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*Bringing science to the art of leadership*

# How Bold Leadership Can Help or Hurt You

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by Joe Folkman



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“Often, in the real world, it's not the smart that get ahead, but the bold.”

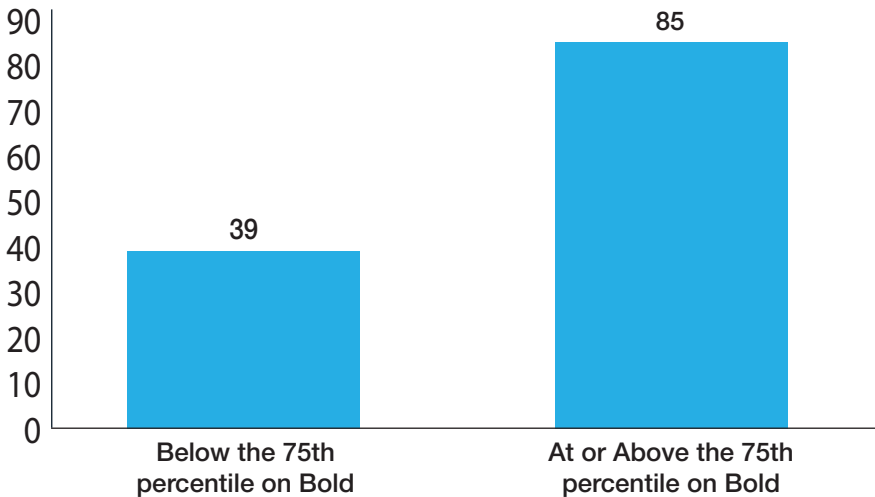
—Robert Kiyosaki

Is being bold always a good thing? Recently, Zenger Folkman did some research on the impact of bold leadership. Bold leaders speak up in difficult conversations, take risks, volunteer for assignments, and often think in unconventional ways. However, there are some negative consequences of boldness as well.

I created a bold leadership index

with seven items from Zenger Folkman's Extraordinary Leader 360-assessment survey. I looked at data from more than 76,000 leaders who receive evaluations on average from 13 others (manager, peers, direct reports). Comparing those who rank at or above the 75th percentile to those below the 75th percentile, I found the following difference in their overall ratings of overall leadership effectiveness.

### Impact of Bold Leadership on Ratings of Overall Leadership Effectiveness



Boldness in leaders seems to have a dramatic, positive impact on overall perceived effectiveness. After doing this research, we found a great deal of interest in bold leadership and received a number of questions from leaders about their individual levels of boldness. To help people understand if they are bold leaders, Zenger Folkman created a self-assessment. We launched this self-assessment a few months ago, and more than 1,400 people from across the globe have completed it so far. (Our initial evaluation of the bold assessment is that it is an accurate predictor of an individual's inclination to behave boldly. In our preliminary research, we found a significant correlation between the bold self-

assessment and assessments of bold leadership as rated by others. The correlation is strong but not perfect because sometimes we don't see ourselves as clearly as others see us. In our experience, the 360 evaluation of bold leadership by others is the most accurate assessment; however, the self-assessment provides a useful indicator of bold leadership as well.)

While there are some significant advantages for leaders who are bold, bold leaders appear to have some attitudes and behaviors that could create problems. Looking at the data Zenger Folkman had gathered from more than 1,400 respondents, I compared those who were the boldest (those at the top 10%) to those who were

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least bold (those at the bottom 10%). I identified the 10 items showing the largest differences between the two groups. These differences clearly illustrate both the advantages and potential problems they face.

- 1. The boldest leaders are 50% more likely to take risks than the least bold leaders.** Most organizations are looking for leaders who are willing to take reasonable risks, but bold leaders need to remember to look before they leap. Their ease at taking risks needs to be balanced with careful judgment around the risks that are reasonable.
- 2. The boldest leaders are 41% more likely to think outside the box and be less conventional.** This trait leads them to be more innovative and creative, but it may also lead them to resist following standard processes and procedures.
- 3. The boldest leaders are 37% more likely to be strategic and future-focused.** The least bold leaders tend to be more tactical and focused on immediate problems or concerns. Bold leaders can become so future-focused that they ignore immediate concerns.
- 4. The boldest leaders are 35% more likely to make decisions quickly and then move forward.** Most organizations greatly value leaders who are willing to make good decisions but once again, these leaders need to be careful to gather all the facts and evaluate alternatives before they decide.
- 5. The boldest leaders are 32% more likely to move at a quick pace which is a very positive trait.** But, those who move at a quick pace can quickly become impatient and frustrated when things move slowly.
- 6. The boldest leaders are 29% more likely to let others know when they disagree.** Typically, this is a very valuable trait because you always know where a person stands. Bold leaders, however, need to take care to not be too disagreeable.
- 7. The boldest leaders are 24% more likely to speak up when they have**

**something to say.** Most of the time, it's great to have people who are willing to speak up, but sometimes you just need people to go along.

**8. The boldest leaders are 23% more likely to be confident, but once again, this can lead to overconfidence and lack of humility.**

**9. The boldest leaders are 22% more likely to be extroverted.** However, there are times when people would be better off if they sat back, listened, and let others lead.

**10. The boldest leaders are 20% more likely to try new**

**or unproven approaches if they look promising.** If a leader is not careful, this could also lead to taking risks that could have a negative impact on the organization.

### **Boldness Is Best Served As Part Of The Meal Rather Than The Entree**

In our research on bold leaders, we discovered that bold leadership has its most powerful effect when it is combined with other competencies. One of those competencies is good judgment. If a leader is skilled at having good judgment but not skilled at bold leadership, they would only have a 1% chance of being an extraordinary leader (e.g., a

leader in the top 10%). On the other hand, if a leader is skilled at being bold but not at having good judgment, they would only have a 4% chance of being extraordinary. When you look at leaders who are skilled at both bold leadership and good judgment, the probabilities go to an astonishing 95%.

In addition to measuring your inclination toward boldness, this self-assessment can also assess your inclination toward good judgment and a strategic perspective. As you look at the above list of potential problems bold leaders can create, these two competencies will enable bold leaders to create a profound strength rather than a probable weakness.

## About Us

Zenger Folkman relentlessly seeks to rise above the inconsistent, and sometimes misleading, nature of popular leadership philosophies and beliefs brought on by opinion. The discipline of leadership and those who pursue it deserve better. Our most valuable asset is the expertise of combining hard data and statistical analysis with logical explanations and actionable application that help individual leaders thrive and organizations succeed.