

5 Surprising CEO Qualities

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What qualities do successful CEOs share? Obvious ones include ambition and leadership. But there are less obvious characteristics that have helped many CEOs advance -- and these can also help you.

"You are the CEO of your life, your department, your team," says executive coach Debra Benton, author of "CEO Material."

"If you embody traits of the best CEOs, you'll have a much better chance of rising to the top."

Check out the traits below to see which surprising CEO qualities you may already have.

1. **People empathy:** The best executives "have an affinity for others; they're affable, they like people. They excel at maintaining the self-esteem of others," says Benton. Just ask Jack Mitchell, CEO of luxury retailers Mitchells/Richards/Marshs. He is the kind of warmhearted boss everyone would like to have. In his book, "Hug Your People," he promotes being nice to employees, trusting them, recognizing them, and, of course, hugging when appropriate.

2. **Integrity/ethics:** "Good CEOs do the right thing, not the thing that feels right," says Benton. Sometimes that means having to admit mistakes and make amends. Take Steve Wasik, CEO of SIGG reusable water bottles, who recently made a public apology for not disclosing that trace amounts of BPA had been found in the bottle's liners years ago. The company even opened an exchange program, where SIGG bottle owners could trade in their old bottles for the newer, BPA-free ones.

3. **Willingness to ask for help:** Top-notch CEOs are not know-it-alls. Conan O'Brien describes a meeting he attended with Jeff Immelt, CEO of General Electric. Immelt responded, "I don't know" to a question. Writes O'Brien: "I've always thought it's a sign of real intelligence when anyone with power and expertise admits he doesn't have all the answers."

Benton agrees and says good leadership is developing the people who work for you and being able to go to them for answers and help.

4. **People smarts:** Great CEOs are also excellent at knowing how to read people. John F. Welch, former CEO of General Electric Co., told BusinessWeek. "If you ask Warren [Buffet] his opinion about [20 people he's just met], he'll have each one nailed. He's a masterful evaluator of people, and that's the biggest job there is in running a company."

5. **Ego drive:** Egomaniacal chief executives can end up alienating those around them. But, for some, this personality trait is the force behind a company's success. Their mantra: "If my company looks great, so do I." Steve Jobs, founder and CEO of Apple, is notorious for his ego. And he was just named the CEO of the decade by Fortune magazine.

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Many of the traits of the best CEOs are similar to those of entrepreneurs. To identify your own CEO qualities, take the free entrepreneur test. This free test will help you find out if you share these key-to-success qualities and have what it takes to start your own successful business.