

**Comment from Jim Kouzes, co-author of The Leadership Challenge
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Q: Why is being forward-looking so important for leadership?

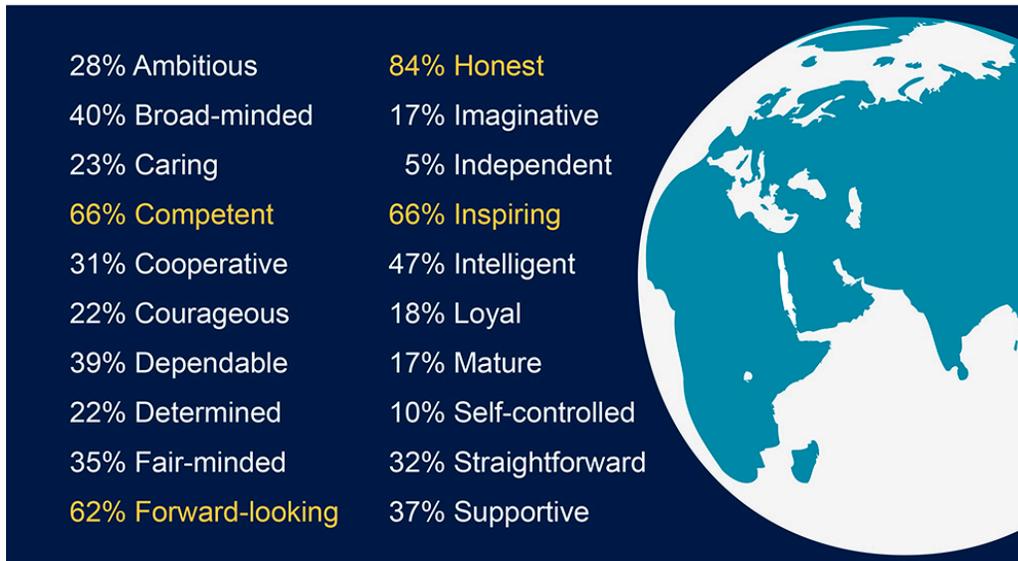
A: When you look back 10 years, were things the same then as they are now? And when you look back those 10 years, were you doing then what you are doing now? We bet your answers to both questions are “No.”

Here are two more questions to consider. Looking ahead 10 years, do you expect the world to be different from what it is today? And, looking ahead 10 years from now, do you expect to be doing something different than you are doing today? To these questions, we’d bet your answers are “Yes.”

These questions and your answers illustrate the first reason why leaders must be forward-looking. Time passes. Contexts and people change. Ten years from now the world will be a different place. How different we don’t know, but it will be different. Although this observation may seem transparent and simple, it’s crucial that you appreciate just how significant it is. It gets to the very essence of what leaders do, and a huge part of that is influencing what the future will be like five, 10, or 20 years down the road. Knowing that the future will be different forces you, and all leaders, to ask and answer such questions as: What are my aspirations for my future? What are the aspirations of my family, my work colleagues, my organization, my community? What are the *shared* aspirations? What can I do to help create a future that I and others envision? What can I do to influence the future direction in which we head? What kind of a person, and leader, do I want to become?

The second reason is this: *constituents expect leaders to be forward-looking*. The truth is that focusing on the future sets leaders apart. We’ve surveyed thousands of people worldwide on what they want in their leaders, and they tell us that being forward-looking (visionary, foresighted, concerned about the future, and having a sense of direction) is second only to honesty as their most admired leader quality. On average, 62 percent of U.S. respondents select it. For over 30 years, forward-looking has been selected by between 62 and 71 percent of all respondents as one of the top four qualities that people look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction they would willingly follow. In Asia, Europe, and Australia the preference for forward-looking is a full 10 percentage points higher. At the most senior level in organizations, forward-looking is selected by nearly 95 percent of the respondents. The following figure offers a complete list of the characteristics people look for in a leader and the percentages who select them.

Global Results



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As a point of comparison, we've also asked people to tell us what they look for in their colleagues (someone you would like on your team) and the responses to this question have revealed a telling and vital distinction between leaders and individual contributors. The quality of being *forward-looking* was not even in the top ten attributes of a colleague. It was selected by only 27 percent of the respondents. Compare to the 62 percent of respondents who want to see leaders be forward-looking. That's a difference of 35 percentage points. No other quality we've studied showed such a dramatic difference between leader and colleague.

The capacity to imagine and articulate exciting future possibilities is the defining competence of leaders. Leaders are expected to be concerned about tomorrow's world and those who will inherit it. Leaders are expected to ask, "What's new? What's next? What's going to happen after the current project is completed?" Leaders are expected to think beyond what's directly in front of them, peer into the distance, imagine what's across the horizon, and move forward toward a new and compelling future.

Jim Kouzes is the Dean's Executive Fellow of Leadership, Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University. Cited by *The Wall Street Journal* as one of the twelve best executive educators in the U.S., he was also the recipient of the 2015 Lifetime Achievement Award by Trust Across America. Together with Barry Posner, he is author of over 30 books and workbooks on leadership and leadership development, including the just-released *Stop Selling & Start Leading* (with additional co-author Deb Calvert), fully-revised and updated sixth edition of the international bestseller, *The Leadership Challenge*, and *Learning Leadership*, selected by *Strategy+Business* as one of the 2016 Best Business Books of Year.

