



Why are true leaders rare?

By Pierrette Desrosiers, psychologist and coach

If given a choice, would you prefer to be seen as a results-focused leader, or as a leader with exceptional social skills?

In short, do you prefer to cultivate strong analytical skills, are you highly motivated to reach goals, do you have initiative, and are you focused on exceptional delivery of results and effective problem solving? Or do you prefer to excel in communication skills, empathy, and the ability to motivate a team?

Or, would you prefer to succeed in both areas?

In 2009, a survey of 60,000 employees compared the characteristics of “great” and “not great” leaders. This study gives us an excellent opportunity to compare leadership styles.

Those leaders who ranked very high in the “results-focused” or “task-oriented” categories were rated 14 per cent higher in leadership skills than the average, while those who scored as very “people oriented, or high on social skills” were rated 12 per cent above average.

We can conclude that task orientation gives you a small advantage if you want to be seen as a leader. But what about those who ranked highly on both scales?

This is where the research becomes interesting: Those who scored as both task oriented and people-oriented were ranked 72 per cent higher than average in their leadership ability.

But how often do these skill sets coalesce in a single person? How many managers can be results focused and people focused at the same time?

When studying this question, David Rock, director of the Neuroleadership Institute, found this combination of qualities to be quite rare. Only 0.77 per cent — less than 1.0 per cent! — of leaders ranked in the top 33 per cent of both categories.

Even when he broadened his search to include managers who ranked in the top 50 per cent of both categories, he concluded that only five per cent of managers possess superior skills in each.

There is a different message here too.

If you think you possess both of these skill sets at a very high level, you’re either a true exception, or you’re in denial. Many managers have a positive self-bias — they view themselves as more skilled than they actually are. Ask yourself some difficult questions to figure out which is true.

But before you make that determination, spend some time contemplating these statistics about entrepreneurs: Studies have shown that only 10 per cent of entrepreneurs have a realistic view of themselves. When asked to self-evaluate on intelligence and competence, 75 per cent of leaders guessed that they belonged in the top 25 per cent.

According to Rock, task orientation and people-orientation function like a neural see-saw in your brain. From neuroimaging studies, he concluded that when one of these areas of the brain becomes more active, the other becomes less active. People literally overdevelop one capacity at the expense of the other.

But great leaders need both of these sets of skills.

A task-focused manager who develops a stellar company vision but doesn’t have anyone who understands her vision, likes her, or believes in her will find herself alone, unable to bring her plans to fruition.

Even worse, some leadership styles trigger resistance, demotivating their employees until they lose their best resources. Of course, the opposite problem isn’t any better. You can be the good guy who everyone likes to invite to parties, but if you do not cultivate problem-solving abilities, a vision, and an effective plan to reach your goals, you will fail to grow your company.

I’ve met many farm entrepreneurs who have built large, successful farms. Almost without exception, they were highly goal oriented. When they were small and ran their businesses by themselves, it worked. But as they expanded and hired employees, they discovered a need to also be people oriented. They needed to learn to share their vision, listen to others, ask questions, and understand others’ needs and motivations.

A lack of those skills threaten the viability of the business.

So, how do we respond to this reality?

First, understand your strengths and weaknesses. Second, commit to improving the skills in which you are weaker.

Remember: Work on one skill at a time. Don’t try to tackle time management, problem solving, communication skills, and stress management all at once — you’ll burn out!

For years, the only skills that were valued were “business-oriented” results that could be quantified and charted. Now we know that the boss’s people skills are a critical piece of the puzzle. When you develop people skills to go along with your business skills, you will bring yourself to a whole new level.

Can you afford to not invest in your own development? **CG**

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