make the safe and easy choices. He doesn't wimp out and take the path of least resistance. He is **Courageous**.

What people see in the leaders they follow

- Far-sighted
- Passionate
- Courageous
- Wise
- Generous
- Trustworthy

He's not a cardboard action hero, though. His brain is tested, and he must be able to learn from his mistakes. In many versions of the story, he doesn't initially follow the advice given him ("don't look back"; "don't let go"; "don't touch this or that on your way out"), and his mistakes create more complexity and danger. The next time a similar situation arises, though, he behaves differently and succeeds at his task. He doesn't deny or whine or blame; he improves. He also often comes up with clever solutions to seemingly insoluble problems. Finally, he uses his powers of discrimination to think through difficult choices and arrive at the best and most moral solution (e.g., long-term happiness vs. current riches; the greater good vs. pure self-interest). He is thoughtful, appropriately humble, clear-headed and curious. He is **Wise**.

Along the way, the future leader meets people or creatures in need, and he helps them or shares with them. He does so even though his own supplies are low; even though helping them takes him out of his way or slows him down. In some versions of the story, he actually has to sacrifice his life for those he loves or to whom he owes his loyalty (this always turns out okay in the end). And later on, when he is king, his people are prosperous and happy because he is not stingy, miserly or selfish. He is **Generous**.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, his word is his bond. If he tells his dying father that he will find the magic potion to cure him, you know that he will. If he tells the princess that he will come back to marry her, she can send out the invitations. When some creature says to him, "If I help you, boy, you must free me," you know the creature is as good as free. The hero does not equivocate or exaggerate. He is **Trustworthy**.

This tale survives in almost infinite permutations because it feels right to us. If we don't see these qualities clearly demonstrated, we won't follow whole-heartedly; it feels dangerous to do so. Of course, no real, flesh-and-blood leader is perfect. If we are asked to follow someone who has four or five of these qualities, we will do it, all the while watching to see if he or she is working to add the missing or less developed qualities.

What Do Key Followers See Today?

To assess your “follow-ability” in a current role, reflect on how you show up to the people who most need to accept you as their leader.

1	2	3
Rarely Seen by Others	Often Seen by Others	Consistently Seen by Others

FAR-SIGHTED

	Current	AVERAGE
• Sees possible futures that are good for the group or organization		
• Articulates the vision in a compelling and inclusive way		
• Models the vision (i.e., actions are congruent with the vision)		
• Sees past obstacles		
• Invites others to participate in the vision		

PASSIONATE

	Current	AVERAGE
• Commits honestly		
• Makes a clear case without being dogmatic		
• Invites real dialogue about her/his passion		
• Acts in support of her/his passion		
• Remains committed despite adversity and setbacks		

COURAGEOUS

	Current	AVERAGE
• Makes necessary, tough choices		
• Puts self at risk for the good of the team, initiative or company		
• Does things that are personally difficult		
• Takes full responsibility for her/his actions		
• Admits and apologizes for mistakes		

WISE

	Current	AVERAGE
• Deeply curious; listens well		
• Assesses situations objectively (i.e., is a fair witness)		
• Reflects on and learns from experience		
• Sees patterns, and shares related insights with others		
• Acts based on what s/he believes to be morally right		

GENEROUS

	Current	AVERAGE
• Assumes positive intent		
• Shares power and authority		
• Shares what s/he knows		
• Freely gives credit, praises and rewards		
• Provides the resources necessary for others to succeed		

TRUSTWORTHY

	Current	AVERAGE
• Tells the truth as s/he understands it		
• Does what s/he says s/he will do		
• Keeps confidences		
• Speaks and acts for the greater good		
• Is capable and gets results		

1	2	3
<i>Risky to follow</i>	<i>Follow-able</i>	<i>“I’m with you; let’s go!”</i>

Development Plan

	MY FOCUS	MY ACTION PLAN
KEY STRENGTH	<p>Note which of the six attributes is your greatest current strength <u>from the perspective of people who most need to accept you as a leader</u> (choose one):</p>	<p>Next, think of two practical, day-to-day ways to use this strength to support the team or initiative you lead. Be as specific as possible about the actions you'll take. It can help to think of ways you can most visibly demonstrate 1-2 of the behavioral indicators on the previous page.</p> <p>I'll use my key strength to...</p> <p>I'll use my key strength to...</p>
FIRST IMPROVEMENT	<p>Refer again to your self-assessment and note below one "growth area" attribute where you believe you need the most development:</p> <p>Now focus your improvement effort further by selecting one of the five behavioral indicators for the attribute you want to develop (e.g., you chose to focus on Far-sighted and rated "sees past obstacles" as a 1 currently). Write that indicator below:</p>	<p>Initial ideas for how I can more clearly and consistently demonstrate the behavior:</p> <p>Seeking Help from a "Wizard"</p> <p>Who to ask and why:</p> <p>How I'll ask:</p>

Managing Self-Talk

Talking to yourself in unsupportive ways can limit your ability to influence or model the leadership characteristics people choose to follow. Here's a model for managing your self-talk so that you can avoid these problems:

- **Recognize:** Once you've become aware of what you're saying to yourself about a situation or person, you have the ability to change it.
- **Record:** Writing down your self-talk helps you to separate from it; it becomes something *you* control.
- **Re-think:** Once you've written down the unsupportive self-talk, decide how to create alternative self-talk that you'll believe (it's true and realistic) and that will lead to a more positive outcome.
- **Repeat:** Like any habit, managing your self-talk requires repetition. Whenever you find yourself falling into your negative self-talk, consciously substitute your re-thought self-talk. If you're going to use this as a tool, you're going to need to say it more than one time. We have grooves in our head.

TRY IT: Re-Thinking Your Self-Talk

- ✓ **Recognize** and **record** unsupportive self-talk related to the leadership attribute you want to model more clearly and consistently.

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- ✓ **Re-think** the unsupportive self-talk.
 - How does the self-talk affect your actions or others in a negative way?
 - What new self-talk will lead to a more positive impact?
 - Write your new, more supportive self-talk below.

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- ✓ **Repeat** your new self-talk.
 - Note how you can protect yourself from slipping back to unsupportive self-talk and reinforce your new, more supportive self-talk.