

What Is Your Leadership Balance?

A White Paper by Lee Ellis, Founder and President of Leadership Freedom, LLC

Abraham Lincoln has been repeatedly voted as our most popular president, probably because he achieved great results in the face of incredibly difficult circumstances. But did you ever stop to think, how did he do it? What was his secret and what are the keys to success of the “greatest leaders?”

I have a good idea because I posed the question to hundreds of managers and supervisors.

A survey I conducted while facilitating leadership development at several large corporations revealed more than 120 attributes. These attributes fell into four areas of leadership – Trust, Relationships, Results and Emotional Intelligence. The best leaders exhibit qualities from all levels; however, Results and Relationship behaviors were the categories that were mentioned more often than all the others.

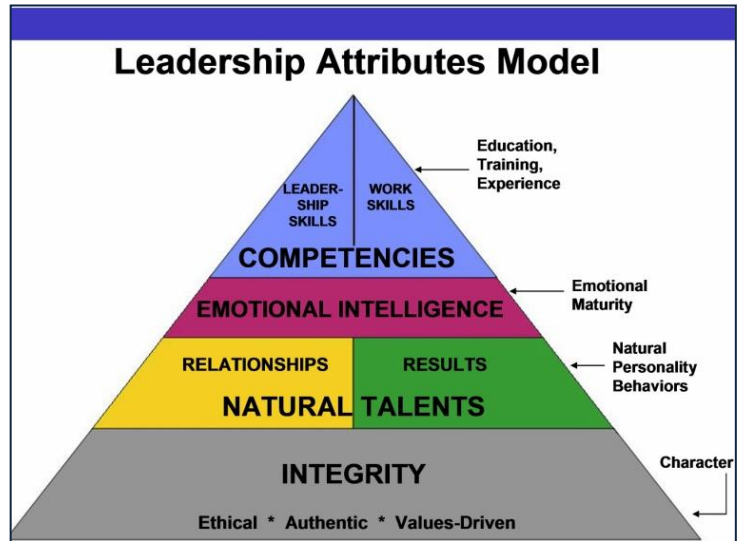
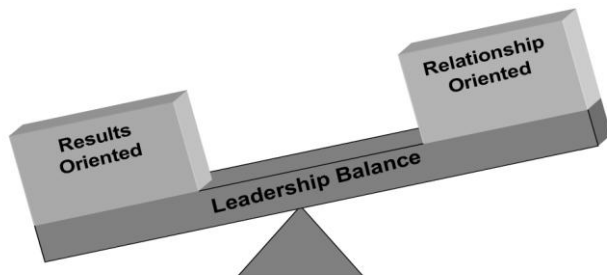
Relationship-Oriented and Results-Oriented attributes correlate very closely with our naturally-motivated behaviors (personalities). These behaviors are absolutely critical to success, and they are excellent areas for potential growth in almost all leaders.

While working with thousands of people over the years, we have discovered a natural seesaw effect between relationships and results; that is, most people tend to be good at (and inclined toward) one and struggle with (neglect or avoid) the other.

So, if you are naturally good at setting standards and holding people accountable (Results-Oriented), you are likely to struggle with Relationship-Oriented behaviors like listening, encouraging, and showing empathy. If you are Relationship-Oriented, then the opposite is likely to be true.

Results-Oriented Behaviors

Results-Oriented behaviors typically get a lot of attention because they are so obviously necessary for success. Without them, you can’t achieve goals or stay in business. It’s only natural that organizations have very sophisticated ways of keeping score on how effective leaders are at getting results. In most companies, there seems to be a constant mantra coming from the top that “results count.”



Results-Behaviors begin with vision and include the energy and drive to challenge people to do their best. Shown below are the top ranked Results-Oriented behaviors in the survey.

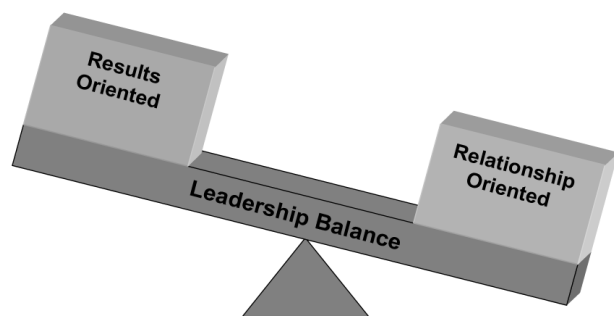
- ★ Big Picture, Visionary, Strategic
- ★ Straightforward, Sets Clear Expectations
- ★ Strong Focus on Tasks
- ★ Good Problem Solver
- ★ Decisive, Gives Direction, Firm (but Flexible)
- ★ High Standards/Goals for Self and Others

It was interesting to note that of the people surveyed, regardless of whether they were Results-Oriented or Relationship-Oriented, both types valued leaders who set and enforced high standards. Furthermore, they wanted clear expectations, accountability, decisiveness and challenging work.

President Lincoln experienced great frustration early in the Civil War because there was little action and not many results on the battlefield. His top generals would not initiate the fight, delaying action in order to “recruit more soldiers,” or “get more training,” or “rest the horses.” He kindly and patiently tried to encourage them, but with little success. Ultimately, he had to fire three successive rounds of Generals before he discovered Ulysses S. Grant, a leader who took the initiative and got results.

Relationship-Oriented Behaviors

The ability to build good relationships is one of the most powerful assets a leader can have. Believing that someone else – especially your leader – cares



about you and believes in you is a powerful motivator. That’s why the following Relationship-Oriented behaviors are so powerful for leading, managing, mentoring, and coaching.

- ★ Good Listener
- ★ Cared, Concerned About Me
- ★ Encouraging, Gave Positive Feedback
- ★ Trusted Me to Do the Job
- ★ Supportive, Lent a Helping Hand
- ★ Respected Others and Me

Pause for a moment and reflect on your greatest leader. No matter how Results-Oriented you may be, it’s likely that these relationship attributes were evident in that person’s style and played a key role in your personal development and success.

The Dilemma of the Relationships - Results Seesaw

Leaders must get results to stay in business and be competitive, but they also must build relationships because it’s people (with motivations and emotions) who do the work. Therefore, both are essential to good leadership, but the *dilemma* is that most leaders are good at one and struggle with the other.

The struggle comes because these attributes are highly correlated to a person’s “go to” behavioral style. So, by nature, some people are Relationship-Oriented and some are Results-Oriented. Typically, for each of us, one is easy and one is a struggle. The side of the seesaw that’s a struggle may not be a weakness, but it will require a conscious (and usually stretching) effort to carry out those behaviors. They are a struggle because it’s going against the grain of our natural behaviors.

As already noted, organizational survival and success logically dictate a strong push for results. Consequently, companies are more likely to select “Results-Oriented” people for leadership roles. Thus, in most organizations, it’s the relationship side of the seesaw that is light and not in balance.

Results Count, and Relationship Behaviors Enhance Results

The good news is that good relationships get better results. Twenty years of research by the Gallup Organization indicates that good relationships improve productivity and retention. This body of evidence provided the central theme for the highly popular business book, *First Break All the Rules: What the World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently*. In it, the authors point out that “*The talented employee may join a company because of its charismatic leaders, its generous benefits, and its world-class training programs, but how long that employee stays and how productive he is while he is there is determined by his relationship with his immediate supervisor.*”¹

Exit interviews taken by corporations typically provide similar evidence – that talented people leave because of poor relationships with their immediate boss.

Leading through relationship behaviors is often a challenge for Results-Oriented people because it “feels” soft. Also, it’s not natural for them to think or operate this way. As one highly Results-Oriented leader said, “It doesn’t occur to me to encourage people because I don’t need it. I can just look at the numbers and see how we are doing. That’s enough for me.”

But what he was missing was that many of his people were starving for positive feedback – especially his more extroverted people who needed a regular dose of approval to stay at their peak. In reality, everyone needs encouragement and even the “tough” leaders admit that they admired the leaders who listened to them, supported them, and communicated high regard for their talents and efforts.

What Can You Do to Become a Better Leader?

Results-Oriented Leader

Slow down, listen, and soften your tone.

Realize that your natural inclination is probably to avoid the relationship behaviors because on the surface they do not appear to contribute to results. Also, since those “people” behaviors may not “feel” natural, you will need to push yourself to stretch and adapt behaviors outside of your comfort zone.

Adapting your normal behavioral style will be easier if you frequently remind yourself of two things:

- ★ It is your responsibility as a leader to take a genuine interest in the growth and development of your people.
- ★ When you value (care about) people you increase their confidence and inspire them to perform at a higher level and therefore produce better results with less turnover.

Of course, when your people are feeling better about their relationship with you, they are more confident and thus empowered to be better leaders and teammates themselves. Your investment has a positive multiplier effect that cascades down through the organization. Furthermore, you are modeling the very behaviors you need to be coaching.

Relationship-Oriented Leader

Tighten up, toughen up and proactively deal with necessary conflict.

If you are naturally amiable and people oriented, acknowledge that your desire for harmony has its down side too. Delaying “unpopular” decisions and avoiding creative conflict does not help the cause on either side of the leadership seesaw. Resolve to stand up for your beliefs and deal with difficult issues regardless of how it “feels” to you.

Remember that people want a leader who leads, so initiate, make decisions and direct others to get results. Set and enforce reasonable boundaries holding people accountable in a caring but firm way. Doing so will bring you into balance and win the respect of those on both sides of this seesaw. The normally amiable Lincoln succeeded because he adapted his behaviors to the needs of the situation.

In *Presidential Temperament*, the authors say Lincoln “was predisposed to restrain himself... But when he was faced with Southern secession, he acted boldly and vigorously... When the crisis of the Civil War finally broke... the non-directive, rational Lincoln became ceaselessly active and persistently commanding.”²

Courage is the key to doing what’s right, when it doesn’t “feel” right.

The secret of great leaders like Lincoln and so many others is their ability to do what needs to be done even when it doesn’t “feel” natural. Psychologist William James has remarked that it’s difficult to feel our way into a new way of acting so we have to act our way into a new way of feeling. This is the test of true courage – will a person do what is appropriate for the situation, even when it feels unnatural and uncomfortable?

For some, it will take courage to coach themselves into being an empathic listener. For others, it will take courage to confront individuals and hold them accountable. Regardless of your tilt, the question is, “Do you have the courage to adapt your behaviors as needed?” Though adapting to new and unnatural behaviors is not the same as attacking a machine gun nest or going into a burning building to rescue someone, it does take emotional courage and that is an essential quality of great leadership.

The bottom line is that regardless of where we are in our leadership balance we all can improve by developing some of those areas we would rather ignore. To be a great leader, it’s not an option to be either Results-Oriented or Relationships-Oriented - we need skills for both. Lincoln learned to do both and so can we.

¹*First, Break All the Rules*, Marcus and Curt Coffman (Gallup Organization, 1999), Pages 11-12.

²*Presidential Temperament*, Ray Choiniere, Kavid Kiersey (Prometheus Nemesis, 1992).



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