

Leadersynth

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Leverage Your PAST to Lead Your Future **Bruce E. Roselle, PhD**

David and I had met a couple of times in our coaching engagement before he was comfortable enough to confide in me that he felt he needed to be someone totally different than himself to be successful in his role. His peer, Edgar, was in a similar business development role, and David began to believe that he needed to fashion his approach after Edgar's personality and style.

I still remember the pained look in David's eyes as he described how much better his peer was suited to their Director, Business Development role, and how much David felt out of Edgar's league. As I listened to him, I recognized that he desperately needed an alternative perspective to help him take a stand and become highly successful in his new role.

Many leaders at all levels in your organization probably struggle with the same sense of inadequacy, particularly when they take on new roles or report to a different manager.

In working with others as a coach since my initial work with David, I began to talk with them more intentionally about leading from the center of who they are. The concept resonated with them, and they recognized more clearly how often they got in their own way by straying from the core of their effectiveness.

From these conversations with organizational leaders, it has become very clear to me how important it is to lead from the core. In fact, my experience makes me conclude that trying to lead from someplace other than the core is the primary reason leaders derail. Attempting to lead others with an approach that is not grounded on who you are at the center of your being is a guaranteed recipe for failure.

Why do organizational leaders think they must lead from someplace other than their core? Some, like David in the first example, start a new position and convince themselves—falsely—that they must approach things very differently than they have in the past in order to be successful. Others have deeply-rooted, fear-based doubts about themselves and lack of self-assurance at the core. Consequently, they struggle when they must take on a new role and they unwittingly undermine their ability to lead. Still others get the strong message from their manager or other senior leaders that they must function in a completely dissimilar way in order to be successful in a new situation.

While it is often true that changes in position, manager, or organization require individual leaders to make some adjustments in their approach to the work, this almost never means that they must alter themselves at the core in order to be successful. In those very rare situations where individuals are not likely to ever thrive with what they bring to the table, the best resolution is for them to leave the position or the organization and look for a better fit. Changing who you are at the core is never the most desirable way to handle a set of circumstances or personalities in your work.

To put it in simple terms, every leader at the core is the product of his or her **PAST**:

- **Personality**
- **Ability**
- **Spirit**
- **Thinking**

You are a product of your PAST, as well, and it is the key to your future. At your core is a combination of personality characteristics, feelings, intellectual, emotional, and physical abilities, and a responsive spirit. At the center of who you are, there are also thoughts, beliefs, and opinions that you hold to be true, and that you have developed since early childhood. It is not feasible to leave your PAST behind. Wherever you go, your core personality traits, abilities, spirit, and thinking go with you. We will address each of these four components individually.

Personality (P). For the purposes of your own self-analysis, think about the aspects of your personality that uniquely define you. What are your signature leadership traits and characteristics, the ones most central to your personality?

This includes characteristics like:

- style and approach across various situations
- intensity of observable energy, degree of drive
- self-discipline, accountability, preference for structure
- emotions, feelings, degree of compassion

Abilities (A). Included in the term abilities are your innate talents, gifts, motivated strengths, cognitive intelligence, and emotional intelligence. Abilities are innate capacities, not learned ones. Certainly, people develop their abilities over time, and those that receive the most focus tend to be their strongest and most recognizable. However, there is a clear line between knowledge and skills you develop, and abilities, talents, or gifts you possess from an early age.

Words like communicator, linguist, wise counselor, visionary, interpersonal facilitator, healer, educator/guide, motivator, or initiator reflect underlying capacities that can be expressed in outward behaviors and actions. Using this partial list of fundamental abilities as a starting point, what are your most motivated abilities as a leader? What do you do easily, that comes naturally to you, and that energizes you? What abilities do others most appreciate about you; what strengths do they leverage most often when involving you on team projects?

Spirit (S). Your spirit develops from a very early age—perhaps at birth or even in the womb—and grows to become an integral aspect of your core being. In popular theological terms, the human spirit is a deeply situated, core aspect of the individual, subject to spiritual growth. In many ways, it is the very center of your capacity for joy and desire.

Spiritual refreshment is one way you can think about the Spirit component of your core. What gives you the greatest sense of calm, relaxation, or inner peace? Which activities in your life resonate within you in a way that leaves you composed or serene? Alternatively, when are you most energized and excited in your work and life? What tasks or activities bring out the most

intense feelings of joy, elation, and well-being? Or, when do you most have the sense that your life has meaning, or that it matters? What in your work seems most central to your life purpose?

Thinking (T). This component includes your beliefs, values, and opinions based on your learning and experience. It includes your attitudes toward things, the way you make sense of the world, and the primary basis upon which you make decisions. Thinking includes logic and intuition, creativity and originality, common sense, and the recognition and understanding of others' feelings and needs. In short, thinking includes any function within your core that involves thought processes.

Some thinking is healthy and leads to confident, competent performance as a leader. Other thinking based on faulty beliefs can undermine high performance behavior. For example, believing that you must prove you are right, avoid conflict situations, speak up first in a debate, convince others that their perspective is wrong, are all examples of faulty beliefs.

Each of these four components of your leader core—personality, abilities, spirit, and thinking—are important for you and other leaders in your organization to understand and leverage. Trying to lead from someplace other than your core is an ultimately fruitless exercise. Helping others around you recognize and apply their PAST is an important aspect of you as a mentor or coach.

The content for this **Leadersynth** edition was taken from Bruce Roselle's forthcoming book, *Leading from the Core*, to be published in 2010. This content is also available in a half-day or full-day workshop, or a keynote length address.