



Activity: Qualities of a Leader

This activity is designed to get students thinking about what it means to be a leader, and to demonstrate that there is no single set of qualities and skills that makes one a good leader: Every leader is different, and you have to find what works best for you.

Activity time: Anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes

Materials needed: Small rectangles of colored paper; tape; an empty wall or whiteboard

Setup: Prior to running the activity, spend some time coming up with a list of 15 to 20 adjectives that may or may not be qualities of a leader. They can be personality traits, physical characteristics, skills, etc. Write each word or phrase on a rectangle of colored paper, large enough to be viewed from the back of a classroom.

On two larger sheets of paper, write the words “important” and “not important”. Tape the sheet with the word “important” on the left end of a blank wall or whiteboard, and tape the sheet with the words “not important” on the right end of a blank wall or whiteboard so that there is plenty of space between them. Along the bottom of the wall or whiteboard, place enough pieces of tape so that there is one for each of the small rectangles of paper with the adjectives on them.

Activity instructions: Shuffle up your stack of adjectives and distribute them evenly among the group. Explain that everyone has been given a few words which may or may not describe a quality that someone should have in order to be a good leader. Explain that in a moment, they will be asked to place the words they have been given somewhere along the spectrum created on the wall or whiteboard. If they feel that a word describes an important quality of a leader, they should tape that word towards the left of the spectrum. If they feel that a word describes an unimportant quality of a leader, or something that is insignificant to whether or not someone is a good leader, they should tape that word towards the right of the spectrum. If they feel that they have a word that is somewhat more ambiguous, or that it *could* be a quality of a good leader but it depends on the situation, they can place it somewhere in the middle.

Once everyone has placed their words along the spectrum, ask for a volunteer to comment on why they placed a certain word where they did. After that person has commented, ask the group if anyone else would like to comment, either agreeing or disagreeing with the placement of that word in particular.

Reminder - It might be a good idea to come up with some group agreements or guidelines before doing this activity. Here are some possible guidelines you might want to consider:

1. *Everyone is entitled to his/her/hir opinions. There are no wrong answers.*
2. *Use “I” statements in expressing your opinion. Don’t speak for others.*

3. *Be respectful with your language. This includes not interrupting others.*
4. *What is true for one leader may not necessarily be true for another.*
5. *Share the space so that everyone gets a chance to speak.*

Discussion questions - Here are some possible questions that you can use to facilitate a discussion around this activity:

1. *Would anyone like to comment on why they placed a word where they did?*
2. *Are there any words up here that are in a different place than you would have put them?*
3. *Are there any words up here that might move if the situation were different?*
4. *Are there any qualities of a leader that are missing that you would like to add to the list?*
5. *Based on this discussion, what are your thoughts on what it means to be a leader?*

Tips - Here are some tips that may help encourage a more robust or lively discussion:

1. *Point out words that have been placed in the middle and say "I'm curious to hear why this word was placed in between 'important' and 'not important'."*
2. *Play the Devil's advocate a bit, especially with adjectives that are more ambiguous or open to interpretation, such as "popular", "loud", and "rebellious".*
3. *Ask pointed questions about certain adjectives, such as "Is there any situation in which it might be important or more effective for a leader to be male?"*

Here is an illustration of what this activity looks like, including sample words that we have used.

