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Writer, speaker, mother, teacher- helping people find their voice, live a brave life, and be their best self.

Be a Woman of Impact With These 8 Qualities of Women Leaders

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Women and leadership is a hot topic right now. A presidential campaign. A woman on the 20-dollar bill. While it’s thrilling to see the current energy and excitement around women’s leadership, the reality is, women have been practicing leadership, doing amazing things, and making global contributions for centuries. And that is leadership: enabling positive change, inspiring action, addressing difficult issues, moving communities forward.

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For the past five years, students in the Women and Leadership class at The University of San Diego have been researching and profiling the leadership contributions of women making a difference in the world. These women of impact include world leaders, businesswomen, artists, activists, entrepreneurs, actresses, athletes, authors and others. We discovered that, for these women, the qualities that they exhibited didn’t just happen when they were doing an act of leadership or working toward a cause. *These qualities defined the way they moved through the world each and every day.* Of course, no one is all that all of the time, yet there is a pervasive theme around the way these women live their life, **and the qualities that make them great leaders are as much about who they are as it is about what they do.**

Leadership is a lifestyle. Leadership is a choice.

We can mold, and develop how we move through the world, *making conscious efforts to shape now only what we do, but who we are.*

As you read through these eight qualities, we hope you recognize that living this way is accessible and available to every one of us. In fact, if you’re reading this, you probably already embody some of these.

Whether you do all of these some of the time, or some of them all of the time, increasing your capacity in these areas is sure to improve your impact on the world and maximize your capacity for leadership. You can be a woman of impact in your work place, with your family, for your community. How? Embody these eight qualities:

**1. An OPTIMISTIC attitude**  
The tendency to look on the positive side of events or conditions helps you keep a hopeful outlook. With an optimistic perspective, one expects the most favorable outcome, and as such, is more likely to get that favorable outcome. There is a connection between optimism and confidence, with optimism often leading to a confident attitude both about the successful outcome and about one’s sense of self. Seeing the bright side helps us take bad experiences and use them as leadership opportunities.

**2. PERSISTENCE**   
Every woman had a work ethic that kept her on task and on course, even in the face of difficulty or opposition. Persistence will often look like a willingness to fail, all the while keeping at it, learning from the mistakes along the way. Sometimes it is a quiet resilience that simply keeps us moving forward, an inner drive to not give up. Persistence is critical, because everyone is going to get tested and life will knock you down, no matter what you’re doing or who you are. The strength is in knowing that when you fall, the important thing is getting back up.

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**3. A strong and powerful VOICE**  
Voice is at the epitome of women’s leadership. It’s a willingness to speak your truth and be heard, even if the message may not neatly align with the status quo or be part of popular opinion. Your voice doesn’t have to be loud, but your voice belongs to you and only you. By telling our stories, sharing our thoughts and feelings, and ideas, we can connect with others, inspire change, and empower ourselves and those around us.

**4. Living with PASSION and PURPOSE**  
Know what drives you, what moves you, and let the fire burn brightly inside. Passion and purpose is dedication to a cause, your cause. It’s feeling a desire and a love for the work you do. Whether that work is raising young children, running a company, teaching 6th grade, or working for social change, it’s your work, and having enthusiasm and excitement will keep you persistent and optimistic.

**5. A strong sense of self and CONFIDENCE**  
Confidence is a belief in your ability to succeed; a belief that you do something well. At the core of this is a faith and trust that you can achieve what you want to achieve and be who you want to be. This is a tough one because we get so many external messages and that little voice in our head often becomes one of doubt. Yet, believing in oneself allow us to take on challenges, continue on in times of stress, and reach out to connect with others. Each of us can contribute to our community and to the world in amazing ways. Sometimes we just have to get out of our own way and allow ourselves to shine.

**6. Embody and EMBRACE CHANGE**  
Coco Chanel revolutionized women’s fashion by offering women a more comfortable gender-neutral clothing line. She used fashion as a statement against the typical societal gender norms of the time, freeing women and allowing them to take new opportunities. Oprah and Ellen offered a new type of daytime talk show. Emma Watson has made a call for men to join in the movement for women’s equality. Leadership is change...change for the better. It is growth, development, moving forward to what’s next. Our kids grow up, we grow up. Life changes with every passing day. Embracing change and being willing to work in the face of change is the embodiment of leadership.

**7. AUTHENTICITY**  
Even though this is such a buzz word right now, it still is critically important. We found that living authentically is more than just keeping it real. It means a willingness to author your own story, to be the person you want to be, not who others expect you to be. I’m going to quote Brene Brown: “Authenticity is the daily practice of letting go who we think we’re supposed to be, and embracing who we are.” For it is from that place, the place YOU truly are, where you will have positive, lasting impact. This might be the hardest one on the list, but arguably the most valuable.  
  
**8. Seeking and receiving SUPPORT**  
No one can do it alone. Impact women know they need the support of family and friends. They recognize that partnerships with other groups, and collaboration on projects will not only help them be better, but get the job done. Women often have an unwillingness to ask for help to avoid seeming incapable, incompetent. But navigating through life takes a village. And the good thing is, people like helping others. It feels good. It creates connection. It shows us that we all have vulnerabilities and need support from time to time.

My guess is that you already are a woman of impact. But in the never-ending quest to improve ourselves and become our best selves, keeping these eight qualities in mind can help. And, remember, leadership is a choice. As are all of these elements. So, when you’re faced with the choice, choose leadership.

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Art: Rosie 2004, by* [*Julie Jalil*](http://jalilart.com/)