



A Conversation About Leadership

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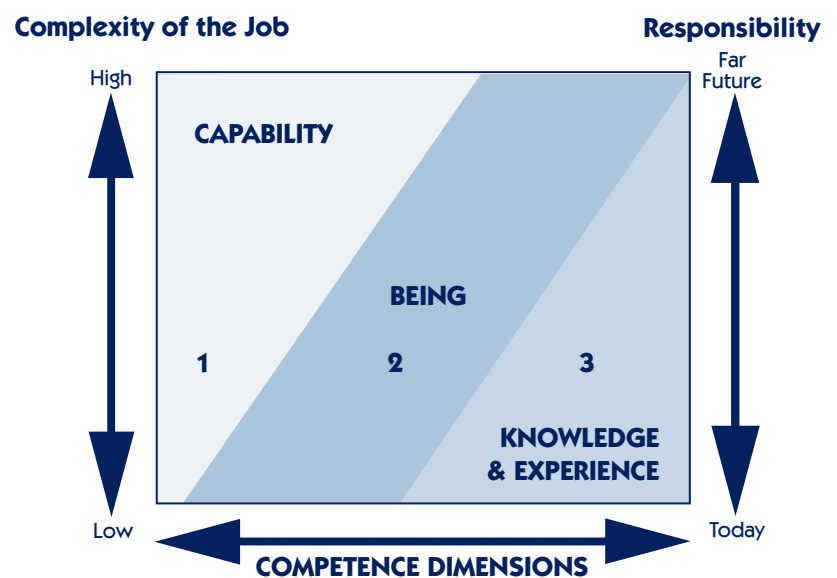
This paper is based on a keynote
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to the U.S. Oncology Conference,
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For me, the leadership role and experience is a privilege. It's not at all about those of us who lead, but all about those who we are fortunate to serve, who we impact, and who take their cues from us.

I've always been passionate about leaders and leadership; and fortunate to have the ongoing opportunity at Diversified Search to serve in leadership roles, study and serve leaders, and help define leadership within and for organizations.

Leadership is not about competence alone. In fact, the boards and CEOs we work with at Diversified ask more about character and if we can help them not only assess executives for "fit" and "stability," but also support them with assimilation and on-boarding.

The chart that follows proposes that as complexity increases, past knowledge and experience become less of a predictor of future success than enhanced, refreshed, relevant skills and qualities. In this dynamic, increasingly complicated business environment, it is our being – an inner core - that is strong, resilient and durable - that continues to be the stabilizing ingredient to progressive leadership.



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In order to thrive in a dynamic environment, leadership requires a delicate balance and adept maneuvering among an interdependent and – at times contradictory – set of roles, responsibilities, and constituents which we and our teams must skillfully and adequately address.

I use the next visual quite a bit when asked to come in and talk with senior executives and their teams to get a reading on what they're doing and how and why they're doing it. These are relatively straightforward concepts but always are a great catalyst for interesting discussion and insights.



Strategy and its effective execution to achieve desired business performance is always top of mind for executives. However, changing governance models and key stakeholders (competitors, customers, employees, community organizations, partners and adversaries) have never been more demanding, diverse, and potentially disruptive.

Demonstrating a progressive leadership portfolio both in the external community and within an organization, requires discipline, focus, and careful prioritization for optimal impact. Although we often try to be all things to all people – it’s not possible. We need to focus on maximizing our gifts, interests, and capabilities while surrounding ourselves with diverse individuals and teams whose skills and attributes help extend our reach and impact. At Diversified Search, we call this “Going Beyond Conventional Wisdom.”

Given the increasingly complex role for executives what are organizations looking for in their business leaders? I can share a few thoughts from our experience working with a large number of firms in a wide range of industries. First, in all my years, I have yet to see a singular set of proven or “can’t miss” competencies, or a competency model that truly defines leadership. Much depends on where an organization is, where it wants to go, and with whom. However, in the last few years at Diversified Search we have seen a developing orientation and mind-set around five executive characteristics. These are: collaborative and influencing skills; a relationship orientation; learning agility (especially as it relates to technology); vision; and business dexterity.

Collaborative and Influencing Skills: While competition drives behavior and performance in all facets of life, team work and collaboration in pursuit of shared goals is a key concept. After all, it is increasingly apparent that in our current business environment we are all either going to win together or lose together. Defining and demonstrating value requires us all to be aligned, engaged, and committed to shared success. Although it is often through conflict that we are able to solve complex problems, having constructive (vs destructive) conflict harnessed to provide a springboard to creativity and innovation is a critical leadership imperative.

A Relationship Orientation: Relationships matter; always have...always will. Having the skill to cultivate both colleagues and new partners will continue to pay dividends both in sustaining traditional business models and in developing new ventures and capabilities. Trust, respect, and valuing differences will continue to be at the core of healthy partnerships and organizations.

If we're not taking care of ourselves and striving for balance and equilibrium as individuals, we won't be as credible or effective with those we lead. As leaders, we need to continually be better in order to better serve others.

Learning Agility: Embracing technology as a key enabler for future business success and innovation is a leadership mandate. Energizing and empowering diverse teams of unencumbered, creative, tech-savvy, high octane professionals

will produce new organizational learning, competencies, creativity and results. Enhanced technology also produces data and analytics that can be used to guide decision making. Decisions that provide a sheer exuberance that stimulates an organization when a breakthrough occurs. Leaders today are becoming more and more mindful of the importance of metrics, transparency, and information to customers, stockholders and other stakeholders.

Vision: Leaders who, in concert with an energized workforce, can envision future strategic opportunities and manage radical change, are highly valued and sought after. Do charisma and presence help motivate individuals at times like these? They do - but not by nearly as much as authenticity, humility, passion, and perspective. This is especially true when the stakes are high, the environment is uncertain, and the choices are difficult.

Business Dexterity: In a challenging, dynamic environment, strategies must be evolving, fluid, and responsive to a constantly changing business context. Leaders who are able to foster a resilient, flexible culture characterized by aligned and engaged associates, and who can turn on a dime when opportunities emerge, have a valuable recipe for high performance and success.

I – and many leaders with whom I have had the privilege to work – view leadership development and contribution as a life-long journey that requires ongoing reflection, re-calibration, and renewal. Leadership starts with us. If we're not taking care of ourselves and striving for balance and equilibrium as individuals, we won't be as credible or effective with those we lead. As leaders, we need to continually be better in order to better serve others.





▲ The status quo. Linear thinking.
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