



To: Company Commanders
From: Company Commanders

What Do You Want Most in a Leader?

In the CompanyCommand forum (<http://CC.army.mil>), we have been talking about the attributes that we value in leaders. We framed two questions to spark the conversation:

- Question 1: What do you want in a subordinate?
Question 2: What do you want in a boss?

In this article, we report on some of the responses. First, however—and we know this requires some discipline—take a few minutes to brainstorm your own ideas. (You will be glad you did!) After you have a list, hone it

down and rank order the top five for each question. In other words, list the top five attributes/competencies that you personally want in a subordinate, then do the same for a boss.

Take a look at your list. Does anything jump out at you? Any surprises? Do you want different things in a subordinate from what you want in a boss?

Now you get to read the article. As you read, compare and contrast your perspectives with those of other valued members of the profession. Read with an open mind, looking for new insights and connections.

Fran Murphy

D/2-34 AR

Subordinate: (1) hardworking (2) honest (3) loyal (4) physically fit (5) proactive.

Boss: (1) smart (2) warfighter (3) charismatic (4) proactive (5) positive.

Joe Byerly

C/3-7 Cavalry and HHC/1-64

Subordinate: (1) competent (2) desire to learn (3) critical thinker (4) authentic.

Boss: (1) competent (2) good mentor (3) authentic (4) listens.

Derrick Zanders

HCB/2-18 FA

Subordinate: (1) confidence (2) listening/people skills (3) initiative (4) leads by example (5) compassion.

Boss: (1) trust (2) genuine concern (3) open to communication (4) clear intent with 3–5 priorities (5) active listener.

Kevin Hadley

C/1-504 PIR

I want the same basic things in both my subordinates and bosses: (1) virtue (excellent character); (2) leadership (provide purpose, direction, motivation); and (3) tactical competence.

That is a pretty tall order. It requires years of formation—vicarious through reading and experiential through mistakes made (and not a little innate potential).

Tony Burgess

A/2-35 IN & LRSD/25th ID(L)

This exercise made me *think*. I brainstormed 20 different attributes and rank ordered the top five. I want my subordinates to: (1) be competent, quick learners; (2) work hard; (3) be team-oriented; (4) demonstrate initiative; (5) take responsibility.

I want my boss to: (1) have exceptional judgment/discernment; (2) have and communicate vision; (3) be concerned about the important things; (4) be collaborative and open to new ideas; (5) let me “run with it.”

As I reflected, I began to see that a boss with exceptional judgment and discernment—what you could call wisdom—is priceless. The other attributes may not matter if you don’t have that first one.

Anonymous

My question to myself: “What would my answer be if I used Army doctrine?” In the newly published ADP [Army Doctrine Publication] and ADRP [Army Doctrine Reference Publication] 6-22, *Army Leadership*, I found the “Army Leadership Requirements Model,” which describes what the Army wants its leaders to be, know and do. There are

Fran Murphy, passing on the D/2-34 guidon, wants his leaders to be smart, proactive and positive.



three meta-attributes—character, presence, intellect, and three meta-competencies—leads, develops, and achieves, with a number of additional, more specific items under each of those. (I assume the Army will update the front side of the Officer Evaluation Report to reflect these.) All in all, there are 23 attributes and competencies; actually, there are more than that because some of the items, such as “Army Values” and “Warrior Ethos,” can be further broken down. Pulling from the 23-plus items in our doctrine, here are my top five for both my subordinates and my bosses: (1) gets results; (2) exercises sound judgment; (3) possesses integrity; (4) creates a positive environment/fosters esprit de corps; (5) develops others.

I’m pretty happy with those.

Edward Cappellano

C/2-108th IN and E/427 BSB in the 27th IBCT (NYARNG)

I read all of the above. What if someone has all of these competencies but is still not a good platoon leader or commander? What if the person is talented but not invested and is just killing time waiting for his next assignment? There has to be another factor. “Team oriented” comes close. I call it ownership, or investment. If a person with all of these competencies is not invested—has no sense of ownership in his unit—all the competencies do not matter.

Tony Burgess

Ed, what I’m hearing you say is that the quality you most want in leaders is for them to be “all in” (i.e., fully committed or invested).

Jeffery Jones

B Battery, 1-134th FA

I agree with this wholeheartedly. I’ve run across many talented leaders who lacked that one attribute, which I believe you hit right on the head. Great leadership attributes do not always make a person great, but the investment of energy (the blood and sweat) with an attitude of teamwork seems to always pay off. I’d venture to say that some of my subordinates who lacked many of the previously identified qualities but possessed this ownership you speak of turned out to be better in the long run.

Dana Riegel

HHC, 173rd BSB and the Greater Kansas City Recruiting Company-4G1

Subordinate: (1) ability to quickly gain situational awareness (2) takes initiative (3) honest.

Boss: (1) ability to quickly gain situational understanding (2) trusts subordinates (3) proactive (4) mentor.

In addition to these, both have to have heart and a passion for what they are doing. As mentioned by several contributors, leaders need to be “all in.”

Chris Miller

HHB 1-7 ADA (Fort Bragg, N.C.)

Subordinate: (1) invested—in the Profession, him or herself, and his or her troops (2) aggressive (3) adaptive (4) physically fit (5) loyal.

Boss: (1) professional—in all matters and at all times (2) competent (exercised at the tactical level—versed at the



Kevin Hadley's soldiers (C/1-504 PIR) inspired him to be a role model, to provide leadership and to be tactically competent.

strategic and operational levels) (3) honest/loyal (4) humble (5) listens to the concerns and suggestions of others with genuine concern and interest.

I filled up an entire sheet of paper with different attributes. In rank ordering them, I found that I value them differently for subordinates and bosses. For example, I had “physically fit” listed as an attribute for both. This attribute, however, made it to my top five for the subordinate and not the superior.

Damian Green

B/501 FSB, 1AD DISCOM, in support of 1-1AD

Subordinate: (1) Do what I asked you to do, but don't do it in a vacuum (ask for input and feedback) (2) Think and provide the output of that thought in a usable format for the unit to consider (3) Once you do what I told you to do, do more; help the organization get caught up or even ahead.

Boss: (1) Provide iterative feedback on the projects that you asked my team to accomplish; don't wait until the end (2) Force me to face the problems that need to be tackled that I may be ignoring (3) Help me overcome organizational boundaries so that I can move forward or you can change your guidance (4) Line up opportunities to allow us to succeed.

Melissa Salamanca

C Co, 305th MI BN

Subordinate: (1) the ability to independently problem solve/research solutions (2) the ability to anticipate requirements/issues (3) the ability to communicate openly and honestly.

Boss: (1) the ability to communicate openly and honestly

(2) trust and support (3) guidance and mentorship.

I would want a subordinate officer to be able to solve problems or look for the solutions independently because I may not have time to do so. Before problems or issues arise, it's important that my subordinate officers anticipate those issues or requirements to “get ahead” of them so we can be proactive instead of reactive. At all levels, communication is vital. The more informed I am, the better decisions I can make.

For a boss, not only would I want communication to be open and honest, but I would also want him/her to provide reasons for decisions, requirements, changes, etc. I can be much more credible in front of my subordinates if I understand why things are the way they are. I would also want my boss to trust the decisions I make and to back me up if the need arises. Finally, because my boss is more experienced than I am and because I will inevitably make mistakes, his/her guidance and mentorship are invaluable to my success in my current position and in the future.

Jill Davis

USARAF G4, CCC/MA OIC

Subordinate: (1) honest—tell it like it is (2) mission focused—accomplish what has to be done, but consider all things in getting to that end (3) committed—work until mission accomplishment to the best of your ability (4) perceptive—anticipate needs, requirements, outcomes, shortfalls, etc., impacting mission accomplishment (5) audacious—ability to think outside the box when everyone is stuck in the box (and to tactfully communicate it).



Dana Riegel (center), with her team, believes all leaders must have “a passion for what they are doing.”



Nathan Wike (right), with his first battalion commander/mentor, LTC J.P. Moore, believes that leaders must actively develop their subordinates.

Boss: (1) communicator—tell me what has to be done by when, and let me know where I stand (2) mission focused—gear all activities toward mission accomplishment (control or prioritize activities that do not contribute to goal end state) (3) team builder—enforce, develop, encourage, and/or allow school training, MTTs [mobile training teams], OPD [officer professional development], traditions, Challenge PT [physical training] (4) honest—tell it like it is (5) trustworthy—closed-door conversations remain closed-door; do things for the benefit of the organization.

My number-one attribute that I need from subordinates is for them to be honest. I make decisions (some that are major) based on their input. I believe Soldiers and NCOs are more likely to believe leaders who tell it like it is, whether good or bad. I need superiors to communicate what the mission or priorities are.

The difference in my attributes is based on levels of responsibility. The five attributes that I named for junior leaders are the building blocks for gaining credibility with their platoons. If I can ingrain those five attributes into my junior officers, they will earn respect from their NCOs, Soldiers and families. The next level of responsibility integrates the knowledge gained from the experiences that were learned as a junior officer. The superior leader capitalizes on the lessons learned to build the vision for the larger organization. The crucial responsibility of the superior leader is building the team and enabling the junior officer through developmental mentorship.

Walter Loyola

HHC, 117th Space Battalion, Colorado ARNG

My two lists are the same, but in a different order:

Subordinate: (1) integrity (2) mental agility (3) initiative/good judgment (4) organized (5) interpersonal skills.

Boss: (1) integrity (2) mental agility (3) organized (4) interpersonal skills (5) good judgment.

What Research Says

For 30 years, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have been asking people all over the world what they look for and admire in a leader. As reported in their book *The Leadership Challenge*, based on the input of 75,000 people, the qualities of a leader people willingly follow include “honesty, forward looking, competent, inspirational and credible.” To read more about Kouzes’ and Posner’s work visit www.leadershipchallenge.com.

For me, the different levels of responsibility drive what’s important. I believe all levels require integrity, which binds the rest of the qualities to each other—to do what’s right regardless of the circumstance or whether anyone is watching. Mental agility is the ability to apply common sense and thinking out of the box as appropriate. We owe it to our bosses to take initiative and exercise good judgment in using mental agility to find solutions to problems and in finding ways to improve the organization. In turn, bosses owe it to their subordinates to have good judgment in terms of knowing when to step in (I am hesitant to say “when to micromanage”) and to recognize good solutions. An organized leader provides structure, particularly in the form of clear guidance, allowing everyone to go in the same direction while employing initiative and mental agility. Interpersonal skills involve understanding people and being able to communicate. The boss has to communicate with more people as the level of responsibility grows. This is why “interpersonal skills” is higher on my top five for bosses than it is for subordinates.

Nathan Wike

HHC 210 BSB, 2/10 MTN (LI)

Subordinate: (1) common sense—must be able to analyze a given situation and craft a logical course of action (2) confidence—being able to stand up for oneself and one’s decisions under both internal (self) and external (others) scrutiny (3) initiative—knowing the commander’s intent and having the fortitude to carry out actions to further it in the absence of orders (4) introspection—the ability to objectively identify personal strengths and weaknesses and develop consequent means to maintain and/or improve (5) interpersonal—no matter the level or variant of rank, must be capable of integrating their skills and resources within a larger team in order to further mission accomplishment.

Boss: (1) integrity—sets the example for others to follow through personal and professional actions, and is willing to stand up for one’s beliefs even in the face of adversity (2) intelligence—well versed in all relevant military skills and subjects and possesses the ability to synthesize knowledge and use it in a relevant, objective manner (3) managerial—recognizes the skills and attributes of others, listens to varying ideas and synchronizes efforts to achieve a common goal (4) humility—accepts criticism, acknowledges the abilities of others and gives proper credit when it is due (5) mentorship—molds and guides others to maximize their

abilities and put forth the highest amount of effort possible.

My list is by no means conclusive. In reality all of these traits should be intrinsic to both subordinates and leaders. The major difference between the two is that a leader must be able to foster and encourage subordinates to become leaders themselves. One noticeable quality absent from my lists is “leadership.” I do not believe leadership is a single trait in and of itself. Rather, I believe that a leader is the successful combination/summation of all of one’s traits and abilities in order to motivate and inspire others.

* * *

This conversation is one of those that becomes valuable in direct proportion to the amount of energy you invest in it. As a quick read, it’s OK but probably without impact. If, however, it serves as a catalyst for you to do the exercise for yourself and with your team, it has the potential to be meaningful. Imagine, for example, a future company commander investing some quality time in the process, bouncing it off respected leaders for feedback, and then using it with his or her team after taking the guidon.

You can take this conversation even deeper, for yourself and for your team: Given what you said you value most in a subordinate and boss, how would your current boss assess you as a subordinate? How would your current subordinates assess you as a boss? In other words, turn your own criteria around on yourself. Finally, how are you putting your “top five” into practice? The greater challenge is not to decide on your top five; rather, it is to act on them—to put them into practice.

If you are a currently commissioned officer, we invite you to join the conversation in the Company-Command forum (<http://CC.army.mil>).

