



Your Leadership Style — How to Assess it, and Why You Should!

by Marie Moran

"Of my three Finance Directors, Frank Johnson is the brightest," the CFO informed me. "I'd really like to promote him to VP, but Frank doesn't come across to others as a guy with strong leadership ability. In meetings, he waits until everyone else puts forward their ideas, and at the end of the discussion he finally contributes. What he has to say is most insightful. But waiting so long to speak up makes him look less confident and somewhat indecisive. I realize he likes to mull things over, but if only he'd speak up sooner, he would be perceived as the natural leader."

Few people in the early phases of their careers recognize how powerfully their leadership style impacts how they are perceived—for better or worse!

Frank's story is similar to many I've heard throughout my 25 years as an executive coach. Frank is intelligent, well-educated, and recognized by his boss as an expert contributor. Unfortunately Frank's career is "stuck" because his leadership communication style is quieter and more reserved than that of his peers. Unless something changes, he's going to have difficulty getting promoted. Frank will find himself consistently outpaced by individuals who are more expressive, more charismatic, or who demonstrate more assertiveness skills.

Can a person like Frank become a stronger candidate for a top leadership position? Is it possible for him to learn to

promote himself and his ideas, without compromising his integrity, individuality or leadership style preferences? The answer is, "Yes, definitely!" But where should Frank begin? And what if he *does not* take action to expand and strengthen his leadership style?

The Case for Leadership Style Development

In our multi-tasking world, business people are constantly competing for attention—to sell their ideas, garner other people's buy-in and commitment, inspire action and move projects forward. Individuals who possess an appropriately assertive, authentically charismatic leadership style make themselves heard

through the din of competition for air time and resource allocation! They know how to get others excited about and eager to contribute to whatever assignments are on the table. **Organizations actively seek leaders with these abilities!**

Unfortunately, too many business professionals still operate under the illusion that **what they do** defines how they are perceived in the workplace. The truth is, as people progress higher and higher within the organization, it is **how they operate**—not just the tasks they complete or how much they can manage—that determines their long-term leadership potential. This is a change in perspective that folks like Frank will definitely profit from—the sooner the better!

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What's at stake for Frank?

Quite a lot. By strengthening his leadership style, Frank will greatly increase his chances to move out of the position of middle manager into a far more personally satisfying and professionally secure leadership role. As he becomes more effective at inspiring and persuading others in the organization, Frank can get more things accomplished that move the business forward. His company will benefit from fully mining the gold of Frank's wealth of knowledge and leadership potential.

Where should Frank begin?

As an aspiring leader, Frank's first step is to clear away any illusions he may be hanging onto that his leadership style is less important than what he gets done.

Secondly, Frank needs to fully understand that he *can* improve his leadership abilities and his promotability by actively working on his style.

Third, Frank must take a hard look at how he currently comes across in presenting himself. He needs to get a grasp on the limiting perceptions he is unconsciously transmitting to others. The process of discovering how he is perceived may be challenging, surprising—or even a bit painful – but ultimately it can reveal a whole lot to Frank. Equipped with this new insight, he can then identify which specific *leadership style characteristics* he wants to strengthen. Working with an experienced coach would assist Frank to develop greater effectiveness and increased options for expressing himself.

Assessing Leadership Style Characteristics

What attributes or qualities should Frank examine in himself, and why are they important? In my own coaching practice, there are 10 core characteristics to consider when calibrating an individual's leadership style.

About the Author

Marie Moran is a nationally recognized expert in executive presence and leadership style development. She began her career as a workshop leader and executive coach in 1981, making her both a pioneer and a 25-year veteran in the field of executive development. Today Marie provides dynamic cutting-edge workshops and one-on-one coaching for people in entrepreneurial and Fortune 500 companies across all industries.

Leadership Style

Core

Characteristic

What to look for:

Assertiveness

How much assertiveness does this individual demonstrate?

- Does he initiate discussion and action, or wait for others to start the ball rolling?
- How quickly does he speak up in meetings to contribute his perspective?
- To what extent does he focus on putting his own ideas forward, versus listening to and absorbing what others offer?

Personal Openness

To what extent does he project accessibility at a personal level?

- How easily do others sense a connection with this individual?
- Does he reveal personal feelings, make self-disclosing remarks, or discuss the personal side of life while at work?
- Does he effectively use facial expressions, body language, and voice inflection to help communicate his feelings?

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Regarding personal openness: Some people engage freely in conversations that have a personal flavor and easily make connections with others. They enjoy “small talk” and are quite comfortable in self-disclosing their personal selves. They tend to express themselves with animation, using their hands when they talk and adding inflection to their voice. Through body language, they readily disclose their feelings of passion and enthusiasm, or frustration and concern. In contrast, other individuals are more controlled in their personal expression. They are harder to read because of a more formal or reserved way of using voice and gestures. These people tend not to self-disclose about personal matters and prefer to stick to business topics. And for other individuals, their degree of personal openness varies depending on the situation.

Ease in Risk-Taking

How comfortable is the person with taking a risk?

- Is he entrepreneurial and focused on fresh ideas and options, willing to step out into the unknown? Or does he prefer to build slowly on past experience?
- In what timeframe does he tend to operate? The past, present, or future?
- To what extent does he focus on the status quo (including elements of job security), versus building something new and taking a chance?
- How often does he go out on a limb with his ideas?

Control Preferences

How important is control to the individual, and how is control demonstrated?

- Over how many tasks or people does this person want influence or authority? Is his focus on controlling people or controlling tasks?
- Are these choices expressed in a balanced way which others easily appreciate, or does a desire for control frequently “push the buttons” of others?

Decision-Making Style

How does this person approach decision-making?

- Does he make decisions rapidly, or take a more thoughtful and deliberate approach?
- How many decisions can this person juggle at one time?
- Does his decision-making style change when the pressure goes up?
- How flexible can he be when viewpoints differ or circumstances change?

Approach to Conflict

How courageous is this person in handling conflict?

- To what extent does this individual “hang in there” to stay openly engaged during a heated exchange?
- Is he willing to address difficult issues, make hard calls and get into the ring when appropriate? Or does he avoid conflict by procrastinating or accommodating others?
- Is passive aggression or sarcasm a part of his style?

Communication Style

How flexible is the person’s communication style?

- Can he effectively converse on topics that are conceptual as well as concrete?
- Is he able to adapt his communication style according to the situation and people involved?
- With what communication modes is he most comfortable and competent (i.e., verbal, written, stand-up presentation, face-to-face, telephone, etc.)?
- To what extent does he read others and adapt his style accordingly?

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Staying Power under Pressure

How does he deal with pressure, stress, or change?

- To what extent can the person remain focused and present, versus worrying or getting distracted from the purpose at hand?
- Does the person remain poised under pressure, or does he tend to “lose it” at times?
- Does he keep an even keel during times of change, or become discouraged, drained, off-kilter?

Appetite for Learning

How eager is this person to learn new things in new areas?

- Is he motivated to discover more about life and others around him? Or does his range of interest seem limited, or focused on areas he already knows?
- How curious is he?
- Does he demonstrate compassion for mistakes and the awkwardness of learning, rather than being critical and judgmental of himself and others?

Authenticity

In general, how authentic is this person?

- Do others sense that the individual consistently presents himself fully and genuinely?
- To what extent does he operate from the heart, versus “using his head” to maneuver the situation or project an image of something he is not?

Making Leadership Style Count

So, what ever happened with Frank? He turned out to be one of the lucky ones! He sought out executive coaching as a way to grow and was genuinely eager to develop from it. Frank adapted his behavior to become more forthright with his ideas and assertive in decision-making. Eventually Frank was promoted to Vice President, and today he mentors others in developing their assertiveness and leadership skills.

For any aspiring leader like Frank, developing self-awareness in these fundamental leadership style characteristics—then improving or expanding where appropriate—can only serve to accelerate one’s leadership development. The process provides a powerful way to mine the gold and the greatness in both the individual and the organization as a whole.

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Marie Moran & Company offers workshops, seminars, and one-on-one consulting to develop personal leadership and life effectiveness. We impart skills and principles to enhance excellence in the workplace, and increase Life balance, fulfillment, and joy!