



PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR SUCCESS

A review of literature in leading business journals as well as interviews with, and observations of, senior managers, reveal some clear attributes of success. The following seem to be the most important personal characteristics.

- **Adaptability** ~ Organizational changes surround us. No industry is immune. So the individual with the ability to adjust quickly, move deftly, and deal with all the changes is prized. Conversely, those that don't or can't adapt, will fail. Whining is out! Complaining about what is lost or the good old days is useless at best. That attitude doesn't even qualify to make you feel better any more. No one wants to listen.
Having and demonstrating the personal confidence that you can handle anything is a sign of intelligence and reality-based thinking. This is not about bluster, empty words or an overbearing demeanor. Rather it is exhibiting the ability to deal with whatever crosses your path in a purposeful and positive manner.
- **Creativity** ~ Certainly the artist has abilities that most of us don't have. I've always envied the person who can take a blank piece of paper and create a masterpiece... either with paints, words or notes. Clearly, these individuals are the minority of the population. However, many more of us have the ability to see a situation with a new set of eyes. That's the kind of creativity that is valuable in business today. This characteristic differentiates the plodder from the leader. The latter demonstrates original thought, unique impressions and unusual solutions to issues, problems and crises. Leaders take the mundane and visualize the possibilities. They take the overwhelming and make it understandable.
The business environment today demands ever-higher standards and more creative problem solving in an increasingly complex world. The people highest in demand are those who are up to this challenge; who long ago relinquished formula based thinking, traditional ways of operating, and reactive or risk averse behavior.
- **Commitment** ~ The dictionary defines commitment as *the state of being bound emotionally or intellectually to a course of action or to another person or persons*. In business, this attribute manifests itself in professionals who seize an issue, make it their own and follow it through to completion. These are the folks who don't need to be coddled. Instead, they grasp the situation, look at it as a challenge, own it and solve it. They tackle what comes their way, not lie down and play dead or stand in the way as an obstacle. These are the project or process champions.
- **Communication** ~ It is not possible to overstate the essential nature of this characteristic. Those who can translate and transfer information to others in an understandable, believable and convincing manner are in a special class.
While written communication skills are indispensable, oral communications have taken on vital importance. The ability to meet one-on-one for discussion,

negotiation, brainstorming and problem solving requires above average use of language, excellent listening abilities and sensitivity to what is being said. Increasingly, professionals also must have high quality presentation skills to win projects, gain new clients or customers, train colleagues, convince or inspire others.

- **Decisiveness** ~ In a business environment anchored in speed, the ability to make quick, forceful decisions based on good analysis is a required characteristic. Tom Peters refers to this as a *bias for action*. Too many folks never have enough information so they engage in analysis paralysis. They study and discuss and process an issue until the positive effects of any decision are dissipated. At the other end of the continuum are those that practice the knee jerk response to decision making. They impulsively act without adequate consideration of the outcomes.
- **Future Orientation** ~ No one is issued a crystal ball, but those with the ability to make connections between current events and future trends have a crucial skill. The capacity to extrapolate is very important when tomorrow's successful venture is envisioned today, based on yesterday's information. The talent for prediction and always looking ahead is one essential piece of strategic thinking.
- **Independence** ~ There are not too many road maps available to guide you through corporate America today. The quality of being self-motivated is essential. The days of hovering supervisors are gone. They don't have the time or the answers. The most successful professionals use their own engines to propel them, not someone else's. They are resourceful in seeking out new information and applying it. They don't wait to be chosen or to be told the next steps.
- **Judgment** ~ *Formation of an opinion after consideration or deliberation* is one definition of judgment. Translated into business terms it means having the ability to evaluate people, situations, issues and problems using clear standards. The operative words are clear standards. To me, this requires values. To be skilled in judgment, one must have a solid understanding of where they begin and end, so that personal needs, interests and biases don't overshadow the wider corporate or employee needs.

Balance and discretion are important components of judgment. When confronted with confusing or incomplete data, the ability to make good decisions, proven over time to be of consistently high quality, distinguishes corporate winners.
- **Teamwork** ~ The Lone Ranger is dead! Today, while the mantra is teams, there are too few individuals who know how to organize, support, grow **and** participate on teams. Flexibility is a key quality here. The roles keep changing. Successful professionals understand that sometimes they lead, sometimes they follow, sometimes they speak and sometimes they listen. All are necessary when working in a team environment.

These nine personal characteristics: adaptability, creativity, commitment,

communication, decisiveness, future orientation, independence, judgment and teamwork are essential attributes for individual success and leadership. How do the leaders in your organization measure up?

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