

# The Leadership Pyramid

Throughout time, pyramids have been symbols of strength and stability, which is why I chose the pyramid as the image that best depicts the qualities of effective leaders.

**Integrity** forms the foundation of the Leadership Pyramid. In my experience, a person with integrity has a strong moral compass, knows what is right and wrong, and does what is right – all the time. “Dictionary.com” defines integrity as, “adherence to moral and ethical principles; soundness of moral character; honesty.” Sadly, the newspapers are filled with stories of leaders who have no integrity (e.g. Kenneth Lay; Bernie Madoff). Fortunately we have leaders (often unsung heroes) who consistently demonstrate integrity in both their professional lives and their personal lives. Leaders exemplify integrity in their professional lives by consistently “walking the talk,” leading by example, and being impeccably honest. Leaders who possess a strong moral compass (integrity) demonstrate it in their personal lives by never cheating or taking unfair advantage of anyone, and by showing respect, humility, and kindness to everyone.

**Trust** is the second tier of the Leadership Pyramid. While doing research for my Ph.D., I conducted over 150 individual interviews. The most interesting finding from those interviews was how often people used the word, “trust” to describe effective leaders (refer to my article, “Building Trust, A Blueprint for Leaders”). “Dictionary.com” defines trust as, “reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence.” Notice that this definition incorporates the word “integrity,” which is the foundation of the Leadership Pyramid. During many years of research and observation I’ve found that strong leaders are extremely effective in building trust with their peers, colleagues, subordinates, and other key stakeholders. Once trust has been established, almost anything becomes possible.

**Vision** is the third tier of the Leadership Pyramid. There have been countless books and articles devoted to the importance of vision as a quality or characteristic of effective leadership. In the context of leadership, “Dictionary.com” defines vision as, “the act or power of anticipating that which will or may come to be; a prophetic vision; the vision of an entrepreneur.” I believe that Martin Luther King’s speech, “I have a dream,” best exemplifies an effective leader’s vision for the future. Another example of a grand vision is the Declaration of Independence. Strong leaders have strong visions and are effective communicating their vision to others. Visionary leaders create a clear and compelling picture of the future. The vision becomes a “blueprint” of how to move the company or organization forward. Establishing a clear vision of the future is the first and most important step in creating a plan for the future.

**Intention** is the fourth tier of the Leadership Pyramid. "Dictionary.com" defines intention as "an act or an instance of determining mentally upon some action or result." Dr. Wayne Dyer states, "our intention creates our reality." That statement certainly became my reality late one afternoon as I was practicing instrument approaches in my Cessna airplane and the engine quit. When I called the Air Traffic Controller to declare an emergency, he responded, "state your intentions." I replied, "I'm going to land this airplane in a farmer's field" (which I did). In my experience, intention is the second step in developing a plan for the future. Strong leaders state their intentions. Once they have formulated their vision, they clearly communicate that vision, and most importantly, they publically state what role they will play in moving the organization forward. Successful companies often get "stuck" in a rut, doing the same thing over and over. Effective leaders state their intentions therefore creating a plan and a bridge to a brighter future.

**Execution** is the top tier of the Leadership Pyramid. It amazes me when I hear about companies that spend valuable time and enormous expense to create elaborate strategic plans, only to put them on the shelf and never follow through on their plans. According to Stephen Covey (noted author and expert on leadership), "execution is the great unaddressed issue in most organizations today." Execution is a disciplined approach to creating plans, goals, timelines, and responsibility to accomplish specific business objectives. An excellent book on this topic is "Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done" by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan (Crown Business, 2002). Bossidy & Charan state, "execution is a systematic way of exposing reality and acting on it." Unfortunately, too many leaders focus on their grand plans (what they want to accomplish) and don't spend enough time on execution (how to carry out their plan). The most effective leaders are good at creating a vision and plans, and are also adept at execution and implementing the plan.