

Characteristics of a Leader

I recently heard the story that department store founder J.C. Penney once filled a key executive spot in his company based on the food salting habits of those being considered for the job.

As the story goes, Penney held a dinner attended by those whose names were, unbeknownst to them, on the short list for a vice president position. Penney's advisors made a unanimous recommendation to the magnate, so when another man's name was announced as the new vice president, the inner circle was naturally perplexed. "Why did you pass over the gentleman we recommended?" they asked. "He clearly has the most experience and the best qualifications."

"He's not the right person for the job," Penney said. "He put salt on his potatoes before tasting them. We need someone who isn't so quick to judge, and who makes more carefully researched decisions."

Whether the tale is true or not, it bears a lesson. Decisions shouldn't focus only on "qualifications"; remember to give regard to character, personal qualities and leadership behaviors.

Communication critical

Garrison Wynn's book speaks to that same topic of character and leadership qualities. In his book, titled *The Real Truth About Success: What the top 1% do differently, why they won't tell you, and how you can do it anyway!*, Wynn studied 5,000 top performers over 10 years in multiple industries, including agriculture, in the areas of leadership, communication and change in order to determine what they do that makes them successful. He whittled it down to a few basic concepts for building relationships and effectively communicating across age groups.

To start, he emphasizes "Build trust." As an employer or manager, establishing trust is a critical component to developing a loyal and reliable employee team. Trust is built on the foundation of two things: compassion and competence. These mean demonstrating to others you have concern for their well-being while also delivering on promises and expectations.

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— Garrison Wynn

Also high on the list is "Make people feel heard." Wynn says if there is one thing a person can do to quickly gain trust, it is to listen to others in order to reassure them that their thoughts and opinions are being considered. For example, when proposing a change, managers can accomplish this feat by first allowing others to share their concerns.

He explains that there is scientific proof that the human body chemically and physically reacts. "When someone feels listened to and heard, in that moment, the pituitary gland puts that person in an anesthetized state," according to Wynn.

Additionally, when people feel "heard," their sense of value goes up, too. Employees who feel valued are more likely to take pride in their work and to strive to meet performance standards. "The number one thing on Earth that humans value is feeling valuable," Wynn stresses. "People who feel

valued tend to make fewer mistakes and do a better job as employees."

Advice for change

Wynn also has some tactical advice for implementing changes. He notes that when businesses announce and implement changes, the initial reaction from employees may be fueled by fear and uncertainty. The "old way" of completing a task makes workers feel smart, and the last thing they want to hear is that the way they are comfortable with doing something is no longer valid. As Wynn explains, "No one wants to be a 'senior beginner.'"

To ease into changes, he recommends first explaining how the "new way" will be similar to the "old way," such as with a lead-in statement like, "Let me show you how the way you have done things for so many years is going to help the new way."

Lastly, Wynn says intelligence isn't enough to achieve success. "I wish I could tell you being smart was enough, but it is not," Wynn says. Given that the average American I.Q. is around 100, most executives are somewhere around that mark, averaging 104, and middle managers slightly above at 115. Out of 400 billionaires in the world, only one has a genius-level I.Q.

Thus, the true key to success, according to Wynn, is clarity. People who are successful can clearly explain what is important. They can articulate it in a way that is easy for others to understand quickly. **HW**