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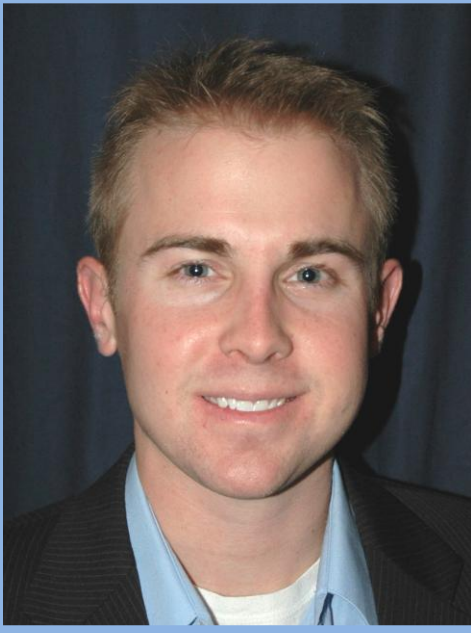


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Four vital components of successful leadership – integrity, competency, emotional intelligence, and vision – act in unison so an individual can effectively stand as a leader... [I]t is reasonable to presume that individuals cannot stand and function as leaders if they exemplify only one or two of these four principles.

Leadership: The Tabletop Concept

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Introduction

Today, students of leadership are inundated with studies, surveys, and research that espouse a wide range of leadership concepts and issues. But four leadership principles in particular – **integrity, competence, emotional intelligence, and vision** – are fundamental to successful leadership. This paper presents these four elements as being analogous to the four table legs that uphold a tabletop. Just like a tabletop cannot remain elevated or functional if there are only one or two table legs, it is reasonable to presume that individuals cannot stand and function as leaders if they exemplify only one or two of these four principles. Likewise, similar to how three table legs can successfully uphold a tabletop for a short duration of time, individuals can also appear to be successful as leaders through possessing only three of the four principles of leadership. An analysis of historical leadership, however, suggests that such individuals are merely momentary leaders who are destined to fail, as they lack a “leadership tabletop” that is buttressed by all four of the “table legs of leadership.”

Leadership: The Tabletop Concept

As the world progresses further into the 21st century, it is commonly accepted that leadership will continue to play an integral role in all realms of society. Regardless of whether it is on the family, business, political, cultural or national level, we can expect to see a multitude of leaders succeed, while also witnessing the downfall of countless others in the coming decades (Peebles,

2010, p. 1). But what determines whether an individual rises to the challenges or succumbs to the demands associated with leadership? Before we address this question, it is necessary to first define what the concept of “leadership” truly is.

Unlike management – which is almost entirely focused on issues such as planning and budgeting, as well as controlling and problem-solving – leadership involves two simple, yet critical, elements: the people and the objective (Conger & Riggio, 2007, p. 136). Specifically, leadership consists of aligning people, to include motivating and inspiring subordinates and peers in a cooperative manner, while simultaneously motivating and communicating the desired direction. Although the concepts of management and leadership are unique and exist independently of each other, it is vital for these two facets to work in unison if an organization hopes to succeed for the long term (French & Bell, 1999, p. 272). Problems arise, however, because the topic of management is largely scientific and quantitative, while leadership is much more theoretical and qualitative.

In fact, many leading scholars recognize the reality that the concept of leadership remains in its growing stages and lacks a grand, unifying theory to provide general direction to thinkers and researchers (Burns, 2003, p. 2). This theoretical article will attempt to remedy this innate shortcoming of the study of leadership by proposing a framework for leadership that is more scientific and less theoretical. In particular, this article asserts that four vital components of successful leadership – ***integrity, competency, emotional intelligence, and vision*** – act in unison so an individual can effectively stand as a leader. Moreover, this article will provide historical examples that seem to suggest that these four elements are so crucial for leaders to possess that they act in a manner analogous to four table legs that successfully keep a table standing.

Tables & Leaders

In general, a table that is comprised of four table legs upholding a single tabletop is the most functional type of table. Although many people could argue that a tabletop can technically be upheld with only three table legs, most individuals would be hesitant to rely on this tabletop to function. This hesitation is probably wise when considering the simple physics of tables: a tabletop upheld by only three table legs is inherently unstable and prone to tip over if conditions are not ideal. The same holds true for the tabletop of leadership: individuals should be hesitant to rely on leaders to function if they do not exemplify all four leadership fundamentals. Perhaps the reason most humans recognize and acknowledge this tabletop reality is because we can witness it every day in real, tangible ways. Unfortunately, it is more of a challenge to view the realities of leadership fundamentals in equally tangible and personal ways.

A multitude of leadership scholars and writers identify this human inability to hash out what the fundamentals are of leadership, and consequently assert that we must construct a general theory of leadership so we can better grasp the role of individual leaders and their traits (Burns, 2003, p. 9). But what are these “roles” and “traits” that leaders must fulfill and/or exemplify? In a survey involving thousands of participants and spanning six continents, leadership scholars Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner discovered that subordinates most admire the following four characteristics in their leaders: ***honesty, forward-looking, competency, and inspiring*** (2002, p. 25).

This survey was conducted several times over three decades, but these four personal attributes of leaders were always the top four, regardless of the year or the country in which the survey was conducted (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 26). This extensive survey reinforces the basic definition of leadership, as it reveals leaders must be focused on both the people (i.e., be honest and inspirational) and the mission (i.e., be competent and forward-looking). As such, this paper utilizes these four leadership fundamentals as the four table legs that uphold the tabletop of successful leadership. However, the term “integrity” will be substituted for “honesty,” and “vision” will be used in place of “forward-looking.” Likewise, the term “emotional intelligence” will replace the term “inspirational,” mostly due to the fact that the best of breed rely on more than just inspiration and power to foster interpersonal relationships as leaders (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002, p. 248). All of these four leadership fundamentals – integrity, competence, emotional intelligence, and vision – will be defined and described in greater detail in the following sections of this paper.

Table Leg I: Integrity

The leadership verity is that all great leaders possess integrity on the personal level. In almost every book devoted to the topic of leadership, one finds either several sentences, paragraphs, pages, or even an entire chapter emphasizing how integrity and resolute ethical values are crucial to leadership (Ciulla, 2004, p. 3). Although it is fairly ambiguous and encompasses several relevant personal attributes, integrity essentially means that a person’s behavior is consistent with espoused values. Moreover, integrity is a primary determinant of interpersonal trust, as it implies the person is trustworthy, ethical, and honest (Yukl, 2006, p. 210).

When individuals discuss the qualities they admire in leaders, they often use “character” and “honesty” as being synonymous with integrity (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 27). Individuals who embody such character and honesty recognize that simply abiding by laws and legal precedents is not integrity; true leaders must be held accountable to a higher standard of behavior than the government requires, as well as to a higher level of ethicality than most individuals expect from themselves (Ciulla, 2004, p. 36). In short, an individual who is in a position of leadership should strive to “keep alive values that are not so easy to embed in laws – our caring for others, about honor and integrity, about tolerance and mutual respect, and about human fulfillment within a framework of values” (Gardner, 1990, p. 70).

Leaders must be able to elevate their organizations to greater levels of ethicality and their subordinates to greater levels of morality. The keystone of this leadership ability is personal integrity, and organizational shortcomings are inescapable if a leader fails to exemplify this first table leg of leadership. Kenneth Lay, the founder and CEO of the notorious Enron Corporation, serves as a perfect case in point of how one’s tabletop of leadership can come crashing down if the table leg of integrity is absent, regardless of whether or not he/she personifies competency, emotional intelligence, and vision.

Prior to founding Enron in the 1980s, Kenneth Lay held a number of respectable jobs that required him to fully utilize his intelligence and competence as a businessman. Lay, who died after suffering a heart attack in 2006, earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Economics from the University of Missouri. He subsequently served as an officer in the U.S. Navy from 1968 to 1971 while simultaneously pursuing a PhD in Economics, which he was awarded in 1970

from the University of Houston. A testament to Lay's academic credentials was the assistant professorship position he held at George Washington University in 1969 when he was stationed at the Pentagon. After leaving the military in 1971, Lay transitioned back and forth between the private and public sectors on several occasions. He held high-ranking positions at numerous organizations tantamount within the energy industry in the 1970s and early 80s: the Department of the Interior, the Florida Gas Company, the Federal Power Commission, and ExxonMobil's predecessor, Humble Oil (Fox, 2003, p. 8-9). But it was not until he joined the Houston Natural Gas Company as CEO and oversaw its merger with InterNorth in 1985 that Lay solidified his place as a highly competent magnate in the energy industry – he was now the Chairman and CEO of the newly rebranded Enron Corporation (Fox, 2003, p. vii).

Not only did Kenneth Lay possess extraordinary competence, he was also a man who demonstrated a level of emotional intelligence and vision for the energy industry. While a student at the University of Missouri, he served as president of the *Zeta Phi* chapter of the *Beta Theta Pi* fraternity, a position largely dependent on the politics of personal popularity (Fox, 2003, p. 8). He subsequently won further recognition for his ability to develop lasting interpersonal relationships as a leader – all of which seem to suggest high emotional intelligence. He was the recipient of the “Father of the Year” award by the Houston Community Partners, the “Brotherhood Award” by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the “Distinguished Citizen” award by the Rotary Club of Houston, and even had a day in Texas – “Kenneth Lay Day” – renamed in his honor by the Mayor of Houston (Kenneth Lay, 2010, p. 1).

Lay also demonstrated his abilities as a visionary leader, writing extensively on the future of the energy industry. Before it was a political or economic issue, Lay was an avid proponent of the development and utilization of wind turbines. In an article entitled “Megatrends of Energy,” he stated, “We expect to see not only a convergence of gas and electricity, but also a convergence of environmental and economic efficiency. Efficient power is clear power” (Lay, 1998, p.1). St. John's University sociological professors Robert Tillman and Michael Indergaard further reinforced Lay's position as a visionary when they wrote that he was “widely seen as a free market visionary because of Enron's success in trading natural gas and electrical power” (Tillman & Indergaard, 2005, p. 2-3).

So how and why did Lay's tabletop of leadership come crashing down so quickly and in such dramatic fashion when considering the competence, emotional intelligence, and vision he demonstrated as a leader? The answer highlights the importance of the first table leg of leadership: leaders must exemplify integrity on the personal level if they hope to be successful as leaders. In the case of Lay's leadership tabletop, he cut off his own integrity table leg by explicitly lying to the public and employees of Enron when he went on the record in August 2001 stating Enron had “no accounting issues, no trading issues, no reserve issues, no previously unknown problem issues...” (McNamee & Zellner, 2002, p. 1).

In reality, however, he had received an internal memo five days earlier that called into question Enron's dubious accounting practices, with a Vice President writing that she was “incredibly nervous [Enron] will implode in a wave of accounting scandals” (McNamee & Zellner, 2002, p. 1). The advantage derived from violating his integrity in this instance was almost purely financial. Enron executives were in the process of capitalizing on their “pump-and-dump” strategy for Enron stock. In essence, these knowledgeable individuals – who were led by Ken Lay – were

artificially pumping up the price of Enron stock by publishing fraudulent financial statements that portrayed their company as being highly profitable. This stock, in turn, was bought by unwitting investors, including Enron employees who were proud to work for such a seemingly successful organization. These purported leaders of Enron then dumped their stock and reaped windfall profits immediately before Enron's true financial insolvency was revealed, which consequently resulted in the stock's value plummeting (Tillman & Indergaard, 2005, p. 4-5).

This nosedive in the stock's value had dire implications for the vast majority of Enron employees who were barred from selling their own shares due to a company-imposed moratorium and saw their life's saving evaporate almost overnight (Tillman & Indergaard, 2005, p. 4). This lucrative pump-and-dump strategy and explicit lying on the part of Kenneth Lay is a glaring deficiency in personal integrity. It is no surprise the other three table legs of leadership – competency, emotional intelligence, and vision – could not keep his leadership intact and functioning after his lack of personal integrity was revealed and this first table leg was entirely cut from beneath his leadership tabletop. While he may have been able to rely on the other three table legs for most of his life as a leader, Lay finally confronted a situation that was unfavorable to his tabletop and it consequently fell to the ground in a manner similar to someone bumping a table with only three legs.

Table Leg II: Competency

For decades, leadership scholars have been debating the role personal intelligence plays in determining whether an individual will succeed or fail as a leader (Neider & Schriesheim, 2002, p. 220). After R.M. Stogdill's 30 years of leadership research was published in 1948, many scholars and surveys posited that intelligence is the best predictor of leadership capability (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2007, p. 147). Since then, scholars have found this to be true, but with an important caveat: intelligence predicts leadership success in environments of low stress, but during high stress scenarios, experience is more important (Sternberg, 2002, p. 9).

Perhaps the best way to appreciate the second table leg of leadership, competency, is to consider an example. If you had to be rushed to the hospital due to a life-threatening emergency, who would you prefer to see in charge of the hospital's emergency room (1) a physician who graduated #1 from medical school but has zero real-life experience, or (2) a doctor who graduated last in his/her class but has 30 years of experience? Most of us would answer "Neither of the two!" because a physician who graduated #1 in his/her class *and* has 30 years of experience is the ideal leader in an emergency room. This simple example underscores the necessity of competency (i.e., intelligence and experience working in concert together) as one of the four table legs that upholds an individual's leadership tabletop. General Ambrose Burnside of the Union Army during the Civil War serves as an example of what can happen to leaders who embody the other three table legs of leadership – personal integrity, emotional intelligence, and vision – but are found to be lacking in competency when an organization needs it the most.

Burnside, who is arguably most famous for being the father of today's "sideburns" style of facial hair, earned an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and graduated in 1847 as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army. What is remarkable about Burnside is the extent to which he epitomized the other three table legs of leadership, but was painfully lacking in the realm of military competence. In terms of personal integrity, he is remembered as being "a simple, honest, loyal soldier, doing his best even if that best was not very good, never scheming or

conniving or backbiting” (Catton, 2008, p. 256-257). It is sadly ironic that when President Lincoln asked him to command the Union Army in 1862, Burnside balked, showcasing his personal integrity by candidly admitting to his superiors that he did not possess adequate competency for such a position (O’Reilly, 2006, p. 2).

Burnside was equally impressive when it came to emotional intelligence and his ability to interact with people on the individual level, even as he commanded thousands of soldiers. Historians document him as someone who was very popular wherever he set foot, to include Providence, Rhode Island where he served as the State Governor from 1866 to 1869 and, subsequently, the U.S. Capitol where he was a Senator from 1874 to 1881. The majority of this popularity can be attributed to his leadership charisma, as he made friends easily, smiled a lot, and remembered everyone’s name (Goolrick, 1985, p. 29). Without question, Ambrose Burnside understood that successful leadership involves the mission and the people. Although he excelled at the people component, which is vividly reflected in the lifelong possession and application of his emotional intelligence, he struggled with the mission component during the Civil War. This was most evident in 1862 when President Lincoln directed Burnside to lead his army of 135,000 into combat against 78,000 Confederate soldiers at the Battle of Fredericksburg (O’Reilly, 2006, p. 21).

This Virginian battle – the largest battle during the Civil War in terms of men engaged in combat – was of crucial strategic significance because Fredericksburg was “the shortest road to Richmond” – the capital of the Confederacy (O’Reilly, 2006, p. 21). Although he was already a Brigadier General when the Civil War broke out, Burnside had seen little combat prior to the first shots being fired at Fort Sumner on April 12, 1861. This was, in large part, due to Burnside’s timing: he graduated from West Point too late to experience the Mexican War firsthand, resulting in never refining the military skills or strategy he developed as a cadet (Kingseed, 2004, p. 158). As a consequence of this inexperience, he was ill-prepared for the demands of leadership placed on him at Fredericksburg.

Unlike many generals, Burnside was decisive and immediately enacted his plans once they were reluctantly approved by the War Department (O’Reilly, 2006, p. 25). As the Union Army began its attack on the Confederate Army outside Fredericksburg, numerous complications arose. Logistics immediately became a problem as administrative bungling resulted in the army arriving at the Rappahannock River before the pontoon bridges that were required to cross the river. Rather than ford the river and began an expeditious offensive, as President Lincoln and other generals had prodded him to do, Burnside squandered the initiative (O’Reilly, 2006, p. 24-33). Shortly thereafter, during the core of the battle, Burnside began to issue vague and confusing orders to his subordinates. Likewise, his directives led to strategic blunders that resulted in the well-manned Union Army being undermanned at critical moments, leading one general to even comment “My God...did they think my division could whip Lee’s whole Army?” (Rable, 2006, p. 216).

Rather than reconsider his strategy after suffering vast casualties, Burnside was stubborn in the closing days of the battle. He ordered his forces to continue on the same path and to renew their assaults against the Confederates. When these efforts failed, Burnside’s subordinates were finally able to persuade him to abandon the offensive. In the end, the Union suffered 12,653

casualties while the Confederacy escaped with only 5,377 lost and proved to be a formidable enemy at this pivotal battle in the Civil War (O'Reilly, 2006, p. 499).

Such a dire analysis of Burnside's competency as a general may lead people to presume he was unintelligent and a lackluster visionary. In reality, however, he was quite the opposite. In addition to his successful campaigns in state and federal politics, Burnside garnered significant notoriety in the railroad industry. He was the president of myriad organizations, including the Cincinnati-Martinsville and the Indianapolis-Vincennes Railroads. Burnside is also popular among gun enthusiasts today due to his stint as the first president of the National Rifle Association (NRA).

Moreover, Burnside was a visionary leader within the rifle industry and showcased his ingenuity as an inventor in this field before the Civil War. He invented and manufactured a new breech-loading rifle as well as his own carbine, which was reviewed as being "the best of all cavalry carbines during the [Civil War], in which more than 55,000 [carbines] saw service" (Marvel, 1991, p. 11-12). Overall, Burnside was a very intelligent individual who was both creative and visionary in his endeavors. So how could a man who so powerfully demonstrated integrity, emotional intelligence, vision, and intelligence off the battlefield fail so miserably as a leader when tens of thousands of human lives were on the line?

The answer is painful to admit but straightforward nonetheless – he was incompetent as a military general. This is an important leadership lesson that has tremendous implications for us all: success as a leader in *most* realms of society does not equate to successful leadership in *all* realms. Ambrose Burnside is but one historical example of this leadership tenet. For example, if George Washington was placed in an emergency room today, no rational individual would want him in charge. As stated previously, a physician who graduated #1 in his/her class and has 30 years of experience is the preferred leader in an emergency room. This does not discredit George Washington's distinguished leadership abilities, but instead underscores that we all want competent leaders making the decisions given particular circumstances. Burnside's incompetency resulted in his entire tabletop of leadership falling down when he confronted another leader at Fredericksburg who possessed a leadership tabletop strongly buttressed by all four of the table legs of leadership: General Robert E. Lee.

Table Leg III: Emotional Intelligence

Whether it is in the workplace or elsewhere in society, everyone has witnessed the awkwardness that ensues what an individual who is seemingly qualified to lead others simply lacks the people skills that are intrinsic to successful leadership. While this awkwardness may seem harmless from an external perspective, it often erodes the efficacy of the entire organization internally. Emotional intelligence, which is the foundation of dynamic, industrious interpersonal relations with others, encapsulates this ambiguous idea of people skills within the leadership framework (Bass, 1999, p. 106). It is defined as a person being attuned to his or her feelings, and the feelings of others, and the ability to assiduously integrate emotions and reason (Yukl, 2006, p. 219). But emotional intelligence is also much more.

Similar to social intelligence, it includes one's level of sociability, friendliness, thoughtfulness, and self-monitoring. Unlike social intelligence, however, individuals with high emotional intelligence also exhibit emotional maturity, conscientiousness, emotional stability, as well as freedom from narcissism, mood swings, and neuroticism (Bass, 1999, p. 106). In essence,

emotional intelligence results in people better controlling themselves, which in turn enables them to better control others as leaders. As Stanford professor Robert Sutton explains in his best-selling book *The No Asshole Rule*, “Certainly, people with high emotional intelligence who are skilled at taking the perspectives of people they encounter and at responding to their needs and feelings are pleasant to be around and well suited for leadership positions” (2007, p. 18). Unfortunately, emotional intelligence is not innate in all humans. For General George Patton, the absence of this third table leg of leadership was the crux that caused his leadership tabletop to wobble unsteadily throughout his entire life.

By all accounts, Patton exemplified excellence in personal integrity, competency, and vision. As he progressed to the highest echelons of military command during World War II, Patton repeatedly demonstrated a high level of integrity as he demanded all human beings be treated with due respect. Concerning the Allied countries utilizing German forced labor, Patton wrote, “I’m opposed to sending [prisoners] to work as slaves in foreign lands...where many will be starved to death.” Furthermore, Patton possessed a macro-level perspective of universal morality, commenting, “It is amusing to recall that we fought the [American Revolution] in deference to the rights of man and the Civil War to abolish slavery and have now gone back on both principles” (Dietrich, 2002, p. 127). Though politically incorrect in his language, Patton was a strong advocate of the philosophy that individuals should be evaluated based on performance, not on race or religious affiliation. He boldly declared, “I don’t give a damn who the man is. He can be a nigger or a Jew, but if he has the stuff and does his duty, he can do anything I’ve got. By God! I love him” (Hirshson, 2003, p. 412).

Patton possessed a comparable level of competency and vision as a leader. Whether it was enemy combatants or his fellow generals, Patton was a legend for his superior abilities as a commander. German Field Marshal Rundstedt is documented as claiming, “Patton was [the Allies’] best” and Omar Bradley ranked him as one of the top American generals in the European theater during WWII (Weigley, 1981, p. 758). Even more impressive, political leaders at the highest levels recognized Patton’s proficiency. Adolf Hitler once remarked that Patton was “the most dangerous man [the Allies] have” and Joseph Stalin even conceded his Red Army was not capable of planning or executing an offensive like Patton did in France (Irving, 1977, p. 677).

Patton also proved his worth as a visionary leader during the First World War and the subsequent interwar years. Working alongside Dwight Eisenhower, Patton was one of the fathers of the Army’s tank warfare doctrine, which would be employed during WWII. Patton’s extensive research and publication of work supporting the development of tanks, including a notable article entitled “Tanks in Future Wars,” serve as testaments to his abilities as a forward-thinker within the military (Hirshson, 2002, p. 156). But even visionary leaders who demonstrate immense personal integrity and phenomenal competency struggle as leaders if they suffer from low emotional intelligence; General Patton was not an exception to this important precept within the tabletop concept of leadership.

Throughout the duration of his career as a military officer, Patton earned an iniquitous reputation for his “harsh methods, his unbending personality, his arrogance, his profanity, and the sheer wrath of his notoriously volatile temper” (D’Este, 1995, p. 3). Perhaps it was because he felt the results were all that mattered as a leader, but Patton disregarded his lack of emotional intelligence and “delighted in the contradictions of his own personality” (Axelrod, 1999, p. 11).

Unfortunately for Patton, the American public and military had a different perspective on leadership, which was manifest in the infamous “slapping incident” of 1943. During this regrettable episode, General Patton slapped a soldier – who was bedbound at a European hospital at the time but was later found to have been suffering from malaria – across the face because he claimed to be incapable of going back into battle (“Gen. Patton Slap,” 1970). The fallout was swift and undercut Patton’s legitimacy as a leader. His superior, General Eisenhower, considered sending him home in disgrace, but opted to keep him in Europe after consulting the Army’s Chief of Staff and ensuring Patton would not be in charge of a major command (D’Este, 1995, p. 534-539).

Patton’s life was tragically cut short in December 1945 when he passed away due to a pulmonary embolism after a minor automobile accident. Although it is impossible to know with certainty, it is fair to presume Patton’s potential as a leader reached a plateau during WWII. His tabletop of leadership – which was robustly supported by his integrity, competency, and vision – was able to function devoid of emotional intelligence due to the reality that the ends typically justify the means on the battlefield. In other words, Patton’s authoritative, impersonal style of leadership meshed well with the demands of military leadership during wartime. Off the battlefield, though, leaders had to have been capable of finding other ways to influence and direct people to accomplish the job besides just barking orders at them. This truth is evident when one analyzes the correlation between Dwight Eisenhower’s relentless exemplification of emotional intelligence – which worked in concert with his personal integrity, competency, and vision – and his success as a leader in both the military and American politics (Davis, 1995, p. 528).

Table Leg IV: Vision

The final table leg of leadership that underpins all successful leadership tabletops is also arguably the most difficult to grasp its full importance. Vision, which conveys an image of what can be achieved, how it can be attained, and why it is worthwhile in the first place (Yukl, 2006, p. 314) is what leadership is all about according to Jim Collins in his best-selling book *Good to Great* (Collins, 2001, p. 74). People want leaders to have a sense

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**“Where there
is no vision,
there is no
hope.”**

– *George Washington Carver*

● ● ●

of direction and possess the ability to set or select a destination toward which their organization should head (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 28-29). In other words, leaders must be proactive, rather than reactive, in their vision for their organization so they can be more effective and efficient in shaping goals and/or outcomes (Levinson, 1989, p. 67). Some leadership textbooks have even portrayed vision as the pinnacle of strategic leadership – the culmination of supporting elements such as mission and strategy (Daft, 2008, p. 389).

What is amazing is how both subordinates and great leaders alike appreciate the role vision plays in upholding successful leadership tabletops. More than 70% of participants in a leadership survey selected the ability to look ahead as one of their most sought-after traits they desire leaders to exhibit (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 28). Successful leaders capitalize on the reality that such vision is in

short supply and act accordingly. In the words of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, “Capital isn’t scarce; vision is,” while George Washington Carver stressed that “where there is no vision, there is no hope.” Collins and his research also highlighted the simple fact that each of the 11 companies they analyzed that made the transition from good to great had a vision for greatness that was instilled by leaders who recognized “good is the enemy of great” (Collins, 2001, p. 1, 71). In a similar fashion, one can analyze past American presidents and conclude that the determinant in whether individuals are remembered as good *managers* or great *leaders* is the degree to which they exemplified the fourth table leg of leadership: vision.

Regardless of political affiliations or preferences, most Americans can agree a venerable personal skill set is a prerequisite to be elected President of the United States. But why is it that some of these great individuals elected to our nation’s highest office – all of whom typify personal integrity, competency, and emotional intelligence during their time in the Oval Office, barring several notorious exceptions – become known as “great Presidents,” while others are merely labeled “past Presidents?” According to presidential historian, Garry Wills, “Great presidents possess, or are possessed by, a vision of an ideal America,” and to succeed as the commander of the ship that is our nation, “presidents must not only have a port to seek but they must convince Congress and the electorate that it is a port worth seeking” (Wills, 2002, p. xvi-xvii). In a 2010 survey of 238 presidential scholars, the Presidents who comprised the top five rankings did just that; they had a vision that would make the United States great and set a course to achieve this during years in the White House.

These five Presidents – Franklin D. Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson – all served as President at least 60 years ago, but their legacy lives on today because their visions had ageless implications for the country. For F.D.R., it was his New Deal legislation that employed Keynesian economics to lift the U.S. out of the Great Depression as well as augmented the role of government in national affairs that solidified his place as one of America’s greatest Presidents (Haugen, 2006, p. 68-70). Teddy Roosevelt also had a vision to make the U.S. great for the populous during his time and for generations to come. Although a conservative President, he injected more government into the American landscape by establishing the National Parks and Monuments that are an invaluable asset today (Ayers, Gould, Oshinsky, & Soderlund, 2009, p. 598).

Needless to say, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln also epitomized vision. Washington is immortalized today “as a visionary leader of the highest degree” for his inextricable role in the founding of the United States (Rees & Spignesi, 2007, p. 3). As the sixteenth President, Lincoln carried this “idealized vision of America as put forth by Washington” into the nineteenth century through a series of audacious, far-reaching actions (Rees & Spignesi, 2007, p. 4). Such valiant actions as the Emancipation Proclamation in 1862 and the Gettysburg Address the following year, both of which were direct outcomes of Lincoln’s vision, acted as catalysts for the pivotal equality movements that were to follow. Finally, Thomas Jefferson left his imprint on the U.S. through his vision of America as an economic and political powerhouse in world affairs. This vision resulted in him overseeing the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory, effectively doubling the geographic size of the young nation and ensuring economic prosperity for centuries to come, in addition to commissioning Lewis and Clark to explore the uncharted West (Stewart, 1997, p. 49).

When one contrasts these five Presidents with the Presidents ranked in the bottom five from this survey of 238 presidential scholars, it is readily apparent that what delineates “great Presidents” from “past Presidents” is vision – or lack thereof – and the corresponding outcomes produced as a result of this vision. Most Americans probably would not even recognize such names as Franklin Pierce, Millard Fillmore, or Warren Harding, largely because these men occupied the Oval Office but failed to execute a vision or set a course for the nation. This leadership concept spans the spectrum of society: leaders must possess and communicate a vision for their respective organization. Failure to do so will result in them being remembered as individuals who merely occupied a position of authority in the past, rather than esteemed as leaders in history. It would consequently be prudent for all individuals to ensure they possess vision if they hope to succeed as leaders, as this is one of the four table legs that guarantees an individual’s tabletop of leadership is steadfast.

Conclusion

The bottom line is clear: individuals must possess all four of the table legs of leadership – integrity, competency, emotional intelligence, and vision – if they are to succeed as leaders. One or two table legs are always insufficient to uphold a tabletop, and the same holds true for the tabletop concept of leadership. History suggests individuals can get by for extended periods of time with only three legs upholding their individual tabletops of leadership, as Kenneth Lay, Ambrose Burnside, George Patton, and the legacy of American Presidents have proven. But similar to a table that has only three legs, if unfavorable conditions confront this table, then the leadership tabletop will come crashing down. This is a concept that transcends all realms of society and that all students of leadership can learn from – and apply in their own lives – every day.

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