

Vision and Leadership Session by Matthew Colless.  
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The takeaway points from this session:

- 1) Everyone needs to be a leader in some context or another – this is inevitable in astronomy.
- 2) Anyone can be a better leader. You can always learn more by listening to others or imitating their style or leadership ideas.
- 3) Leadership is a skill you can learn and improve upon.
- 4) There is more than one way to do it, you can be a different leader in different contexts.

Notes

There are three main theories of leadership, the trait theory, the great events theory and the process theory. The trait theory says that leaders are born possessing a certain set of personality traits that make them leaders. The great events theory states that leaders are forged in crisis. The process theory states that leaders are made and that leadership is a skill you can learn. The truth is a mixture of all three of these. You become a leader by stepping up, at which point you are immediately thrown into a crisis!

Some traits associated with leaders are: vision, passion, authority, drive, integrity, courage, empathy, resolution, commitment, confidence, oratory, determination, charisma, strength, reliability, openness, principles, people skills, trustworthiness, creativity.

Think of three other traits you value in a leader to add to these. Some additions: listening, delegation, innovation, improvisation.

From this extended list select the leadership traits that are most important to you in a leader. There is no one “correct” answer to this - different leadership traits are valued by different people and groups.

Looking over the long list of traits, it is certain you possess some of them and it is certain you don't have all of them. The key is to play to your strengths, enhancing the traits you have and using them to help you be a good leader. Find good people to work with and don't micro-manage.

What do leaders do? Leaders speak truth - this is different from THE truth and is about articulating ideas clearly and authentically. Leaders care about the people around them and the role they have in their development. Leaders have integrity and strength of character. Who you are speaks much more loudly than what you say. Leaders have courage to do things they don't want to do. When there is a choice between the hard thing and the easy thing the hard thing is the right thing – there's only a conflict through being tempted by the easy thing! Leaders build teams and communities, giving people a sense of belonging and fostering collaboration and friendship. Leaders know themselves, again playing to their strengths. Leaders dream and think “what if...?”. Leaders can always see a way forward and can inspire others. Leaders achieve goals,

creating their legacy, one the most important parts of which is the formation of the next generation of leaders.

A key part of leaderships comes from the vision of the leader. Quote: "Leaders articulate and define what has previously remained implicit or unsaid; then they invent images, metaphors, and models that provide a focus for new attention. By so doing they consolidate or challenge prevailing wisdom. In short, an essential factor in leadership is the capacity to influence and organize meaning for the members of the organization." Bennis and Nanus (2007)

Vision involves being able to see through brick walls and over horizons, seeing and thinking things that others don't. It is capturing the zeitgeist, imagining the future and imagining as well that you can change the future.

Some examples of vision statements:

1) "Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in case of success." Ernest Shackleton in an 1890 job ad for his first Antarctic expedition.

2) "When I'm through...everyone will have one." Henry Ford on producing automobiles.

3) "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving this goal, before the decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth." President Kennedy initiating the Apollo program.

Think of your own vision statement, for your career, organization, or field.

There are many different leadership styles. These include: The Dictator, The Consensus-builder, The Visionary, The Administrator, The Team Captain, The Expert, The Prophet, The Field Marshal, The Sage, The Power Behind the Throne, The Educator....and many more! No one of these will work every time by itself. It is necessary to mix and match and try out new styles in different contexts. This can be practiced by consciously adopting a persona and then trying it in different areas of your life. The situation is critical!

Leadership is practiced by leading. Find an opportunity to lead and do it. Always have confidence in yourself, for if you don't know one else will either. Start bigger than you dare, and then some! Don't fear failure, it will happen and you must be able to learn from it, but succeed more than you fail. Copy the good leaders around you, watch them and use their ideas. Learn your strengths and weaknesses as a leader and try different styles to assess how and when they work. Practice, practice, practice and you will become a better leader!