



ENABLER



ENGAGER



ARTIST

## THE LEADERSHIP SKILL SET

WHILE LEADERSHIP STYLES MAY VARY, CURRENT LEADING CANADIAN CEOs PRACTISE A TIME-HONOURED LEADERSHIP SKILL SET.

BY HENRY L. KUTARNA

Current discussion on the leadership skill set is ablaze with anticipation. The expectation is high that new leadership models will restore good leadership following the September 11th confidence impacts, recent public market bubble-bursts, and publicized ethical behaviour breaches.

Will it take new skills of leadership to improve things? Should we be hoping for a new leadership skill set? Or is there a current repository of skills to check?

An internet search on the phrase “the leadership skill set” uncovers over 1,310,000 citations. A cursory review of only a dozen or two of these suggests that the leadership skill set may already exist. Perhaps philosopher G.K. Chesterton was right when he asserted in “The Reason Why” that nine out of ten of what we call new ideas are simply old mistakes. Let us test his idea.

As an executive coach, I have gleaned clear observations from over seven years of intensive work with nearly 500 Canadian CEOs who participate in an international think tank group process (The Executive Committee, an

international organization of 9,000 CEOs in 15 countries who work in peer groups under the leadership of a professional chair). There is strong evidence that three distinct sets of skills are acquired in three stages: 1. Leader “Enabler,” 2. Leader “Engager,” and 3. Leader “Artist.”

New or young leaders first focus on the leader as enabler, who initially emerges competent in:

### 1. FINANCE, CASH FLOW, BUDGETING:

This is not only about accounting skills. It is about quantifying production or service plans and organizational goals into a financial plan that can be controlled and monitored.

### 2. LOGISTICS AND OPERATIONS:

This concerns work flow, steps in the process, the logic of the flow of materials, supplies, ideas, cash, equipment, labour, finished products, or completed services, etc. Advancements then occur in efficiency, cost saving, revenue enhancement, time saving, and others.

- 3. UNDERSTANDING THE ECONOMICS:** This is about factors that make up the demand for one's product or service, supply influencers, underlying demographics, marketing realities, and competency in the art of forecasting.

By gaining competency in such basics, the leader first enables the organization to thrive in business and gain profitability/credibility.

The developing leader then becomes an *engager*, who uses internal dialogue and external conversations to shape outside perception of the organization. The engager then acquires new competencies in:

- 4. NEGOTIATION:** The ability to show strength, decisiveness, and immediate command of the subject is directly related to negotiation success. There are many negotiations each day.
- 5. COMMUNICATION:** This is more than skill in public speaking or the ability to empathize. It is the art of conveying with the right mix of head and heart, the values of the company.
- 6. MEDIA RELATIONS:** Once it was believed that a CEO should avoid the media. Today's CEO who is prepared to do a radio, TV, or print interview positions the organization in a positive way in front of a significant audience.
- 7. DEALING WITH PERSONNEL AND LABOUR ISSUES:** It is essential to express expectations to staff clearly. There ought to be a "philosophy" of how employees are treated, how they are directed, what is expected, how performance feedback occurs, and how incentives are built into the system.
- 8. ANALYSIS AND POLICY-MAKING:** This is about taking a problem and methodically breaking it down into components that can be addressed in several optional ways, selecting the appropriate solution and implementing it. It is about creating an organizational position. It is the art of fitting a solution to the greatest number of situations possible so as to save time and energy for the company in the future.
- 9. CHAIRING MEETINGS AND BRIEFINGS:** It is important to show the skill of leading a discussion, not wasting time, covering all aspects of an issue, allowing full stakeholder contribution, and drawing the meeting to a conclusion in a professional manner. Stakeholder confidence begins here.
- 10. PERFORMANCE REVIEW/MEASUREMENT:** It is vital to convey accurately and decisively the measure to be used, the results of that measure, and the reasons for that measure.

- 11. PUBLIC SPEAKING:** This is the art of knowing how to speak, how to appear, how to articulate, how to present, how to use a podium, how to use a microphone, how to use a/v equipment, how to be heard at the back of a room, how to excite the audience, how to cover material in a timely fashion, and how to "convince."

Finally, the leader becomes an *artist*, able to assimilate with confidence all the previous skills into a template that can be replicated in new circumstances. This positions the business for the very long term. It inspires and motivates employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders, and other observers. Skills acquired in this phase include:

- 12. BALANCE:** The leader brings into balance all aspects of a life – self, spouse, children, extended family, friends, associates, colleagues, and others in due proportion.
- 13. VISION:** Long-range vision and goal-setting requires thinking time, research, techniques of discernment, strategic direction-setting, forecasting, and anticipating.
- 14. JUDGMENT:** It has been said that good judgment comes from experience, which itself comes from bad judgment. The most respected CEO will learn quickly to exercise judgment in a mature, responsible, and prudent manner.
- 15. LEADERSHIP:** Leadership is the art of creating confidence in yourself and in the organization. It includes creating such respect that others will willingly follow your direction, go beyond the call of duty, and model their behaviour after yours.
- 16. INTEGRITY:** This cannot be taught. But it can be learned. At this stage of leadership, it is exercised and seen by others in a consistent and visible manner time after time.

With time and effort, the aspiring leader journeys this three-stage path to leadership. Reflection may confirm that the list seems familiar. It is interesting that, while leadership styles may vary, current leading Canadian CEOs practise a time-honoured **leadership skill set** even in the face of the most recent challenges. A back-to-basics Chesterton may have been right.

Henry L. Kutarna leads a group of family-based property investment businesses. His consulting groups, The Family Business Advisor and The Executive Advisor, assist family business transitions and executive leadership development initiatives in Western Canada. He is an Executive-in-Residence at The Banff Centre. ■