

5 Attributes of Inspirational Leaders Dr. John C. Maxwell

The Sahara plays tricks on the eyes of its travelers. As the desert sun beats down on the sand, heat waves rise from the ground. Light bends as it passes through the superheated air, painting illusory pictures on the horizon. To thirsty travelers moving through the Sahara, it often appears as if an oasis looms in the distance. However, as the voyagers journey on, the oasis proves to be nothing more than a mirage. Unfortunately, the ranks of leadership are inhabited by a host of mirages: people who look impressive from a distance, but end up being disappointments. After being fooled by a few mirages, followers become jaded about leadership. That seems as true now as it ever has been. Our trust in leaders has been shaken as politicians have reneged on promises, CEOs have squandered money entrusted to their firms, and managers have advanced self-interests above all else. To restore society's confidence with those in power, leaders have to be able to inspire. I'm not talking about inspiring someone to buy into the corporate vision statement, to meet quarterly sales goals, or to work more efficiently. These aren't bad things, but right now, people are looking for a leader attuned to their personal needs. They want leaders who will encourage them, believe in their potential, and help *them* grow.

5 Attributes of an Inspirational Leader

ATTITUDE OF SERVICE

To be an inspirational leader, you must adopt an attitude of service toward those you lead. This requires laying aside selfish interests to add value to another person. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity." When you serve, you awaken something magnetic inside of you. People are drawn to follow you because they know you'll find ways to make them better.

AFFIRMATION

To inspire means to have a positive view of others. If we're not careful, we become fault-finders, magnifying the flaws in everyone around us. Instead, leaders should emulate gold prospectors - always on the lookout for potential gold mines. When they find traces of ore, prospectors assume there's a rich vein to unearth, and they start digging. In the same fashion, leaders ought to search for the best traits within a person and commit to uncovering them. One of the best applications of this idea is expressed in what I call the 101 percent principle: Find the one thing that you believe is a person's greatest asset, and then give 100 percent encouragement in that area. Focusing on a person's strengths inspires them by promoting confidence, growth, and success.

ATTENTIVENESS

Great inspirers know the desires of those they lead. As much as people respect the knowledge and ability of their leaders, these are secondary concerns for them. They don't care how much their leaders know until they know how much their leaders care. When leaders attend to the deeply felt needs of their team, the determination and commitment of each team member skyrockets.

AVAILABILITY

Leaders inspire by intentionally investing time in the people they lead. They make themselves available. People cannot be nurtured from a distance or by infrequent spurts of attention. They need a leader to spend time with them - planned time, not just a conversation in passing. In our fast-paced and demanding world, time is a leader's most precious commodity. While it feels costly to give up, nothing communicates that you value a person more than the gift of your time. In addition, investing time to develop others has a way of reaping dividends. As Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked, "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

AUTHENTICITY

To inspire, leaders have to be genuine. More than anything else, followers want to believe in and trust their leaders. However, when leaders break promises or fail to honor commitments, they reveal themselves as being inauthentic, and they lose credibility. Trust rests upon a foundation of authenticity. To gain trust, a leader must consistently align words and deeds, while showing a degree of transparency.

Summary

Inspirational leadership can be confused with momentary charisma. I prefer to think about inspiring as more of a process than an event. More than a brilliant speech, it's cultivating habits of brilliance that manifest themselves daily. By modeling the five attributes of an inspiring leader, I trust that you'll win the respect of those you lead and earn the right to influence them.

ABOUT

John C. Maxwell is an internationally recognized leadership expert, speaker, and author who has sold over 16 million books. His organizations have trained more than 2 million leaders worldwide. Dr. Maxwell is the founder of EQUIP and INJOY Stewardship Services. Every year he speaks to Fortune 500 companies, international government leaders, and audiences as diverse as the United States Military Academy at West Point, the National Football League, and ambassadors at the United Nations. A *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Business Week* best-selling author, Maxwell was named the World's Top Leadership Guru by Leadershipgurus.net. He was also one of only 25 authors and artists named to Amazon.com's 10th Anniversary Hall of Fame. Three of his books, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, *Developing the Leader Within You*, and *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* have each sold over a million copies.