

Seven Characteristics of Advancing Leaders

I am a leader watcher.

Indeed I have observed and learned from leaders as far back as my memory takes me. At this phase of my life in my late fifties, I continue to enjoy watching and learning from leaders. My son, Jess Rainer, and I did a study and book on the Millennials. Our research included leadership issues related to this young-adult generation.

But my observations are not limited to just this generation. To the contrary, my leadership research spans multiple generations in multiple vocations. I am particularly fascinated to watch those persons who are obviously on the move, who seemed to be both present and future leaders. Recently, I made an attempt to summarize seven general characteristics of these leaders who are advancing in their organizations and in life in general. Here are the seven traits I noted, none of which should be a surprise:

1. **Strategic.** Advancing leaders not only do what they are assigned, they are always thinking ahead. They take on responsibilities well beyond what their supervisors expect of them. While they do excel at tackling today's work, they are always thinking about what needs to be done for the future betterment of the organization.
2. **Joyful.** The leadership literature twenty years and older rarely mentioned joy as a characteristic of advancing leaders. That is not the case anymore. These leaders have devoted followers because the leader himself or herself has a joy that is contagious. As a corollary, advancing leaders tend to have fun with their work.
3. **Articulate.** These leaders have good communication skills, both verbal and written. If they are not particularly adept at communicating, they make their improvement a high priority in their leadership development. Advancing leaders speak well and write well.
4. **Humble.** Again, the leadership literature of just a couple of decades ago rarely spoke of humility as a positive trait. To the contrary, some of the older publications implied that humility could be perceived as a weakness. Confidence moving toward arrogance was not uncommon among the leaders of the past. Today, advancing leaders are more likely than not to have a humble disposition. Confident humility actually engenders followship.
5. **Hard working.** This trait has not changed over the years. Leadership is earned with hard work. Perhaps more today than the past, leadership is not handed to entitled persons. Advancing leaders are paying their dues today.
6. **Grateful.** If you want to see a stark contrast between an advancing leader and someone who is not, listen to their conversations. Advancing leaders are always grateful for opportunities; they rarely have a sense of entitlement. Others are more likely to complain about the organization, co-workers, the government, the leaders in the organization, and others. It's never their fault; someone else is to blame. To the contrary, advancing leaders take responsibility and express gratitude regularly.
7. **Innovative.** Advancing leaders are creative and innovative. They have the ability to think outside the box. When they hit a roadblock, they just seem to find a way to move around it. Many of the great ideas of the future are being formulated in the minds of these leaders today.

It is indeed fun to watch these leaders as they advance in organizations and society. They are changing the world for the better in the future. Many of them are changing the world for the better today.

What characteristics have you noticed in other leaders which could be added to this list?

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