

Sniffing Out Strong Leaders

Unleash your development efforts • BY KRISSI BARR



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The leadership wisdom of dogs. Those are five words most chief learning officers likely never thought they'd see in a professional setting. Don't worry, your career hasn't gone to the dogs — just your inspiration for leadership development.

That's because great leaders — and great dogs — share some of the same traits.

- Faithful leaders earn loyalty by wearing their positive emotions front and center, and doing what they say they're going to do when they say they'll do it.
- Inspirational leaders move people to do the extraordinary with their optimism and passion.
- Determined leaders focus on what matters most, shake off setbacks and keep moving toward their goals.
- Observant leaders spot problems and opportunities sooner by sensing things other people miss.

These four traits spell out FIDO, a new way to connect abstract leadership concepts with something furry and tangible that everyone can relate to.

Faithful leaders are dependable. Sit, stay, deliver the report by first thing Thursday morning.

It isn't easy to develop an "I've got your tail no matter the circumstances" attitude. Words are good, but they only convey some of the message. Dogs don't rely much on the exact words you speak, and your employees don't either. It's what you do that has the biggest impact.

That's why faithful leaders wear their loyalty on their collars. They defend their pack at every opportunity. Employees, like dogs, can sniff out a fake from across the conference room. So, is it OK for the big dog to show emotional vulnerability at work? Woof yes! That's because authenticity exudes confidence. And confidence is seen as competence.

Inspirational leaders help others believe they can do what they used to think was impossible. They lift spirits with their passion and energy. And sometimes they just wag their tails to show how happy they are.

Attitude is everything. That's why inspirational leaders approach every task with enthusiasm. Attitude is contagious and a lot less dangerous than kennel cough, so go ahead and spread some around your workplace.

Inspirational leaders also set the overall vision for the organization. It doesn't have to be grandiose, just aspirational. All that's needed is a simple statement that defines what the organization wants to become.

An effective vision will remind your teammates that they're making meaningful contributions every day.

Determination is the secret sauce of leadership. When you combine a clear focus with a never-give-up mindset, you get a team that can achieve virtually anything. Of course, a dog is the personification of perseverance, like when it's trying to pull a bag of jerky snacks through a cracked pantry door.

IS IT OK FOR THE BIG DOG TO SHOW EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY AT WORK? WOOF YES!

When you truly own something, you'll follow up and follow through to make sure the job gets done. Responsibility can get fuzzy when there are many people working on a project. But if you really own the outcome, you are the one ultimately responsible for making sure everyone does his or her part.

Observant leaders know that information is king. Like a hungry Labrador, they use all their senses to take in as much as possible to make the best decisions.

Observant leaders feel momentum shifts and read body language. They identify patterns quickly because they look at things from different perspectives. They listen intently, act when something doesn't smell right and sense things others miss.

Great leaders are also great askers of questions. They pepper their conversations with phrases like "And then what?" and "Tell me more" to glean additional information. Most importantly like dogs, observant leaders are great listeners.

The benefits of improving leadership are clear: You'll attract better applicants, innovate faster and generate superior results. It's just hard to get people engaged on the subject.

Like Dorothy with her ruby slippers, dog lovers have had the answers to great leadership all along. So unleash your team with the leadership wisdom of dogs, ultimately benefiting your entire organization. **CLO**