

The Four A's of Leadership

*Barbara Kay, MA, LPC, RCC
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A New Direction in Leadership

Professors at top universities now teach MBA students NOT to write business plans. Instead they're taught to adopt the "drunken man stumble, in which you keep staggering forward in the general direction of your vision, without feeling the need to go anywhere in a straight line." This quote from a Center for Creative Leadership white paper flies in the face of accepted leadership practices.

There's a big shift going on in leadership development that rejects many established standards. In fact, McKinsey, a leading global management-consulting firm, recently published a list of leadership fundamentals and there's not one business or technical competency on the list. They focus entirely on relationship skills including, connecting, engaging and energizing. Certainly business competencies are important but it is fundamental individual and interpersonal skills that elevate leaders to greatness.

The Four A's of Leadership

These fundamental qualities are summarized in the Four A's of Leadership model. It synthesizes multiple elements of leadership development into four core characteristics. Great leaders are positively:

- ★ Aware
- ★ Authentic
- ★ Adaptable
- ★ Accountable

Aware

Good leaders are acutely aware of their gifts and challenges, and those of their team. They regularly seek honest feedback and use it to build excellence within themselves and others. Awareness is the first fundamental of leadership.

Authentic

Authentic leaders are honest, genuine and caring. They say what they do and do what they say. They have a powerful combination of strength, confidence, generosity, humility and integrity.



Adaptable

Adaptable describes a flexible and open leadership style. Adaptable leaders give their team the authority and support to be agile, resourceful, self-directed and pro-active. They realize traditional top down direction slows action, hampers innovation and reduces the power of individual responsibility. Instead of directing, they focus on equipping and inspiring team members to willingly lead themselves and others toward a common goal.

Accountable

Leading consistent and productive accountability is one of the biggest challenges for any leader. Fostering a positive balance of challenge and support is a tough. Most of us tend to be too hard or too soft. The good news is that developing the other leadership qualities of awareness, authenticity and adaptability greatly increase the odds of achieving balanced accountability.

What Do I Do Now?

Linda Hill, Harvard Business School professor and chair of the Harvard Leadership Initiative is an expert on leadership development. In her view, becoming more self-aware is one of the most important tasks of any leader. Assessments are a great resource for building individual and team effectiveness. Below are five tips on how to select and use these valuable tools:

1. ***Expensive or exclusive ≠ quality*** – There are plenty of quality assessments that are reasonably priced and easily available. I'm leery of tools that are expensive or lock the client into required certifications and exclusive agreements. The tools I use are widely available. Clients can get them through a number of sources.
2. ***What the assessment can't tell you is equally important*** – Assessments are based on defined parameters. People tend to over generalize and it's common to want an assessment to do more than it can do. Learn what it does and does not measure so the results can be utilized properly.
3. ***There are a variety of good choices*** – There are multiple useful assessments. The ones I use are particularly helpful but there are others to choose from. I often coach people who've already taken an assessment and we use the results they have. If an organization has a quality favorite, I recommend they stick with it. If folks are looking for an assessment, then we talk about their interests and pick a preferred option among several good choices.



4. ***Go to an established provider*** – Quality assessments take significant resources and time to develop, test and verify. They don't get whipped up overnight by gurus. The good providers have a history in the business and can authenticate the accuracy and reliability of the instrument.
5. ***Invest in practical application & development*** – Most assessment results are self-explanatory. It's possible for individuals to build and execute their own development plan, but it's not likely. I frequently come across folks who took an assessment, read the results and stuck it in a drawer, end of story. Investing in application and development can turn the assessment into a fantastic catalyst for growth.

There are excellent instruments for multiple roles and purposes. They're easy, efficient and effective. Quality assessments reveal important data fundamental to individuals, teams and leaders who seek to be aware, authentic, adaptable and accountable.

Where do I go for assessments?

1. *Career & Outplacement Firms* are a good source for assessments that evaluate core strengths, talents and interests. They use assessments to help individuals find their ideal career path.
2. *Human Resources* professionals are good sources for predictive assessments used for employee selection. They also may have resources for career placement and training.
3. *Coaches & Consultants* focus more on growth and achievement and are a source for assessments that develop individuals, build dynamic teams and enhance leadership.

