



## ***WorldWIT Wisdom: Ten Tips Toolbox***

July 2005 - **10 Traits that Are Essential for Female Leaders**  
By: Lyn Turknett, Founder of Turknett's Women's Initiatives

How is your leadership character? Here are ten traits women can focus on in order to develop the strong leadership behaviors and skills necessary to rise to power positions in the workplace. Plus, at the end of Lyn's piece, she included a simple quiz you can take to find how you rank in leadership skills.

### **10 Traits that Are Essential for Female Leaders**

Recent research indicates that women's management style, which emphasizes communication and building positive relationships, is well suited to the current leadership paradigm. Here are ten traits women can focus on in order to develop the strong leadership behaviors and skills necessary to rise to power positions in the workplace.

#### **1. Lead with integrity and truth-telling.**

When people are asked what trait they most want in a leader, integrity and honesty come out on top over and over. Women may have an integrity advantage; they pay attention to ethics and tend to be more values- and principle-driven. Studies have shown that what women bring to boards is an increased focus on ethics and good governance. Women can, however, sometimes mistake self-righteousness for adherence to principle. When women become moralistic, holier-than-thou, and overly certain, they can lose influence.

#### **2. Respect others.**

Women excel at this. Real respect requires seeing another person as genuinely worthy. No leader is seen as having integrity if she treats people badly. Our research shows that people who are respectful often find it easy to spend time on the front lines, because they know that every person is essential to the success of the enterprise. You can't lead well if you don't know what's going on at the edge-where the cash register rings and the customer connects with the organization.

#### **3. Show courage.**

Even though it may not come easily to all women, successful female leaders develop courage. Courage is required to make sure your department or group has the resources they need, and to resist conforming to a leadership style that has historical precedence but isn't your own. For example, be willing to lead collaboratively if that's your style but is not the one modeled at the top. Ask for what YOU need in terms of salary, experience, or career opportunities. That is, after all, what you'd want another female leader to do.

#### **4. Be willing to take risks and embrace change.**

We know from our research on personality in executives that women tend to be less natural risk takers than men. On the other hand, they are somewhat MORE change tolerant. Some willingness to take risk-and to tolerate the mistakes that ensue-is critical for leadership.

#### **5. Give up perfectionism.**

Whether it's biological or the fact that we grow up striving to be "good girls," women are often cursed with exaggerated perfectionism. Perfectionists often refuse to delegate-who could do it better than I? Perfectionists take too long on each project or work overly long hours. The perfect is the enemy of the good. Perfectionism can also be a career derailer. These traits serve women

well in some ways; people want them on projects to take care of the details. If women aren't careful, though, the exaggerated responsibility, detail orientation, and perfectionism can mean that they are overlooked for promotion and for higher-level jobs that require speed, vision, and a constant focus on the big picture.

#### **6. Stay laser focused.**

Great leaders always know one or two things that are most important to focus on for the year, the week, the day, and the hour. Leaders are responsible for creating a shared vision and maintaining focus on it. Great leaders understand the power of simplicity-keep your organization focused on what's most important, and communicate it in a meaningful, memorable way. Don't let your ability to multi-task diminish your ability to focus.

#### **7. Get comfortable with power.**

There are two kinds of power: personal and institutional. Great leaders are driven by a desire for institutional power-power in the service of the good of the organization. Because women tend to have an advantage in emotional intelligence and reading nonverbal cues, they are good at developing political savvy. Women would be well-advised to use their political savvy to develop power to use for the good of the whole-and that kind of behavior benefits them as well.

#### **8. Share information and ask for information.**

Women are naturally good communicators, and there's no better way to motivate, to build commitment, and to simply get great ideas than two-way information sharing.

#### **9. Be confident**

Confidence is essential for executive presence. Women often need a confidence boost. Our research comparing 360-feedback results for men and women executives finds that women score significantly better than men on 25 of 47 dimensions and significantly lower on only one: self-esteem. To build confidence, remember that if you think you can, you probably can. Fake it till you make it. Speak with confidence and without too many "female qualifiers." A caveat: When you're pumping up your confidence, don't lose your humility. Great leaders are confident AND humble.

#### **10. Embrace conflict; don't avoid it.**

As a leader, you have to resolve conflict and embrace the constructive conflict that generates new ideas. Sometimes you have to confront conflict in relationships, but you can do it in a "female" way. One woman who had gotten a promotion knew one man was not going to support her. Her first thought was, "I'll just try to avoid dealing with him." But she decided instead to look for what she could do for him. When she found out that he was starting a new project for the company, she wrote to him pledging that her department would do anything they could to support the project. She turned the relationship around by not avoiding him.

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*Lyn Turknett is founder of Turknett's Women's Initiatives program and was sponsor of last year's Leadership Lab for Women conference at Kennesaw State University. She is cofounder of Atlanta-based Turknett Leadership Group, an organizational and executive development firm that specializes in helping businesspeople and companies establish ethical business practices. She coauthored *Decent People, Decent Company: How to Lead with Character at Work and in Life* (Davies-Black). You can also find out more about her at [www.turknett.com](http://www.turknett.com).*

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## QUIZ

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### How Is Your Leadership Character?

Take this quiz to find out.

Rank each of the following statements with the answer that best describes you: 1 = Never; 2 = Seldom; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Always. See scoring, at bottom.

- \_\_\_ I treat the people I work with as equals.
- \_\_\_ I can be counted on to keep my promises; I'm dependable.
- \_\_\_ People are drawn to me and they confide in me.
- \_\_\_ I stay positive and maintain composure during times of stress.
- \_\_\_ When things go wrong, I refrain from assigning blame.
- \_\_\_ I have no problem being vulnerable and letting others see my imperfections.
- \_\_\_ I take 100 percent accountability for situations and relationships that call for improvement.
- \_\_\_ I'm confident of my convictions and larger goals, and am willing to take risks to support them.
- \_\_\_ I move forward decisively and embrace necessary change.
- \_\_\_ I see everything I do in terms of the larger picture, the greater good.
- \_\_\_ When I see a problem, I don't just sit back and ask, "Why don't they fix this?" I ask, "What can I do?"
- \_\_\_ I see myself as a leader of integrity and the people in my organization would characterize me this way too.

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Scoring: Add up all of your numbers.

0-15 Whether you're a manager or a starting-level employee, there are lots of opportunities ahead for you to strengthen your relationships at work, realize more of your potential, and achieve more satisfaction at your job and in your life in general.

15-30 You've got leadership qualities that others admire and that could take you far. But why stop here? By working on your communication skills and focusing on your larger self, you will elevate yourself to a new level that could yield personal and professional breakthroughs.

30-45 You're an individual whom others look up to. You have a good sense of self, but you're not the type of person to become complacent. Take the next step to self-development and self-exploration and you will discover that building character skills will benefit you in unimagined ways and will have a positive effect on those around you as well.

45-60 Congratulations! You possess many character traits of a true leader. If you're not already in a leadership position, you could be. Because you are resilient and know yourself well, you are a natural role model for those around you. You are the type who wants to keep growing and changing. The highest levels of self-discovery and character building are the most difficult-but they are also the most rewarding.