In any human group existing in the private sphere, the exercise of authority confers a certain prominence. This is the case of a father—and, in participation with him, his wife—the president of an association, a professor, the coach of an athletic team, and so on.

1) Intellectual requisites of a leader

The exercise of authority requires certain qualities. In the first place, the leader must have a clear and firm notion of the objective and the common good of the group he directs. Then he needs a lucid knowledge of the means and procedures to attain this good.

These intellectual qualities, however, do not suffice.

The leader must also be able to communicate his knowledge and, as much as possible, persuade those who differ. However broad his powers, however drastic the penalties imposed on those who disobey, however honorable and generous the rewards conferred on those who obey, these factors are not enough for the leader to make himself obeyed.

A profound and stable consensus must exist between his subordinates and him regarding his objectives and methods. His subordinates must also have the earnest confidence in his capacity to employ methods correctly and achieve these goals, all in the view of attaining the common good.

2) Requisites of the will and the sensibility

Moreover, it is insufficient for the leader to merely persuade through flawless logical argumentation. Other attributes are also necessary. These lie in the realm of the will and the sensibility.

Above all, the leader must be gifted with a penetrating psychological sense. This quality requires the simultaneous exercise of the intelligence, will and sensibility. A very intelligent but weak-willed and unperceptive person ordinarily lacks the psychological sense needed to fathom even elementary aspects of his own mentality. How much less can he fathom that of others, such as his spouse, children, students and employees. For a leader lacking psychological sense it is difficult not only to persuade the minds of subordinates but also to unite their wills for a common action.

Not even this psychological sense, however, suffices. The leader must also be endowed with a sensibility rich enough to suffuse whatever he says with the

flavor of reality, honesty, authenticity, and a touch of interest and inspiration that prompts those who should obey him to follow joyfully.

In brief, these are the qualities without which someone who presides over a private social group will lack the conditions to fulfill his mission in ordinary circumstances.

3) The leader in exception circumstances whether favorable or adverse

However, exceptional circumstances, whether favorable or adverse, occasionally alter the normal order in any private group.

Unable to rise to the occasion, the average leader risks losing the excellent opportunities that he either fathoms incompletely or misses altogether. In this way, he lets them slip by, taking either partial advantage of them or no advantage at all.

Should he prove incapable of discerning danger when it appears on the horizon, evaluating the threat it poses, and devising means to eliminate it as quickly as possible, he risks seriously harming the group under his direction and even causing its ruin.

“Regarding groups of any kind… we can say that since the common good of the group—in other words, its general good—is higher than the individual good of its members, it is ipso facto nobler.”

Taken from “Nobility and Analogous Traditional Elites” by Plinio Correa de Oliveira.