

The Only Trait of a Leader

*A field guide to success
for new engineers, scientists,
and technologists*

**by
John E. West**

The Only Trait of a Leader

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It is not the purpose of this text to reprint all available information on leadership skills and techniques for technology professionals, but instead to complement, amplify, and supplement other texts. You are urged to read all of the available material to learn as much as possible and tailor the information presented here and elsewhere to your individual needs.

This is a sample from the new book “The Only Trait of a Leader,” by John E. West.

If you're interested in learning more, check out full details on the web site, www.onlytraitofaleader.com. There you can download samples of other chapters, or buy the entire book in PDF or print form.

Thanks for reading!

Chapter 1

The Principles of Enlightened Technology Leadership

Your life and career don't wait for milestones. What you are doing now—and what you will do next—is happening because of what you have done up to now. Your career doesn't start when you finish your degree and get your first job. It started with your first chores around the house, and your first homework assignments. The attitude, work ethic, and approach to life that shape your future are being molded by all the events you experience now, or have experienced, and by your reactions to them. That includes reading this book.

You probably will not *become* a leader. That's because you probably *are* a leader. Right now you are influencing the behavior, thoughts, and actions of someone around you. It doesn't matter whether you are reading this book as a first-year student in college or as you are starting your supervisory job at a multinational technology firm. Right now, somewhere, somehow, you are probably leading. Without position or title, probably without money or fame, and without anyone calling you "ma'am" or "sir," you are leading.

It's a big responsibility. How are you doing?

This chapter will introduce you to the philosophy, the general principles, of enlightened technology leadership. We'll cover the basic concepts that govern enlightened leaders in their daily interactions with those around them. Some of the core concepts will be obvious, some not. The challenge is to make each of them an active part of your life, to internalize them. Put another way, you need to "heart-learn" not just "head-learn" these concepts. When you heart-learn these concepts they will shape your attitudes, choices, and actions automatically, without your having to think about them. It's like the difference between reading about how to fire a gun and spending months on a range firing thousands of rounds. At the end of your time on the range, you can fire without needing to think about it. If you're a police officer, heart-learning can save your life. If you're a leader, heart-learning can save your organization.

This process takes time. Adopting these concepts is a big learning process. I'm still going through it, and as far as I can tell this is something we'll all work on for the rest of our lives. But it is good work, and work that will pay dividends far beyond what you'll recognize at first. By becoming an enlightened technology leader you'll work from a position of abundance looking for ways in which everyone can have a starring role in his or her own life. The biggest impact you'll have will be in setting an example for others to follow, and in teaching them how to look at the world through your eyes. Enlightened eyes. If you take care of leading in your corner of the world, and the people you know are inspired to lead the enlightened way in theirs, imagine the difference we can make together.

The only essential trait of a leader

One of my mentors frequently reminds me that the only absolutely essential trait of a leader is that he or she has followers. As I said above, leadership does not come from position, power, money, or fame. Certainly being a leader doesn't guarantee those attributes,

either, although leaders often find that they are blessed with at least some of them. You cannot be given leadership in your personal or professional life. You are leading, as indicated by the observation that people are following you, or you aren't leading. If you haven't yet developed leadership traits and qualities, this book may be able to help you do so.

Look at your organization and the power structure. By virtue of being a part of management, managers are in charge, and the workers in the organization do have to carry out the manager's wishes or seek employment elsewhere. But managers aren't necessarily leaders. The terms *leader* and *leadership* are often used interchangeably with *manager* and *management*. This is actually quite common, and certainly it is desirable to have your managers be leaders, but management and leadership are not the same activity, and it is all too often the case that managers are not leaders.

The difference between managing and leading people is essentially a question of motivation. People follow leaders; they move of their own accord in the direction that the leader has set out for them. When people are managed they aren't led anywhere, they are pushed. A manager who is in charge but not leading is *pushing*, and pushing is a miserable way to manage. In fact, it's what makes management hard and something to be dreaded. Pushers must constantly apply energy, time, and resources to herding an uncooperative, unmotivated workforce toward the organization's goals.

A leader, by contrast, applies a lot of energy at the beginning when she or he communicates the vision, articulates the goals, and creates a vibrant team in which everyone feels a part of what's being done and wants to succeed not just for the organization, but for himself or herself. The successful leader then applies a little energy periodically along the way to check the pulse of the project and make sure everyone is on track toward the vision and goal. When individuals are led, they feel that their personal goals are inextricably linked to the organization's goals.

An organization with pushers may still achieve its goals, but usually it will fall just short of them. The reason is simple: as a pusher, you cannot make people care; you can only make them comply. Caring about something is a voluntary action that comes from the inside of what makes people, well, people. Put more practically, you can usually only hope for 70% by the whip. To get 110%, you have to have the heart.

Be an enlightened leader, not a pusher.

The principal principle

Leadership starts with adherence to the principal principle: be great at what you do.

It doesn't matter what you do. It doesn't matter where you do it. Some are called to be great in a field that changes the world, and are recognized with Nobel prizes. Most of us are not given such high callings or such tremendous talent. But each of us has the opportunity to be great at whatever we are called to do. Be a great accountant. Be a great writer of technical manuals. Be a great spouse. Be a great boss. Be a great teacher. Be a great leader.

Don't be good. Don't be adequate. These are wastes of time. Be great.

Being great doesn't mean never failing, and it doesn't mean changing the world. It means providing more than is expected when you do your job.

A leader who is only adequate at his job is doing a great disservice. People follow leaders. They set the example. If you are a leader then it is your obligation to the universe to set an example of greatness that others follow.

To be an enlightened leader, follow the principal principle: be great at what you do.

Thanks for reading this excerpt from the new book “The Only Trait of a Leader.”

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I hope you've enjoyed reading this sample.