

A New Direction In Leadership

by Barbara Kay, LPC, RCC



Unlike a generation ago, professors at some top universities now teach MBA students not to write business plans. Instead, students are 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.”*¹ This quote from a Center for Creative Leadership

white paper flies in the face of traditionally accepted leadership practices.

There’s a big shift going on in leadership development that rejects many established standards. In fact, McKinsey & Co., a global management consulting firm, suggests a list of capabilities for centered leadership², and there’s not one business or technical competency on it. The list focuses 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.

These fundamental qualities are summarized in what is commonly referred to as the four As of leadership, synthesizing multiple elements of leadership development into four core characteristics. Great leaders are positively:

1. Aware
2. Authentic
3. Adaptable
4. 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

Where Do I Go For Assessments?

If you wish to evaluate core strengths, talents and interests of you and your staff, career and outplacement firms are a good source. They use assessments to help individuals find their ideal career paths.

Human resources professionals are good sources for predictive assessments used for employee selection. They also may have resources for career placement and training.

Coaches and consultants focus more on growth and achievement and are a source for assessments that develop individuals, build dynamic teams and enhance leadership. —Barbara Kay

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

Use Assessments to Improve Leadership

Linda Hill, Harvard professor and faculty chair of the Harvard Leadership Initiative, is an expert on leadership development. In her view³, becoming more self-aware is one of the most important tasks of any leader. Assessments can be a great resource for becoming self-aware and being a more successful leader by building individual and team effectiveness. There are many assessment instruments for multiple roles and purposes. Quality assessments reveal important data fundamental to individuals, teams and leaders who seek to be aware, authentic, adaptable and accountable. Here are four tips on selecting and using assessment tools:

Expensive or exclusive does not equal quality. Plenty of quality assessments are reasonably priced and easily available. I'm often 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.

Use an established provider. Quality assessments take significant resources and time to develop, test and verify; they aren't whipped up overnight by gurus. Good providers will have a history in the business and will authenticate the accuracy and reliability of the assessment instrument.

Invest in practical application and development. Most assessment results are self-explanatory, so it's possible for individuals to build and execute their own development plans, but let's face it—that'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.

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. Learn what the specific assessment you intend to take does and does not measure so the results can be used properly. ○

Barbara Kay, LPC, RCC, is a business psychologist and productivity coach. She is the author of The Top Performer's Guide to Change and The \$14 Trillion Woman. Contact her at www.barbarakaycoaching.com.

Endnotes

1. Petrie, Nick. *Future Trends in Leadership Development*; Center for Creative Leadership white paper, August 2011. www.ccl.org.
2. *The Value of Centered Leadership: McKinsey Global Survey Results*, McKinsey Quarterly, October 2010. www.mckinseyquarterly.com.
3. Markowitz, Eric. *Becoming a Better Leader*; Inc.com, December 2010. www.inc.com/articles/2010/12/linda-hill-being-the-boss-book.html.



Barbara Kay MA, LPC, RCC

630.212.5460

barbara@barbarakaycoaching.com
www.barbarakaycoaching.com

Practice Management
Solutions

Reprinted with permission by the Financial Planning Association, *Journal of Financial Planning*, July/August 2012, Barbara Kay, LPC, RCC, *A New Direction in Leadership*.

For more information on the Financial Planning Association, please visit www.fpanet.org or call 1-800-322-4237.