

Leadership

We often see students at Staples who feel pressured to excel on all fronts: academics, sports, artistic endeavors, clubs. Not only are they concerned about their own achievement in these areas, but increasingly they feel pressured to demonstrate leadership ability in them as well. Many young people understand this to mean that they must rise to a designated leadership position where they are able to exert some power over their peers. The title of captain or president becomes the goal, regardless of what they might actually do in the position once they have earned it. This zero-sum view compounds the competitive nature of ambitious young people, as they jockey for a limited number of leadership positions. More importantly, such a narrow conception of leadership does nothing to encourage the development of truly meaningful personal qualities and, in fact, is *not* all that colleges look for in prospective students. While leadership ability is important, so are qualities like integrity, kindness, humility, commitment, and a positive attitude.

Brennan Barnard, college counselor at a private high school, asked admissions officers to share their ideas on what it means to lead as background for his article, "[Take Me To Your Leaders: What College Admissions Deans Are Looking For](#)." There are common threads that emerge: character, engagement, commitment, responsibility, support, encouragement, inclusion, ethical mindset, motivating toward a common vision, and reflection. Students should appreciate that they have opportunities to live these qualities every day - and to lead every day - no matter who they are or the title attached.

For more, please read Susan Cain's recent article, "[Not Leadership Material? Good. The World Needs Followers](#)," as well as this earlier [Resilience email](#), which summarizes the ideas Cain presents in her book, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. The

Staples Resilience Project is an ongoing endeavor by the Staples High School Guidance Department. We welcome your feedback at shs-resilience-project@westport.k12.ct.us.