

“How to Spot a Potential Leader”

Ten ways to identify a promising person.

Here are several traits to help identify whether someone is capable of learning to lead.

1. Leadership in the past.

The best predictor of the future is the past. Has this individual held leadership positions in the past, either in their career or as a volunteer?

2. The capacity to create or catch vision.

Do their eyes light up with a passion when you speak of your vision? Have they ever had a vision for one of their ideas or ministries? A person who doesn't feel the thrill of challenge is not a potential leader.

3. A constructive spirit of discontent.

There is a difference between being constructively discontent and critical. If somebody says, “There's got to be a better way to do this,” see if there's leadership potential by asking, “Have you ever thought about what that better way might be?” If he says no, he is being critical, not constructive. But if he says yes, he is being constructive. That is an un-scratchable itch. It is always in the leader.

4. Practical ideas.

Not everybody with practical ideas is a leader, of course, but leaders seem to be able to identify which ideas are practical and which aren't.

5. A willingness to take responsibility.

Carrying responsibility doesn't intimidate a leader, because the joy of accomplishment, the vicarious feeling of contributing to other people, is what leadership is all about.

6. A completion factor.

The person who grabs hold of a problem and won't let go, like a dog with a bone, has leadership potential. The quality is critical in leaders, for there will be times when nothing but one's iron will says, “Keep going.”

7. Mental toughness.

No one can lead without being criticized or without facing discouragement. We don't want mean or callous leaders, but ones that are willing to develop a tough skin while maintaining a sensitive heart for people.

8. Peer respect.

Maxey Jarmen said, “It isn't important that people like you. It's important that they respect you. They may like you but not follow you. If they respect you, they'll follow you, even if perhaps they don't like you.”

9. Family respect.

After Fred Smith spoke about leadership, his daughter said, “Dad, one thing I appreciate is that after you speak and I walk up, you are always attentive to me. You seem proud of me.”

10. A quality that makes people listen to them.

Potential leaders have a “holding court” quality about them. When they speak, people listen. Other people may talk a great deal, but nobody listens to them. Take notice of people to whom others listen.

(adapted from “Spotting A New Leader” by Fred Smith)