

There are a number of important leadership traits, as I've learned in this section. One of the most important seems to be critical thinking. First, a leader must be able to organize his values and beliefs in his mind. The leader must have clarity in what he believes, and in order to achieve this clarity, he must be able to understand what it is that makes him feel the way he does. Critical thinking allows a leader to organize his thoughts and beliefs and allows him this clarity.

Second, a leader must have communication skills. It's not enough for a leader to have clarity in beliefs and values. A leader must be able to communicate those values effectively to her constituents. The leader has to portray her vision to those who choose to follow her so that they will not only understand the vision but also choose to join in that vision.

Honesty is another important leadership trait. In order for a leader to be legitimate in the eyes of constituents, the leader must be able to model his beliefs. If the leader is not honest in his values and his beliefs, it will be difficult for the leader to lead by example. The followers will recognize this discrepancy, and it will damage the leader's credibility.

I've seen these traits displayed by my supervisor at work. Although he is a first line supervisor, I think he has tremendous leadership potential. First, he has had a strong upbringing, and he has strong values and beliefs that are a core part of him. When presented with dilemmas, he is able to think critically and use his values to solve the problem. He also is able to communicate his values effectively. He is able to share his thoughts and opinions without being overbearing. Everybody knows where he stands, but he doesn't force you to stand with him. Rather, he invites you. Lastly, he is honest. His values don't change from day to day. His actions match his words. There is no discrepancy in what he tells you and what he does.

I don't believe that leaders are naturally born. However, I do think some people have a better foundation for leadership than others through their experiences and upbringing. A person who grows up in a family that has strong values is going to be better prepared for a leadership role than somebody who grows up not knowing exactly what they believe. While these traits can be learned later in life, I think many people who don't develop some of these foundational advantages early on tend to give up. It becomes easy for people to believe that they can't become a leader because they don't have the natural born talent. It becomes a self fulfilling prophecy.

This class is teaching me leadership can be learned. While some of these traits are more developed in some people than in others, we all have these abilities. For some, they are deeper down than others, but it's just a matter of bringing them out and honing them.