

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## The foundation of leadership

Walter N Lockwood, Consultant



*I have known a thousand scamps, but I have never met one who considered himself so. Self-knowledge isn't so common.—Ouida*

Kyle Wagner sat across the table leaning forward in anticipation. “Just tell me what to do, Walt. I don’t have time for all the psychology stuff; just give me the steps to lead this bunch.” At the same time he impatiently glanced at his watch. Not surprisingly, Kyle wanted a quick fix, a technique, an approach, a model, something that would allow him to get on with the high demands and time pressure of his position.

Like many others, he did not recognize, or accept, his *obligation* to become a truly effective leader. And like many others, 20 years from now he’ll be wondering why he didn’t make it, why he feels incomplete and unfulfilled.

The workforce, the human capital of the organization, deserves excellent leadership. Unfortunately, Kyle’s expectations have become too common and rather typical of many who aspire to, or have been thrust into, positions of leadership. For too many, leadership has become just

another technique for getting work done. However, leadership is about human behavior and is therefore heavily steeped in human psychology, and that’s work, lots of it.

Over 35 years of executive coaching and comprehensive behavioral interviewing, the question that has consistently gotten the blank stares is, “What are your strengths?” Another one that seems to stump lots of folks is, “What are your development areas?”

While you’d expect people climbing the career ladder to have formulated definitive answers for questions such as these, more often than not, they display an alarming lack of self-awareness and self-knowledge. Moreover, they also exhibit a reluctance, or inability, to share their life wisdom—their introspection.

When I ask, “What do you do when you don’t know what to do,” I expect to hear some imagination, creativity, or innovation drawn from their introspection and intuition, drawn on their past training and life experiences. Instead, too often, there are few cogent responses.

Hundreds of times I have told new clients, “If you could see you, the way I see you, you’d be an entirely differ-

ent person.” In fact, I typically assess them stronger and more competent than they do themselves. They just don’t know themselves at an acceptable level; their self-awareness comes up woefully shy.

Simplistically, leadership can be defined as getting another person to do what you want him to do. On the other hand, a more in-depth analysis confirms that leadership is about creating desired behavior, motivating, and inspiring folks to want to do something—in most cases exceeding expectations.

Leadership is about creating sufficient confidence and safety to allow others to focus on desirable goals and objectives, to attempt more than they thought possible. It’s about creating sufficient trust to gain their dedication, allowing them to experience self-actualization—that is, to be all they can be.

There are libraries filled with the works of leadership scholars and experts. There are also thousands of proven models, techniques, and processes intended to maximize one’s leadership actions. Making a concerted effort to learn as much as possible about leadership and its application is admirable. Still, because of the

## Why you want to read about leadership

My experience with the production and distribution of electricity took place during the 17 years I worked for Florida Power Corp and Progress Energy, retiring as a consultant to senior management. Initially, my job was to develop and implement an Assessment Center Process, a program designed to identify high-potential men and women from both the line and production departments.

The assessors were mid-level managers trained to observe and collect behavioral factors during various exercises and simulations. Their objective was to assess the participant’s competencies in various dimensions—such as analysis, leadership, judgment, decisiveness, oral communications, and development of subordinates.

Now, if I were a plant manager, maintenance superintendent, or shift supervisor looking through the COMBINED CYCLE Journal, and I came across a series of articles on leadership written by a guy named Walt Lockwood, I’d wonder what had happened to the publisher.

What was he thinking? Why leadership? CCJ is supposed to be about powerplants and electricity generation. Well, the answer is easy to explain. This represents 35 years of knowledge I want to share, with the hope that it will make a difference in the lives of aspiring men and women, as well as those who are comfortable in their current jobs but want to perform better in their leadership roles.

The reader is offered a view of leadership essentially developed while working with men and woman on the shop floor, the control room, as well as in the offices of plant managers and superintendents. Additionally, that view of leadership also was expanded by working with and observing the senior management of the company—for example, the president, senior VP production, and the senior VP operations. Incidentally, the last was an assessor before being promoted to his senior position.

Naturally, along the way I learned a lot. I thought I knew a lot but it only took one shift supervisor to straighten me

complexity of leadership and human behavior, effectiveness will not be sustained unless you build on a foundation of self-awareness: There are just too many variables—for example, the behaviors of those to be lead and especially the behaviors of the one doing the leading.

Every employee is different and an established principle of leadership is that *the follower always determines the approach and style the leader will adapt*. Yes, leadership is about shaping human behavior—the employee's and the leader's. Accordingly, leadership is about psychology, requiring substantial investments of time studying and learning about that behavior, theirs and yours.

From the viewpoint of the would-be leader that all begins with an adequate level of self-knowledge which is at the core of leadership competence. If you don't know and understand your own emotions, how can you expect to empathically respond to the emotions of others? If you don't know your own strengths and weaknesses, how can you effectively identify and manage the strengths and weaknesses of others? How can you effectively adapt and apply your talents if you don't know what those talents are?

Effective leaders must instinctively maneuver in ways to keep pace with the employee. Otherwise, how can you maximize the utilization of your organization's human capital?

The criticality of self-awareness in the development of leadership competencies has now caught the attention of scholars who have studied the subject for years.

Recently, when the 75 members of the Stanford Graduate School of Business's Advisory Council were asked to recommend the most impor-

tant capability for leaders to develop, their answer was nearly unanimous: self-awareness. You've got to know what you have in your inventory. You've got to know the skills, talents, and competencies you have at your disposal. Additionally, you also have to be aware of your weaknesses, hang-ups, behavioral foibles, vagaries, and mannerisms that affect your leadership efforts.

## Rate your self-awareness

Let's take a look at what you get when you maximize your self-awareness, which must be continually expanding and effectively applied in the leadership role. Self-awareness and self-knowledge assure that you:

### 1. Have a deep understanding of your values, beliefs, attitudes, moods, and emotions. Know your motivations, needs, and drives.

- What causes you to behave as you do? How do your values, beliefs, and attitudes determine your behaviors?
- How do these behaviors affect others?
- How do these behaviors affect your ability to form alliances?
- What would you really go to the mat for? What's so important to you that you'd put your job at substantial risk—maybe put it all on the line?

*Being in touch with the roots of your behaviors gives you opportunities to manage those behaviors as a means to avoid offending others while at the same time getting on the same page with them. Regardless of a person's leadership skills, every leader is incomplete and must rely on others to*

*fill the gaps. If you're going to lead, you must be able to inspire a following of loyal supporters who will take up the slack and translate your ideas into reality.*

*Knowing yourself provides the confidence to stand alone independently, without the support and backing of others—even though you may look foolish and you could be wrong. That takes courage, the courage that comes with character fortified by a solid self-awareness along with a firm belief that you can do it.*

### 2. Know your fears and apprehensions. Are they real and valid? Is it time to put them behind you, or should you build defenses? How do they affect your self-confidence?

- How do these hinder and limit your willingness to emerge as a leader?
- How do they impact your courage and readiness to stand alone?
- How do these restrict your willingness to be candid and straightforward, to be totally authentic, to expose your shortfalls?
- How do your fears and apprehensions limit your willingness and ability to build vulnerability based trust relationships? Are you willing to be vulnerable?
- How do they curb the full utilization of your skills, talents, and competencies? Do you have the courage to leverage your talents and competencies?

*Self-aware people are noticeably confident because they know what they have going for them. According to Jack Welch, the former chairman and CEO of General Electric Co, "Legitimate self-confidence is a win-*

out. I quickly learned that "help that is not perceived as help is not help." I soon learned that plant people don't take kindly to outsiders with slick ideas. Consequently, I determined the optimal course of action was to listen and observe. I noted that a sense of order and a focus on results was evident. Work got done, and results were produced even though they didn't have the benefit of my knowledge. It was humbling, but it certainly gained the respect of those working on a boiler or the guys and gals in bucket trucks.

Someone once wrote, "If you choose a work you love, you'll never work a day in your life." That quote describes my tenure at Florida Power Corp. I immersed myself in my work. I rarely worked because my daily activities were acts of love of my job. I enjoyed the people. I appreciated the culture with its dedication and commitment to doing the best job possible. But most of all, I respected and valued the morality, the integrity, and the ethics of those

generating and delivering electricity to customers.

My first experience with leadership occurred when I spent 20 years in the Air Force working in the intelligence business. In 1973, I graduated from the University of Maryland in Heidelberg, Germany. After retiring from the Air Force, I taught psychology at Pensacola Junior College and the University of West Florida, where I majored in Organizational Psychology. Organizational Psychology and its application in the workplace became my passion, a 35-yr love affair.

For the last 18 years I've been focused on executive selection and development. Existing and past clients include United Technologies, Marine Terminals Corp, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines, and KPMG. I welcome your questions, feedback, and comments. I believe it would be both value-adding and fulfilling to develop open dialogues with readers who care to engage. I can be reached at [wal-ternlockwood@aol.com](mailto:wal-ternlockwood@aol.com) or 727-224-8418.

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ner; the true test of self-confidence is the courage to be open," to be exposed and vulnerable. It all starts with self-awareness that allows you to understand how your feelings, moods, and behaviors affect others, their relationships with you and ultimately their performance. Because self-aware people are more willing to be vulnerable, they are notably authentic with little or no ambiguity. They are believable and therefore trustworthy.

### 3. Identify your blind spots and know how those blind spots have limited your personal power bases (expertise, information, and reference power) and your influence potential.

- Do you routinely seek feedback from trusted others?
- Do you readily recognize when a blind spot has been identified?
- Do you act on feedback by taking steps to eliminate or minimize blind spots that limit your leadership potential?
- Do you continually seek to identify your personal idiosyncrasies?
- Are you aware of how your mannerisms and non-verbal behaviors affect how others experience you, a factor that affects their trust in you?
- Do you regularly observe the behaviors and reactions of others when they interface with you?
- Do you seek clarification and understanding of others' reactions and responses?
- Do you sense that people trust you? Why or why not?
- Do you routinely engage in self-analysis and self-evaluation?

*A lack of self-awareness brings about inner turmoil because there is no internalized clear understanding of current reality so life becomes a guessing game; a game of chance that you'll be sufficiently lucky to chose the right alternatives while avoiding others.*

*Self-aware people candidly and accurately self-assess. They are self-confident and able to speak openly about their abilities and limitations, their emotions, and how these factors impact their work.*

*Self-aware people readily engage in self-deprecating humor which displays their humanity and it puts others at ease because self-aware folks are comfortable laughing at themselves. As Adlai Stevenson noted, "It's hard to lead a cavalry charge if you think you look funny on a horse."*

### 4. Have a very accurate inventory of your strengths and weaknesses—your competencies.

- Do you routinely analyze your behaviors, focusing on your successes and failures?
- Do you continually leverage your strengths while addressing and compensating for your weaknesses?
- Do you consistently act on constructive feedback and self-discovers?
- Do you maximize the utilization of your introspection and intuition? How does that impact your risk taking?
- Do you effectively leverage your total inventory of strengths, talents, capabilities, and competencies?

*Self-awareness enables you to identify your strengths and weaknesses accurately, and to maximize the utilization of your assets. Those who are highly self-aware know where they are going as well as the why and how they intend to get there.*

*If you desire and seek success as a leader, self-awareness allows you to determine what works and what gets in the way.*

*An accurate sense of self-awareness allows you to be honest with yourself and others. Another way of saying this is that you're comfortable in your own skin—authentic and believable with no obvious hidden agendas.*

*Transparency: There should be a minimum of ambiguity regarding who you are, what you are, your intentions, your desires, your values, your beliefs, where you invest your treasures.*

So, if you want to be a leader, you must be willing and determined to begin a career-long endeavor of leadership development, a never-ending study of the essence of leadership. That also means constantly seeking feedback, which is a major factor in the pursuit of increased self-awareness.

Unfortunately, getting feedback is not an easy task, particularly if you're already a boss. Giving your boss feedback, especially personal feedback, is a risky business particularly if you're going to tell him he's not doing so well. No one wants to work for a pissed-off boss.

As a matter of fact, asking for feedback is also scary and risky. If you're going to ask for feedback, you'd better be ready to hear comments that may not be that flattering. Additionally, you've also got to be prepared to do something with the information you get, especially if it's negative.

Speaking of negative feedback, that

too is usually very scarce. Realistically, the boss typically hears about how good things are going and how well he's doing as the person in charge. So, in the real world of work authentic feedback is a rare commodity.

## Winners have good coaches, in business as well as sports

Perhaps the most reliable way to develop self-awareness is through disciplined coaching with an outside consultant who doesn't have a personal stake in the politics of the organization. That process, along with its in-depth assessment and analysis, produces the most comprehensive, objective, and accurate inventory of self-knowledge—including identification of strengths, development areas, under-utilized capabilities, over-utilized capabilities, behaviors to attempt as well as behaviors to avoid.

The coaching process includes regular counseling as well as targeted books, articles, courses, programs, special assignments, and other learning interventions. As has been said, "You can't teach a person anything, you can only help them discover it in their own minds." Coaching is an activity of constant discovery. Therefore, expanding your self-awareness is your personal process of discovery.

As you participate in coaching activities you should legitimately expect direct, authentic, and unambiguous feedback. You must be willing to begin a persistent undertaking of self-directed analysis, experimentation, discovery, and learning, along with a commitment to apply that learning.

Without a doubt, trusted others represent a rich source of self-awareness—such as mentors, bosses, associates, subject-matter experts, and other folks who know and observe you on a regular basis. As an aspiring leader you must be willing to solicit targeted feedback while at the same time engaging in substantial self-disclosure, keeping ambiguity at a minimum. That includes the establishment of trusted relationships with those who are willing to provide direct and honest feedback—both positive and negative.

Development and learning also come with expectations of risk-taking, like applying wisdom and analysis to on-going problems and challenges or courageously taking self-reliant independent action. Of necessity, this becomes a lifetime of constant calculated risk, exploration, and discovery. CCJ