

Five Key Aspects Of Leadership

Armando Cano Anzures · 2026

In some recent discussions, an employee told me about the dilemma his area manager had put him in. The Manager (with a capital M) was asking him to speak with another employee about behaviors that could be improved for the benefit of the business. That conversation would likely have a confrontational tone, and the Manager did not want to jeopardize his friendship with that employee. In other words, for this Manager, his personal relationship with the employee mattered more than achieving the business goals that are — or should be — his primary responsibility. Does this sound familiar?

As I referenced in my previous article, when we talk about leadership, we must think of it as something fluid rather than fixed. Just as technology, science, and the humanities advance — and just as manufacturing processes evolve — so too do our ideas about what makes a good leader. However, in my view, what changes is only the way those qualities are perceived and the emphasis placed on them; the qualities themselves do not truly mutate. I like to think of them as closer to values: immutable and easily recognized and accepted by everyone.

I asked Claude (Anthropic AI) to help me review articles published on the subject over the last five years. That brief research effort yielded the following list of five qualities that appear most frequently in descriptions of a good leader:

- ▶ **Internally stable** — determination, stoicism, self-awareness, and personal balance.
- ▶ **Externally empathetic** — servant leadership, psychological safety, and emotional intelligence.
- ▶ **Digitally literate** — not merely delegating AI to the IT department but engaging with it strategically.
- ▶ **Anchored in purpose** — leading with values, sustainability commitments, and authentic character.
- ▶ **Perpetual learner** — treating continuous learning as a personal trait, not just an organizational policy.

If you look at this list and reflect on each quality, you will notice they are all linked to other concepts that have also had their moment in the leadership literature. For example: externally empathetic sounds a lot like emotional intelligence, doesn't it? That is precisely what I mean when I say these qualities are only perceived differently — at their core, we are talking about the same skills that a good leader must understand, master, and deploy daily.

Internally Stable

A leader must always act with conviction and confidence and must project that confidence to the members of the team. Over many years I have had leaders whose anxiety spiked at the first sign of a possible risk, which in turn created an unnecessarily tense environment. Internal stability is not accidental — it requires conscious effort and emotional self-control that allows you to project confidence even in the worst of circumstances.

In something I read once (though I cannot recall the source), the author argued that to be a good leader you must have quite a large ego. Despite all circumstances, you must believe in yourself, in your team, and in the decisions you have made. Remember that as a leader you can also make mistakes, but the only way not to be defeated by them is to turn them into lessons learned and get back in the game.

Externally Empathetic

This quality is closely aligned with emotional intelligence and the ability to recognize that our team members will at times display behaviors shaped by their emotions. This is simple human nature — we all do it. The leader must be able to read those emotions, even when they are not expressed verbally, and redirect them toward the right behaviors.

One thing you cannot lose sight of as a plant manager (senior leadership) is that your role is not to ensure that processes and procedures are followed — that is what the management layer is for. Your role is to look after the behaviors of your people. Those behaviors must be aligned with the strategy, mission, vision, and values of the organization; otherwise, the organization cannot achieve its ultimate objectives.

Digitally Literate

I simply cannot fathom how we lived before AI. Not only is it a remarkable tool, but it evolves so quickly that keeping up with it is a challenge in itself. And yet some people use it only to write emails! There are also other tools that are somewhat more mundane but equally powerful, grouped under the umbrella of Industry 4.0 (the Fourth Industrial Revolution) or the Internet of Things (IoT).

And as you may have seen on television, humanoid robots are advancing at an ever-faster pace — for example, in Beijing, a robot recently ran a half-marathon in under 51 minutes, faster than the Ugandan holder of the human world record. Power BI, Tableau, and similar tools are now part of everyday business life and being a good leader means being effective at implementing and using them. It is undoubtedly an effort, but it is part of the leader's job.

Anchored in Purpose

Ask yourself honestly: do you have a clear sense of your purpose as a leader? Go a step further and ask yourself whether you have a clear sense of your purpose in life. If both are aligned, you will almost certainly be an outstanding leader. From my perspective, it is clear that excellent leaders do not only project themselves positively in their professional environment — it also shows in their personal lives, their family relationships, and their social interactions.

Think of your purpose as the goal or reason that motivates you and gives you direction. If it is well defined, expressing it will come naturally. However, if you find it difficult to articulate, I think it is worth taking the time to reflect on it.

Perpetual Learner

Being a good leader requires being competent: you must be the ultimate resource to whom the most difficult problems, the most critical business crises, and the most entrenched conflicts are brought. In addition to being internally stable and externally empathetic, you need to have the knowledge to be a true asset to your team.

And let us be honest — what we learned in college is not enough to make us a good leader. We need to invest the time, effort, and money to keep educating ourselves in order to stay relevant. Fortunately, in this era of podcasts, YouTube videos, book summaries, and similar resources, all you really need is to commit the time to keep learning. This does not exclude formal education and graduate studies, or the specific certifications relevant to your industry.

Be prepared to invest your own money in them. Never count on the company you work for to offer you scholarships. Remember that in the end it is an investment in the most important product you have: yourself.

What do you think about these five qualities we have described? I insist on it: I am sure there are many others that can be just as relevant, but as I mentioned, it all comes down to perception and what the current market identifies as a trend. I can assure you that working on these five qualities will never be time poorly spent, and they will help you become a better leader for your organization every day and, ultimately, a better leader for your family and your community.

Think also of a leader you admire and ask yourself: does he or she exhibit any of these qualities? Is there one that stands out more than the others? Now ask yourself: which of these qualities is most developed in you? Which one have you paid the least attention to? Remember that the best way to improve our performance as leaders is to work on our weaknesses and turn them into strengths.

My suggestion: start by making sure you have a well-defined and comprehensive purpose. Getting that alignment right from the outset will have an outsized effect on your growth as a solid, trustworthy leader.

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