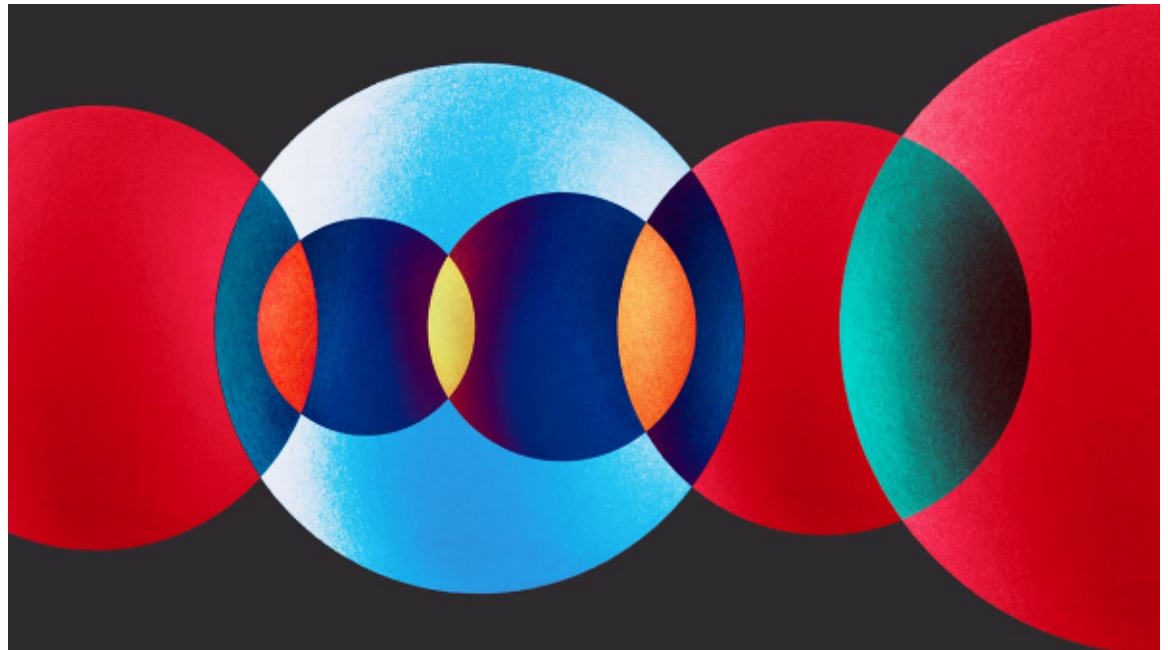


LEADERSHIP

How to Become a More Well-Rounded Leader

by Tony Schwartz
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For years, when I spoke with CEOs or senior leaders, it was because they were interested in how my consulting firm could help their employees become more engaged, or innovative, or sustainably high-performing. During the past year – and especially the past six months – I’ve been hearing a different and much more personal initial question: “Can you help me better manage my own life?”

Consider the [challenges](#) that modern corporate leaders – and especially CEOs – now face, in addition to running their companies every day:

- A high likelihood that the company they run has a business model that is being seriously disrupted, most often as a result of technology.
- A far more vocal and influential group of stakeholders, including employees, customers, and the public at large, all emboldened by their access to social media and by the speed at which their opinions can go viral.
- A highly volatile political climate that has prompted fear and uncertainty both inside and outside companies.
- Ambivalence about how to best attract, manage, and retain **Millennials**, who now represent the largest generation in the workforce, expect more flexibility in the way they work, and prefer to work for employers with a mission that goes beyond maximizing profit.

How can leaders balance these complex and often competing demands? The core challenge for modern leaders, I believe, is to become more wholly human – to actively develop a wider range of capabilities and to more deeply understand themselves.

Consider the following qualities:

Self-control
 Tenacity
 Boldness
 Honesty
 Focus on results
 Confidence
 Pragmatism
 Decisiveness

Is there any doubt these are desirable strengths for any leader? Most of us think in binary terms. What's good is absolutely good, and the alternative is bad. Given a choice between an employee with the profile on the left, and the one on the right, it's a no-brainer, isn't it?

- strength
 Self-control
 Tenacity
 Boldness
 Honesty
 Focus on results
 Confidence
 Pragmatism
 Decisiveness

- negative opposite
 - Impulsivity
 - Laziness
 - Hesitancy
 - Deceitfulness
 - Aimlessness
 - Insecurity
 - Impracticality
 - Wishy-washiness

Common as it is to see the world through an either-or lens, it's more limiting than we recognize. And relying on one set of relatively fixed strengths turns out to be insufficient to manage the complex environment leaders must now navigate.

Here's what happens, for example, when we overuse or rely too exclusively on the strengths on the left.

- strength
 - Self-control
 - Tenacity
 - Courage
 - Honesty
 - Focus on results
 - Confidence
 - Pragmatism
 - decisiveness
- strength overused
 - Rigidity
 - Ruthlessness
 - Recklessness
 - Cruelty
 - Narrowness
 - Arrogance
 - Unimaginativeness
 - Dogmatism

Think for a moment about one of your own strengths – a quality that has served you well at work and has been admired by others.

Now try to recall a situation in which you have overused or over-relied on this quality. Are there occasions when your strength became a liability, causing more harm than good and even leading to the opposite of what you intended?

We most often overuse our strengths under stress. When we're not getting what we want, our instinct is to double-down on whatever has worked best in the past. It's the same sort of impulse that prompts an addict to increase the dose when the drug of choice no longer produces the same high it originally did.

I recognize this inclination in myself. When I think of qualities that have served me well at work, drive and perseverance are high up on my list. But during the past year, as we introduced a new business model, I felt compelled to push harder and exercise more control than I had in the past. It was a rocky road. At times, I know my colleagues felt intimidated and discounted, rather than inspired and empowered.

Simply noticing this inclination has reminded me of the choices I can make every day at work. But that's not enough. It is also important to build complementary strengths or "positive opposites." Consider the qualities in the right-hand column below:

- strength
 - Self-control
 - Tenacity
 - Discernment
 - Honesty
 - Focus on results
 - Confidence
 - Pragmatism
 - Decisiveness
- positive opposite
 - Spontaneity
 - Patience
 - Acceptance
 - Compassion
 - Reflectiveness
 - Humility
 - Imaginativeness
 - Open-mindedness

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins wrote that the best leaders were characterized by a blend of "humility and fierce resolve."

In my experience, it's rare to find leaders who equally value the qualities on both the left and the right. Our tendency is to favor one, rather than recognizing the ways that each can serve as a balancing function for the other.

A leader who values directness is more likely to give feedback that others can hear and apply if she balances her honesty with care and compassion. The opposite is also true. A compassionate leader who avoids difficult conversations for fear of hurting people ends up impeding their growth.

The first step is simply deepening self-awareness. We can't change what we don't notice. What are your signal strengths? What does it look like when you overuse them? What potentially balancing qualities have you undervalued?

The goal is not to find a perfect balance, but to build a complementary set of strengths, so that we can move gracefully along a spectrum of leadership qualities. Embracing our own complexity makes us more wholly human and gives us additional resources to manage ourselves and others in an increasingly complex world.

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