



FIVE STEPS TO ENHANCE YOUR LEADERSHIP PERSONALITY

One useful way to better understand yourself as a leader is to understand your personality, says Iain McCormack. So how emotionally stable, extroverted, open to experience, agreeable and conscientious are you?

Like many other leadership writers, Bill George, in his book *True North*, argues that leaders need to gain self-awareness in order to further develop themselves. This is easy to suggest but not so easy to do. George even admits that it can

take a lifetime to gain complete self-awareness.

One useful way to better understand yourself as a leader is to understand your personality. The advantage of exploring this avenue is that personality has been extensively researched over that last 30

years and there is a great deal of science behind it.

There is now almost universal agreement among practicing and academic psychologists that personality has five major dimensions: emotional stability, extroversion, openness to experience,

agreeableness and conscientiousness.

Understanding these five dimensions and your own tendencies in these areas can be extremely beneficial to you as a leader. This understanding can help you build on your strengths, moderate your weaknesses and work more effectively with both your team and your peers.

1. EMOTIONAL STABILITY

Emotional stability is important for leaders as it helps them to deal effectively with pressure, hurdles and complexity. However, leaders can have too much of a good thing. Leaders that are a picture of perfect resilience and calm, may seriously underestimate risk, be unconcerned about other's emotions and so be seen as uninspiring and uncharismatic.

Can you imagine Martin Luther King giving his famous "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech perfectly calmly and without emotion – I am sure you cannot. By contrast emotional instability can lead to worry, apprehension and insecurity. Highly reactive, shoot-from-the-hip leaders or those constrained by fear will rarely get the business risk and reward balance right.

So the first question to ask in order to develop your leadership personality is: How emotionally stable am I? Are you so emotionally stable that are you in danger of being seen as unconcerned and uncaring?

If this is the case you should look for some training or coaching in the area of emotional intelligence. Or, on the other hand, do you worry a lot and find it difficult to make decisions? If this is the case you may benefit from training in the area of relaxation and mindfulness meditation.

Perhaps you are somewhere in the middle and this is not a leadership area you need to work on? To check your self-assessment ask for feedback from your peers and your team.

2. EXTROVERSION

The second major personality dimension is extroversion. This is another important characteristic of successful leaders as it enables them to be engaging, outgoing, and assertive.

However, when overdone, it can lead to dominance and aggression. Leaders like this can easily alienate team members and cause high staff turnover. By contrast leaders who are very introverted can be seen as socially isolated and insensitive.

So the second question to develop your leadership personality is: How extroverted or outgoing am I?

If people comment that you can be domineering you should look for some training or coaching in the area of empathy development. Or, on the other hand, do you shy away from others a lot and find it difficult to speak in public? If this is the case you may benefit from training in the area of conversation and presentation skills.

Perhaps you are somewhere in the middle and this is something you do not need to work on. Again to validate your own views ask for feedback from your peers and team.

3. OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE

The third personality dimension is openness to experience and this means the tendency to be imaginative, artistic, willing to try out new things and intellectually curious. Successful leaders tend to be either too low or too high in this dimension.

Being very high can mean individuals are too easily distracted by new ideas or events and often unable to effectively complete tasks. Being too low can mean that people are unimaginative, have a very narrow range of interests and are conventional and dogmatic. So where do you sit?

If you see the need to improve your distractibility and to complete tasks then you should seek out some coaching in the ability to suppress disruptive thoughts, feelings and old habits. If you want to improve your creativity you will need to set aside time to explore new potential areas of interest from architecture to art to aesthetics.

4. AGREEABLENESS

Agreeableness is the degree of importance people place on getting along with others. Those high in agreeableness are accepting, trusting, frank, modest and sympathetic. Those low in it are suspicious, cautious, competitive and hard headed.

After many years of research it appears that there is very little relationship between agreeableness and effective leadership. Some leaders are hard headed, suspicious and cautious and it is easy to see how this is important for a correctional service (prisons) leader or a CEO of a security company.

Other leaders are trusting, modest and sympathetic and this style is important for leaders in social work or any of the caring professions. So as long as you



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are not alienating your team members with your coldly logical and stubborn behaviour or with letting your team abdicate responsibility because of your soft-heartedness, there is not too much to work on here.

5. CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

The final personality dimension is conscientiousness or how strong your sense of duty is. This has been shown to be a very important element of leadership.

Effective leaders have a strong sense of their own competence, are well organised, responsible and ambitious. As with many of the other personality dimensions conscientiousness can be overdone and these leaders tend to be perfectionistic, overly demanding and neglect their health and family as a result of overwork.

If this is a tendency of yours find a coach and read the book *When Perfect Isn't Good Enough* by Martin Anthony and Richard Swinson.

However if you need to get better organised and effective try reading *Getting Things Done* by David Allen and find a colleague to support your newly organised self.

As you develop your leadership capability you will need to better understand your areas of strength and weakness. Understanding the structure of personality and asking for feedback from your coach, mentor, family, friends or team is a great way to build self awareness and so develop your leadership skills. **M**

Dr Iain McCormick enables senior executives to experience fulfilment in their work life and he develops fun, high-performance teams that people love to be part of.
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