THE “REAL” DEFINITION OF AN IDEAL LEADER

“The Characteristics of an Ideal Leader” checklist in the new PKAL portfolio, *Leadership: Investing in the Future*, is both useful and daunting. As I worked my way through the list and assessed my own ratings on those various measures, I started to get somewhat discouraged at my low scores on many of the items.

Do I have a high tolerance for complexity and ambiguity? I don’t think so. More accurately: has a high desire for simplicity and certainty (and is constantly frustrated by all that complexity and ambiguity).

I didn’t score very high on several items on the checklist, and I suspect that many other readers had the same experience. Maybe you did.

**Does that mean that we’re at best destined to be frauds as leaders, or worse, failures?**

I don’t think so. These are, after all, the characteristics of “ideal” leaders, and I haven’t met one of those yet; I certainly don’t see one in my mirror in the morning. But, I’ve known lots of effective leaders: some with titles and some without. That’s what I aspire to be.

For me, the lesson is not that leaders should possess all these “ideal” characteristics before they are entitled to try to lead, but that they should:

- recognize their strengths and weaknesses
- strive to work on the weak areas.

After all, the ideal characteristic is a “willingness to admit mistakes,” not a talent for never making any.

I do think there are some essential characteristics that all effective leaders have, including:

- integrity
- willingness to see others’ points of view
- persistence
- an ability to learn from their own mistakes
- an eye for good ideas.

But, I’ve found that their other strengths and their personal styles are quite variable, and I certainly don’t think there’s any one sure route to success, much as I might wish there were. (Oops! there’s my “weakness for certainty” sneaking in again).
My advice is to use this list as a way of getting to know yourself better, not as a litmus test of your suitability as a leader. Otherwise, we'll all be sitting around doubting ourselves and no one will take the lead, except perhaps those who are certain they have all the answers. And I'm certain that such a person is not someone I want to follow.

Get out and do what you see needs doing, change what you see needs changing, collaborate with those of like mind, and, before you know it, someone will be calling you a leader. And they'll be right.