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The Top 6 Most Important Leadership Competencies

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It's easy to call to mind examples of great leaders — from explorers to activists to military, political, community, sports, and business leaders. And many leadership qualities stand the test of time.

Communication. Vision. An ability to motivate others.

Yet studying past leaders isn't enough to shape leaders for today. Each time in our history calls for leaders who can connect with the realities of that time. In this time, an accelerated pace of change is driving innovation, competition, and a scramble for talent. Social causes, health and wellness, and work/life balance are now mainstream business concerns.

What does it take, then, for our newest business leaders to succeed? Here are six of the most important leadership competencies for today's new leaders.

ONE. Self-Awareness

Unlike leaders of the past, many of whom effectively delivered proclamations from afar, today's leaders are thoroughly inspected by all. We live in a digital, social media-filled world where lines between personal and professional lives are blurred and individual activity is instantly visible to the masses.

New leaders must be aware of their strengths and failings. A periodic leadership competency assessment can be a benchmark of progress toward building skills. Leaders also need to know their purpose and passions. The right mix of self-knowledge, self-confidence, and self-discipline must be firmly intact before leaders can ably put the interests of the organization and community first.



TWO. Can Build Relationships

Ours is an interconnected world. Our employees, clients, partners, suppliers (and their suppliers) are geographically distributed. International travel and the Internet created a global marketplace, filled with opportunities and competition. Today's leaders can't effectively go it alone.

Whether building business partnerships, using mentors and colleagues as sounding boards, or getting to know employees, today's best leaders understand the value of collaboration. And they start by listening.

Former Defense Secretary [Jim Mattis](#) advises junior officers leading troops into combat to get to know their troops. He encourages leaders to find out, "What are their hopes, what are their goals? ... Do they want to stay in the Army or are they going to get out? Do they want to save money for a car, are they going to college some day?" He adds, "The more you know about your troops, the more they know you care about them as individuals." Today's employees and colleagues expect the same personal interest from their leaders.

THREE. Flexibility and Adaptability

Most leaders in history have led through change. What's different today is the accelerated pace of change. Flexibility, adaptability, rapid response, and 24/7 communications are table stakes for effective leadership today.

FOUR. Critical Thinking

Right alongside that expectation of a fast response is a need for sound decisions. Today's leaders need to build the muscles of critical thinking, to ensure they are keeping their companies on track.

Sound critical thinking involves examination and assessment of a problem or question. Exploration and assessment of next steps. Evaluation of the possible outcomes and impact of those steps. Especially when it comes down to a choice between two bad decisions, critical thinkers push themselves and their advisors to create new options.

Ultimately, good critical thinking leads to decisions and actions that have a positive long-term effect.

FIVE. An Ability to Inspire Others

Knowing the right thing to do and defining the strategy to get you there is only part of the answer. Leaders, of course, need followers. For companies and workforces to effectively compete in an evolving marketplace, there needs to be a shared vision, plan, and drive to thrive.

On February 7, 2021, NFL quarterback Tom Brady led the Tampa Bay Buccaneers to victory in Super Bowl LV. That win was Brady's seventh – more than the two winningest Super Bowl teams (Pittsburgh Steelers and the New England Patriots, each with six all-time [Super Bowl wins](#)).

Whatever you think of Brady, he is a recognized leader on the field with a strong ability to inspire others. You may not be aiming to win the next Super Bowl, but new leaders must embrace their responsibility to lift up those around them.

SIX. Taking Care of Yourself

Business leadership isn't just about running a business anymore. As Millennials and others have nudged businesses to become more purpose-driven, today's leaders are expected to take on some of the world's toughest challenges. There are now corporate initiatives to, for example, combat global warming; prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion; and give time and treasure to our communities.

In our demanding, "ever-on" world with "close up" leadership, it can be tough to detach from the demands of those around us to take care of ourselves.

But self-care is an essential skill. The good news is that we are now more adept at recognizing and supporting leaders who take care of themselves.

Reading a book, exercising, talking to a friend, saying no to select activities, listening to music, meditating ... Select your favorite ways to unplug and re-energize. Then take the time and discipline to build it into your routine. You'll be a better leader for it.

Whether you're a new leader or you're sharing these key leadership competencies with others, find out how defining, assessing, and measuring competencies can help to shape great leaders for today. [Contact us](#) to discuss how [WebMentor Skills™](#) can help build the key competencies for today's newest leaders.