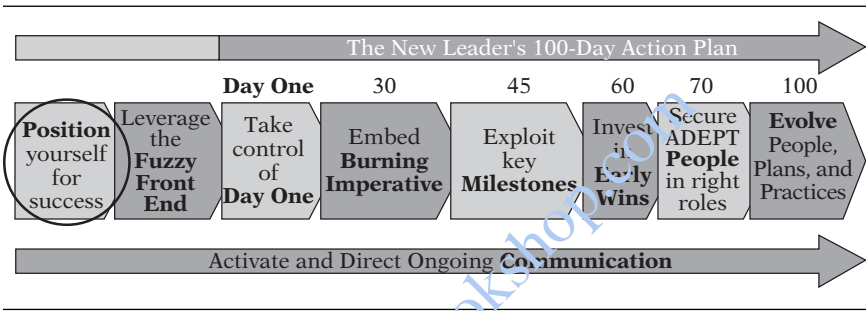


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Position Yourself for a New Role



There are three components to activating your leadership potential. The first is knowing your own leadership qualities and capacities. The second is building a career plan. The third is interacting effectively with others in such a way that this becomes a part of an organization's or a market's perception of you. Know yourself, create a plan, and then help others know you. We've mapped out three concrete steps you can take to position yourself for leadership roles and promotions.

1. *Know your leadership potential.*

Begin with the first dimension—know yourself as a leader. A title or promotion does not make anyone a leader. Leadership emerges from the character, qualities, and capacities of the individual. Make no mistake about it, authentic leadership is personal. It starts with identifying the characteristics, values, attitudes,

strengths, and preferences that you hold at your core that will be the foundation for your leadership style. Without knowing these it's possible that your leadership style will be ineffective or seem hollow. Knowing oneself is the foundation of all true leaders.

2. *Build a career plan.*

Great leaders are not made in a day. Leadership is built over time. You start with your preferences, identify your strengths and opportunities for growth, reach down to your core values, and then build, methodically and intentionally, toward developing the skills, connections, and momentum that will help you realize your personal goals.

3. *Communicate your readiness for leadership.*

The best way to communicate that you can lead is to lead. Step up and lead something. It could be a major project. It could be an extracurricular cross-functional effort like a community service effort or a team outing. Either way, volunteer to lead something and lead.

Let's go into more depth on these three steps.

Know Your Leadership Potential

We have developed a tool called BRAVE: Behaviors, Relationships, Attitudes, Values, and Environment to start the process. This tool provides a quick and effective way to help you break out the elements of what makes you tick professionally and then, guided by a deep understanding and focused intent, design a career trajectory for yourself. Use it to get to know your preferences and your values and to help you align your professional choices and behavior with those qualities.

We will be returning to this tool at later points in this book, each time with a slightly different purpose in mind, and each one effectively building off this first analysis and assessment. BRAVE becomes the core connection between you and your team, your team and the larger organization. We encourage you to think of it as a foundation, a pivot, off which all your actions and intentions will move, into the future, and into success. This foundation is your core ethical being—who you are. It drives what you say and what you do. Or as one of our clients summarized it: “Be. Do. Say.” It will also be the framework by

which you evaluate your leadership opportunities and challenges. Be, Do, Say. We will be coming back to these over and over again.

We have designed a suite of tools for you and in a number of cases you will be asked to use them more than once. These are, after all, tools. They are designed to be used and reused. Like any craftsman with a tool, you will get better and better at using them with repetition.

There is a copy of the BRAVE Tool 1.1 at the end of this chapter and a downloadable, printer-friendly copy of this tool (along with many of the tools in this book) at www.onboardingtools.com. You may find it more effective to write things down on these tools than to write in the book.

BRAVE PREFERENCES

Behave: How do you prefer to act, make decisions, control business, and so on?

Relate: How do you prefer to communicate (including mode, manner, and frequency), engage in intellectual debate, manage conflict, assign credit and blame, and so on?¹

(continued)

¹Ben Dattner explains in *The Blame Game* how credit and blame are key determinants of corporate cultures: “When credit and blame are managed properly, people are willing and able to experiment, learn and grow. When credit and blame are mismanaged and unfair, people shut down, become demotivated, and focus more on covering their rears rather than moving forward” (Ben Dattner, *The Blame Game*, Free Press, 2011, p. 17).

Ben then went on to explain to me that it’s not necessarily that differences in the way credit and blame are used are good or bad, but that they are different. Do not assume that your new culture will use credit and blame the way your old culture did. You can just as easily err on the side of taking too much credit and not enough blame as on the side of taking too little credit and too much blame.

Attitude: What's your ideal organization's purpose, mission, vision, identity, basis for power, and so on?

Values: What are your underlying beliefs, approach to learning, risk, time horizons, and so on?

Environment: What is your preferred environment in terms of office space protocols, decor, and so on?

Answer these questions for yourself for now. This framework will come back in subsequent chapters as a way to approach the “fit” interview question, do due diligence on that after you’ve been offered a job, and then determine your approach to engage the organization.

The point of this process is to have you look at your own preferences or habits and then work from there to identify your strengths, your values, and your goals. If you’re quite honest with yourself, you may find that there are some preferences that may not work as strengths, or even truly connect with your values.

For example, you might be a highly motivated perfectionist, and find that you would rather “do things yourself” than work with a team. In some environments that combination might fit perfectly well, in others, not at all. Or you may find that in your perfectionism you tend to be as severe with others as you are with yourself, which undermines a deeper value you hold to serve as a mentor for others.

Once you have completed this exercise, you’ll want to let your leadership intention be known by declaring it. The *declaring* part is important, because this is what best enables you to commit to your career path. Start by declaring this to yourself. Commit yourself. Your commitments become more real as you share them with others.

Select a listener (a buddy or two) and declare your intentions and your commitments to them. Your commitments are suddenly that much more real. It actually works, try it. If you feel uncomfortable declaring your commitment to someone else, it's a good sign that your commitment as you've defined it might not be authentically yours. Keep refining it until you feel more comfortable. Make it real!

Build a Career Plan

Having used the BRAVE tool to analyze the basic elements of your leadership potential, you are now ready to design your career plan. Your career plan will have a short-term positioning dimension and a longer-term strength-building dimension. The short-term dimension starts with our Five-Step Career Plan tool—Tool 1.2—which can also be found at the end of this chapter and online.

Five-Step Career Plan Tool

This tool provides a quick and effective way to help you understand what makes you tick professionally and design a career trajectory for yourself. Use your BRAVE preferences as input and then align your professional choices with those preferences.

Let's walk through the main steps of the Five-Step Career Plan tool:

1. *Likes/dislikes.* This is your raw data. Take a hard look at your BRAVE preferences to guide you and then go through your past activities and jobs and lay out everything you liked and didn't like. This is about specifics, not generalities.

It may help to use the third person pronoun when making your list. (He. She.) She liked: planning, thinking, getting a sense of accomplishment, working with people. She liked: having some freedom, the support system in a big company, having a short commute, not working on weekends. He didn't like: being pushed too hard, not being able to take Sunday off, dealing with things that didn't work right, having colleagues let him down, feeling as if he worked at a company of second-class citizens.

People tend to enjoy doing things they are naturally strong in. This exercise will help you understand your strengths.

2. *Ideal job criteria.* With your BRAVE preferences and these likes and dislikes in mind, lay out your ideal job criteria. If you could wave your magic wand, what would that dream job look like? Explore what features of these criteria are meaningful or important

to you. Test, challenge, and shape your answers. Make sure the job criteria you've come up with line up with your preferences and likes or strengths.

3. *Long-term goals.* Next, consider your long-term goals. It may help to start with the end in mind. Start at retirement and work back 5 years, then 10 years, then 15 years, and so on to start laying out an entire career line. What do you want to achieve? Think about your professional life and about your personal life, and especially about the ways these are connected. At every point in the process, you should be thinking about whether your strengths, motivations, values, job criteria, and goals match. You may feel that you have a good sense of these before you start. Or you may feel that these are too removed from the practical job at hand. Either way, go through this exercise, and open yourself to these questions: "What matters to me, now? What will matter to me over time?"
4. *Options.* The idea of options triggers widely different responses in people. Some people become oddly passive, or even fatalistic. "What will be, will be." Or, "Well, it was meant to be." Others panic, get jumpy. We urge a different approach. We are convinced that the mind-set that generates a sense of possibilities, of options, is the mind-set that creates real opportunities and fosters success. We encourage you to read Appendix 1—Deploy Six Basic Elements of Leadership. This should enrich your sense of how to create leadership options for yourself.

Do not create just one option! Options energize potential. Create parallel options for yourself. Real ones. Even if your second option is not nearly as attractive as the main option at hand, having a viable alternative is crucial to your success. A second option also allows you to gain a greater perspective on the first option, thus seeing it in a better light. Remember: Create options in parallel!

5. *Choices.* If you follow these suggestions, sooner rather than later an opportunity will come your way. If you've done your homework, you will have at least two real options to choose from when the moment comes to make a decision. Go back to your list of BRAVE preferences, ideal job criteria, and long-term goals. Look at your options. Think through what they are likely to bring you. Compare options by weighting your criteria and evaluating each option's results.

Gut check: Once you've made your choice, write it down and go to sleep. If you wake up in the morning feeling good, then you've probably made a good decision. If you wake up in the morning with your gut indicating that you have made a mistake, you misled yourself. Most likely, you erred in weighting your ideal job criteria. It's okay to have misled yourself, just so long as you have the maturity and mechanism to make yourself aware of it. Your gut is that mechanism.

The Five-Step Career Plan exercise should be reviewed periodically throughout your career as your parameters change. By doing so you will continue to: (1) understand yourself and your goals, (2) create options, and (3) select the best option that best matches your strengths, values, interests, and goals. You can consider this exercise over a short-term, midterm or long-term time frame.

Over the *short term*, you can't change your strengths. You are what you are and where you are and you should focus on creating options that can take advantage of your existing strengths and position. This means that you should concentrate on understanding your own strengths and helping others understand them.

Over the *midterm*, you can expand and sharpen your strengths and take a measured approach to deploying them and creating real leadership momentum. Look for ways to develop them by getting involved in projects both inside the company and outside that afford you the opportunity to stretch, learn, and practice those skills. If you are proactively building your strengths, people often take it as a sign that you are meant for leadership.

Over the *long term*, decide what strengths you'll need to have to achieve your long-term goals. Continually use the tools in this chapter to discover what you need to learn to move to the next level. As Charan and Drotter discuss in *The Leadership Pipeline*, different strengths are required to manage yourself, to manage others, to manage managers, to manage functions, or to manage an entire business.²

Virtually all the leaders we've ever talked to readily admit that along the leadership path they continually learned . . . that they had more to learn. Thus, if you want to move to different levels of leadership

²Charan, Ram, Drotter, Stephen, and Noel, James. *The Leadership Pipeline* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001).

over time, you're going to have to build new strengths, supplementing your existing talents with new knowledge and skills. With a long-term view you can and should invest in appropriate learning and in getting yourself into positions and assignments that allow you to practice new leadership skills.

Crucial Strengths

Yes, we have told you to pick roles that match your strengths and that allow you to leverage them best. But that doesn't mean you should ignore key skill sets that do not fall into your strengths bucket. Some strengths are nice to have, others are must-haves if you are in a leadership role. Different roles require different strengths.

One undeniably crucial skill for all leaders is communication. Leadership and communication are inextricably related. If communicating is not one of your strengths, you *must* put a plan in place to improve your abilities in this area. Buying a lottery ticket might give you a better chance at winning than trying to succeed with poor communication skills. To increase your muscle in this area, you'll have to become aware what your limitations are so you'll know how to extend yourself beyond them in the future.

Each role will have a few crucial skills that will be required for a leader to possess to be successful. As you complete the Career Planning exercises it is essential that you know the crucial strengths required for the role you are seeking. Once they are known you must honestly assess whether there is a match with your strengths. The moment you find that you are lacking in a crucial strength, start working on a plan to develop that skill as best you can and have an augmentation plan in place if you can not get that particular strength to the level required for the role. It is essential that you are thorough in determining the crucial strengths required for a role and that you are honest in your self-assessment match.

Communicate Your Readiness for Leadership

Warning: You should only move on to this next step after you have thoroughly and honestly completed the earlier exercises.

Once you've begun to know yourself, the next step is to help others know you. Now that you've gotten a good handle on your strengths, values, and goals, you are ready to think through positioning them in a proactive and methodical way. The simple exercise of

knowing your strengths and goals will set in motion a leadership dynamic where you signal your leadership qualities to others, they attribute these qualities to you, others still begin to see these qualities, and opportunities for leadership emerge. The point here is to make this a deliberate and conscious plan, something you control rather than wait for random luck to fall your way.

We've broken down the components of communicating leadership into a set of six basic elements that you can deploy deliberately and consistently. Here are the headlines. See Appendix I on leadership for more discussion.

1. Listen and observe first.
2. Talk in order to listen and connect better.
3. Imagine the leaders' or key stakeholders' perspectives.
4. Identify potential areas for leadership.
5. Lead through actions that communicate.
6. Carpe Diem.

Communication Pillars

Before you even accept a job, your communication plan should begin to take shape. As you position yourself for leadership in a new role, you should already be fortifying the foundations of what will eventually become your comprehensive communication plan. We will ask you to think strategically about communication through this book and in great detail in Chapter 8, but as a start you will want to be aware of the three pillars of a comprehensive communication plan. Just as a computer program calls up subroutines on a regular basis in the background to make sure that things are always running smoothly, this book refers to these pillars in several different places. The three pillars are:

1. *You*. You can't communicate anything meaningful to anyone anywhere anytime until you know who you are and what's important to you. The exercises in this chapter are designed to help you develop that awareness. What you say is only credible and sustainable if it's delivered in your own voice backed up by your actions and your values. **Be. Do. Say.**
2. *Target audience*. Communication must be received to have any impact. Knowing whom you are communicating with, what's

important to them, and how they will receive that communication is just as important as knowing who you are.

3. *Message.* You can't get people to do anything differently unless they believe there is a reason for them to do that (platform for change), they can picture themselves in a better place (vision), and they know what to do to be part of the way forward (call to action). These are the basic points from which your message will be derived and that you'll be driving over and over again in your communication.

At this point you should begin thinking about each of these pillars as essential elements to your communication campaign. The first pillar you'll want to solidify is you, but be aware that every interaction you have will provide key information on your target audience and your message. Do not miss those opportunities.

This is another tool we will return to again in the communication chapter. We introduce this tool now with a focus on positioning yourself for leadership. It is never too early to begin to develop your message. As you position yourself for leadership you'll want to develop a message that is true and that communicates your leadership potential and style.

Let's go into a little more depth on the tools and on your message that you can use as you position yourself for leadership.

Identify Them—Your Target Audience

Start by getting clear on whom you are communicating with, what they are thinking, doing and know.

- With whom are you communicating? Be as specific as you can and include everyone and all groups that can have an impact, including your targets, their primary influencers, and other influencers. Answer each of the following questions with your entire target audience in mind.
- What are they currently thinking and doing? What's most important to them?
- What do they need to stop doing, keep doing, or change how they are doing it?
- What do they need to know to move them from their current state to the desired state?

Choose the Right Message for You and for Them in Your Particular Context

Think through the platform for change, vision, and call to action. Then distill them down to one driving message and your three communication points.

1. *Platform for change.* The things that will make your audience members realize they need to do something different than what they have been doing.
2. *Vision.* Picture of a brighter future—that your audience members can picture themselves in.
3. *Call to action.* Actions the audience can take to get there.

To illustrate these points, imagine a pack of polar bears. They are playing on an ice flow. It's melting! It's drifting out to sea! They're either going to drown or starve to death. Either scenario is not good. [Platform for change.] The good news is that there's some food nearby that's sitting on land. The bears could play there, be safe, and get food. [Vision.] So, the lead polar bears come up with a plan to depart the drifting ice and safely swim to land. [Call to action.]

Keep in mind that everyone who is affected by your leadership will want to know the same thing: "How will the changes impact me?" So, when you are crafting your communication points, be sure to be able to explain (1) how the changes will affect them, and (2) how they enable them to be more successful themselves.

Great communication pivots off a central message. For example, "We're going to be ranked 1 or 2 or we're going to get out" was one of Jack Welch's early messages at GE. Or, "a car in every driveway" was the overarching message Ford deployed early in the twentieth century. The purpose of an overarching message is to anchor everything else in your communication plan. A good place to find it is in your vision of the future.

Writing about Rochester, New York's former school superintendent at the time of his hiring, Jean Claude Brizard and Meaghan McDermott said,

His message for Rochester is that we must "make education personal."

"I read somewhere once that every child is a work of art," he said.

“Our task is to help create a masterpiece out of each. We need to get teachers and principals to a place where they can track the progress of each student and create the proper enrichment and intervention for each.”

He said he wants to create an environment in the district where if he asks a school principal about a specific student and their dreams, aspirations, struggles and achievement, he and school leaders will be able to have a meaningful dialogue about that child’s future.³

Voice

Find your voice, the outward expression of your underlying attitudes and values appropriate for the context you’re facing. This will come to life in your behaviors, the way you relate to others, and the environment you create. If you’re using a voice that is not authentically yours, it won’t work. Make the effort to discover your own voice.

Your message and voice are inextricably linked—if not the same thing.

The greatest impact comes when three things intersect:

1. You and what’s important to you in terms of behaviors, way of relating to others, attitudes, values, and environment.
2. Your audience’s character or culture and its readiness for change.
3. The situational context and the importance and urgency of the need for change.

When you get those in line you will find the message and the voice you need to inspire and enable others to feel the way you want them to feel and do the things you need them to do.

Position Yourself: Summary and Implications

Don’t underestimate the value of investing in your own positioning.

- Know your leadership potential: identify your preferences and existing strengths and talents that you can turn into strengths appropriate to meet your long-term goals.

³Meaghan M. McDermott, “Brizard takes city school district’s reins today,” *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*, January 2, 2008. (Brizard has since moved on to head up Chicago’s schools.)

- Build a career plan—short-, mid-, and long-term goals. Showcase your strengths, develop your skills, stretch yourself.
- Demonstrate your readiness for leadership: lead something, whether it's a major project or just the team outing.
- Be aware of the communication pillars and work to solidify you first while constantly gathering information to help to identify your target audience and message.

QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK YOURSELF

- Do I understand my strengths?
 - Am I aware of the crucial strengths required for the roles I am seeking?
 - Do I understand what motivates me?
 - Do I understand my own preferences so I can determine fit?
 - Am I ready to lead?
 - Am I prepared to demonstrate that readiness to lead?
-

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TOOL 1.1

BRAVE Preferences*

Behavioral Preferences

ACTIONS more individual|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... more team-based

DECISION MAKING hierarchical|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... collaborative

CONTROL POINTS written/systematic|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... verbal/face-to-face

OTHERS _____

Relationship Preferences

COMMUNICA-TION formal|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... informal

INTELLECTUAL DEBATE surface-level|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... in-depth

CONFLICT avoided/destructive|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... welcome/constructive

OTHERS _____

Attitude

BUY-IN TO PURPOSE not much|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... fully committed

IDENTITY subgroup bias|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... one-team bias

POWER controlled|.....|.....|.....|.....|..... diffused

OTHER OBSERVATIONS _____

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TOOL 1.1 (continued)

Values

LEARNING	directive	collaborative/ shared
RISK APPETITE	protect what is	risk more/gain more
TIME HORIZON	shorter term	longer-term, multiyear

UNDERLYING BELIEFS _____

Environmental Preferences

OFFICE LAYOUT	walled	open
OFFICE DECOR/ DRESS	formal	casual

OTHER INSIGHTS: _____

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TOOL 1.1b

BRAVE Preferences Guide

Behaviors

ACTIONS: Do you prefer to act more on your own or with a team?

DECISION MAKING: Do you prefer bosses to make decisions and tell subordinates what to do or more team-based collaborative co-creation and consultation?

CONTROL POINTS: Do you prefer a business that is managed in writing systematically or more verbally and face-to-face?

OTHER: Note any other behavioral preferences that give you clues as to “The way you prefer things to be done around here.”

Relationships

COMMUNICATION: The scale goes from more formal to less formal modes and manners.

INTELLECTUAL DEBATE: Are you more comfortable with surface-level, polite conversations or more in-depth probing, discussion and debate?

CONFLICT: Do you prefer to avoid conflict because it is destructive or welcome it as a constructive way to move ideas forward?

OBSERVATIONS RE USE OF CREDIT & BLAME, ETC. other uses of credit and blame.

TOOL 1.1b (continued)

Attitude

BUY-IN TO PURPOSE: How important is purpose to you?

IDENTITY: Are you more comfortable identifying with yourself, a sub-group, a group/division or the organization as a whole – one-team?

POWER: An organization’s attitude to power is closely related to the way it makes decisions. Whether power is institutional, personal, or resource-based, figure out how tightly you prefer it to be controlled or diffused.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS: Note other things about your attitudes.

Values

LEARNING: Determine if you prefer to be directed around what and how to learn or whether you prefer learning to be more collaborative and shared.

RISK APPETITE: Determine whether you’re happier in an organization that cares more about protecting what it is or gaining what it doesn’t have, but could have – risking more to gain more.

TIME HORIZON: Determine whether you prefer an organization that is more focused on shorter time-frames or longer time-frames.

UNDERLYING BELIEFS: Note any other core beliefs that are relevant.

Environment

OFFICE LAYOUT: Do you prefer more formal walled offices vs. more casual open spaces?

OFFICE DÉCOR: Preferences re: formality vs. casualness of dress and work spaces.

OTHER INSIGHTS: Note other environmental preferences.

TOOL 1.2

Five-Step Career Plan*

1. List your LIKES and DISLIKES

Activities

Jobs

Situations

Lifestyle

Other

2. List your IDEAL JOB CRITERIA categorized as follows

Good for others (impact on others, match with personal values, influence on organization)

Good for me (enjoyable work/activities, fit with life interests, reward, recognition, respect)

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TOOL 1.2 (continued)

Good at it (match between activities and strengths, learning, development, resume builder)

- Life interests:
- Application of technology
- Quantitative analysis
- Theory development, conceptual thinking
- Creative production
- Counseling and mentoring
- Managing people and relationships
- Enterprise control
- Influence through language and ideas

3. Identify your LONG-TERM GOALS

4. Build a broad range of OPTIONS that meet your long-term goals

5. Make CHOICES by evaluating your options against your criteria

Finally, perform a *gut check*.
