

## Leadership Development: The Journey from Ideal Self to Legacy

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### Introduction

The focus of models of leadership development has been on training leaders to demonstrate the emotional, social, and cognitive intellectual competencies predictive of effective leadership. “Much of the training in organizations...is designed to produce leaders or at least people who can act the way effective leaders act” (Boyatzis, 2008, p. 301). While these approaches have advanced our knowledge, and contributed to the design of numerous leadership development programs, sustainable growth and change in leadership skills has not always occurred. Many potential leaders recoiled from the risk inherent in change by re-asserting control in order to satisfy the demands of those they were accountable to (Boyatzis, 2008). Research studying the effect of such models of leadership development has shown the impact training to be relatively short lived (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, Duncan & Weick, 1970; Boyatzis, Stubbs, & Taylor, 2002; Boyatzis & Saactioglu, 2008). Leadership skills acquired in training are soon forgotten as the desired end state is compliance or approval rather than change (Boyatzis, 2008). In fact, many times “a person leaves the program enthusiastic and committed to improving, but back in the office, dozens of e-mails, letters, and calls await him.... and all of the new learning slips away as old, knee-jerk responses take over” (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p. 98,). These regressive “knee jerk” reactions are often reinforced by satisfying the demands for compliance and risk reduction (e.g., keeping your job) (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Heightened focus on growth along with “greater pressures for efficiency and discipline spawn greater formalization of organizational procedure and suffocating bureaucratic rigidity” (Massey & Hart, 2007, p.1).

Consequently, it is not surprising to find that leadership training programs rarely produce sustainable behavior change. Costs associated with these leadership development efforts include not only time and travel expense, but frustration, limited creativity, poor morale, and sustaining ineffective leadership from people in key positions. To offset these often unintended consequences of training, new models have recognized that the desire or intention to change is rarely attended to. Yet the desire to be a better leader remains a key component to producing sustainable change in leadership behavior (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006).

In the book, *Primal Leadership*, the authors attribute many of the disappointing results of conventional leadership training programs to the fact that “many development programs do not focus on the whole person, or on the discoveries that lead to sustainable change, such as finding one’s own dream and tying development to it” (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, p. 232). They advocate that sustained change represents a metamorphosis in actions, habits or competencies associated with effective leadership that is driven by intentional effort focusing on emotional intelligence, not solely technical competence or skill. Consequently, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) and Boyatzis (2008) propose a five step intentional change model that focuses on integrating the aspirations of potential leaders in developing leadership competency. Such an approach activates a range of positive emotions that motivate people to make and sustain personal changes as a foundation for effective leadership. Desired change is the basis for leadership development (Boyatzis, 2008). The Intentional Change Theory (ICT) describes new ways of developing leaders who demonstrate real and sustainable change through the application of principles of emotional intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Boyatzis, 2008), a set of self- and relationship-management skills that have been shown to enhance motivation and sustain productivity.

The ICT model proposes that individuals only develop the characteristics of effective leaders if they want to be leaders, not to satisfy others' desires, not if they are pushed into leadership, or not solely to advance their careers. The format for leadership development that is most effective begins with self-directed learning; intentionally developing or strengthening an aspect of who you are or who you want to be or both. This requires gaining an image of your ideal self (who you want to be as a leader) as well as an accurate picture of your real self (who you are as a leader; how others describe you as their leader). There are five steps involved in this kind of recursive or reflective learning, a learning that follows a sequence with each step requiring a different level of time and effort. Each of the steps is a tool for making the changes needed to become an emotionally intelligent leader reflecting a lifelong process of growth, reflection, and adaptation.

Step 1: **Identify the Ideal Self.** The discovery or identification of the ideal vision of your- "self" or seeing your- "self" as the person you want to be is the motivator that fosters the development of leadership ability. The vision of ideal self is a powerful representation and recognition of the values and commitments that drive or guide your behaviors. It represents a powerful image that brings forth the passion, courage, and hope necessary to support change. It is the fuel that inspires the hard work of self-development and the courage to engage in the process of change. This is also the goal of leadership development; the destination traveled towards and the legacy of how one will and wants to be known as a leader. Conventional wisdom informs us that unless individuals are able to articulate their destinations, it is impossible to reach (e.g., unless you know where you want to go, it is impossible to get there). All athletes and performers spend significant time visualizing their desired outcomes prior to and in preparation for their actual performance.

**Step 2: Identify the Real Self.** The articulation and discovery of who you currently are as a leader is critically important in mapping out the foundation you are pushing off of. Research from behavioral economics informs us of the inaccuracies of our evaluations of our self and others (Chabris & Simmons, 2010 ). We tend to overestimate our abilities when evaluating our own performance attributing success to personal characteristics we possess and failures to external persons or event. Conversely we often attribute others' success to external factors and criticize their failures to achieve as reflections of their personal abilities or characteristics. Such an illusion of accurate self-perception makes it extremely difficult to see what is in the mirror. Additionally, it is often difficult to get accurate feedback from others as even constructive feedback can have significant negative repercussions to the individual offering it (e.g., the emperor has new clothes). Some of the observations you make of yourself may be consistent with your ideal self but unless how-you-think-you-act is compared with how others actually view your actions, it is impossible to accurately appraise the gaps that exist between how you want to be and how you are. Realizing the discrepancies between your ideal and real self establishes the basis for changing your leadership style and creating a development plan.

**Step 3: Articulate the learning agenda.** Learning agendas that lay out very concrete practical steps to achieving goals yield the most powerful improvement. When people know what steps to take they can actively follow them, evaluate how well they have done so, utilize the feedback from self and other reflection, and achieve their outcomes. The goals you work towards in part depend upon the realities of your life and the demands on your time. Working on a developmental goal often requires that it be integrated into an already crowded schedule. The question becomes how will individuals manage themselves and what they say no to in order to create the time needed to work on the goals of their learning agenda. The key to successful implementation of the learning agenda is to design a plan so that the concrete steps taken are

integral to what is already being done. It is also important to identify individually preferred ways of learning rather than trying to conform to an externally imposed style. Research shows that people learn best when they use learning modes that suit them; either through concrete experience (allowing them to see and feel what it is like to change), reflection on change or thinking about their own and others' experiences, building a model of or creating a theory that makes sense of what they observe, or experimenting with an approach (Boyatzis, 2008).

Engaging in the first two steps of self-directed learning makes it possible to develop a realistic agenda that can facilitate the achievement of leadership goals. This involves comparing the ideal vision of your-self as a leader with the reality of how you lead, using that comparison to identify not only what is done well but also the behavioral competencies that require development. Those skills and abilities in need of development are the gaps between your ideal and real self as a leader. The learning agenda targets those specific leadership abilities in a plan that articulates a practical course to strengthen them.

**Step 4: Experiment With and Rehearse New Behaviors.** Much of what is known about leadership has been learned incidentally through practices that have implemented through trial and error efforts of putting into practice leadership-behaviors we have seen others demonstrate. All too often how or where someone has learned what to do as a leader cannot be articulated; it is often just done simply by emulating what key others have done. If your boss is a pacesetter (e.g., setting many goals to be accomplished simultaneously), it is likely that a similar style will be adopted by you to win your boss's favor. This may particularly be the case when the uncertainty and ambiguity inherent in assuming a new leadership position is faced. In psychological circles, this may be known as a process of identification; children are observed to emulate the behavior (both good and bad) of their parents that impacts them most strongly. Yet despite this very basic process fostering the development of specific behaviors, it is still possible

to improve what you do. Bad habits must be brought into awareness, a better way must be consciously practiced, and new behavior must be rehearsed at every opportunity until it becomes automatic and is mastered. Even Tiger Woods spends significant time rehearsing new golf swings to improve his play despite his history of success.

**Step 5: Building Resonant Relationships.** Leadership does not occur in a vacuum. Other people facilitate the process of articulating the ideal and real self, the gaps between them, and developing learning agendas. Most importantly, they give feedback on what is working or not working in experimentation and practice. They are a necessary and critical part of developing leadership behaviors. Others help build awareness of what is needs to be done, affirm the progress that is made, help ensure that outcomes are perceived more accurately, and support the modifications needed that produce better outcomes. Without the support of others, change is not sustained and leadership skills atrophy. The support of others also creates the climate that is crucial for authentic learning to occur. Leaders often feel scrutinized and consequently, they are less likely to take the risks associated with new behavior. Being viewed under the microscope with a critical eye causes harsh and frequent self-evaluation, curtails exploration of new methods, and decreases risk taking. Thus, it is incumbent upon leaders to cultivate relationships with those they are leading built on candor, trust and support. This enables accurate feedback and also support for initiating changes in leadership style. It is important to remember that even Michael Jordan had a coach as well as fans to encourage him and inspire greater performance.

## Conclusions

Recent approaches to leadership have proposed that sustainable change results from a focus on intentional change rather than simply developing competencies. A five step process

demonstrated to produce positive change in leadership behavior has been articulated which bases development efforts on the creation of a learning agenda or plan that highlights behaviors promoting more effective leadership. The foundation for development is the desire to change and the intention to be a better leader. The five steps include: (1) an articulation of the ideal self-as-leader, (2) an accurate appraisal of the real self, (3) creation of a learning agenda based on the gaps in skills evident between ideal and real self, (4) systematic practice or rehearsal of new skills, and (5) the creation of relationships that provide support and candid feedback.

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