
Five leadership qualities your staff are looking for.

What 3,831 leaders, managers and employees told Leadership Management Australasia about the managers they want.

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Leaders and managers are often criticised for focusing too much on technical skills, knowing too little about management, and communicating poorly. So what do their staff actually want from them?

The training organisation Leadership Management Australasia (LMA) runs a rolling survey of leaders, managers and employees, and reports on it three times a year. Its 2012 report covered 3,831 people: 261 senior managers or business leaders, 443 middle managers or supervisors, and 3,127 non-managerial employees.

Here are the five things employees most wanted to hear from their managers, followed by the full list of what makes a good manager in their eyes.

1 **Tell me clearly where we are going, and our goals and vision.**

At the time of the survey, employees had become less optimistic. Redundancies, falling production and reduced overtime had changed their view of the future.

LMA chairman Grant Sexton put it this way: "Employees today are like customers have always been: they only go where they want to go, and they stay where they are appreciated. If we are not creating the right environment at work, they will slack off or go somewhere else."

Leaders need to talk regularly about the organisation's future, in a reassuring way. If uncertainty makes that difficult, give clear points in time when more detail will be shared. Employees value the honesty of knowing as much as they can about their future. As the report says, they are "people first, employees second". Sexton suggests explaining the problems and the short-term and long-term response, then asking, "What part do you want to play and how can we support you?"

2 **Give me honest feedback on how I am performing.**

Failing to pick up on poor performance is one of the big criticisms of Australian managers. Sexton says it tells the underperforming employee that they are not important. Feedback makes people feel appreciated.

Staff want to know whether they did something well or what they need to fix, but they are unlikely to ask. So leaders must take the lead: "Look, Bill, I am not happy with that, so let's talk it through and let's see what we need to change to do it better next time."

3 Listen to me, and show that you respect my input into decisions.

"Real ideas about improving processes or reducing waste can only come from the people on the front line, doing it," says Sexton. If an idea is adopted, there's a pat on the back. If it isn't, thank the person anyway and explain why. Otherwise the ideas just dry up.

When the organisation needs to make a major change, approach the whole team for input. Explain the change and why it is needed, then open up the question of how best to achieve it. People who take part become part of the solution. Telling people a decision has been made and they will comply creates adversity and conflict.

During the global financial crisis, many companies found that staff preferred to cut hours across the board rather than see some colleagues lose their jobs entirely.

4 Treat me in a fair and even-handed way, and make reasonable demands.

The survey found that people now choose their workplace on very personal grounds, with a strong focus on looking after themselves.

If a manager gets the best out of people, has no favourites, recognises anyone who does well and shares out the unpleasant jobs fairly, staff respond when they are asked to lift for a deadline. They think, "That's fair enough."

Unfair criticism kills innovation. If you ask people to be innovative and take responsibility, and they try something that doesn't work, they need to know you will help them find a better way rather than jump all over it.

5 Trust me with challenging work, and coach and develop me.

The survey found that 84% of participants would prefer to develop their careers with their current employer, but only 60% believed this was possible, often because nobody talks about it.

Managers can fear developing talented staff in case they leave, show the manager up or ask for a pay rise. Sexton says none of those fears has a place in leadership thinking, and that it is a major factor holding back productivity. As the old saying goes, only a manager who makes themselves unnecessary is indispensable.

What makes a good manager.

The characteristics employees most often put in their top five, from LMA's 2012 survey, with the previous year's rank for comparison.

2012	Characteristic	% in top five	2011
1	Clearly communicates where we are going	54	=2
2	Gives honest feedback on how I am going	44	5
3	Listens to and respects my input into decisions	39	4
4	Is fair and even-handed, and makes reasonable demands	38	6
5	Trusts me with challenging work	35	10
6	Gives me the space to do my work, but supports me	32	=2
7	Is trustworthy and open in approach	31	1
8	Has a sense of humour	24	14
9	Coaches and develops me	23	9
=10	Recognises me for extra effort and results	21	=7
=10	Provides guidance on how to meet expectations	21	15
=10	Supports me in the decisions I make	21	11
=13	Provides the resources I need to do my job	18	=7
=13	Involves me in determining my performance	18	=19
15	Helps me with my career development	17	13
16	Takes responsibility for their actions	15	12
=17	Sets a good example of work and life balance	10	16
=17	Respects what is personally important to me	10	17
19	Takes my talents into account when assigning work	8	=19
=20	Sees their own job as different, but not more important	7	18
=20	Openly helps me resolve workplace conflicts	7	21
22	Helps me prioritise my work	5	22

Source: Leadership Management Australasia, 2012, with comments from LMA chairman Grant Sexton. 3,831 participants. Organisation type: government or quasi-government 18%, public company 24%, private company 47%, franchise 3%, not for profit 5%, other 3%. Location: metropolitan Australia 65%, regional Australia 25%, New Zealand 10%.

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Importance.**
Seek to be a person of Value.

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