



# New Insights from The New Extraordinary Leader

Part 2 of 2



ZENGER | FOLKMAN

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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.

**The following are 13 suggestions for ways in which leaders can improve the attributes or behaviors that are vital in producing extraordinary results.** The key thing to remember is that improvement you make on any one-dimension spills over to many others. There is no such thing as working on only one leadership quality or attribute. When you improve one, you will invariably be improving several others.

## 13. Study the Current Reality the Organization Faces

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**Good development encompasses improving one's character, one's knowledge, and one's behavior.** This topic focuses on knowledge. One important leadership development exercise is to step away from your organization and look at it through the eyes of a security analyst. Then look at it as if you were a competitor. Then stand away and see how it would look if you were a supplier. Then do the same thing from the perspective of a customer. Be aware of industry trends and where your organization fits into that. Stay abreast of relevant technology facing your industry.

A key quality of effective leaders is the ability to see reality without blinking. **It is hard to lead an organization in the best strategic paths if you are unwilling to face the reality of where you are now.** Being brutally frank with yourself, and encouraging total candor from others, is the best safeguard to keeping in touch with your organization's current reality.



## 14. Learn to Think Strategically

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One of the frequent complaints heard from executives about their subordinates is that they are completely tactical in their thinking. They simply do not think in a strategic way. For many, strategic thinking seems a complete mystery, and they see no obvious way to acquire this esoteric ability. In fact, there are good books on strategic thinking that help people understand the basics of strategy. They give a **road map to understanding your own organization's strategic choices, to understanding why organizations choose various strategic paths, and generally to becoming more comfortable in intense strategic discussions.**



## 15. Communicate with Stories

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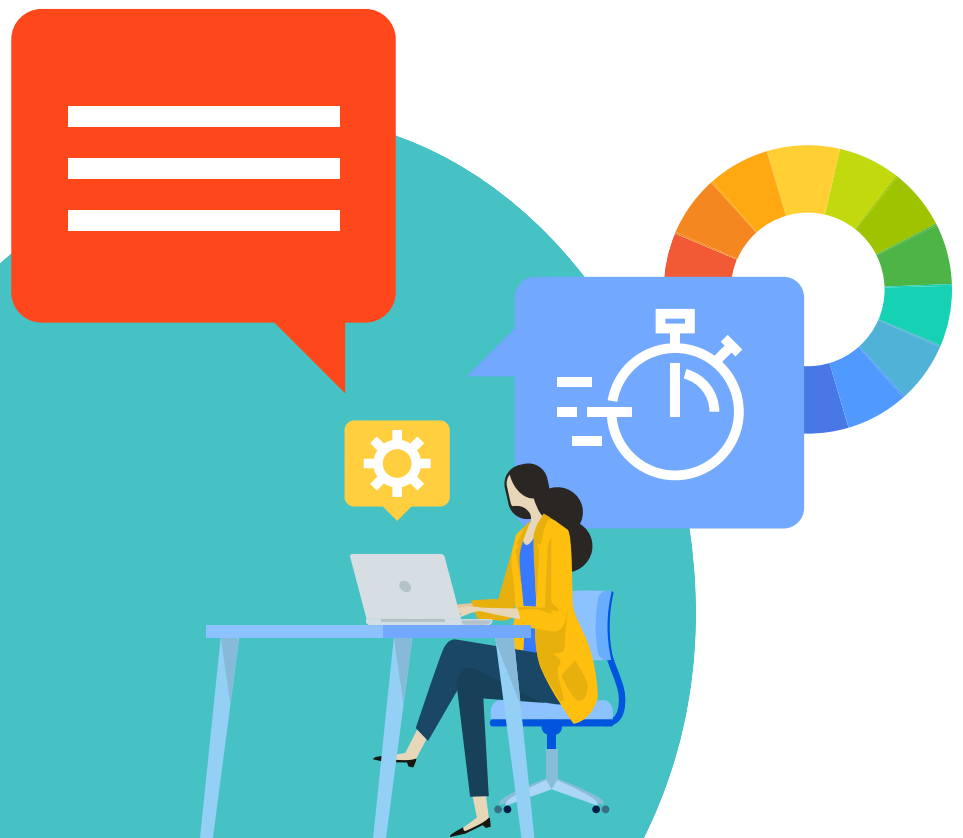
Learn to recount important messages with powerful stories that connect emotionally with those about you. Stories help reduce complexity to manageable simplicity. They are memorable. They connect with the hearer at a more powerful level. The best insight into any organization's culture comes from the collected stories that circulate among the people in the organization. So, the beginning point is to collect important stories and examples that can be used in your dialogue inside the organization. **Then, practice the skill of recounting stories as the best way to convey an important message.** Illustrate the major points you wish to make with appropriate examples and stories.



## 16. Infuse Energy into Every Situation

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One of the keys of leadership is to understand that leaders bring excitement, enthusiasm, and energy to any endeavor. They ignite other people's passions to move forward. We all know people who are energy absorbers. When they are around, it is as if a giant vacuum sucks the energy from a discussion. Seldom is that person seen as a leader because leaders need to do just the opposite. They need to capture and amplify the enthusiasm of others. **The best way to get that started is to inject your own enthusiasm into any discussion or activity. Watch a videotape of yourself. Listen to a recording of your participation.** Are you depositing or withdrawing energy from the process or project?



## 17. Allocate Specific Time to People Development

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A powerful tool in your own development process is to become involved in the development of people who report to you, or anyone who would benefit from your tutelage. We noted earlier that one of the keys of good leadership is the ability to obtain good results. Along with that, however, leaders also need to build the capacity within the organization to continually improve its performance and thus be able to produce long-term, sustained results.

The “law of the harvest” talks about reaping what we sow. **For the organization to constantly reap high productivity and innovation from its people, there has to be “sowing.”** That means taking the time, putting forth the effort, and possibly spending the money required to get front-line associates trained up.

Some leaders view people development as a frill—extraneous to their real work. Amidst the punishing workload of today’s business climate, finding time for people development seems impossible to them. However, taking the time to develop people is an important behavior of a leader, not only for what it does for the recipient, but equally for the impact it has on the leader. **Developing others moves you from being an independent professional person, concerned only with yourself, to the role of the true leader who creates organizational capacity and builds people.**



## 18. Weld Your Team Together

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Great organizations nearly always have strong teams at the top, composed of people who genuinely like each other and who want their colleagues to succeed. A strong, cohesive team becomes a powerful development tool aiding leaders to constantly improve. Many organizations engage in team-building activities, ostensibly to improve the working relationships of the people on the team, and also to enable the group to be even more productive. **What is often missed is the fact that a good team-building exercise is one of the most powerful learning experiences for the leader. First, the team has fresh, firsthand data about the leader's behavior and results. They are in the best position to provide useful feedback to the leader regarding strengths and any areas of improvement.** Thus, a good team-building session is one of the most powerful and positive development activities that a leader can undertake.





## 19. Build Personal Dashboard to Monitor Leadership Effectiveness

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Good overall measures of leadership do not usually exist in most organizations. How do you know if you are performing well? What objective measures exist that would confirm or deny that? If such measures do not exist now, then an excellent developmental activity is for you to take the initiative and develop them for yourself. These will obviously differ by organization and functional responsibility, but some measures that would be frequently used include:

- **Retention data**
- **Customer satisfaction measures**
- **Productivity measures (e.g., costs to complete a given action or time to complete an activity)**
- **Performance against budget**
- **Results from organizational climate surveys**

Having developed your own “dashboard” with which to monitor your leadership effectiveness, it then becomes possible to take a weekly or at least monthly reading of your effectiveness as a leader. A visit to an Air Force base involved a meeting with a major general, the commander of the base. He was obviously proud of the management information system that had been developed and offered to demonstrate what information it could provide. The general could call up 846 measures of performance, ranging from fuel consumption to productivity measures and the number of arrests on the base in the previous eight hours. Most leaders will be content with far fewer measures, but without some information system, the leader is driving with a windshield made of opaque glass.



## 20. Plan and Execute a Change Initiative

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A powerful developmental activity for any leader is to define a change that should appropriately be made and then undertake to make that change happen. The change could be as simple as implementing a new reporting system, a new work process, or a new organizational structure. **Whatever the change, a powerful development process involves planning the change, defining the outcomes that will result from the change, implementing the change, and finally evaluating the results.** The real learning and development come from comparing the final results with the predicted outcomes, and then attempting to find out what caused the differences. As Machiavelli noted, “There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage, than to initiate a new order of things.” Centuries later, a noted psychologist, Kurt Lewin, would observe, “If you really want to understand an organization, try making changes in it.”



## 21. Become a Teacher/Trainer

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Approximately 80 percent of all learning and development is delivered with live, classroom instruction. In a large percentage of those cases, the organization has purchased learning systems from an outside supplier, or they have developed training programs internally. Whereas the organization often has a training department, a large portion of that development is delivered by hand-picked managers selected from inside the organization. They are chosen on the basis of several criteria, and these usually include:

- **Well respected by peers, subordinates, and upper management**
- **Perceived as a high-potential person**
- **Articulate and capable of making an engaging presentation**
- **Practices the leadership or management principles being presented in the development program**

The process of being trained on how to deliver a learning and development program to people inside the organization is one that produces real growth in the instructor. Nothing cements a body of information inside someone more than teaching it. In addition to personal growth, it brings the instructor into contact with many people with whom he or she would never have had contact. It educates the instructor on the challenging issues the organization is facing and how the people are reacting to those challenges. From our vantage point of having watched many organizations select and train line managers as in-house instructors, we have seen it consistently enhance their careers and accelerate their development. Stewart Friedman led Ford Motor's Leadership Development Center. He wrote, "Every program features extensive use of teachers. Graduates of our programs serve as leader-teachers, a practice that helps participants and the instructor grow and develop new capacities for leadership. The concept of leader-teacher isn't unique, but Ford places a high emphasis on teaching. The lesson begins at the top."



## 22. Study the High Performers and Replicate Their Behavior with Others

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In every organization, there are a handful of people who have figured out how to perform a given job in the best possible manner. That is true of customer service representatives, salespeople, factory workers, supervisors, and corporate vice presidents. It will probably remain a mystery why more organizations do not identify who these people are and take the time to study what they do and how they do it. Then, armed with that information, it would seem logical to attempt to get others to perform or behave in that same way. What more valuable process could occur than identifying someone with a job that is a close counterpart to your own and whose performance is recognized as being outstanding? **Through observation and interrogation, find out what that person is doing that makes him or her so effective. Identify which elements of what that person does can be integrated into your own activities.**



## 23. Volunteer in Your Community

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The ideal leader is one who is complete. Stewart Friedman wrote, “We at Ford are pioneering a new dimension of leadership that seeks to integrate all aspects of a person’s life. We call it ‘total leadership.’ It’s different from many prior leadership models because it starts with your life as a whole: your life at work, your life at home, and your life in the community. **Total leadership is about being a leader in all aspects of life.**”

It is clear that people’s work life, home life, religious activity, and community service are not as separate as they once were. The formerly sharp lines are now murky. People are striving for work–life balance, and one popular approach is to blend them rather than build walls between them. **By practicing leadership skills in the other aspects of your life, leadership skills can be honed and perfected.** The organization is enhanced financially and organizationally, the community is improved, the church or synagogue gets much needed talent, and the family enjoys the benefits from improved leadership.



## 24. Practice Articulating Your Vision for the Firm and Your Group

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Leaders describe to a group their vision of the future and often assume it has been understood and internalized. Time passes and people ask questions: “Okay, what is our strategy? I don’t know where we’re going.” The leadership lesson is that communication of complex messages must be repeated over and over. This is especially true when it concerns a topic that carries over a long period of time, and one where people will scrutinize the leader’s behavior to see if it is aligned with the earlier words.

Married people or others in any lasting relationship have learned that you do not express your affection and commitment to the other person once and assume it holds until further notice. With the passage of time, things are said or done that cause the other person to question what was said earlier. And the mere passage of time dims the force and clarity of the words, so they need repeating.

That same phenomenon is at work in any organization. Yes, the leader said we value trust and openness, but look what happened to Ralph when he asked the question in the staff meeting. Or, rumors begin to swirl in the organization and they are quite contradictory of earlier messages. It is for those reasons that messages of vision, values, mission, and strategy need to be repeated over and over. How many times? Some have said that people really do not take a message seriously until the seventh time they hear it. The number is probably different for each of us, depending on the topic and what is happening in our lives. However, **it is clear that the message needs frequent repeating. We advocate that you practice repeating those messages frequently to the associates with whom you work.**



## 25. Prepare for Your Next Job: Think Ahead Regarding the Skills You Will Need

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**One mistake that many leaders make is not to start getting prepared for their next assignment or role.** Like the chess player who sees two or three moves ahead, so are wise leaders looking into the future for the roles they will be playing, and then preparing themselves with the skills that will be needed in those new roles. Will the future require more technical expertise? More strategic thinking skills? A different kind of business acumen? Whatever those new requirements may be, **it is never too early to be identifying them and taking active steps to add them to your skill set.**



**It has been estimated that more than 80 percent of what people learn while working in organizations has been gained on the job. No matter how powerful the classroom experience, it pales in comparison with the learning that comes from experience. How much people gain from their experience is nearly all up to them. Regardless of the percentage, it is clear that leaders can make huge strides by taking responsibility for their own development. They should not count on the organization to do that for them.**

**The 25 suggestions to develop your own leadership abilities were meant to convey the message that all leaders can do a great deal on their own. Do not rely on the organization to make you an even better leader. There are powerful steps you can take to move you down the path to becoming an extraordinary leader. For further information about programs and materials designed to help leaders improve their skills, please go to our website at [\*\*www.zengerfolkman.com\*\*](http://www.zengerfolkman.com).**

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