

# 4 Things That Set Successful AEs Apart From the Rest

Study shows the common personality traits of successful REALTOR® association CEOs



**H**ighly successful REALTOR® association CEOs each have dramatically different skills that enable them to perform at a higher level, yet they have amazingly similar personal characteristics.

In my Winter 2017 column, I mentioned the study of highly successful CEOs, the research process, and the results. I found that there are 10 skills for success that set top executives apart.

As is often the case in research, there are revelations—even surprises—that are tangential to the main subject but increase understanding. Although the primary focus of my research was on the unique skills of highly successful CEOs, I also discovered that there are four personality traits common among these executives, even though their individual success skills could

be substantially different.

## **Skill or Characteristic?**

A skill is an individual's ability to do something well. It is competence and capability. A skill is an attribute that requires experience or training to perform well. It is the "how" of the job. For example, a good CEO skill could be the ability to ask the right questions to uncover essential information, or the ability to build and foster teamwork among staff.

A personal characteristic is a defining feature of an individual. It is a personality trait, mannerism, or quality that makes someone recognizable. It is the "who" of the individual.

While the skills of a successful CEO, which I'll dive deeper into in future columns include fostering innovation, making

personal connections, and adeptly wielding influence, here are the personal characteristics I found common among successful REALTOR® CEOs in my study.

## **Modesty**

**Highly successful CEOs are humble about their skills.**

Highly successful executives don't boast about their accomplishments and are even self-effacing when discussing success.

They do not see themselves as that much more talented than competent CEOs. In my interviews with them, they were somewhat embarrassed to have been selected as among the "highly successful," a term I used when discussing performance with them.

Also, most were amazed that their peers had such a high opinion of them. Yes, they knew they were competent, but not something

dramatically higher.

When I asked AEs about their own executive abilities, one successful CEO said, “I will agree that I am a pretty good CEO. However, I don’t see myself as that much better or stronger than most any of my experienced peers. I have a long way to go.”

As Illinois Association of REALTORS® Past President John Kmiecik said of CEO Gary Clayton, “He is understated and unpretentious, and that allows him to quietly and effectively make his points on any issue. He listens, and because of his style, others quickly listen to his opinion.”

## Openness

**Highly successful CEOs are willing to share with fellow executives.**

Successful REALTOR® association CEOs believe sharing what has worked for them (programs, services, or methods) is a natural thing to do, whereas some CEOs in the study, who were not ranked as highly, think sharing ideas puts them at a disadvantage. Successful CEOs view openness as not a gain or loss, but as expected among professionals.

Many highly successful CEOs also are willing to mentor or coach other executives as they grow in their careers. This, too, is seen as normal, not to be constrained, and is the highest level of openness.

“My greatest thrill is working with new executives,” Ginger Downs, CEO of the Chicago Association of REALTORS®, said. “To be able to assist them in growing quickly by not making the same mistakes I did has been personally rewarding. In fact, I think I learn more from mentoring than they do.”

## Drive for Improvement

**Highly successful CEOs are constantly seeking personal and professional development.**

The next characteristic was a bit surprising at first, but then made sense upon

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reflection. That characteristic is the drive by highly successful CEOs to become even better—to constantly improve. They want to reach further. Every successful CEO I interviewed named skills they wanted to improve or develop.

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When I asked Bud Smith, former National Association of REALTORS® CEO, about attending a course that appeared to be below his level, he said, “If I don’t learn anything new from the presentation, then I know that I am current. However, I always hear something through a comment by the speaker or another attendee that sets me on a trail of study. When you are through improving, you are through.” Successful CEOs are at the zenith of their careers, yet they are still reaching.

## Faith in the mission

**Highly successful CEOs are personal advocates of homeownership as the American dream.**

Highly successful CEOs are advocates of the values of homeownership, property rights, and community, not because it’s their job, but because they truly believe in

it. Their own internal principles are aligned with the direction and purpose of the REALTOR® organization. This characteristic creates a stronger personal bond with the members.

As a past president said about Cindy Butts, CEO of the Connecticut Association of REALTORS®, “She is dedicated to the purpose of what we do and its impact on a community. And she creates a culture of caring around her among the staff.”

Interestingly, this particular characteristic was recognized in successful CEOs not by their fellow CEOs, but by the REALTOR® leaders I interviewed.

When I set out to uncover the skills of highly successful REALTOR® CEOs, I was not seeking information about their personal characteristics, but the same few personal characteristics of successful CEOs kept reoccurring. It was interesting that in the midst of differentiation of skills, there was commonality of characteristics.

## Common Traits and Uncommon Performance

There are 10 unique skills that define outstanding CEO performance, but each particular skill differs with the individual. However, virtually all of the successful CEOs had these four common characteristics: they are modest, they are open, they are improving, and they are advocates.

Although skills can be cultivated and learned, personal characteristics are much harder to develop. In future issues of REALTOR® AE magazine, I’ll explore the intangible skills of successful CEOs and how you can attain them.



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