

Choosing Leaders

A key action for any top leader is choosing the people who will lead the important units. How much emphasis do you put on the harmony of similarity? How much emphasis on the compensatory strength of differences? Which leadership qualities stand out in lieutenants?

Ben Bradlee

You've got to be competitive. You can't be satisfied with second for very long. You've got to be totally understanding of other people's problems. And you've got to create the feeling that when you go to bat and you go to war on an issue, that it's something that's completely important to you, overwhelmingly important to you. And that way, people will know that you're not going to war just for the sheer joy of screwing other people.

Jack Fuller

What I look for are people who are comfortable in their own skin, who have their legs under them pretty firmly. It's the opposite of being egotistical or brimming with self confidence of a certain showy sort. It's more that they are fully acquainted with their own strengths and weaknesses. They're comfortable with the person they are.

They are less likely to behave irrationally or emotionally. They're going to have better judgment. They're going to be able to deal with other people better because they're not [thinking] every exchange is a test of themselves.

Lou Boccardi

Why not find a bunch more just like me and let that go forward? That's a serious mistake, and I work hard not to do that.

[Choosing leaders is] a blend of things: It's brain, it's character, it's ability to work with people, ability to get things done, this overworked thing called vision — call it creativity.

Jay Harris

I tried to match the leader with the job. I tried to think first about what it was that I wanted that person (to) do. Secondly, I wanted to know that she or he had the potential to do the job. In an odd way, I set the bar a little bit lower, because I think that if you only look at people who have already demonstrated that they can do it, then you have essentially ruled out the emergence of the rising star.

Matt Storin

The people that I have seen fail as editors ... failed because they could only work with some of the staff.

They looked out on the newsroom and saw white hats and black hats.

Sandy Rowe

On my first staff meeting with the metro staff, I had been talking about what reporters needed to do when a reporter raised his hand and asked, “And what do editors need to do?” I wondered for a moment, “How am I going to answer this?” and then I just said, “Editors who can coach and teach and lead will be successful here, and editors who can’t will not be.”

I was told later that some of the editors behind me were quivering a little.

That was a promise, a commitment I made to the staff, and I made it out loud. I’ve really used it as a yardstick to evaluate editors and to make sure that editors know if they’re moving copy, if they’re helping make it better, that’s really good but that’s not all of their job. Their real job is to make sure that the people who work for them are increasingly successful in ways that are apparent in the paper and obvious to their colleagues.

Tom Johnson

Rule one, integrity. I want people in leadership positions who have integrity. Rule two, a passion for their work. I want people who love it and who are committed to it. And then after those two, it is very good to have a strong educational background and experience.

How can you be in the field of current events and not be reading every day?

The importance of a demonstrated track record is something that I always look at. You must be able to understand, in this world that we’re living in, economics, history, political science and at least one international language. And then to read. I don’t want anybody in my newsroom who doesn’t read the daily papers, read books — nonfiction especially. Read for pleasure, not just because it’s required. How can you be in the field of current events and not be reading each day?

Alberto Ibargüen

[Look for] intelligence, experience, capacity to feel. People who are able to listen, people who are curious. People who enjoy finding out stuff. People who approach an issue skeptically, but who can believe.

Mark Whitaker

[*Newsweek* often promotes relatively young leaders.] A lot of that is this tradition of, well, in the long run, if you are going to end up promoting the guy anyway, why wait? Why have this kind of grooming period and ticket-punching period and so forth? Let us just throw them in the deep end and see how it goes.

Burl Osborne

A leader is someone who can appreciate that the job isn't necessarily all big picture or all nuts and bolts. Leaders describe the big picture in a way that causes other people to want to be part of it. The last thing I would say is, always try to find someone smarter than you are. And that has been fairly easy for me to do.

William Hearst III

I always say, you don't have a glimpse of another person until you've interviewed them three times, which hardly ever happens. Usually you [have] an interview and maybe a meal, if it's an important person. Ultimately, you want to know, will they lead successfully? Do they have the spark? Are they determined to produce victories? Does the future speak to them? Are they going to be part of the team? Would you be willing to get into trouble with this person? Often you're dealing with younger people; you're just taking the bet that they'll develop in our organization. I wish I had a science. There have been books written on how to interview people. But I don't find them to be any better than just spending time with somebody. Better yet, go on a trip with them. Then you will know.

Journalists get their protection — and their revenues — from an often rancorous public. The surprises in public reaction to news coverage are without number. But indifference is the worst reaction. How do we connect better?

Tim McGuire

I used to worship at the Altar of Bright. I still value bright people. More and more I've been choosing people who have great credibility with [their] staff and other departments, people who are regarded as being straightforward, trustworthy and effective in dealing with people. They have the trust of the staff. They're still bright, but I don't worship at the Altar of Bright. I think that in our business, we often have worshiped at that altar — and that's when we've gotten people who know nothing about handling people, who are power mongers, who are arbitrary.