

## Theranos Essay

Elizabeth Holmes' vision for Theranos was pure and beautiful. Holmes envisioned to make healthcare more accessible and affordable by promising to deliver groundbreaking technology that would revolutionize blood-testing. With only a single prick of blood, Theranos' technology could grant patients access to hundreds of blood test results to be used for making important medical decisions. If successful, Holmes' vision would have been life changing and the technology perhaps, "the most important thing humanity has built".

Holmes' communication tactics with her team versus her stakeholders were quite different, yet very effective with both parties. With her team, Holmes' used preventive and controlling measures as forms of indirect communication to keep them motivated and working. Eventually these measures established a culture of fear and secrecy that enabled Holmes to communicate exactly what she wanted without the need for much verbal communication. These measures included barriers built around the devices at Theranos, 24/7 security guards, and extensive card key access. All of these means were meant to hide the secrets and lies of Theranos from its own employees. Aside from the building itself, Holmes had every employee sign a contract promising they would not disclose any information regarding the situation at Theranos, say certain words, or even put "Theranos" under their LinkedIn biography. Some employees even figured out that each access of their card key was being monitored along with personal phone calls. Using these measures as forms of indirect communication, Holmes was able to instill fear in every member of her team. Holmes made workers scared of losing their jobs which empowered her to place tremendous pressure on her employees to perform and get the results she wanted. The fear was extremely effective and made Holmes almost immune to whistleblowing, especially by those workers who were sponsored for a VISA by Theranos.

With the stakeholders, Elizabeth Holmes did not have this culture of fear at her disposal, so she had to use more verbal communication in order to hide the secrets of Theranos. Holmes would deliberately lie and provide manipulated results in order to con the Board of Theranos into launching a product that was not actually ready. On top of that, Holmes intentionally chose board candidates who lacked medical or biology background so she could be assured that her board would not investigate too deeply on what her team does and the situation overall. Similarly, for investors, Holmes was very successful in convincing people to invest money into Theranos by providing tampered with data that did not show everything to make them look more appealing.

Elizabeth Holmes exhibited many leadership skills and possessed many traits that made her a successful leader. First and foremost, Holmes is outright very charismatic. In the interview with Tyler Shultz, he mentioned how with just a five minute conversation, Holmes was able to use her charisma to sway him to change his mind about Theranos and make him feel motivated about his job again. Tyler claimed that if he was not working with Theranos' device everyday, he could see how Holmes could easily convince her workers that the vision was still very much real and motivate them to continue working towards an unachievable goal.

Second, Elizabeth Holmes really knew how to connect with her supporters and team. A large part of this was attributed to the fact that her vision was simply so beautiful and easy to sell. In the United States, healthcare prices are way too expensive and many people have sick family members. Holmes knew her vision was one that people could easily get on board therefore she used it to pull at people's heartstrings and reignite her team's belief in the vision.

Lastly, beyond her personality and communication skills, Holmes' reputation also fueled her leadership capabilities. A strong female Stanford drop-out who became the CEO of a multi-billion dollar health technology company is a very admirable persona, especially among women and people in the health and science sector.

Aside from these leadership strengths, Elizabeth Holmes lacked the key leadership skills of honesty and transparency. Holmes must have realized at some point that her vision and the technology Theranos was advertising became unrealistic. At this point, instead of being honest with the public, she decided to manipulate data, stage equipment, and fake experiments to put up a facade that Theranos' products were ready to be pushed out to neighboring Walgreens stores. Since Holmes was providing patients with dubious tests and faulty diagnoses to make serious medical decisions, she also lacked the humanity and compassion needed to be considered a respectable leader.

Furthermore, a skill that every strong leader should have is the ability to create new visions and goals. The lack of this skill was probably the main factor that led to Holmes' downfall. If Holmes was able to let go of her vision and start a new one before it was too late, then perhaps Theranos could have still helped the lives of many in a different way rather than harm them.

In my eyes, despite Holmes' deceitful and secretive leadership style, she was no doubt a really effective leader and a highly capable individual. Going from a college-dropout to the CEO of a multi-billionaire dollar company takes a lot more than mediocre leadership and competency. I believe Holmes fulfilled each step in the pyramid of the five fundamentals for being a Level 5 Leader. Even though her leadership style relied on fear rather than loyalty and respect, many successful leaders like Adolf Hitler who some people consider to be a Level 5 Leader also used fear to lead his people.

But to qualify as a legitimate Level 5 Leader, on top of the five fundamentals, one must also demonstrate a compelling modesty by shunning public worship and never appearing boastful. Holmes lacked this compelling modesty needed to reach that full Level 5 Leader status because she undeniably cared about her image. Holmes strived to be the biotech version of Steve Jobs and described her technology as the iPod of healthcare. She was hungry for the hero-worship and even worse she wanted to be worshipped as someone she was not. Furthermore, I believe another aspect of personal humility is being able to admit failure. Holmes was never able to do this and held onto the mindset that "failure is not an option". She was not able to let go of her vision and admit that things were going wrong. She decided to feed people fake delusions because she was too boastful to tell the public the truth of Theranos' failures.

Another aspect of personal humility that Holmes lacked was the innate ability to look in the mirror rather than out the window at times of failure. Level 5 Leaders always take responsibility for poor results rather than blaming their team or other people. Holmes, on the other hand, used gaslighting to make her employees feel like they were always the ones who were wrong and that they were missing something. The culture that Holmes established at Theranos, made employees always place the blame on themselves rather than the technology whenever undesirable test results arose.

Holmes' relentless pursuit of success and incapability to look in the mirror in times of failure, forced her down a rabbit hole of instilling a crippling fear inside her employees to get them to manipulate her lab results and deceive government inspectors in order to keep Theranos afloat. A hole that she was never able to dig herself out of.