

# Rapid Skill-Builder® Leadership



**Although many leadership models and theories exist, most agree that effective leaders share a number of characteristics.**

Successful leaders:

- Hold a strong set of values and have the ability to understand people's feelings
- Can see possibilities and potential that are often invisible to others
- Can describe a vision of the future and illuminate paths to get there
- Encourage creativity, innovation and lateral thinking
- Enable individuals, groups or teams to manage personal change and reach for higher goals
- Guide people's relationships with one another
- Continually "walks the talk", while listening and learning along the way
- Will often have extraordinary strength and persistence.

The good news is that these abilities can be developed. This Skill Builder focuses on understanding these characteristics and what you can do to build your skills in order to become a more effective leader.

# ▼ Learn

---

## Understanding Yourself

On the journey to becoming a more effective leader, understanding your strengths and development needs is a good place to start.

However, self-evaluation is no easy task. Most people are conditioned to believe that there is a point where personal learning and development stops. That point is usually the day they finish school or university!

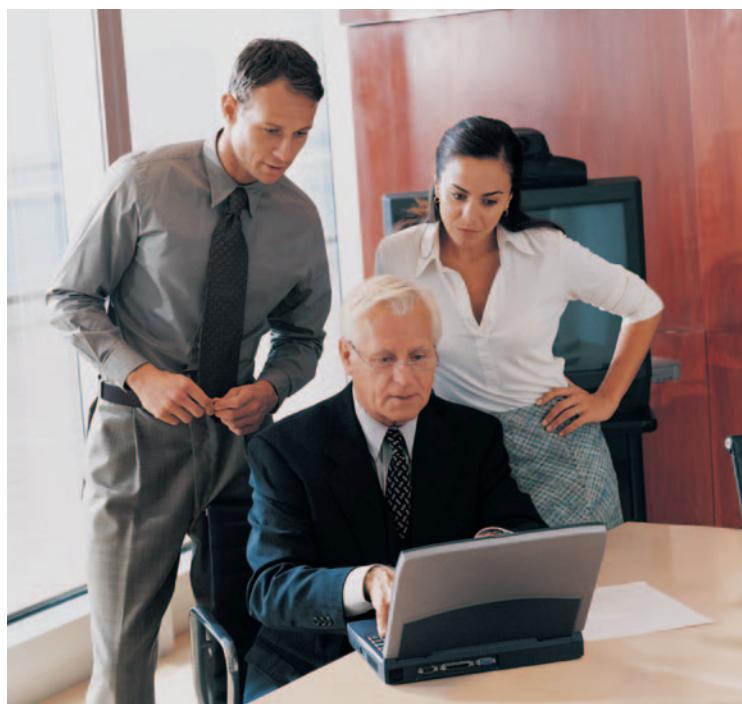
This limited view can stop you from conducting an honest appraisal of your current abilities and style. But to be an effective leader, you need to overcome your inner fears and take a hard look at yourself. Although such deep defensive conditioning to cease learning and even stop listening to the views of others can be difficult to throw off, it is important that you choose to view your own personal learning and development journey as an endless one.

There are a number of ways you can analyse your current position. You could choose to complete a leadership assessment that measures your competencies in a range of key areas, such as Team Publications' Leadership Effectiveness Profile. You might ask suitable people to offer their honest feedback regarding your leadership ability and style: this could be your own leaders, peer group, customers, suppliers or team members. Another option is to spend some time thinking about what you believe you do well as a leader, and where you find it difficult. You may choose to do all of these.

Whatever method you use, conducting a rigorous assessment is important. It will help you to determine the gap between your current skills and abilities, and your desired goal of being an effective leader. You can then use this information to develop a continuous learning plan, which could include such things as:

- **Participating in formal training** – either short courses that target a specific skill set, or more long-term programs that will build your abilities in a range of key areas
- **Determining that you will read more often and more widely** – this could be books on leadership, industry or business magazines, or any other relevant information
- **Volunteering to lead a short-term project team**
- **Learning some creative thinking techniques** and practice using them to solve current problems in your organisation or team.

There are many different actions you can take to develop your skills. The key is to be open enough to take an honest look at where you are now, decide on where you want to be in one year, then determine the steps you will take to get you there and most importantly – act on them!



## Understanding Others

Learning about what drives and motivates people, as well as their needs and concerns, is a powerful method for becoming a better leader. Effective leaders are good at relating with people. They learn how to empathise with people's emotions and adjust their approach accordingly.

Your personal communication style is heavily influenced by how you prefer to interact with other people, and one of the first steps in understanding others is realising that not all people are like you! Within any group there will be a variety of different personality types.

Some people are internally focused (introverted) preferring to work through problems before speaking about them. These individuals are happy to work on their own and tend to avoid group activities. When they're in a meeting, they often hold back unless they have something really important to say, which they will have worked out in advance. This can create some difficulty in face-to-face communication because, if the conversation gets away from the main topic, introverted people may not be comfortable.

More outgoing (extroverted) people are outwardly focused. When they have a problem or issue that they're trying to deal with, they will usually share it with others right away. They are comfortable in meetings and are usually considered by introverts to be people who talk too much. They tend to work things out by talking them through as the ideas occur to them. In face-to-face communication, extroverts may appear to "shoot first and ask questions later".

Understanding, even at this simple level, that others may have quite different needs to your own can help you to tailor your approach, or your communication, in a way that will be more effective.

## Understanding Possibilities

Spend time developing your creative thinking techniques as this can help you to both generate and identify possibilities for yourself, your team and your organisation.

Don't be limited by what has been done before, or even by what others in your industry are doing. Some of the best and most successful ideas have been completely out of the box, compared with traditional practices.

There are many techniques you can use to challenge and develop your thinking and these include:

- Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats – which teaches you to look at an issue from many different angles
- Brainstorming
- 5W/1H – asking Who, What, When, Why, Where and How questions.

Make a conscious choice to explore these and other techniques and develop your ability to use them.



# ▼ Empower

---

It is often said that good leaders work hard to establish an environment in which their followers can respond well. Mother Teresa is a powerful example of this model of *enabling* leadership.

Many athletic teams have captains who are not the stars of their team or basking in the limelight. However, they are able to mould their team, encourage others to greater heights and make on-field decisions that make the best use of people and their skills. This booklet concentrates fundamentally on this leadership model and suggests that, to lead effectively, a deep understanding of the specific individuals and the groups to be led is critical to ultimate success.

As the chart below indicates, leadership consists of an inspirational, motivational or “visionary” side that focuses on aligning people with long-term goals and targets in order to help bind the team and win commitment. Secondly, leadership has what is termed in this example a “management” side. This side relies on organising people through decision-making processes and more formal systems.

Your team needs to see you fulfilling both these aspects of the leader’s role. At different times and in different circumstances, one side will be more dominant than the other. However, you will need both aspects in order to be a successful leader.

## The Essence of Leadership

| Strong Visionary but Weak Manager  | THE LEADERSHIP QUADRANT<br>Strong Visionary and Strong Manager   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visions detached from reality</li> <li>• Alignment without organisation</li> <li>• Strategies lack foundational support of formal planning</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inspirational visions and strategies</li> <li>• Widespread organisational alignment</li> <li>• Integrated planning</li> <li>• Full employee empowerment and commitment</li> </ul> |
| Weak Visionary and Weak Manager  | Strong Manager but Weak Visionary  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No vision or strategies</li> <li>• Out-of-control processes</li> <li>• Employee disaffection and frustration</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processes grow more bureaucratic</li> <li>• Over-specialisation</li> <li>• More policies and procedures evolve</li> <li>• Controls stifle innovation</li> </ul>                   |

## The Power of Enabling

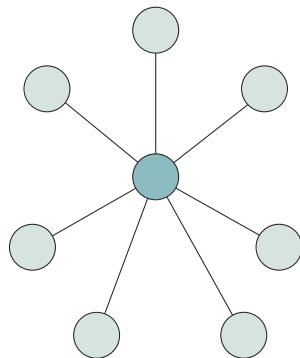
In much of the old thinking on the subject of leadership, motivation was more about “**command and control**” than about enabling or empowerment, and was focused on “beating people with a stick” rather than “enticing them with a carrot”. The leader was portrayed as the strong person, courageously out in front and having considerably more expertise than those they were leading.

This strong leadership model has been deeply embedded in the psyche and, in practice, has been hard to throw off. Truman, Churchill, Hitler, Mao Tse Tung and Franco are all excellent political examples of such leadership. In all of these cases, their style is strong, individualistic and quite black and white. In addition, they liked to portray all of their leadership actions as decisive and very much their own.

Although such strong leadership styles are still admired in many quarters, current thinking has shifted considerably to a “people-focused” and far less individualistic model. In this style, the team to be led is invited to pursue goals (rather than told or ordered), and its input on how goals are to be achieved is highly valued. In these circumstances, your role as a leader shifts dramatically from being in front to being behind or in support of the team – a view proposed by Greenleaf and Depree in their writings about “servant” leadership.

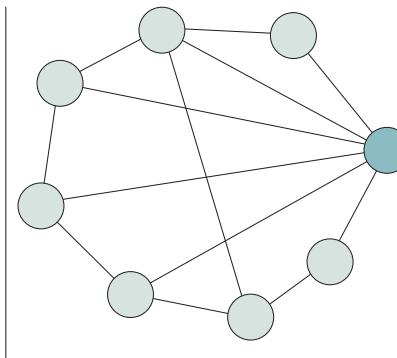
The model shown below provides an effective illustration of the dramatic difference in the autocratic leader role versus the enabling leader role.

### The Leader's Journey from “Autocracy” to “Enabling”



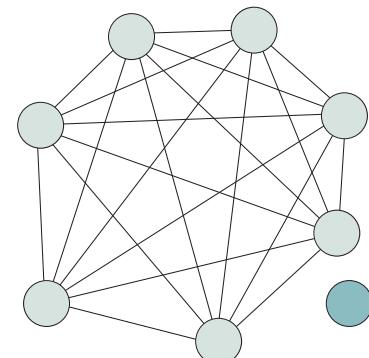
#### THE AUTOCRAT (The Spider's Web Leader)

This type of leader mainly uses authority and control to lead the team and therefore likes to occupy a “hub” position and be the centre of influence. This affords the opportunity to control all of the communications with and between team members, and discourage any inter-team communication at will.



#### THE TEAM LEADER/COACH (The Communicating Leader)

This type of leader moves out of the hub position and leads the team more as a peer, using coaching and communication skills to encourage the team, to keep members informed and in the loop. This leader allows some direct communication between team members (but likes to keep informed and involved).



#### THE ENABLER (The Boundary-Riding Leader)

This type of leader moves entirely outside the team and its direct sphere of operation, leaving members free to pursue goals as they see fit (and communicate freely between themselves). In this role outside the circle, the leader offers support and advice to the team, and keeps an eye on the longer-term time-horizon to spot any problems that might arise.

 = Team Leader

## Team Values and Empowerment

A high performing, aligned and motivated team needs to have a number of common values if it is to really succeed over the longer term. There is no formula for coming to agreement on which values are most important for a team to succeed. These will vary according to experience and beliefs and people's respective goals and aspirations, but it is the actual discussion of what is important to the team that is often most beneficial.

Many leaders avoid this discussion or view the debate as too open-ended to be useful. *Nothing could be further from the truth.* An effective leader will seek to draw out what is important to team members, then discuss differences and how they might be reconciled.

The first step to drawing out team values is to start with individual's values: each person can list their three or four most important personal values, and then rank them. The individual values of the entire group are then shared and discussed with a view to reaching a common understanding (bracketing values together where different words reflect similar meanings).

Once this is done, the entire group can reflect on the views that have been expressed and look for common themes as well as differences that might need to be managed in the future. They can also form a better judgement about commonly-held views and beliefs, and about their consistency with the values in the organisation.

In some cases there might be a clash between individual or team values and those of the organisation that will have to be dealt with by the leader. For example, an organisation might value analytical ability and conservatism. Many financial institutions would have values like these. This would be likely to clash with an individual or team that values broad conceptual ideas and risk-taking, or pragmatic decisions to save time.

A key part of your role as an effective leader is to focus on the capability of individuals and groups, and to make sure that people are helped to perform to the highest possible level and not compromise their performance.

To do this, you need to focus on principles rather than rules. Principles invest the task or process in question with purpose, while allowing plenty of room for individuality and initiative. Rules, by their nature, espouse a single prescriptive way that a task should be handled. This is a powerful key to really empowering your team.



## ▼ Assess



Although setting a broad vision and providing directional clarity will usually inspire your team to follow you, the vision itself rarely describes the specifics of what needs to be done.

Therefore, as an effective leader, you need to help individuals and teams make the connection between future goals and what they need to be doing tomorrow. The best way to do this is by setting short-term objectives and targets.

Successful goal-setting almost wholly relies on whether or not the goals are congruent with the vision of the organisation and the needs of individuals and teams. Using clear language that everyone can understand is also important.

Although making sure that your goals and vision match may seem obvious, a remarkable number of organisations that work hard to shape and then communicate their vision fail to set goals that would help them to achieve that vision. More often than not, this is because the vision-setting exercise and the process of setting goals are seen as two separate activities.

This “separation” occurs because most organisations generally have some kind of process to set targets for the coming six or twelve-month period. This process might be deeply ingrained in the culture and have gone unchanged for years. The vision-setting exercise, however, is seen as one-time-only at best, or something to be done every four or five years (often in an off-site venue with a game of golf or some other social activity very high on the agenda). Unfortunately, **this is like separating the engine of the train from all its cars before the journey even begins.**

A vision is highly comparable with the train engine as it has the power to pull the whole organisation in a particular direction. The goals are like the train's carriages which are given impetus and directional force by the vision. Every goal must follow the vision and be consistent with it. If any goal has its own independent force and direction, the team or the enterprise will find itself losing focus and energy. The danger lies in the fact that this may not be apparent to anyone, including senior managers, and therefore may go on unchecked for years.

To help make sure you don't fall into this trap, ask the following questions:

- Where is our team or organisation positioned currently?
- What is the gap between our current position and our vision?
- What do we need to do in the short-term that will help us to achieve that vision?
- In the medium-term?
- In the long-term?

Conducting regular reviews and assessing progress made against your goals is also important. Constantly reinforcing the vision and building review mechanisms into regular meetings will also be helpful to ensure that your team stays on track.

## ▼ Decide

Visions, goals and targets are good, but if there is no measurement system in place how will you ever know if they have been achieved?

In a leadership context, measurement does not require a complex system of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) with graphs and charts to track progress. What it does require is agreement on what will be measured and how, and what will constitute a good outcome as opposed to one that is negative or poor.

There is a saying that "if it can't be measured, it won't be managed". This certainly applies to goals. If a goal can't be measured, how will you know when it has been achieved? Every individual goal requires the development of an appropriate measure. It should be something you can apply today, and again at any point in the future, and then compare the results in order to see if there is a difference.

It is also important, when deciding on the appropriate measures to use, to make sure you are measuring the right things. The leadership writer Warren Bennis once described the difference between management and leadership as follows:



**"Management is climbing the rungs of the ladder as fast as we can. Leadership is making sure that the ladder is leaning against the right wall."**

If you apply the same principle to goals and their measurement, it is more important to make sure that you are measuring the right things, than it is to gather evidence of fantastic performance in an area that has little bearing on the achievement of your organisational vision.

People often see measurement as a complicated activity, and as a result try to use a sophisticated matrix that may not even do the job. In reality, goals can be measured in a limited number of areas, which are: Quality, Quantity, Cost and Timeliness.

Think of this as an example. If you make a goal to double the amount of time you spend with your children within the next twelve months, and then achieve that by sitting in the same room watching television, you have probably missed the point. The measure of quantity (exact count of hours spent in their vicinity) may indicate you were successful, but you also need to use the measure of quality. For example by considering "how many more conversations I had with my son about topics that are important to him".

This may sound obvious, but organisations are often guilty of using the wrong yardstick. Costs are often cut at the expense of revenue opportunity, cycle time is reduced at the expense of quality and quality is lifted at the expense of profits. Considering all the measures that combine to demonstrate whether the goal has been successful is the key.

# ▼ Evaluate

---

As a leader it is important to make sure you are monitoring performance within your area of responsibility. This will apply to both the overall performance of the group, and that of the individuals within it.

When performance slips below accepted standards, it is important to take swift action. Although this can be difficult, a lack of intervention will not result in improvements and is more likely to cause the situation to continually decline.

The *Managing Poor Performance* booklet in this Skill Builder Series will help you to develop your skills in this crucial area. However, some key actions you can take when addressing inadequate performance with an individual are:

1. Point out the difference between present performance and agreed upon expectations
2. Describe specifically the negative impact of the individual's performance
3. Ask the person for their view of the situation
4. Ask for ideas on how the employee can correct the situation, and then add your own if necessary
5. Explain any steps you plan to take and why
6. Agree on an action plan for improvement and a date for follow-up
7. Express confidence that the individual can correct the situation.

Continually monitoring the effectiveness of teamwork is also important. Effective leaders are aware of relationship strengths and weaknesses amongst their team. Helping build positive relationships is a key responsibility for any leader.

How you relate to others will have a significant effect on the relationships in your team. If you support and coach staff, helping them to take responsibility for their own development and encouraging them to be life-long learners – and making sure you are leading by example – you will help to build the same values into your team.

Another key is to practice open communication, particularly when there is any conflict. Keep the focus on solving problems rather than laying blame, and build a culture where it is okay to make a mistake. Be quick to apologise and admit your mistakes and you will find that your team members soon begin to follow your lead.

As much as possible, practice an “open door” policy where you are accessible to everyone. This doesn’t mean you can never shut your door to interruptions, but it does mean that you encourage your team to talk to you if they are facing any challenges and do what you can to help them find a solution.



# ▼ Review

---



## Recognise a Job Well Done

The value of honest feedback as a means to lift the human spirit is often understood but rarely utilised. Without feedback, no-one knows whether their performance is up to the minimum level or better than average, and standards may start to fall as the individual or team begins to feel unappreciated. This may even result in valuable employees resigning and moving to an organisation that they believe will appreciate them.

As a leader, it is important that you give your team incentives to perform well. This is an area where the myth that money and promotion are the greatest motivators is most in question. You may not be in a position to use either of these tools to reward strong performance, but there are many other ways you can do so.

Whatever method you use, if you don't make it clear what the rewards are for, your efforts will be ineffectual. Individuals and teams need to know exactly what they are being rewarded for, if you want to make sure that they continue to demonstrate the skills or behaviour that earned them the reward in the first place.

When consistent and frequent enough, recognition of a job well done also performs the important function of keeping the momentum going and ensuring that the team is moving forward. If a proverbial "pat on the back" is accompanied with an unspoken reassurance that the individual is going in the right direction, and at an appropriate pace, the pay-off in terms of high morale and incremental effort can be enormous.

It is also important to match the degree of praise to the size and nature of the accomplishment. Minor recognition for major achievements and significant rewards for a minor contribution may send confusing messages. Consistency is the key.

As you build a positive culture, ideally each member of the team will come to recognise and acknowledge good performance, and start to provide recognition for the good work of fellow team mates.

## Encourage Contributions

As each new project arises, the process of encouraging ideas is critical. No matter how "off the mark" any ideas may appear at first glance, analysing the pros and cons of each is a powerful tool. Many great ideas have developed from concepts that appeared crazy when first proposed. Some people are more effective when they bounce off the ideas of others, and that supposedly crazy idea may just provide the starting point needed to come up with a really creative solution.

By building an attitude where every person's contribution is encouraged and valued, you will build self-confidence in each of your team members. If some suggestions are not feasible, highlighting what is good

---

about the idea as well as any challenges will help ensure your team is confident enough to voice even their wildest and most creative thoughts.

This open culture doesn't stop at sharing ideas. Effective leaders are always learning from their team as well as imparting advice. When freely given and obtained, valuable knowledge, expertise and helpful suggestions will flow between all team members, including their leader.

## Take Time to Celebrate

Enabling your team doesn't only involve them setting their own targets, but also designing their own reward and recognition systems.

If you are part of a large organisation, your ability to impact on major rewards systems may be limited. However, there are still ways that rewards can be individualised in order to celebrate outstanding performance or achievement.

At first glance, it may seem that asking your team to devise their own rewards system may lead to ambitious desires for rewards that are out of reach, however most of the research shows the reverse is more likely to be the case. Teams are more likely to be interested in the softer side of recognition than in asking for monetary rewards. Individuals will have their own view on what is motivating for them and respond well when it is made available as part of the goal achievement system.

## Review Your Performance

The only way that you can truly know how effective you are as a leader is through constant feedback. The best place to access this feedback is from the people you lead on a daily basis.

Make it clear to your team that you welcome their feedback on your performance. The reason for doing this is to continually improve your effectiveness as their leader and as a team member.

Remember to carefully consider the feedback you receive. Ask yourself what you can do to actively improve in any areas that may have been highlighted. Review your personal development plan and take action to help you grow as a leader.

The Skill Building template on the following page will help you to work through all the areas covered in this booklet, and also provides a leadership checklist that you can use to assess which areas you can further develop in.



# Leadership Skill Building Template

