



Ten Keys to Successful Leadership Development

Gaining better awareness of our own nature, along with the ability to think outside of our own immediate concerns, illuminates the path of better leadership.

That choice of words is deliberate because leadership—like much that's worthwhile in life—is a path rather than a destination.

We take the first steps on the leadership path by learning, as young people, how to follow instructions and be good followers.

As we continue on this path, we gain experience, insight, and (if we're paying attention) wisdom. If we're extremely lucky, we'll encounter a mentor who can flatten our learning curve a bit and speed the progression to positions of greater responsibility. But the journey on the path of successful leadership development continues, even then.



Only 11% of surveyed organizations reported having a “strong” or “very strong” leadership bench.

That's the lowest corporate self-confidence rating in the past 10 years.

Many of us have suffered under the poor leadership of someone who thought they knew everything about running a team or an organization, someone who had clearly abandoned the leadership development path at some point. Continuous training from HR is necessary to help both these wayward leaders and their employees keep their minds—and their hearts—open to self-improvement.

For HR leaders and managers, the keys to successful leadership aren't made of steel. They're matters of flesh and blood.

Just like the employees who make up every organization.



Key #1: Self-Awareness

If you carry only one key on your ring, let this be the one. Until you develop sufficient [self-awareness](#), your strengths will be mostly beyond reach, and your development areas will be difficult to see. Research reveals that leaders with better self-awareness are more effective in their positions, enjoy better relationships on the job, and suffer from less work stress.

According to a [University of Pennsylvania leader mindfulness study](#), participants linked improved self-awareness to measurable positive changes, such as:

- 100% reported significant improvement in effectiveness.
- 79% described more effective workplace relationships.
- 86% were better at identifying and managing their emotions.
- 81% credited improved emotional self-awareness with a reduction in stress.

“Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.”

Carl Jung

How do you acquire this key leadership skill?

Many successful HR managers include psychometric assessments like the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator](#)[®] (MBTI[®]) assessment on the leadership developmental path.

The MBTI framework serves as an honest mirror for self-reflection, leading to greater self-awareness.

Taking stock of personal strengths, weaknesses, and tendencies in the workplace unlocks a potential leader's ability to identify personality characteristics to sustain, and areas that could use improvement.

Discovering motivational drivers and limitations by engaging with a development tool like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment can help you understand your personal leadership style, a realization that can help you succeed in any organization.



Key #2: Awareness of Others

Add awareness of others to self-awareness and you have both sides of a very important coin.

It's critical to understand your own emotions to be able to leverage them in your favor. It's also important for developing leaders to be able to pick up on the social cues of others in the workplace.

We're talking about [emotional intelligence](#), and among other things it means that leaders have to demonstrate empathy to employees to contribute to a positive corporate culture.

And the more developed a leader's self-awareness and awareness of others can be, the better they'll understand similarities and differences with their employees.

"We cannot safely assume that other people's minds work on the same principles as our own. All too often, others with whom we come in contact do not reason as we reason, or do not value the things we value, or are not interested in what interests us."

Isabel Briggs Myers

The four components of emotional intelligence, according to researchers John Mayer and Peter Salovey (who coined the term in 1990), are:



Self-awareness—as described earlier.



Self-management—the ability to manage your emotions (especially in stressful situations), to stay positive, and keep your impulses in check.



Social awareness—the ability to “read the room.” In other words, recognizing the emotional dynamics at play in your organization and being aware of others.



Relationship management—the ability to coach, mentor, influence others, and resolve conflict.



Key #3: Solid Communication Habits

Most human resources training sessions for leaders stress the importance of good communication habits. Here’s why.

Effective communication depends heavily on awareness of self and others. Leaders have to be aware of their own state of mind, perspectives, and biases when communicating with employees. Are you feeling stressed? Do you have a headache? Too much caffeine today? Tiny factors like these can make us start off on the wrong foot, and developing habits that mitigate or even lessen the frustrations of the day will pay off in the form of good workplace relationships.

People who complete the MBTI assessment gain an advantage in communication. This is because they’ve learned about their own personality and communication preferences.

Even if they don't know the MBTI results of another person, increased self-awareness of their own communication style can help them:

- Be aware of their own biases.
- Avoid assuming their perspective is absolute truth.
- Understand why another person may see things from a different perspective.

Effective leaders have a good awareness of others and can manage their relationships well. Strong communication skills help this to happen.



Sherrie Haynie, Director of US Professional Services for The Myers-Briggs Company, uses these eight components to define inclusive leadership:

- Seeking diverse perspectives
- Flexibility
- Empathy
- Emotional intelligence
- Openness/transparency
- Awareness of personal bias
- Leading for team trust and engagement
- Leveraging the value of differences to support effectiveness

The keys to successful leadership development are mutually supportive. Part of promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace is understanding that people have [different preferences and approaches to problems](#), and that it's a good thing.

Diversity strengthens an organization by providing a broader base of experience and expertise.

And while nearly every company prioritizes diversity, it takes inclusive leaders to fully engage the strengths of a diverse workforce.

Being [inclusive](#) means making each person in an organization feel respected and valued as a team member, regardless of how closely their personal characteristics align with your own.



Key #5: Awareness of Team- and Self-Stress Triggers

We mentioned the combination of self-awareness and “reading the room” as necessary to good communication habits. Let’s drill down on a broader sense of awareness.

All leaders feel stress, but it’s how they react to it that matters.

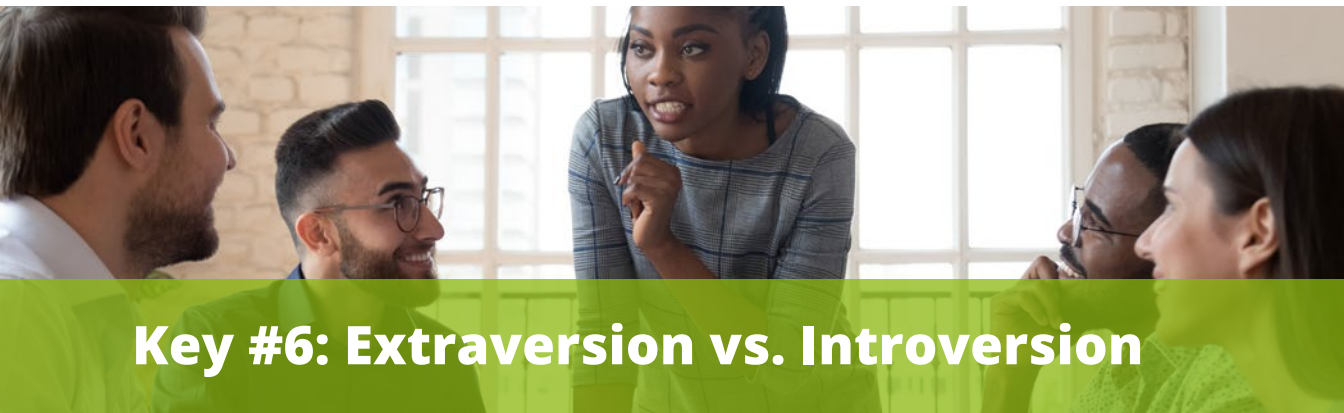
A team often mirrors the mood of its leader, and this is exacerbated when a leader storms into a room—especially if it’s full of already-stressed employees. One thing you should never do is pass on your own feelings of stress and associated behaviors to others. Your team needs your considered leadership, and they’re entitled to the most conscious and mindful version of yourself.

Knowing your own stress symptoms (behaviors), triggers (internal and external), and remedies to stress go a long way toward becoming a better leader and benefitting your team.

Some stress-inducing red flags leaders should watch for include:

- Rushing from meeting to meeting (in-person or virtual) and feeling unprepared for each.
- Feeling that one must personally take on every important task.
- Failure to resolve employee conflicts.
- Operating under a “closed door” policy with no time (or patience) to hear employees out.

This isn't a complete list, of course. But these situations will not only stress out a leader, they'll ruin workplace peace and well-being for everyone involved. On the other hand, a self-aware leader who makes it their business to stay abreast of the “vibe” at the workplace can often resolve issues before they become problems.



Key #6: Extraversion vs. Introversion

The MBTI assessment helps people identify how they are energized—either by preferences for Extraversion or for Introversion. This has useful insights for understanding how different individuals take part in brainstorming.

People who prefer Extraversion can take over the room, dominating discussions and leaving little space for those preferring Introversion to contribute their equally valuable input. It's not done out of malice or even intentionally, it's just how different personalities communicate ideas.

Those preferring Introversion will generally think through options in their mind before sharing with the rest of the group. Often, this takes more time so they'll wait for a pause in the conversation to speak up about their opinion or findings. But if the brainstorming session hasn't been designed with time at the end for a little quiet, teams often lose the input of those preferring Introversion.

Top 4 MBTI types most likely to be executives:

ESTJ 20.8%

ENTJ 13.4%

ISTJ 13%

ENTP 10.7%

In a global sample, Introverts make up 57% of the population.

Leaders can compensate for this imbalance by encouraging the Introverts in the room, asking them specific questions, leaving 10 seconds of quiet after brainstorming before moving on, and ensuring their contribution to the team is recognized.

It's also important to recognize that the more senior a leader is, the more statistically likely they are to have a preference for Extraversion. This is because our society generally prefers and rewards extraverted behavior.

Some leaders have learned skills and tactics effective enough to naturally bring Introverts into the fold. Others benefit from a more formal style of meeting in which each person is recognized in turn to share their insights into a problem and its solution.

One way to include those with preferences for Introversion is to wait 10 seconds after you've asked a question and the Extraverts have answered. Or, when asking for questions, wait 10 seconds after you've received the last question before moving on. Try it: count to 10 in your head and see if you have a few more people adding to the conversation.

Find your own best method, but be sure to account for the differences in your team members' styles of communication.



Key #7: Empathy

Empathy is a step beyond developing an awareness of others. It means putting yourself in another's place. Train yourself to ask, "How would I feel if I were them?" or "What would I do next in their shoes?" And then answer those questions honestly.

But don't stop there.

A leader truly levels-up their empathy when they can understand that not everyone reacts identically to a given challenge, and that there's value in the varied approaches to problems that different people take.

Even when others don't choose the same option you would have chosen, ask what might motivate them in that situation. Ask how you can enable them to succeed.

A leader's job isn't to make each team member a copy of themselves. It's to empower people to be the best version of themselves possible.



Key #8: Awareness of Biases

Where did you grow up? What were you taught? What biases must you resist on a daily basis to be fair and just as a leader? What biases do you have because of your personality—for example, the way you prefer to get energized, to learn, to make decisions, and organize your time?

This is an elite level of self-awareness that requires deliberate introspection. You may not always like what you discover about your own biases, but until you honestly examine them, you'll be at their mercy.

[Bias awareness](#) is key to developing an accurate picture of yourself as a member of a team, an organization, and society. When you identify your own biases, you can begin to develop and refine yourself into a more inclusive and supportive leader.



Key #9: Growth Mindset

Regardless of your career, your education level, or your stage of life, there is always more to learn. It takes a forward-thinking mindset to venture into each day seeking new knowledge and experiences, and remaining open to innovation and change.

[Embracing a growth mindset](#) is about persistence, courage in the face of possible failure, and embracing the opportunity to learn.

A growth mindset means recognizing that even if you aren't good at something now, you can learn skills to improve—in leadership and in life.

[Want to learn more? Check out this TEDtalk by growth mindset researcher Carol Dweck.](#)



Key #10: Conflict Management

Sometimes, a dispute can reach the point where conflict management is needed to resolve it. For leaders to be successful in this area, their conflict management training must strengthen what Professor Bernstein refers to as “soft skills.” These include:

[Active listening](#) | [Empathy](#) | [Creating value in a negotiation](#)

If and when conflicts develop, a deeper understanding of personality differences can promote mutual respect and empathy between people. This allows for good outcomes.

Conclusion

Regardless of your own preferences and personality type, the Myers-Briggs framework offers a discovery process. It helps you learn who you are and understand other people better too.

With the personality insights generated by the MBTI assessment, you have the tools to develop yourself and your people in ways you might never have considered. It's the start of a fascinating journey.

According to the third-party TechValidate survey of 61 MBTI assessment users, 69% of customers improved individual leadership effectiveness with the MBTI assessment.

Third-party validated survey of 61 MBTI assessment users.

Becoming an [MBTI Certified Practitioner](#) qualifies you to administer the assessment and use it in your own leadership and team development programs. With it, you can give your people a basic framework and common vocabulary for understanding and discussing interpersonal differences. This will help your employees, and your leaders, develop the self-awareness to become the best versions of themselves on and off the job.

[Learn more about virtual and in-person MBTI Certification Programs here.](#)

Three initial steps toward professional self-assessment:

- Take stock of your strengths, vulnerabilities, and workplace tendencies.
- Identify areas for improvement.
- Anticipate pitfalls likely to appear on your journey toward being a better leader.

About us

In our fast-changing world, your edge lies in harnessing 100 percent of your talent — whether you're at work, home, college, or anywhere in between. Your success and sense of fulfillment aren't just about what you know and what you can do, they hinge on your relationships and interactions with others.

[The Myers-Briggs Company](#) empowers individuals to be the best versions of themselves by enriching self-awareness and their understanding of others. We help organizations around the world improve teamwork and collaboration, develop inspirational leaders, foster diversity, and solve their most complex people challenges.

As a Certified B Corporation®, The Myers-Briggs Company is a force for good. Our powerfully practical solutions are grounded in a deep understanding of the significant social and technological trends that affect people and organizations.

With over 60 years in assessment development and publishing, and over 30 years of consultancy and training expertise, a global network of offices, partners and certified independent consultants in 115 countries, products in 29 languages, and experience working with 88 of the Fortune 100 companies, we're ready to help you succeed.

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