

# Personality Traits of Leaders

## Information for the Leadership Advisory Board



What are traits of leaders? This is not a new question. As a matter of fact, trying to determine traits of leaders has been studied for years. The first noted leadership theories focused on leadership traits of individuals. Covey (2004) points out that the first recognized leadership theory was *Great-Man Theories*. These theories focused on studying leaders like Moses, Gandhi, Washington, and Churchill. The conclusion of the Great-Man Theories was that “there is no such thing as leadership by the masses. The individuals in every society possess different degrees of intelligence, energy, and moral face” (Covey, p. 352).

### Personality Traits of Leaders

Everyone is different. Some people are extraverted while others are introverted. One thing we know for sure. Everyone has traits and everyone has different personalities. There are truly no two people that are exactly alike. We can define traits as distinguishing personal characteristics. Personality is best defined as a combination of traits that classifies an individual's behavior.

There are all types of personality profiles that helps each of us determine our own personalities. One of the most widely recognized personality profiles is the “*Big Five Model of Personality*.” The Big Five Model of Personality categorizes traits into dimensions of surgency, agreeableness, adjustment, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (Lussier and Achua, 2001). Figure 1 reveals these five below.

- **Surgency** – includes leadership and extraversion traits. People strong in surgency like to lead and want to be in charge.
- **Agreeableness** – includes traits related to getting along with people. People strong in this area are typically characterized as warm, easygoing, compassionate, friendly, and sociable.
- **Adjustment** – includes traits related to emotional stability. People strong in adjustment are characterized as being good under pressure, having self control, being calm, secure, and positive.
- **Conscientiousness** – includes traits related to achievement. People that are conscientiousness are hard working, go beyond the call of duty, and have a strong desire to achieve success.
- **Openness to Experience** – includes traits related to being willing to change and try new things. These individuals are risk takers free thinkers, and creative.

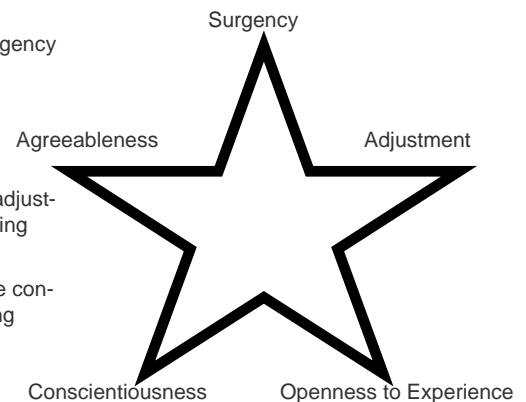


Figure 1. Big Five Model of Personality Traits.

### Traits of Effective Leaders

After understanding general personality traits, it is then important to discuss general traits that leaders have been known to possess. House and Aditya (1997) noted that there does appear to be traits that separate leaders from others.

- **Dominance** – ability to take charge
- **High Energy** – drive, tolerate stress, and have enthusiasm
- **Self-confidence** – self assured in judgments, decision making, and ideas
- **Locus of Control** – Control over your own destiny
- **Stability** – emotionally in control of themselves, secure, and positive
- **Integrity** – behavior that is honest, ethical, and trustworthy
- **Intelligence** – cognitive ability to think clearly
- **Flexibility** – ability to adjust to different situations
- **Sensitivity to Others** – understanding the difference between handling individuals and groups

There are very few people in the world that are strong in these nine traits. Great leaders may not be strong in all nine of these. However, it is important that each of us know our strengths and weaknesses. What we can do is work on these traits that we may not be strong in. There is one thing we know for sure, you can lead others until you know yourself.