



Five Distinctive Qualities of Leadership needed for *putting our differences to work*

1 Makes diversity an organizational priority.

This quality flips everything we have been conditioned to believe. You know, let's put our differences aside, we are more alike than we are unlike; look at all we have in common. These remain valuable truths, but when we stop there, our differences are made secondary, sometimes brushed away as if they don't matter. The bigger oversight is that our differences aren't even recognized as an advantageous stockpile of kindling to ignite new ideas and breakthrough thinking – the drivers of creativity, innovation, and invention at any level, in any organization or community. It asks us to look for differences, welcome them, and utilize them for the good of all, consciously making differences a priority – part of the mix – for any mainstream practice, like problem-solving, team-building, and decision-making.

2 Gets to know people and their differences.

This quality expands our thinking to enable us to see the many dimensions of diversity in a new light. This requires us to respond to the global realities of the 21st Century by updating, upgrading, and expanding our knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the many dimensions of diversity. Seeing our differences as organizational assets is new to many of us. More often, anything to do with diversity is deemed a human resources issue or not considered as more than a nice-to-know in mainstream business activities. Putting our differences to work means consciously developing a curiosity, a reservoir of knowledge, and a day-to-day practice that masters how, when, and where to tap into these invaluable resources with unique ethnic origins, cultural perspective, generational insight, global know-how, marketplace understanding, fresh new thinking, challenging new motivations, creative talents and a wide range of life experiences.

3 Enables rich communication.

This quality defies the notion of unilateral streams of thought. Within organizations of every kind, this quality closes the gap between layers of hierarchy that destroys opportunities for putting our differences to work. It relies on approaching problems with a “beginner's mind” – even as an expert, asking us to reach beyond asking questions or inviting input, especially when the past shows little was heard or acted upon. It places a new level of value on what others have to say and raises the level of leadership responsibility and openness to listen with a new consciousness of mining for the better idea. It dramatically broadens the notion of open, honest two-way communication. How about three-way, four-way or across the world?

4 Holds personal responsibility as a core value.

This quality acknowledges the shift from “institutional loyalty” of the past to the reality of being “free agents,” or perhaps other more fluid, mobile kinds of arrangements we've not yet imagined in the marketplaces, workplaces, and communities that are in a continual state of churn. What is added to our way of operating as individuals is the essential quality that Nelson Mandela affirmed, “*With freedom comes responsibility.*” It is a sense of personal responsibility that needs to be part of our portable portfolio that goes with us when we move from one job to another, to a new company or within an organization, out in the community or in some new region of the world. Putting our differences to work is greatly enhanced when personal responsibility is a common thread woven tightly into everyone's fabric.

5 Establishes mutualism as the final arbiter.

This quality builds upon its definition: a doctrine that mutual dependence is necessary for social well-being. It is also essential for organizational well-being. So, this quality applies this concept to all aspects of work and life in all types of organizations, institutions and entities. It creates a new definition of success that has a clear “yardstick” that serves as the final arbiter of all plans, innovations, decisions, products, services, programs, profit-making, et al: *Everyone benefits and no one is harmed.* In other words, it creates win, win, win – I win, you win, we all win. Building the future on a foundation of mutualism changes everything we do. It asks more of us, but the benefits are significant. It demands that we consciously make a routine practice of first evaluating our actions, behavior, decisions, thinking, and new ideas with a thoughtful inspection of the implications and benefits to all concerned. It adds a new element of consideration to every business or strategic plan.

Source: Adapted from Five Distinctive Qualities of Leadership
Putting Our Differences to Work by Debbe Kennedy

*Watch your thoughts, they become your words.
Watch your words, they become your actions.
Watch your actions, they become your habits.
Watch your habits, they become your character.
Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.*

—unknown