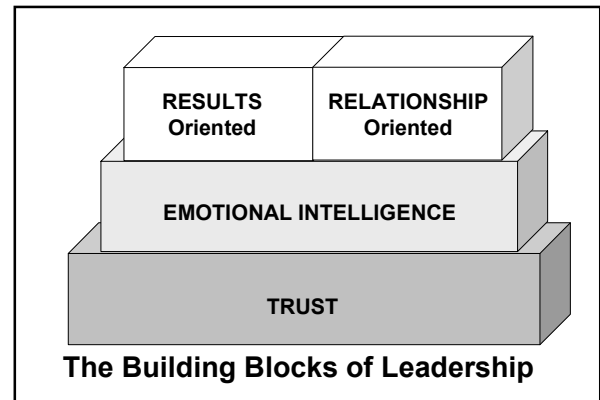


Abraham Lincoln has been repeatedly voted as our most popular president, probably because he achieved great results in the face of incredibly difficult circumstances. But did you ever stop to think, how did he do it? What was his secret and what is the key to the success of the “greatest leaders?”

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

The “My Greatest Leader” survey, conducted in several large corporations where we facilitate leadership development, revealed more than 120 attributes. These attributes were broken into the 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. These behaviors are absolutely critical to success, and they are excellent areas for potential growth in almost all leaders.

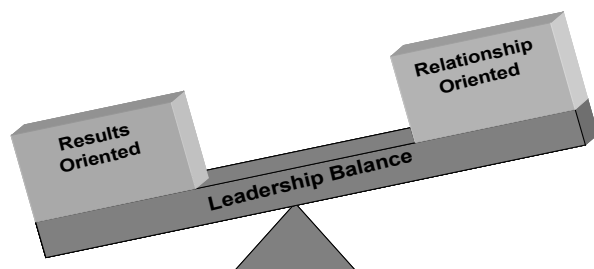
While working with thousands of people over the years, we have discovered a natural seesaw effect between relationships and results; that is, most people tend to be good at (and inclined toward) one and struggle with (neglect or avoid) the other.

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 – “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.



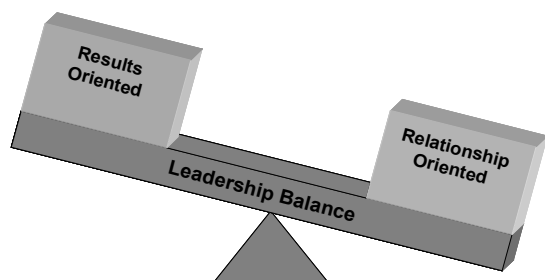
- Big Picture, Visionary, Strategic
- Straightforward, Sets Clear Expectations
- Strong Work Ethic
- Good Problem Solver
- Decisive, Gives Direction, Firm (but Flexible)
- High Standards/Goals for Self and Others
- Holds People Accountable

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 Worlds 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 RightPath’s clients provide similar evidence – that talented people leave because of poor relationships with their immediate boss.

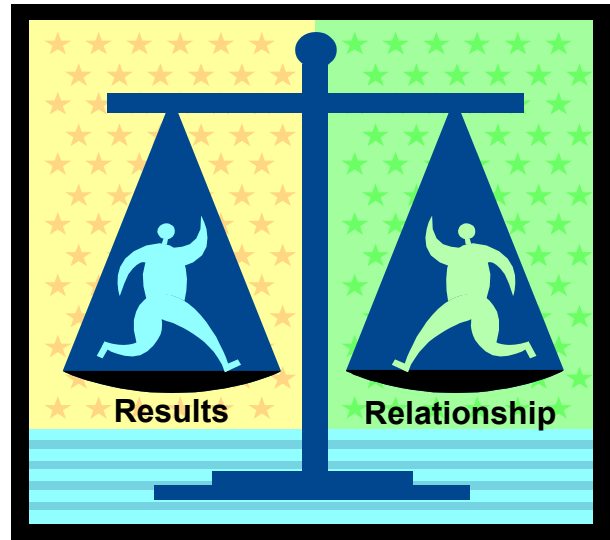
Leading through relationship behaviors is often a challenge for Results-oriented people because it “feels” soft. Also, it’s not natural for them to think or operate this way. As one highly Results-oriented leader said, “It doesn’t occur to me to encourage people because I don’t need it. I can just look at the numbers and see how we are doing and 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 many of the “tough” leaders admitted that they admired the leaders who listened to them, supported them, and communicated high regard for their talents and efforts.

Listening is the Most Powerful Tool to Build Relationships and Get More Results

It should not be a surprise that *listening* was the top rated (most frequently cited) leadership attribute in our survey. Those who study leadership and motivation also consistently cite it as the key to good relationships. Real listening encompasses the essence of most of the other relationship attributes and is highly correlated to “empathy” which is a powerful trust builder.

In his best selling book *Primal Leadership*, emotional intelligence (EQ) guru Daniel Goleman describes empathy as “*Sensing others’ emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking active interest in their concerns.*”² He goes on to explain that empathy is essential to social effectiveness at work.³ Thus we see that empathic listening with a willingness to show caring concern for the other person, is an important component of the key indicators of high EQ that is so integral to good leadership.



Listening is Very Difficult for Results-oriented Leaders

During RightPath’s Managing Differences workshop, we find a remarkable honesty among Results-oriented leaders who are willing to admit and deal with the challenges of listening. This group is typically confident (opinionated), quick-minded and fast paced (impatient) and thus not naturally equipped for listening. One senior leader who is diligently trying to improve in this area, explained the struggle quite well saying, “I am working on becoming a better listener, but it’s so hard. My mind seems to run so fast, it’s just hard to slow down and listen.”

Relationship Behaviors Take Time But in the End Yield Results.

Dealing with people on a personal basis does take time, but it’s the price of leadership. Abraham Lincoln is well known for his “open-door” policy and he even remarked: “I do not often decline seeing people who call on me.” He also took every opportunity to meet socially with groups of his constituents, knowing that personal contact not only generated loyalty, but also provided him with valuable feedback. He explained his position saying: “I call these receptions ‘my public opinion baths’... and though they may not be pleasant in all particulars, the effect, as a whole, is renovating and invigorating.”⁴



Taking time to interact with people on a personal basis is the price of leadership. In this illustration, a young 1842 era Abraham Lincoln entertains ex-President Martin VanBuren at the home of Mr. Doty in Rochester, IL. Illustration courtesy of Springfield Illinois Tourism and www.abelincoln.com.

One newspaper writer said of Lincoln that “all will agree that he is the embodiment of good temper and affability. They will all concede that he has a kind word, an encouraging smile, a humorous remark, for nearly all [who seek} his presence.”⁵ Lincoln explained the power of encouragement by saying “everyone likes a compliment.” He made it a point to lift others’ spirits. And, isn’t that what good leaders do – inspire us?

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 don't appear to contribute to results. Then, 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 to your developing leaders.

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."⁶

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 have to do both. Lincoln did and so can we.

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

²*Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, (MA: Harvard Business School, 2002), page 39

³Ibid., page 50

⁴*Lincoln on Leadership*, Donald T. Phillips, 1992, (Warner Books, Inc., 1992) page 18

⁵Ibid.

⁶*Presidential Temperament*, Ray Choiniere, Kavid Kiersey, (Prometheus Nemesis, 1992)



5400 Laurel Springs Pkwy - Ste 1301
Suwanee, GA 30024
678 845 0400 or 877 THE PATH
contact@rightpath.com

Lee Ellis is a founding partner and senior vice president of Rightpath Resources Inc., a leadership and talent development company providing Internet-deployed solutions for hiring, developing, and retaining people. The RightPathing system uses highly accurate and reliable online assessments, PATH 4, PATH 6, RightPathing Your Future, RightPath Reflection 360 and RightPath EQ, that give companies a way to identify the natural talents and strengths of individuals. These profiles have proven highly effective for a broad range of human capital management applications such as hiring benchmarks, career development, team development, management coaching, leadership assessment and development, diversity training and succession planning.