

Top 10 Attributes of a True Leader



Edward H. Pappas

“You do not lead by hitting people over the head—that’s assault, not leadership.”

—Dwight D. Eisenhower

“A leader is a dealer in hope.”

—Napoleon Bonaparte

In difficult times, people look to leaders to make things better and give them hope. The words of former President John Fitzgerald Kennedy still ring true today:

It is time for a new generation of leadership, to cope with new problems and new opportunities.

The term “leader” is used generously these days to signify someone in a leadership role, but there is much more to being a true leader than achieving a leadership role. Every lawyer has an opportunity to be a leader, whether he or she is working with clients, representing victims of crimes, providing pro bono legal services, or volunteering for community and charitable organizations. Some lawyers take on high-profile leadership roles in society, while others lead in less visible roles. All lawyers, however, are in a position to model leadership for others because of their legal expertise and unique role in our justice system.

There are different views on the attributes of a true leader, but my list of the top 10, in no particular order, is as follows:

- (1) A true leader understands and listens to people.
- (2) A true leader enlightens people.
- (3) A true leader guides, but does not dictate to, people.
- (4) A true leader enables and empowers people.
- (5) A true leader motivates people.
- (6) A true leader inspires people.
- (7) A true leader credits people.

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- (8) A true leader helps people.
- (9) A true leader leads people by example.
- (10) A true leader serves people.

There is a common theme to my top 10 attributes of a true leader: people. In my view, a true leader is driven by what he or she can do for other people. In his book, *Toward a Meaningful Life*, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson wrote:

A true leader should be judged not by what he has, but by what he has not—ego, arrogance and self-interest. A true leader sees his work as a selfless service toward a higher purpose....When it comes time to take credit, he makes himself invisible; but he is the first to answer at the time of need, and he will never shrink away in fear....A true leader

wants nothing more than to give people pride, to make people stand on their own, as leaders in their own right. Instead of trying to blind us with his or her brilliance, a true leader reflects our own light back to us, so that we may see ourselves anew.

This year, the State Bar of Michigan launched “A Lawyer Helps,” a program to recognize and celebrate lawyers who are true leaders in our profession, in our community, and in our society. There is much to celebrate, because lawyers are involved in leadership roles in every aspect of our society. Lawyers help and serve people in need, reflecting key attributes of true leaders. We are all privileged to be in this noble profession. I invite all of you to be active participants in a “new generation of leadership” and do what you can for other people. ■