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*“Are Leaders Made or Born?”*

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What makes a good leader? This is an on-going question that has been debated over the years and continues to be discussed and explored. Leadership is defined differently today than it was 20 and even 10 years ago. The characteristics, expectations, skills and abilities have changed over the decades. In today's competitive marketplace, leadership is a required competency of every successful manager and executive. An individual contributor can also be a great leader and in many cases, is expected to be a leader. The ability to lead is essential for most professionals in order to compete in our current global market.

How do we define effective leadership? The ability to bring out capabilities in others, realizing their utmost potential and unleashing their leadership talents are sure ways of measuring leadership capabilities. Organizations have grown to appreciate that their success is largely dependent on their ability to identify, develop and retain leaders within their organizations. The fact that these potential leaders can be found at all levels of an organization and within all disciplines, however, is not yet fully recognized. Ongoing talent assessment is a key part of building a pipeline and preparing your organization for the future.

As companies continue to experience on-going change, growth as well as challenging business conditions, it results in the creation of much opportunity for leaders to shine and emerge. Investing in the growth and development of leadership capabilities throughout your organization will ensure successful results and outcomes. Effective leaders are on-going learners and always looking to develop themselves and their teams. Senior executives are now seeking out advisors

and coaches to help them grow, uncover blind spots, as well as to provide a neutral perspective and reality check for them.

Every organization may differ on the specific skills and competencies needed for success but there are many leadership competencies that are relevant in all cases. The following are my **Top Ten Competencies of Leadership**:

## TOP 10 COMPETENCIES OF LEADERSHIP

**L**istening Skills – the ability to conduct and initiate dialogic communications; practicing active and reflective listening; and possessing strong communications and interpersonal skills

**E**motional Intelligence – self-awareness, self-management, social awareness (empathy) and relationship management (according to Daniel Goleman, psychologist and best-selling author)

**A**ction-Oriented and Agile – leading by example; taking results-oriented actions; being value driven with a focus on learning; “walking the talk”; and being able to flex and bend as required depending on varying needs of given situation, people, environment and conditions

**D**iversity Awareness – understanding the importance of diversity for success; embracing cultural, social and economical needs and differences within this diversity; providing positive influences and role modeling; as well as promoting value-add for everyone

**E**nthusiasm, Eagerness and Energy – generating positive attitudes, positive thinking and optimism resulting in high impact and motivation; exuding passion and excitement; inspiring through actions

**R**esilience and Responsiveness to Individual and Corporate Needs – anticipating the unexpected, taking initiative and carrying through; seeing the big picture perspective, thinking “outside the box”; and being a proactive problem solver taking into consideration needs of peers, leaders, team members, customers, shareholders and organization as a whole with appropriate level of urgency

**S**ense of Humor – keeping things in perspective, maintaining grounded and balanced outlook at all times; laughter can be a stress releaser as well as a team builder, more often than not

**H**igh Standards of Excellence – setting the tone for high standards of excellence; displaying behaviors that create trust, accountability and credibility; maintaining highest level of integrity, honesty and sincerity; transparency, holding and role modeling a high bar for acceptable standards

**I**nfluencing – ability to be the catalyst for change and impact results; understanding and taking into consideration needs of all stakeholders; rallying involvement and participation; and communicating in a way that engages commitment and responsiveness

**P**roactive – strategic visionary; envisioning and anticipating future needs; looking ahead and translating goals and objectives into strategies, both short term and long term; seeing all possibilities and following through to execution

Leadership skills and competencies can be acquired by all – given the right tools, resources, development and, most of all, the desire. *Are leaders born or made?* I believe everyone has the potential to lead. Retaining talent, critical skill sets, as well as up-and-coming potential is vital to the success of every company. Unleashing leadership potential in all employees is at the forefront of distinguishing high-quality organizations that are continuously employing best practices around their talent management initiatives and setting them apart from their competition.

Leadership starts and ends with inner strength. There is no one-size-fits-all leadership style. Unleash the leader within you and within your team!

*Ask Rita: Do you have a career question and/or a career story to share? Email your questions or stories to [rita@ritaballenassociates.com](mailto:rita@ritaballenassociates.com)*

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