

Successful Leaders

Lesson Objective:

Lesson Objective: Comprehend the characteristics and traits which contribute to making a successful leader.

Desired Learning Outcomes:

1. Describe the basic traits of a manager.
2. Describe the basic traits of a successful leader.
3. Discuss the difference between managers and leaders.
4. Explain why communication is a critical success factor of leadership.
5. Discuss five questions to ask when evaluating leadership ability.

Lesson:

Overview:

What makes a leader successful? Is it how well they get along with their subordinates and customers? Is it how quickly and effectively they accomplish the mission? Is it because they complete their work under budget? Is it that they are good managers? Is it how well they inspire those around them, or the fact that they ask only what they would expect from themselves? Actually, it's a combination of all these things plus many more.

This section will help you become more aware of the traits successful leaders have, explain the difference between leadership and management, and learn ways to help you assess your own leadership ability.

What are the characteristics of a successful leader? To answer this question, we must first define two terms that are often treated as the same thing: manager and leader.

Traits of Managers:

What are some common traits of a manager? Managers basically do three things. First, they plan the activities of their programs. They plan both strategically and tactically the proportion of which correlates to their level of responsibility. For instance, CAP's National Commander primarily plans at the strategic level, planning for the good of the organization as a whole, and for extended periods of time. Squadron commanders, on the other hand, plan primarily at the tactical level, using shorter bits of time, weeks and months, not years. Squadron commanders also do some strategic planning relative to their unit such as identifying those members who will be groomed for future leadership positions. Another example would be setting long-term goals, such as to relocate to a new unit headquarters, or to increase the unit's capacity to contribute to wing activities and missions. While unit commanders make plans having an impact on the operation of their particular squadron, they need to be mindful of the long-range, far reaching decisions that impact Civil Air Patrol as a whole.

Managers:	
•	_____.
•	_____.
•	_____.
•	Are equated with things and programs, _____.

Managers also control activities. They are the people responsible for the outcome of unit activities and programs and oversee progress and completion of activities. Just how much direct control the manager should exert over an activity depends on several things, like the manager's personality, the complexity and importance of the activity, the resources available, and the expectations of the manager's supervisor. This is why managers need to closely monitor some programs, while other programs require much less direct control and supervision.

In addition, managers organize activities, ensuring that the activities receive the proper resources and support. How a manager chooses to control operations also affects their approach to organizing the program. Sometimes the manager may leave the task of organizing to their staff, providing minimal guidance, while other times take on the task of organization almost totally by themselves.

Managers are often associated with, *things and programs*, not necessarily people. Managers in this context are viewed as treating everything and everyone, as inorganic resources. There are times when this may be appropriate, like when disciplining a member who also happens to be a friend. Effective unit commanders realize they must combine the traits of a good manager with the traits of a successful leader to ensure success of their unit. Now let's look at the traits of successful leaders.

Traits of Successful Leaders:

Successful leaders also have some distinctive traits. These traits pertain to the leader's ability to balance long-term goals with task accomplishment, along with the ability to communicate with people and treat them fairly. Successful leaders:

A. **Communicate, strategize, and coach:** Leaders communicate with their people. They respect their member's ability to participate in the decision-making process.

They allow their people to help them plan the unit's future. Finally, they coach and inspire; they do not drive their people. They treat their people as valuable coworkers who have valuable input.

Leaders:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communicate, strategize, and _____.• Are able to effectively _____.• Look at the bigger _____.• Are good _____.• Align goals with those of the _____.• Are good _____.

B. **Delegate:** Leaders empower their people to help them accomplish the mission. These leaders recognize that they cannot do everything themselves, and thus need to

rely on their people to get the mission accomplished. They also recognize that in order to effectively delegate to their members they must give them the authority to accomplish the task.

C. **Look at the bigger picture:** Leaders tend to think beyond the situation immediately in front of them and beyond the unit itself. They think in terms of how their action will affect other actions and how what they do affects the unit, other units, and the wing. For instance, say the unit commander sees that the unit's corporate plane has flown very little over each of the past three years. The commander must decide to either try to retain the airplane or return the airplane to wing control. The successful leader evaluates whether keeping the airplane will adversely affect other squadrons in the wing. What if another squadron or group flies their airplane constantly and could really use an additional resource? How will the squadron commander's pilots feel about losing the airplane? How difficult will it be to get that aircraft back if flying requirements increase? While there is no one correct answer to the problem, the point is that a successful leader would look at the whole picture, before arriving at a decision.

D. **Are good followers:** Leaders are also good followers. This may sound ironic, but it's true. Everyone has to answer to someone else. Squadron commanders have to answer to the wing commander who has to answer to region commanders, and so on. Being a good follower has two effects. First, it reduces friction between you and the higher echelons, because you are working together to get the job done. Second, it sets a positive example for the people who work for you because they will see that you know when to lead and when to follow.

- E. **Align unit goals with those of the organization:** A successful leader realizes that their unit does not operate in a vacuum, separated from other units and the organization as a whole. Rather, they see that their unit as a significant piece in the puzzle. The successful leader therefore, seeks to align the interests of the unit with those of the wing, and ultimately, with Civil Air Patrol. The leader realizes that in order for the system to work, their goals must support, not hinder, those of the units around and above them. This is not to say that they have to blindly support everything that comes down the line. They should work (within the system) to change those rules and policies which they feel hurt their unit and CAP as a whole. A word of caution however, leaders understand that working for meaningful change does not entail taking action that is intentionally harmful or malicious. Such actions harm the person taking the action, the unit they are working with, Civil Air Patrol itself, and ultimately their cause.
- F. **Are good managers:** Finally, successful leaders are good managers. They understand what it takes to get the job done and support it, not stand in its way. Some people who have leadership ability ultimately fail as leaders because they do not cultivate their managerial skills. Such people can burn out their subordinates, formulate goals which do not support the overall mission, miss critical tasks, or lose control over the program.

We've seen some of the traits that effective leaders have. You may be saying to yourself: sure, these are good traits, but don't they also apply to managers? Not necessarily. In the context of this discussion, managers and leaders have different, but overlapping skill sets. Let's take a closer look at the difference between leaders and managers.

The Difference between Leaders & Managers:

Managers and leaders have different but overlapping skill sets. While it's true that managers may not be leaders, it's also true that successful leaders are good managers. Let's examine why.

- A. **Managers work with objects and programs, logic and analysis:** Managers tend to be more comfortable with inanimate objects and tasks. They are pragmatic and tend to separate the emotional component of the problem from the problem itself.

They can manage a problem, program a computer, write a report, and manage a budget. They are good at controlling the situation.

The difference between leaders and managers:

- Managers work with _____ and _____, _____ and _____.
- Leaders succeed with _____.
- Managers are not necessarily leaders, and _____.
- Successful leaders however, cultivate their _____, _____, and focus their efforts to _____.

- B. **Leaders succeed with people:** Leaders motivate and inspire. To contrast this with what a manager does: Can one motivate or inspire a computer program or an action report? Of course not. Can one control a human being? That's just as impossible; while one's actions can be controlled, ultimately control is a commodity for a person to relinquish, not for another to take. Leaders are effective in enticing others to carry the banner for their cause to accomplish their goals.
- C. **Managers are not necessarily leaders, and vice versa:** Some of the best managers around couldn't lead a horse to water, they work best alone, and they are extremely successful. These people control vast resources: computers, systems, equipment, numbers, economic activity, etc. But what they control is the program, not the people. Likewise, some good leaders have no managerial ability whatsoever. You've probably met two or three: they can't find their own car keys but you'd follow them to the deepest swamp because of who they are.
- D. **Successful leaders however, cultivate their managerial skills, and accomplish the mission.** The difference between mediocre leaders and successful leaders is that the successful ones cultivate their managerial skills to enhance their ability to get the job done. They have the ability to lead their people toward accomplishing goals while understanding and controlling the processes to get it done.

All this given, there is one success factor, if not mastered by the potential leader, that will lead to their failure. Successful leaders must master the art of communication.

Communication: A Critical Success Factor of Leadership:

The most basic skill that successful leaders master is the art of communication. They realize that in order to get the mission accomplished they have to explain to their people what the mission is and listen to the feedback their members provide.

The leader must be able to effectively communicate thoughts and, ensure that the members understand them. First, the leader must be able to effectively articulate the goal, mission, or task. It must be clear and concise providing the members with all the information they need to get the job done. Success is measured not by what the leader thinks the member understands, but in what the member actually DOES understand. For instance, you may instruct one of your cadets this way, "Cadet Russell, bring me 10 women's size 12 jackets from the supply room." On the surface it sounds clear enough, but when the cadet goes to the storeroom and asks the supply officer for the jackets, the supply officer asks, "What kind of jackets? BDU jackets or the jacket for the blue uniform." All of a sudden, the clear message you thought you sent is cloudy.

Just as important to communicating clearly is being able to receive effective feedback. Provide a positive atmosphere that allows members to provide feedback. If you foster a negative environment, that is, gain a reputation for shooting the messenger when they come with bad news, or you lose patience with a member who comes to you with a question, you'll scare your people from telling you what you need to know. That's poor communication and a sure path to failure.

Five Critical Questions to Ask:

How do you know if you are on the road towards becoming a successful leader? Since the question is wholly subjective – seen through the eyes of people you work with and for, it's not a question you can completely answer by yourself. However, there are five questions which can give you an idea of how well you're doing, and what areas you need to work on.

- 1. Are you a manager, leader, or both?** Do you feel more comfortable managing projects? Do you shy away from people? Do you feel like your job is to coach, inspire, and lead the charge? Do you feel comfortable in all of these roles?
- 2. What skills will you share?** What can you share with your members? What do you wish to share?
- 3. What skills will you improve?** Of yourself? Of your members?
- 4. How do you accomplish the mission?** Is the mission your constant focus? Can you balance the mission with the needs of your members? Can you ask for help? Do you drive and bully your members to accomplish the mission? Do you coach and mentor? Do you bark when you have to? Can you stand up to members who are friends?
- 5. What will you do differently next week?** Will examining your leadership style influence how you do your job next week? How can you improve your leadership skills?

Five critical questions to ask

- Are you a _____, _____, or _____?
- What skills will you _____?
- What skills will you _____?
- How do you accomplish the _____?
- What will you do _____ next week?

As you've no doubt noticed, these questions, while appearing simple on the surface, can lead to some deep soul searching. Becoming a successful leader is not simple, and the journey, for those who wish to take it, never ends. Becoming a successful leader should not be seen as an end, but as a challenging and rewarding process.