

The Leadership Challenge: Part III

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In our prior newsletter, I referenced six of our Twelve Essential Leadership Skills. In this edition, I will highlight the final six, rounding out the key attributes of today's successful leader. In total, these Twelve Skills embody the core essence of facilitative leadership. Here at The Leadership Academy, we have designed a training framework built upon these Twelve Essential Leadership Skills. Our framework includes various customized, on-site workshops, involving specific organizational role-plays and case studies.

TWELVE ESSENTIAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS

7. **MANAGING CONFLICT:** Workplace conflict is inevitable. Failure to manage conflict, however, can undermine collaboration and teamwork and ultimately sabotage workplace culture. Effective leaders understand how to have the crucial conversations needed to manage and diffuse conflict, use conflict to promote creative solutions to workplace problems, and deal with potentially difficult workplace situations.
8. **ACTING WITH FOCUS:** Business leaders consistently list "time" as one of their most important assets. From crisis management, to implementing the organization's strategic vision, to simply managing day-to-day responsibilities of leading an organization, the demands and stress imposed upon today's leaders can be overwhelming. Leaders must be able to act with focus in order to function effectively, achieve established objectives, and deal with the complex challenges that can arise on a daily basis. What does it take to have the focus of a truly effective leader? The ability to establish clear priorities, the power to concentrate on the tasks necessary to progress through increasing and sometimes conflicting demands, and the proficiency to accomplish those priorities. Leaders who understand priorities but lack concentration, know what to do but cannot seem to get it done. Those who have concentration but fail to prioritize, act without direction and lack progress. However, a leader who can harness both priorities and concentration has the potential to achieve great things.
9. **STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT:** Organizational effectiveness results from the strategic alignment of four fundamental components: (1) a workplace culture that values success and achievement; (2) a clear vision and direction consistent with the organization's purpose and values; (3) the ability to influence and mobilize people to pursue that vision; and (4) the fundamental focus and action plan to achieve that vision. Effective leaders, therefore, must be able to develop and maintain the strategic alignment necessary to deliver their organization's strategic objectives. This approach aligns leadership behavior to the organization's strategic vision, to the marketplace, and to the culture, required to implement that strategy.

10. **CHANGE MANAGEMENT:** To succeed in today's highly volatile and increasingly complex work environment, organizations must successfully manage change with minimal disruption to the corporate culture. Companies who are successful in making change work to their advantage, possess leaders who see change as an opportunity for the business. "Change management" therefore is the ability of organizational leaders to initiate and respond to change in ways that create advantage, minimize risk, and sustain performance.
11. **LEARNING AGILITY:** Learning agility is an individual's ability to continually acquire new skills, learn from experience, confront new challenges and market dynamics, and perform effectively under rapidly changing conditions. As corporate leaders exhibit those qualities, enterprise agility follows. To be effective, leaders at every level must continue to grow and develop by continually learning new skills and being open to new ideas and alternative ways of thinking. Throughout their careers, successful leaders show the willingness and ability to learn and take away meaning from their experiences. These leaders recognize the nuances in different situations and then adopt innovative approaches to confront new workplace challenges.
12. **BUSINESS ACUMEN:** Leaders are essentially the stewards of an organization's core assets – its people, finances, reputation, brand, shareholder value, and market position to name just a few. To serve as effective stewards of these core assets, leaders must possess "business acumen" – *i.e.*, the ability to review and understand financial statements and balance sheets, budgeting, asset allocation, corporate and legal compliance requirements, people management, etc.

Of course, a leader does not have to master and consistently exhibit all Twelve of the essential skills to be effective in his or her role. In fact, that leader probably does not exist. Nevertheless, as leadership is situational, truly effective leaders must understand these Twelve Essential Skills and have the ability to develop and flexibility to employ them as circumstances may require.