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What Do People Need Most From Leaders?

New Gallup research spotlights four needs of followers worldwide

BY **JON CLIFTON** AND **BENEDICT VIGERS**



Great leadership is defined not by authority alone, but by how much the people who follow leaders trust and support them. The best leaders -- of countries, organizations or other groups -- keep their followers in mind when making decisions, because without

them, even the most capable leader lacks true influence.

In a rapidly changing world of technological advancement and geopolitical uncertainty, Gallup set out to learn what people around the world need from their leaders -- simply by asking them. The full results from what we found are detailed in the newly released [*Global Leadership Report: What Followers Want*](#).

The Universality of Hope

Across 52 countries and territories -- accounting for 76% of the world's adult population and 86% of global gross domestic product -- Gallup asked two questions:

1. What leader has the most positive influence on your daily life?
2. Now, please list three words that best describe what this person contributes to your life.

The three words that people use to describe the most positive leaders in their lives fall into four themes. **Hope** stands out as the dominant need, accounting for 56% of all attributes tied to positive leaders, far outnumbering mentions of the next key need, **trust** (33%). **Compassion** (7%) and **stability** (4%) combined account for about one in nine positive leadership traits mentioned.

The Four Needs of Followers -- Distribution

Now, please list three words that best describe what this person contributes to your life. (open-ended)

	Hope	Trust	Compassion	Stability
% Of mentions	56	33	7	4

Base: n=72,439 responses across 52 countries and territories

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

N.B. People could give up to three responses, so this report provides statistics at the responses level rather than the respondent level. Any nonsensical responses that could not be grouped into one of the four codes were excluded from the analysis.

Family members and managers are the leaders mentioned most often, but people's needs from leaders are consistent regardless of the type of leader people choose.

There are some slight variations based on factors such as age and geography. Despite these subtleties, the most important quality followers seek in their leaders is remarkably consistent worldwide: the universality of hope.

The Link Between Leadership and Follower Wellbeing

There is a connection between people's ratings of their lives and the presence of positive leadership traits.

Among those who do not mention hope in relation to the leader they identified, 33% are classified as thriving (meaning they rate their current life a "7" or higher out of 10 and their anticipated life in five years an "8" or higher), and 9% are classified as suffering (meaning they rate both their current and future lives a "4" or lower).

However, once the need for hope is met, thriving rises to 38%, and suffering dips to 6%. As hope is the need with the highest prevalence, this suggests a link to a reduction in suffering.

Relationship Between Leadership Traits Mentioned and Life Evaluation

	% Thriving	% Struggling	% Suffering
Hope + Trust + Stability	43	53	4
Hope + Trust + Compassion	39	57	4
Hope + Trust	37	57	6
Hope	38	56	6
No hope	33	58	9

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Followers with leaders who provide trust *and* hope are just as likely to be thriving as those with leaders who provide hope only. But when hope -- the foundational need -- is combined with trust *and* either compassion or stability, rates of thriving increase again (39% and 43%, respectively).

This suggests a link between people's wellbeing and having a leader in their daily life who meets several of their needs. Suffering is higher with low hope but decreases as numerous needs are met. Although the base rate of suffering is low, the decline in suffering is significant, as even slight differences in suffering mean a lot to the people who experience it.

What This Means for Leaders

Today's leaders, and those destined to lead in the future, face many profound challenges, not the least of which are recent developments in artificial intelligence. To face the evolving challenges of our time and succeed in this changing world, leaders must ultimately know three things to succeed.

First, leaders must understand the needs of their followers. This not only strengthens the follower-leader relationship but also increases the likelihood that their leadership will have a lasting, positive impact. But not all leaders will naturally fulfill the four needs of hope, trust, compassion and stability.

As such, leaders also need to know themselves. Understanding one's natural talents, and developing them into strengths through knowledge and skill, can unlock individuals' unique leadership styles and allow them to capitalize on what they do best. When leaders lead with their strengths, it helps create sustainable, high-performance practices that bring out the best version of themselves -- and those who follow them.

The most successful leaders also have a deep understanding of the demands of their specific role and the expectations attached to it. The best leaders achieve success -- despite varied roles, organizations and industries -- by bringing multiple teams together and making great decisions, driving the purpose and performance of their organization.

The more leaders can provide their followers with hope, trust, compassion and stability by leaning on their unique strengths and applying them to the specifics of their role, the more successful they will be.

Learn more about leadership and the needs of followers by downloading [*Global Leadership Report: What Followers Want*](#), launched at the World Governments Summit.

[SURVEY METHODS](#)



OCTOBER 9, 2015 | UPDATED OCTOBER 7, 2021

Strengths-Based Leadership: The 4 Things Followers Need

BY BRIAN J. BRIM, ED.D.



Read our extensive guide on [Effective Leadership: How to Be a Better Leader](#).

In their bestselling book, *Strengths Based Leadership*, coauthors Tom Rath and Barry Conchie explore the topic of [leadership through the lens of strengths](#). In addition to discussing how different leaders can create success through the application of their own strengths, Rath and Conchie's research also examined the specific emotional needs people have to experience with their leaders in order to feel engaged and connected to the organization and their day-to-day work. Through this research, the authors brought forth four key areas of focus: trust, compassion, stability and hope. When people feel those things, they feel more involved in their companies.

Followers' Four Basic Needs

Trust: Building trust is the foundation for leading. Honesty, clarity and behavioral predictability all make up trust. Leaders must adopt the trait of trustworthiness and prioritize it as one of their most important skills.

Compassion: Being compassionate means caring about your followers holistically while seeing them as more than just their ability to perform. Compassionate leaders should be willing to share their own struggles and accept the same honesty from others.

Stability: Providing stability looks like creating space where people feel psychologically safe, like they can depend on you to answer their questions, hear their ideas and address their concerns. Communication is key for this trait. Stability puts emphasis on the current moment, keeping people grounded in the here and now -- knowing they can count on you.

Hope: Encourage people to believe in a better future. While stability focuses on today, hopefulness deals with the future. People need to see that their leaders have a clear direction in mind. When leaders communicate hope, they can help followers feel more enthusiastic about the future.

The Impact of Trust, Compassion, Stability and Hope

Gallup studied 10,000 people in "follower" job roles between 2005 and 2008. We found that leaders who are perceived to be trustworthy and compassionate and who offer stability and hope have a significant impact on their employees. For example:

- When followers trust their leaders, one in two are engaged. When followers don't find leaders trustworthy, only one in 12 are engaged at work.
- Followers expect compassion and "general positive energy" from high-level organizational and global leaders. More locally, when followers were asked if their "supervisor or someone at work" cared about them, they were significantly more likely to stay with companies, have much more engaged customers, were substantially more productive and were more profitable to their employers.
- Employees need to feel their jobs are stable for them to do their best work. In fact, followers are nine times more likely to be engaged in their jobs if they feel the company's financial future is secure.
- The most powerful question Gallup asked followers was about hope -- 69% who strongly agreed that their leaders made them "feel enthusiastic about the future" were engaged. Only 1% of those who disagreed with the statement were engaged.

The goal of this blog series will be to explore these four areas more deeply, as well as to look at how leaders can leverage their strengths to more effectively provide what their people need as it pertains to these four areas.

For those of us who coach leaders, these articles will serve as a template for things to consider as we work with leaders to help them leverage the best of who they are. Often organizations will establish a set of leadership expectations they feel their leaders need to emulate. However, if we can better understand what is at the heart of each of these four needs and then help leaders understand how to fulfill those needs through their strengths, leaders will be able to more effectively build their business, while also building their people. Ultimately, as a coach, building people through our work is a powerful and meaningful goal.

[Purchase Strengths Based Leadership.](#)

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Brian Brim's Top 5 CliftonStrengths are Futuristic, Maximizer, Strategic, Relator and Achiever.

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Strengths-Based Leadership: Building Hope in Followers

BY BRIAN J. BRIM, ED.D.



Read our extensive guide on [Effective Leadership: How to Be a Better Leader](#).

Building a sense of hope for employees is absolutely essential to the sustainable success of an organization. Companies face more and more complexity and change as a part of doing business. With complexity often comes confusion and with confusion, disengagement. Hope helps employees to see a way forward when facing uncertainty. When asked whether their company's leadership made them feel enthusiastic about the future, 69% of employees who strongly agreed were engaged, compared with just 1% who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Hope is a powerful thing.

So, how is it that leaders can infuse hope into their work environment? Start by thinking about the words employees use when asked about hope. In the Gallup study, followers used words like direction, faith, and guidance. At every interaction, how are we instilling faith in the future? Are we guiding our people toward a tomorrow that looks better than today? Are we creating a sense of direction toward exciting possibilities ahead of us?

Leaders who try to instill a sense of hope need to consider the picture we paint about the future. Are we creating a dark and foreboding vision of what lies ahead, or are we helping our employees see a road that leads us to better times? Do we have hope of a better road ahead? Do we have faith in what we can accomplish? We first must get our hearts and minds around the positive possibilities before we can ever help others to see this future as well.

We must intentionally help employees see where they fit in this hopeful future. Consider the other needs of followers: People need to feel a sense of stability from the picture we paint. They need to be able to say, "I fit into that hopeful future." This also helps employees trust leadership more. Furthermore, it helps them feel cared about, because they can sense the compassion leaders have for their people as they try to help them see a positive future ahead.

Even the successful leaders highlighted in *Strengths Based Leadership* admitted they didn't spend enough time instilling hope. Instead, they say their focus is much more on reacting to the needs of the day. So, as leaders, we need to understand how to leverage our talents more effectively to help us do a better job of being positive and proactive about the future. These questions can help leaders to understand their approach:

- How can I leverage my strengths to help me see the hope in the future before me?
- How can I leverage my strengths to spend more time communicating a future of hope for my team and organization?
- How can I leverage my strengths to make sure I am helping employees see how they fit into our hopeful future?
- How can I use my strengths to pull out insights of hope from those around me?
- How can I use my strengths to create opportunities for employees to share hope with one another?
- How can I tie hope to our reality of today in order to help employees feel optimistic even in difficult times?

Hope doesn't always have to be about a faraway future. It can be about the here and now as well. Hope can come to life in the way that we perceive the challenges we face. I once observed two managers explaining the same situation -- a drawdown of temp workers in their part of the business -- to two different teams. One manager stood up and said,

"Here we go again. The company is asking us to do more with less." This created grumbling and a true lack of hope in the room. The second leader stood up and said, "Here is our chance. We now have the opportunity to show the company what we can really do." The team was immediately excited and hopeful that this was a chance to create a better way forward.

There's a great quote in *Strengths Based Leadership* for leaders to consider: "If, as a leader, you are not creating hope and helping people see the way forward, chances are, no one else is either." As leaders, we have to keep our eyes, and the eyes of our employees, on a hopeful future. We have to involve them in building toward something better each and every day. And we can leverage our strengths to help us do this more consistently.

Dr. Shane Lopez, one of Gallup's most inspiring senior scientists, spent his life studying hope. Sadly, Lopez recently passed away. But he leaves us with a brilliant description of this powerful emotion.

Hope is: "the belief that the future will be better than the present, along with the belief that you have the power to make it so."

Purchase [Strengths Based Leadership](#).

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Brian Brim's Top 5 CliftonStrengths are Futuristic, Maximizer, Strategic, Relator and Achiever.

APRIL 17, 2023

Why Trust in Leaders Is Faltering and How to Gain It Back

BY DENISE MCLAIN AND RYAN PENDELL



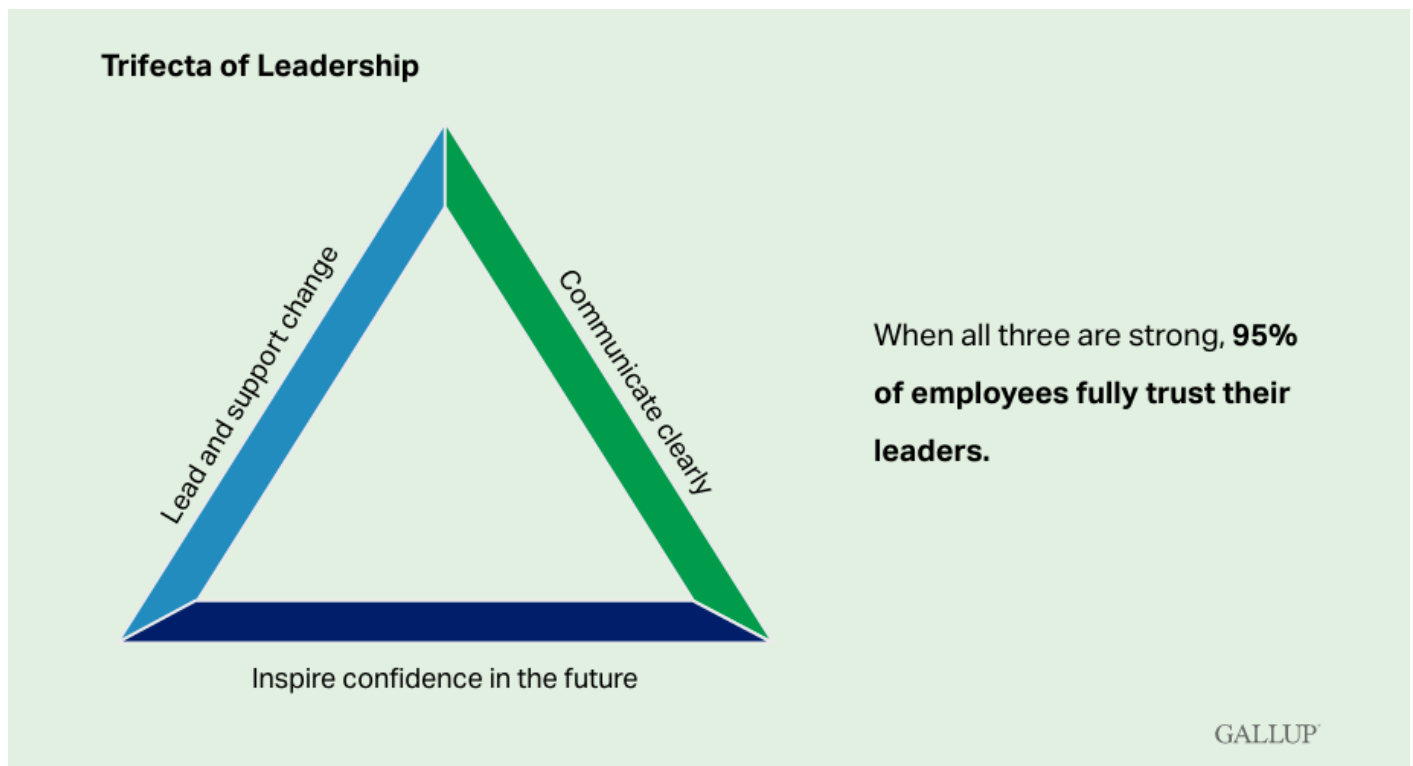
STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Employee trust in leadership has declined, as has employee engagement
- Clear communication from leaders helps set expectations and priorities
- Manager development is key to communicating and navigating change

The red lights are flashing on America's business leadership dashboard. Leaders are losing trust with their employees.

Three key leadership measures tracking behaviors that drive alignment and execution for organizations have declined since the start of the pandemic. Most notable is a drop in trust in leadership. **Only 21% of U.S. employees strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization.** This marks a noteworthy decline from its 2019 peak (24%) and raises a serious question about morale in American businesses.

Trust begins to build when employees feel inspired by senior leaders and see strategic actions leading to business success. As such, the declines in employees' confidence in the financial future of their organization and feeling inspired by their leadership further indicate that employees' trust in leadership is evaporating. And all of this coincides with a historic decline in employee engagement.



Building trust in leadership is necessary to drive the performance that companies seek. When change is clearly defined and successfully managed, performance goals are met, and a strong, positive corporate culture is in place, trust follows. These are not simple

outcomes to accomplish, nor are they quick and easy fixes. But they lead people to begin to build trust with leaders.

Gallup finds that when employees strongly agree that their leaders implement three specific actions, **95% fully trust their leaders.**

Here's what the best leaders do to earn (or build) trust:

1. Trusted Leaders Communicate Clearly

In 2020, at the start of the pandemic, employee engagement in the U.S. reached a record high. This coincided with a radical new way of seeing our leaders and hearing their thoughts. We saw executives on video town halls, in their homes, wearing baseball caps, with kids or barking dogs in the background. The suit and tie were gone. The perfectly polished speech was gone. And leaders were honest about what they didn't know. They became vulnerable: They were open about admitting they didn't have answers yet. And they were actively listening to their front-line and essential workers. They said, "Tell me what's going on and what you need to do your job."

In the early stages of the pandemic, an astonishing 55% of employees strongly agreed that their leaders communicated a clear plan of action in response to COVID-19. By the middle of 2022, only 22% strongly agreed that their leaders communicated a clear plan of action for how they would move forward *post-pandemic*. Clearly, communication had lessened -- and it was affecting employees' understanding of the envisioned future state of their workplace.

Notably, the percentage of employees saying they know what's expected of them at work dropped to a record low in 2022. Great leaders provide a clear vision for their people. They explain where the company is coming from and where it's going. They also explain what the company will always do (setting clear expectations and creating stability for the organization) and what it needs to do *now* (establishing priorities to help employees move forward). When leaders clearly articulate their vision and the approach needed to achieve it, they offer their employees a road map for where to focus their energy.

Many leaders have been eager to get back to the office and back to business as usual. But there is no longer “usual business.” The best leaders have taken a lesson from the pandemic playbook. Instead of going back to pre-2020 communication methods, they’ve given thought to what they learned during lockdowns. They have identified the best ways to communicate with their employees and kept to those rhythms. They understand that communication is at the heart of leadership. Even though the crisis is over, they’ve found that increased two-way communication pays off in higher productivity and performance.

When leaders clearly articulate their vision and the approach needed to achieve it, they offer their employees a road map for where to focus their energy.

2. Trusted Leaders Inspire Confidence in the Future

At the beginning of the pandemic, leaders didn’t know what was up ahead -- but that didn’t stop employees from trusting them. Leaders proved that they were aware of the challenges and risks, and they approached those challenges thoughtfully, with company values (and empathy) in mind.

Leading change is much harder when your team can’t make sense of it. *Only 18% of employees strongly agree that their leaders help them see how changes made today will affect their organization. And just two in 10 feel highly confident in their leaders to manage emerging challenges.*

Followers don’t need the entire plan in detail. They need a broad sense of the primary goal and the next steps to get there. By giving information in digestible chunks, leaders communicate that they have a plan and know how to get there. They also highlight big

(and small) successes or progress along the way. This reminds employees that the plan is working and helps build confidence in their strategic direction.

Some leaders get one of these things right, but not others. They provide the big picture but miss the practical next steps or acknowledgment of progress. Or they focus on the next steps without giving their teams the main objective. But projecting trustworthy leadership means communicating all of it: *I know where we're going; here is what we need to do to get us there, and here is where we are making progress.*

3. Trusted Leaders Lead and Support Change

When employees don't trust leadership, the breakdown is often at the manager level. To successfully navigate change, leaders need to make every effort to provide their managers with training and development. When the pandemic presented them with a disrupted work environment, for example, 57% of hybrid managers indicated they were left out in the cold without training to help them work in this new way.

So, as leaders seek to build trust, they must first give their managers the tools to communicate: Articulate the vision, explain the why, answer questions, and help their people believe in the change.

This intentional communication will build trust and confidence throughout the organization. *When managers actively support change, employees are 11 times as likely to believe their leaders provide a clear vision of how today's changes will affect their organization.*

Gallup has established seven guiding principles of change management that should be applied when leaders plan their communication with managers. These principles help managers to become ambassadors of change and drive that change within their own teams.

1. Clearly articulate the vision for change.
2. Involve the right people: limited vs. broad involvement.
3. Communicate the right information at the right time.
4. Always account for resistance to change.
5. Celebrate short-term wins without declaring premature victory.

6. Effectively anchor the change to the organization.
7. Always plan for change to be "the only constant."

One simple action is for leaders to have regular manager-only meetings to understand the questions they are hearing and help them provide answers for their teams. *Here's what needs to happen. Let's talk about what this means for your teams, processes and routines.*

Next, leaders must set the expectation that every manager discusses with their team how change will impact them. Only about three in 10 leaders and managers say they have discussed with each team member how changes in their organization will affect them specifically. As mentioned above, this requires more than one-way communication. It's a *two-way conversation* that makes employees believe in their leadership, and that happens at the team level with the manager.

Trust Starts by Listening Today

All leaders can agree that business runs on communication. But it's those invaluable two-way conversations, especially during times of disruption, that are essential to building confidence and trust. *When employees strongly agree that they have had opportunities to provide honest feedback about organizational changes, they are 7.4 times as likely to have confidence in their leaders to successfully manage emerging challenges.*

Many leaders have had to implement major organizational changes -- from hybrid work policies to new strategic initiatives -- and they've missed a big opportunity to build trust by not including their teams in the process.

This should be a wake-up call to leaders and an invitation to pursue more successful change efforts in the future. We know that trust in leadership impacts engagement, performance, retention and much more. And that trust begins with having effective and supportive two-way conversations with followers, not with having all the answers.

Clearly, the pandemic put trust to the test for a lot of companies. And many leaders likely feel this ebbing of connection, of bonding, within their organization. It can be a little scary! But the good news is that employee trust can be regained. When leaders communicate clearly, inspire confidence in the future and support their people during times of change, they build the trust necessary to reach higher levels of productivity and performance.

Begin rebuilding employee trust today.

- [Track U.S. employees' perceptions](#) of their interactions with leaders and managers.
- Learn how to [become a more effective leader](#).
- Lead better by using your strengths with [CliftonStrengths for Leaders](#).

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Improve Your Leadership With These 4 Skills

BY JENNIFER ROBISON



STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Employees want trust, compassion, stability and hope from leaders
- Leaders who develop these leadership skills get better business results
- Effective leadership skills means putting them into practice

Want to know how the world's most influential leaders succeed using their strengths? Check out our latest series, [Leading With Strengths](#).

It's great when followers tell you what they need from you. It's better when you can fulfill it. But you've probably noticed how rarely followers can articulate what inspires their best work, describe their intrinsic motivators or name their aspirations.

It's very likely they don't know what they need from leadership -- making it much harder for leaders to provide it. To be a good leader, you need to know what employees need from you.

So, Gallup asked. In a landmark study of 10,000 employees, we asked about the leadership skills that matter the most to employees and enable them to achieve their best. Our analysis identified four leadership skills at the top of the list:

- trust
- compassion
- stability
- hope

To be a good leader, you need to know what employees need from you.

We also found that leaders who display those qualities get better business results: Gallup analysis finds that trust, compassion, stability and hope are associated with higher levels of employee engagement, which is correlated with better performance.

It's probably because people who trust you feel cared for and safe, see a bright future, and have more confidence in you and themselves. They can focus better and work harder. They know you have their back and you're building something great together.

However, trust, compassion, stability and hope can't be rolled out like new software. Honoring followers' needs takes *skill* -- specifically, skilled communication.

Leadership Soft Skills in Practice

Let's start with trust, the foundation of leadership. Certain communication traits make it easier for people to trust you. Communicating with honesty clarifies your motives. Communicating with consistency makes you predictable. Both read as trustworthy because followers know where you stand and what to expect.

That doesn't mean you can't admit uncertainty, concerns or errors. People aren't looking to follow a robot. And communicating your doubts and mistakes invites your followers to admit their own, which alerts you to brewing trouble.

Yet there are greater rewards for trustworthy leaders: When followers strongly agree that they trust their leaders, Gallup analysis shows, one in two are engaged; when followers don't find leaders trustworthy, only one in 12 are engaged. And in high-trust organizations, employees give leaders the benefit of the doubt even when they make mistakes.

Next is **compassion**. If you care about the work, you must care about the worker; compassionate leaders see followers as whole people. In fact, Gallup's research shows that when employees talk about their leaders' compassion, the words they use most often are "caring," "friendship," "happiness" and "love."

Those are intense words. When your followers use them, they're saying you listen and you care -- and because *you care*, *they* care about you and the organization. Compassion reciprocates. That may be why employees who strongly agree that their "supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about [them] as a person" are likely advocates for their employer and support their coworkers personally and professionally.

If you care about the work, you must care about
the worker; compassionate leaders see followers as
whole people.

There are a lot of ways to communicate care. Cheer with your followers when things go their way, and sympathize when they don't. Ask questions and tell your own stories -- it shows you're a whole person too -- and listen to what you hear.

And when you respond, communicate **stability**. Calm, assured leaders feel reliable because when you communicate stability, you show you can be counted on. (A tight grasp on purpose helps.) That keeps people grounded and focused on the present. In fact, followers are nine times more likely to be engaged in their job if they feel that the company's financial future is secure.

Communication is a two-way street, though. So, Gallup recommends asking followers about:

- their priorities, especially what they believe their top priorities are and if they're clear on their responsibilities
- where they think the team -- or even the whole company -- is most and least stable
- what they can't control that they worry about and, more positively, what they can't control that they hope for
- how you can help, be a better partner or clear obstacles

When followers told Gallup what stability feels like to them, they used words like "security," "strength," "support" and "peace." So, assure followers that you're running interference, be as consistently supportive as you can, and take opportunities to address concerns and hear ideas. Employees need to feel that their job is stable for them to do their best work.

While stability addresses today, **hope imagines the future**. You can't underestimate the power of hope. People can only strive, aspire and change if they have hope that the future can be better than the present. That belief has a profound effect: A Gallup study found that 69% of followers who strongly agreed that their leaders made them "feel enthusiastic about the future" were engaged. Only 1% of those who disagreed were engaged.

But that future needs your direction. So, detail the bright future you're working toward, outline your strategies to bring that future to life and describe how it will affect your followers. Acknowledge difficulties while communicating the best possible outcomes.

Give hope. It's shockingly effective.

How to Be a Good Leader

If that sounds a little performative, well, OK. Followers rarely have the time and proximity they need to receive low-key messaging. But walking the walk does more good than talking the talk, and leadership development is a practical, sustainable way to gain the leadership skills followers need most -- which is a particularly low-skill area for most leaders. Just over one in 10 employees strongly agree that leadership communicates effectively or makes them enthusiastic about the future, and only one in three strongly agree they trust their leaders.

Walking the walk does more good than talking the talk, and leadership development is a practical, sustainable way to gain the leadership skills followers need most.

And there are more opportunities for it than you might think. All those quick chats before meetings, emails, texts, one-on-ones, speeches and even your holiday cards offer ways to show followers that they can depend on you, that you care about them, that they're secure, that the future can be better than the present -- and that you're making it so.

Then again, the present may also improve a good bit. Followers take their cues from you, so your skills may come to be their trustworthy, compassionate, stable and hopeful behavior at work.

Your organization can get there, but it requires fulfilling your followers' needs. That starts with great leadership. And *that* starts with you.

Better leadership begins here:

- Read [Effective Leadership: How to Be a Better Leader](#) to learn more about the four things followers need.
- Learn about the expectations for leaders, and [download the free activity](#).
- Sign up for the [CliftonStrengths Insights newsletter](#) for more strengths-based leadership insights.

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