Leadership is fundamentally about one thing: connecting two points in the longest distance in the world – the one between the head and the heart.

Brian Concannon  
CEO, Haemonetics

Matthew was among the brightest corporate executives in this global pharmaceutical company. His technical background and business acumen were unparalleled. He inspired confidence inside the company as well as with Wall Street analysts and investors. As a leader, he pursued an aggressive strategic agenda evoking an odd combination of awe and fear from the people who reported to him.

Soon after receiving a major promotion, he requested and received a comprehensive 360 feedback. The results were a stunning condemnation of his leadership style. He learned that his brilliance, intensity, and micro-management had had serious disempowering and de-motivating effects on his direct reports. In an off-site retreat with his leadership team, he courageously apologized, expressed his regret, made no excuses, and committed to a number of changes in his leadership behavior.

Eighteen months later, having delivered on his behavioral change agenda, he had attained the committed dedication of his leadership team members. He had deepened his relationships with other key stakeholders. He had accelerated business results. He had orchestrated the emergence of a truly empowered and high-performing team. While he remained mindful of the possibility that he could regress to old behaviors under stress, his heightened commitment to managing his stress kept that likelihood at bay.

As we explore what makes leaders Remarkable, we are looking at this information primarily through the lens of how it informs ways to manage them more effectively. The specifics of this boss management are discussed in Chap. 6. Further, if you are a leader now, this information can enrich or test
what you already know about effective leadership. If you aspire to become a Remarkable leader, consider this information as giving you a running start toward achieving that aspiration.

Life History

The Remarkable leaders in this sample shared a number of life history factors. These included (1) a two-parent family, (2) at least a college education, (3) marriage and a ≤5% divorce rate, (4) at least two children, (5) discovery of their life’s work before reaching age 30, and (6) steady career histories (fewer than three company changes).

In general, they moved through Erikson’s eight life stages smoothly, i.e., they were on time in accomplishing the developmental task associated with each life stage. Beginning with Stage 1 (birth-1 year), their physical and emotional needs were met; therefore, there was a strong likelihood of their forming trusting relationships later in life.

The Stage 2 (ages 1–3) task of exploring and becoming increasingly independent was assured completion by parents who were neither over-controlling or absent. By age three or four, Remarkables were showing Stage 3 (ages 3–5) signs of goal-oriented behavior to the delight and tireless encouragement of their parents and other caregivers. Given the attentiveness of their parents and babysitters, it was not uncommon for them to know the alphabet, numbers to 100, and to already be reading by the time they entered first grade.

Early in primary school, they displayed a Stage 4 (ages 6–11) belief in their ability to learn, solve simple problems, and accomplish goals they had set for themselves (e.g., doing well in school, making things with building toys, cooking simple recipes, etc.). These accomplishments contributed mightily to their can-do attitudes and growing sense of confidence. Many had received early messages from family members and/or teachers about their potential to excel. Those who did not receive these messages, tended to self-ignite through the discovery of things they were passionate about such as a hobby, school subject, or athletic skill. For some, their self-ignited confidence combined with a strong desire to “show” others what they could achieve. This was a fire that would burn throughout their lives.

By Stage 5 (ages 12–18), most Remarkable leaders had met the identity task and displayed early leadership behavior through such activities as scouting, special interest clubs, class officer roles, and sports teams. They had also begun to identify areas for further study that would ultimately influence important career decisions. While most had the advantage of a parent or
teacher guiding their college decisions, others fended well for themselves making choices that were driven by their scholastic strengths, geographic preferences, college reputation/status, and budding career inclinations.

While Remarkable leaders had their share of adolescent growing pains and social disappointments, for the most part they were sufficiently resilient and focused to move through the developmental hurdles of Stage 6 (ages 18–35) well. They discovered and pursued a course of study that resulted in successful and rewarding careers. Over 50% of them pursued graduate study in business, law, and/or the sciences. By their early 30s, all had married and started their families.

In many respects, the accomplishments of Stage 6 set the stage well for the easier unfolding of Stage 7 (ages 35–55). Given the good decisions they had made professionally and their accumulated successes, most were eager and ready to impart knowledge and experiences to others, thus meeting the developmental challenge of generativity. For many, this meant a more intentional focus on mentoring talented high-potential employees in their organizations. For others, this meant assuming leadership roles in community-based charitable organizations. For some, it was a combination of both internal mentoring and externally focused volunteerism. Every Remarkable leader in this sample was committed to grooming people who could potentially succeed him/her. They also ensured a focus on talent management generally in their organizations.

The one issue that Stage 7 Remarkables grappled with less effectively was what is commonly referred to as work–family balance (I prefer the term work–family integration). The demands on their time increase exponentially as they move toward C-level roles, and the necessity of travel – especially if they are doing business on a global scale – poses a relentless drain on quality time for family members. While there are no easy solutions, every executive family is well-served by making this a priority, i.e., an issue that gets discussed openly and one for which they find their own coping techniques – and rewards.

By the time Remarkable leaders hit Stage 8 (ages 55-death), they are in a sound state of mental preparedness for “the rest of the journey,” as one of my CEO clients once described it. Having performed admirably professionally, groomed others well, maintained strong family and other personal relationships, and even cultivated a compelling non-work interest or two, they had a highly integrated and contented sense of themselves and the life they’d lead. Steady feelings of satisfaction, peace, and calm dominated as they began planning for their life-after-work transition.

This is not to say that these transitions are necessarily smooth. They are not because they involve a destruction of what was and the creation of a
new life model. While most Remarkables (who reached retirement at this writing) were sufficiently planful and had supportive marital partners who were pleased to “get them back,” others struggled for they had not been as planful as they needed to be. These leaders found my Five P Model for Career After Life helpful.

Psychological Testing Results

Overall, Remarkable leaders did extraordinarily well on each of the five psychometric tools described in Chap. 1. Based on the Watson–Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, they fall into the superior–very superior ranges when compared to executive and manager norm groups. This finding indicates that their abilities to study a body of facts, arrive at logical conclusions, and set sound priorities are very highly evolved. Obviously, these are critical abilities in senior leadership roles.

On a measure of behavior preferences, The Myers–Briggs Type Indicator, most of these leaders were at least moderately extraverted, intuitive, relied on objective data for decision-making, and were quick to judge mediocre performance. Most had a preference for order and thoroughness; however, they were also comfortable with ambiguity. Behaviorally, they tend to be direct and decisive. They take a systematic approach to problem-solving and strive to maintain traction and momentum on identified goals. They will be sensitive to people and organizational dynamics, but they are not going to be distracted by them. They prefer multi-talented teams that include members who compensate for their own weaknesses. While they prize and seek innovative ideas, they require sufficient objective data before investing considerable resources in them.

Based on the Life Styles Inventory (LSI), Remarkables consistently tested as having constructive thinking styles. This means they are likely to be excellent leaders because they are focused on (1) joint achievements; (2) the self-actualization of themselves and others, i.e., ensuring that one becomes all that he/she is capable of becoming; (3) providing humanistic and committed support for the growth and development of others; and (4) forming relationships through which the work evolves and people thrive in authentic and caring relationships with each other.

Remarkable leaders proved to be psychologically fit and robust on the NEO-PI-R, a measure based on the Big 5 Factor theory of personality explained in Chap. 1. To summarize, they were (1) resilient versus neurotic, (2) extraverted, (3) open, (4) moderately agreeable (their intellectual discernment moderated this factor), and (5) highly conscientious.
The NEO-PI-R was one of the psychological assessment tools used in the empirical research described in Chap. 1. To recap, compared to Perilous and Toxic leaders, Remarkable leaders were found to be more (1) resilient than neurotic, (2) extraverted (gregarious), (3) conscientious (belief in their abilities, working efficiently, adherence to ethical and moral obligations, focused and discipline), and (4) assertive. Based on this data, it also appears that Remarkable leaders prefer a faster pace than Perilous and Toxic leaders.

The Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) was the other psychological assessment tool used in the empirical research described in Chap. 1. In a nutshell, Remarkable leaders possess strong emotional intelligence. As described in Chap. 1, the four core dimensions of emotional intelligence are represented by the acronym SO SMART (Wasylyshyn 2003).

Starting with the foundational dimension of self-observation, they possess an accurate understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses. They strive to leverage their strengths and to minimize any adverse effects or weaknesses by remaining self-aware, seeking and using frequent feedback, and surrounding themselves with people who fill their gaps. Through an accurate perception of their own and others’ emotions, they bring another powerful resource to the act of leading well. Specifically, they can rely on their emotions – along with objective thoughts – to inform sound, even stellar, leadership behavior.

Able to control and channel their emotions – both positive (e.g., happiness, anticipation, excitement, pride in work well done) and negative (e.g., anger, disappointment, frustration, apprehension) – Remarkable leaders can use their emotional awareness often with stunning results. For example, they can sound the inspirational clarion call to motivate others and they can also deliver the tough – albeit constructive messages – necessary for change.

A CEO of a global manufacturing company once described this as “passion with a deadline.” Embedded in this comment are both the urgency for action and the positive emotion essential to drive results. These leaders are also characterized by their extraordinary resilience – both in good times and especially in the face of adversity.

Their attunement to others distinguishes Remarkable leaders both inside and outside their organizations. They possess an uncanny ability to use their emotions to see what they need to see and to hear what they need to hear. This attunement is natural and reflexive whether they are interacting at the board level, within their leadership teams, with employees in other geographical regions, or with critical external stakeholders. Their focus on others is at once genuine and piercing in a manner that helps
forge lasting trust. Because *Remarkable* leaders strive to have an empathic understanding of others’ concerns, anxieties, and aspirations, they build deep commitment and loyalty. Equally important, such attunement enables them to accrue “grace points” that are banked and drawn upon when things go awry.

Because *Remarkable* leaders strive to understand the emotional states of others, they are able to form authentic and lasting connections. In the workplace, their relationships are not merely transactional (*I need you to do this now*). Instead, these leaders establish meaningful connections with others and have knowledge of their personal lives. This has obvious implications for their ability to ensure the commitment of high-performing teams that are distinguished by goal-oriented collaboration and often breakthrough results.

### Core Leadership Competencies

The success of *Remarkable* leaders like Matthew is distinguished by the strength of the four leadership competencies described in Chap. 1 (1) strategy, (2) driving results, (3) managing people, and (4) executive credibility. *Remarkable* leaders are not only strong in each of these competencies – they are gifted in the ability to leverage the interaction among them. When/if they consider themselves less effective in any of these competency areas, they are likely to import the necessary talent to their leadership teams rather than risk a continuing competency deficit. These competencies are defined in Table 2.1.

Since they are also solid in the four dimensions of emotional intelligence (as described above under Psychological Testing Results), like Matthew, they exemplify *total brain leadership (TBL)* – the integration of left brain (IQ) and right brain (EQ) functioning. This integration can enrich both the quality of their decision-making and their relationships inside and outside their companies (Wasylyshyn 2003). The importance of this integration of left and right brain functioning cannot be overstated in that many business leaders are overdeveloped in one dimension – the cognitive.

As Kaplan and Kaiser (2003) noted, “Leadership consists of opposing strengths, and most leaders have a natural tendency to overdevelop one at the expense of its counterpart. This resulting imbalance diminishes their effectiveness” (p. 19).

It’s no accident that business leaders can over-rely on a particular strength like analytical problem-solving, for example. This strength surely works; it’s
reliable, and it’s a core factor in executives being rewarded well. But over-reliance on a strength – when a broader array of capabilities is required to be fully effective – can be a serious problem. This is as true in professional sports as it is in business. Consider Andy Roddick who arguably has one of the best serves in men’s tennis and yet he’s not won a major tournament in several years given his failure to lift the rest of his game – especially the mental part of it – to the level of that astounding serve.

Kaplan and Kaiser (2003) suggest that the key to executives moderating overused strengths is for them to place less value on them, to identify less with a particular strength, and to ease up on the use of them. In their words, “The key to moderating strengths that have been taken to an extreme is for managers to learn to be more nuanced in their application… they need to see the control mechanism not as an on-off switch, but rather as a dial, one that they can simply turn down a notch or two. They don’t have to give up their gift; they can instead make more discriminating, and therefore more effective, use of it” (p. 25).

This is good advice – especially if followed in concert with an intentional stretch toward releasing other capabilities that would enable them to lead with a more balanced mix of leadership strengths.

Table 2.1 Four leadership competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Sees ahead clearly; can anticipate future consequences and trends accurately; has broad knowledge and perspective; is future oriented; can paint credible pictures and visions of possibilities and likelihoods; can create competitive and breakthrough strategies and plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Driving results</td>
<td>Can be counted on to exceed goals successfully; is constantly and consistently one of the top performers; very bottom-line oriented; steadfastly pushes self and others for results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing people</td>
<td>Ensuring clarity about roles, responsibilities, resources and direction. Achieving alignment on objectives, as well as efficient and cost effective results. Providing frequent and candid performance feedback. Remaining focused on people’s ongoing needs for learning and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive credibility</td>
<td>Possessing strong character, integrity, and ethical principles. Communicating with clarity and confidence in the future. Behaving consistently and with the courage of one’s convictions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategy
Their effectiveness in formulating strategy is supported by a number of distinctive abilities. These include (1) superior analytical abilities (as measured by the Watson–Glaser), (2) rapid recognition of business patterns, (3) accurate synthesis of their own and others’ thoughts about these patterns, and (4) the ability to articulate a clear, compelling and inspirational picture of the future.

Remarkable leaders also understand the power of inclusion and prefer that all key people are at the table when strategy is formulated. In their subsequent ambassadorial roles, direct reports along with the leader, ensure strategic alignment and execution. McKnight, Kaney and Breuer (2010) emphasize, “No strategy can succeed if the people who have to implement it don’t understand it. If kept in the dark, employees are but passengers along for the ride. Having said this, it’s astonishing how few executives make sure that employees understand the business, how it works, the factors critical for winning or, indeed, the strategy itself” (p. 43).

Finally, Remarkable leaders have a “nose” for unexpected flaws in a strategy and for recognizing early warning signs that necessitate rapid adjustments. Their agile thinking and cognitive flexibility are other differentiating factors among these leaders because their egos don’t get in the way with defensive reasoning or other immature behaviors (Argyris 1991).

Driving Results
Early in their careers, Remarkable leaders learn to make a strong distinction between activity and results. They have a special radar for seeing when people have busied themselves with activities that are not critical to reaching identified objectives. They also have the courage to call out this behavior and get people refocused. They understand the continuing nature of gauging clarity and of ensuring it along with encouragement and sufficient resources so objectives are met. At the same time, they expect sustained momentum and will not be patient with excuses, missed deadlines, or anything else that deters expected outcomes. Former Rohm and Haas (now DOW) executives referred to this essential leadership behavior as “steel trap accountability.”

Managing People
Remarkable leaders know that even the best strategies will not ensure business success if they don’t have talented people in key roles and an organization structure that supports strategic priorities. They lead by the axiom
that structure follows strategy. These leaders also understand that their jobs are easier when they have ensured the right conditions for people to be successful. This begins with role clarity and everyone understanding his/her core responsibilities, as well as how things are to be achieved—technically, managerially, and behaviorally.

*Remarkable* leaders are also intentional about giving feedback—frequent, specific, and constructive performance feedback that reinforces what people are doing right and instructs on how they may need to do things differently. For these leaders, this is not the dreaded annual performance review; it is a dynamic and ongoing process of give-and-take that anticipates problems, unleashes mutual problem-solving, and ensures the delivery of necessary results (see the poem, “Duende” in Chap. 9 for a metaphorical representation of this type of feedback).

**Executive Credibility**
The executive credibility of *Remarkable* leaders is another strong suit based on the interaction of at least three factors: communication, consistency and courage. They are usually fluid and compelling communicators who are able to connect with both large and small groups effectively. They may have come by this naturally, or they may have done the necessary work with a communications expert who helped them find their own authentic way of reaching people—whether it’s in the corporate Board room or at a town hall meeting in Asia.

With *Remarkable* leaders, there is enormous consistency between what they say and do. They resist both hyperbolic and passive representations of the future. They remain mindful of maintaining a realistic perspective for all stakeholders. This necessitates three things: (1) truth telling about the present, (2) acknowledgement about the things in the organizations that are working and bode well for the future, and (3) bridging from the now to a hopeful picture of the future. More will be said about this leadership tool of *perspective-making* in Chap. 7.

*Remarkable* leaders maintain the courage of their convictions but beyond that, and perhaps more importantly, they are fearless. This is an informed courage—being bold but not reckless in the pursuit of business goals and success. They relish leading, are willing to speak out, stand alone, influence open debate, probe unexpressed views, and leverage resident wisdom. They are also willing to confront company “sacred cows,” decisions, policies, and/or practices that could impede business success.
**Coaching Notes**

*Remarkable* leaders are intentional about their continuous learning— including behavioral change if that is warranted. Their HR partners typically provided corroborating information about the commitment of these leaders to their ongoing development as leaders. Their impressive career progressions stand as testimony to their learning efforts.

In coaching them, I observed an array of other admirable behaviors. These behaviors included patience, the ability to tolerate frustration, flexibility, and non-defensiveness. Like Matthew, they can “own” their mistakes, learn from them, and move on without undue self-chastisement or rumination. While they are typically ambitious, they are not preoccupied with self-image or advancement or the trappings of power. Instead, they are dedicated to serving their organizations capably by ensuring business results, modeling enterprise thinking and behavior, and developing a bench of talented employees who continue to learn and evolve technically and/or managerially.

Given their preference for trusting in the capabilities and intentions of others, *Remarkable* leaders readily form high-impact teams. Members of their teams feel empowered and well-motivated by shared goals and group cohesion. The deep sense of satisfaction that *Remarkable* leaders typically take from their work cascades over their teams influencing collective feelings of meaning—and even fun.

*Remarkable* leaders are typically open to new learning, can tolerate ambiguity, and can assume the perspective of another. While certain single-minded, super confident, and powerful *Remarkable* leaders could be described as narcissistic, they are what Maccoby (2000) described as “productive narcissists.” Current business leaders to include Bill Gates (Microsoft); Steve Jobs (Apple); former eBay CEO, Meg Whitman; FMC Chairman and CEO, Pierre Brondeau; and DuPont Chairman and CEO, Ellen Kullman, all personify this positive business persona. They are brilliant, confident, courageous, and relentlessly clear about their strategic pursuits, key people, and operational decisions.

On a continuum of narcissistic behavior running from productive to unproductive to malignant narcissism, the *Remarkable* leader would clearly be at the productive end of the continuum. For perspective, failed CEOs including Dennis Koslowksi (TYCO), Durk Jager (Proctor & Gamble), Al “Chainsaw” Dunlap (Scott Paper and Sunbeam), Robert Nardelli (Home Depot), and Ken Lay (Enron) would fall into the unproductive range. Certain political monsters of the world to include Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin, and Osama Bin Laden would be at the malignant end of this continuum (see Fig. 2.1).
In summary, there is much that readily distinguishes Remarkable business leaders. They are total brain leaders (TBL) possessing a distinct combination of intellectual capabilities and behavioral assets. They are strategic, results driven, excellent managers of people, and enormously credible within their companies and with critical external constituencies as well. They are also emotionally smart given their high self-awareness, discipline, empathy, and ability to form authentic relationships with diverse people on a global landscape. Finally, their healthy psyches enable them to share success and guide others – including their successors – over key development hurdles. This might just be their biggest competitive leadership edge of all.

Remarkable leaders – like Paul (see box) are often spotted early.

Paul joined the Research division of a global chemical company and did well in his early technical roles. However, what emerged fairly quickly were his distinctive abilities to identify growth prospects, engage well with his commercial peers in the company, and an overall business acumen that set him apart from his Research colleagues. His impressive combination of strategic thinking, operational strength, and people management capabilities further identified him as a top high-potential manager. Behaviorally, he was courageous, charming, confident, steady, and charismatic.

People craved to work for him and learned well under his demanding tutelage. His loyalty and commitment to them influenced their prolific efforts. He practiced the annual performance review as an art and focused relentlessly on getting the right people in the right roles and creating the
right conditions for them to be successful (see Duende in Chap. 9). A relentless work-hard-play-hard leader, members of his teams learned the incalculable importance of fun.

As he helped propel the company’s presence in Asia and build a new business platform that contributed exponentially to the growth of the company, his name was an obvious one for the CEO succession list. Well-mentored by the sitting CEO, when he was made President, the succession appeared set – until the company was acquired by a giant other in their space.

Unable to work in the culture of the acquiring company – despite the senior role he was given – he resigned and soon found himself with a number of attractive roles to consider. Ultimately, he accepted a CEO role in another global company that had been led by a brilliant, operations-oriented executive. The mission here would be growth – and the opportunity to change a command and control alpha culture. Paul’s experience, combination of left and right brain capabilities, interpersonal gifts, resilience, and fundamental belief in the power of team-based leadership would serve him, the employees, and the shareholders well.

---

**The Remarkable Leader**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ratings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I – Leadership competencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Strategy</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Drives results</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. People</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Executive credibility</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II – Emotional intelligence (SO SMART)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Self observation</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Self management</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Attunement</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Relationship traction</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**End Notes**

1 The author uses the more apt term “work–family integration” instead of the popular “work–family balance” terminology. For top talent individuals, work–family balance – if considered literally as a balance between
the two domains of work and family – is an impossible objective to achieve. On the other hand, everyone should strive to find her/his version of work–family integration.

2 The five P Model for Career After Life is a holistic planning process that focuses on five essential factors (1) Purpose (identification of activities that will give one’s life meaning), (2) People (identification of the people one most wants to spend time with), (3) Place (making decisions regarding where one most wants to live and in what type of dwelling), (4) Physical (promoting one’s healthy lifestyle and physical well-being), and (5) Prosperity (deciding/planning of all financial-related issues). For some who are more spiritually oriented, there is a 6th P – “Phaith.”

3 Emotional Intelligence (EQ) – the awareness of one’s own and others’ emotions and the ability to discriminate among them. The ability to use that emotional awareness to achieve work and personal objectives (see Table 2.1).

4 I purposely use the term releasing and not developing because in my experience with senior business leaders, they often have a strong left brain cognitive preference and appetite for facts and data but they are not without right brain conceptual and interpersonal capabilities. In other words, their lopsided leadership styles are a function of their having chosen to cultivate a certain leadership persona and/or they have been socialized to reveal and revere only certain parts of themselves. When leadership circumstances necessitate their tapping into behaviors or abilities that have been masked or otherwise diminished, they can – especially when they are encouraged and valued for doing so.

5 Steel trap accountability – relentless drive for results. No defensiveness. No sad stories. No excuses. No blaming others. Making the necessary adjustments (in people, process, and/or strategy) if needed – and doing it quickly. Hard work alone is not enough – the results have to be there.
Behind the Executive Door
Unexpected Lessons for Managing Your Boss and Career
Wasylyshyn, K.M.
2012, XIII, 174 p. 12 illus., 11 illus. in color., Softcover
ISBN: 978-1-4614-0375-3