

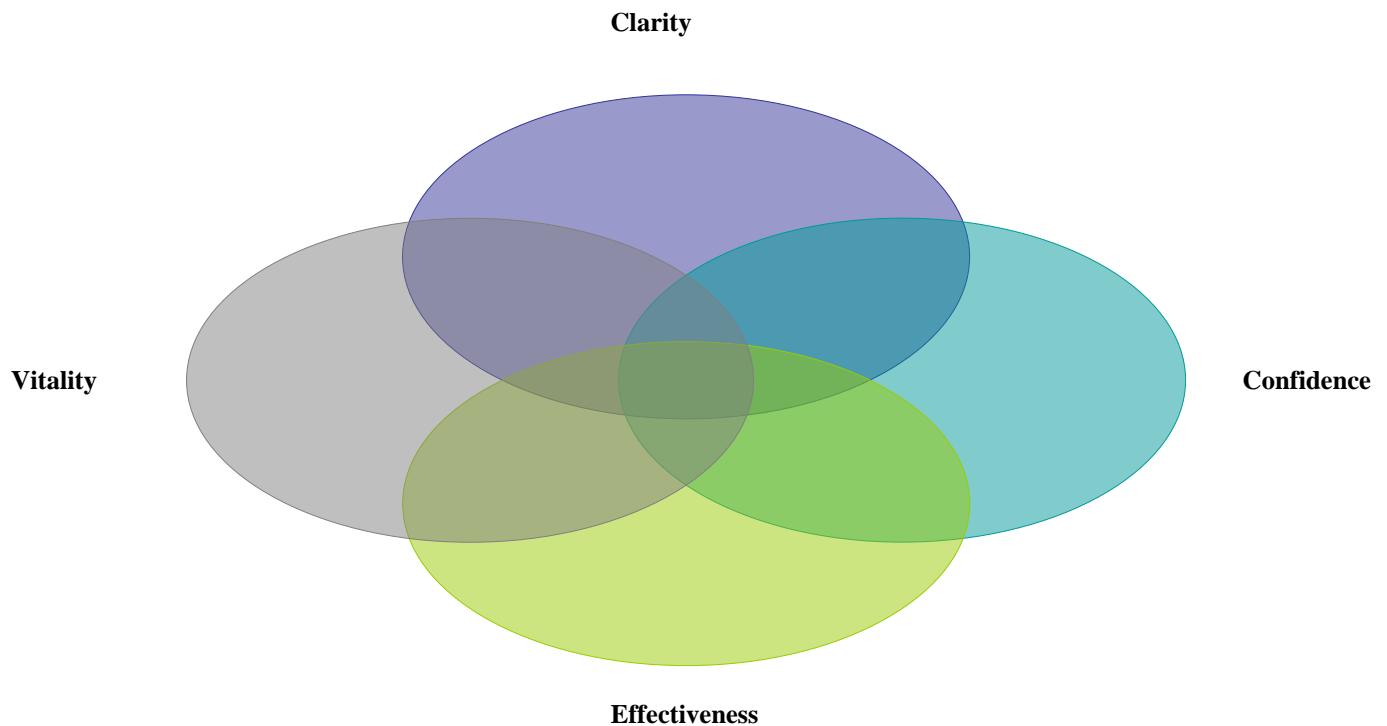
The Four Dynamic Qualities of Leadership Fitness™

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Effective and successful leaders know they must work consistently to maintain a high level of impact in their lives, their organizations and their world. While outsiders looking in often mistakenly attribute accomplishment to luck, or being in the right place at the right time, successful leaders know better.

It is hard work preparing to run the race. Winners understand the importance of practicing and nurturing the positive habits necessary to achieve sustainable impact. In our work developing hundreds of agile, competent and energetic leaders, we have observed Four Dynamic Qualities of Leadership Fitness™.

In this paper, we introduce our model of Leadership Fitness™ and describe how the attainment of clarity, confidence, effectiveness and vitality come together dynamically to create impact and success.



Clarity

Effective leadership begins with establishing and then communicating a clear sense of direction. One of the pivotal ingredients of developing followership is painting a palpable vision of the future. The best leaders are able to assess current reality, often with brutal honesty, and are then able to chart a new course for moving entire teams from “where we are today” to “where we need to be”.

More than anything else, employees seek clarity from their leaders. Leaders lacking clarity, and leaders that do not take the time to provide clear direction to their teams, create an environment where staff are forced to choose among multiple priorities. This often results in employees concluding “we don’t know where we are going” or “I’m not sure what I am supposed to be working on”.

Operating from a place of confusion or contradiction is obviously not a productive platform from which to lead. It is, at best, very distracting for employees who are looking for where to focus their often scarce resources of time and energy. At its worst, it can create a crisis of credibility for the leader. When employees look to leadership for direction, and it is not there, team members begin to wonder whether their senior management (or anyone for that matter) is steering the ship.

Leaders interested in bringing clarity to their teams must be prepared to ask and then answer several hard questions around core purpose and priorities.

- ✚ What must we become (or do) to create value for our key stakeholders?
- ✚ How urgent is the need for change?
- ✚ What differentiates our approach from that of others in our market space?
- ✚ What are our three-year, one year and three-month goals?
- ✚ How will we align each team members’ goals and objectives around the overall strategic direction of the organization?
- ✚ What expectations do we have for employee performance and delivery?
- ✚ How will we capture the opportunities and manage the risks in our environment?
- ✚ How will we communicate our vision, internally and externally, in a clear and concise manner?

Clarity (continued)

Leaders can improve the clarity of their messages by investing time in answering the above questions, and by clearly communicating the answers to their teams on a regular basis. As we will see next, however, clarity is not enough to attain the highest level of leadership fitness.

Confidence

While clarity creates a necessary and strong foundation for action, we find that the most successful leaders combine their sense of direction with a powerful self-confidence that amplifies their message in ways that words and planning documents alone do not convey. We have observed many intelligent leaders, even those with great plans and smart strategies, fail to succeed. This failure often can be linked to the leader's lack of confidence in his or her own ideas and/or the leader not fully appreciating his or her role in rallying the team around a new strategy or new direction.

Great leaders must reach deep into their souls to muster the self-confidence necessary to win the commitment and buy-in from the rest of the organization. Employees have a keen sense, a sort of radar, when it comes to interpreting what they hear from their leaders. While the words may be logical and understandable, if there is a lack of authenticity or a feeling that the leader does not really believe what he or she is espousing, the leader's message has been compromised.

When leaders allow their own doubts to go unresolved, they risk contaminating their own messages with the shadow that lurks behind their words. There are many words that have been used over the years to capture the power these doubts often carry. To some, these doubts are known as gremlins. To others, they are known as saboteurs. Regardless of how we label them, these doubts get in the way of our overall impact by limiting the power of our beliefs and intentions.

Successful leaders learn how to overcome the dampening effect of powerful, and negative, influences. They develop strategies to effectively push ahead with conviction and self-assurance. The successful leaders we work with tend to be more optimistic, bolder and more likely to see the glass as half-full than half-empty. It is important to not mistake these traits as Pollyannaish. The leaders we work with are not misleading themselves or their teams. They are clear (see our discussion of Clarity above) on what is necessary to get to where they "know" the organization must go next, and they have developed the resiliency and confidence necessary to bring others along with them.

Confidence (continued)

Leaders seeking increased confidence are encouraged to spend some time answering the questions found below.

- ✚ What am I allowing to get in my way of boldly taking the organization where I know we must go?
- ✚ What doubts am I harboring about next steps?
- ✚ What is the strength of my conviction?
- ✚ How do I handle feelings of inadequacy when I am in front of my team?
- ✚ What are the names of my gremlins or saboteurs?
- ✚ How full is my glass?
- ✚ How well do I stay focused on translating my intentions into reality?

One of the interesting aspects of confidence is that it becomes self-perpetuating. When we accomplish something important and significant because of our clarity and confidence, we actually increase our confidence moving forward. Similar to building physical stamina and energy (see our discussion of Vitality below), when we stretch ourselves and push beyond our normal limits, we strengthen our muscles and come back with more capacity the next time.

The combination of clarity and confidence can produce powerful results for leaders. As mentioned above, confidence often serves as a way to amplify the clarity leaders bring to their teams. Once leaders have defined new paths and have committed themselves mentally and emotionally to the hard task ahead, leadership fitness turns next to the critical qualities of effectiveness (how to get things done) and vitality (how to endure).

Effectiveness

Clear and confident leaders also must be skilled in the core competencies of managing and leading people. Substance does matter. Without the requisite level of sophistication in key management and leadership practices, all of the clarity and confidence in the world will not create the long-term results leaders seek for their teams and organizations.

Effectiveness (continued)

In our work with leaders, we often find varying degrees of experience and expertise in the areas of communication, team building, conflict resolution, performance management, creating accountable organizations, delegation and execution. Fit leaders develop core strength in each of the above key areas.

First and foremost, successful leaders know how to build strong teams. They understand how teams evolve through different stages, and they know the signs of team breakage. When confronting ineffective teams, effective leaders know when it is appropriate to intervene and when it is not. They have the skills and experience to overcome the challenges and dysfunctions of their teams. Importantly, they have mastered the art of motivating individual team members so that employees consistently deliver their best work.

Another critical component of leadership fitness is personal accountability. Strong leaders create accountable organizations in which all employees follow through on the promises and commitments they make to themselves and others. The leader serves as an important example and role model in this regard, and reinforces the expectation that all employees will demonstrate unwavering accountability to others.

To be effective, leaders also must become competent practitioners in each of the following important leadership and management functions:

- Translating Plans into Action
- Communicating with Clarity
- Managing Performance
- Delivering Effective Feedback
- Resolving Conflict Productively
- Delegating Effectively
- Leading Change

Leaders seeking greater effectiveness are encouraged to spend some time answering the questions found below.

Effectiveness (continued)

- ✚ How do I bridge the “knowing-doing” gap?
- ✚ What gets in the way of translating my strategy and plans into action?
- ✚ What steps am I taking to avoid ambiguity in my communication?
- ✚ How can I increase the impact of my communication?
- ✚ How am I utilizing feedback to both encourage and develop my employees?
- ✚ How well am I doing providing feedback at the teachable moment?
- ✚ How adaptable am I in managing conflict based on the situation I find myself in?
- ✚ How do I show up when others disagree with me or push back on my ideas?
- ✚ What assignments and projects am I holding onto that others can do for me?
- ✚ What can I do to lead change more effectively?

The qualities of clarity, confidence and effectiveness equip the leader with a potent set of tools. As we have discussed above, it is important for leaders to establish a clear line of sight to the future, to resolve their doubts and deepen their conviction and to acquire the relevant skills to be effective. Without vitality (see discussion of Vitality below), the final quality of leadership fitness, leaders run the risk of losing touch with an important source of their power, and setting themselves up for fatigue, burnout or worse.

Vitality

When first constructing our model of leadership fitness, we were quite comfortable concluding that any leader successfully integrating the qualities of clarity, confidence and effectiveness had what it took to create the impact he or she was striving for. However, as we continued our exploration into what drove

Vitality (continued)

sustainable success and long-term impact, we discovered the absence from our model of one of the most critical qualities of leadership fitness, that of vitality.


We added vitality to our model due, in large part, to our observation that too many leaders were failing to “go the distance”. We saw repeated instances of frustration, overwhelm and overload where we might otherwise have determined that the leader was as fit as he or she needed to be. We believe that the addition of this fourth quality results in a model of leadership fitness that is both more holistic and dynamic. It is, in fact, a reflection of the relationship between our internal and external sources of power.


We see vitality as a measure of our energy, stamina and endurance. It is an important sign of our ability to manage the numerous and competing demands for our time. It is also a sign of how effectively our own system of personal organization operates. The risk to leaders of becoming bogged down by the endless stimuli they confront on an almost hourly basis begs for a model of leadership fitness that embraces the proficiency with which leaders handle all of life’s demands.

Our work with successful leaders has confirmed the contribution that vibrancy and vitality make to the overall leadership fitness of individuals and organizations. Successful leaders know how to manage their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual energy. They eat better, drink more water and exercise regularly. They take time to rejuvenate and recharge their batteries.

Vital leaders have increased flexibility and a greater range of motion. The synergies between Vitality and the other three dynamic qualities of leadership fitness far outweigh the synergies between any of the others. Without vitality, it is more difficult to achieve clarity. Mental acuity and physical vitality are linked more than we know. Without vitality, it is less likely that leaders will remain confident. Finally, without vitality, the energy it takes to lead and manage well becomes depleted.

Leaders seeking more vitality in their life are encouraged to spend some time answering the questions found below.

-  How often do I take breaks from my work?

-  What system(s) do I utilize to organize and manage all of the competing demands for my time?

Vitality (continued)

- ✚ How often do I exercise?
- ✚ What breakthrough activities can I begin to incorporate into my weeks that will increase my energy?
- ✚ What role does importance play in how I allocate my time?
- ✚ How much time do I devote to developing and maintaining key relationships in my personal and professional life?

Leaders operating at their prime understand and leverage the dynamic synergies between all four qualities of leadership fitness described in this paper. They derive power and balance from the interrelationships that exist between clarity, confidence, effectiveness and vitality. This gives them staying power and degrees of personal and organizational effectiveness that becomes the envy of others that watch them succeed.

For more information on our model of Leadership Fitness, or to learn how our team of experienced and certified professionals can assist you in achieving your highest level of leadership fitness, contact us at info@theleadershipfit.com or by calling 1-866-960-LEAD.