

You Can... Identify leadership characteristics

Leadership is, somewhat surprisingly, a new concept within education. Pre-millennial teachers were managers and the only rightful leader was seen to be the headteacher. Yet the reality is that we all display leadership characteristics from the moment we enter the classroom. The skills needed to be a school leader and a classroom teacher are essentially the same – a passion for your vision, a defined understanding of your own strengths and a desire to grow the potential of those who surround you.

Thinking points

- Warren Bennis, an American scholar widely regarded as the pioneer in the field of leadership studies, differentiated managers from leaders by saying that, 'Managers are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right thing.' The step up from a manager to a leader is achieved by people who look at what needs to be done and how to do it.
- Leadership styles are changing within schools. The old model of top-down, headteacher-style leadership is being flattened out to embrace a wider, distributed model of leadership. The advantage of this model is that middle and senior leaders are given genuine powers of responsibility while freeing the headteacher from many day-to-day tasks to concentrate on their core purpose: leading the vision and ethos of the school.

Tips, ideas and activities

School leaders need to develop the following characteristics:

- Be honest – display sincerity and integrity in all your actions. Deceptive behaviour will not inspire trust and is easy to spot.
- Be competent – do what you say you are going to do. Delegate so that what you say can be done will be achieved.
- Understand your vision – effective leaders envision what they want and how to get it.
- Inspire – display confidence in all that you do. Know how to teach and have a full appreciation of the broad educational world. Take charge when necessary but equally show flexibility in your leadership style.
- Be current – keep up to date with current practice and ideas. Attend briefings and read reports.
- Be tolerant – seek out diversity.
- Take risks – have the perseverance to accomplish a goal, regardless of the obstacles. Look confident and calm when under stress.
- Use plain English when speaking or writing documents.
- Be creative – things do not always go to plan but the creative leader will look for an opportunity where there appears to be none. It is your duty to keep morale buoyant and to anticipate change.