

The Six Traits of Excellent Leaders

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SUBJECT(S): Communication, Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

Students will begin this lesson by becoming familiar with two companies and their leadership philosophies. Then they will read the article, “HP and Patagonia: Two Similar, Yet Different, Leadership Styles” and take note of the six traits mentioned. After a brief discussion of each trait, students will work in groups to create skits that display leaders who have each trait and leaders who do not.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Communication, III. Workplace Communication
- Management, IV. Personal Management Skills

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“Three Critical Steps to Help You Choose a College”](#)
- [“Mountain Guides Teach Us About Leadership”](#)
- [“Leadership, Patagonia-style: Changing the Criteria for Success”](#)
- [“Digital Natives Are Poised to Solve World Problems – and Close the STEM Gender Gap”](#)

Common Core Standard(s): Technology and Digital Media, Key Ideas and Details, Comprehension and Collaboration, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Objectives/Purposes: Students will learn six traits of excellent leaders.

Knowledge@Wharton Article: “[HP and Patagonia: Two Similar, Yet Different, Leadership Styles](#)”

Other Resources/Materials:

Internet Access: (<http://www.patagonia.com>, <http://www.hp.com/>)

Activity:

1. (5-10 mins) Start the day’s lesson by allowing students to get familiar with two companies, HP and Patagonia. Begin by asking what types of products HP produces and what types of products Patagonia produces. Then visit the websites for both companies. To streamline the process, have something in mind that you want to look at. For example, you can shop for a desktop and watch videos at the HP site and for Patagonia, you can shop for items for a camping trip. You can also allow students to explore products of interest and get a feel for what types of products and services each company produces. Mention that despite the fact that the two companies produce very different types of products and services, they have very similar philosophies on leadership. You can see if any students would like to guess what these leadership philosophies are, based on what they have just observed from their websites.

2. (20 mins) To learn more about the six traits of excellent leaders, have students read the article, “HP and Patagonia: Two Similar, Yet Different, Leadership Styles.” As they read, have each student take note of the six skills that an excellent leader needs to deliver the company strategy and what they mean. These six skills should be:

- A winning attitude
- A passion for customers
- An ability to collaborate across boundaries
- A global mindset
- An ability to leverage diversity and talent for working just fast enough
- Getting the right balance point between overly rapid decision-making and paralysis by analysis

Article Takeaways:

- Developing leadership has some common themes, regardless of an organization’s type or size.

- HP’s Leadership Framework consists of four components that create the field within which an HP manager runs his or her business. These components include strategy, “where you put your financial and people resources;” structure and processes that can deliver the strategy; metrics and rewards to support strategy, structure and process; and values and behaviors required to achieve goals.
- The very best leaders are the ones who can manage all four of these simultaneously, get them all in sync and know which one to turn or change when something is going wrong. Those “best leaders” excel at each of the six skills.
- With those skills, “great leaders can make an organization work like a system. They can pick a direction; excite people to move in that direction and turn individual stars into a high-performing team, like a sports team. Then you get a really powerful group.”
- Patagonia’s CEO Michael Crooke sketched a recognizable portrait of leadership. He spoke in terms of a dynamic “eco-system” within an organization: “Sometimes one part is thriving, while another part is dying.” A leader sees the often subtle differences within the system, addresses the problems, gets things into balance and brings all elements into “a high-performance zone, into ‘the flow.’”
- “If you have any standard for excellence, strive to be *the* best, not second or third.”

After students are done reading, lead a discussion on the meaning of each skill and have them identify leaders who they think display these qualities. Have students present the different leaders they chose and why they chose them.

Tying It All Together: (20 minutes) Now students understand that with certain skills, great leaders can make an organization work like a system and “turn stars into a high-performing team that acts with a single voice.” For this next activity, break students up into groups of six. Assign each group one of the six traits. Have each group come up with two skits about the trait they have been assigned. One skit should be to display how excellent leadership embodies that trait and the other skit should show the opposite. For example, if the trait a group was assigned was a winning attitude, one of their skits would be to display an example of a winning attitude in a business, or other setting related to leadership, while the other would be a non-winning attitude. Have each group perform their skits for the class.

Practice Outside of the Classroom: Reflect on which of these traits you possess and which ones you do not. Think about how you can incorporate all of these traits and practice implementing them. Also, observe others who are in leadership positions; how many of these traits do those leaders possess and how does it affect their performance?

An effective follow-on lesson would be to discuss emotional intelligence. This is a critical skill for all leaders, especially in the workplace where leaders deal with a variety of personalities and situations. Assign the class the WGYP article [Great Leaders Recognize and Value the Power of Emotions](#) as an introduction to the topic and require that they explore emotional intelligence further through the conversation starters, related links and related WGYP stories found in the vertical toolbar to the side of the article. Plan for additional team-based skits the following day to explore different scenarios involving emotions and leadership in the workplace and to use some of the skills from the article. Some suggested themes:

- An employee learns of her mother's passing hours before a big presentation. As her boss, how would you deal with it?
- You are the CEO. You learn that a manager in your company has been spreading rumors about you to other employees that is affecting their productivity. You're angry and hurt. How do you handle it?
- The company you manage is facing cutbacks due to a poor economy. An employee approaches you fearful that he is going to lose his job. He expresses his anxiety and begins to cry. What do you do?
- You are tasked with managing a team of 10 on a special project. It quickly becomes clear that two of your team members do not communicate respectfully with each other and, quite frankly, can't stand working together. Due to limited resources, the team must remain intact. What do you do?

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently: For this lesson, it will be important to have a sense of how you want to display the websites for both HP and Patagonia. Have some destination in mind for each site that you would like to share with students, since they may not know or have an interest in the products. I found that it worked well to show videos of featured products on HP's site and then ask students if they wanted or needed that product. For Patagonia, I also asked students if they owned or used any of their products and then I had the class shop for camping gear. Also, for the skits, you may want to give students a minimum and maximum time limit. For example, tell students that their skit must be at least one minute and encourage them to display a full scenario. It is also important that students create two separate skits to dramatize both types of leaders.