

LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



THE MAGAZINE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

JANUARY 2009



**Being
a Leader**

**Align
Core Values**

**Interview with
George Borst**

Master Innovation

**Gary Hamel
Leadership Consultant**



"Leadership Excellence is an exceptional way to learn and then apply the best and latest ideas in the field of leadership."

—WARREN BENNIS, AUTHOR AND USC PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT

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Best and Worst Leaders

We sometimes forget that all three pigs were proactive and enterprising. All built shelter and had some provision. But only Practical Pig's brick built-to-last structure stood the test of time when good times ended and recession set in.

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Skip the Mirror

Look to others to learn of self.



by Bob Schwieterman

AS A KID, MY MOTHER used to tell us to always check the mirror before going to school. She wanted to ensure we weren't wearing a stained shirt or have food in our teeth. And while I now have a family that points out such things to me, I still look at my reflection each morning.

Many leaders use this self-reflecting approach to assess their performance. They rely on their perspective, personal experiences, and belief systems when charting their future leadership course. They wrongly assume the skills and behaviors that brought them to a senior position will continue to work.

Managers attain greater responsibilities based on demonstrating specific functional or "hard" skills; however, effective leadership is based more on interpersonal or "soft" skills. Many new managers fail because they lack interpersonal skills. The Hay Group reports: "The higher people move up, the more likely they are to overrate themselves and develop blindspots that hinder their effectiveness as leaders."

TRACOM's research shows a disconnect between a manager's view of their own abilities and the view of the people with whom they work—particularly in interpersonal skills and effective leadership. The study involved 166 executives, 337 managers, and 377 staff employees. It asked managers to rate their abilities and asked executives and staff to rate the managers with whom they work. The findings included:

- More than half of managers selected "effective communication" as one of their greatest strengths. Yet nearly 78 percent of staff and 85 percent of executives said communication skills were a deficiency among managers.
- 56 percent of managers said they had not promoted someone due to the candidate's poor interpersonal skills.
- 85 percent of executives had witnessed an executive-level leader fail or derail due to poor interpersonal skills.

This research makes a compelling case that many leaders lack interpersonal skills. As leadership expert Susan West wrote: "When it comes to being a good manager or leader, you must

master the hard skills of your job as well as the soft skills of interpersonal relations. Interpersonal skills must be a focus of your leadership development."

Because most leaders believe they have strong interpersonal skills, they need to see an objective measure of their skills (often in the form of a multi-rater or 360-degree assessment). After they complete a questionnaire about themselves with input from colleagues, direct reports, and boss, they need to see an evaluation of their interpersonal skills and behavioral preferences, showing strengths and weaknesses as well as highlighting areas where their self-ratings are different from those provided by others. The report will identify specific areas that can limit the leader's interpersonal effectiveness and performance. Areas that can be affected by interpersonal shortcomings include the person's ability to establish rapport, give and receive feedback, communicate, or manage/delegate work assignments effectively.

An objective report showing that the leader's self-perception of their abilities differs from others provides opportunity for improvement. While some people will shrug off the data, most leaders find the information to be eye-opening and use it as a launching pad for personal improvement. It creates a highly "teachable moment."

Leaders recognize they're not being as effective with others as they want. One-on-one coaching or workshop training programs are effective ways to explore interpersonal effectiveness issues and build specific skills.

You can improve your interpersonal skills by identifying the behavioral preferences of others and work in a way that makes them comfortable.

Take these four basic steps:

1. Know yourself—understand your behavioral preferences.
 2. Control yourself—don't let those preferences dominate interactions.
 3. Know others—note the behavioral preferences of your key relationships.
 4. Do something for others—accommodate preferences of key relationships.
- You can easily learn these skills and quickly see results. Often, just making an effort to work better with others increases productivity.

Interpersonal skills never become obsolete. Apply the principles of effective relationships to keep moving to next levels of leadership. LE

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ACTION: Improve your interpersonal skills.