



# LEADERSHIP MATTERS

13 Roles of a High Performance Leader



**MDA** LEADERSHIP  
CONSULTING

*Since 1981*

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## Leadership Matters.

This book is about leadership and leading. It draws on the knowledge that the experts at MDA Leadership Consulting have generated since the firm was founded in 1981.

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# WHAT WE THINK ABOUT LEADERSHIP

You wouldn't walk into a bookstore and expect to find a copy of *Orbital Mechanics for Dummies*. If you did, chances are you'd be nervous signing on for a job flying with NASA. Because you know that a task like space travel *isn't* for dummies. It's complex. It requires education, training, practical experience, and continuous learning. It's, well, rocket science.

So is leadership.

Imagine leading a multi-million dollar business unit of a global medical technology company with two thousand employees in your division on three continents, an upcoming acquisition in another country, scientific advances that threaten to make your core products obsolete, and a team that looks to *you* to define strategy, direction, and values. That's rocket science.

Yes, you can find hundreds of books on leadership, including *Leadership for Dummies*. The question is how you can take one of the world's most complex and demanding jobs and compress it into a few pages of Leadership 101.

Answer: You can't.

We *don't* expect you to read this book and walk away with a roadmap to make you a better leader. The only roadmap that works is one that's tailored to your personal situation and based on tough, practical career experience.

What we *do* want you to understand from this book is the *complexity* and *importance* of leadership. That the quality of leadership in organizations makes the difference between success and failure. And that being a leader is the most challenging and multi-dimensional task you will ever face in your career.

Even if you used to be an astronaut.

### LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Without great leadership, nothing works. Make a list of the things that make a business successful. Innovative, high quality products. Efficient infrastructure. High levels of employee satisfaction and commitment. Strong customer loyalty. Dominant market share. Healthy profit.

Now imagine an organization that can sustain *any* of these outcomes without great leadership.

For a few quarters? Maybe. But businesses that deliver high performance year after year have one thing in common: superior leaders at all levels of the organization.

Study after study has shown that leadership practices, employee performance, customer satisfaction, and bottom-line results are all linked.<sup>1</sup> Effective leadership and good management:

- *increase a company's sales, profit, and stock value;*
- *reduce employee grievances, absenteeism, and turnover;*  
*and*
- *contribute more to a firm's financial success than industry, environment, competitive, and economic factors—combined!*

1. For example, see D. Whetten and K. Cameron, *Developing Management Skills*, 2005, and McKinsey & Co./Centre for Economic Performance, *Management Practices: The Impact on Company Performance*, 2005.

Leadership is about driving the performance of others. Go ahead and ask yourself: Are you willing to judge your success entirely on what *other people* do? Because that's what leadership demands.

Great leadership transforms an organization by creating and communicating a direction that inspires people to work harder and achieve something that is bigger and better than their own interests. Great leadership touches people personally—it elevates their potential and helps them grow and contribute more to the organization.

With great leadership, anything is possible.

### GREAT LEADERS EVOLVE

Great leadership is a continuous process of learning and development. Most leaders fail because they fail to grow.

The irony of leadership is that, in almost every new leadership role, the skills that got you there *aren't enough for you to succeed*. It's natural to want to do what you've always done and what has served you well in the past. If it worked before, you assume it will work again.

But it won't.

Maybe you know more about the business at a technical level than almost anyone else. Maybe you can manage to a budget. Maybe you've delivered great results already as a leader of an entire division.

But move up just one level, and you're in a different job. In a new leadership position, the former technical expert must focus on hiring and training others. The former budget manager must allocate financial resources to competing projects and priorities. The former division leader must work with and lead entirely new areas of the business.

That's true for every level of leadership. Just when you think you've "got it," you need to learn something new. Each level requires a growth in skills and a new assessment of the roles, values, and priorities needed to succeed. As leaders move higher in the organization, they need to learn about the whole business, not just their own

function. They need to understand the marketplace and their company's competitive position. Most of all, they need to continue learning about themselves, so they remain credible and effective.

This process never ends—indeed, it grows more and more complex and multi-dimensional.

A popular book called *The Leadership Pipeline*<sup>2</sup> describes six critical transitions for leaders, as individuals go from managing themselves to managing others, managing managers, functions, business units, groups of businesses, and ultimately the enterprise itself. Each bend in the pipeline demands more and different things from the leader.

When companies don't understand this progression, their leadership pipeline is filled with people who are performing below the requirements of their jobs. To be successful, your skills as a leader need to be aligned with your current role, not your last one.

### THE MOST CRITICAL FACTOR

Our perspective is that leadership is *the most* critical factor in determining an organization's success. Companies that prosper and survive do so because of strong leaders.

We believe leaders are mostly made—not born. But leadership effectiveness develops over time. Becoming a great leader depends on a number of things: your personal traits and qualities, your skills, and the lessons you learn from your experience.

Does a great leader have to be intelligent? It helps, but it's not the most important or admired characteristic of leaders. In a study of over 20,000 people on four continents,<sup>3</sup> seven characteristics out-ranked intelligence as a quality most looked for and admired in a leader. In rank-order, these included honesty, being forward-looking, inspiring, competent, fair-minded, supportive, and broad-minded.

2. Ram Charan, Stephen Drotter, and Jim Noel, *The Leadership Pipeline: How to Build the Leadership Powered Company*, 2000.

3. J. Kouzes and B. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 1995.

Other research expands the list. We also know that great leaders must show curiosity, humility, energy and drive, an openness to learning and change, courage, a willingness to take risks, and emotional balance and self-confidence.

Great leaders have a broad and deep skill set. They help people plan and accomplish their work—and address the human and interpersonal dimensions of the workplace. Great leaders plan with foresight and solve problems with insight. They inform, clarify, monitor, and communicate extremely well.

Great leaders also have a special talent with people. They share an active concern for “soft issues,” are savvy about building and working with teams, have an aptitude for listening and understanding, and the ability to develop trusting relationships.

Great leaders know that real learning happens on the job. They aggressively seek out assignments that help them grow and develop. They look for opportunities to take on more responsibility. They put themselves “on the line” in situations that matter. They manage through difficulties and adversity. They make things happen in situations where they have no direct authority or control. These are the kinds of experiences that build and shape strong leaders.

Finally, a great leader is always measured by results, not excuses. Great leaders find ways to succeed, despite obstacles, despite internal and external challenges, despite their own limitations and weaknesses. They rise to the occasion.

Are you up to the challenge?

### THE ROLES OF A HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADER

Leadership is multi-dimensional. Imagine a soccer coach who recruits only the best players—and then fails to develop game plans and plays. A talent manager? Sure. Strategist? Not so much.

The same coach would be no more successful if he knew how to craft the most brilliant plays but failed to find the right players or give them the proper training and equipment.

There are many responsibilities of leadership and therefore different hats that a leader must wear.

We have identified **thirteen distinct roles** of the high performance leader. On the pages that follow we provide an introduction to these roles and how they influence a leader's performance.

Obviously, certain roles are more critical in different situations. A leader facing rampant turnover may need to devote the most time as talent manager, team leader, and coach. A leader overseeing a product line expansion needs to emphasize his or her role as strategist, results driver, and change sponsor. And while certain roles may require more time and attention today, it does not mean that the other roles are unimportant.

These are *business-based* choices. Choosing the roles that require the most focus means assessing what the organization and team require from the leader and not just gravitating to the roles where the leader feels most comfortable.

### 13 ROLES OF A HIGH PERFORMANCE LEADER

Coach	External Influencer
Talent Manager	International Executive
Team Leader	Visionary
Function Expert	Strategist
Internal Influencer	Spiritual Leader
Results Driver	Change Sponsor
Executive-at-Large	

A common danger for leaders is to over-rely on their skills in one or two roles, particularly those where they have been successful in the past. This is a potentially disastrous path. First, the roles emphasized in yesterday's job may be unimportant to today's business situations. Second,

by maintaining a narrow focus based on comfort level or existing skills, the leader risks ignoring vital dimensions of the current leadership challenge. As the needs of the business shift, so must the roles the leader emphasizes and pays attention to.

A leader must be intentional about the roles he or she plays. By carefully prioritizing time and finding ways to be successful at today's most critical roles, a leader can achieve and sustain high performance.