

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Suanne M. Sandage & William J. Winslow

With increasing competition, advances in technology and science, and more challenges in the marketplace, leadership has become unquestionably vital to the success of any organization. Change is now our constant companion at an ever-increasing rate of speed. In response, a growing number of organizations are investing more time and dollars to educate, train and develop their leaders. As Jack Welch stated during his tenure with GE, "The day we screw up the people thing, this company is over."

So what does it take to be an effective leader? Are you one of them...can you become one? In the nature vs. nurture debate over whether leaders are born or whether leadership can be learned and developed, an overwhelming amount of research now supports the latter. As Peter Drucker states, "Leaders grow, they are not made...Leadership is...the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations." By understanding the personality traits of a successful leader and knowing where you are on those traits, you are in a good position to manage your behavior in a way that enables you to provide the right kind of leadership for any situation.

Let's look at the leadership challenges facing the following three individuals and see how they might overcome their normal limitations.

Jim has always been extremely achievement-oriented and has excelled at most of his endeavors. This allowed him to rise quickly through the corporate ranks, and he is currently in a very enviable position with a bright future. So what is the problem?

Well, Jim feels "tight" inside on a daily basis. He micromanages his staff and snaps at his wife and kids. He continually has to "rise to the occasion" when he is called into spur-of-the-moment meetings and when he is required to make presentations with very little forewarning. Because of his good organizational skills and keen product knowledge, things usually turn out okay. However, he is churning inside. And no amount of exercise, vacations, or martinis seems to quiet this feeling of fear. Why does he feel so insecure? Why can't he be content? Could he handle another promotion if he got one?

On one hand, Jim probably has low self-confidence, low composure, high control, and low contentment traits, which contribute to his pessimism. On the other hand, he also has high achievement-orientation, high sociability, and high organizational traits, which enable him to frequently land on his feet. Over time, however, his continuing feelings of restlessness, insecurity, and angst will more than likely contribute to high blood

pressure, heart disease, depression — or just lousy relationships and constant fear of failure. Is this what life is all about?

Celeste has extensive education and experience in technology. She has excellent programming skills and knowledge. Her background has allowed her to provide impressive results under extremely tight deadlines. All this hard work, time away from her family and friends, and excruciating stress is finally paying off: Celeste gets promoted to Team Leader for a special new development project. Deadlines are tight — but that is nothing new!

Six months into the project, Celeste is feeling exhausted, frustrated, insecure, and angry. She is short-tempered with her team members and even more so at home with her family. Her days seem crowded with an endless string of meetings, and yet nothing seems to get accomplished. There are meetings to discuss how to start, meetings to clarify expectations, meetings to resolve conflict, and more meetings to schedule meetings. Dealing with team members is increasingly difficult — some need too much direct supervision, and others are completely uncooperative. Celeste is working more, enjoying it less, and wondering if this promotion was all it was cracked up to be. She longs for the "good old days."

You see, the same personality traits that helped Celeste excel in the technology arena — her organizational skills, attention to detail, independence, and the ability to work well with "things" rather than "people" — enhanced her ability to succeed as a programmer. She was promoted because of her excellent ability at that job — but not this one. Now in order to excel as a Team Leader, she needs to utilize or develop the traits that are required for this new career role. These traits probably relate more to interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, assertiveness, optimism, and self-confidence.

Dave is outgoing and enthusiastic. He breaks most sales records, and his clients love him. He is constantly meeting new people and always quick to mention the benefits of the products he sells. He is an absolute "selling sensation," and in no time at all, he is promoted to Sales Manager. WOW — less travel, more time with his family, more golf — plus more time to catch up in the office. This is great!

However, three months into this new role, Dave's behavior is driving his co-workers, family, and friends NUTS! His incessant talking and his constant presence feel like micromanagement to his sales team. They can't get their calls made because he is always hovering and "coaching" them with specifics on how *he* would handle

each particular situation to ensure that the deal would get closed. Dave starts to feel corralled. He doesn't feel the same sense of satisfaction from his new role. His success seems more dependent on the success of those he is managing, and he isn't sure he likes that. They aren't selling as well as he could. What is he going to do?

Well, Dave is probably high in traits relating to sociability, boldness, exhibition, self-confidence, optimism, endurance, and nurturance. All of these traits might be vital to sales success but may not be as helpful in everyday environments where you are overwhelming your co-workers and smothering your family and friends. Dave's inability to work alone causes him to call more and more meetings just to have social interaction, and sales quotas are suffering as a result— even though the low quotas are what they are meeting about! It seems that the Sales Manager is disrupting his team's time to sell.

But remember, there is hope. **Leadership can be developed.** So where do we start? Before Jim has a heart attack or gets to the end of his career with very little enjoyment from his successes; before Celeste quits, and her company loses an extraordinary programmer; before Dave gets fired, and his organization loses a fantastic salesperson – can we develop them as successful leaders? First, let's find out what the key traits of a successful leader are.

Over the past several years, one of the most important contributions that the field of psychology has made to the field of business has been in determining the key personality traits of effective leaders. Various psychological tests and assessments have been used to determine what traits are most common among successful leaders. This list of traits can now be used to help managers gain insight into their strengths and weaknesses. This enables them to grow and develop their leadership skills.

Raymond Cattell, a pioneer in the field of personality assessment, derived the five Global Factors of personality in the 1960s and is considered by many to be the "Father of the Big 5" Global Factors commonly used today. However, his work with the sixteen more specific primary personality scales has been found to predict behavior better and was influential in developing our flagship assessment, **The Winslow**. It is this work that is still referred to today to determine the traits which characterize a successful leader. These traits include the following:

- **Emotional Stability:** Good leaders are able to tolerate frustration and stress. They are well-adjusted and have the psychological maturity to deal with anything they are requested to face.
- **Dominance:** Leaders enjoy controlling and directing the activity of others and are willing to be responsible for them. They are assertive in

their thinking style as well as their attitude in dealing with others.

- **Enthusiasm:** Leaders are usually seen as active, expressive, and energetic. They are often very optimistic and positive thinkers. Overall, they are generally responsive to others and quick to become enthusiastic.
- **Conscientiousness:** Leaders are often dominated by a sense of duty and tend to be very exacting in character. They usually have a very high standard of excellence and an inward desire to accept and abide by the rules and regulations. They also tend to be very self-disciplined.
- **Boldness:** There are two dimensions to boldness: social boldness and risk-taking. Leaders tend to be socially bold and easily speak up to others, while they are also willing to take chances and risks within the scope of their responsibilities.
- **Tough-mindedness:** Good leaders are to-the-point and able to function in stressful and harsh environments. They recover quickly from disappointments, setbacks and failure. Leaders tend to be lower in sentimental attachments and comfortable with criticism. They are usually insensitive to hardship and very poised.
- **Self-confidence:** Self-assurance and resiliency are common traits among leaders. They believe they have the personal resources to be successful and to meet challenges. They are generally secure, free from guilt, and unaffected by prior mistakes or failures.
- **Compulsiveness:** Leaders are controlled and very precise in their social behavior and interactions. Overall, they are very protective of their integrity and reputation, and consequently, they tend to be socially aware, abundant in foresight, and very careful when making decisions or determining specific actions.¹

In addition to those traits identified by Cattell and others, today's leaders must have team orientation, high energy, optimism, and emotional intelligence — just to name a few. Various theories continue to emerge about which traits are most important, how many should be measured, what the traits should be named, and the best way to combine and develop those that are most important to successful leadership. Traits relating to relationship building and emotional intelligence continue to gain attention and respect.

Daniel Goleman's 1998 research outlined the Emotional Competence Framework, which identifies five keys to leader development: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. According to Goleman, "knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions" and "managing one's internal stages, impulses, and resources" are foundational to

success. So, *knowing* (“self-awareness”) and *managing* (“self-management”) are the keys to leadership development. Both are available to us if we choose.

A recent study on Leadership, Emotional Intelligence and Personality Type with 265 leaders (one-third executives, one-third directors, and one-third primarily business owners and consultants) found that leaders now consider emotional intelligence competencies, such as relationship building and adaptability, to be more important to leadership success than traditional leadership competencies, such as planning and financial acumen. The first major implication of this study is that individual leaders can increase their potential for success by mastering the most highly valued competencies, which include building relationships, developing people, thinking strategically, offering vision, executing work, taking initiative, and fostering teamwork. The second implication is that excelling at these highly ranked competencies requires leaders to focus on the emotional intelligence building-block competencies of self-awareness, empathy, and adaptability. This same study shows that leaders may underestimate the importance of these basics.²

Research has revealed that an underlying dynamic — self-awareness — facilitates both empathy and self-management, two factors which in combination allow effective relationship management. Thus, successful leadership development builds from this foundation of self-awareness.³ It is very similar to taking a trip — if you don’t know where you are, you do not know which way to go in order to get to where you want to go. If you do not recognize your own areas of strength and areas of concern, you will be poor at understanding and managing those traits in others and, as a result, be inept at coaching others to develop and improve. Once leaders understand their own strengths and abilities, as well as perceive and understand those of others, their leadership skills skyrocket!

In the book, *Primal Leadership*, the authors refer to the crux of effective leadership development as *self-directed learning*: intentionally developing or strengthening an aspect of who you are or who you want to be or both. They refer to a model of learning developed by Richard Boyatzis, in which people who successfully grow and change in *sustainable* ways cycle through the following five discovery stages:

- **The *First* Discovery:** My ideal self – Who do I want to be?
- **The *Second* Discovery:** My real self – Who am I? What are my strengths and gaps?
- **The *Third* Discovery:** My learning agenda – How can I build my strengths while reducing my gaps?
- **The *Fourth* Discovery:** Experimenting with and practicing new business, thoughts, and feelings to the point of mastery.

- **The *Fifth* Discovery:** Developing supportive and trusting relationships that make change possible.⁴

Today, it takes a combination of many traits to excel as a leader. Leaders today need to be educated, have vision, excel in their industry, exude emotional intelligence, and be both learners and teachers. They need a strong sense of ethics, commitment, and the ability to live their values. Leaders need to be able to function as both collaborators and commanders and have the judgment to know when to be which. Adaptability in order to increase effectiveness is vital in this age of constant change.

The good news is that leaders can be developed. You can improve in your leadership ability today. You can grow into one of tomorrow’s great leaders. The choice is yours. Robert Sternberg, in his book, *Successful Intelligence: How Practical and Creative Intelligence Determine Success in Life* states that “people who succeed...know their strengths; they know their weaknesses. They capitalize on their strengths; they compensate for or correct their weaknesses. That’s it!”⁵

With over 35 years of experience in this arena, we have seen many of these theories come and go. We offer an assessment for individuals and organizations that has staying power and yet is current and consistent. What we have found is that our flagship assessment and the twenty-four personality traits assessed in four categories (including Interpersonal, Organizational, Dedication and Self-control) enables participants to gain the most insight in a simple yet effective manner to enhance their self-awareness and self-managed development. As one of the only assessments that guarantees the most accurate and objective results, we can confidently help individuals and organizations to maximize their potential for success. We strongly recommend individuals and organizations participate only in highly credible assessment programs with built-in validity controls so that selection decisions and development goals are not based on invalid or misleading results.

Leadership today demands keen self-awareness and strong self-management skills as never before. A successful leader at times must be a good team member and at other times, must lead the team. The 2004 film *Miracle* recounted the story of the US Olympic Ice Hockey Team that beat the strongly favored Russian team in the 1980 Olympic Games. That American team was developed with top performers who also had individual and team leadership abilities. In fact, the test used to assess these athletes’ personality traits was a Winslow Assessment created specifically for competitive athletes. It is still used today by many professional athletic teams which are developed with knowledge from a well-developed assessment so that the individual athletes know what to concentrate on to grow and develop, their coaches know how to help them improve and maximize their potential, and it ends up being a win

all the way around. The point is that at times we need superstars to work together and support each other so that the sum is greater than the parts. At other times, we need leaders to “step up” and lead. Because knowledge of traits, or self-awareness, is paramount to success, this assessment allows individuals to read themselves and others in order to make vital self-management decisions that increase their effectiveness as a leader – today *and* tomorrow.

Remember Jim, Celeste and Dave? They all decided to go through our assessment/coaching program to increase their self-awareness and develop a learning agenda that would enhance their self-management and potential for success as leaders. Today, Jim is leading a global organization, experiencing better health, and enjoying his success both on and off the job. Celeste’s team successfully completed the new development project within the timeframe and on budget. She is leading another team on another project, but enjoying it more this time! Dave approached his COO and asked to return to the sales team so he could “be a round peg in a round hole.” He proposed the job description, the commission schedule, and the incentives and ended up with a more horizontal promotion that fit his personality traits. He is back to being a Sales Leader.

In their book *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan discuss the need for leaders with emotional fortitude to be able to *execute*, which must be the major job of a business leader. They state, “Emotional fortitude comes from self-discovery and self-mastery. Good leaders learn their strengths and weaknesses; especially in dealing with other people, then build on their strengths and correct their weaknesses. They earn their leadership when the followers see their inner strength, inner confidence, and ability to help team members deliver results, while at the same time expanding their own capabilities.”⁶

Knowing their strengths and weaknesses, and approaching their work accordingly, was a competence found in virtually every star performer in a study of several hundred “knowledge workers” — computer scientists, auditors and the like — at companies including AT&T and 3M done by Janet Caplan and Robert Kelley of Carnegie-Mellon University. From their findings, Robert Kelley states, “stars know themselves well.”⁷

For many years, the Franklin Covey organization has also utilized **The Winslow** Assessment System in their Executive Coaching Program. In his book, *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Stephen Covey explains, “It’s relatively easy to work on personalities...But it’s comparatively hard to change habits...Nonetheless, it’s the true test and manifestation of our maturity.”⁸ It is not easy to *change* – however, it is possible to control, manage and modify personality traits and behavior in a manner that improves leadership and life.

So remember, there is hope! You, too, can continue to grow and develop your leadership skills. The first step is self-awareness. A self reporting assessment such as **The Winslow*** is a vital first step in this self-awareness process. Then, combining this new self-knowledge with an individualized action plan developed with a knowledgeable coach or mentor allows you to set your learning and development agenda, become consistently accountable, and chart your progress toward becoming a success leader. For sustainable results – try to follow Boyatzis’ five discoveries stated earlier in this article – and experience self-directed learning.

To maximize your leadership potential, start the journey of *self-awareness* and *self-management* now. Assess your personality traits and find out how your strengths can be developed further and how your areas of concern can be managed. Become the leader *beyond* your normal limitations – for today and tomorrow. Maximize your leadership potential. Remember, the choice is yours – choose to make a greater difference.

Suanne M. Sandage is Founder and President of Services for Success, Inc., a consulting, training and coaching organization, and a Certified Winslow Assessment provider. Sandage@ServicesforSuccess.com

William J. Winslow is Founder and President of Winslow Research Institute, a research and development organization.

Endnotes

¹ “Leadership Traits”, Small Business Administration (<http://www.sba.gov/managing/leadership/traits.html>)

² Study of: Sharon L. Richmond, Pam Fox Rollin and Julie M. Brown. “What Makes a Successful Leader: Summary Findings from a Study on Leadership, Emotional Intelligence and Personality Type.” June 28, 2004. (<http://www.ideashape.com/leadership-research.htm>)

³ Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Robert J. Sternberg, *Successful Intelligence* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

⁶ Larry Bossidy & Ram Charan, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done* (New York: Crown Business, 2002).

⁷ Daniel Goleman, *Working with Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1998). p. 347.

⁸ Stephen R. Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992).