

The leaders discussed as follows are Harriet Tubman, Winston Churchill, Mother Teresa, Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, and LeBron James. As you read about each of them, think about their leadership traits.

Harriet Tubman (c. 1820–1913)

Harriet Tubman was an American activist who played a major role in the abolitionist movement in the years leading up to the Civil War (1861–1865). She was born enslaved in Dorchester County, Maryland. At the age of 12, she suffered a severe blow to the head while trying to assist a fellow enslaved person who was being attacked. The wound she received caused intermittent blackouts for the rest of her life. In 1849, Tubman escaped by way of the Underground Railroad from Maryland to Philadelphia in the free state of Pennsylvania by traveling at night, using the North Star as her guide. After she gained her own freedom, Tubman became a “conductor” for the Underground Railroad. She subsequently made 13 return trips to the South and rescued as many as 300 other enslaved people. Tubman was known as “Moses” because she helped her people escape to freedom. During the Civil War, she became a spy and soldier for the North (for the Union Army) and was the first woman in the armed services to carry out a military operation: In 1863, she led the successful Combahee River Raid that freed more than 750 enslaved people. In her later years, she settled in Auburn, New York, where she established a home dedicated to the care of older African Americans. When she died in 1913, Tubman was 93 years old.



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Traits and Characteristics

Harriet Tubman was a tenacious leader (C. Clinton, 2004; Wills, 1994). She had a far-reaching impact despite horrific treatment, a lack of formal education, and the seizures she experienced as a result of her head injury. She fought courageously to end slavery with persistent resolve. Devoted to her cause, she repeatedly risked her own life to bring freedom to others. She was determined, focused, strong, and unpretentious. Her leadership combined the spiritual and the practical; she believed in divine guidance but was pragmatic and methodical in her approach to tasks. Tubman was a remarkable leader and her accomplishments extraordinary.

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