

# Where Have All the Leaders Gone?

by Lee Iacocca

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## The Test of a Leader

I've never been Commander in Chief, but I've been a CEO. I understand a few things about leadership at the top. I've figured out nine points — not ten (I don't want people accusing me of thinking I'm Moses). I call them the "Nine Cs of Leadership." They're not fancy or complicated. Just clear and obvious qualities that every true leader should have.

### So, here's my C list:

A leader has to show **CURIOSITY**. He has to listen to people outside of the "Yes, sir" crowd in his inner circle. He has to read voraciously, because the world is a big, complicated place. If a leader never steps outside his comfort zone to hear different ideas, he grows stale. If he doesn't put his beliefs to the test, how does he know he's right? The inability to listen is a form of arrogance. It means either you think you already know it all, or you just don't care.

A leader has to be **CREATIVE**, go out on a limb, be willing to try something different. You know, *think outside the box*. Leadership is all about managing change — whether you're leading a company or leading a country. Things change, and you get creative. You adapt.

A leader has to **COMMUNICATE**. I'm not talking about running off at the mouth or spouting sound bites. I'm talking about facing reality and telling the truth. Communication has to start with telling the truth, even when it's painful.

A leader has to be a person of **CHARACTER**. That means knowing the difference between right and wrong and having the guts to do the right thing. Abraham Lincoln once said, "If you want to test a man's character, give him power."

A leader must have **COURAGE**. I'm talking about *balls*. (That even goes for female leaders.) Swagger isn't courage. Tough talk isn't courage. Courage is a commitment to sit down at the negotiating table and *talk*.

To be a leader you've got to have **CONVICTION** — a fire in your belly. You've got to have passion. You've got to really want to get something done. How do you measure fire in the belly?

A leader should have **CHARISMA**. I'm not talking about being flashy. Charisma is the quality that makes people want to follow you. It's the ability to *inspire*. People follow a leader because they *trust* him. That's my definition of charisma.

A leader has to be **COMPETENT**. That seems obvious, doesn't it? You've got to know what you're doing. More important than that, you've got to surround yourself with people who know what *they're* doing. A leader has to be a problem solver.

You can't be a leader if you don't have **COMMON SENSE**. I call this Charlie Beacham's rule. When I was a young guy just starting out in the car business, one of my first jobs was as Ford's zone manager in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. My boss was a guy named Charlie Beacham, who was the East Coast regional manager. Charlie was a big Southerner, with a warm drawl, a huge smile, and a core of steel. Charlie used to tell me, "Remember, Lee, the only thing you've got going for you as a human being is your ability to reason and your common sense. If you don't know a dip of horseshit from a dip of vanilla ice cream, you'll never make it.

### **The Biggest C is CRISIS**

Leaders are made, not born. Leadership is forged in times of crisis. It's easy to sit there with your feet up on the desk and talk theory. It's another thing to lead when your world comes tumbling down.

### **A Hell of a Mess**

But when you look around, you've got to ask: "*Where have all the leaders gone?*" Where are the curious, creative communicators? Where are the people of character, courage, conviction, competence, and common sense? I may be a sucker for alliteration, but I think you get the point.

**Lido Anthony "Lee" Iacocca** (born [October 15, 1924](#)) is an [American industrialist](#) most commonly known for his revival of the [Chrysler](#) brand in the [1980s](#) when he was the CEO. Among the most widely recognized businessmen in the world, he was a passionate advocate of U.S. business exports during the [1980s](#). He is the author or co-author of several books, including [Iacocca: An Autobiography](#) (with William Novak), and [Where have all the Leaders Gone?](#)