



When you think of someone who has a strong leadership presence who comes to mind?

Is it someone who might show up on a list of influential political leaders?

Or notorious ones?

Is it somebody in Tech?

Social justice?

Business?

Religion?

The military?

Or even somebody from TV or in the movies?

Whoever came to mind for you, I hope you were able to see in this very small study sample of well-known leaders that leaders look and are different.

There's not one right way to have a strong leadership presence, but there are some important principles to keep in mind.

When we talk about leadership presence, unfortunately, a lot of times we spend time on things that don't matter like personality background, demographics, and appearance.

Now when I say these things don't matter, I don't mean they don't matter in the grand scheme of things. Of course, your personality affects a lot of your life and your relationships and who you spend your time with.

So do all these other things. These things are a part of who you are. I don't say they don't diminish them. I also don't want to imply that they don't matter when it comes to opportunities. We know that we live in an inequitable society and these things do matter in terms of what opportunities people have and how they are perceived.

So I want to be clear when I say these things don't matter. What I mean is that they don't matter to your ability to be an effective leader.

People from every personality and background and demographic and appearance can be an effective leader. These things might affect how you are perceived or your path to becoming a leader, but they in no way impact your ability to be a leader.

The first one especially is an area where a lot of people waste time trying to cultivate a personality that is not their own. There's this image that persists that leaders are charismatic and funny and talkative and extroverted.



People who fit that personality certainly can be effective leaders, but that is by no means the only way to lead effectively.

You should not change who you are and try to take on a personality that is not your own.

1) it doesn't work and 2) there's no need.

Whatever your personality is, you will be able to lead effectively with it.

The things that do matter universally are authenticity, effectiveness, consistency, and integrity.

This is what makes a strong leadership presence. Whether your presence is loud or quiet. These things will speak volumes of who you are as a leader.

Harvard Business Review did this really fascinating study and they asked a bunch of employees about their leadership. They said they would rather have a consistently terrible leader than one who they didn't know what to expect. One day was terrible, one day was wonderful, one day acted one way, one day acted another way. It's just too challenging to expect staff to navigate all of that.

Now, of course, we don't want anybody to be consistently terrible, but the point is you want to consistently act with authenticity and integrity and focus on your effectiveness as a leader.

Keep in mind, though that with many things, balance is the key. There is a necessary balance between authenticity and adaptability. You want to stay true to your values and beliefs and you also want to be able to be flexible to give your staff what they need.

The first time I ever supervised a team, it was two people and they were so opposite in almost every way. Initially it was a headache. In hindsight, I'm grateful for it. It really helped to develop me as a leader.

One instance very early on was in our one-on-one meetings. One staff member was naturally more like me, so when we sat down to one-on-one meeting we just dove right in.

Item number one on the agenda. Let's get to it.

It worked great for both of us. But it did not work for my other staff.

When I would sit down before I could even say number one, they would ask about my weekend. Or how my mother was doing. Or something about the weather.

It was obvious early on that the way that I naturally did it didn't work for them. It was an easy adjustment for me to make sure at the beginning of our meetings that we had time for chit chat.



I tried it with the first person. We sat down and asked how their weekend was and they said, 'what do you care? Let's go. Let's go. We have an agenda to get through.'

Like I said, nothing worked for one that worked for the other. In these moments, it's important to stop for a minute and ask yourself, am I being authentic or am I being stubborn?

Am I being flexible and adapting or am I compromising my values?

There's not always an easy answer to these questions and sometimes we make mistakes along the way. That's all part of the journey.

Make sure you do check yourself and reach out to those you trust to help you see how to navigate that balance.

I had this staff once who was wonderful, dedicated, hard-working, and had a type of presence that rubbed a lot of people the wrong way.

They thought that in some cases they were a little too aggressive or even to the point of being disrespectful or rude. Over time, some of the other folks on the team and some clients came to me as a team leader to complain. As the team leader, it was my job to work through this. So I sat down with the staff.

We had a great relationship and I was able to be honest and share some of the feedback that I was receiving. Their response was- I can still hear their voice in my head- 'well, I'm not the person who's gonna bake cookies for everybody.'

And I said, 'that's fair. You don't have to bake cookies for everybody. But what is your version of baking cookies?'

Because all the work you do, any of the work you do starts with relationships. If you're not able to build trusting, positive relationships you are going to struggle for your entire reign as leader. How are you going to show your team and your clients that you care about them? That you are invested in them? That you are focused on developing them?

That's what people need and it shouldn't be for them to figure it out or to guess or to play hide and seek. It needs to be obvious to them. It was a tricky conversation because you know, it almost sounds hypocritical. We started this session saying you don't want to compromise who you are.

At the same time, if the way that you come off to people is making it impossible for you to lead effectively, then where are places that you need to adapt? What is your version of baking cookies for other people?

So, the most important question for you to ask yourself is, what kind of leader do you want to be?



And what kind of leadership presence do you want to have?

You might not know a definitive answer yet. That's okay.

It's something that might change over time.

It will probably take some time to develop so don't feel pressure to say, 'this is the type of leader I am from this day forever more.'

Figure out the leadership presence you want to have that speaks to your values and beliefs as you act with integrity and authenticity and get you the results that you want.

Oh, that was a big one.

It's a tough one, and it's really important.

So thanks for sticking with it.

I'll see you next time.