

5 Traits All Influential Leaders Possess

The key to expanding influence is to become a leader who inspires people to follow.

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Influential leaders know how to increase their visibility, effectiveness and reach. They make sure the workplace is a more efficient and profitable enterprise. They set higher standards to serve their customers and clients. And, in doing so, they create positive opportunities not just for themselves, but for their colleagues at all levels, as well.

The key to expanding influence is to become a leader who inspires people to follow. How to you do that? By following these five traits shared by all people of influence:

1. technical and professional competence,
2. interpersonal skills and charisma,
3. professional reputation,
4. executive presence and
5. persuasiveness.

1. Enhance Your Technical Skill and Education

Enhancing your technical competence is the first step to building a reputation. Invest time pursuing advanced degrees and certifications that are relevant to your field. Aggressively pursue professional development opportunities.

This isn't just about learning your boss's job; take time to learn the core tasks your subordinates need to accomplish, as well. When you understand their jobs, you will make better decisions, employ your people more efficiently, and earn their respect and loyalty.

This doesn't mean a hospital executive needs to learn how to be a brain surgeon or registered nurse. But it does mean that the healthcare leader needs to understand the challenges, problems and headaches his or her staff encounters-on everything from compensation to clinical skills to compliance.

2. Enhance Your Likeability

There's no doubt there have been some tremendously successful and powerful executives who have not been very likeable people. But they were successful *despite* their poor interpersonal skills, not because of them. Improving your likeability factor is easier said than done.

- Assume the best of people, rather than the worst.
- Catch others doing something well and complement them.
- Share credit with your subordinates. They'll see what's going on.
- Never pass the blame when things go wrong.
- Remember peoples' names. And those of their spouses and children. (Keep notes!)
- Tell others you work with, "You know what I've always admired about you?" Then complete the sentence.



3. Enhance Your Reputation

Leaders need to be respected. And at the C-level, and for those aspiring to the C-level, technical competence isn't enough. The executive needs to become skilled in the *judicious application of authority*. How can you do this?

- Know when to make a decision-and when to stick with it. Indecisive leaders paralyze an organization. People will begin to dodge responsibility, instead of running with the ball you give them. Once you've gathered all the information you can reasonably expect, and built all the "consensus" you can, know when to say "Ok, gang. Here's what we're going to do."
- Follow through. Check on your directives to see that they're carried out. If you made a bad decision, adjust your course. But don't ignore your course or the realities of the situation and your team's capabilities.
- Live by the standards of behavior that you set. You can't expect or enforce standards of professionalism and behavior from others if you don't embody them yourself.



4. Enhance Your Executive Presence

Executive presence is about having a powerful and confident persona. The magnetic pull of your charismatic personality draws people to you and compels them to follow you. They trust in your leadership and feed off of your confident sense of self.

- Work on visible projects. Seek out projects that others will notice. When you excel at invisible projects, only those in your department will notice. When you excel at visible projects, or *projects that produce revenue*, you expand your visibility much more-and to higher management levels.
- Be the calm one. Keep your head when those about you are losing theirs. Crises bring out the best and worst in people. Great leaders try to avoid crises in the first place. But when the unavoidable happens, be on the spot, in the thick of it, and be the one making calm, rational decisions-in a timely manner. People remember that.

5. Enhance Your Persuasiveness

Persuasion involves building alliances. When your peers buy into your idea, it becomes easier for them to follow you. Seek to form bonds with people who have power and influence. If you bring them on board, others will trust the direction you're heading.

- A big part of persuasiveness is being able to put yourself in other peoples' shoes. How do they *perceive* the situation? Do they benefit from your proposed course of action? How is the action perceived, both by middle management, by the rank and file employees, and by patients, shareholders, donors or other stakeholders?
- Here's an exercise: If you anticipate pushback over a proposed course of action, try to write out a coherent, principled argument from their point of view. You cannot expect to persuade if you don't first understand their position well enough to express it yourself.
- Once you have done that, you are in an excellent position to build consensus and form the alliances you need to help your project succeed.

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