How do you define good leadership? There is no general agreement. After a comprehensive review of the leadership literature, R. M. Stogdill concluded that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (1974).

A useful yardstick that principals can use to measure their leadership ability is provided by the U.S. Marine Corps. These 11 principles, adapted from the Marine Corps leadership course for small-unit leaders, give principals practical guidance in developing or refining their individual leadership styles.

1. Be Technically and Professionally Proficient
   Effective principals leaders concentrate on such critical functions as planning and creating the master schedule, developing the budget, and disseminating information. They do not spend their time and effort doing the same kind of work as their staff, but they must have sufficient technical knowledge to understand the time constraints, methods, procedures, and effort involved with each staff decision.

2. Know Yourself and Always Seek Self-Improvement
   Leaders must recognize their weaknesses and strengths and be receptive to comments from
others about the positive and negative aspects of their behavior. Don’t be thin-skinned! Be ready to seek and accept constructive criticism about your ability from students, teachers, custodians, and anyone else you have contact with on a regular basis.

3. **Know Your Staff and Look Out for Their Welfare**

The effective leader must have a sound understanding of human behavior and constantly work on creating a relationship with staff that is based on trust. Much of what a leader should know about a staff member is gained from speaking to the person on an informal basis, usually in a group. Don’t think that by calling people into your office to talk that they will tell you much about themselves. You may feel that you know them, but in reality you probably haven’t even scratched the surface of finding out what motivates them, what they fear in the workplace, and what are their concerns.

By making a conscientious effort to observe your staff as often as possible, to become personally acquainted with them, to recognize their individual differences, and to share in their joys and sorrows, you will show yourself to be a caring administrator and be recognized as such by the staff.

4. **Keep Your Staff Informed**

The more your staff knows about why and how a decision is made, the more trust they will have in your ability and leadership. Be open. When your staff knows what is going on, they will not only support you, but may have ideas you never dreamed of. There will be situations where you cannot explain your decision in a timely manner, but if you explain when time permits, you will eliminate speculation, rumors, and mistrust.

5. **Set an Example**

Successful principals set personal and professional standards for their staffs by providing an example of integrity, moral courage, administrative knowledge, professional competence, personal appearance, and personal conduct. Never develop the attitude of “do as I say, not as I do.” Respect is never automatic; it must be earned. This does not mean that you must be a superman or bionic woman, but it does mean that your actions, appearance, and performance must be exemplary.

Be on time, dress appropriately, maintain an optimistic outlook, and be loyal both to those you report to and those who report to you. As the saying goes, if you “talk the talk, then walk the walk” you will create a climate in which your staff will respect you and follow your example.

6. **Ensure that Tasks Are Understood, Supervised, and Completed**

The act of assigning someone a particular task is only the initial, and relatively small, part of a leader’s responsibility. The primary responsibility is to supervise the activity to make sure it is completed correctly and on time. While there is nothing wrong with offering advice or instructions while the assigned person is working at the task, it’s best to wait until the task is completed to offer suggestions on how it might be accomplished more easily next time.

7. **Train Your Staff as a Team**

Training as a team creates unity, morale, and camaraderie among your staff and promotes buy-in by the participants. Many districts have a set number of professional development days throughout the year. Use these days and your faculty meetings as opportunities for your staff to work together on such common objectives as goals, lesson plans, technology, and classroom management.
8. **Make Sound and Timely Decisions**

   Every administrator must develop the ability to make a rapid estimate of the situation and arrive at a sound decision as soon as possible. Responding to a staff member’s request for assistance by saying “Let me get back to you” is a sign of vacillation that often creates a lack of confidence within the organization. The fastest way to destroy the morale and effectiveness of a staff is to have someone in charge that always has to go to someone else for a decision.

9. **Develop a Sense of Responsibility Among Your Staff**

   Staff buy-in is critical if an activity is to succeed. People will accept responsibility for something if they feel they have a say in how it is created and how it is utilized. Likewise, giving the credit to the people who do the work impacts their future effectiveness.

10. **Utilize Your Staff According to Their Capabilities**

    Principals should have a thorough knowledge of their staff’s professional and personal capabilities. They should assign tasks that are doable, properly evaluate the time and space factors needed to complete the tasks, and be prepared to make adjustments if necessary.

11. **Take Responsibility for Your Actions and Those of Your Staff**

    The principal is responsible for all that the staff does or fails to do. Any effort to evade this responsibility destroys the bond of loyalty and respect that must exist between you and them. If something goes wrong, you must be willing to accept the blame even though you personally may not be responsible. Don’t try to blame others, but hold subordinates strictly accountable for results of delegated responsibilities.

Be proactive, not reactive, in accepting responsibility for your actions. Be prepared for criticism and don’t be traumatized by failure. Administrators who have never failed have never tried. The best leaders acknowledge their mistakes and take corrective actions to reduce the possibility of similar mistakes in the future.

These principles are simply commonsense guidelines that an administrator, at any level and in any organization, should understand and follow. The list is not meant to be complete, but rather to serve as a starting point for your own elaboration and refinement.

**Reference**

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**WEB RESOURCES**
Visionary Leadership, Ltd. provides “Learning to Lead,” Parts I and II, by Major General Perry M. Smith, U.S. Air Force (Retired), originally published by the *Marine Corps Gazette*, incorporating many of the principles adapted for this article.
http://members.aol.com/genpsmith/lead.html
http://members.aol.com/genpsmith/lead2.html

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory has an extensive listing of references for “Leadership Characteristics that Facilitate School Change.”
www.sedl.org/change/leadership/references.html

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