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Leadership: do traits matter?

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Executive Overview

The study of leader traits has a long and controversial history. While research shows that the possession of certain traits alone does not guarantee leadership success, there is evidence that effective leaders are different from other people in certain key respects. Key leader traits include: drive (a broad term which includes achievement, motivation, ambition, energy, tenacity, and initiative); leadership motivation (the desire to lead but not to seek power as an end in itself); honesty and integrity; self-confidence (which is associated with emotional stability); cognitive ability; and knowledge of the business. There is less clear evidence for traits such as charisma, creativity and flexibility. We believe that the key leader traits help the leader acquire necessary skills; formulate an organizational vision and an effective plan for pursuing it; and take the necessary steps to implement the vision in reality.

Article

Few issues have a more controversial history than leadership traits and characteristics. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, "great man" leadership theories were highly popular. These theories asserted that leadership qualities were inherited, especially by people from the upper class. Great men were, born, not made (in those days, virtually all business leaders were men). Today, great man theories are a popular foil for so-called superior models. To make the new models plausible, the "great men" are endowed with negative as well as positive traits. In a recent issue of the *Harvard Business Review*, for example, Slater and Bennis write,

"The passing years have . . . given the coup de grace to another force that has retarded democratization—the 'great man' who with brilliance and farsightedness could preside wth dictatorial powers as the head of a growing organization."[1]

Such great men, argue Slater and Bennis, become "outmoded" and dead hands on "the flexibility and growth of the organization." Under the new democratic model, they argue, "the individual *is* of relatively little significance."

Early in the 20th century, the great man theories evolved into trait theories. ("Trait" is used broadly here to refer to people's general characteristics, including capacities, motives, or patterns of behavior.) Trait theories did not make assumptions about whether leadership traits were inherited or acquired. They simply asserted that leaders' characteristics are different from non-leaders. Traits such as height, weight, and physique are heavily dependent on heredity, whereas others such as knowledge of the industry are dependent on experience and learning.

The trait view was brought into question during the mid-century when a prominent theorist, Ralph Stogdill, after a thorough review of the literature concluded that "A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits."[2] Stogdill believed this because the research showed that no traits were universally associated with effective leadership and that

situational factors were also influential. For example, military leaders do not have traits identical to those of business leaders.

Since Stogdill's early review, trait theory has made a come back, though in altered form. Recent research, using a variety of methods, has made it clear that successful leaders are not like other people. The evidence indicates that there are certain core traits which significantly contribute to business leaders' success.

Traits *alone*, however, are not sufficient for successful business leadership—they are only a precondition. Leaders who possess the requisite traits must take certain *actions* to be successful (e.g. formulating a vision, role modeling, setting goals). Possessing the appropriate traits only makes it more likely that such actions will be taken and be successful. After summarizing the core leadership traits, we will discuss these important actions and the managerial implications.

The Evidence: Traits Do Matter

The evidence shows that traits do matter. Six traits on which leaders differ from non-leaders include: drive, the desire to lead, honesty/integrity, self-confidence, cognitive ability, and knowledge of the business.[3] These traits are shown in Exhibit 1.

Drive

The first trait is labeled "drive" which is not to be confused with physical need deprivation. We use the term to refer to a constellation of traits and motives reflecting a high effort level. Five aspects of drive include achievement motivation, amibition, energy, tenacity, and initiative.

Achievement. Leaders have a relatively high desire for achievement. The need for achievement is an important motive among effective leaders and even more important among successful entrepreneurs. High achievers obtain satisfaction from successfully completing challenging tasks, attaining standards of excellence, and developing better ways of doing things. To work their way up to the top of the organization, leaders must have a desire to complete challenging assignments and projects. This also allows the leader to gain technical expertise, both through education and work experience, and to initiate and follow through with organizational changes.

The constant striving for improvement is illustrated by the following manager who took charge of a $260 million industrial and office-products division:[4]

After twenty-seven months on the job, Tom saw his efforts pay off: the division had its best first quarter ever. By his thirty-first month, Tom felt he had finally mastered the situation. . . . [Tom] finally felt he had the structure and management group in place to grow the division's revenues to $400 million and he now turned his attention to divesting a product group which no longer fit in with the growth objectives of the division.

Drive: achievement, ambition, energy, tenacity, initiative
Leadership Motivaton (personalized vs. socialized)
Honesty and Integrity
Self-confidence (including emotional stability)
Cognitive Ability
Knowledge of the Business
Other Traits (weaker support): charisma, creativity/originality, flexibility

Exhibit 1. Leadership Traits

Managers perform a large amount of work at an unrelenting pace. To perform well, a leader needs to constantly work toward success and improvement. Superior managers and executives are concerned with doing something better than they or other have ever done it. For example, at PepsiCo only "aggressive achievers" survive. Similarly, Thomas Watson of IBM has been described as "driven throughout by a personal determination to create a company larger than NCR."[5] This brings us to a second related motive: ambition.

Ambition. Leaders are very ambitious about their work and careers and have a desire to get ahead. To advance, leaders actively take steps to demonstrate their drive and determination. Ambition impels leaders to set hard, challenging goals for themselves and their organizations. Walt Disney, founder of Walt Disney Productions, had a "dogged determination to succeed" and C.E. Woolman of Delta Air Lines had "inexhaustible ambition."

Effective leaders are more ambitious than nonleaders. In their 20-year study, psychologists Ann Howard and Douglas Bray found that among a sample of managers at AT&T, ambition, specifically the desire for advancement, was the strongest predictor of success twenty years later. The following character sketches of two managers who successfully progressed illustrate the desire for advancement:[6]

I want to be able to demonstrate the things I learned in college and get to the top," said Al, "maybe even be president. I expect to work hard and be at the third level within 5 years, and to rise to much higher levels in the years beyond that. I am specifically working on my MBA to aid in my advancement. If I'm thwarted on advancement, or find the challenge is lacking, I'll leave the company.

[He] had been promoted to the district level [after 8 years] and certainly expected to go further. Although he still wouldn't pinpoint wanting to be president (his wife's dream for him), he certainly had a vice presidency (sixth level) in mind as early as year 2 in the study, after his first promotion.

Even at age 70, Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart discount stores, still attended Wal-Mart's Saturday morning meeting, a whoop-it-up 7:30 a.m. sales pep rally for 300 managers.

The following sketches characterize two less ambitious individuals:

Even though Chet had the benefits of a college degree, his below-average scholastic performance did not fill him with confidence in his capabilities. He hedged a bit with his interviewer when asked about his specific aspirations, saying he wasn't sure what the management levels were. When pressed further, he replied, "I'd like to feel no job is out of my reach, but I'm not really possessed of a lot of ambition. There are times when I just want to say, 'To hell with everything.' "

After [his] promotion to the second level, he looked more favorably upon middle management, but he still indicated he would not be dissatisfied to stay at the second level. [He] just seemed to take each position as it came; if he ever looked ahead, he didn't appear to look up.

Energy. To sustain a high achievement drive and get ahead, leaders must have a lot of energy. Working long, intense work weeks (and many weekends) for many years, requires an individual to have physical, mental, and emotional vitality.

Leaders are more likely than nonleaders to have a high level of energy and stamina and to be generally active, lively, and often restless. Leaders have been characterized as "electric, vigorous, active, full of life" as well as possessing the "physical vitality to maintain a steadily productive work pace."[7] Even at age 70, Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart discount stores, still attended Wal-Mart's Saturday morning meeting, a whoop-it-up 7:30 a.m. sales pep rally for 300 managers.

The need for energy is even greater today than in the past, because more companies are expecting all employees, including executives, to spend more time on the road visiting the organization's other locations, customers, and suppliers.

Tenacity. Leaders are better at overcoming obstacles than nonleaders. They have the "capacity to work with distant objects in view" and have a "degree of strength of will or perseverance."[8] Leaders must be tirelessly persistent in their activities and follow through with their programs. Most organizational change programs take several months to establish and can take many years before the benefits are seen. Leaders must have the drive to stick with these programs, and persistence is needed to ensure that changes are institutionalized.

An example of heroic perseverance in the face of obstacles, from American history, is the tale of John Paul Jones, a captain in the newly formed American Navy. On September 25, 1779, John Paul Jones, aboard the Bonhomme Richard, engaged in battle with the English ship, Serapis off the cost of England. After being bombarded with cannon fire by the Serapis, having two old cannons explode causing a fire, and being fired at by their supposed ally, the Alliance, Jones appeared to have lost the battle. When asked to surrender in the face of almost certain defeat, Jones made his immortal reply: "I have not yet begun to fight."

Determined to sink the Serapis, Jones spotted an open hatch on the Serapis' deck and ordered a young sailor to climb into the rigging and toss grenades into the hatch, knowing the English had stored their ammunitions there. After missing with the first two grenades, the third grenade disappeared into the hatchway and was followed by a thunderous explosion aboard the Serapis. Engulfed in flames, the English captain surrendered to Jones. Even though the entire battle had gone against him, John Paul Jones was determined not to give up, and it was this persistence that caused him to finally emerge victorious.

It is not just the direction of action that counts, but sticking to the direction chosen. Effective leaders must keep pushing themselves and others toward the goal. David Glass, CEO of Wal-Mart, says that Sam Walton "has an overriding something in him that causes him to improve every day. . . . As long as I have known him, he has never gotten to the point where he's comfortable with who he is or how we're doing." Walt Disney was described as expecting the best and not relenting until he got it. Ray Kroc, of McDonald's Corporation, was described as a "dynamo who drove the company relentlessly."[9] Kroc posted this inspirational message on his wall:

Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence.
Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with great talent.
Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.
Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts.
Persistence, determination alone are omnipotent.

Persistence, of course, must be used intelligently. Dogged pursuit of an inappropriate strategy can ruin an organization. It is important to persist in the right things. But what are the right things? In today's business climate, they may include the following: satisfying the customer, growth, cost control, innovation, fast response time, and quality. Or, in Tom Peters' terms, a constant striving to improve just about everything.

Initiative. Effective leaders are proactive. They make choices and take action that leads to change instead of just reacting to events or waiting for things to happen;

that is, they show a high level of initiative. The following two examples from consultant Richard Boyatzis of McBer and Company illustrate proactivity:[10]

I called the chief, and he said he couldn't commit the resources, so I called the budget and finance people, who gave me a negative response. But then I called a guy in another work group who said he was willing to make a trade for the parts I needed. I got the parts and my group was able to complete the repairs.

One of our competitors was making a short, half-inch component and probably making $30,000-$40,000 a year on it. I looked at our line: we have the same product and can probably make it better and cheaper. I told our marketing manager: "Let's go after that business." I made the decision that we would look at it as a marketplace rather than looking at it as individual customers wanting individual quantities. I said, here's a market that has 30,000 pieces of these things, and we don't give a damn where we get the orders. Let's just go out and get them. We decided we were going to charge a specific price and get the business. Right now we make $30,000-$40,000 on these things and our competitor makes zero.

Effective leaders must not only be full of drive and ambition, they must want to lead others.

Instead of sitting "idly by or [waiting] for fate to smile upon them," leaders need to "challenge the process."

Leaders are achievement-oriented, ambitious, energetic, tenacious, and proactive. These same qualities, however, may result in a manager who trys to accomplish everything alone, thereby failing to develop subordinate commitment and responsibility. Effective leaders must not only be full of drive and ambition, they must *want to lead others.*

Leadership Motivation

Studies show that leaders have a strong desire to lead. Leadership motivation involves the desire to influence and lead others and is often equated with the need for power. People with high leadership motivation think a lot about influencing other people, winning an argument, or being the greater authority. They prefer to be in a leadership rather than subordinate role. The willingness to assume responsibility, which seems to coincide with leadership motivation, is frequently found in leaders.

Sears psychologist Jon Bentz describes successful Sears executives as those who have a "powerful competitive drive for a position of . . . authority . . . [and] the need to be recognized as men of influence."[11] Astronauts John Glenn and Frank Borman built political and business careers out of their early feats as space explorers, while other astronauts did not. Clearly, all astronauts possessed the same opportunities, but is was their personal makeup that caused Glenn and Borman to pursue their ambitions and take on leadership roles.

Power is an "expandable pie," not a fixed sum; effective leaders give power to others as a means of increasing their own power.

Psychologist Warren Bennis and colleague Burt Nanus state that power is a leader's currency, or the primary means through whcih the leader gets things done in the organization. A leader must want to gain the power to exercise influence over others. Also, power is an "expandable pie," not a fixed sum; effective leaders give power to others as a means of increasing their own power. Effective leaders do not see power as something that is competed for but rather as something that can be created and distributed to followers without detracting from their own power.

Successful managers at AT&T completed sentence fragments in the following manner:[12]

"When I am in charge of others I find my greatest satisfactions."
"The job I am best fit for is one which requires leadership ability."
"I depend on others to carry out my plans and directions."

A manager who was not as successful completed the sentence fragment "Taking orders . . ." with the ending "is easy for it removes the danger of a bad decision."

Successful leaders must be willing to exercise power over subordinates, tell them what to do, and make appropriate use of positive and negative sanctions. Previous studies have shown inconsistent results regarding dominance as a leadership trait. According to Harvard psychologist David McClelland, this may be because there are two different types of dominance: a personalized power motive, or power lust, and a socialized power motive, or the desire to lead.[13]

Personalized Power Motive. Although a need for power is desirable, the leader's effectiveness depends on what is behind it. A leader with a personalized power motive seeks power as an end in itself. These individuals have little self-control, are often impulsive, and focus on collecting symbols of personal prestige. Acquiring power solely for the sake of dominating others may be based on profound self-doubt. The personalized power motive is concerned with domination of others and leads to dependent, submissive followers.

Socialized Power Motive. In contrast, a leader with a socialized power motive uses power as a means to achieve desired goals, or a vision. Its use is expressed as the ability to develop networks and coalitions, gain cooperation from others, resolve conflicts in a constructive manner, and use role modeling to influence others.

Individuals with a socialized power motive are more emotionally mature than those with a personalized power motive. They exercise power more for the benefit of the whole organization and are less likely to use it for manipulation. These leaders are also less defensive, more willing to take advice from experts, and have a longer-range view. They use their power to build up their organization and make it successful. The socialized power motive takes account of followers' needs and results in empowered, independent followers.

Honesty and Integrity
Honesty and integrity are virtues in all individuals, but have special significance for leaders. Without these qualities, leadership is undermined. Integrity is the correspondence between word and deed and honesty refers to being truthful or non-deceitful. The two form the foundation of a trusting relationship between leader and followers.

Successful leaders are open with their followers, but also discreet and do not violate confidences or carelessly divulge potentially harmful information.

In his comprehensive review of leadership, psychologist Bernard Bass found that student leaders were rated as more trustworthy and reliable in carrying out responsibilites than followers. Similarly, British organizational psychologists Charles Cox and Cary Cooper's "high flying" (successful) managers preferred to have an open style of management, where they truthfully informed workers about happenings in the company. Morgan McCall and Michael Lombardo of the Center for Creative Leadership found that managers who reached the top were more likely to follow the following formula: "I will do exactly what I say I will do when I say I will do it. If I change my mind, I will tell you well in advance so you will not be harmed by my actions."[14]

Successful leaders are open with their followers, but also discreet and do not violate confidences or carelessly divulge potentially harmful information. One subordinate in a study by Harvard's John Gabarro made the following remark about his new president: "He was so consistent in what he said and did, it was

easy to trust him." Another subordinate remarked about an unsuccessful leader, "How can I rely on him if I can't count on him consistently?"[15]

Professors James Kouzes, Barry Posner, and W.H. Schmidt asked 1500 managers "What values do you look for and admire in your superiors?" Integrity (being truthful and trustworthy, and having character and conviction) was the most frequently mentioned characteristic. Kouzes and Posner conclude:

Honesty is absolutely essential to leadership. After all, if we are willing to follow someone, whether it be into battle or into the boardroom, we first want to assure ourselves that the person is worthy of our trust. We want to know that he or she is being truthful, ethical, and principled. We want to be fully confident in the integrity of our leaders.

Effective leaders are credible, with excellent reputations, and high levels of integrity. The following description (from Gabarro's study) by one subordinate of his boss exemplifies the concept of integrity: "By integrity, I don't mean whether he'll rob a bank, or steal from the till. You don't work with people like that. It's whether you sense a person has some basic principles and is willing to stand by them."

Bennis and Nanus warn that today credibility is at a premium, especially since people are better informed, more cautious, and wary of authority and power. Leaders can gain trust by being predictable, consistent, and persistent and by making competent decisions. An honest leader may even be able to overcome lack of expertise, as a subordinate in Gabarro's study illustrates in the following description of his superior: "I don't like a lot of the things he does, but he's basically honest. He's a genuine article and you'll forgive a lot of things because of that. That goes a long way in how much I trust him."

Self-Confidence

There are many reasons why a leader needs self-confidence. Being a leader is a very difficult job. A great deal of information must be gathered and processed. A constant series of problems must be solved and decisions made. Followers have to be convinced to pursue specific courses of action. Setbacks have to be overcome. Competing interests have to be satisfied. Risks have to be taken in the face of uncertainty. A person riddled with self-doubt would never be able to take the necessary actions nor command the respect of others.

Self-confidence plays an important role in decision-making and in gaining others' trust. Obviously, if the leader is not sure of what decision to make, or expresses a high degree of doubt, then the followers are less likely to trust the leader and be committed to the vision.

Not only is the leader's self-confidence important, but so is others' perception of it. Often, leaders engage in impression management to bolster their image of competence; by projecting self-confidence they arouse followers' self-confidence. Self-confident leaders are also more likely to be assertive and decisive, which gains others' confidence in the decision. This is crucial for effective implementation of the decision. Even when the decision turns out to be a poor one, the self-confident leader admits the mistake and uses it as a learning opportunity, often building trust in the process. Manor Care, Inc., for example, lost over $21 million in 1988 when it was caught holding a large portion of Beverly Enterprise's stock. Chairman and CEO Stewart Bainum, Jr. stated, "I take full and complete responsibility for making the acquisition."[16] Considered to be the "best managed company in the [nursing home] industry," Manor Care's stock has rebounded, and it seems to be making a comeback. Less successful managers are more defensive about failure and try to cover up mistakes.

Emotional Stability. Self confidence helps effective leaders remain even-tempered. They do get excited, such as when delivering an emotionally-charged pep talk, but generally do not become angry or enraged. For the most part, as long as the employee did his/her homework leaders remain composed upon hearing that an employee made a costly mistake. For example, at PepsiCo, an employee who makes a mistake is "safe . . . as long as it's a calculated risk."

Emotional stability is especially important when resolving interpersonal conflicts and when representing the organization. A top executive who impulsively flies off the handle will not foster as much trust and teamwork as an executive who retains emotional control. Describing a superior, one employee in Gabarro's study stated, "he's impulsive and I'm never sure when he'll change signals on me."

Researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership found that leaders are more likely to "derail" if they lack emotional stability and composure. Leaders who derail are less able to handle pressure and more prone to moodiness, angry outbursts, and inconsistent behavior, which undermines their interpersonal relationships with subordinates, peers, and superiors. In contrast, they found the successful leaders to be calm, confident, and predictable during crisis.

Psychologically hardy, self-confident individuals consider stressful events interesting, as opportunities for development, and believe that they can influence the outcome. K. Labich in *Fortune* magazine argued that "By demonstrating grace under pressure, the best leaders inspire those around them to stay calm and act intelligently."[17]

Cognitive Ability
Leaders must gather, integrate, and interpret enormous amounts of information. These demands are greater than ever today because of rapid technological change. Thus, it is not surprising that leaders need to be intelligent enough to formulate suitable strategies, solve problems, and make correct decisions.

Leaders have often been characterized as being intelligent, but not necessarily brilliant and as being conceptually skilled. Kotter states that a "keen mind" (i.e., strong analytical ability, good judgement, and the capacity to think strategically and multidimensionally) is necessary for effective leadership, and that leadership effectiveness requires "above average intelligence," rather than genius.

An individual's intelligence and the perception of his or her intelligence are two highly related factors. Professors Lord, DeVader, and Alliger concluded that "intelligence is a key characteristic in predicting leadership perceptions."[18] Howard and Bray found that cognitive ability predicted managerial success twenty years later in their AT&T study. Effective managers have been shown to display greater ability to reason both inductively and deductively than ineffective managers.

Leaders have often been characterized as being intelligent, but not necessarily brilliant and as being conceptually skilled.

Intelligence may be a trait that followers look for in a leader. If someone is going to lead, followers want that person to be more capable in *some* respects than they are. Therefore, the follower's perception of cognitive ability in a leader is a source of authority in the leadership relationship.

Knowledge of the Business
Effective leaders have a high degree of knowledge about the company, industry, and technical matters. For example, Jack Welch, president of GE has a PhD in engineering; Geroge Hatsopolous of Thermo Electron Corporation, in the years preceding the OPEC boycott, had both the business knowledge of the impending need for energy-efficient appliances and the technical knowledge of

thermodynamics to create more efficient gas furnaces. Technical expertise enables the leader to understand the concerns of subordinates regarding technical issues. Harvard Professor John Kotter argues that expertise is more important than formal education.

Effective leaders gather extensive information about the company and the industry. Most of the successful general managers studies by Harvard's Kotter spent their careers in the same industry, while less successful managers lacked industry-specific experiences. Although cognitive ability is needed to gain a through understanding of the business, formal education is not a requirement. Only forty percent of the business leaders studied by Bennis and Nanus had business degrees. In-depth knowledge of the organization and industry allows effective leaders to make well-informed decisions and to understand the implications of those decisions.

Other Traits
Charisma, creativity/originality, and flexibility are three traits with less clear-cut evidence of their importance to leadership.[19] Effective leaders may have charisma, however, this trait may only be important for political leaders. Effective leaders also may be more creative than nonleaders, but there is no consistent research demonstrating this. Flexibility or adaptiveness may be important traits for a leader in today's turbulent environment. Leaders must be able to make decisions and solve problems quickly and initiate and foster change.

There may be other important traits needed for effective leadership, however, we believe that the first six that we discussed are the core traits.

The Rest of the Story
A complete theory of leadership involves more than specifiying leader traits. Traits only endow people with the potential for leadership. To actualize this potential, additional factors are necessary which are discussed in our forthcoming book *The Essence of Leadership* (written with additional authors).

Three categories of factors are discussed here: skills, vision, and implementing the vision. *Skills* are narrower in meaning than traits and involve specific capacities for action such as decision making, problem solving, and performance appraisal.

The core job of a leader, however, is to create a *vision*—a concept of what the organization should be. To quote Bennis and Nanus, "a vision articulates a view of a realistic, credible, attractive future for the organization, a condition that is better in some important ways than what now exists. A vision is a target that beckons."[20] Next the leader must *communicate* this vision to followers through inspirational speeches, written messages, appeals to shared values and above all through acting as a role model and personally acting in a way that is consistent with the vision. Third, the leader must develop or at least help to develop a general *strategy* for achieving the vision (i.e. a strategic vision).

Implementing the vision requires at least six activities:

1. *Structuring*. Today's effective organizations have minimal bureaucracy: small corporate staffs, few layers of management and large spans of control. The leader must insure that the organization's structure facilitates the flow of information (downward, upward, and diagonally). Information from customers regarding product quality and services is especially crucial.

2. *Selecting and Training*. Leaders must make sure that people are hired who have the traits needed to accept and implement the vision. Maintaining and upgrading skills is assured by constant training, as is commitment to the organization's vision.

3. *Motivating*. Leaders cannot achieve the vision alone; they must stimulate others to work for it too. They must generate enthusiasm, commitment, and compliance. Besides communicating the vision, effective leaders use at least six procedures to motivate followers.

Formal authority. The leader is the "boss" and must use his or her legitimate power constructively. The leader must start by asking directly for what he or she wants. *Thriving on Chaos* author Tom Peters said that if one wants something, then "Just ask for it."

Role Models. Leaders must behave the way they wish their followers would behave. For example, if they want subordinates to be customer-oriented, they should spend time themselves talking to customers. This has far more influence on employees than just telling them that customers are important.

Build subordinate self-confidence. If employees have been carefully selected and trained, such confidence will be justified. Jay Conger calls the process of strengthening subordinates' belief in their capabilities "empowerment."[21]

Effective leaders do not just reward achievement, they celebrate it.

Delegation of authority. Giving autonomy and responsibility to employees also creates empowerment. In their book *Superleadership*, Charles Manz and Henry Sims[22] argue that delegating authority actually enhances the power of leaders by helping their subordinates become capable of attaining organizational goals. Effective delegation, of course, pre-supposes that subordinates are capable of holding the responsibilities they are given (as a result of extensive training and experience).

Specific and challenging goals.[23] Ensuring that subordinates have specific and challenging goals lead to higher performance than ambiguous goals. Challenging goals are empowering, because they demonstrate the leader has confidence in the follower. Goals must be accompanied by regular feedback indicating progress in relation to the goals. Feedback, in turn, requires adequate performance measurement.

For goals to be effective employees must be committed to them. Inspiration, modeling, training, and delegation all facilitate commitment.

Rewards and punishments. Effective leaders are *not* tolerant of those who reject the vision or repeatedly fail to attain reasonable goals. Rewards (and punishments) send messages not only to the employee in question but also to others; followers often direct their own actions by looking at what happens to their peers. People may learn as much or more by observing models than from the consequences of their own actions.[24] Rewards may include pay raises, promotions and awards, as well as recognition and praise. Effective leaders do not just reward achievement, they celebrate it.

4. *Managing Information*. Leaders have a profound influence on how information is managed within the organization. Effective leaders are effective information gatherers because they are good listeners and encourage subordinates to express their opinions. They stay in contact with the rest of the organization by, in Tom Peters' terms,"wandering around." Leaders actively seek information from outside the organization. Good leaders also disseminate information widely so that followers will understand the reasons for decisions that are made and how their work fits into the organization's goals. At the same time, effective leaders try not to overwhelm subordinates with too much information.

5. *Team Building*. Achieving goals requires collaboration among many (in some cases, hundreds of thousands) individuals. Leaders need to help build effective

teams, starting with the top management team.[25] While an effective leader cannot do everything, he or she can insure that everything gets done by hiring, training, and motivating skilled people who work together effectively. And they, in turn, can build effective teams of their own.

6. *Promoting Change and Innovation*. Finally, effective leaders must promote change and innovation. The vision, since it pertains to a desired future state, is the starting point of change. This must be reinforced by constant restructuring, continual retraining to develop new skills, setting specific goals for innovation and improvement, rewarding innovation, encouraging a constant information flow in all directions and emphasizing responsiveness to customer demands.

* * *

It is clear that leadership is a very demanding activity and that leaders who have the requisite traits—drive, desire to lead, self-confidence, honesty (and integrity), cognitive ability, and industry knowledge—have a considerable advantage over those who lack these traits. Without drive, for example, it is unlikely that an individual would be able to gain the expertise required to lead an organization effectively, let alone implement and work toward long-term goals. Without the desire to lead, individuals are not motivated to persuade others to work toward a common goal; such an individual would avoid or be indifferent to leadership tasks. Self-confidence is needed to withstand setbacks, persevere through hard times, and lead others in new directions. Confidence gives effective leaders the ability to make hard decisions and to stand by them. A leader's honesty and integrity form the foundation on which the leader gains followers' trust and confidence; without honesty and integrity, the leader would not be able to attract and retain followers. At least a moderate degree of cognitive ability is needed to gain and understand technical issues as well as the nature of the industry. Cognitive ability permits leaders to accurately analyze situations and make effective decisions. Finally, knowledge of the business is needed to develop suitable strategic visions and business plans.

Management Implications

Individuals can be *selected* either from outside the organization or from within non- or lower-managerial ranks based on their possession of traits that are less changeable or trainable. Cognitive ability (not to be confused with knowledge) is probably the least trainable of the six traits. Drive is fairly constant over time although it can change; it is observable in employees assuming they are given enough autonomy and responsibility to show what they can do. The desire to lead is more difficult to judge in new hires who may have had little opportunity for leadership early in life. It can be observed at lower levels of management and by observing people in assessment center exercises.

Leaders do not have to be great men or women by being intellectual geniuses or omniscient prophets to succeed, but they do need to have the "right stuff" and this stuff is not equally present in all people.

Two other traits can be developed through experience and *training*. Knowledge of the industry and technical knowledge come from formal training, job experience, and a mentally active approach toward new opportunities for learning. Planned job rotation can facilitate such growth.Self-confidence is both general and task specific. People differ in their general confidence in mastering life's challenges but task-specific self-confidence comes from mastering the various skills that leadership requires as well as the technical and strategic challenges of the industry. Such confidence parallels the individual's growth in knowledge.

Honesty does not require skill building; it is a virtue one achieves or rejects by choice. Organizations should look with extreme skepticism at any employee who behaves dishonestly or lacks integrity, and should certainly not reward dishonesty in any form, especially not with a promotion. The key role models for honest behavior are those at the top. On this issue, organizations get what they model, not what they preach.

Conclusions

Regardless of whether leaders are born or made or some combination of both, it is unequivocally clear that *leaders are not like other people*. Leaders do not have to be great men or women by being intellectual geniuses or omniscient prophets to succeed, but they do need to have the "right stuff" and this stuff is not equally present in all people. Leadership is a demanding, unrelenting job with enormous pressures and grave responsibilities. It would be a profound disservice to leaders to suggest that they are ordinary people who happened to be in the right place at the right time. Maybe the place matters, but it takes a special kind of person to master the challenges of opportunity. Let us not only give credit, but also use the knowledge we have to select and train our future leaders effectively. We believe that in the realm of leadership (and in every other realm), the individual *does* matter.

Endnotes

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[2] R.M. Stogdill, "Personal Factors Associated with Leadership: A Survey of the Literature," *Journal of Psychology*, 1948, *25*, 64.

[3] See the following sources for evidence and further information concerning each trait: 1) drive: B.M. Bass's *Handboook of Leadership* (New York: The Free Press, 1990); K.G. Smith and J.K. Harrison, "In Search of Excellent Leaders" (in W.D.Guth's *The Handbook of Strategy*, New York: Warren, Gorham, & Lamont, 1986). 2) desire to lead: V.J. Bentz, "The Sears Experience in the Investigation, Description, and Prediction of Executive Behavior," (In F.R. Wickert and D.E. McFarland's *Measuring Executive Effectiveness*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967); J.B. Miner, "Twenty Years of Research on Role-Motivation Theory of Managerial Effectiveness," *Personnel Psychology*, 1978, *31*, 739–760. 3) honesty/integrity: Bass, op cit.; W.G. Bennis and B. Nanus, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); J.M. Kouzes and B.Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Get Things Done in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass); T. Peters, *Thriving on Chaos* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); A. Rand, *For the New Intellectual* (New York: Signet, 1961). 4) self-confidence: Bass, op cit. and A. Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: business: Bennis and Nanus, op. cit.; J.P. Prentice-Hall). Psychological hardiness is discussed by S.R. Maddi and S.C. Kobasa, *The Hardy Executive: Health Under Stress* (Chicago: Dorsey Professional Books, 1984); M.W. McCall Jr. and M.M. Lombardo, *Off the Track: Why and How Successful Executives get Derailed* (Technical Report No. 21, Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, 1983). 5) cognitive ability: R.G. Lord, C.L. DeVader, and G.M. Alliger, "A Meta-analysis of the Relation Between Personality Traits and Leadership Perceptions: An Application of Validity Generalization Procedures," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 1986; *61*, 402–410; A. Howard and D.W. Bray, *Managerial Lives in Transition: Advancing Age and Changing Times* (New York: Guilford Press, 1988). 6) knowledge of the business: Bennis and Nanus, op. cit.; J.P.Kotter, *The General Managers* (New York: MacMillan); Smith and Harrison, op. cit.

[4] From J.J. Gabarro, *The Dynamics of Taking Charge* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1987).

[5] All PepsiCo references are from B. Dumaine, "Those highflying managers at PepsiCo," *Fortune*, April 10, 1989, 78-86. The Watson quote is from Smith and Harrison, op. cit., as are the Disney and Woolman quotes in the following paragraph.

[6] The four quotes are from Howard and Bray, op. cit.

[7] From Kouzes and Posner, op. cit., pp. 122 and V.J. Bentz, op cit. The Sam Walton quote is from J. Huey, "Wal-Mart: Will it take over the world?," *Fortune*, January 30, 1989, 52-59.

[8] From Bass, op. cit.

[9] The Walton quote is from Huey, op. cit., and the Kroc quote is from Smith and Harrison, op. cit. The quote on Kroc's wall is taken from Bennis and Nanus, op. cit.

[10] From Boyatzis, op. cit. Also, Kouzes and Posner,op. cit. stress the importance of leader initiative.

[11] From Bentz, op. cit.

[12] From Howard and Bray, op. cit.

[13] The distinction between a personalized and a socialized power motive is made by D.C. McClelland, "N-achievement and entrepreneurship: A longitudinal study,"

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1965, *1*, 389-392. These two power motives are discussed further by Kouzes and Posner, op. cit. [14] From McCall and Lombardo, op cit.

[15] From Gabarro, op. cit.

[16] K.F. Girard examines Manor Care in "To the Manor Born," *Warfield's*, March, 1989, 68-75.

[17] From K. Labich, "The Seven Keys to Business Leadership," *Fortune*, October 24, 1988, 58-66.

[18] From Lord, DeVader, and Alliger, op cit.

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[20] From Bennis and Nanus, op. cit.

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[22] C. Manz and H.P. Sims, *Superleadership: Leading Others to Lead Themselves* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1989).

[23] See E.A. Locke and G.P. Latham, *A Theory of Goal Setting & Task Performance* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990).

[24] See Bandura, op. cit.

[25] See D.C. Hambrick, "The top management team: Keys to strategic success," *California Management Review*, 1987, *30*, 1-20.

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