

# THE INTANGIBLES OF LEADERSHIP

## The 10 Qualities of Superior Executive Performance

**T**he *Intangibles of Leadership: The 10 Qualities of Superior Executive Performance* by Richard A. Davis draws attention to characteristics of exceptional leaders and challenges readers to critically think about their own behaviours and where these characteristics may fit within their own leadership.

Leadership is not straightforward; it is complex. What works in one organization will not work in all organizations. No single model will fit all organizations, nor will all organizations fit into a perfect framework model for the simple fact that leadership cannot be a standard process. Great leaders are necessary to fit the mold of a given organization and lead according to its particular demands.

In the book, Davis sets out to answer the basic question: *Why do certain leaders succeed and others fail?*

In his experiences in management psychology, Davis has noticed a pattern of qualities and characteristics that truly distinguish extraordinary leaders.

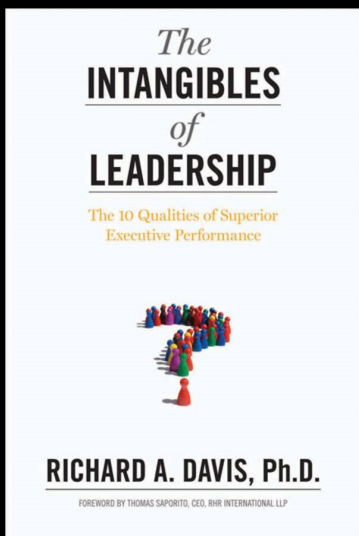
Davis himself considers the book a “practical atlas” of these qualities. He explains how to identify and embody each quality and thoroughly describes the underlying psychological mechanisms to empower leaders to develop these characteristics and differentiate themselves from other leaders.

*“Why do certain leaders succeed and others fail?”*

Overall, the book was insightful and encouraged outward thinking about leadership and ways to grow and develop as a professional. Davis truly makes ‘intangibles’ tangible.

## CONTENTS:

- Page 1– Overview/Summary
- Page 2– What Makes a Good Leader Great?
- Page 3– 9 – 10 Qualities of Superior Executive Performance
- Page 10– Leadership Connections
- Page 11– Discussion Questions
- Page 12– Evaluation
- Page 13– Quotes & References



## WHAT MAKES A GOOD LEADER GREAT?

The differences between good leaders and extraordinary leaders are subtle. Davis identifies 10 qualities and characteristics that he believes are fundamental extraordinary leaders. These includes: wisdom, will, executive maturity, integrity, social judgement, presence, self-insight, self-efficacy, fortitude, and fallibility. These subtle differences are key to success and known as the 'intangibles'.

Each of these characteristics are those that have fallen between the cracks of existing leadership models. They are the keys to success. They are the 'intangibles' that make the differences in successful leaders. Leaders who can carefully craft and balance organizational needs and individual psychology are effective in utilizing and unlocking these intangibles.

The possession of these qualities is not enough to be an extraordinary leader. One must be able to correctly recognize the state of an organization, how to lead based on its varying needs and strengths as a whole, and to best suits the needs of followers through situational leadership.

Davis also eludes to the idea of authentic leadership in its entirety; involving intrapersonal, interpersonal and developmental perspective (Northouse, 2016). Most significant is the developmental approach whereby the pattern of leader behaviour develops from and is grounded in the leader's psychological qualities.

## WHAT YOU'LL LEARN:

- Identify attributes of extraordinary leaders
- How to improve your own leadership approach
- The differences between leaders and extraordinary leaders
- Why it's okay to be a less than 'perfect' leader

# Leadership

A leadership process  
ability to motivate a group  
organizing a group of  
achieve a common goal  
intentional influence

## THE 10 QUALITIES OF *SUPERIOR* EXECUTIVE PERFORMANCE

### WISDOM

Many of us consider wisdom to be something passive; it occurs as a result of our experiences. However, Davis takes the position that knowledge does not become wisdom until it's consciously applied to a new situation. Experience does not equal wisdom. Building wisdom takes time and involves both experience and self-reflection. Self-reflection is not reserved for just our experiences, but by taking the time to analyze and evaluate others.

#### HOW TO RECOGNIZE SOMEONE IS WISE:

They are advice worthy

They encourage others to think about where they've been in the context of where

They exercise good judgement

They don't rush their words

They think independently



## WILL

Davis associates will with individuals who seem always able to get things done. They dig deep within themselves to get things done. What is most interesting is the way in which these individuals influence those around them; their willpower is like a magnetic force. Leaders that exhibit this intangible don't wait for things to happen to them, they go the extra mile, give everything they have,

*"...when it comes to exceptional leadership, it's the ability to make things happen that proves the biggest differentiator"*

and find ways around obstacles no matter what. Will requires action, but it is something we are all capable of.

Davis notes, "...too many leaders think about what they might do and how they might do it, instead of just doing it." As well, Davis explains that willful leaders 'create their own luck'; they take

matters into their own hands, work hard and create conditions that lead to positive outcomes. Leaders with will stand firm in their decisions, exercise self-discipline and never give up. The final line of this chapter resonates with me most: "...when it comes to exceptional leadership, it's the ability to make things happen that proves the biggest differentiator."

## EXECUTIVE MATURITY

Executive maturity is about regulating emotions and being aware of emotions and

triggers. Very few leaders truly master their emotions. Exceptional leaders know when to showcase their emotions and when to hold back how they are really feeling. Executive maturity can develop with time, but this does not mean more experienced leaders exhibit such maturity. The process of developing such maturity can be accelerated:



## INTEGRITY

Integrity is a multi-dimensional construct involving trust, consistency and a moral compass. A lack of integrity from a leader can lead to the wreckage of an organization. It doesn't matter how intelligent, charismatic or organized a leader is because it doesn't count for much if they lack integrity. Integrity earns the respect of others. Follower should know exactly what a leader's values are, what they stand for and how they will react in a given situation. Davis explains that although a firm moral compass may be difficult for others at times, "a highly aggressive executive who

behaves according to a consistent compass still gets more respect than one who values appear to slide back and forth.” People are less likely to follow someone whose thoughts and actions are highly influenced. Be consistent in what you say and do; make sure they are the same thing!

Something I found extremely interesting is the fact that Davis admits that this is the one intangible that he still cannot completely visualize or note. To understand an individual’s sense of integrity, one must know them for a period of time to truly understand their values and learn how they dealt with certain circumstances. Although you can assess a leader’s integrity based on their followers, the only true way to evaluate their integrity is to watch them in action and in decision making.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Richard A. Davis** is an Industrial/Organizational psychologist at RHR International’s Toronto Offices. He works with leaders to make good decisions about people and advises regarding leadership effectiveness, hiring, succession planning and other management decisions.

### SELF-INSIGHT

Self-insight is one’s perspective of themselves. Self-insight is important because without it, one can’t grow or change as a leader. It is a key tool for growth and development as a professional.

Studies have shown that there is a mismatch between our actual performance and our perceived performance; typically, people struggle with the idea of self-insight. We tend to fall victim to the Dunning-Kruger Effect; a phenomenon where we overestimate our skill and fail to recognize inadequacy. Davis uses the example of American Idol. After its premiere season, the show had hundreds of auditions where people were totally shocked to hear they did not make the cut and believed they were the next big superstar; meanwhile, they were one of the train-wreck auditions that viewers love to watch. Davis points out that it is the worst singers who are often the most upset about failing to qualify for the next round. This is because they truly do believe that they are fantastic singers, when in reality, they just lack any sense of self-insight.

Self-insight can be gained over time, and the idea of recognizing a lack of self-insight is an important step in working toward improvement of this intangible. The token message of self-insight is this: “if you do not have the ability to see yourself objectively, it is impossible for you to recognize what a given situation requires of you or what qualities you can leverage at certain times” (p.157).

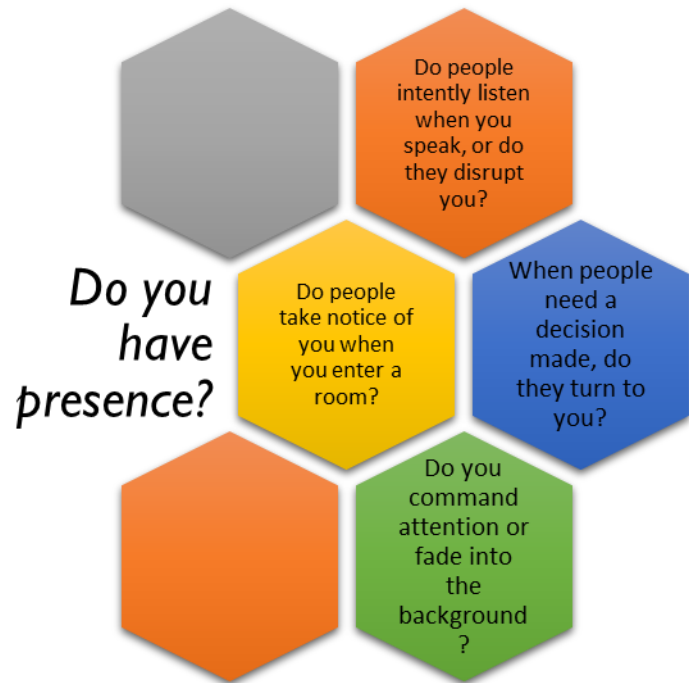
### FALLIBILITY

Despite our best attempts, no one is perfect. Fallible leaders are real leaders. When followers have a relatable leader who is ‘human, they will listen.

“Shouldn’t we always aspire to be the best? I don’t think so. I believe that being second or third might even be better” (Davis, 208). This may be the most puzzling line in the book—until I read Davis’ justification. We get grow and improve in pursuit of being the best. Extraordinary leaders become extraordinary BECAUSE they were second or third.

*“Shouldn’t we always aspire to be the best? I don’t think so. I believe that being second of third might even be better”*

### PRESENCE



Presence is an important and powerful intangible; however, it must be backed up with substance. Just because someone commands presence, it does not mean they are a leader. Reputation, identity, charisma, and communication skills are all critical components of presence. Of all the intangibles, presence is perhaps the easiest to identify and potentially the one with the greatest power. Understanding your own presence and its impact on followers can allow leaders to achieve great things.



## SELF-EFFICACY

Self-efficacy: the capacity for producing a desired result. Believing in one's self sounds simply enough, but the notion of self-efficacy is complex and influenced by numerous aspects.

Believing that you can do something doesn't just happen. It is built through positive experiences and success. But, if someone has easy successes, they will be discouraged by failure. It is the development of a sense of resilient to overcome and persevere that contribute to self-efficacy. Davis believes that this very powerful intangible is what truly characterizes the best of the best.

### *Self-efficacy versus self-esteem*

Self-efficacy is more specific and targeted than self-esteem. Self-efficacy is the mindset to succeed in a given circumstance while self-esteem is more of a general sense of self-worth across different aspects of life.



## FORTITUDE

Greek philosopher, Plato outlines four virtues of fortitude: courage, justice, temperance and wisdom.

Courage was the most central idea. Extraordinary leaders find the courage to stand strong in tough times. There is a sense of audacity. Through his experiences, Davis has noted a phenomenon related to fortitude: many of the most extraordinary leaders he has encountered has been faced and overcome at least one major setback in their life. Perhaps it is these challenges and lessons derived from them that influence the way in which they lead, and their strong, determined character. They face the challenges in leadership with the same courage they faced their other crises, traumas and setbacks.

*“...many of the most extraordinary leaders...have encountered and overcome at least one major setback in their life.”*

Leaders with fortitude test themselves and don't rest on their laurels; they are always seeking new pursuits. These leaders show conviction in their actions and always take responsibility. Leaders with fortitude are always willing to go against the grain and seek challenge to find change.

Choosing a mantra, embracing tough battles and new endeavours, facing your fears, and learning from others are all ways to grow in your leadership and build a sense of fortitude.

## SOCIAL JUDGEMENT

Social judgement is defined as the ability to analyze people and situations and make good decisions based on this information. This ability is one of the most basic intangibles. Observations related to social judgement can be classified into 5 groups.

Davis's description of social judgement overlaps with Northouse's understanding of emotional intelligence. Northouse (2016) states that emotional intelligence deals with many aspects of emotions, such as expressing emotion, understanding and reasoning with emotions, and managing our emotions (with others and ourselves). Being cognizant of others emotions helps leaders to better understand followers, what motivates them, what they value, what emotions are at play when in particular circumstances, etc. Leaders with social judgement, and emotional intelligence, are better able to reach their followers and motivate them in a way which allows for prosperity for the organization's benefit.

### Physical Behaviours

- All movements, such as eye contact, voice control, crossing arms, and movement of feet, can reveal information about someone's emotional state, their goals and motivations.

### Emotional Dynamics

- Interpret the emotions behind the behaviours. Carefully observe emotions around you. Address emotions that may be cues for larger existing conflicts, anxieties, etc. Deal with these yourself- do not pass them off to someone else to deal with. Show that you are a person too.

### Decision Processes

- Watch how decisions are made. By watching how a group makes a decision, it can reveal critical information about the direction of change needed. Try not to be too talkative and see how much you learn.

### Meeting dynamics

- Pace and flow of a discussion can help identify what the group values, are comfortable with, uncomfortable with, etc.

### Interpersonal dynamics

-Interaction amongst followers gives understanding to confidence, collaborative efforts, conflicts, etc. Such observations give you insight into how followers work with others and how they can function as a unit



What is it?

How do you know it  
when you see it?

How do you get it?

Why it Matters

Davis models each intangible  
using the model to the right.

## The Bottom Line

| QUALITY            | THE BOTTOM LINE  |
|--------------------|--|
| Wisdom             | Experience is the basic ingredient in wisdom- but reflections and perspective are what allow you to rise to the surface. |
| Will               | Be accountable for your own luck. Will success to occur.   |
| Executive Maturity | Master your emotional reactions, and use them to influence others.   |
| Integrity          | Do the right thing, be consistent about it, and lead with your values.   |
| Social Judgement   | Be a student of behaviour. Understand people as a means of leading them.   |
| Presence           | Your reputation will always precede you. Think, act, and speak like the executive you want to be.                        |
| Self-Insight       | Figure out what makes you tick. It's the only way you'll get better at what you do.                                      |
| Self-Efficacy      | Believe you can do more than you have the ability to do, and you will.   |
| Fortitude          | Your leadership destiny will be determined largely by the strength with which you confront challenges.                   |
| Fallibility        | Don't try to be perfect. Influence others by showing that you don't have all the answers.                                |

# LEADERSHIP CONNECTIONS

From the surface, it is obvious that there is clear connections to trait approach leadership. Despite this, makes it very clear that truly exceptional leaders are distinguished by looking past skills, traits and standard competencies. Much like Northouse (2016), Davis explains that although certain traits are useful in identifying leaders, the presence of such traits does not guarantee that they will be utilized for the purpose of leadership. One commonality between Northouse and Davis was the idea of integrity being integral to extraordinary leadership. Both explain that sticking to a strong set of values is vital to gaining confidence in follower and being responsible for actions (Northouse, p.26).

As well, both Northouse and Davis recognize that traits can serve as clear benchmarks in leadership. Having established qualities or traits does make it easier for a leader to assess their own attributes, abilities and approaches to leadership.

Moreover, the notion of situation leadership is woven throughout the book. Different situations require different leadership. Specifically, Davis discusses this in the chapter on social judgement. One-size-fits-all leadership does not work. Personalizing interactions with followers, observing and interpreting and acting on dynamics, and understanding emotions behind behaviours are all things to consider when leading. One must be able to observe and analyze all this information and lead according to needs of the followers and organization.

Finally, aspects of transformational leadership are present within the book. For instance, on the chapter about fortitude, Davis talks about going against the grain and taking risks to achieve great change. Likewise, Northouse (2016) discusses challenging the process and being willing to step into the unknown take risk and create change (p.174).





# DISCUSSION

# QUESTIONS

1. Take a close look at the list of 10 intangibles. Which do you feel you embody the most? Least? Predict what a coworker, family member and/or friend would answer these two questions about you. Are the answers the same or different?
2. Which intangible do you personally value most?
3. What was the last 'big decision' you made? What did you learn from it?
4. Recall one of the biggest mistakes you've ever made. What value did it have?
5. Think about someone you know who has presence. Why do they have presence? List the things about them that contribute to this intangible. Consider your own presence.
6. Do you think you have self-insight? Why?

# EVALUATION

Richard Davis' *The Intangibles of Leadership: The 10 Qualities of Superior Executive Performance* was a very easy and enjoyable read. In his Introduction, Davis points out this isn't a self-help book, or a manual of how to be a top leader. Rather, he describes it as, 'a glimpse into the elite executive's mind and heart' (p.xvi). After reading the entire book, I would most definitely agree with this initial statement. Personally, the book served as a tool that helped me reflect on my practices as a leader and made me critically evaluate how I approach leadership.

What I appreciated most about the book was its clear and logical structure. Not only did Davis point out 10 'intangibles' but he carefully details why they are effective for extraordinary leaders, how to identify them and develop them. He does this in a way that is open ended enough that his advice is applicable to different kinds of leaders in different situations; yet, in a specific enough manner that leaders can apply and adopt

strategies of extraordinary leaders.

Each chapter contains anecdotes, empirical research, insight from Davis' experiences, his observations of extraordinary leaders, compelling quotes, clear cut strategies, and checklists. Some of the intangibles explored were things many may overlook as important to leadership, but Davis provides convincing arguments and evidence to their significance. I think this book truly caters to any leader; there is something in it for everyone.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION**

This book can be used as a practical atlas for those in leadership positions. It would be a useful tool for someone to reflect on their own leadership approaches and create an action plan for self-improvement. As well, many of the intangibles discussed are transferable to outside the leadership realm. Teachers would especially find chapters on will and self-efficacy particularly beneficial for ways to promote a perseverance and growth mindset amongst students.





# QUOTES

“When one player believes in his own ability, he’s well positioned for individual success; but when an entire team believes in itself as a unit, the opposition had better watch out” (p.170)

“You need downtime. Don’t be a hero and thin the world will stop if you are in the Bahamas for a week” (p.65)

“Look famous. Be legendary. Appear complex. Act easy. Radiate presence. Travel light. Seem a dream. Prove real.” (p.115)

“Figure out what makes you tick. It’s the only way you’ll get better at what you do” (p.159)



“You can wait for those experiences to shape your leadership or you can play an active role in building it” (p.198)

“The optimal level of self-confidence is slightly above one’s actual abilities. You must believe that. It’s okay to have a slightly inflated sense of our abilities” (p.180)

## References:

- Davis, R. A. (2010). *The intangibles of leadership: The 10 qualities of superior executive performance*. Toronto: J. Wiley & Sons Canada.
- Northouse, P.G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.