

Are you living up to your leadership potential? - an assessment tool

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Leadership Traits That Need to be In Place

As managers climb up the management tree, they need to ask themselves how far can my leadership go? Could I become a COO or even a CEO? To help answer this question, you need to see how much leadership is in your DNA and how much you are prepared to commit to rectifying shortfalls.

My interest in leadership stemmed from a chance encounter with the book "Shackleton Way" by Margot Morell and Stephanie Capparelli. I created a model that described Shackleton's successful leadership. I then studied other leaders of the past and noted that the model predicted their success or failure.

Subsequently, this model was amended as a result of a leadership think tank. It emerged that it is imperative to separate those leadership behaviour traits that need to be in your DNA from those skills that can be learnt. In the think tank we came up with eight behaviour traits that need to be in your DNA and fifteen skills that can be learnt.

The Eight Behaviour Traits

I believe that many leaders fail when managing large enterprises because some of the eight behaviour traits that need to be in their DNA are absent. They may have been successful in managing smaller teams because their flaws were not fully exposed. Some very famous leaders, such as Sir Winston Churchill, were flawed because some of these traits were absent or compromised. In Winston Churchill's case, he was flawedⁱⁱ in 'love thy neighbour as thyself' and in "self-awareness and self-regulation", whilst the other six traits were clearly in his DNA.

I believe some of these eight behaviour traits are hard-wired in the individual's DNA, and some are trainable, as shown in the table below.

Trait type	Traits	Nature of trait
People focused traits	Integrity and honesty	Hard wired
	"Love thy neighbour as thyself"	Hard wired
	Abundance of positive energy	Hard wired
	Self-awareness and self-regulation	Behavioural change programme can radically improve performance
Courage traits	Decision-making and risk-taking	Exposure to best practice can improve performance
	Ability to excel in a crisis	Hard wired
Handling change traits	Seeing future opportunities	Exposure to best practice can improve performance
	Learning agility	

To excel as a leader of a large team or organisation you need these eight traits in place. In Jack Welch's terminology, these traits are "tickets to the game" a given, a must-have. Leaders need to make sure they do not compromise these traits, for their leadership will suffer.

Some positive behaviour change can occur in these traits if the leader is aware of the damage they are creating and is committed to changing. A change in behaviour is complex and incurs your attention every week until the "penny drops", and it becomes an automatic response. I can relate from first-hand experience that anger management experts changed my relationship with anger in a twelve-week programme. I developed the mechanism to choose whether I wanted to get angry or not.

This view is consistent with the early days of the theories of evolution. It was argued by the evolutionist Jean-Baptiste de Lamarck in 1809 that skills, knowledge and traits are passed down generation by generation through the DNA that we share (nature). We are then influenced, in our formative years, by our family, peers and teachers (nurture) arriving at a place where our collection of traits determines our potential to be leadership material.

To the manager, daunted by a shortfall of possessing these traits, I say there is some good news. Stick to leading small teams.

Trait #1: Integrity and honesty

Integrity and honesty are not traits you can grow easily or quickly. Many famous corporate collapses have unearthed a major shortfall in **Integrity and Honesty**. Mother Teresa is the epitome of integrity and honesty. She lived a very simple life mirroring the hardships of many people experiencing poverty that she lived to help.

The integrity we have, I believe, is a result of the ethics that were present in the household we grew up in and in our peer group during the informative years of our development. To an extent, there is also a linkage back to the integrity our parents inherited from their ancestors.

In addition, Daniel Goleman has linked self-regulation to integrity. He points out that many of the bad things that happen in organisations are a function of impulsive behaviour. Employees with poor self-regulation should not be placed in positions of authority. At best, they will be nightmares to work for and, at worst, they are more likely to commit fraud, should an opportunity present itself.

Jack Welch was one of the first CEOs to talk about "**candour**", meaning being honest and upfront in your conversations. Jack Welch pointed out that candour has many benefits as it allows more people to participate in the conversation; it generates speed, cuts costs, encourages underperformers to reflect on their achievements and moves them forward to greener pastures where they are able to blossom.

Trait #2: "Love thy neighbour as thyself"

I was asked the other day to explain this trait. I mean that as a leader, you put your team's welfare before your own. Staff that work for you have careers that they would not have had if they had worked for someone else. You change the lives of people you meet for the better. You see the growth in the people whom

you touch as the very reason why you are here on this planet. It is the centre of the "Servant Leadership Model".

This trait requires us to have some greater driving force than simply looking after our self. Many great leaders exhibit some spiritual element that has assisted them on their journey. Jan Gunnarsson says that hostmanship is the way we make people feel welcome. It is interesting to note that one's ability to be a *host* is influenced by one's past, both in experiences at home and with one's role models. It is no wonder so many of us have issues here.

Daniel Goleman, in his ground breaking HBR paper of 1998, "What makes a Leader?" points out that empathy is one of the vital component parts of emotional intelligence. Emotional Intelligence (EI) being defined as "the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, and those of the people around you." People with a high degree of emotional intelligence know what they're feeling, what their emotions mean, and how these emotions can affect other people. Whilst one's emotional intelligence can be enhanced there must be a firm foundation stone in place.

One of the most interesting findings in the work of Collins and Porras was that most of the "Built to Last" organisations researched had CEOs who got on with their job without too much fanfare. In other words, being charismatic may be useful but it is not a requirement for a good leader.

Trait #3: Abundance of positive energy

There are four components to this behavioural trait.

An Unwavering Resolve

In the "Good to Great" study Jim Collins and his team developed a theory that eminent leaders had a combination of humility (discussed already) and an unwavering resolve. Collins and his team found that inspirational leaders (level 5)

"have ambition not for themselves but for their companies, they routinely select superb successors. Level Five leaders want to see their organisations become even more successful in the next generation"

"Energize" Others

Jack Welchⁱⁱⁱ puts this trait in his top-five must-haves for leaders: the ability to release the team members' positive energy "to take any hill." Shackleton had the ability to energise others. The team was prepared to take on any task he wanted as they knew he would be working beside them. He energised them to; spend weeks in the futile task of trying to break the ship free from the ice, haul the lifeboats over the ice-floe, and make the seemingly impossible traverse of South Georgia's snow peaked mountain range.

An Abundance of Passion

In his book "Cracking Good Leaders" Bruce Holland^{iv} points out that in all of us is a passion for something. The key for leaders is to ensure that you are in a

Score Yourself Against Winning Leaders

This is my checklist to help you monitor your progress with adopting “winning leadership” traits.

Checklist on the leadership behavioural traits	Do you have this covered?
Trait #1 Integrity and Honesty	
Would those around you hold your integrity as an example for others to follow?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you prepared to forsake personal gain for the greater good of your organisation and those people it serves?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you known for your openness, honesty and frankness (candour)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Has integrity and honesty been a hallmark of your family’s values?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you honest with underperforming employees?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Trait #2 Caring for the welfare of others	
Are you known for your acts of kindness to staff?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you often demonstrate a “genuine interest in someone else’s well-being”?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you a good host, making people feel welcome whether they be guests of staff seeking your advice?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would your staff call you a caring person?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you well known for your ability to listen first?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you respect your colleagues’ and your team members’ time avoiding setting unnecessary deadlines?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would your suppliers say you are a pleasure to deal with?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would staff say that you demonstrate humility?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have a spiritual side to you that helps guide your direction?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you seek a win-win solution with third parties rather than resort to litigation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you treat the visitor in front of you as your most important task and are able to welcome the interruption?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would others consider you as a good host to your guests?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

When dealing with individuals do you treat them as equals?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would others consider you to be humble?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you invest time to assist poor performers to improve?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Trait #3 Abundance of Positive Energy	
When in difficulties do you believe "there's always another move, you just have to find it."	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Can you energise the teams you work with?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would you be described by your staff as 'young at heart'?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would your peers say you are a purveyor of hope and optimism?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have the knack of making work fun?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you big on celebrating success?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you in a job that you are passionate about?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Trait #4 Self-Awareness and Self-Regulation	
Do you know where you stand on the enneagram ? (See www.enneagraminstitute.com)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you understand your thinking preference ? (see Hermann thinking preferences www.hbdi.com)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you know your Myers-Briggs Profile?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you attended a Neuro-Linguistic Programming course?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you attended a Transactional Analysis course?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you attended an Intensive Life Skills course?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you reprimand in a positive way, avoiding emotional damage?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you embrace irregular people as their irregular ideas can be very valuable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you engage the dissidents and avoid needless power struggles?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
When there are major failings can you suppress the urge to have an outburst of anger?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Trait #5 Decision Making and Risk Taking	
Are you able to make the hard, and sometimes unpopular, decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you happy to rely on your gut instinct when information is not available?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would your peers say you are decisive?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you rigorous in the analysis of new business proposals before you decide?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Are you good at separating “above the waterline” risks from those beneath?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you prepared to make well considered bold decisions?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you willing to make decisions that may turn out to be mistakes (learning experiences)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you run through risk scenarios with your team so that if the event occurs everybody will know what to do?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Trait #6 Ability to Excel in a Crisis	
Would others say you excel in times of crisis?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would others say you handle stress well?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you anticipate the likely crisis and have some general and alternative plans discussed with your team?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have enough knowledgeable people in the senior management team who have experienced many crises before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you flexible in your thinking in a crisis?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you known for your sense of humour during difficult times?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Trait #7 Seeing Future Opportunities	
Do you set time aside on a regular basis to look ahead for new business opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you set aside time, every day, to read about future opportunities?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Would your peers say you embrace new technologies and methods?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you set some big hairy audacious goals (BHAGs) which have energised the staff in the organisation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you spend time with your team looking at the business from outside-in? (some successful organisations have the senior management team work together in an operational unit once a year)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you known for your sound perception of what the future may hold for your organisation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you bold in vision and careful in planning?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you discuss tactics with your direct reports so that they could make the right decisions when you are not around?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you careful that the team does not develop excessive pride or self-confidence?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Trait #8 Learning Agility	
Do you constantly seek 'new learnings' from the great leaders of the past to apply to your understanding?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you read the recommended books in this paper?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you listened to webcasts from Drucker, Jack Welch, Peters & Waterman and Jim Collins?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you an avid reader of management /leadership/ business literature?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you planning your career to gather the experiences that you will need for a major leadership position?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you undertaken formal leadership training?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you approach problems with an open mind (approaching problems with your ignorance as Drucker would say)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

Suggested score rating on leadership traits

More than 75% score on all eight traits	Get a few of your direct reports to also score you. If the scores are the same congratulations you are a serving leader, "A Viking with a Mother's Heart".
More than 75% score on most traits	Beware of your deficiencies, and ensure you seek active mentor support in these areas to minimise the downside. You still can be a successful leader of large enterprises.
50-75% score across the eight traits	Leadership roles should be restricted to small teams.
Less 50% across the eight traits	Look to specialise where leadership is not a key attribute for success.

Score Your People Skills

Checklist on the people skills to master	Do you have this covered?
1 Communicating and Influencing	
Do you invest adequate time in PR providing press releases, expert comment, and interviews?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you avoid public disputes?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you only reprimand staff in private and in a careful manner?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If there is to be a major change, would you mention it in passing individually so when publicly announced the change was of no surprise?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you have more one-to-one sessions than meetings?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you known for your regular walkabouts, so you keep in touch with staff, colleagues and stakeholders?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you known for your "personal" handwritten memos to staff?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you attended a presentation course to learn how to give a good presentation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Have you attended a train-the-trainer course so you can deliver "killer" presentations like Steve Jobs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you increasing your profile through public speaking opportunities and writing articles in professional journals?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you known for your "go and ask" attitude?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2 Recruiting and Promoting the Right People	
Have you got a core team of experienced staff around you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you treat recruitment decisions as one of the most important ones you make? (Peter Drucker called them life and death decisions)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are you happy to employ staff who are more talented than you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
When interviewing a candidate, are you rigorous in your questioning so you know what the candidate is like, their values, their passions, their reason for moving jobs etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you seek people who have the 4Es and 1P: e nergy, ability to e nergise others, ability to e xecute, have ' e dge' and a p assion for the job? (Jack Welch's recommendation)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Do you consider promotions an important task, worthy of quality thinking time?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No