

The “It” Factor

How Leading Yourself Gets You Further Faster



Why do some people succeed and others don't? The leaders who get the plum assignments, attract the best clients, earn praise, and move up faster -- what do they have? Is it something real, or just a bunch of smoke and mirrors?

Sure, there are those who enjoy moments of glory, but they don't have the substance to sustain it. In that case, they're just fooling themselves and others, and their accomplishments are short-lived.

On the other hand, truly successful leaders have figured out how to put their careers on a long-term upward trajectory. They don't just look good in the moment, they are good all the time. Their approach to leadership is grounded in a solid understanding of what really matters, and they work to master these critical qualities and skills as they grow.

What is “it”?

They’ve also acquired something quite special – the “it” factor. All great leaders have this, and it’s not simply how charming or charismatic you are. It’s a specific set of skills you can learn over time to set yourself up for greater leadership success.

These skills are game-changers, and they are often the hardest ones to master, which is precisely why they make the biggest difference.

Let’s take a closer look. Decades of research shows successful leaders are accomplished in three general areas:

Leading work

Getting things done

Leading others

Establishing and nurturing effective relationships

Leading self

Regulating your own emotions and behavior



Most leaders focus on the first two and give little attention to the third category. Why? Because the internal battle is the hardest.

It’s far easier to amass accomplishments or tell others what to do rather than to keep your cool or demonstrate courage. Many people prefer to focus on building relationships and acquiring followers on social channels instead of tackling self-doubt or bouncing back from a failure.

It’s much harder -- and a lot less fun -- to work on yourself. But excelling at self-management is what will get you further, faster in your career. And in life.

Let’s take a closer look at what leading self entails.

Essential qualities of 'it' factor leaders:

Communication

Inspirational – Speaks capably and comfortably in a variety of settings

Intentional – Speaks capably and comfortably in a variety of settings

Transparent – Speaks capably and comfortably in a variety of settings

Public speaking skills – Speaks capably and comfortably in a variety of settings

Written communication skills – Articulates meaningful ideas and messages through effective writing

Executive presence – Maintains composure, exhibits confidence and gravitas

Character

Integrity – Acts and speaks in a way that demonstrates high ethical standards

Courageous – Bold, willing to move forward in spite of uncertainty

Trustworthy – Honest, maintains appropriate confidentiality

Sincere – Genuine and heartfelt

Safe – Creates a feeling of security for themselves and others, allows for trial and error

Resilient – Recovers quickly from setbacks, perseveres in the face of adversity

Reliable – Consistent, dependable

Accountable – Owns up to mistakes, willing to change direction

Self-aware – Recognizes own strengths and weaknesses, realistic understanding of how they are perceived by others

Centered – Demonstrates mindfulness, fully present, aware of own thoughts and feelings, consciously chooses how to think and behave

Emotional maturity – Manages emotions, maintains perspective

Learning Capacity

Technical expertise – Mastery of essential industry principles, processes, systems and regulations

Knowledgeable – Intelligent, well informed

Credible – Accurate, believable, demonstrates relevant experience

Adaptable – Flexible, responds well to change

Growth-oriented – Lifelong learner, supports growth of others

Innovative – Recognizes and seizes potential, calculated risk-taker, creative thinker

Cultivate your “it” factor

Leading self is a tall order, and one that leaders must work on over time. By consistently cultivating your “it” factor, you will see immediate impacts and enhance your leadership performance over time. Here are 10 ways to experience greater leadership success — starting today.



Communication

- 1. Be proactive** – Don't wait to be asked; become a more intentional communicator. Especially when you are collaborating with others, open lines of communication are critical. Status updates and well thought out agendas are an integral part of how you work. They don't have to be lengthy in detail, but can be quick bullets providing critical information to share. Ask yourself, “What do I know that they don't?” and proactively communicate those things.
- 2. Listen more** – Effective communication and deeper understanding starts with listening. Try a “lead-by-questioning” approach with others. When participating in meetings, focus most of your time on listening rather than speaking – try a 70%/30% split. Then when you're ready to contribute, be selective about what you share, and make sure it adds value. Be confident and concise. Avoid fillers such as “um” and “like.”
- 3. Prepare before you present** – Think about an upcoming presentation. Block off time on your calendar to begin preparing well in advance. Think carefully through your content, organizing the message and any call to action. Practice out loud several times, rehearsing with any audio/visuals and scripting your transitions. From the moment you begin speaking, focus on how you can help your audience.
- 4. Demonstrate gravitas** – Having a strong executive presence helps others perceive you as a capable leader. One of the most effective ways to exhibit presence is to demonstrate “gravitas” – often thought of as having confidence and a cool head, particularly under pressure. You can demonstrate gravitas when making difficult decisions. Your goal is to act decisively. This isn't making a snap decision; it is being willing to make a difficult decision in a timely manner and sticking to your guns in the face of pressure. Leaders often make judgment calls that impact others. By having confidence in your decision and communicating how and why you made that decision, even if others don't agree they will respect it and see you as a capable leader with gravitas.

Character

5. Know what you stand for — Having a clear sense of your personal values will help you make important decisions about your work and your life. Write down a few words that reflect what you believe in. When considering all the words together, does this capture the essence of who you are -- and most importantly, who you are striving to become? Do your best to use these values to guide what you say and do every day.

6. Own up to your mistakes — Everyone makes mistakes. Successful leaders are accountable for their errors and learn from them. Think of a recent situation where you've made a mistake or said something you regret. Go to those involved and apologize. Then make a change for the better.

7. Be resilient — Every leadership journey has its ups and downs. The greatest test of character is how you respond to obstacles you inevitably face. Instead of tossing in the towel when you experience a setback, get back in the game. Be resilient. Remain optimistic and do all you can to overcome it. If you're still dwelling on a recent failure, accept it, put it behind you, and try again. This time you'll be wiser and one step closer to success.

Learning Capacity

8. Be coachable — You can benefit from the constructive feedback of others, especially in areas where you know you are not strong. Be open to advice, and be sure others know that. Ask for the perspectives of those you trust about your work and your behavior. Take notes and, more importantly, take action on things you need to improve.

9. Push yourself — Don't limit yourself to only doing what you do well. Complacency is a dangerous thing. You can stagnate or burn out very easily. Take some risk to learn new skills. Sign up for an online course or leadership training. Break through a fear that's holding you back. If you're not growing, you're falling behind others who are.

10. Find answers — No one knows it all. If you don't have a solution to a problem, be willing to say so. But recognize that you must do whatever it takes to find out. The best leaders are lifelong learners who are known for tackling even the toughest of problems. Many times they work to find new solutions. Next time you are presented with a challenge, roll up your sleeves and go find some answers.

I'm Elise Mitchell, a three-time CEO, leadership strategist, executive coach, business consultant, author, wife and mom. My passion is helping high-performing leaders achieve more.

Over the past 15 years, I've coached, consulted and trained leaders from a wide variety of industries ranging from non-profits to Fortune 500 companies. My goal is to inspire and equip you to lead at your best.

Contact me at elise@elisemitchell.com



What would you like to change?

Every leader has gaps holding them back. I work with clients to help them strengthen their leadership, resolve pressing business problems, and get the results they want.

This is achieved through three core services:



Leadership Development

Customized programs that equip you and your team to manage complexity, think more strategically and mobilize others



Business Advisory Services

Guidance and tools to help you address challenging business issues, from driving change to planning an exit strategy



Executive Coaching

Inspiring, results-oriented coaching using neuroscience and business insights to help you achieve your most important goals

