



Leadership Concepts Series – 2010

**** Common-Sense Guidelines for Successful Organizations ****

Leadership Concept #4

Capability: The Skills of Successful Leaders

“What would you say you do here?”

- Bob Slidell (of the Bobs)

In order to be an effective leader, there are certain things you will need to be able to do; certain capabilities you must have in your toolkit. These capabilities and skills, along with the characteristics we discussed before, are the raw materials that build the bond of confidence and trust your team needs. Your personal traits and capabilities inspire people to follow and support you. That support and the desire to achieve will generate success. Success reinforces the behavior of your team and validates their faith in you. In turn, they are willing to give you even more support. You can inspire your team to the next level of achievement. Without depth of character and capability, your likelihood of delivering as a leader becomes less and less likely. When that happens, a leader dwindles to a title.

There's good news, though! These are things you can learn and develop. These are things you control.

So, what are these magical capabilities? What must you be able to do? Read on. . .

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Active
Management Pillar
Applicability



Leadership Skills and Capabilities

Excellent leaders will develop a majority of the following skills. You need to be able to:

Read the Signs. You must pay attention and make connections. As the leader, you will not be intimate with the details of all situations within your span of accountability. You need to watch for the flags that trigger questions. In a conversation, is someone choosing their words too carefully? Are there disparate events or comments intersecting which might be connected (Tom said... + a project delay + plus customer complaint = freight train coming down the tracks directly at your nose). Notice anomalies and patterns and ask questions.

Get to the Root Cause. Leaders find the root cause. They may be forced initially to mitigate symptoms (to buy time or stop bleeding) but they will root out the underlying cause and deal with it. In their discovery process, they seek to close the logical loop. If there are holes in the explanations or reasoning, they persevere until they have filled them.

Deal with Unpleasant Things. No one likes to deal with unpleasant situations. However, if the leader doesn't display the courage to take on the hard stuff, the culture will follow their lead. You will sometimes need to confront others, sometimes even your friends. You will discipline and fire people. You will sometimes be the bad guy and take the blame. A leader who can't deal with unpleasant things rapidly moves from supportive to enabling and from enabling to an object of ridicule.

Make a Decision on Inadequate Information. You will not always have the luxury of having all the facts and data you would like to make an informed decision. Too bad; figure it out. That's why you get the leather chair. Here is some advice: Reduce and screen. Eliminate as much extraneous noise as you can. Find the (under ten) key points and see how many you can nail down. Based on the facts you have, your experience, and your intuition, just make the call. Then stop flapping your hands and get a good night's sleep.

Create a Vision. A leader, by definition, is taking people somewhere. You must create a vision your team can rally around. There must be a worthwhile destination.

Stay at the Right Level. Leaders must focus on their mission and achieving their objectives. They must be able to drive their organization. If they become bogged down in a mechanism (such as Six-Sigma, ITIL, Process Engineering, or even expense control) they will break the connection to the end-game. Remind yourself and your staff: it is the achievement of our definition of success that matters. Any element or activity must be connected and contribute to that end.

Display Comfort with Ambiguity. Leaders can't let ambiguity get under their skin. You are the leader. Often there will be nothing in front of you but wide-open ocean. You must know you will be able to figure it out. Your team will pick up on your behavior and remain calm as well. Number one rule in a typhoon: Stay calm. It's panic, not weather, that sinks the ship.

Recover from Setbacks. Like Mom said: when you fall down, stand up, brush yourself off, and try again. Leaders know that initial setbacks are common and often precede great victories.

Enforce Accountability. If you don't do it, no one else will. Your organization will become dull and flaccid.

Leadership, Raymond Spruance, and Midway

Early in June of 1942, one of the most important battles in the history of the world was fought and won by a beleaguered United States Navy at Midway Atoll in the Pacific. Raymond Spruance, a junior flag officer was in command of the battle though he had no experience commanding aviators and he was far outclassed by the commanders of his Japanese opponents. Bill Halsey, flamboyant and aggressive, who should have been in command, was hospitalized with a skin disease.

Spruance displayed the skills of a great leader that day. He also had great good luck. But luck without decisive action is simply cosmic vibration.

Spruance was dealing with the Halsey staff that had little respect for the quiet guy from surface ships. He had to countermand Miles Browning, Halsey's Chief of Staff several times during the day.

The launch of a coordinated attack was botched by fairly green crews and Spruance had to make a command decision that it was better to hit quickly even if it was not coordinated. He took a shot from the hip.

Through luck or divine intervention, the U.S. attack waves arrived in exactly the opposite order they were intended. By plan, the dive bombers distract the ships and air cover to allow the slow-moving torpedo planes to lumber in and deliver the punch. The torpedo planes stumbled on the Japanese Fleet first and were almost totally slaughtered. Not a single torpedo hit its target or if it did, it did not detonate. This did, however, draw the Japanese air cover down to the wave-tops. At precisely that moment, dive bombers from the *Enterprise* and the *Yorktown* stumbled on the fleet and in six minutes the balance of world history changed. Four days later the Japanese had lost four carriers and they never recovered.

Finally, after inflicting a severe blow to the Japanese navy, Spruance backed off and posted his task force in a position to protect Midway rather than chase a wounded enemy. He was roundly criticized for timidity. But it turned out to be a really good idea. Had Spruance taken the bait, Admiral Yamamoto was waiting to engulf the American task force with the most powerful warships on the planet.

One more example of leadership happened the night of June 5. His planes were flying back after dark and they had no experience with night carrier operations. Despite the potential danger from submarines and surface ships, Spruance turned on the blazing deck lights until the last plane was hooked. It was a courageous decision in a balance of competing needs.

Raymond Spruance showed himself to be a great leader. To this day, we live in a world shaped and impacted by his leadership.

Now, go through the above and see how many leadership skills you can identify.

About Agovia

Agovia Consulting has one aim:

*To facilitate your success
Through management consulting
And management skills development*

We focus on small-to-medium sized organizations. Businesses, nonprofits, schools. We work mostly with organizations that need all the rigor and capability of large businesses but don't have the deep pockets to pay hundreds of thousands a year to consultants. You need to plan. You need to execute. You need to be operationally sound. But you don't need to drill a hole in the bottom of your bank account to do that.

Agovia is your partner in crafting common-sense plans, execution governance, and management practices that are laser-focused and, by design, create your results and your success. We help you solve your problems today and help assure your success tomorrow through management practices built on outcomes, results, and achievement.

Managing to Success

Success requires the alignment and coordination of many factors. Enterprises must be competent, not only in elements of their core mission, they must also have the ability to create and maintain the management infrastructure that surrounds and supports that mission.

What We Do

Agovia is a management consulting firm. It's what we do. Picture us a management fitness coach. We help you develop and strengthen the skills you need to succeed. We have provided consultation and solutions to multiple industries including: Information Technology, Insurance, Universities, and Homeless Services. We bring you the support, advice, and driving facilitation that allow you to stop "planning" and start getting results.

Services

- ❖ **The Rapid Planning System – Tools, Training, Portfolio Management**
- ❖ **Identity Development (Mission & Vision)**
- ❖ **Team Effectiveness Coaching**
- ❖ **Strategic and Tactical Planning**
- ❖ **Planning and Governance Training**
- ❖ **Organization Turn-Around**
- ❖ **Retreat Facilitation**
- ❖ **Runaway Project Services**
- ❖ **Problem Solving – A Cultural Effective Approach**
- ❖ **Conflict Resolution**
- ❖ **Team/Function Start-Up**

Trust yourself

You are the expert in your business. The challenges are often nuts & bolts issues: organization, clear vision, discipline, management infrastructure, and communication. Sometimes you just need a catalyst.

We listen. We pay attention. We work with you.

