

7 Crucial Traits of the Best Leaders in Hockey

Ben Levesque December 28, 2015



There are leaders...

...and then ***there are those who lead.***

You might think slapping a letter on a player's jersey is enough to bring about leadership in hockey.

Wrong.

Simon Sinek states in his book titled "***Start With Why***" that the best leaders are those who **inspire others to do great things**. This is the *true definition of leadership*.

Being a leader is one thing.

Any hockey player can be given an 'A' or a 'C' and call themselves a leader because of it...

But are they really *inspiring greatness*?

Are they really *inspiring* teammates to **become better players**? To *learn* every day? To *leave it all out on the ice* for the good of the team and not just personal gain?

True leaders bring out the best in those around them through everything they do:

- The *actions* they take.
- The way they **carry themselves**.
- The things they *say*.
- And even the things they *don't say*.

The truth is successful hockey teams aren't built without a **solid leadership core**— *both with and without 'letters' on their jerseys.*

An important lesson on leadership in hockey

Back in Major Junior, I was lucky enough to be a part of what my coach called the '*leadership group*' of our team. We would meet and discuss with our coach on a weekly basis and make sure we were all pulling in the right direction and fighting for the same ultimate goal— *winning it all.*

Turns out, *all 6 of us had many of the same qualities.* What's more, these 7 *leadership qualities* are the same ones you see present in guys like **Toews**, **Crosby**, and the other *supreme leaders* of the **NHL**.

If you're a hockey player, pay attention to the following qualities and see if you're a true leader. If you aren't, rest assured that leadership is a *skill just like any other* and **can be learned** by simply paying attention to these qualities and building them into your character.

If you're a coach, look for these traits & qualities before giving out your '*letters*' each season.

And one more thing before I jump into the *must-have* qualities of a true leader...

It seems to be common practice in the minor leagues to give the **A's** and the **C** out to the best players or those who get the most points.

This is counter-productive and shouldn't be the basis by which you decide on your leaders!

You have to choose your leaders based on **true leadership qualities**, and not whether or not they can **put the puck in the net**.

It has **nothing to do with skill** and *everything to do with inspiring teammates to do great things.*

That said, here are **7 must-have qualities for leadership in hockey.**

1. The best leaders are the best servants

My old Major Junior coach **Guy Boucher** used to say, “*The best leaders are the best servants.*”

At first, I wasn’t quite sure what he meant by that. But I soon understood...

I came from a team where the rookies did all the work while the veterans just relaxed and took it easy. As a rookie, I would pack the bus, unload it when we arrived at our destination, and a whole bunch of other rookie-related jobs that weren’t fun at all.

When I arrived in *Drummondville*, I quickly noticed that everyone here was equal. There were 5-year veterans doing things I had seen only rookies do in the past.

Why was this important?

It created an atmosphere that fostered **growth** and **learning**. On other teams, the rookies and veterans were very separate—almost *disconnected*.

On this team, everyone was close and no one was better than another. There was no hierarchy, and the leaders of this team were also **servants**—they helped those around them (the rookies) and showed them the way. They showed us how things should be done both on and off the ice, *empowering us, inspiring us, and allowing us to improve* as young players.

Coach even made it a point to tell the older players *that it was their job to help us*. When practice was over, the older guys would stay on the ice and help the younger guys **improve their skills** and work on whatever it was that we needed help with.

We became a better and more complete team because of it. The best leaders are the best servants...*remember that.*

2. The best leaders listen more and talk less

Everyone thinks a leader is a player who’s always standing up in the room giving speeches, talking between shifts and always has something motivating to say.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

A true leader is a player that **listens more than he talks**, and only speaks when the time is right. If you speak all the time, your words *lose impact* and you may as well be

speaking to a wall.

But choose your words wisely and speak up at the right time, *and your voice will be heard.*

As a true leader, you make an impact with every word you say. **Don't ruin that power with useless remarks.**

I've seen some leaders do this well and other leaders do this poorly...

Don't be the leader that everyone sees as a *distraction* every time you speak. Instead, become the leader that *everyone waits for* to stand up and say something during crucial moments.

3. The best leaders bring people up instead of putting them down



True hockey leaders always bring teammates up instead of putting them down.

If your teammate is having a tough game, instead of pointing out his mistakes and 'putting him down', be positive about it and tell him how much your team needs him right now.

The easy thing to do is tell them they're playing a horrible game. That doesn't do anyone any good. Do that and you've not only lost that player for the game, but potentially even longer moving forward.

A true leader would use the second example below to *bring a teammate up*, rather than the first example which *brings people down*:

- “Come on man, you **shouldn’t** have made that pass. It resulted in a **turnover** and now we’re **down a goal**. You **know better** than that. Next time just give me the puck so you don’t **mess anything up again**.”
- “Hey man, we need you in this game. You’re our best skater and we need to see some of your speed. So what, you’re having a tough game. Big deal. I’ve seen what you can do. Brush it off and get back to playing your style of hockey that no one else on this team can.”

Be positive with your words and actions, and encourage your teammates to ‘**be better**’ rather than putting them down. The results will speak for themselves.

Notice all the negative words in the first example. *Stay away from those.*

4. The best leaders always have an ear to the ground

While being a leader in hockey has a lot to do with what goes on in or around the rink, true leaders also recognize the importance of *hockey/non-hockey life balance*.

A true leader always has an *ear to the ground* so to speak and knows how his teammates are doing outside of the rink. He’s always present at social activities and knows if a player is having a tough time.

Make it a point to speak to each of your teammates on a regular basis. Even if it’s just small talk, speak to each player in order to get a feel for how they’re doing both from a hockey perspective and in other areas of their lives.

For myself, this meant knowing how my teammates were doing in school, if they were having trouble at home or if their relationships weren’t going so well. This allowed me to help out and give advice whenever I could, and also shed a lot of light of many situations...

A lot of the time, if a player isn’t playing up to his potential, it has to do with something going on in his life *outside of hockey*. Sometimes, all it takes is a little advice or someone to talk to and they’re back on their feet again playing to their full potential.

It’s extremely important as a true leader to make sure your teammates are focused when they come to the rink to play or practice, and this means taking care of or addressing all distractions.

If your teammates feel like they can come to you for anything, *you’re doing a good job*.

5. The best leaders lead by example

A true leader in hockey is one who **leads by example**.

He doesn't *cut corners* in practice by curling when he's supposed to stop.

He doesn't *fake* blocking a shot because he knows it might hurt.

He doesn't stand *off to the side* when comes time to screen the goalie—he parks himself right in front.

A true leader shows the way through his actions, and makes it clear to everyone else that this is the way things are to be done. His work ethic, drive and determination becomes the standard, and anything less is *unsatisfactory*.

A leader who inspires through his actions is a **powerful leader**. If you lead with your work ethic, do all the little things right and have laser-like focus, your teammates WILL notice and WILL feel inspired.

A true leader that leads by example can make a tremendous impact on the overall strength of a team by getting everyone to play to his standards.

You don't even have to say a word. Lead by your actions and you'll make everyone around you better for it.

6. The best leaders are selfless

Basketball great John Wooden left us with a timely sports quote that hits the nail right on the head:

"It's amazing what can be accomplished if no one cares who gets the credit."
It's *true*.

Put a team full of individualistic players together who only care about their own personal statistics, and you won't get very far. Everyone plays for themselves, and there's no sense of urgency to make sacrifices for the greater good of the team.

But put a team full of committed, **selfless** players together all pulling in the same direction, ready to do anything it takes to achieve one common goal—*no matter what it takes to get there*—and you've got something **extremely powerful**.

The best leaders realize they're just one small piece of a much larger puzzle. They don't look for goals, assists or points. All they look at is the *wins column*, because that's all that matters to them—being the best team, *not the best player*.

Reward hard work over talent & results, and you'll create selfless leaders that put the team first.

7. The best leaders do the right thing when no one is watching

Being a true leader means having *integrity* and *character*. It means doing the right thing when no one is watching.

“Character is doing the right thing when no one is watching. There are too many people who think that the only thing that's right is to get by, and the only thing that's wrong is to get caught.” – J.C. Watts

There are those who work hard just enough to get the job done, but *nothing more*.

There are those who work hard only when the coach is looking so as to *not get in trouble*.

Then, there are those who work hard all the time because ‘*doing the right thing*’ is etched so far down in their morals that *it's the only thing they know*. These people don't need to be watched, coached or told what to do.

They work hard all the time whether or not someone is there to see it. They don't need praise for hard work. They don't need to be pushed. They do it because they believe it's the *right thing to do*.

We all know a player who starts pumping his legs and working hard when the coach is on his side of the ice during practice. As soon as the coach leaves, he goes back to coasting and *going through the motions*.

A true leader's work ethic & performance doesn't change when someone's around to see it. He realizes that cutting corners—regardless of who notices—is only hurting himself and his teammates.

Conclusion



YES, PRICE IS A LEADER.

So there you have it— *7 crucial traits that all of the best leaders in hockey have.*

Most important of all however, is not to just be called a ‘leader’, but to actually **inspire those around you to do great things.**

As a coach, you should **praise hard work over talent**, and choose your leaders based on their **leadership qualities** rather than the number of points they put up. You yourself must also let these qualities shine through in all that you do.

As a player, you can lead through your **actions**, your **words**, and the way you **carry** yourself both on and off the ice.

Be a servant and give those around you everything they need to get better.

Listen more than you talk.

Choose your words wisely and make an impact with each one.

Bring your teammates up instead of putting them down, and keep an eye out for anything that may be affecting your team’s performance outside of hockey—address it when necessary.

And lastly, be **selfless** because it’s amazing what you can accomplish when no one cares who gets the credit.

Become a true leader by building some of these qualities into your character.

You’ll not only make yourself better, *but everyone around you as well.*

This is the definition of a true leader, and you don’t need an ‘A’ or a ‘C’ on your jersey to be one.