

23 Key Leadership Skills & Competencies for Work in 2023

You found our list of effective **leadership skills & competencies**.

Leadership skills are abilities that help professionals guide teams, projects, and organizations. For example, decision-making, empathy, and delegation. The purpose of these traits is to identify capable leaders and put the right professionals in positions of power.

These skills are similar to [leadership qualities](#). Many of these traits overlap with [executive skills](#), [HR skills](#) and [team management skills](#). Professionals can improve these skills by reading [books on leadership](#), [leadership books by women](#) and doing [leadership activities](#).

This article includes:

- leadership communication skills
- leadership soft skills
- qualities of good leaders
- traits of good leaders

List of leadership skills

Here is a list of leadership competencies that help professionals manage teams and excel at work.



1. Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is one of the most important leadership soft skills. Leaders deal with a variety of sensitive and stressful situations, and need good judgment to be able to operate appropriately in such circumstances. Understanding what employees might be thinking or feeling in certain situations helps managers make decisions that support the staff. These leaders are less likely to alienate employees and likelier to connect more deeply with team members.

Leaders who can read emotions and predict potential reactions can keep employee morale high and avoid many workplace conflicts. Plus, these bosses can react in realtime and change tactics mid conversation, for instance if they notice team members withdrawing from

conversation or displaying guarded body language. These skills help leaders de-escalate tension and detect issues within the department. Also, emotional intelligence simply helps leaders get along better with staff and foster greater levels of trust.

2. Relationship Building

Relationship building is one of the most essential traits of good leaders. To gain a leadership position, a professional should show an aptitude for getting along with others. Leaders interact and work with a wide variety of people, from the team they manage, to higher-ups, to fellow managers and collaborating departments, to clients and vendors. To do the job effectively, leaders must know how to connect and communicate with these different groups and individuals. The relationship between supervisor and supervisees is especially important, as leaders can only develop their reports through positive rapport and repeated contact.

Beyond making 1:1 connections, leaders must also know how to foster relationships between team members. Leaders unite team members around a common vision and shared goals, and keep those bonds strong by nurturing communication and respect among the group. To achieve harmony and cooperation, leaders must know how to build and maintain group ties.

Here is a [list of relationship building activities](#) and [ideas for team building leaders](#).

We also have a [guide to collaborative leadership](#).

3. Problem Solving

Problem solving is one of the most essential leadership skills. Leaders spend a significant amount of time putting out fires and solving issues for customers, the company, and the team.

Leaders are the ones colleagues look to for advice and help, and often have the final say on the course of action.

These individuals need to know how to think outside of the box, imagine new solutions, predict consequences, and test out theories in low-risk ways. This quality separates leaders from the rest of the workforce. Even without an official title, leaders come to coworkers' aid, brainstorm, and try to come up with fixes to issues and better ways of operating.

These individuals also need to know how to solve problems in group settings, since modern work revolves around collaboration. More input means a greater variety of ideas, and a leader should know how to choose the best ideas from the bunch. Leaders should also learn how to guide teammates through the problem solving process instead of automatically fixing every issue that arises. This approach helps teams be more skilled and self-sufficient.

Check out this [list of books on problem solving](#), and this [list of problem solving games](#).

4. Decision Making

Leaders make many decisions. Often, these individuals have the final say on tough calls, and many times, need to choose a path with imperfect or incomplete information. These decisions tend to involve large budgets or affect operations or employees.

Great leaders have the confidence and competence to make sound decisions quickly. These managers know when to wait for more intel, how to get more insight, and how to evaluate choices and pick the best option.

Great decision-makers are able to predict consequences and complications, and can prepare for best and worst-case scenarios. These leaders also can explain and defend their decisions

to higher ups, their own teams, and other departments, and know how to get others onboard with the plan.

Here is a [list of books on decision making](#).

5. Persuasion

Persuasion is the difference between managers vs leaders. Managers get team members to follow orders, yet leaders get team members to believe and buy into a vision. It is important for leaders to be able to convey the importance of a mission. Persuasion is essential to getting colleagues to join a cause. Great leaders can express the importance of the mission and make team members believe in leadership and themselves. Persuasion sparks passion. The most skilled leaders not only convince team members to cooperate, but inspire these teammates to collaborate. When these individuals win their peers' confidence, coworkers question their decisions less and follow on instinct. These folks are able to earn trust by showing colleagues that the plan is in their best interests.

Persuasion is an especially useful skill for up-and-coming leaders. Since these professionals do not have a track record of experience and success to prove their prowess, they must convince their bosses and reports to believe in and take a chance on them.

Leaders must get buy-in from stakeholders, and should know how to persuade different parties and how to alter the approach to fit the situation and individual.

6. Coaching

The ability and willingness to lift others up is one of the most outstanding qualities of good leaders. Less experienced managers often make the mistake of rushing in to solve

supervisees' problems instead of teaching them, or focusing only on their own performance and metrics instead of empowering others. Great leaders know they have a responsibility to help those around them become the best version of themselves. These individuals have a knack for coaching and helping colleagues reach their true potential. Such leaders know how to guide team members towards a solution without outright giving the answer, spark thought, provide encouragement, and motivate the team. These habits start even before these folks become managers, as they regularly encourage and help their peers.

Here is a [list of books on coaching](#).

7. Compromise

Most folks think of leaders as the head of the chain of command. In reality, leaders are less on top and more in the middle. No leader has complete authority or control. Even presidents and CEOs must bend to outside forces such as investors and board members, market and global conditions, the industry at large, and the public.

Leaders constantly find themselves in situations where they must broker deals between parties and find best interest solutions all around. Compromise is an essential management skill to master. Leaders must know how to delegate between competing interests and navigate conflicts in ways that satisfy all involved parties. These leaders learn how to present arguments, moderate discussions, brainstorm solutions, and get parties in agreement. Finding a perfect fix is a rare occurrence, and skilled compromisers know how to find middle ground. These individuals know when to negotiate more and when to settle, and how to find solutions that serve all stakeholders.

8. Delegation

Leaders who do everything by themselves are not really leaders. By definition, leaders lead, which means assigning tasks and guiding teams. Delegation is one of the most critical leadership competencies. Great leaders know how to split, balance, and re-balance workloads so that no team members are overwhelmed, and tasks get completed on schedule. These folks know the right time to hand off tasks and the right people to give those jobs to.

Distributing the workload is a large part of leadership, as well as monitoring the team to ensure no member is overloaded or headed for burnout. Skillful leaders know how to split up the work and present assignments in ways likely to be accepted. These folks also know how to give up control, trust team members, and let their people do their jobs instead of trying to handle the whole project alone and causing bottlenecks.

9. Time Management

A leader's time is in high demand, and their to-do-lists often seem never-ending. A good sense of time management is critical for professionals in charge of important projects, tasks, or teams. These individuals know how to structure the workday, estimate projects, keep meetings on track, meet deadlines, and keep their schedule from ballooning. Pros are able to limit the time spent on tasks, and have a sense of urgency that helps them prioritize.

Great leaders also have a sense of how the team spends time. These managers make sure that team members spend their hours productively, and make changes or suggestions to improve processes and make systems more efficient.

Here is a [list of the best time management tips](#), [list of time management books](#) and a roundup of [time tracking tools](#) to help organize the hours.

10. Organization

In theory, leaders could outsource all organizational tasks to assistants and direct reports. In reality, no one wants to work under these kinds of leaders. Working for a messy manager is rarely fun. Scattered bosses add unnecessary stress to the workday, and make it hard for teammates to trust or rely upon them. Disorganized leaders can cause confusion and make extra work for employees. Not to mention, the leader sets an example for the rest of the team, and disorganization sends the message that sloppy work is ok.

Offloading tasks is a form of organization in itself. It is fine for leaders to delegate and rely upon assistants and teammates to keep order, however leaders should have a firm grasp on their schedules and surroundings. Solid organizational skills and good systems provide structure and help teammates focus their time and energy on higher level tasks instead of busywork.

Here is a [list of executive assistant tools](#) that can help you stay organized.

11. Boundary-setting

Boundary-setting is one of the most overlooked leadership competencies. It is important for leaders to be able to set limits and strike balance in many areas, such as with their time. Hours can stack up, and managers who take on too many responsibilities and make themselves ever-available to employees can find themselves constantly working and headed for burnout. On the flip side, leaders who are not generous enough with their time can run into performance and relationship problems with staff.

Perhaps most importantly, leaders must have professional boundaries. Leaders aim to develop positive relationships and be friendly with employees, however should keep the right amount of distance to promote a level of authority and respect. Leaders should also have ethical boundaries, and not allow themselves or their employees to get pressured into behaviors that go against personal beliefs or moral norms.

12. Presentation Skills

According to *The Harvard Business Review*, the average executive spends 23 hours per week in meetings. More often than not, leaders are the ones running those meetings, or at the very least, delivering reports and updates during some portion of the call. Leaders find themselves in front of groups often, and must have solid presentation skills. These competencies include the ability to structure and plan meetings, public speaking skills, and familiarity with tools and equipment. Not to mention, improv skills and the ability to remain unflustered when faced with surprises such as technical issues or unexpected questions.

Good presenters must also be able to distill large amounts of information into the most important highlights and hold the audience's attention. Presenters may also moderate discussion between attendees. Presentation requires a combination of salesmanship and showmanship that keeps audiences engaged, and great leaders are masters of these practices.

13. Active Listening

Active listening is an important skill for leaders to master. Being the distracted boss who repeatedly asks staff the same questions does not send the message that the manager cares about employees' opinions. Plus, leaders receive large amounts of information every day, and need to process the data quickly to avoid missing important details. Skillful leaders know how to filter conversations to mine out the most important points and can ask thoughtful and relevant follow-up questions. These leaders understand that listening is a visual art that involves giving cues that show interest and engagement and encourage the speaker.

14. Empathy

Empathy is one of the key skills for leaders. Leaders make decisions that affect workers, and understanding employees' different viewpoints and experiences helps leaders better serve the staff. The effects of these decisions go beyond immediate wins and benefit the organization in the long run, for instance, by inspiring staff loyalty and reducing turnover rates.

This quality can also help leaders identify and solve issues more quickly. Bosses who are sensitive and in-tune with employees' needs and feelings can pick up on trouble and get to the root of problems much more easily. Plus, empathy makes for a better working environment overall. Workers want to feel seen, valued, and supported. Leaders who make efforts to empathize with employees create atmospheres where teammates can be their full selves at work.

Here is a [list of ways to increase empathy at work](#).

15. Multitasking

Few leaders have the luxury to work on one task at a time. Leaders typically have to juggle multiple responsibilities at once, such as attending meetings, updating executives, managing teammates, assigning projects, de-escalating conflicts, and keeping up with documentation. Often, leaders have to quickly switch between tasks, sometimes unexpectedly. These folks are master multitaskers that give full focus and attention to tasks, yet can seamlessly shift attention between subjects. Prioritization is key to this practice, and these individuals are able to mentally reorganize to-do lists constantly. This type of leader rarely gets lost or overwhelmed, and manages to complete tasks on time despite fluctuations in the workload.

16. Focus

Many experts insist that laser-sharp-focus is the quality that separates leaders from the general workforce. Leaders have the determination and commitment to pursue goals to completion. These professionals can hone in on priorities, give important tasks full attention, and work until they achieve the objective. Great leaders possess strong self-discipline on an individual level, and also have a solid sense of focus in terms of the wider team and department. Focus is the compass that helps leaders guide their people towards the right results.

Here is a [list of books on focus](#).

17. Learning

Despite the air of authority, leaders do not know everything. In fact, leaders, more than anyone, need to keep learning. The world changes fast, and new information comes to light constantly. To make informed decisions, leaders must stay up-to-date on conditions and trends. Leaders are also sources of knowledge and guidance for colleagues and learning a new skill or subject gives the entire team access to new information and abilities. The best leaders are avid readers, lifelong students, and frequent fliers at trainings, [leadership conferences](#), and educational events.

The most successful leaders are eager students and are able to pick up new knowledge and skills quickly.

18. Discretion

Leaders have access to a large amount of sensitive information, from details about employees' personal situations to trade secrets to upcoming company announcements and plans.

Professionals in positions of power need to possess discretion and be able to determine what

information is ok to pass along and what should stay top secret. Successful leaders must strike a balance between keeping secrets and keeping the team informed. These folks are trustworthy and know how to handle confidential topics. Also, these leaders act with tact and sense which subjects to avoid even when not explicitly told.

19. Planning and strategizing

Leaders choose the direction for the team, and occasionally the entire department or organization. It is important for leaders to align projects and work with the goal of the business. While the general workforce tends to focus more on independent tasks and immediate results, leaders need to employ more interconnected and long-term thinking. These individuals select desired outcomes and plan steps to help the team arrive at this goal.

Great leaders give guidance and structure and ensure that teammates' work adds up to more than the sum of its parts. These managers have a thorough understanding of the probable outcomes and determining elements, and can create a roadmap that gets teammates from point A to point B. The best leaders are also able to recognize when strategies are no longer effective and draft new plans.

Here is a [list of books on business strategy](#).

20. Emotional Regulation

Leaders need to know how to stay calm. Employees look to leaders for social cues. When leaders stay calm, the team stays calm, and if the leader is optimistic then the team tends to be as well. In reality, managers often face crises and understandable stress. Leaders need to know how to process and overcome difficult emotions, ignore overreactions, and keep a clear, logical head even amongst chaos. For these reasons, emotional regulation is one of the most

valuable skills for leaders to possess. Bosses who are in control of their thoughts and feelings anchor the team and give teammates the strength and support needed to perform.

21. Instruction

Instruction is one of the most important leadership communication skills. It is important for leaders to be able to clearly express ideas and explain complex concepts in simple ways. Many managers mistakenly assume that teammates can read their minds and guess their intentions. Skilled leaders check for understanding before moving on, and never make their colleagues feel stupid for asking a question. Giving direction is a deceptively tricky skill to master. The best leaders get a feel for how much can be left unsaid and which points to stress when giving instructions, and can get the desired results from teammates without further explanation.

22. Conflict resolution

Leaders often have to be mediators. There are bound to be clashes of personalities, opinions, and interests, and it is the job of leaders to guide involved parties towards peaceful resolution. Good leaders understand that conflict is part of the team development process, and have skills, strategies, and tactics to navigate disagreements effectively. While “getting along” does fall partly on employees, the leader is ultimately responsible for achieving harmony. Great leaders have the know-how to keep tensions at a minimum, address issues swiftly and skillfully, and gain alignment and agreement.

Here is a list of [conflict resolution activities](#) and a list of [books on conflict resolution](#).

23. Toughness and resilience

Leaders should be flexible yet firm. Bosses need empathy, yet also need strength and a willingness to push against opponents or confront teammates. Many individuals mistakenly assume that bosses need to choose between being a tyrant or a pushover. The best leaders fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum and act with a mix of kindness and firmness. These individuals do not let themselves or their teams get taken advantage of, yet also are willing to show softness and compassion.

Leaders are subject to a great deal of adversity and also need resilience and internal steadfastness to ride out challenges and regulate stress.

Final Thoughts

Promotions do not make leaders, skills and attitudes do. Perhaps the greatest trait an aspiring leader can possess is the willingness and ability to reflect, learn, and improve. If these qualities are present, then professionals can develop any skill. The idea of a “born leader” is mostly a myth. Even folks with natural leadership tendencies make mistakes and have to adapt and improve to remain on top of their game. The important question to ask is not whether or not an individual is a good leader, but rather what qualities can that person work on to become an even better leader.

Next, check out [this list of CEO books](#), these [virtual leadership ideas](#) and this guide to [management and leadership](#).

We also have a [list of examples of good leaders](#).

FAQ: Leadership skills

Here are answers to common questions about leadership skills.

What are leadership competencies?

Leadership competencies are traits and abilities that signal that a professional is good at guiding groups. These skills require development and practice. Some folks have more of a natural knack for leadership than others, but experience and mindfulness help leaders perfect the art. Managers do not automatically obtain leadership skills upon receiving a promotion, and many workers show leadership potential without having a title.

What are the most important leadership skills?

The most important leadership skills include problem solving, decision making, empathy, planning and strategizing, presentation skills, multitasking, and emotional regulation.

How do you develop leadership skills?

The best way to develop leadership skills is to tackle new responsibilities on the job. You do not need a manager position to become a better leader. No matter what your role, you can sharpen your skills by taking initiative, moving beyond your comfort zone, trying out new tactics and tasks, and asking for feedback on your performance. By seeking out opportunities and challenges, you can gain experience and improve your abilities.

How do you improve leadership skills in the workplace?

The best way to improve leadership skills in the workplace is to offer employees leadership training and skills coaching. Many organizations promote managers without offering formal training and development. Rather than subjecting supervisors to trial by fire and dealing with

the fallout of avoidable failures, it is better to identify leadership potential in employees and nurture those skills gradually. Teaching workers to be leaders makes management transitions flow more smoothly. Plus, these lessons can help all employees, not just the ones who want to be bosses. Skills like empathy, organization, and conflict resolution are helpful in many work situations beyond management.

Share:

-

-

-



Author: [Angela Robinson](#)

Marketing Coordinator at teambuilding.com.

Team building content expert. Angela has a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and worked as a community manager with Yelp to plan events for businesses.

[Angela Robinson](#)