



# THE NEW EXTRAORDINARY LEADER

New Research.  
New Insights.  
New Methods.

# One Organization Can Have Many Great Leaders

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Being a great leader can be defined by selecting the top 5 or 10 percent from any distribution, but this is artificial. It was done for the sake of ease and objectivity in our research. However, greatness should ultimately be defined against a standard rather than merely comparing people against each other. There is no reason why half the leaders in an organization could not be great if they were developed properly. Better still, why not all? Great leadership is not a competitive activity in which one person's success detracts from another's success.

# Women Are Better Leaders Than Men

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On the 16 competencies that we have historically most often measured, women are statistically significantly better on 13 of them. Men are better on two and the other competency is alike. These differences are not miles apart. In fact, in absolute terms they are quite close. However, these statistically significant higher scores are true at every level in the organization, and also hold true in nearly every functional area of the firm. Women at the helm of traditional male bastions such as research, IT, and legal departments receive higher scores on leadership effectiveness than their male counterparts.



# Leadership Competencies Are Linked Closely Together

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Although an effort has been made to make them appear unique and specific, the fact of the matter is that leadership competencies are highly intertwined. Several forces appear to be at work to make this happen. One is that becoming good at one competency appears to make people better at another. This is the “cross-training effect.” The second way they become linked appears to be from “attribution” or the creation of a “halo effect.” If a leader is perceived as being highly effective in working with people, then it is easy to attribute to that person the skills of being committed to the development of subordinates.



# Some Competencies Differentiate Extraordinary Leaders From Others

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Our research suggests that some competencies tower above others, and which ones are most important often depends on the organization. For example, in one organization we studied, the data showed that the single most important competency for a leader was to be seen as technically competent. Conversely, the quality that put leaders into the bottom rung was their lack of technical competence. This one characteristic was far more important than the second or third distinguishing capability. Many senior executives, in a desire to improve effectiveness, decide independently or in a group discussion with other executives which competencies are most important for their organization.



# Leadership Is Needed and Occurs at All Levels Throughout the Organization

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Ideally, the behavior and thought processes of effective leadership permeates the entire organization. Some effective leaders do not have the words “manager” or “director” in their titles, but they influence many others. Some organizations invest the lion’s share of their development investment in the most senior executives, leaving very little of their investment for the development of front-line supervisors or managers who are early in their careers. If one of the objectives of improving leadership effectiveness is to have every employee enjoy the benefits of working for a good manager, then it becomes obvious that development must involve all levels of the organization.



# Effective Leadership Development Requires Integration with Job Duties

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Nearly all the competencies required of an effective leader can be utilized in whatever position a person currently occupies. Expanding technical knowledge, learning to build stronger relationships, practicing good communication, sharpening the skills of being a good team member, or practicing the skill of getting feedback; these can all be learned in virtually any job. No one needs to wait until they have received a big promotion to consciously practice on a daily basis the capabilities of a good leader.



# Great Leaders Make a Huge Difference

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We have known for some time that huge differences exist between top performers and average performers in any job category. One meta-analysis showed that for high-level jobs, the productivity difference between the top person out of 100 and the great majority is huge. For example, the top person performing high-complexity jobs is 127 percent more productive than the mean average person and infinitely more productive than the 100th person in that curve. The researchers said “infinitely” because the number was so large that it would be lacking precision to say anything other than infinite.



# Conclusion

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Leadership has been shrouded with a mysterious quality that drives our desire to make less mysterious something that has seemed so hopelessly baffling. Obviously, many more books on leadership will be written. We hope our research will help to push the study of understanding of leadership attributes and leadership development to the next rung on the ladder by removing some of that mystery.

For more insights and to learn how you can partner with Zenger Folkman to develop extraordinary leaders in your organization, please visit our website or contact us.

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Insights provided using excerpts from *The New Extraordinary Leader*.

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