Three "Must Have" traits for all Leaders

I was thinking what would be one Leadership trait that would be common between all leaders that I admire where I took "**Integrity**" as a given. I could not settle on one trait and had to settle for two additional traits. Do you agree? If not then what would be your top 3?

I feel like that there are numerous traits that all Managers have to develop to transform themselves from Managers into Leaders. I believe that there are two that are fundamental to all leaders and serve as a prerequisite for other traits. These two are:

1. Problem Solving Attitude
2. Courage to do the right thing

Problem Solving Attitude:

Most organizations and people define strategies, allocate budget, apply resources, identify timelines, etc. to achieve corporate or personal goals.   Irrespective of the corporation, geography, size of the goal, there is a very high probability that Murphy's Law will strike: "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong". I refer to this phenomenon as "Life Happens".

Life happens, and it happens often since everything is not in our control in a work or personal situation. We have been in situations where we developed a three-year strategy only to find out that price of a relevant commodity dropped 70% creating funding challenges. In another situation, due to management decisions in transitioning a company from a startup to profitability, key product developers left at the same time. Similarly, I have a dear friend that is well educated, highly accomplished and had a plan

to retire at a certain age until he found out that his daughter was diagnosed with MLS which led to a change in plans.

The question is not "will life happen to me?" but rather "how can I bring a problem solving attitude when life happens to me?"

The leaders who demonstrate qualities that should be followed for problem solving attitude include:

- Do not panic or show panic, stay calm and collected as if one was accepting "Life Happens", and there is a plan in place to address it.
- Take it upon themselves to analyze the situation, and come up with multiple scenarios for dealing with the situation
- Perform what if scenarios by putting themselves in the shoes of all stakeholders to create winning propositions such that they can communicate options with full understanding with impact for each person
- Reset expectations as to what is now realistic and what is not, plus how can we potentially get back to original end state
- They do not blame management or any superior being, their only focus is situation: we are where we are, and how do we move forward from here

Courage to do the Right Thing:

One of my favorite sayings is, "Integrity is the heart of Leadership, while courage is the Soul". I firmly believe integrity is personal, and must come from within, while everything else can be learned.

One of my favorite movie lines is from, "We bought a Zoo", where Benjamin Mee played by Matt Damon says, "You know, sometimes all you need is twenty seconds of insane courage. Just literally twenty seconds of just embarrassing bravery. And I promise you, something great will come of it". I feel it is so true that we need to muster that twenty seconds of bravery for things that we believe in all the time.

On one of my assignments as a consultant with a large global bank, I was working with a highly trained and exceptional technical resource that could provide you with all the answers in a "one on one" setting by probing him since I knew he had the knowledge,

but once in a meeting he would not speak up even though he knew the organization was making poor decisions. He continued to get exceptional reviews based on technical knowledge to where his salary was considered high end for his grade. When the bank had to trim resources, he was one of the first resources that was let go since he did not have the courage to speak up in meetings.

In another situation, with another client I witnessed a situation where a resource was very knowledgeable, typically always on the right path, usually correct and stood up for what he believed to be the correct thing. Instead of being appreciated for his honesty, most people did not like working with him since they thought "he was very difficult to work with" even though in my mind it was just his communication style.

Courage to do the right thing is one of the two most important characteristics of a leader. It is also an art that needs to be mastered since you have to communicate your beliefs in a manner that will create an impact, especially if it is not popular.

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