The Green Book
on Senior Executive Leadership
(2013 Edition)

by Douglas R. Satterfield

FIG. 2.—ARRANGEMENT OF CABLE DRUMS, FOOT BRIDGE, CRADLES, AND CABLES, BROOKLYN ANCHORAGE.
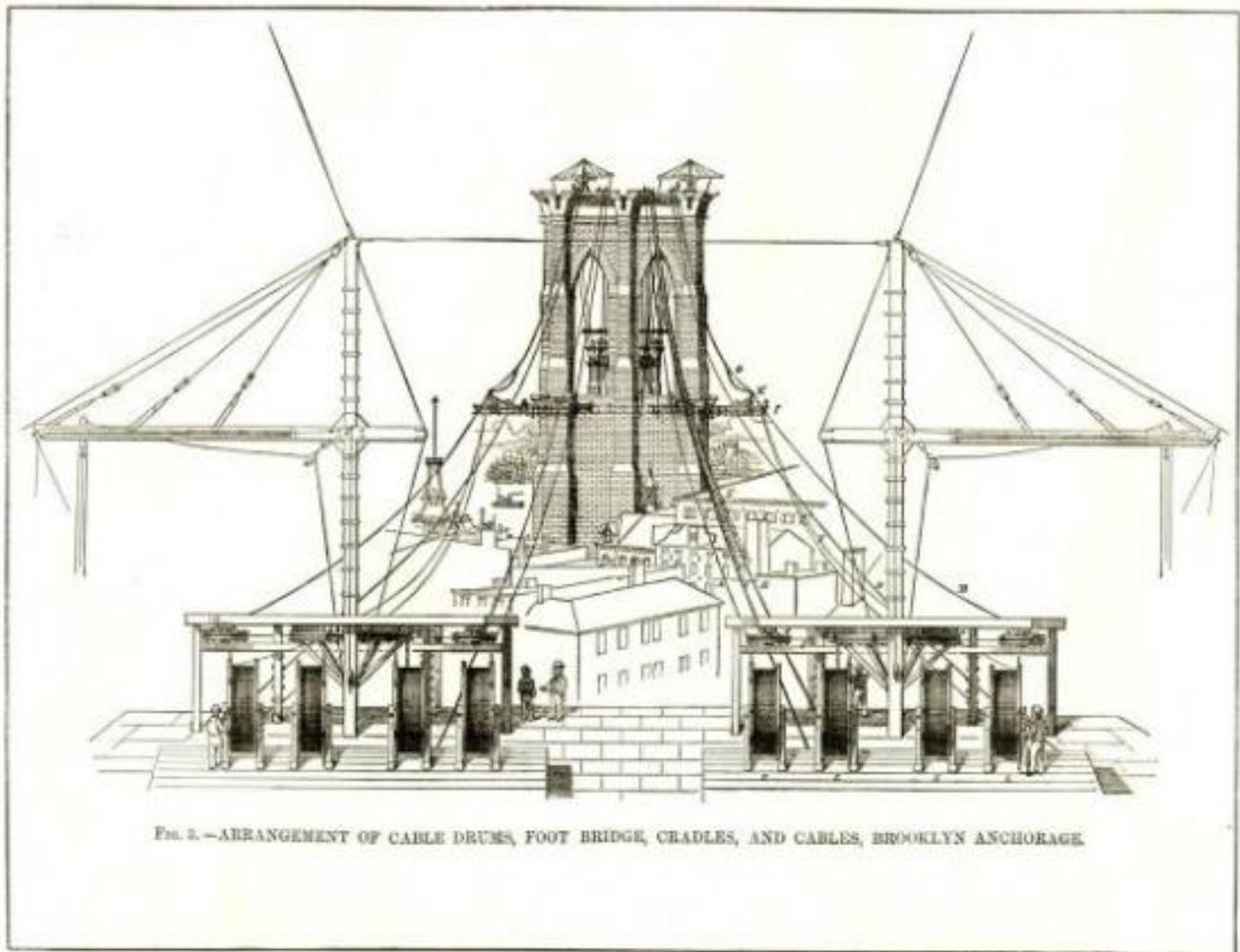
The Great Suspension Bridge Between New York and Brooklyn

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All the following originally appeared in the Senior Executive Leader constructed and maintained by Doug Satterfield.

Cover graphic is from the collection of drawings in the original design of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Graphics in document are from various sources.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

I began my long road to senior leadership in the military nearly 40 years ago as a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry. Along this path were many people, both military and civilian, who made this possible.

They were American, British, Australian, Canadian, Korean, Columbian, Jamaican, Panamanian, German, Iraqi, Egyptian, South African, Mexican, and many other nationalities. The military forces were mostly Army but also Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, and a host of paramilitary and police forces around the world.

For their dedication to providing me with their insights … thank you.

> *"Don't tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results."* – George S. Patton

This "Green Book" was originally to be a summary of those things I believe to be most urgent characteristics for senior executives. But I could not remove the detailed nuances of language and thought in my original postings.

Here you will not find the final work, nor a complete collection of the traits and characteristics of senior leaders. This work will never the done. But what I have attempted to do is to make them consistent in punctuation and grammar and I have also corrected some typographical errors. My English teachers of many years ago would not be pleased, but my mediocre performance in their inspiring and enriching courses notwithstanding, I have done my best.

Leadership dominates everything we do as humans do or fail to do. The most advanced societies have the greatest leaders. The most dominant societies have had the most successful leaders. Whether this leads to good (Mahatma Gandhi) or evil (Adolf Hitler) depends on many factors.

War shapes our history and much of what is found in these senior leader characteristics is also found in the leaders in war. They are also found in businesses, religions, and a variety of organizations regardless of culture or time in history.

The future of any country will be largely determined by how successful the senior leaders are in their positions.

Brooklyn, NY: December 31, 2013

Characteristics of a Senior Executive Leader

As promised, this is about the exploration of attributes and character of the senior executive leader.

This allows a dive more into the depths of those points that distinguish the senior executive leader from the beginner and junior leader. Truthfully, many attributes will be distinguished by degree; laying along a continuum of strength or concentration. While other attributes will be unique to the senior executive and therefore studied more closely. Additionally, the core character of senior executive leaders will be dissected and reviewed.

Along the way, we will explore some of the "Great Men and Women of History" and what were the characteristics they displayed that allowed them to stand out among the many. How were they winners and what was it about their achievements that made what they did so spectacular? Along the way, the debate about "born leaders" will be re-looked. But our focus will always be about learning senior executive leadership principles.

Some of the topics will also look at current events and how senior executive leaders in our world have used those leadership principles. Were they successful or not? Were they criticized or praised? These current events will be used to reinforce the philosophical basis for the use of leadership and how we all can improve our own senior leader abilities.

The particular order that these take are not to be construed that one attribute is more important, frequently used, or preferred. Each characteristic will be explored individually for simple ease of discussion. We all recognize that no attribute stands alone. Each senior executive leader has an ever changing tool box of skills that interact and combine across a range of challenges that we measure as success or failure.

To achieve this and to indulge in some entertainment and education along the way is my goal.

Let's begin.

Characteristic #1: You're Living in a Fishbowl

You live in a fishbowl for all to see.

As a senior executive leader, if you work in a highly visible organization, in particular those that are taxpayer or privately funded or a highly competitive commercial corporation, then expect that your public and private life will be seen and judged against diverse moral, legal, and ethical standards.

We all make mistakes. That is why all senior executive leaders should develop and maintain a transparent system so that honest minor mistakes can be handled without fanfare.

Living in a fishbowl should neither be the source of fear, nor should it prevent the leader from action.

Of note, senior executive leaders are exposed to a variety of stresses and temptations. Stresses we are familiar with, but frequently senior leaders are caught short when they fail to plan for worse case scenarios. How those stresses (challenges and obstacles) are handled, determine in large part the strength and flexibility of our character. Letting emotions or poorly thought-out reactions to an unexpected or unwelcome event, is not often productive.

We are also tempted more as senior executive leaders than the basic, junior leader. People are attracted to those in power; the good and the bad. Great care and maturity is to be exercised. Too many exceptional senior executive leaders have resigned their positions or have their employment terminated for giving into simple human weaknesses. Plan to proactively shield yourself from temptation.

At the end of the day, we still "live in a fishbowl" and must realize that despite the power and prestige that comes with senior executive leaders positions, people see what you are doing. We are not exempt from a basic code of conduct. It is too easy to succumb to those stresses and temptations. To recognize this reality is good. To be unhappy with it or throw up barriers to it, will serve little purpose and place you at a disadvantage.

We need to simply get over the fact that this is the reality of senior executive leaders.

Characteristic #2: Building Trust and Confidence

Trust is like an
eraser,
it gets smaller and
smaller,
after every mistake.

A fundamental attribute of the senior executive leader is the ability to build trust and confidence in the people who work for us, supervisors, peers and associates, and clients.

Building and management of that trust and confidence ranks as one of the top factors to achieve and sustain high levels of organizational strength. It is also a measure of the senior executive leader's successful performance.

To lose that trust and confidence is easy. A loosely translated and often quoted Dutch proverb says "trust arrives on foot, but departs on horseback." Another way to interpret the proverb is to say that a single stupidity can ruin your reputation that took years to build.

For those of us at the senior executive level, this is intuitively obvious; we could not have achieved this status without our personal efforts to realize this very trust and confidence. Good communications, breaking down information stovepipes (or silos), making it easy for everyone to interact, and building a culture of open dialogue and truthfulness goes a long way to ensuring the maintenance of that trust.

Under the rubric of the "Art of Senior Leadership," personal relationships enable leaders to build the trust and confidence that all organizations need. Of course, trust and confidence is very labor intensive, takes time to develop, and cannot be "surged" like physical resources can be.

As senior executive leaders, we should always be on the lookout for opportunities to improve upon professional relationships and to know that this is one of the senior leader's most valued and irreplaceable commodities.

Here are a few things we should do that will go far in building trust and confidence:

- be helpful
- provide good communications
- provide a clear, understandable vision
- make all your processes transparent
- be principled and consistent in making decisions
- be prepared
- have a positive attitude of humility
- have the courage to take on difficult problems

The personal skill sets required to build and maintain trust and confidence starts with a high level of *maturity* and *confidence* in the senior executive leader. *Humility* is another.

Senior executive leaders should be mindful that they occupy a position of trust, and to sacrifice or to lose that trust is far easier than we think.

Trust and confidence will be a recurring theme here, for it is the foundation that supports the pillars of our organization and is the means for measuring success.

Characteristic #3: Intense Intellectual Thinking

I was once told that a philosopher said that if there is no answer to a question, then one should not worry about it. My personal opinion is that is exactly the opposite of what we should do.

Senior executive leaders have an obligation to think – and program themselves the time to think critically about important things, and yes those *hard and unimaginable things*, that matter to their organization. There must be an intense focus on the study of and reflecting on the issues that affect the long-term success of the people in the organization and its mission.

Certainly, the world is more complex today than ever before, requiring a higher level of analysis and thinking, as well as smarter and more creative responses to it. The environment that we work in today is more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. And, we are told that the old model of classic, linear problem solving will be inadequate.

Creative thinking, non-linear thinking, thinking "out of the box", are all slogans that do have some merit to remind senior executive leaders about the necessity to be more than a day-to-day leader. In due course, it is the leader's success in how they guide the organization through the maze of obstacles and challenges that determines if their thinking was on track.

For the senior executive leader, an "intense level of intellectual" thinking is fundamentally a method to ensure our organizations can withstand minor shocks and to push our organizations in a direction that suits mission goals and avoids major shocks.

Intellectual thinking does not mean we have to be smarter or stronger than others are; it simply means we have to be more flexible and adaptable and have a willingness proactively try new things.

Characteristic #4: Urgent and Important Matters

Henry Kissinger saw that one of the challenges of senior leaders on foreign policy was being able to discern between urgent and important matters, and then developing procedures to keep the urgent from overcoming the important.

What the Honorable Kissinger was saying is that leaders are sometimes so busy coping with urgent issues, like the recent Middle East violence, that they occasionally will fail to cope with important issues, like taking the time to develop a Middle East strategy that includes U.S. interests.

This is very applicable to senior executive leaders of all organizations, not just in foreign policy. It specifically includes the business world, military affairs, and other large-scale organizations such as universities and international non-profit organizations.

For leaders to be able to distinguish between the urgent and the important, and then develop methods to ensure the urgent doesn't crowd out the important, is a critical skill set. Often, we are so overwhelmed by the sheer weight of daily meetings and telephone calls that we fail to provide support to the processes necessary to develop an organizational vision and mission.

Dedicating resources to mundane but important issues surrounding the organization's future cannot be left for tomorrow. Those issues might not be exciting, but they are things that must be dealt with in a methodical manner. Payoff is long term for important matters.

It is a human tendency to put off for tomorrow those things that require a grinding, concentrated effort to get it done, especially if it takes a long time.

It is the mark of a successful senior executive leader who can accomplish both urgent and important matters for their organization.

Characteristic #5: Taking Responsibility

If there had to be one common characteristic of all leaders, basic to senior executive, honesty would be it.

"The buck stops here" is a phrase that was popularized by President Harry Truman, who kept a sign with that phrase on his desk at the White House. The phrase refers to the fact that the President has to make the decisions and accept the ultimate *responsibility* for those decisions.

Senior executive leaders take this characteristic to a new level. Senior executive leaders are responsible to:

1. Establish an easy to understand Strategy and Vision and developmental process.
2. Ensure successful employee, staff, and team performance.
3. Take care of employees [training, health issues, managing expectations].
4. Resource the organization properly, especially for the future, long term.
5. Provide continuous guidance and information flow.
6. Lead the organization in transitions
7. Identify and resolve difficult problems, in particular systemic problems.
8. Handle major, unexpected events.
9. Oversee the training, mentoring, and experience of other senior executive leaders.
10. Encourage risk taking and freedom of ideas.

Authority to accomplish tasks and direct resources increases as leaders move up in an organization. The mark of the best senior leader executive is one that pushes authority down to those in the organization, empowering employees, while maintaining responsibility for their actions at the top.

There will always be "leaders" who claim that the complexity of their organizations and the list of missions and numbers of employees are so great, that it is impossible to be fully responsible. This attitude is defective and is not an example of great leadership.

Senior executive leaders seize responsibility when there are problems and things go wrong. These leaders do not blame others for mission failures; they don't "pass the buck". In addition, they do not look for credit when things go right, giving credit to other factors and to the employees in the organization.

The buck stops at the senior executive leader level. It should be embraced.

Characteristic #6: On Being Honest

"Honesty and integrity are absolutely essential for success in life – all areas of life. The really good news is that anyone can develop both honesty and integrity."
– Zig Ziglar, author, motivational speaker, salesman.
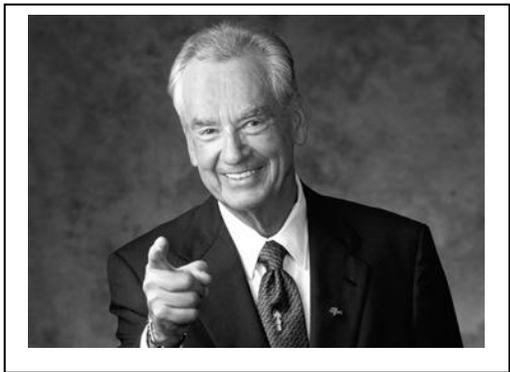
There is a short-list of values that are essential to all leaders. One of the most important among them is *honesty*[1].

Why? All human interaction is, at some level, based upon trust. Conceptually, even "contracts" are based on trust; they just happen to be codified. For leaders this means that to be successful in what you do, in work or life, to lay the groundwork for trust to occur, you yourself must be an honest person.

The senior executive leader ought to believe in and live as an honest person. Just as important, the leader must be scrupulously perceived as being honest. Through one's word and deed is honesty demonstrated. Honesty cannot be fabricated – it is the easiest value to see when it is present and to detect when absent.

At the U.S. Army military academy at West Point, the Cadet Honor Code reads simply that *"A cadet will not lie, cheat, steal, or tolerate those who do."* In a word, *honesty.* Shades of gray are not in the dictionary of the cadet. An act is either honest or it is not. They do not tolerate those who are dishonest and rightly should not. Their profession demands honesty in all things, else there is a potential deadly price to pay on the battlefield.

Being honest also means accepting bad news when it is brought to your attention and conversely communicating bad news as necessary. The saying that bad news does not get better with time is certainly true. One must be honest enough to tell those responsible that something bad has occurred and that they must know about it. Only this way can timely solutions be used to resolve it.

When at their best, senior executive leaders do not tolerate dishonesty. They create a culture of honesty through training, action, and reminders, keeping in mind that this will pay dividends to the organization and to all employees.

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[1] Honesty: uprightness and fairness; truthfulness, sincerity, or frankness; freedom from deceit or fraud.

Characteristic #7: Selecting the Right People

One of the key attributes of senior executive leaders is their ability to select the right people for the right job. Unfortunately, sometimes people are chosen even to be senior leaders who turn out to be stunning failures.

Choosing leaders is not just a difficult task, but new senior executive leaders should quickly establish their own teams and staffs with those who believe in the organization's strategy and vision. The success of an organization depends upon the people who are around you. So, it is not good enough to have the best people, but also those with the right fit; the best is not always the right person.

Being an effective senior executive leader also means that there will be some disruptions, so making those new leader hires happen quickly, allowing a new clean slate. Taking an aggressive, proactive hiring approach also helps prevent organizational stagnation.

The senior executive leader cannot do all the hiring, so recognize that top-notch executives who are doing some of the hiring will typically hire others who are exceptional and that leaders who are not the best often will not hire exceptional employees.

Proactive hiring also means that the senior executive leader should be in contact with a network outside the organization that identifies the best talent. Waiting for the need to appear before an executive/employee search begins, ensures your organization remains behind the curve.

What are some of the traits to look for in potential hires? Not all traits can be found in their reputations, interviews, or resume/biographies. Just a few attributes are listed here and reflect my personal bias:

- Positive attitude and sense of humor.
- Ability to "see" outside the obvious.
- Diverse, interesting, useful opinions.
- Ability to think quickly and recognize solutions.
- Dedication to one's family and community.
- Activities outside work.

In the end, the senior executive leader is responsible for all hires. And, if an employee is not contributing to the organization or creating a toxic environment, the senior leader must ensure swift action is taken to remove that person from their position (reassign, terminate, transfer, demote). The only wrong decisions are to fail to act or to transfer a problem employee to someone else.

Ensure that the selection of the right people is based on your senior leader priorities, not those of others. Ultimately, the senior executive leader has final say and final responsibility.

Characteristic #8: Developing Strategy

He who defends everywhere, defends nowhere. – Sun Tzu
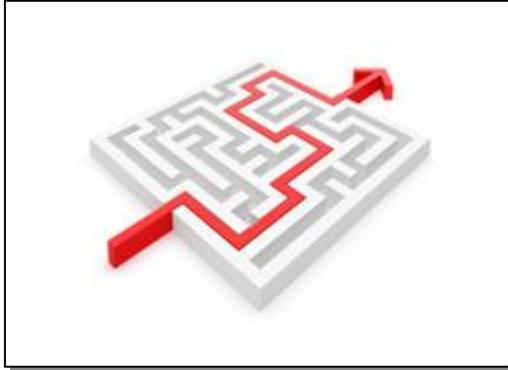
The senior executive leader is personally responsible to ensure that an effective strategy[1] is developed and that their organization is properly guided along a path to achieve its objectives and goals.

Without a strategy, there is no map for this journey.

What does strategy allow us to do?

- Prioritize objectives/goals.
- Align resources.
- Provide a guide for all activities.
- Clarify the unknowns and risks.
- Establish a realistic end-state.

Without a strategy, there is little direction, resources are wasted, and organizational drift and eventual decline will occur. The organization begins to experience internal competition and conflicts; wasting precious energy.

It has been said that "if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there"[2]. Prioritization of the objectives/goals is the most difficult part of strategic development. Getting this part right is essential. For all that follows, once priorities are clarified, the planning and resource allocation are easier. Those objectives/goals are few and rightly so.

The strategic development process, while it can be difficult and intense, must be undertaken with personal attention from all the senior executive leaders. Consensus is not required in the developmental process but harmony in execution is necessary.

There are no short cuts to developing the right strategy.

So what is the process for strategic development? There are many techniques but there is some common ground that should not be ignored.

- Establish goals/objectives, organizational mission and vision.
- Develop courses of action and select the most suitable.
- Implement the strategy with tenacity.
- Evaluate and review progress.

A strategy could be off the mark, or outright wrong. This happens more often than one would expect. An evaluation and review is necessary to ensure defects are identified early. Senior executive leaders need to be alert to this phenomenon and have established milestones and metrics to assist in monitoring the applicability of the strategy.

A mature strategic developmental planning process, however, is not wasted if the strategy proves problematic. Planning helps us have situational awareness and is a forcing function for strategic thinking. If necessary, formal planning can begin again with renewed vigor.

Strategy is only as good as the people dedicated to developing it, leading the implementation, and review. Therefore, anything less than the full effort will lead to misfortune.

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[1] *Strategy* is an overarching plan to achieve a major goal. *Strategy Development* is the process used to build the organization's strategy.

[2] *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,* Lewis Carroll. 1865.

Characteristic #9: The Right Values

Senior executive leaders recognize that values[1] held by people will be one of the factors that determine the success or failure of that employee and of that organization.

In today's work environment, it is no longer politically correct to enquire about personal values. This is unfortunate because there are values that directly contribute to a successful employee, and there are, conversely, values that do not.

Recognizing that some specific value contributes to organizational effectiveness (or not) is a necessary skill of the successful leader. For example, an employee that believes in the rewards of hard work for its own sake is better than one who believes that the organization owes him a living, benefits, and a guarantee of employment.

What are those values that contribute to a successful employee?

Here are my personal top five values that directly contribute to employee success:

- Loyalty
- Respect of others
- Honor and Integrity
- Moral Courage
- Integrity

...and here are my top five values that contribute directly to workplace success:

- Hard work
- Positive attitude
- Team player
- Reliability
- Problem solver

Regardless of the values possessed by the employee, the key question is whether they are a right fit for the organization. If so, the employee is more likely to stay with the organization and be successful.

For employee values, senior executive leader responsibilities are exercised in three ways. First, through value *education* of the workforce. Second, through *support networks* via a mentor and other leaders. And third, through *rewards* to those who exhibit values that lead to successful job performance.

Values can be taught, although modification of employee values from the job are minimal. This is why the determination of values up front, and whether they are harmonious with the organization, is so important.

The senior executive leader bears full responsibility to articulate those values that best fit the organization, for selection of employees with the best fit values, for continued education on those values, and for ensuring they help lead to a successful organization.

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[1] Values: Important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad and desirable or undesirable. Values have major influence on a person's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations. Some common business values are fairness, innovation, and community involvement.

Characteristic #10: Take Care of Employees

Taking care of employees can mean many things but what *it should mean* is that employee opportunities to succeed are in place. The work environment and organization culture must be one that maximizes individual employee success.

People do work for money but there are other important reasons. Research has shown that many times pay is not the main reason. If leaders do not care about their employees and fail to set the conditions for the proper work setting, employees will leave.

Taking care of employees translates into also taking care of their families. This means that families are afforded a level of respect and know that their voices can be heard. Senior executive leaders should ensure formal policies are practical and effective and are institutionalized as part of creating conditions for family support.

Senior leaders who take care of their employees also ensure that poorly performing employees are re-trained, transferred, demoted, or terminated. And that unethical, illegal, and immoral employee behavior will not be tolerated. Toxic leaders and poor performing employees must be quickly turned-around or terminated.

Good communications with employees by the senior leader will help set expectations and ensure problems can be identified early. An open door policy is one technique. Keeping employees informed, especially when change occurs is crucial. Get ahead of the curve and let them know what possibly is coming in the future that may affect them.

Regardless of what communications tactic used, every employee must know that the goal is providing employee success and that senior leaders can be counted on to help them.

All employees – full time, part time, permanent, interns, or temporary – are still employees and ought to be treated with respect. Yes, even those that are poor performers and toxic should be treated professionally and with respect.

Treating employees with respect is a measure of leader professionalism.

Also recognize that employment benefits (health care, retirement funds, etc.) are sensitive issues and the senior leader should tread carefully when anticipating change. How benefits are handled will drive employee perspectives on how well they are cared for by leaders.

Pay, benefits, family, and opportunity are part of the main reasons people perform well. The senior leader's job is to ensure employees are motivated to achieve a greater level of performance and senior leaders hold the key.

Characteristic #11: Mentor Essentials (Part 1) 66 Essentials for Junior Leadership

66 Essentials to be a Successful Junior Leader.

Senior executive leaders provide value to other leaders in a variety of ways. Be available to teach, coach, and mentor those leaders working for you.

One way to do this is to articulate those things that you see as elements for a successful junior leader.

In this list of "*66 Essentials to be a Successful Junior Leader*," I have listed those that have personally helped me as a leader. Most of the list is derived from conversations with others over 4 decades. There is also some conceptual overlap within the list but it is also very comprehensive.

The "*essentials*" are listed in no particular order or priority.

1. Be positive and have a friendly attitude.
2. Strive for integrity.
3. Respect others, their opinions, their ideas, and comments.
4. Always be considerate and gracious.
5. Act appropriately at all times.
6. Develop trust and confidence in your subordinates, peers, and boss.
7. Keep your boss informed.
8. Develop a winning team, but do not brag or grandstand.
9. Think before you act but be decisive.
10. Do not be a gatekeeper.

11. Do not ask for a reward, promotion, money, etc. for doing your job.
12. Do your work every day, complete all tasks assigned.
13. Plan ahead; anticipate future problems, trends, and concerns.
14. Follow protocols.
15. Know the senior staff and leaders of your organization.
16. Measure what you want to improve.
17. Trust but verify.
18. Keep your work area clean and orderly.
19. Communicate effectively up, down, left, right, internally, and externally.
20. Great strangers and visitors and make them feel welcome.
21. When visiting others, always compliment the place and people.
22. Maximize your time with people who work for you.
23. Learn and practice your organization's values.
24. If you don't know something, ask.
25. Answer the mail, email, telephone, etc. promptly, politely.
26. Remember that nothing is truly secure or private.
27. Stand up for what you believe in (moral courage).
28. Strive to be a balanced person; physically, morally, spiritually, socially.
29. Learn from your mistakes and move on.
30. No matter the circumstances or how small, always be honest.
31. Do not impose rules on the customer.
32. Learn and be able to articulate the history of your organization.
33. Become a mentor to junior employees, not in your chain of command.
34. Be on time; to work, for meetings, and appointments.
35. Encourage excellence in others both verbally and by example.
36. Know your job and be able to articulate the requirements.
37. Do not allow shortcuts.
38. Establish and follow priorities.
39. Know that "character" can be learned, teach it.
40. Strive for the job that has maximum responsibility for your position.
41. No matter what job you are given, do your very best.
42. Think about who else needs to know.
43. Be fully qualified for your job.
44. Complete all required education as soon as possible.
45. Take care of your employees and assist their families when asked.
46. Be focused and engaged always.
47. Be culturally aware.
48. Build "teams" with all, do not exclude.
49. Remember that you are responsible.
50. Do not complain around employees or show a poor attitude.
51. Know your employees.
52. Think two levels up in your organization.
53. Do more than expected.
54. Be consistent, steady and unemotional.
55. Offer solutions to problems you cannot handle.

56. Follow up on everything.
57. Do the dirty work cheerfully.
58. Be aggressive but don't be a pest.
59. Don't avoid difficult situations.
60. Develop the art of listening.
61. Get along with and influence peers.
62. Be creative and imaginative, present novel and innovative solutions.
63. Recognize that support staffs have power, treat them well.
64. Be loyal, promote the team and organization.
65. Be safe, do not take unnecessary risks with your well-being.
66. Do not bring shame on yourself, team, company, or the country.

Can you think of more? Do you disagree with some of these? Please write me or make comments. Thanks.

Characteristic #12: Mentor Programs (Part 2) Aspects of a Mentorship Program

As noted before (Characteristic #11), senior executive leaders provide value to other leaders in a variety of ways.

One way to do this is to articulate those things that you see as elements for a successful junior leader (the *"66 essentials"*).

Another way is to ensure that there is a functioning and effective mentorship program in place.

It is difficult to believe that in today's work environments (being so competitive – to include everyone needing every advantage possible), that most employees have no access to a mentor and many organizations have no mentorship program.

Having some form of mentorship program, regardless of the level of complexity and formality, seems like a common sense approach to most of us. But why?

Mentors accomplish several positive goals. Their mentorship helps employees personally and professionally, which leads to improved employee performance, increased motivation, and higher retention rates. Theoretically, this leads to improved organizational performance.

A mentorship program is also a contributor to a positive work environment and is likely to result in outsiders wanting to be part of your "winning team" or organization.

The downside to a program is the commitment of resources (usually time) to both the mentoring activity and mentor training. Another downside is that a poor mentor can actually do more harm than good.

There are several aspects to a mentorship program to ensure it is effective:

1. The program should align with the organization mission, vision, and values. For example, if "customer respect" is a company value, the mentorship program must reflect it. Additionally, the program should be part of the overall fabric of the organization in how it functions.

2. It requires a very senior executive leader "champion" in the organization who visibly encourages mentors. And other senior leaders must have buy-in so they can encourage its development.

3. The best, most experienced people should be recruited and trained to be mentors. Typically these are more senior personnel. They should also be provided with some form of incentives. Mentoring requires the time of the best leaders, so "recognition" of their efforts is just a start.

4. Preferably, there should be some formalization of the program that defines mentor objectives, benefits, training, and processes of mentoring.

5. There should be a sustainment effort that ensures the program is a long-term and can change with the dynamics of the organization. Ideally, there is also a method to monitor and track the effectiveness of the program.

Who gets mentored and the type of mentoring program will depend upon the organization and its goals.

Certainly, junior leaders and "top talent" should be mentored. Most of us would not argue with that. But what about new employees in entry level positions or very senior employees nearing retirement? Should all employees have the opportunity to have a mentor?

These are fundamental questions that must be addressed by the senior executive leader early on.

Characteristic #13: Drive a Positive Culture

If employees enjoy coming to work and customers are pleased with your product and services, then you have a positive organizational culture. A positive, healthy culture is the basis for improving your organization's competitive edge.

The most senior executive leaders have the responsibility to drive their organizational culture in a positive direction. While this is done in several ways, for example through a well developed strategy, leaders must be careful to closely observe and manage it.

While it is generally agreed that a positive organizational culture is best to achieve the organization's mission and leader vision, consensus on "how" to achieve it varies dramatically. The fact that so many cultures do not fully achieve their mission and vision means that there must be some significant obstacles.

The two most significant obstacles to a positive organizational culture are lack of leader knowledge and difficulty in implementation of workable methodologies.

Many agree that the lack of knowledge is the least problematic. By the time senior leaders reach their positions, typically they have gained the right stuff to ensure some level of workable methods of a successful organizational culture.

It is difficult to implement certain methods to achieve a positive culture because it requires dedicated resources and a strong senior executive leader and leader teams.

So it is execution less than know-how that prevents us from achieving a positive culture. But first, the know-how … the things that are indicative of a good organizational culture:

- Increase employee motivation and passion.
- Decrease workplace stress.
- Develop team building and collaboration.
- Build employee resilience and professionalism.
- Teach communication skills.
- Develop conflict resolution systems.
- Encourage openness and respect for others.
- Teach and encourage the Right Values.

Execution. The main variable that helps ensure a positive culture is a team of senior executive leaders that have the will, knowledge, and resources (time, people, dollars). It is the "will" that is often lacking. The focus in many senior leaders is often short-term, while a positive culture, of course, demands a long-term approach.

Organizational cultures take time to influence and this means senior leaders must focus over an long period when short term demands are hard to ignore and must be balanced. This is why senior leaders must be aware that *urgent* issues (short term gain) are to be managed so they do not overcome the *important* (long term organization health).

Being able to be successful with shorter term organizational gains, while managing long-term[1] culture is difficult, but achievable in any organization. Making positive changes[1] to an existing organization is achievable with the right senior leader.

Only a top-down approach can work. The most senior leader must be fully committed or organizational health will suffer.

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[1] *"Who Moved my Cheese?: An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in You."* Spencer Johnson. 1998.

Characteristic #14: Overcoming Obstacles

"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal." – Henry Ford

Keeping an organization on track (Staying on Plan) is a difficult task. There are seemingly endless list of obstacles/challenges that hinder leader, team, employee, and organizational performance and mission accomplishment.

Some goals are externally imposed, like the customer who demands a certain delivery schedule. Some are internal, like organizational bureaucracy.

The job of leaders at all levels is to figure out ways to either eliminate/reduce obstacles or ways to bypass them. This is where leaders frequently falter, giving up in the face of adversity and out of frustration.

So, how do we prevent obstacles from preventing us from achieving our goals? The most important thing is to begin with a winning attitude. Employees and leaders who operate in a positive organizational environment will be more successful.

The first step in overcoming obstacles is the proper identification of the obstacle(s) themselves. Then, using the organization's strategy as a guide, develop courses of action that reduce a specific obstacle's impact. The next step is to decide on the course and develop a follow-up plan to monitor progress. Lastly, senior leaders understand this is a never ending cycle of intense activity.

Where do we normally go wrong? Typically, it's a lack of imagination or lack of creativity in dealing with obstacles. The level of obstacle difficulty or complexity is rarely the problem – these require the most senior leader involvement.

Large complex obstacles require intense study, purposeful attentiveness, aggressive action, and the focus of the most senior executive leader. Normally these cannot be solved or bypassed but can be reduced to a point that their impact is lessoned.

George Eastman created his company, Kodak, originally on glass plate photographic technology but was later able to deliver photographic and video to all with film technology – creating a capital empire in a few years.

Senior executive leaders must create the conditions for employees to overcome or bypass obstacles.

This is more than providing the required resources but also setting the positive, creative work environment; allowing risk taking, providing rewards and recognition, encouraging the imaginative, protecting the thinkers and problem solvers, and taking the necessary action to put the right people to the task.

Characteristic #15: Leading Transitions (Part 1) Learning from Mistakes

Organizational "transitions" are those events when an organization takes *risk* to change its *processes*. Transitions involve major changes to the organization.

Organizational transitions are either internally or externally driven, require significant resources and planning to surmount, and put the organization at some level of danger of failure. Some organizations are in a near constant state of transition while others rarely experience it.

Nevertheless, why do organizational transitions occur?

- Senior leadership change
- Mission change
- Relocation, reduction, increase in facilities
- Merging, downsizing, growth, gaining new partners
- Major processes or tools realignment (equipment, software, etc)
- Significant funding changes

The way to ensure a smooth change and reduce the risk involved, is to learn from others' mistakes. Those lessons learned are quite informative. Part 2 will go into more detail about the lessons learned.

The primary lesson learned from organizations that have undergone a transition, is that while senior executive leaders may be skilled at responding to the structural changes

(creating a new vision, strategy, culture, systems), they have not mastered the personnel side of change.

We know that employees and customers will resist the change.

"The ultimate test of leadership is creating positive change." – John Maxwell

Why do people resist change? John Maxwell in his 1998 book[1] describes the reasons why people resist change. There are others who have added to his work. The following reasons are a few:

- Not their idea
- Fear of the unknown
- Challenges tradition
- Vision is unclear
- Payoff doesn't match the sacrifice
- Leaders don't have the people's trust
- Lack of passion
- Misunderstandings
- Their natural temperament

This is where senior leaders play a key role; leading employees in the right direction, a positive direction. Without strong, decisive leadership, any important transition will be difficult at best. Moreover, failure is common.

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[1] *"The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership : Follow Them and People Will Follow You"* John C. Maxwell, 1998.

Characteristic #16: Leading Transitions (Part 2) Ready and Relevant

In Part 1 on "Leading Transitions", we saw that the way to ensure a smooth change and reduce the risk involved, is to learn from others' mistakes.

Part 2 will go into more detail about the lessons learned.

With a weakened and changing economy (e.g., technological advances), it is not that hard to see why the subject of transitions is so popular. Add to this mix a government "shutdown" and we have a level of uncertainty that will get anyone's attention.

For any organization to remain *relevant, ready, responsive, and reliable¹* in this environment, it must be flexible and agile enough to adapt. This requires a conscious recognition that change may occur, plan for it, and be prepared to execute it with vigor.

Senior executive leaders will be required to lead the way and must be prepared to coach others in their organization through the transition. To create a great plan is important but our employees will not be so easily swayed.

Some specific lessons learned regarding transitions:

- Must have a dynamic and flexible plan
- Plan and rehearse the plan
- Have a high level of communications
- Have a clear and compelling vision
- Depends on effective senior leadership
- Know that it rarely goes according to plan
- People will resist
- Moral courage is required
- Timing is important
- Requires intense focus by the team
- Keep a positive attitude
- Get advice from alumni
- Takes longer than planned

This is where senior executive leadership is so important. Most senior leaders have earned their way to high-level positions in part because they came from backgrounds where operational, technical, or financial skills were paramount.

Yet these backgrounds do not necessarily prepare the senior leader for a major transition. The senior leader must be mentally prepared to understand two important things.

First, the senior leader is part of the transition process and being so it gives us a myopic view during its progression. The leader must recognize this and put into place mechanisms that help them keep a clear view of what is happening in the organization.

Second, transitions are more about people than anything else. Senior leaders often overlook this fact and stumble through organizational change repeating mistakes of other companies. Recognizing this early and studying other organizations will be helpful.

Senior executive leadership is about knowing and leading people. By understanding your employees and treating them right during the transition, success will follow.

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[1] U.S. Army Corps of Engineers motto.

Characteristic #17: Provide Motivation

Motivation gets you moving, determination keeps you going

- anonymous

For any leader, one of their most important tasks is to give inspiration to people in the organization to carry out the mission. The most talented leader not only provides employee enthusiasm but also provides the motivation for their boss(es), peers, and customers.

This is what we mean when we say a leader provides motivation[1].

What distinguishes the senior executive leader from all the others is that the senior leader provides the determination and motivation for other senior leaders, as well as providing motivation, focus, and direction to the organization as a whole.

For a senior executive leader, they must be extraordinarily self-motivated and passionate in their role. That leader must know himself or herself, strengths, weaknesses, and possess a strong urge to achieve the organization's mission.

All leaders should have the leadership qualities to influence motivation. Unfortunately, there is no roadmap for providing motivation to employees.

> *"Motivation is everything. You can do the work of two people, but you can't be two people. Instead, you have to inspire the next guy down the line and get him to inspire his people."* – Lee Iacocca, businessman and philanthropist

What are those characteristics that are found in an inspiring leader? The leader must be able to:

- Be a role model and set the example
- Reward extraordinary behavior
- Synchronize employee needs with organizational needs
- Develop teams and provide them guidance
- Communicate clearly
- Increase team spirit and morale
- Infuse morals and ethics
- Provide motivation

An *effective* leader will have the knowledge of motivational methods and use them to properly move the organization in the right direction. That leader will know the wishes, desires, goals of employees.

It is leadership that is used to motivate others through inspiration.

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[1] Motivation is an inner drive to behave or act in a certain manner. These inner conditions such as wishes, desires, goals, stimulate us to move in a particular direction in behavior.

Characteristic #18: Moral Courage

The photograph accompanying this article is famous in many respects. It is a photo taken June 6, 1944 of the Omaha Beach landing during World War II. It is used to symbolically represent courage. More accurately it is symbolic of *physical* courage.

Moral courage, on the other hand, is more difficult to show symbolically and is why I used this photograph.

> *"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."*
> – Edmund Burk, Irish, orator, and philosopher

In this famous quote, Edmund Burk goes directly to the heart of the concept of a failure in moral courage.

He is saying that evil in the world comes from ignorance or acts of omission, the failure to take action, the failure to observe, and perhaps even of good intentions – as much as it may come from willful evil.

Moral Courage itself is the courage to take action for moral reasons <u>despite the risk</u> of adverse consequences. Courage is required to take action when one has <u>doubts or fears</u> about the consequences.

Moral courage therefore involves deliberation or careful thought.

Reflex action or dogmatic fanaticism does not involve moral courage because such impulsive actions are not based upon moral reasoning. However, moral courage may require physical courage when the consequence is punishment or other bodily peril.

Moral courage can be exceedingly difficult as a behavior. We take pride in the witness of people who display moral courage.

Demonstration of true moral courage in the face of adversity means that we have struggled with the complex, the unknown, the fear, and the anguish that so often accompanies courage.

Moral courage is more difficult than physical courage. While both may be admired and physical courage the most regaled, it is moral courage that most advances our group, organization, society.

There is a noticeable lack of moral courage today, in particular in senior leaders. This is a sad commentary. Fortunately, there are those who do possess moral courage (it doesn't come in degrees).

Too many people are no longer interested in doing what is right but what is popular or the most expedient; those things that will simply prevent them from being a target for ridicule or insult.

Characteristic #19: Storytelling Leadership

Understanding the psychology of human beings; what motivates us and focuses our employee talent is something every senior executive leader wants.

From the beginning of the human race in the most primitive settings to our modern world, a good story is something we all can relate to and remember. Thus, the use of storytelling[1] in leadership can help us accomplish more and is an asset to improve organizational success if used correctly.

Storytelling is a powerful tool when used to communicate. It functions to educate, infuse moral values, entertain, motivate, and transmit culture. In any good story, there is a message.

> *"If the story is not about the hearer, he will not listen. And here I make a rule – a great and interesting story is about everyone or it will not last."* – John Steinbeck in East of Eden

The most effective senior leaders will be masters of storytelling. It is well known[2] that President Abraham Lincoln used storytelling as his primary form of persuasion and the most important and effective aspect of his leadership style.

Successful storytelling can be used to motivate organizations, help manage conflict, communicate vision, teach important lessons, recruit talented people, improve morale, improve employee creativity, define organizational culture and values, and explain why the organization is doing something.

Good storytelling can also be used in complex, difficult, and delicate situations like when leading organizational change or managing diversity and inclusion.

Therefore, mastering authentic storytelling is a crucial characteristic of a senior executive leader.

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[1] Storytelling is the conveying of events in words, and images, often by improvisation or embellishment. Crucial elements of stories and storytelling include plot, characters, and narrative point of view.

[2] *Lincoln on Leadership: Executive Strategies for Tough Times.* Donald T. Phillips. 1992.

Characteristic #20: Recognizing a Slow Race

Senior executive leaders need to possess not just more experience and focus, but they must also be capable of exceptional performance. This performance should be an order of magnitude better than average.

When I was a new second lieutenant at the Infantry Officer Basic Course in Fort Benning, Georgia, my class of 300 officers were given a physical fitness test that included three events: sit-ups, push-ups, and a 2-mile run.

Having trained for a year for the run, I knew I would do well and did in fact complete the 2 miles in under 12 minutes; only 25 of us were able to accomplish this. The track was one mile long, so we had to loop it twice. Yet when I approached the half-mile mark (1.5 mile point into the run), I could see one of my peers finish the race. He had finished in just over 8 minutes. His performance was an order of magnitude better than mine.

What I learned from this was two lessons. First, when you are one of the best at what you do, there will be someone who is much better – faster. Second, to truly be the best (i.e., the most successful) you should strive to be an order of magnitude better than the best.

I spend a lot of time with some excellent junior leaders. Many of them are the best in their military class. It is not unusual to see them being satisfied with what they have achieved.

The advice I give to them is that while they may be the best in their group, they are not necessarily the best overall. They should not be satisfied with where they are. While they may be the winner of this particular race, they are simply running in a relatively slow race. To truly be the best, they must finish far ahead of their peers.

The analogy puts into perspective that we should not be happy with the "best" performance but we should strive for increasingly better performance. Senior executive leaders should be mentoring those exceptional junior leaders to strive for improved performance and they themselves should be an order of magnitude better.

Thus, it is important that leaders be capable of "recognizing a slow race" when they see it.

Characteristic #21: Dealing with Surprises

As senior executive leaders, it is important that we deal with surprises appropriately. At the executive level we are fond of saying we don't like surprises, simply because surprises tend to be very large and very bad.

How senior leaders deal with a surprise can determine success or failure in our organizations.

> *"What you see is what you get. What you don't see gets you."   – Donald Rumsfeld*

The talent to put into place *systems and procedures* to resolve problems caused by surprises is the epitome of a great leader. We normally think of these as Flag/General officers in wartime or CEOs of large companies. But we should all prepare ourselves.

> *Be Prepared... the meaning of the motto is that a scout must prepare himself by previous thinking out and practicing how to act on any accident or emergency so that he is never taken by surprise. – Robert Baden-Powell, Boy Scouts founder*

Deeper thinking for senior executive leaders is what distinguishes them from others. Thinking about, preparing for, and dealing with substantial surprises can be a daunting effort. However, it is worth the preparation. The element of surprise afflicts senior leaders of all stripes.

When the surprise is bad news, senior leaders want to know as soon as possible. Bad news does not get better with age, as the saying goes. The sooner you know about it, the easier it is to deal with the consequences. Waiting to deal with it once you find out may mean time has run out on a solution.

Of course, there is a tendency for people to gloss over rough edges or avoid tough conversations about issues that are negative. While they may be making it easier on themselves in the short term, it will probably get worse as time goes by.

Keep the lines of communications open. To find out what is really going on, make it a habit of talking with the people that work for you – they often know more about what is really happening than you do. Keep your office door open and lead by walking around and physically being present.

Ultimately, develop a culture in your organization where employees feel empowered to bring problems to you.

Characteristic #22: Dealing with Unknown Unknowns

Unpredictable major events, good or bad, that have a major effect on people, organizations, or society are often justified as destiny after their occurrence. While we cannot predict such events, we can certainly put into place mechanisms that prepare us better to take advantage of them. Taleb called these events "Black Swans."[1]

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld[2] began speaking about these many years before Taleb's book. Rumsfeld notes that with respect to significant events, knowledge of them falls into three categories. There are things about them we know we know, there are things we know we don't know, and there are "*things you don't know you don't know*." Rumsfeld calls them "*unknown unknowns*." We only know about them after they have occurred.

The main idea of both Rumsfeld and Taleb is that we should not attempt to predict such events, but should build robust systems to protect ourselves against negative ones and be able to exploit positive ones.

There will always be a gap in our knowledge and as senior leaders we should at least know that the potential exists for a such a surprise from the unknown. This is where having as much knowledge as possible and the flexibility to "connect the dots" helps us cognitively to put together procedures to handle the evitable outcome.

We can do this in several ways.

First, by developing a staff of personnel who are regularly challenged to "think out of the box," to be innovative, to develop and work solutions not tried before, and to be provided the time to engineer new, flexible methodologies to problem solving. While we cannot prepare for these unknown unknowns, we can certainly have the talent who have been tested and are available for such an event.

Second, by having the most amount of up-to-date and organized information possible and readily accessible to the senior leadership and staff. If there is the possibility that an event in another business can affect your organization, then the information should be sought after. The emphasis here is *organized* information – but beware that problems can often result from information overload.

Third, avoid operating from a preconceived mindset. This will limit options and place us on the path to failure. Any existing plan, procedure, policy, or standard operating procedure can be ineffective despite being up-to-date simply because they are built on assumptions that turn out to be wrong.

Fourth, when the inevitable unknown unknown does occur, we should not take the normal response by trying to find out who is at fault and waste precious time trying to fix blame. There will be time for that later.

As senior executives leaders we need to remain nimble and agile. By developing our employees and staffs in open communications, leaders can take advantage of those Black Swan events.

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[1] *Fooled by Randomness*. Nassim Nicholas Taleb. 2001. *Black Swan* is a metaphor that describes an event that comes as a surprise, has a major effect, and is often inappropriately rationalized after the fact with the benefit of hindsight. Nassim Taleb's 2007 book *The Black Swan* extended the metaphor to events outside of financial markets. Taleb regards almost all major scientific discoveries, historical events, and

artistic accomplishments as "black swans"—undirected and unpredicted. He gives the following as examples of black swan events: rise of the Internet, the personal computer, World War I, dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the September 2001 attacks.

[2] *Rumsfeld's Rules: Leadership Lessons in Business, Politics, War, and Life*, Donald Rumsfeld, 2013.

Characteristic #23: Humility

Humility is defined several ways. However, the meanings used today lead to confusion, especially when employed to describe a leader. First, it can mean lack of confidence or timidity. Or second, it can mean to be humble, lacking pretence, not believing you are superior to others.

In some cultures, the language separates the meanings but not so in English. For our purposes, the latter definition is used. The confusion is unfortunate because it is a constant irritation as it incorrectly implies weakness when describing "humble" leaders.

> *"Successful senior leaders blend extreme personal humility with intense professional will."* – Unknown

My personal experience on the battlefield suggests that the best senior leaders give credit to others, never to themselves. They talk about the troops and the heroic nature of those efforts and their determination and strength. Those senior leaders have a ferocious doggedness and fortitude to do what it takes to make the military and its mission a success. They never aspire to be named a hero or elevated above others. They have humility.

Humility is basic trait of all great senior leaders. General Douglas MacArthur, despite his aloof leadership style, was still humble. To be truly great like MacArthur, a senior leader must have a good understanding of one's self and the force of will to ensure the mission is completed.

A peer of General MacArthur, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, is the epitome of humility. In the case of Eisenhower, it is much easier to see the differences between these two men. Nevertheless, both Eisenhower and MacArthur were humble servants of our country.

> *"Humility must always be the portion of any man who receives acclaim earned in the blood of his followers and the sacrifices of his friends. "*
> – Dwight D. Eisenhower

The best and brightest of senior leaders know what they need to be successful. They recognize that they cannot attain success without the achievements of others. Humility attracts people to them and it is those people that actually do the hard work to fulfill the mission.

Consequently, it is the combination of humility and force of will that are the key ingredients for the best senior leaders. This is a secret that will take your organization from good to great.

Characteristic #24: Recognizing Bias

Every decision that leaders make involves some level of bias. The problem is not that there is bias, a natural function, but that some biases in decision-making and employee affairs can lead to an incorrect judgment, unfounded conclusions, and uncertainty.

Senior leaders are interested in both *mission accomplishment* and *taking care of their employees*. Therefore, any action taken by a leader in the organization that does not accomplish these two requirements is problematic.

Biases arise in the decision-making and employees includes: information shortcuts, leader motivations, and social preferences. These will always occur because those biases also lead to positive outcomes. Distinguishing between biases that are productive and positive from those that are destructive and negative is the challenge.

Biases that are a factor that negatively affects an organization and its people, must be recognized and the bias influence reduced or removed. Senior leaders should ensure that there are organizational processes in place that helps filter biases early and aggressively.

Only the most senior leaders can set the conditions for the organization to be acting to thwart the introduction of negative biases.

The first step in eliminating the impact of a negative bias is simply recognizing the negative bias. It is also the most important and most difficult step. For example, people use information shortcuts because we never have perfect knowledge. The problem for us is to find those shortcuts that are leading to bad decisions or improper treatment of people. Note that not all negative biases will do this.

The second step is ensuring that there are formalized processes in the organization to reduce the impact of important negative biases. This is typically accomplished through some form of codified decision-making process and employee policies that target areas particularly vulnerable to bias. "Assumptions" about the organizational mission or about people are examples where bias can truly do harm.

The final step is that there must be a continuous review during mission execution to be on the lookout for those identified biases and for any *new* biases that may arise. This step is often overlooked but tactically it is just as important as any other.

Recognizing bias is an important trait in any leader. However, recognition of those important negative biases that will influence the organization's mission or people are the ones the senior executive leader must be most attuned.

Characteristic #25: Learning from Failure

Success is 99% Failure

It is said that learning from your mistakes is the best teacher. I think the jury is still out on that judgment but failure certainly provides the most unforgettable opportunity to learn.

Senior executive leaders will learn lessons from those failures just like any leader. However, the lessons that senior leaders take away are more varied and complex.

> *"Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose."*
> – Bill Gates

Most leaders understand logically that it is important to learn from failures. At the same time, they are naturally concerned that if they are open and accepting of failure (risk taking), they will be creating an environment of "anything goes" and where workplace standards are inconsequential.

Here are some lessons that all employees and leaders need to consider about failure. Note that senior leaders learn something a bit different. Their focus is at the mission or strategic level; and how failure affects employees.

| All Employees and Leaders	Senior Executive Leaders
1. Accept the *criticism*	1. Accept the *responsibility*
2. Admit *mistakes* were made	2. Admit calculated *risks* were taken
3. Determine *what* when wrong	3. Determine *why* it went wrong
4. *Immediate consequences*	4. *Long-range consequences*
5. Determine what *tasks* failed	5. Determine what *mission* failed
6. Figure out *who* is responsible	6. Figure out what *system* failed
7. Learn from *tactical* failures	7. Learn from *strategic* failures
8. Improve *team* skills	8. Improve *organizational* skills
9. Build more integrated *teams*	9. Build an organizational *team of teams*

The biggest mistake that senior leaders make is that they believe they should take control and employees will just tag along. That by having employees identify those things that caused failure and then repairing them, success will follow. This is certainly necessary and helpful, but it will not take your organization from good to great.

What senior leaders should be doing is giving control and creating leaders – building a team of teams. Those leaders can then understand the vision and intent of the senior leader and help take the organization where just the senior leader cannot.

Characteristic #26: Extraordinary Persistence
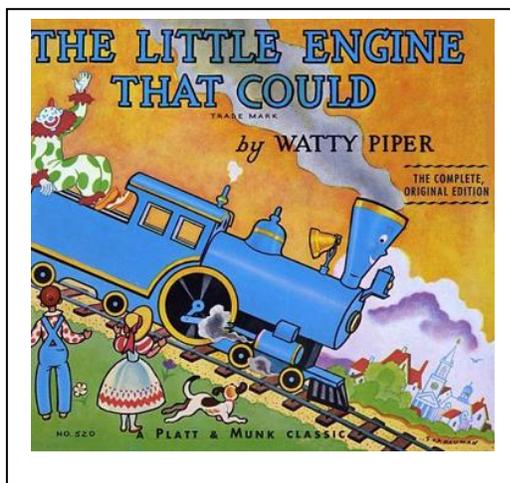
Great leaders have extraordinary persistence. Yes, possession of large doses of persistence is a prerequisite for great senior executive leaders.

The dictionary defines persistence as, *"Firm or obstinate continuance in a course of action in spite of difficulty or opposition."* In other words, do not expect persistence to be easy.

For senior leaders in the upper reaches of the success ladder – technical competence, talent, intelligence, and leadership ability – are assumed traits. However, the characteristic that is missing for sustained achievement is persistence.

"Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan "press on" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race."
– President Calvin Coolidge

In order to achieve complicated or difficult goals, persistence is the most significant factor. There are lessons from successful, persistent leaders who have overcome enormous obstacles. Here are some of them of the lessons:

- Be Consistent: Treat employees by the same rules.
- Be Reliable: Be there, be seen, be consistent in the results delivered.
- Complete the Task: Finishing the job requires the ability to overcome obstacles and to stick to one's goals.
- Never give up: Keep at it despite the obstacles, despite the odds.

Simple, right? Yes. Simple to say, but very hard to do. That is so because extraordinary persistence must be a *habit*, otherwise it will not work for the leader.

Remember the book, "*The Little Engine That Could*"?[1] The message is simple, if you keep trying, you will succeed – part of this is attitude but also habit, optimism, and hard work.

As we hear, experienced leaders say … failure is simply a temporary impediment.

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[1] *The Little Engine that Could* is an illustrated children's book that was first published in the United States of America in 1930 by Watty Piper with Platt & Munk Publishers. The story is used to teach children the value of persistence, optimism, and hard work. Based on a 2007 online poll, the National Education Association named the book one of its "Teachers' Top 100 Books for Children."

Characteristic #27: Intense Mental Toughness
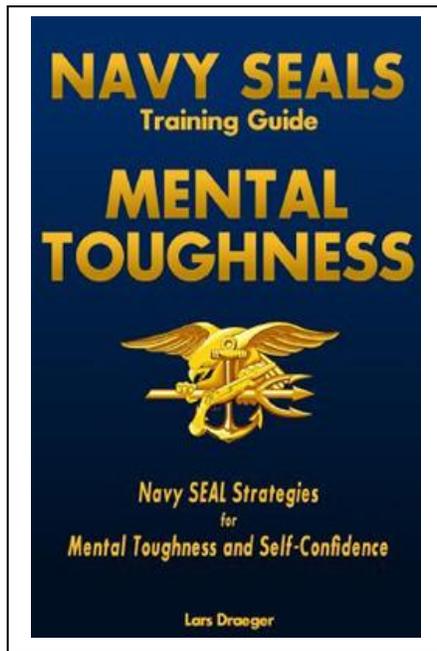
Most people can be leaders but only a very few can be great leaders because most do not possess the mental toughness required – intense mental toughness is a rare commodity that only a few have the *will* to attain.

Mental toughness is not to be confused with the false sense of bravado or with displays of a bad attitude so often seen today. Neither is it a show of a verbose, garrulous manner.

Mental toughness is closely associated with physical attributes and rightly so. In order to attain the highest levels of competitiveness requires a serious dedication to the effort. This is why we often associate mental toughness with professional athletes.

> *"Mental toughness is essential to success."*
> – Vince Lombardi

There is an abundance of writings on sports and mental toughness; from golf to football to basketball – you name the sport and someone has written about mental toughness. And they are not alone, the U.S. military has manuals on it[1].

Yet while there is an effort in both sports and the military to train and improve mental toughness, there also appears to be a counter-trend here in America. More and more the government is the one who takes care of the people.

There are the few and the committed that are working to improve their mental toughness[2]. Senior leaders should be most interested in encouraging intense mental toughness – the rewards are vast.

> *"Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal. Nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude."*
> – Thomas Jefferson

Mental toughness[3] is difficult to obtain and also very difficult to sustain. The rewards are obvious and necessary for greatness. Any organization with a senior leader possessing a high degree of mental toughness today should hold on tight to that person.

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[1] For example – *Navy SEAL Training Guide: Mental Toughness.* Lars Draeger. 2013.

[2] *Develop Mental Toughness*: Ralph Jean-Paul. August 27, 2011.
http://potential2success.com/develpomentaltoughness.html

[3] Mental Toughness – Having a physiological edge that enables you to be consistent, confident, focused, and determined during high-pressure situations in order to perform at maximum potential.

Characteristic #28: Relevant Experiences

We all want our leaders to be problem solvers and overcome all obstacles. Fundamentally, relevant experience is what makes this possible. While experience is necessary for all leaders, our most senior leaders need a broader array of experiences.

Senior executive leaders should have the experience of sufficient moral preparation to stay right, to act quickly when called upon, to be resolute and kind, to remain intelligently flexible, and remain calm when others panic.

> *"A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to its old dimensions."* – Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.

Today, senior leaders working in a much more volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, will be far more reliable if their experiences range beyond their current job description. They should also be capable of calling upon other senior leaders for ideas, information, and assistance – be leaders not just in their sphere of business.

With narrow experiences, a senior leader is limited intellectually and emotionally. This is especially true in dealing with atypical problem sets and unusual obstacles. It is simply human to be confined to organizational standardized processes.

Of course, a senior executive new to the organization, hired from outside the business specialty, works initially from a disadvantage because they lack company-specific knowledge. Yet what they bring in new ways of thinking establishes their real value.

Experience in problem solving, planning, decision-making, resourcing, and personal leadership techniques of the broadly experienced leader, is a distinct advantage to the organization.

Many companies recognize this and have policies that move their leaders about into a diversity of jobs. The intent is to gain relevant experience across the organization. This will eventually benefit them as critical senior leaders. While this is helpful, experience outside the organization is a superior technique.

This may mean that the organization leadership should be willing to give up their leaders for periods of time, even years, so that they return to them with a wider view.

In-house organizational experience is still the most applicable. But senior leaders, with a wide array of experience, are more likely to successfully lead an organization that is faced with unusual problems fostered in our complex world.

David J. Schwartz calls this "thinking big." If you think big, you will succeed.[1]

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[1] *The Magic of Thinking Big,* David J. Schwartz. 1959.

Characteristic #29: Dealing with Crisis

The best way to deal with a crisis is to simply be prepared.

Planning, resourcing, rehearsing, organizing, and placing the right people on the job is key. The upside? Lives and property are saved and organizations survive. The downside? It detracts from other priorities and is expensive.

It is difficult to replicate crises experiences but the preparation process helps prepare for the "big one." Learning from the failures of others and participating in practical exercises are also beneficial. Lessons show us many things will go right and some wrong – the trick is to minimize what goes wrong and not make a strategic blunder.

A big challenges for a senior leader with a crisis is to control the tempo of action – not acting too hastily or slowly, managing actions and resources, ensuring timely and accurate information flow, and a variety of activity to ensure an acceptable outcome.

> *"Faced with crisis, the man of character falls back on himself. He imposes his own stamp of action, takes responsibility for it, makes it his own."*
> – Charles de Gaulle

All crises are, of course, different and hardly anything goes unnoticed either by employees or the world.

This is where relevant experience and quality senior leadership can make a difference. This senior leader must be able to simultaneously deal with the crisis and continue the care of employees, educate the public (as needed), cooperate with the media, continue the functioning of the organization, and maintain enough rest to be at peak performance.

The complexity of crises and the potential devastating effects, has led to studies in crisis management. Rightly so, this field is a growing area of study that is helpful to senior leaders. A reading of much of the literature can provide a richer understanding of dealing with crises.

The senior leader who has extensive and diverse, relevant crises experience and is grounded in the lessons of failure (through the study of crisis management), is both difficult to develop and hard to find. In this world of intolerance for failure, great senior leaders are even more valuable.

Characteristic #30: Having Big Ideas

Senior executive leaders develop big ideas.

Big ideas are a framework, a way of making sense of something about the world we live in that solves a problem or makes something better. They help us "see," to organize desperate facts and details into a picture that gives us insight.

Charles Darwin wrote that his theory of evolution came to him suddenly. Yet, a reading of his notes years before shows that he was unconsciously developing the idea for a long time ... it had not yet crystallized in his mind.

> *"Nothing before had ever made me thoroughly realise, though I had read various scientific books, that science consists in grouping facts so that general laws or conclusions may be drawn from them."* – Charles Darwin

There are two major points to be made about big ideas. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is a case in point.

First, big ideas usually develop over time from close study and thought, discussion, and analysis. Typically, big ideas don't originate as a flash of the obvious but are something that slowly develops.

Second, once people are educated about the big idea, they should be able to apply the idea to a variety of events, beyond the original big idea itself. The big idea should generate debate and analysis that can later be used to revise and improve upon it.

So, having big ideas means much more than simply coming up with some network of thoughts that explain reality. It also means:

- the big idea must be *communicated* to the right people, explained and understood.
- the big idea must be *applied* in such a way to be tested and validated.
- lessons learned from executing the idea are then *used to improve* the original idea.

Big ideas take time to develop and take hold. It is common for them to have little immediate impact. For example, it took the television and the internet about 20 years each in development before they became accepted and viable economically.

Big ideas are important for organizational success in the long term but they are also something that takes time and resources to put into place.

Big ideas alone do not make a senior leader – but the ability of the leader to focus the attention of others will determine their true potential. Their focus and discipline to keep the big goals in sight matters.

Characteristic #31: Experienced Judgment

Good judgment comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgment.
- Will Rogers
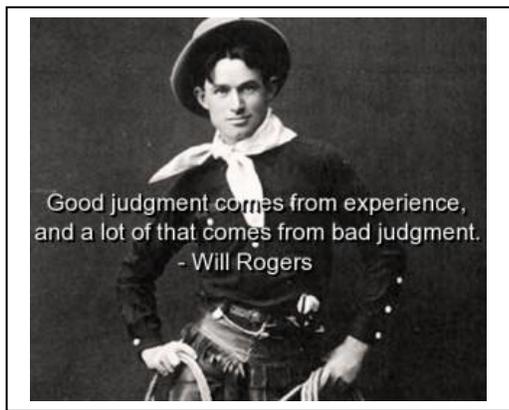
Judgment is the essence of leadership. The ability of first-class leaders to make good judgments and the cumulative impact of those judgments will determine the quality, effectiveness, and success of the leaders' organizations.

The exercise of good judgment in the workplace is the special quality sought in leaders of all kinds. In particular, this is critical for senior executive leaders since their judgments are important to the organization and those people connected to decisions derived from them.

The quality of those judgments themselves is based on the context of the leader's relevant experiences, social connections, organizational methods, and the business environment. In short, the leader will have biases that influence judgment.

Because the leader is influenced by biases, the possession of moral courage and character should be emphasized. Taking responsibility, knowing right from wrong, developing trust and confidence, and decision-making for the good of others is an essential for that leader. The integrity of the leader cannot be overstated.

Important for senior leaders is also knowing *when* and *what* judgments must be made. Leaders are capable of making decisions in many situations, but they should be circumspect about them.

Leaders are taught to make timely decisions. Timely however does not mean immediate. Waiting may be the right thing to do. By waiting, more information can be gathered, conditions can change, or even the need for a decision may go away. Patience, knowing when to make a judgment, is another positive quality of the senior leader.

Some judgments are easy to make. Senior leaders should make only those judgments relevant for their level of authority. Easy ones can be made by junior leaders; it gives them the opportunity to be decisive, gain experience, and show their value. The best senior leaders make judgments only on those things they must make a decision, nothing more or less.

> *"With good judgment, little else matters. Without it, nothing else matters."*
> – Noel Tichy and Warren G. Bennis[1]

Long-term success of making the right judgment calls is the personification of the best leaders. Only those with the right experience and moral character can make the right judgments.

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[1] Noel M. Tichy and Warren G. Bennis. *Judgment: How Winning Leaders Make Great Calls.* Penguin Group (USA) Inc., New York, New York. 2007.

Characteristic #32: Professional Competence

Senior executive leaders must be sufficiently competent in their professions to survive. High-quality leaders have the capability to perform the duties of their job with an acceptable level of quality – a combination of knowledge, judgment, and skills.

Technical competence by itself will not assure a leader's success since there are other traits that are a part of leadership. Ineptitude, ineffectiveness, and inaction, for example, will surely cause a leader's downfall. Knowing *what to do* and *how to get it done* is vital.

Professional competence[1], therefore, is the minimum acceptable standard for all leaders in positions of authority. Successful leaders must not only have technical professional competence, they must also possess the informal dimensions of competence as demonstrated by the degree of leadership they show.

> *"There is nothing which rots morale more quickly and more completely than... the feeling that those in authority do not know their own minds."* – Lionel Urwick

Innovative leaders have obtained their competence through a range of learning experiences that includes informal knowledge and maturity. Poor leaders, on the other hand, have not obtained this informal knowledge.

The actions and inaction of poor leaders erodes credibility. This means a loss of trust and confidence in the leader, team, and organization. The result is failure.

Professional competence is developed from formal education, meticulous self-development, moral maturity, and a variety of relevant professional experiences.

> *"Morally, a philosopher who uses his professional competence for anything except a disinterested search for truth is guilty of a kind of treachery."* – Bertrand Russell

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[1] Professional competence is the ability to perform the duties of one's profession to an acceptable quality. This is a skill one acquires by going through training in the relevant filled and participates in activities that promote one's ability to be a competent professional. Such activities include mentorship, career development forums, and coaching which provides different experiences to learn from.

Characteristic #33: Passion

A major theme in the philosophy of leadership is the concept that passion is an essential trait of leaders. For senior executive leaders, passion is fundamental to their ability to guide their organization and is a characteristic without peer.

Passion is ultimately about winning and success – it is in our human nature to be competitive and to win. Passion drives winners. This means producing results.

> *"You don't get any medal for trying something,*
> *you get medals for results."* – Bill Parcells

A few days ago I ran across a short, 32 second video called "*The Heart of the Game*[1]." What I liked about it was the acknowledgement that while baseball is very much about physics and technique … to win, what really matters is heart.

What senior leaders instinctively know is, that if you don't have the will to win, the heart, the passion, the love of the game, you will not win (or succeed) … period.

Whether in baseball, business, the military, or any organization, only through passion as an inner force can anyone hope to beat the odds.

Everyone has some level of dedication about most things in life – the more important it is, the more dedication. But passion goes beyond dedication and this is what makes a leader. For the greatest leaders, either you succeed spectacularly with passion or you fail.

> *"There is winning and there is misery."* – Bill Parcells

Passion is a combination of *extraordinary ambition* and *zealous commitment*. This is the fuel, the inner drive, to do greater good beyond one's self, to win, to accomplish your goals.

For those who want to be the *best of the best*, the *winner*, the *leader* (CEO, President, Commander); passion pushes you past the basic mechanics of success and places you at the top of your game.

[1] The URL for the site is: http://wapc.mlb.com/sd/play/?content_id=25794889&topic_id=26668336

[2] There is also an excellent book with the same name that looks at this dedication; in this case, baseball (of course). *Heart of the Game: Life, Death, and Mercy in Minor League America*. S.L. Price. 2009.

Characteristic #34: Extraordinary Ambition

Successful senior executive leaders are highly motivated and have the inner drive to be the best at what they do. For leaders, *ambition*[1] is a major source of motivation, passion, and inspiration – there is no adequate substitute.

The desire to grow as a leader, to improve, to increase knowledge and qualifications, and to have a positive, significant impact on the leader's organization, requires a highly ambitious leader.

But there is danger. While ambition is one of the strongest psychological, inner driving forces for good, it can also mean that it drives that leader's interest only in one's self – to possess all things, regardless of others.

In such a case, ambition is a character flaw. All leaders must be aware of the dual nature of ambition and use it for the good of the organization; to create a greater sense of purpose. When ambition generates unethical, illegal, or immoral behavior, then integrity and the greater good is sacrificed and the result is destruction for all.

Great leaders are exceptional at what they do because they want to *achieve* something great, not to *be* someone great.

Extraordinary ambition is an essential factor in senior leadership. When applied to others (the team, company, organization), it is a positive individual trait. Fortunately, great leaders recognize the dual nature of ambition and must have the humility and moral courage to temper the ego.

"Intelligence without ambition is a bird without wings." – Salvador Dalí

Leaders without ambition are stagnant. It would be unheard of for a senior leader to lack ambition, unless a recent development. This being especially unfortunate as the damage such a person could do.

On the other hand, high ambition, when combined with the right *technical* and *operational* skills, is a force that will propel both the senior leader and organization to greater heights of success.

For ambition to succeed for the greater good, the leader requires an intense aptitude for self-discipline, creativity, and vision … for the leader and for others.

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[1] Ambition is defined as a desire for success – a strong feeling of wanting to be successful in life and achieve great things, objective or goal – a goal or objective that somebody is trying to achieve; Synonyms: drive, determination, get-up-and-go, motivation, desire, spirit.

[2] A good book on the affect of ambition on senior leaders can be found in *Higher Ambition: How Great Leaders Create Economic and Social Value*. Michael Beer, Flemming Norrgre, and Coauthors. 2011.

Characteristic #35: Zealous Commitment

Commitment is the one senior leader attribute that makes all others possible.

Leaders understand that success is not a single event. Success is a continuous experience. That is why senior leaders are zealous about commitment, for the reason that it provides them the intense, inner motivation to sustain success over the long haul.

Commitment simply means you do something you want to, not because you have to. Zealous commitment for senior executive leaders means they are driven for more fiercely than others – making them more likely to be winners. They certainly are not so committed because of money.

In the current November 2013 Sky Magazine[1], famous New York City chef Mario Batali successfully runs 27 restaurants of many types. He says that the "dollars and fame aren't that important…"

Commitment, combined with ambition, fuels the passion, the inner fire, to achieve the best for the leader's organization.

> *"Desire is the key to motivation, but it's determination and commitment to an unrelenting pursuit of your goal – a commitment to excellence – that will enable you to attain the success you seek."* – Mario Andretti

Given the world's current economic instability and changing business models, organizations are reorganizing in such a way that employees must act more independently and with less guidance. This uncertainty puts stress on the leadership to do more in order to get the maximum value from each employee.

Of course, people do vary in their level of commitment, as do leaders. Ultimately, this is the senior leader challenge – how do they supply the inspiration for others? They can appeal to the employee's personal gain or to the employee's motivation to help others – or both.

Commitment is hard work and must also mean respect for others, rewards for good behavior, support to other leaders, and many other external behaviors that helps drive commitment in others.

> *"Commitment requires hard work in the heat of the day; it requires faithful exertion in behalf of chosen purposes and the enhancement of chosen values."* – John Gardner

[1] *The People's Chef: How Mario Batali Conquered the World, One Impeccably Sourced Ingredient at Time* by Andrew Zimmerman. Sky Magazine, November 2013.

[2] A good book on commitment is: *The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change Your Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success.* Nicholas Lore. 1998.

Characteristic #36: Immense Adaptability

To paraphrase Charles Darwin, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change."

Although written for a theory to explain how species survive, the idea has applicability to success in human organizations. Adaptability is at the core of his theory. Darwin also wrote that a species must adapt but also adapt *quickly* if it is to survive as a species.

An example of wartime adaptability is from the beginning of the war on terror in Afghanistan. Our Special Forces, CIA operatives, and airpower combined to decimate Taliban formations. Taliban convention forces were on the receiving end of a campaign that literally destroyed their main ability to operate in the country.

A core competency of the most successful leaders is having an "immense adaptability" in the workplace. With competition, evolving markets, changing priorities, transitioning organizations, and a complex array of shifting requirements, only the most adaptable will succeed. Senior leaders must be *personally adaptable* but they must also promote *team and organizational adaptability*.

Adaptability is even more important the higher in an organization the senior leader is in the hierarchy. There is a danger here for senior leaders since the higher we are, the more influence and control we can exert on the organization, rather than using our ability to adapt.

A high-level, immensely adaptable senior and experienced leader is rare and is extraordinarily valuable. Great senior leaders are motivated, inspired, and capable of action despite obstacles, ambiguity, and adversity.

There is a large amount of information on adaptability and its connection to leadership – much of it on the web. It is recommended that some time be devoted to read some of the more popular. Although much of it is duplicative, and some perhaps misleading, there is plenty of nuggets of truth and wisdom there.

Characteristic #37: Unmatched Bedside Manners

I vividly remember reading the Miss Manners column in our local Texas newspaper back in the early 1980s. What drew my attention to them was her ability to give such common sense advice about how to have good manners under difficult social circumstances.

She was good at telling us how to handle "old Uncle Billy" who was such a bore at family gatherings and on many such special occasions. Manners, she tells us, are the oil that lubricates social interaction and Miss Manners never let us forget that fact. Those manners are invaluable.

Bedside manners, not unlike the physician's interaction and communication with a patient, are to be cultivated to ensure we "connect" successfully with other people.

An unmatched bedside manner, the ability to engage people in a genuine way, is an important character for a senior leader. President Bill Clinton has this trait. He is

comfortable most when he is around other people and he has a way to make them feel important and that he cares about them.

Senior executive leaders should possess a first-rate bedside manner to ensure a smooth social interaction with clients, customers, and frankly with anyone connected to their organization. There is a good book called *Bedside Manners: A Practical Guide to Visiting the Ill* by Katie Maxwell. While the book is clearly about sick people, it is also about improving people skills and worth reading with that in mind.

Senior leaders frequently are in awkward and difficult social situations that require more than a simple technical understanding of their field or basic social skills. A practiced bedside manner will go a long way to helping achieve the mission.

A senior leader will also experience plenty of challenges in their position. By having a bedside manner that works well with people, those challenges will be easier to overcome.

Characteristic #38: Understanding People
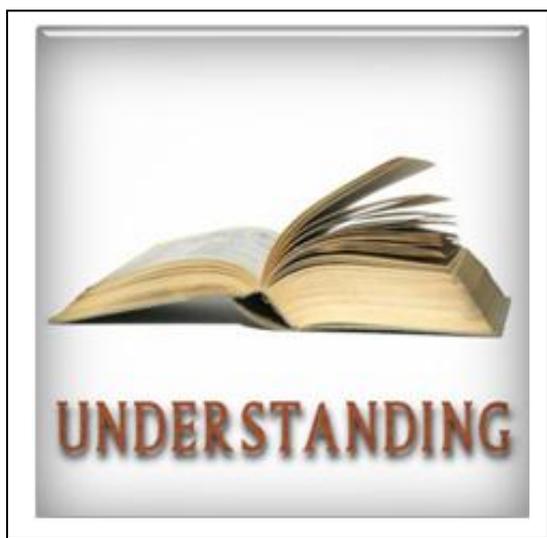
Senior executive leaders, by the nature of their position, must possess a grounded, pragmatic, and experienced understanding of human psychology. By that, I don't mean they have academic training in psychological theories or a college degree in psychology or sociology.

The most successful senior leader knows people; what makes them "tick."

Being a leader at any level and acquiring this appreciation of people is absolutely necessary. Without the ability to connect to people and get a good read on their wants and needs, a leader will

fail. We've all seen inexperienced leaders try their best to organize a team and miserably fall short.

> *"Psychology is as important as substance. If you treat people with respect, they will go out of their way to accommodate you. If you treat them in a patronizing way, they will go out of their way to make your life difficult."*
> – Mohamed ElBaradei, Egyptian Diplomat, Scholar, and Nobel Prize winner

Children spontaneously "know" that a person does not connect with them and will act out accordingly. This is best illustrated in schools; as teachers know at the beginning of the school year that they must quickly gain the attention and confidence of the students or their class will fail to learn the required material and there will be disciplinary problems.

Adults also know when a leader lacks this ability. And, they know when a leader is deficient in the basic understanding of people. Such a leader is immediately "written off" as a person not having the aptitude to work with them or assist them.

The best senior leaders make a special effort by dedicating their attention, over their lifetime, in the study and understanding of people psychology.

Characteristic #39: Unquestioned Integrity

If there is but one characteristic of senior executive leaders that stands above all others, it

is the possession of unquestionable integrity. Without it, all the other key leader traits will amount to nothing at all.

> *"The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office."* - Dwight David Eisenhower

Any discussion about leadership will habitually include integrity as an important leader trait, and rightly so. Integrity and leadership are discussed together frequently because, candidly, they are inseparable as "two peas in a pod."

One thing about integrity not frequently discussed in open conversation is that integrity is no short-term or easy trait to hold. It takes consistent honorable service over many years, and because it is hard to do, it requires tremendous moral courage to sustain.

How senior leaders differ from junior leaders, are that the former's behavior is both closely and frequently scrutinized and held to rigidly high standards. The possession of integrity, then, is much more difficult to sustain as a leader moves upward in an organization – as they are tested often and rigorously.

Any senior leader knows this and those more competent will welcome the continued testing of their character. They fundamentally understand that the secret to maintaining the necessary moral fiber of leadership requires a mental workout. When a leader is not tested, their character weakens.

The crucible of combat is where the most intense testing of leadership occurs. Integrity is a trait that is central to successful combat leaders and where it is lacking, troops can pay a price with their lives. Combat-proven senior leadership is where integrity stands out the most but all senior leaders must possess it.

In our changing world, integrity will be a more valuable trait than ever before. In the U.S. we see a moral relativism seeping into many leaders. This dangerous trend can be reversed only through strong leadership and a good dose on the disinfectant known as integrity.

Characteristic #42: Great Communicator

Undoubtedly, when the most well-known and greatest leaders are discussed, their ability to communicate sets them apart. The best senior executive leaders are also the greatest communicators.

Leaders must have vision. However, without the ability to articulate that vision effectively, the leader's ability to see the future would be wasted.

Due to its importance, the "great communicator" characteristic is a 3-part series addressing the five main aspects of communications. The elements of the great communicator are broken down into categories to help make more sense of this topic.

Here are the major components of the most effective communicators:

- People Skills (external)
- Passion (internal)
- Credibility
- Clarity
- Listening Ability

There are more books and articles written on effective communications as a part of leadership than any other subject; and that's a fact that is not unexpected. So what makes up this greatest asset of leaders?

The five components of communications listed here are addressed individually. But these elements are overlapping conceptually and also are mutually supporting. For example, one cannot have *people skills* and not have the *ability to listen*.

PART I

People Skills[1]: Simply, this refers to the ability to socially interact with others effectively. Such skills are a basic component of being a well-adapted person and successful professional. What the greatest communicator does is hone this ability into a fine-tuned asset.

The talent of possessing people skills also means that one has the ability to "connect with people." Often this appears to be a natural-born quality because it is quite difficult to learn and requires the ability to use many different abilities at the same time.

President Bill Clinton is an example of someone who could walk into a room and have everyone focus on him. He knew his audience. He had confidence, intensity, and charisma. A true leader can make people feel that they are something special. President Clinton said it best himself, "I can feel your pain."

Verbal skills are crucial. Through proper tone of voice, word inflection, use of key words and phrases, one can deliver ideas more efficiently. Whether speaking to a person one-on-one, to a small group, or large audience, the way the leader speaks to them differs only in degree.

Non-verbal messages are also important when connecting to people. This means a leader is able to communicate through facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and other body positions. This helps thwart misinterpretations. It also includes the way a person dresses and body posture.

People skills therefore are one of the key aspects of great communications. Used in everyday life, anyone who has wants to do well should look to improve their ability to connect to others. This is the mark of the greatest leaders and allows them to inspire people to follow.

In Part 2, passion and credibility will be addressed. While these have been addressed in earlier posts, it is crucial to understanding how these interact within successful communications.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People_skills

PART II

In Part 1 of this 3-part series on great communicators, the idea that people skills are crucial to successful communications was proposed. Any cursory reading on communications will concentrate on *people skills* as a major factor in a great leader's communication success.

In Part 2, this discussion will focus on both *passion* and *credibility* as two of the five factors. The interplay between the two is something that is vital to the success of a great communicator.

Passion[1]: Fundamentally, passion is having the internal motivation to do something. It is both the enthusiasm to do good things and the self-evaluation to take corrective action to improve one's self. Passion is positive motivation; a leader cannot be passionate when driven by fear or trepidation.

Credibility[2]: Credibility means that people believe that a leader has a certain level of *skills* and *expertise,* plus that leader is *trusted to do the right thing* with those skills and expertise. This also means that credibility is based on relevant experience that has formed the expertise.

A great communicator cannot have credibility without the passion to build skills and expertise. This requires introspection, hard work, and enough moral courage to see one's self as needing more and better skills and expertise. Whether it is through formal education, certifications, or experience, it all boils down to the desire to improve.

By improving oneself, only then can a leader be a better communicator. The greatest communicator got there by learning. It was not an inherited skill from mother and father but one that was developed through a lifetime of work and focus on that skill set.

It is true that some people like President Bill Clinton had an incredible ability to communicate with people. President Ronald Reagan (the "Great communicator") was also an exceptional communicator who seemed to be born with the talent. In reality both men worked hard to establish their communication skills.

Passion and credibility thus are two more of the key aspects of great communicators. In Part 3, **clarity** and **listening ability** will be addressed. These final two components will be tied into the other three in the last installment of "great communications."

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passion_(emotion)

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credibility

PART III

In Part 1 and 2 of this series on great communicators, the idea that *people skills, passion, and credibility* are vital to successful communications was proposed.

In this final Part 3, the discussion will be on *clarity* and *listening ability* as another two of these five factors.

Clarity[1]: The ability to take complex, confusing subjects and translate them into coherent, understandable points is an important talent. And, it is difficult to learn. The great communicator however is able to do this in-stride, without much thought because this is a practiced attribute.

Criticism of this ability is commonplace, because may appear that leaders are oversimplifying. It is imperative, however, that leaders are able to fully articulate their needs of the organization. Sometimes this means not dwelling on the minor issues but focusing on the more important subject.

Clarity requires focus. Without the ability to put issues into context of its worth, means that leaders will have difficulty handling large amounts of and complex information. Intelligence of the leader helps but is not a prerequisite.

Listening Ability[2]: The keys to listening is the ability to "connect" with people. This means understanding people and knowing the psychology of how humans operate, especially in your organizational field of expertise. Being open minded, empathetic, and respectful will go a long way to helping the great communicator.

It also means have a keen sense of observation. Noticing small clues like facial expressions and understanding the nuances of language, enables the leader to "read" and understand better where people are coming from. By doing so, the leader can win the hearts of the audience.

The Five Components: The greatest leaders possess all five components of effective communications. Senior leaders that are truly great are the ones who have fine-tuned this ability to a high degree. This takes effort and many hours of social interaction – making the trait "appear" to be a natural ability.

Communication is also very dependent upon the context and the culture in which it occurs. There are social norms (i.e., societal morés) that "bend and distort" these components but, as always, the basics are the same.
Great leaders are greatest communicators.

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[1] http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Clarity?s=t

[2] Also called "active listening." See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Active_listening

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks to all the dedicated readers who have made this "Green Book on Senior Executive Leadership" a success. Also, thanks to my wife Nancy who has also given her time and patience to allow me to work.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
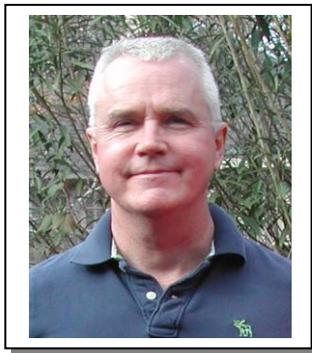
My name is Douglas Satterfield and I live with my wife Nancy in New York City. My experience in Senior Executive Leadership has been fascinating and my intent is to share some of the lessons and characteristics of those who have gone before me.

As I travel about, people ask me to discuss leadership and those many conversations have helped develop deeper friendships. This "Green Book" is a capture of both those discussions and new leadership discoveries.