

Background: The following essay was published in *Der Angriff*, 22 April 1929, on the occasion of Hitler's 40th birthday, Goebbels explains the nature of leadership, and ends with a brief mention of Hitler. After 1933, Goebbels gave an annual speech on the occasion of Hitler's birthday, many of which are available elsewhere in the [German Propaganda Archive](#).

The source: "Der Führer," *Der Angriff. Aufsätze aus der Kampfzeit* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1935), pp. 214-216.

Der Führer

by Joseph Goebbels

A leader must possess character, will, ability, and luck. If these four characteristics form a harmonious unity in a brilliant person, we have a man called by history.

Character is the most significant factor. Knowledge, book learning, experience and practice do more harm than good if they are not based on strong character. Character brings them to their best expression. It requires courage, endurance, energy, and consistency. Courage gives a person not only the ability to recognize what is right, but also to say and do it. Endurance gives him the ability to pursue the chosen goal, even if apparently impossible obstacles stand in the way, and to proclaim it even if it is unpopular, even if it makes him unpopular. Energy mobilizes the strength to risk everything for the goal and the persistence to keep at it. Consistency gives his eye and mind the sharpness of knowledge and logic in thought and action that gives truly great people the ability to reach the eternally wavering masses. These manly virtues together comprise that which we call character. Character, in short, is style and behavior in the highest form.

Will raises character from the individualistic to the universal. Will makes the man of character into a political man. Any man of significance wants something, and indeed is ready to use every means to attain his end. The will distinguishes the man who acts from the man who merely thinks. It is the intermediary between knowledge and action. It is much more important for us to want that which is right than it is simply to know what is right. This is particularly true in politics. What good is it for me to know the enemy if I do not have the will to destroy him! Many know why Germany has collapsed, but few have the will to end its misfortunes. What distinguishes he who is called to leadership from all the rest is this: He not only has the will to want, but also the want to will.

But in politics it is also important not only what one wants, but what one accomplishes. This leads us to the third characteristic of the able political person: ability. Progress requires accomplishment. Leadership means to want something, and to be able to show the way to realize what one wants. History judges by what has been done. We Germans need to realize that. Politics is a public affair, and one cannot apply the laws of private matters to public matters. We Germans often tend to confuse the desire for something with the ability to do it, and to forgive the incompetent who says that he wanted good and proper things. "We have not brought about socialism," say the November Marxists, "but at least we wanted to." That is irrelevant, just as we do not care if someone wants to play the violin. He must be able in fact to do so. He who wants to rescue a people must above all have the necessary ability.

Character, will and ability, the three prerequisites to leadership, show themselves in capable people. They are either there, or they are not there. The fourth characteristic binds the other three together: luck. The leader must have luck. He must have a blessed hand. One must be able to see that all his

actions stand under the protection of a higher power. A leader can lack everything save luck. That is irreplaceable.

The masses do not oppose leaders. They do instinctively oppose usurpers who claim power without having the necessary will and ability. The leader is hardly an enemy of the masses. He shuns only the cheap tricks of mass flattery that feed the people with phrases rather than bread.

The leader must be able to do everything. That does not mean that he understands all the details, but he must know the basics. There are other helpful people who can keep the wheels of politics spinning.

The art of organization is one of the most important factors in the capabilities of political leaders. Organization means rightly assigning work and responsibility. The leader is the master in the clockwork of an intricate political machine.

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Today we celebrate Adolf Hitler's 40th birthday. We believe that fate has called him to show the German people the way. We greet him with honor and devotion, and wish only that he be preserved for us until his work is finished.