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# Educator Toolkit: Leadership and Resilience

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## Why This Matters Now

A few years back, Knowledge@Wharton High School asked several high school students to share their definitions of leadership. Their answers were provocative. Take, for instance, Haley Holliday from Atascocita High School in Humble, Texas. “Leadership means being actively involved in your community and causes that are dear to your heart. It means inspiring others to be motivated to do something and to accomplish a goal that they have.” Mallory Keller from Belton High School in Missouri said, “A great leader is a person who is able to understand when it’s time to take action and be a leader, but also when it is time to step back and let others become leaders.” And Kristopher Brown from Lincoln Charter School in North Carolina said, “A great leader is someone who is passionate about what they do.”

While the young leaders we called on had lots to say about inspiration and motivation, one idea from Sujay Rao at Minnesota’s Eden Prairie High School in particular caught our attention. “A leader,” he said, “should be determined to stay on his path.”

These days we hear a great deal about the importance of failure and learning from our mistakes. A big part of embracing failure is learning to persevere and stay the course that we believe is true. Call it grit, determination or resilience; it is the essence of powerful leadership. Strong leaders will take setbacks as learning experiences, make the appropriate course corrections and keep pushing forward.

## Resources

### Article

#### [Mountain Guides Teach Us About Leadership](#)

Christopher I. Maxwell, a senior fellow at the Wharton Center for Leadership and Change Management, is an avid mountain climber who set out years ago to interview mountain guides, sometimes called sherpas, about their experiences leading people to the highest peaks. This article is a great overview of key leadership skills, illustrated with examples of how guides demonstrate those skills. It would be an interesting follow-on read from the Leadership and Resilience lesson plan below, which introduces students to this idea of resilience through the tragic story of climbers losing their lives on Mt. Everest.

### Lesson Plan

#### [Leadership and Resilience](#)

In this lesson, students read about leaders who have overcome challenges, and then reflect on how they’ve exhibited resilience themselves as leaders. Students will work constructively in pairs to share one another’s stories in a creative format – and then share what they’ve learned more broadly with the class. The linked leadership article is also available as an audio podcast if educators want to kick off class by listening to the story, rather than reading it together.

### Hands-on Learning

As evidenced by the students’ quotes in the above “Why this Matters Now” section, leadership means different things to different people. This activity is designed to get students thinking about leadership in a creative way. Encourage students to think about leadership qualities and then depict them in a simple pencil drawing. Give your class the following assignment: Design an image that represents leadership, and then write a paragraph explaining why you selected that image. When students are done, post their images around the room. Invite students to walk around the room and look at all the depictions of good leaders. What do the images have in common? What pictures stand out as different? Are there

any illustrations that surprise you? How might you add to or change your image based on what you see from others? For many years, Wharton freshmen were required to do this assignment and then discuss their images. You will be surprised by what many come up with! Read or listen to this [Knowledge@Wharton article](#) to research more about the images designed by Wharton freshmen.

**Video Glossary**

Provide an extra layer of learning for your students with our video glossary. Here, Wharton professors define terms: Management and Organization.

**KWHS Quote of the Month**

“Many aspiring entrepreneurs and leaders face constant rejection, and instead of moving forward with their ideas, they give up. Rather than quitting, leaders use rejection and criticism to improve their products or ideas – they use that little “no” word to further ignite their desire to succeed.” – *John DePass, Annapolis High School, Annapolis, Maryland, in [Leadership Challenges from an FBLA President](#)*