



Leadership That Goes the Distance - *John C. Maxwell*

If you could improve one quality in yourself to increase your leadership ability, what would you choose? If you're like the majority of people, you would probably like to increase your charisma. After all, that's what initially attracts followers, right?

Author Anthony Trollope once said, "Marvelous is the power which can be exercised, almost unconsciously, over a company or an individual or even upon a crowd by one person gifted with good temper, good digestion, good intellect, and good looks." What he's describing are the effects of charisma. It's very valuable to leadership, but unfortunately the effects of charisma are only temporary. Strong charisma will get you in the door with people, but it can never sustain your influence by itself.

When it comes to lasting influence, nothing is more important than character. As Robert A. Cook noted, "There is no substitute for character. You can buy brains, but you cannot buy character." It's the inner fiber of a person. And it's essential to ensuring that your leadership goes the distance. Here's why:

1. CHARACTER SETS YOU APART.

There was a time when the people who lacked integrity stood out from the crowd. Unfortunately, now the opposite is true. So when you consistently exhibit character over a period of time, people take notice. Billy Graham is a good example of this. Every President since Harry Truman has sought his leadership and wise counsel--a result of his lifetime of unwavering integrity.

It's true that charisma can make a person stand out for a moment, but character sets a person apart for a lifetime.

2. CHARACTER CREATES TRUST.

Charisma can draw people to you, but it gives them no reason to trust you. With character, you build trust with others each time you choose integrity over image, truth over convenience, or honor over personal gain.

PepsiCo Chairman and CEO Craig Weatherup explains, "You don't build trust by talking about it. You build it by achieving results, always with integrity and in a manner that shows real personal regard for the people with whom you work." Character makes trust possible. And trust is the foundation of leadership.

3. CHARACTER COMMUNICATES CONSISTENCY.

NBA great, Jerry West commented, "You can't get too much done in life if you only work on the days when you feel good." Leaders with inner strength can be counted on day after day because their ability to lead remains constant. If your people know what they can expect from you they will continue to look to you for leadership.

4. CHARACTER PROMOTES POTENTIAL.

John Morely said, "No man can climb out beyond the limitations of his own character." When a leader's character is strong, people trust him, and they trust his ability to release their potential because he has taken steps to reach his own. That not only gives followers hope for the future, but

it also promotes a strong belief in themselves and their organization.

If you're currently leading people, you probably have some measure of both charisma and character. The question is, which one are you relying on to lead? The answer can be found in your response to this question: As time goes by, is it easier or harder to sustain your influence within your organization? With charisma alone, influence becomes increasingly more difficult to sustain. With character, as time passes, influence builds and requires less work to sustain.

Take some time to evaluate your character. Ask yourself the hard questions, then if necessary commit to making changes to ensure you are building a stronger foundation of trust among your people.

Special Feature: A Character Profile of Abraham Lincoln - *John C. Maxwell*

Abraham Lincoln has almost become a mythical figure in our nation's history. But Lincoln was much more than the sum of his myths. He was an outstanding leader--quite possibly the greatest President in the history of this nation.

What is it about Lincoln that made him such a great President? The time of his presidency was marked by much conflict and criticism. Yet, despite the turmoil, he maintained many admirable qualities which should be modeled in every leader's life:

1. CHARACTER.

Lincoln's leadership was founded on character. A man of solid values, he actually lived up to the "Honest Abe" moniker given to him as a young shopkeeper. For example, when Lincoln was 24-years-old, he was the postmaster of New Salem, an appointment that lasted briefly since the post office closed.

Because the bureaucracy was so slow in those days, years passed before a government agent came to settle accounts with him. When he was told that he owed the government \$17, Lincoln produced the exact amount of money which had remained untouched despite his poverty. The agent was shocked. But Lincoln explained, "I never use any man's money but my own."

Lincoln always desired to do the right thing. His motto was, "Stand with anybody that stands right. Stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong."

2. COMMUNICATION.

Lincoln has an uncanny ability for communication. His Gettysburg Address is still considered to be one of the finest speeches written in the English language.

Lincoln knew how to connect with an audience. He once said, "They say I tell a great many stories. I reckon I do; but I have learned from long experience that plain people, take them as they run, are more easily influenced through the medium of a broad and humorous illustration than in any other way."

He also excelled at one-on-one communication. It's said that he could convince anyone of just about anything. A letter from journalist Thurlow Weed illustrates: "I do not, when I am with you, say half I intend... partly because you talk me out of my convictions and apprehensions."

Lincoln put his communication skills to good use. He spent much time out among the people, particularly with the troops. He also employed an "open door policy," rarely declining to see anyone.

3. COURAGE.

Perhaps the greatest demonstration of Lincoln's leadership was his courage in the face of adversity and his ability to beat the odds. Entering the office of President, he inherited the mess left behind by his predecessor, James Buchanan: seven states had seceded to form the Confederate States of America, and the Union Army, unprepared for war, was facing budget cuts in Congress.

Ernest Hemingway once defined courage as "grace under pressure," three words that appropriately describe Lincoln's tenure as President. He displayed amazing courage when the country needed it most, and did so while facing vicious criticism. He wrote to General John McClernand, "It often requires more courage to dare to do right than to fear to do wrong. He who has the right needs not to fear."

Abraham Lincoln's attitude and actions characterize what it takes to be an effective leader in any organization. His character stood the test of time; his ability to communicate effectively continually broadened his influence; and his courage inspired a nation. Abraham Lincoln's leadership clearly went the distance.

Quotes of the Month

"You can never conquer the mountain. You can only conquer yourself."

- *Jim Whittaker*

"To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful."

- *Edward R. Murrow*

"Character is power."

- *Booker T. Washington*

"Dreams are the touchstones of our character."

- *Henry David Thoreau*

"Leadership only functions on the basis of trust."

- *John C. Maxwell*