

# 5 TRAITS OF THE BEST TEAM LEADERS

A checklist to assess and hire amazing managers



# How Strong Is Your Leadership Team?

“Leadership is a competency. A company’s ability to continuously keep the pipeline filled with talented leadership candidates is an important success factor. Organizations need to have a systematic approach to identify, attract and develop current and future leaders to ensure they have what it takes to grow into new roles.”

– Bruce Powell,  
Managing Partner,  
IQ PARTNERS

STRONG LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION IS VITAL FOR SUCCESS AND LONGEVITY, YET LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT OFTEN GETS NEGLECTED. While it’s common for organizations to prioritize the development of future leaders, **more than one-third of organizations do not have a formal leadership development strategy, and only 31% of companies say their leadership development practices are above average.**

Often, companies default to promoting top performers rather than seeking out and developing young and emerging leaders. The issue—just because a person is good at their job doesn’t mean they have the skills to effectively manage people. Companies promoting their best people without assessing or developing their leadership ability only sets them (and their teams) up for failure.

With **79 percent of businesses resigning to the fact that succession planning will become a major issue for their company within the next decade**, it’s time for your organization to better understand how to find, hire and develop amazing managers—the people who will be the future leaders of your organization.

IQ PARTNERS HAS BEEN BUILDING EXCEPTIONAL MANAGEMENT TEAMS FOR OVER 16 YEARS. Our experience has gained us valuable insight into the traits of successful leaders.

Our recruiters are dedicated to helping you find the leaders of tomorrow in your organization. While it is an organizations responsibility to develop leader skills sets and nurture future managers, we can help you gain a deeper understanding of how to identify management candidates. Here is a checklist of the top 5 traits of the best team leaders.



## In This Guide:

- ✓ 5 traits of the best leaders
- ✓ Advice from world class business leaders such as Richard Branson, Howard Schultz, CEO of Starbucks, and Eric Schmidt, former Google CEO, and more
- ✓ Hiring tips to find the best management candidates
- ✓ Interview questions to ask candidates about leadership traits
- ✓ A hiring checklist to help you score candidates

# 1 Effective Leaders Are Modern Communicators

“The art of communication is the language of leadership.”

– James Humes

THE BEST TEAM LEADERS ARE CLEAR COMMUNICATORS. According to [a recent study](#) where global leaders were asked to rate top leadership competencies, **56% believe a leader needs to be able to clearly communicate expectations, and 42% believe the ability to communicate often and openly is a top requirement for leaders.**

Communicating today extends well beyond face to face contact. Managers must have the skills to communicate effectively and on a platform that makes sense for their audience. They must be able to use modern technology (CRMs, email, social media, instant messaging) to communicate with their team. Equally important, they must intuitively know when modern technology must be set aside in favour of a good, old fashioned face-to-face conversation.

Communication today is not about directives; it's about creating a two-way dialogue and listening and responding to employee concerns, having open and honest communications, using communication as a tool to understand, engage, and bring people together toward a common goal.

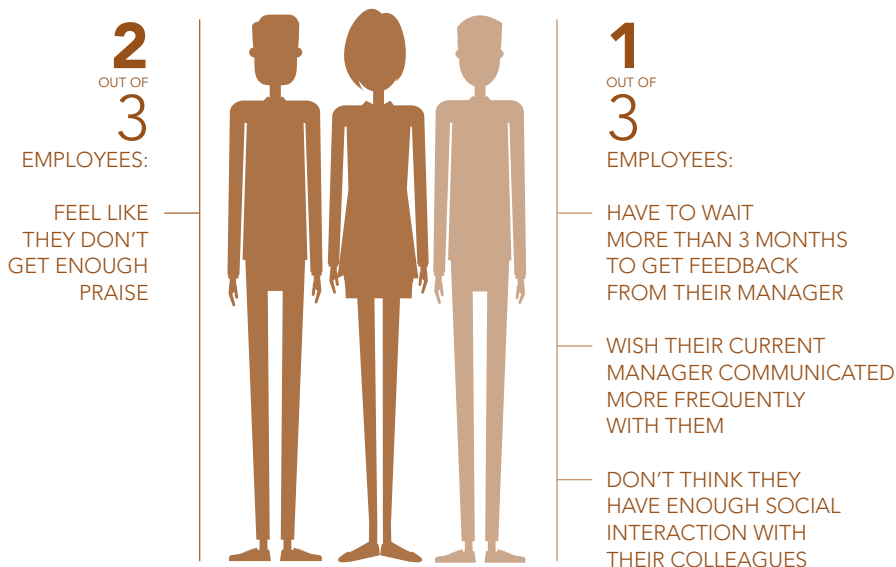
In fact, Richard Branson believes that communication is the most important skill any leader can possess. He calls communication an art.

“Communication makes the world go round. It facilitates human connections, and allows us to learn, grow and progress. It's not just about speaking or reading, but understanding what is being said—and in some cases what is not being said,” says Branson on his [blog](#).

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CLICK TO READ OUR BLOG:

**[The State of Employee Engagement: Are You Engaged?](#)**

Regular communication with employees is an important way to keep people engaged and focused. According to [a 2017 report](#), companies are failing to be effective communicators:



**Questions you can ask to identify strong communicators:**

- Q:** Explain concept xyz. / Tell me about yourself.
- Q:** Why do managers need to be strong communicators?
- Q:** Tell us about a case where clear communication made a difference in the situation.
- Q:** How do you vary your communication approach based on the audience you are addressing?
- Q:** How do you collect employee feedback?

**Hiring Tip:**  
**Seek out management candidates who are strong, clear and confident communicators.**

Strong communicators provide employees with clarity about their role and what is expected of them. They make it a point to touch base with individual employees regularly to address concerns, offer feedback, answer questions and maintain an open line of communication.

Being a regular communicator with employees makes it easier for them to voice their concerns, discuss issues, and it promotes an open and honest organizational culture—something that top candidates in today's job market are looking for when comparing companies.

# 2

## The Best Team Leaders Are A Seamless Cultural Fit

"The only thing we have is one another. The only competitive advantage we have is the culture and values of the company. Anyone can open up a coffee store. We have no technology, we have no patent. All we have is the relationship around the values of the company and what we bring to the customer every day. And we all have to own it."

– Howard Schultz,  
CEO, Starbucks



VALUES ALIGNMENT IS CRITICAL YET OFTEN OVERLOOKED. It's not enough to only assess a candidate for skills. Finding managers who fit your organizational culture and are in alignment with your company's core vision and values is the most important part of maintaining a strong and cohesive culture.

**Today, close to 80% of Fortune 500 companies use personality tests to assess candidates as part of their hiring process, and for good reason.**

Finding candidates who are a good cultural fit is a key factor in reducing turnover and increasing the probability that a new manager will be able to effectively communicate your company's core beliefs, values, and desired behaviours in how they manage and lead employees.

LinkedIn is a great example of a company that is focused on culture when hiring.

"Talent is our number one operating priority and our employees take great pride in their ability to shape LinkedIn's culture. It's this amazing culture that sets us apart, defines who we are and shapes what we aspire to be. There are many places where we can see the strong, positive impact our employees have made on the company, but one of the biggest is in our diversity, inclusion and belonging programs," says Sandy Hoffman on the LinkedIn Official Blog.

She adds, "Led by our six Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and three functional, employee-led initiatives, our talented people play an integral role in helping us foster a diverse and inclusive environment, where everyone can feel like they belong."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CLICK TO READ OUR BLOG:

**[Should You Hire for Personality or Skill?](#)**

“While you can teach candidates new skills, you can’t teach character. If they are not aligned on your core values, it will be a challenge to make them fit.”

**Questions you can ask to assess a manager’s cultural fit:**

- Q:** Why do you want to work here?
- Q:** In which type of workplace culture are you most comfortable?
- Q:** Which workplace values are most important to you?
- Q:** Describe your ideal workplace/ company.
- Q:** What do you like most about our company culture?
- Q:** How do your personal values align with our company culture?

**Hiring Tip:**

**Hire for cultural fit first, skills second. Skills can always be taught.**

Finding candidates who reflect company culture is more challenging than hiring based on skills alone. It’s more important to determine if they are a “fit” for the organization and share the similar values. If they lack skills in a certain area, they can be taught through onboarding, training, coaching, and mentoring.

# 3

## Great Leaders Have A Crystal Clear Vision

"A leader has the vision and conviction that a dream can be achieved. He inspires the power and energy to get it done."

– Ralph Lauren

RALPH LAUREN

"Capital isn't scarce. Vision is."

– Sam Walton,  
CEO, Wal-Mart

Walmart 

A RECENT STUDY ABOUT THE IMPACT OF GOOD AND BAD LEADERSHIP FOUND THAT **32% OF EMPLOYEES BELIEVE THEIR BOSS LACKS CLEAR VISION AND DIRECTION.** This feeling has a negative impact on a manager's authority and ability to get employees to engage in their work.

The best team leaders have a crystal clear vision about what they want to accomplish, how to manage their team and where they are headed in their career. What they also have is the ability to communicate this vision effectively to others. They can paint a vivid picture for the employees they manage. They can explain how employees fit within the larger picture, and ensure individual employees understand their role and how it helps the company achieve its overall business goals.

Managers with a strong vision can bring people together, get them to buy in, increase engagement and champion the need to adopt company values and beliefs.

Former Google CEO and current executive chairman of Alphabet, Eric Schmidt provides some insight into the importance of vision when hiring in [a recent interview he did with Medium](#):

"All success starts from doing one thing really well, but you'll recruit better with a broader vision so you can sell the dream."



FOR MORE INFORMATION, CLICK TO READ OUR BLOG:

**[Recruiting Plays a Vital Role in Successful Succession Planning](#)**

"It's important to think long term when hiring and not just be solely focused on filling a stop gap. Hiring is an opportunity for your company to get better with each new hire. Therefore, it's important to consider a person's fit not only for the current position you are hiring for, but also how they fit within your company culture if you think they can be groomed and moved up to a higher level."

**Questions you can ask to assess a candidate's vision and career objectives:**

- Q:** What is your vision for "xyz" management position?
- Q:** How does your vision fit with our company core values?
- Q:** How will you communicate your vision with your team?
- Q:** Where you do see yourself in 5 years?
- Q:** What barriers/ challenges do you need to overcome to make your vision a reality?

**Hiring Tip:**

**Look for candidates with a clear vision of their role as a leader or potential leader, career goals and direction.**

Candidates who are up for team leader and management roles should have a clear idea of what they want to accomplish now and the type of roles they want to move into in the future. Look for candidates who envision working their way up within your organization.

# 4

## Team Leaders Are Growth Focused

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership."

– Harvey Firestone



PROVIDING PROPER TRAINING AND COACHING IS A TOP PRIORITY FOR ORGANIZATIONS. According to [Brandon Hall Group's 2015 State of Performance Management Study](#), **64% of companies stated that developing leaders to be effective coaches was their greatest opportunity to improve employee performance, and 83% believe that development for leaders at all levels is very important.**

Great team leaders are not only focused on growing professionally themselves, they have a desire to help others grow and develop their skills. [In a recent study](#), global leaders believe **the ability to help others grow into next generation leaders (38%) and being committed to ongoing training for employees (43%) as two of the top 10 leadership competencies.**

In [a separate report](#) about what CEOs expect of future leaders, **19% of those surveyed believed that future leaders should embrace opportunities to coach and mentor others.**

Employees who pursue development opportunities will be more willing to put in a greater effort and have a great drive to achieve desired results—helping to boost performance and morale.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CLICK TO READ OUR BLOG:

**[Want to Keep Your Top Employees? Try the 'Stay Interview'](#)**

"Strong companies have an innate ability to keep their top employees. They understand that one of the key success factors for any organization is not only to recruit and hire the best talent, but also have a process in place to retain them. While most companies are focused on recruiting and job interviews, many relax and put less effort into developing them and ensuring they are happy once they are in your grasp."

**Questions you can ask about being motivated to grow:**

- Q:** What are your career goals? What do you need to do to achieve these goals?
- Q:** What is your view on professional development?
- Q:** Do you have a coach or mentor?
- Q:** How important do you think it is to mentor others?
- Q:** How have you / will you make your employees better? Which training or coaching strategies or techniques will you use?

**Hiring Tip:**

**Prioritize candidates who have demonstrated a past commitment and future motivation to grow professionally.**

Company leaders who are focused on growth can be infectious within your organization. They will push for employee development, skills training, and have an internal drive to be better leaders. In turn, employees will adopt the same desire for growth and improvement.

# 5

## The Best Team Leaders Are Inspiring and Empowering

"Businesses often forget about the culture and ultimately they suffer for it, because they cannot deliver good service from unhappy employees."

– Tony Hsieh,  
Zappos



"No company, small or large, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission and understand how to achieve it."

– Jack Welch,  
General Electric



ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERS NEED TO BE INSPIRING IF THEY WANT EMPLOYEES TO FOLLOW THEM. They also need to empower their team and give them the resources and opportunities to maximize their skills and abilities. According to Universum's 2020 Outlook survey, **the ability of future leaders to empower his or her employees tops the list with 41% of CEOs and HR professionals having this expectation.**

A truly inspiring leader not only encapsulates many of the desired team leader traits we've discussed above, they inspire others by giving their best effort consistently. They are always challenging themselves and their people to be better, but also provide the support to do so. They have high standards and expectations, and hold people accountable, including themselves.

A great example of an inspiring and empowering leader in action is Starbucks, CEO Howard Shultz. With news of stock market turmoil in August 2015 as a result of a plunging Dow Jones and issues in the Asian markets, rather than sit idly by, he decided to take action, by addressing his employees directly—all 190,000 in a memo that encouraged his employees to special concern for their customers amid the news.

A simple memo like this can inspire an entire organization to provide a memorable customer services experience when customers need it most. Managers that can do this will ensure their team can achieve great results for their company.

[Here is the memo:](#)

To: Starbucks partners; managing directors for company-operated and joint venture markets  
Date: August 24, 2015  
Re: Message from Howard: Leading Through Turbulent Times

Dear Partners,

During our 23-year history as a public company, we have experienced – and successfully navigated through – several periods of extreme stock market volatility. And although we are not immune from the global stock market selloff that has now made its way to Wall Street, my confidence in our company and in all of you has never been greater. We are in the midst of another record-setting year – combining our unique “third place” in-store experience with highly relevant coffee and tea innovation and differentiated customer-facing mobile and digital technologies. We are making a profound social impact in the communities we serve around the world, and will continue to do so today and into the future.

Our company has weathered many different types of storms. But our brand has never been stronger or more relevant. Our pipeline of new products and breakthrough innovation has never been more robust. And our long term commitment to delivering an elevated partner experience is unwavering. I can assure you that we will continue to lead and manage the company through the lens of humanity, doing everything we possibly can to continue to make your families proud of our company and all we stand for. You have my word on this.

Today’s financial market volatility, combined with great political uncertainty both at home and abroad, will undoubtedly have an effect on consumer confidence and perhaps even our customers’ attitudes and behavior. Our customers are likely to experience an increased level of anxiety and concern. Please recognize this and – as you always have – remember that our success is not an entitlement, but something we need to earn, every day. Let’s be very sensitive to the pressures our customers may be feeling, and do everything we can to individually and collectively exceed their expectations.

Our growth plans for the future of our company will not be impacted by the turmoil of the financial markets. We will positively manage through today’s challenging environment just as we have positively navigated through challenging moments in the past. The experience we deliver in our stores, the strength and equity of our brand, and the primary reason for our current and future success is because of all of YOU. I believe in you and have never been prouder to be your partner.

Onward,  
Howard

## Hiring Tip:

### Look for candidates who make others around them better.

A candidate with management experience is desirable, but a person with a track record of achieving great results, leading teams, and who has a passion for working with and empowering others will have a big impact on culture and performance.

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#### **5 Reasons Why Top Employees Quit**

*"If your top employees are leaving your organization, you have an issue, especially if it is a regular occurrence. But the issue is not with the company; it's often with leadership and the people in management positions. After all, people work for people, not for your organization."*

#### **Questions you can ask about being one to inspire and motivate others:**

- Q:** How does your management style inspire others?
- Q:** How do you empower your team members? Which strategies do you believe work best?
- Q:** Which strategies do you use to motivate and inspire your team to achieve better results?
- Q:** What inspires you? What are your main sources of inspiration?

# How Did Your Potential Candidate Score?

Using the five traits of the best team leaders outlined in this guide, assess a potential candidate based on our hiring checklist.

**Assign one point per question and score them out of 5**, giving you a quick tool to compare a candidate's leadership skills and fit for your organization against other candidates.



## Hiring Checklist

- ☐ Is the candidate a strong communicator?
- ☐ Is the candidate a good cultural fit?
- ☐ Does the candidate have a clear career vision?
- ☐ Does the candidate value growth and development?
- ☐ Does the candidate have the ability to inspire and empower others?

# Improve Your Company Leadership

IQ PARTNERS  
helps companies  
hire better,  
hire less  
and retain more.

FINDING THE RIGHT PERSON TO LEAD YOUR EMPLOYEES, PROMOTE YOUR CULTURE, MAKE OTHERS AROUND THEM BETTER AND ACHIEVE DESIRED RESULTS IS CHALLENGING. Looking for the traits outlined above in candidates and using the hiring checklist will help you better assess the best team leader candidates and help you hire a future organizational leader.

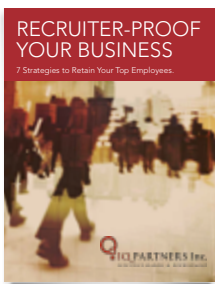
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