

## Six Great Myths About Leadership By Robert T. Whipple MBA CPLP

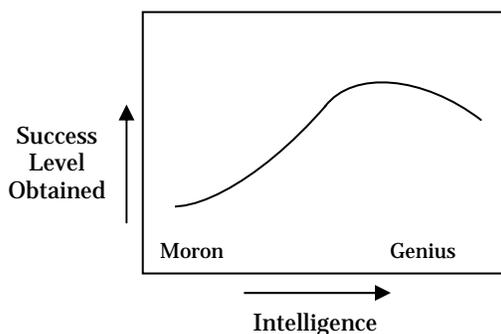
Leadership stereotypes are numerous in our society. You can see them every day on the cartoon pages of your local newspaper. People cut out their favorite “skewer the boss” strips and hang them on the wall at work. They send emails with jokes poking fun at inept leaders. If they are not poking fun, they are complaining. Leaders themselves are not exempt from the “fun.” It may help people cope with their frustrating lives, but underneath it all is a current that is swift and dangerous. By dealing in stereotypes, people write off opportunities to improve their own lives and become great leaders themselves. That is the reason why it is important to address the myths surrounding leadership.

### Myth 1 – Great leaders are more intelligent than mediocre leaders.

“The difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has its limits.” Albert Einstein

There are so many examples that debunk this theory that it is hard to pick just a few. Raw intelligence is not correlated with outstanding leadership characteristics. In fact, if you drew a correlation line showing IQ on one axis and success as a leader on the other, it would not be a straight line. There is a maximum point beyond which higher IQ is actually a predictor of lower success as a leader.

Figure 1  
Relationship between  
intelligence and success

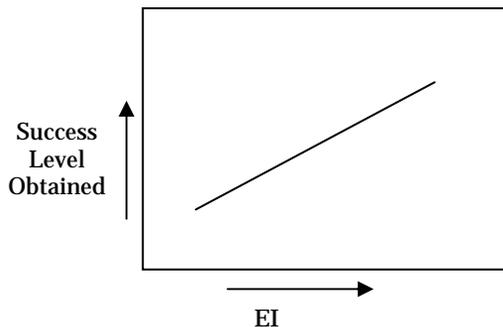


When you stop and think, the curve in Figure 1 above makes intuitive sense. At very low levels of intelligence, an individual does not have the capacity to lead others. He may be a good shipmate, but he does not have the capability to be the captain. This is because the ability to develop strategy based on external conditions is not well developed. People will not follow a leader whose visions are

significantly flawed or are only vague dreams. Once a reasonable level of intelligence is present, other factors become more relevant to the level of a leader's success. However, at very high levels of intelligence, you can find leaders that are so smart they have a difficult time relating to their followers. They know the theory of sailing in minute detail, but lack the gut level ability to communicate it well to the sailors. Genius level leaders often struggle and are frustrated with the pace and level of understanding in others. This tension is evident to followers who become leery of the leader's vision and connectivity. It is the unfortunate plight of many ambitious MBA students. Once they get out into the world and get a leadership position, they are free to stun the world with their brilliant knowledge. For many of these super-intelligent students, there is a rude awakening when they find themselves leading but look around to find nobody behind them.

The work of Daniel Goleman in developing his Emotional Intelligence theory showed that while IQ did not correlate well with leadership effectiveness, EI (Emotional Intelligence) showed a continuous positive correlation with effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> If we look at the correlation between EI and success, it shows a different path.

**Figure 2**  
**Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and success**



This correlation is linear because the ingredients in Emotional Intelligence create a stronger ability to lead with increasing levels. Goleman identified the parts of emotional intelligence as:

***Self Awareness***

- Emotional self awareness
- Accurate self assessment
- Self confidence

***Self Management***

- Self control
- Trustworthiness
- Conscientiousness
- Adaptability
- Achievement orientation

Initiative

***Social Awareness***

Empathy  
Organizational awareness  
Service orientation

***Social Skill***

Visionary Leadership  
Influence  
Developing others  
Communications  
Change catalyst  
Conflict management  
Building bonds  
Teamwork and collaboration

The notion that one must be highly intelligent to lead effectively is a myth. There are numerous examples that identify highly effective leaders who were only average or lower in intelligence.

Lou Holtz has been called one of the best motivators and leaders in the history of sports. In his famous videotape *Do Right<sup>2</sup>* he admits in his typical humorous style that he was very low on the intelligence scale. First he revealed that when he graduated from High School he ranked 234 out of a class of 278.

He said, "That didn't bother me, but it did upset me when the principal said it was a rather stupid class overall."

He recalls the guidance counselor asking him if he was going to work in the foundry or the steel mill. He told her he was going to go to Kent State University. She shot back that he didn't have the academic ability to succeed and predicted he would flunk out.

He said, "You don't think I'm very smart do you?"

Her response was imprinted on his mind for the rest of his life. She said, "Lou Holtz, a lot of people don't know what's going on, but you don't even suspect anything's going on."

With less than average intelligence, he was able to rack up a winning record before retiring that would make any leader proud. He took over six college teams in his career: The College of William & Mary, North Carolina, Minnesota, Arkansas, Notre Dame, and South Carolina. He never inherited a team with a winning record. He never failed to take that team to a bowl game by the second year at the latest. It was not intelligence that brought about the change; it was the other ingredients in leadership. His philosophy of leadership was disarmingly simple. It had only three rules:

1. Do what is right
2. Do the best you can
3. Treat others as you would like to be treated

Doing right things and avoiding wrong things enhances one's self-image. This is the most basic rule for behaving in an ethical manner. Ethical leadership can be boiled down to two words: Do Right.

Doing the best you can simply means not settling for less than the best a person is capable of doing, and that includes the leader as well. If a leader does the best he or she can and demands that much from everyone else, it really covers the motivational aspects of the job.

Lou's final rule is simply the Golden Rule. If we hold others with the same esteem we hold ourselves, then they will recognize that and respond in kind. Imagine a world where a leader actually followed the Golden Rule at all times. Nearly all of the problems with low morale and dissatisfaction would vanish.

I actually have trouble with the Golden Rule if we take it literally. The conundrum is that other people might not want me to treat them like I would like to be treated. That sounds convoluted, but it is basically sound. Imagine I am a kind of person who loves to churn out work. I like to get up very early in the morning and get 4 hours of work done before most people get out of bed. I heap work on myself because getting things accomplished makes me feel fulfilled. If I dump piles of work on top of other people because that's how I would like to be treated, they are not going to be pleased.

We could modify the Golden Rule to read "Treat others like *they* would like to be treated," but that doesn't work either. Imagine trying to follow that rule in the real world. A leader would instantly go broke by giving workers huge sums of money, lots of vacation time, and cushy offices. No, you can't always treat people the way they want to be treated. So, how do we work with Lou Holtz's third rule? It's simple: Treat people the right way. Of course, we now have to define what that means. Much of this book deals with how to treat people the right way.

Most of my students start out thinking it is best to treat everyone the same. That is clearly defensible from a discrimination standpoint, but is this the best policy? I think not. Here we run into a major problem. Some sailors really enjoy manning Crow's Nest and scanning the water for hazards. For them it is a special treat and an honor. Others can become deathly sick due to the extreme movement and the height. The first thing to recognize is that treating people right does not mean treating everyone the same way.

As long as we focus on the intent of Lou Holtz's three points, they make a great philosophy of leadership. It has worked for him over several decades, and it can work for you if you choose to follow his specific formula. Regardless, Lou's rules demonstrate how a simple and logical set of rules can streamline the complex business of leadership and make it possible for the masses to access the "magic." The complexity of day-to-day leadership decisions can always be boiled into these three behaviors, so the formula can deal with complexity even though it is simple. You do not need to be brilliant to be a good leader. Leadership need not be difficult or complex to be effective. This theme will be repeated numerous times in this book.

Another example relating to intelligence is John Chambers, CEO of Cisco. John has been hailed as the best boss in America. People who have been lucky enough to work at Cisco have had the pleasure of riding a modern corporate

success to personal wealth. In an interview with Diane Sawyer for ABC's 20/20, John admits that he nearly flunked out of grade school because he couldn't keep up with the work.<sup>3</sup> He had dyslexia and was slower than other students to comprehend the assignments. Most people considered him the dunce of the class, yet John went on to become a billionaire and one of the most successful corporate leaders of our time. I love how he puts the issue of leadership into simple terms during his interview:

**I basically take things as they are. Life is not very complex. I am just impatient about my vision.** -John Chambers

Note the disarming simplicity of this philosophy. Of course the philosophy is only the start. John translates his passion into the hearts and minds of his employees through countless actions and rules for himself and his key leaders that he follows religiously. John understands the value of consistency and is expert at reinforcing candor. Once he gets on a theme about his own behaviors, he never, ever, waivers from that path. Whether it means sitting in a cubicle rather than a plush office or flying coach, he models his values for all to see every day. He also models exceptional transparency on a daily basis with all his stakeholders.

On the other side of the scale is Bill Clinton. As a 1968 Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University and graduate of Yale Law School, he demonstrated his incredible intelligence.<sup>4</sup> Many people see him as a great leader. However, he certainly did not carve out the leadership moral high ground for our nation when he publicly forgot the meaning of the word "is" and became only the second president in the history of our nation to be impeached. His leadership could be put into question, not because of his IQ, but because he was arrogant enough to believe he could trick the American people into believing a lie. He might have even pulled it off, if it were not for the stain on a particular blue dress. The tragedy is that even when he was caught in the lie, he continued to deny it publicly and attempted to excuse the whole mess as just a temporary lapse in judgment. He modeled the opposite of candor and transparency. The Congress and the American people would not buy it.

So the first myth, that good leadership means being highly intelligent does not seem to hold in many cases. Of course, people of extremely low intelligence do not make good leaders because they don't have the capacity. Beyond that, we should not try to paint a strong correlation between exceptional leadership and level of intelligence. A reasonably strong mind is all that is required for greatness.

## **Myth 2 – Great leaders work harder than poor leaders.**

The old stereotype is that the poor leaders are always playing golf with their buddies, out on the lake sailing for pleasure, or snoozing in the office most of the time, and the great leaders have a nose to the grindstone about 18 hours a day and are simply married to their jobs. While it is possible to find these two extremes in isolated cases, the stereotype of how hard leaders work is not as sure as we once thought, nor is it an accurate predictor of the caliber of leadership.

It is true that great leaders are always passionate about their work. This fact was highlighted in Jim Collins' book, *Good to Great*.<sup>5</sup> After studying the leadership at successful companies for several years, the researchers boiled down all the characteristics that great leaders had in common and put a title of "Level 5 Leaders" on the concept. It is interesting that they came up with just two unifying concepts that all Level 5 leaders had in common: passion for the work and humility. Since great leaders are incredibly passionate about their work, does that mean they work harder? Not necessarily. Poor leaders may be working just as hard or even harder but not getting the same results.

Exceptional leaders, while passionate about their work, are also passionate about squeezing every last drop of experience out of living. Just as they have extreme dedication to their work, they also have a good sense of balance and make time to do other things.

Downwind leaders delegate better.<sup>6</sup> They have built up levels of trust in their people and organization that allow time to relax once in a while without feeling guilty. Delegating means letting other people steer the boat sometimes. Allowing others in the organization to shine often takes the pressure off the leader and reduces the tendency for burnout.<sup>7</sup>

Poor leaders have problems with trust and transparency, so they must witness and be involved in every nook and cranny of the organization. Each decision must be personally researched and blessed in order to not make huge blunders. That is an exhausting task because problems are lurking everywhere. Marginal leaders are habitually overworked taking care of problems, many of their own making.

The lack of trust in poor leaders also means that problems do not get resolved efficiently. Each problem is like a plate of spaghetti, where each piece needs to be straightened out, washed, dried, and put back in the box. If the problem is two people fighting, the leader needs to have a meeting to find out who said what, when, and try to unscramble the mess until both parties agree with the solution or at least agree to go away mad. Each issue is infinitely more complicated to resolve in contrast to the situation where a great leader has managed to build an environment of trust. In a trusting environment, there are still problems, but they are like a temporary turbulence in the wind. You just pull in the sail a bit and keep heading in the direction of your vision with the wind at your back.

Mediocre leaders have a tendency to leave problems in their wake. The messes are often interpersonal issues. These leaders are in a constant state of damage control, battling simply to survive. They feel forced to work incredibly long hours in a futile attempt to outflank the problems of their own creation. Relaxation is impossible when you are in a constant dilemma between fight or flight.

### **Myth 3 – Great leaders have charisma because they look the part.**

**I've never been an intellectual, but I have this look.** -Woody Allen

Leadership has little to do with how people look. If looking charismatic was a key specification for great leadership, you would have to write off leaders like Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi. The best definition of leadership I have found came out of IBM in 1974, in an internal book entitled *On Leadership*, written by Carole Kismaric and Charles Mikoloycak.<sup>8</sup>

“Leadership is an invisible strand as mysterious as it is powerful, it pulls and it bonds. It is a catalyst that creates unity out of disorder. Yet it defies definition. No combination of talents can guarantee it. No process or training can create it where the spark does not exist.

The qualities of Leadership are universal. They are found in the poor and the rich, the humble and the proud, the common man and the brilliant thinker; they are qualities that suggest paradox rather than pattern. But wherever they are found, Leadership makes things happen.

The most precious and intangible quality of Leadership is trust – the confidence that the one who leads will act in the best interest of those who follow – the assurance that the leader will serve the group without sacrificing the rights of the individual.

Leadership’s imperative is a ‘sense of rightness’ – knowing when to advance and when to pause, when to criticize and when to praise, how to encourage others to excel. From the Leader’s reserves of energy and optimism, followers draw strength. In the Leader’s determination and self-confidence, they find inspiration.

In its highest sense, Leadership is integrity. This command by conscience asserts itself more by commitment and example than by directive. Integrity recognizes external obligations, but it heeds the quiet voice within rather than the clamor without.”

Since most great leaders are humble, they do not seek the trappings that go along with looking the part. A contrary example is Donald Trump. Trump looks and sounds the part of a charismatic leader, but in reality his leadership is questionable. He rules by fear and intimidation and definitely does not reinforce candor. People who tell him what he does not want to hear are often humiliated publicly. While Donald does appear to demonstrate the Table Stakes in the Trust model he has problems with some of the Enabling Actions, such as admitting mistakes, having patience, or coaching privately. He does make a lot of money at times and is exceptional at self-promotion, but in terms of strong leadership skills, he comes up short. His TV show, *The Apprentice* is a good example.<sup>9</sup> His methods there foster the opposite of teamwork. He starts out with 1000 bright upcoming leaders, then creates 999 losers and one winner. That is hardly the way to create loyalty and cohesiveness among people. It could be just for the show,

but if he operates like that in real life, he will create a culture that looks great on the surface but has no substance beneath.

I saw one episode of *The Apprentice* that provided some good insight. One individual gave up a “bye” (meaning he could not be fired) on the current round as a strategy to gain long term teamwork in his group. Donald saw this as a mistake (which I would debate). Ultimately, although Donald admitted the guy was probably the strongest of the candidates, he was fired for making a “stupid mistake.” This demonstrates that Donald is willing to sacrifice top talent if a person makes a mistake. He would rather go with lesser talented people who are not interested in building a true team. As he punishes people who make mistakes, he demonstrates intolerance for subordinates who take risks, even though he takes huge risks himself. That models a “do as I say, not as I do mentality.” What kind of culture do you think this will breed? If making a mistake was grounds for being fired, Donald would have to say “I’m fired” several times a year. He makes many blunders.

Looking the part of a leader does not qualify one for greatness any more than wearing a sailor’s hat qualifies one for winning the Americas Cup. To win, you need to be the part rather than look the part.

#### **Myth 4 – Great leaders have a college education.**

**“A college education doesn't make fools; it merely develops them.” -Anonymous**

There are some indications that better-educated people rise to higher positions. This is particularly true in the areas of reading and vocabulary. Steven B. Sample in his book, *The Contrarian’s Guide to Leadership*,<sup>10</sup> makes a case that in leadership, “you are what you read.” That is an over-generalization, and taken out of context, actually sounds ludicrous. Sample makes a good case that reading the so-called “super texts,” such as Machiavelli’s *The Prince*,<sup>11</sup> allows leaders to see themselves in the context of historical knowledge, which is an incredible benefit for any leader. Sample posits that spending time reading books that have stood the test of time over hundreds of years is better than spending time reading today’s news, regardless of the source. Reading good literature helps leaders understand the benefits of practicing the Table Stakes and using the Enabling Actions to the fullest extent. This is particularly true in biographies that document how the great leaders of history learned their lessons. Sample remarks, “In reading, as in so many other areas, maintaining one’s intellectual independence is an essential prerequisite for effective leadership.”

Vocabulary also shows a solid correlation with the level to which one rises. Earl Nightingale in his tape series *Lead the Field*<sup>12</sup> observes that the number of words in a person’s vocabulary is a remarkably accurate predictor of one’s station in life. He illustrated this with a 20 year study of college graduates who took a vocabulary test. He plotted their success over time and correlated their word power with their earning power. The link Nightingale found was so significant that he said, “*Without a single exception, in every case those who had scored highest on the vocabulary test given in college were in the top income group, while those who had scored the lowest were in the bottom income group.*”<sup>13</sup>

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With the above trends, why is it a myth that the best leaders have a college education? It is because there are so many examples of outstanding leaders who had little or no formal education. What they lacked in formal or conventional education, they made up for with a different form of education of equal or greater value.

Napoleon Hill makes a good case in point. He had a weak education going through school and only attended a two year secretarial college, yet he went on to become one of the greatest thinkers of our time. This was due to an amazing offer given to him by Andrew Carnegie. When Hill was a cub reporter in Washington, he tried to get into see Mr. Carnegie, who was at that time the richest and most powerful man in the world. It took several tries for Hill even to get an interview.

What originally started out as a brief discussion on what made Mr. Carnegie tick as a leader, led to a lifetime of discovery for Napoleon Hill. Mr. Carnegie gave Napoleon Hill an offer to work for him at no salary on an assignment that would take about 20 years. He was to interview all of the great minds of the time and read all the historical literature about leadership in order to distill a body of knowledge that could be passed on to future generations. Hill took up the offer and spent the rest of his life studying successful leaders, thereby becoming one himself. His theories are chronicled in several books, the most famous of which is *Think and Grow Rich*.<sup>14</sup> He also distilled similar information in a tape series entitled, *The Science of Personal Achievement*.<sup>15</sup> So, starting with a meager education by most standards, Napoleon Hill became one of the most educated people on the planet in terms of understanding the nature of leadership and personal achievement, and the Leadership Trust model given in Chapter 3 is congruent with his writings.

It is interesting to note that Andrew Carnegie himself had no formal education beyond grade school.<sup>16</sup> His thirst for knowledge through reading books and understanding people gave him the edge to become a famous and wealthy leader.

According to Dr. Edwin Weaver of Unique Leaders Professional Development Consultants, “The business world does not need highly educated people guiding it. The business world needs leaders with heart. Leaders who know the hearts of those around them and can inspire them to do great things. For decades I have studied the greatest leaders; military, governing and business. The majority of these great leaders had very little education, but they knew the hearts of those around them. They knew what was needed.”<sup>17</sup>

## **Myth 5 – Great leaders are expert at playing politics.**

Do great leaders play politics? Is that a good thing to do? Is it morally right? Is it smart?

We are surrounded by politics at all times. How we deal with political situations has a huge impact on the quality of our lives. Webster defines politics in an organizational setting as: “scheming and maneuvering within a group.” Immediately, the word is given a negative connotation. If we are practicing politics, something bad is happening. We can all identify with the negative

aspects of politics. We have encountered Machiavellian individuals who would take credit for the work of others or somehow undermine others' efforts in order to enhance themselves. You can undoubtedly picture a highly political individual in your mind as you read this page. What gives rise to political thought?

All of us have a set of wants, needs, and desires. For example, most of us would like to get our hands on more money, thinking it would allow fewer problems in our lives. Most of us wish the world would slow down so we could relax once in a while and enjoy the ride. None of us like to feel we have been taken advantage of in any kind of interchange, whether it be a co-worker goofing off while we toil away, or our boss forgetting the raise we were promised. In short, most of us want more of the "good stuff" in life, and we want to be assured we are not disadvantaged by someone else hogging more than his or her share.

You have a vested interest in getting your share in life: what you have worked for and are entitled to receive. Since we all feel that way, there is a constant agenda going on in everyone's mind relative to ensuring this equity. It makes no difference if you are on death row or the CEO of a multinational organization, you have political thoughts daily.

It is impossible for the needs of all people to be optimized at once, which creates tension between individuals and groups. How we deal with this tension is called politics. There is a continual dialog going on in our subconscious or conscious minds about how we can influence the rest of the world to come around more to our way of thinking. In today's parlance this is often called WOO – short for Winning Others Over.<sup>18</sup> We all engage in WOO most of the time. There is nothing wrong with doing this. It is human nature. We navigate our sailboat sea of politics.

The ethical dilemmas around politics surface when people get greedy. They want more than their fair share of the "good stuff" and work to figure out ways to enhance their portion at the expense of others. You need to be alert for these people and protect your interests at all times. Sometimes they are easy to spot like the one-eyed pirate trying to cut off your head with a broad sword. Other times, they are so crafty that their damage seems almost painless, as if you are being sliced up by a razor-sharp foil. The end result is the same.

Conducting yourself in an ethical manner, yet still being politically astute, can do wonders for your sanity and your pocketbook. Downwind leaders understand the nature of politics and participate in political thought, but they are not caught up in trying to improperly manipulate others in a selfish attempt to gain an excessive share of the goodies. Instead, like astute sailors, they operate from a set of rules regarding politics that keep them out of trouble most of the time.

### **A downwind leader's set of rules for political survival:**

- 1. Act in ways consistent with your values and sense of spiritual rightness.** You know what is right. Often people rationalize and do wrong things in order to get ahead. These actions tend to backfire by reducing trust.

2. **Know who butters your bread and act that way.** Some people seem to forget their boss' power to influence the quality of their life. This does not mean you need to be a "yes man" or a "suck up." Rather, just don't go around intentionally undermining the boss, even if you think she is wrong. You could end up dead right.
3. **Make 20 positive remarks for every negative one.** It is amazing how many people have that ratio exactly backward. They gripe and bitch all day long. Then they wonder why nobody likes to be near them. Test this out on yourself. Make a mental note (maybe keep a 3x5" card and make hash marks) of each positive and negative statement that comes out of your mouth. You may be surprised. If you don't like your ratio, change it.
4. **Do not grandstand.** Practice humility and avoid taking cheap shots. Putting people down often feels satisfying at the moment (like they got what was coming to them), but in the long run, you cannot afford to make an enemy if it can be avoided, which is always possible with effort.
5. **Try to understand the intentions and motivations of others.** It isn't enough to observe people's behaviors. You need to dig deeper to reach the true meaning in their actions. Only then can you understand what is happening.
6. **Follow up on everything.** Try to achieve a reputation for being 100% reliable at doing what you promise. Show initiative and be alert for opportunities to demonstrate your reliability.
7. **Do the dirty work cheerfully.** Every job has unpleasant or boring aspects. Do these quickly and efficiently without complaint. You are not too good for the menial jobs.
8. **Agree to disagree.** Arguments at work can persist for months while people dig in further to buttress their positions and undermine the other side. Life is too short for this pettiness. After three legitimate attempts to convince one another, it is best to say, "It looks like we are not going to agree on this matter. Rather than arguing about it, let's agree to disagree. We still respect each other and can work well together. We just have this one area where we see things differently." It is amazing how much time and acrimony can be eliminated with these few words.
9. **Don't beat dead horses.** Forget the discussions that go on an on, especially in e-mail exchanges where they can be re-read by other people. Make your point once. If you think it was misunderstood, make it again. After that, move on. Repetition is a rat hole. Sometimes you

can observe a group in heated discussion for a full hour. It sounds like an argument, but they are really in violent agreement.

**10. Be aggressive, but don't be a pest.** There is a fine line between high initiative and being intrusive. Learn to read the body language all around you and back off before you go too far.

**11. Recognize that administrators (and other support people) have real power.** This is because:

- The administrative person holds the key to the boss' calendar. If you are a favored person because of past dealings, you can gain access when others might be bumped. Don't abuse this advantage, but cherish it and reinforce the person for any favors.
- Support people have knowledge of sidebar conversations with the boss. They will overhear things and have useful clues. Integrity will prevent them from giving you information outright, but if you have mastered the art of reading body language, you can know a great deal about inner workings at the office.
- If support people like you, they will put in a good word for you when it counts the most. The boss, Alice, might say to her assistant, "I think Pete is being really anal about these maintenance reviews. He keeps bugging me about them." The assistant might say, "He really does show a lot of passion for doing things right. If we had more people like Pete we would be sitting pretty." The real payoff is that the next time you are in the area, this assistant will pull you aside and tell you, "Alice is starting to get annoyed by your intensity on the maintenance reviews. Keep up the work, but tone down the volume a little." That kind of sidebar information is priceless.
- Support people know the published agenda as well as all the unpublished ones. If you are appreciated, they will share the inside scoop inadvertently without loss of integrity. Take them to lunch every once in a while as a "thank you" for their help. Do not pump them for information, but just try to uncover how you can help their situation.
- One word of caution, these support people are extremely sensitive about their positional power. Do not butter them up with false praise or lavish gifts, etc. It will backfire. Do not ask them to share information that could compromise their trust with the boss. Trust is a top priority for them, and if you are asking for gossip, you will turn them off immediately.

Instead, realize the pressure cooker they are in and be helpful where possible. Just sharing an empathetic ear will help, but reinforcing their actions sincerely and appropriately will get you on the right road.

**12. Keep an active social life with work associates.** This is not mandatory, but the better the relationship outside work, the more information will naturally flow in the conversation. Information is power. You also have some political pull as a result of outside friendships. The basis for political power is that people do things for people they like.

**13. Always be considerate and gracious.** Try to avoid snapping at people. It is not always helpful to wear your emotions on your sleeve. The best rule here is the “golden” rule. Put yourself in the other person's place and ask how you would like to be treated.

**14. Foster peers and others as political allies.**

- Treat your peers and superiors with the same respect and integrity as people in your group. Often that is a challenge because you compete with them for critical resources. The best advice is to always use the golden rule.
- Find ways to help peers in ways they recognize. Visualize yourself walking around the office with a bundle of olive branches strapped to your back. Each day see how many olive branches you can give away to people who would squabble with you.
- Whenever possible, be a vocal supporter of other people's positions in meetings. If you act like an ally, it is more difficult for them to view you as an adversary. If you think of them as the enemy, they will reciprocate.
- Go the extra mile to help people solve their problems. Sometimes that means taking problem people off their hands to make a fresh start in your organization. It might mean the loan of equipment or other tangible assets. Be bountiful with your assistance.
- Foster great relationships with the key lieutenants of your peers. They have high influence and will help your cause if they see you as a friend.
- Bond with peers whenever possible in social settings. Get to know their families and their hobbies, etc. The closer you are as friends, the more they will help you at work.

- You will negotiate often with peers for resources. Establish a track record of being fair and looking for the win-win opportunities. Never try to win at the other person's expense. This tactic will always boomerang and you will lose in the end.
- Be visible with your concessions. Demonstrate that you deal with fairness.
- Resist the temptation to “blow in” a peer when a mistake is made. It may feel good at the time, but you have made an enemy. You can never afford an enemy if it can be avoided (and it almost always can.) Some people go around creating enemies to satisfy their ego, their lust for conquest, or just to have fun. They don't last very long. If a peer makes a mistake, it's a great opportunity to help them regain equilibrium, not a time to twist the knife. Kindness pays off.
- Do not engage in e-mail battles. If a peer is less than kind in an e-mail, respond to it with courtesy and maturity. Getting into a food fight over some issue has no place in the adult world, yet we see it all the time. Be bigger than that.
- Don't belittle, berate, or embarrass people, even if they do things to deserve it. This is a test of your own maturity.
- When you make a mistake or create a political faux pas, admit it immediately and ask for forgiveness. Don't try to hide your blunders.

This long list of “dos” and “don'ts” is mostly common sense. The point is that your reputation (which is your most precious asset) is on the line in every interaction. Do everything possible to enhance it. Downwind leaders do the things on this list instinctively, which allows them to sail with the political wind and navigate around storms most of the time.

### **Myth 6 – Great leaders have large egos.**

To understand why this is a myth, it would be good to understand the meaning of the word “ego.” A dictionary would define ego as:

1. The self, especially as distinct from the world and other selves.
2. In psychoanalysis, the division of the psyche that is conscious, most immediately controls thought and behavior, and is most in touch with external reality.
3. **a.** An exaggerated sense of self-importance; conceit.  
**b.** Appropriate pride in oneself; self-esteem.

The layman's view of having high ego means a person is too filled with himself. The focus of attention is on how great the person is, such that all

interfaces are colored by the leader's need to shine relative to others. This placing one's self above others in all ways at all times is the common view of an overactive ego. Leaders in the classical view often do demonstrate bloated egos. There is a need to be perceived as the end-all and be-all in the organization. This ensures power, and power leads to control which keeps your boat upright and heading in the right direction.

Many people expect their leader to have a huge ego. It comes with the territory: a divine right given to someone who made it to the top of the heap based on wits, intelligence, political savvy, or just hard work. Having a leader who was not full of ego would seem unnatural or incongruent.

The view that high ego must accompany the leader is flawed. In fact, with the concept of the servant leader, the reverse is seen to be more powerful. In the image of Christ, who washed the feet of his disciples, great leaders are not bound to have inflated opinions of themselves. In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins identified "humility" as one of the two common characteristics of all Level 5 leaders.<sup>19</sup> In fact, he found a negative correlation between high ego and great leadership. Could we have been so wrong for all those years, or is there another explanation?

I believe there is a balance. Excellent leadership does entail that a person know and respect herself. Leaders need to understand their position and power in order to use it for the good of the organization. That is one of the key points Daniel Goleman makes in *Emotional Intelligence*.<sup>20</sup> So, if ego means a high degree of self-awareness, then it does go with good leadership. What does not go is a false sense of the worth of a person's opinion. If a leader's self talk is all about herself and showing her great insights, then ego is getting in the way of listening to people. That is a disaster for any leader because it does not allow the reinforcement of candor.

For the downwind leader, the self-awareness part of ego does not go further into the realm of thinking that "my ideas are better than yours," or more simply, "I am better than you." The evidence is overwhelming that this attitude will produce alienation rather than respect. It will polarize people rather than foster teamwork. It will reduce the longevity of any leader or at least cause constant need to tack because the results are marginalized. It will reduce the essence of great leadership, and that is trust.

There are probably dozens of other myths about leadership, but the preceding ones constitute a good start at beating down some of the stereotypes. Let's also examine some of the great truths about leadership. What can we say with certainty about good leaders other than that they may or may not conform to the myths?

*The preceding information was adapted from the book **Leading with Trust is like Sailing Downwind**, by Robert Whipple. It is available on [www.leadergrow.com](http://www.leadergrow.com).*

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