

# LEADERSHIP Excellence



*Warren Bennis*

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## Beyond Negotiation



*The time for talking is over. It's now time for immediate, innovative and incisive action, as evident in the gestures and facial expressions—the warriors' clear response to the last proposal.*

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# Personalized Development

*Make the eight dimensions work for you.*



by Jeffrey Sugerman, Mark Scullard, and Emma Wilhelm

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, WE BEGAN A LEADERSHIP program centered on the question, “How are personality characteristics relevant to leadership?” We surmised that a leader’s personality plays *some* role in their effectiveness, but we wanted to know *how* and *why*. And, how can leaders use knowledge about personality to be more effective?

Despite all of the tools, processes and programs meant to develop leadership skills, some leaders are still more effective than others. And even those who become outstanding leaders make typical early-career mistakes.

How do we *know* when we see an effective leader in action? What is it about them? We began our “leader watching” by collecting observations from our 360-degree research, conducting an extensive literature review, and interviewing leaders at all levels.

We also took into account the leaders’ *personality self-assessments*. We learned whether leaders see themselves as primarily hard-charging and competitive, or more collaborative. We gained a sense of whether they were gregarious and entrepreneurial, or more reflective and analytical. We began to see distinct patterns that we categorized into leadership default settings, or primary leadership dimensions.

What comes to mind when you ask yourself, “Who am I as a leader?” You may think of objective facts such as your title, the size of your group, or your pay grade. But, if you push yourself further, you’ll start to name personal style characteristics. For instance, you might call yourself a *fair* leader, a *tough* leader, or a *motivating* leader.

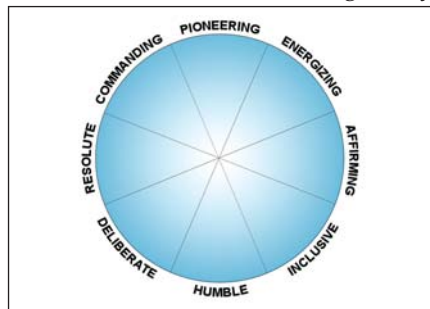
## Eight Dimensions Leadership

That sense of who you are and what you prioritize as a leader is your default setting. We identified eight dimensions: *Pioneering, Energizing, Affirming, Inclusive, Humble, Deliberate, Resolute, and Commanding*. These

dimensions form a *circumplex* model of behavior. The dimensions are arranged in a circular fashion, and those that sit across from one another are considered to be the most different in meaning.

Those dimensions opposite a given leader’s primary dimension should come least naturally to her; without conscious effort, she’ll likely stay in her “comfort zone” of behaviors. If she’s naturally a *Commanding* leader—that is, forceful, driven, and results-oriented—it will be a stretch for her to dial into the *Inclusive* dimension (facilitating dialogue and showing diplomacy).

So, given what we learned about leaders’ primary dimensions and their 360 ratings, we were curious: “How are personality characteristics relevant to leadership?” What we found surprised us. Those leaders who receive globally



high ratings of leadership effectiveness not only excel in particular areas of strength such as their primary leadership dimensions, but they also stretch *beyond* their default settings and cover more area of our *circular leadership model*.

## Creating a Personalized Experience

Leaders rated as *highly effective* can cover a broad spectrum of leadership behaviors, but *how do they learn to move beyond their individual strengths?* They often learn things the hard way—by seeing what isn’t working in terms of how others are negatively impacted by their behaviors. Many leaders also learn from *mentors* whose strengths differ.

Clearly, it would be preferable to find ways for leaders to develop more efficiently; and since personality *does* matter to leaders, it makes sense to *personalize* the LD experience. A *Ten Commandments of Leadership-style* program can’t possibly address the myriad perspectives that people bring to leadership.

The first step in creating a more per-

sonal development process is to understand your *psychological drivers*. If you’re an *Affirming* leader, you likely have a need for acceptance and affection, and an aversion to conflict. How could these two drivers impact your ability to traverse into other areas of the circle? Leadership behaviors such as *setting high standards for others* and *speaking up about problems* may be more challenging.

If you’re a *Resolute* leader—the opposite of the *Affirming* leader—you likely have a natural skepticism and a tenacious drive to overcome obstacles. These deep-seated *psychological drivers* may inhibit you being seen as *approachable* or able to create a positive culture for those you lead. By doing reflective work to understand how *your* particular psychological drivers may influence your leadership behaviors, you will be better prepared to make changes.

## Leadership Lessons You Need Now

How can you begin to stretch beyond your *default behaviors*? There is no one-size-fits-all prescription, even when taking your primary leadership dimension into account. The lessons that you need right now depend not only on your personality, but also on the culture, your goals, and career stage.

To personalize the LD experience, we created a *Leadership Needs Assessment* to help leaders discover which dimension they need to focus on now. Often, it’s a dimension that sits opposite their own, but this is not always the case.

Once you consider which one or two dimensions to work on, the key is to *learn from other leaders’ experiences*. Leadership development *does not* have to be all trial and error. For example, the *Humble* leader teaches us that: people need leaders to stay calm under fire; you need other people more than you think; and other people have needs that differ from your own.

We help not-so-humble leaders to assimilate these lessons into their leadership practices. Individual leaders can reflect on the drivers that trip them up.

Personality characteristics can be *leveraged* to create a highly personalized LD experience. With some self-assessment and reflection, you can learn to stretch beyond your comfort zone. You can identify thoughts that may be holding you back and take steps to adopting the positive behaviors that will enhance your ability to lead. You can learn to lead like you—*only better*. LE

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**ACTION:** Understand your *psychological drivers*.