



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Versatile Leadership: Do You Under-Do or Over-Do? ***February 26, 2007***

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we begin a two-part interview with Rob Kaiser, Partner in Kaplan Devries, and co-author with Bob Kaplan of the book "The Versatile Leader", as well as the Leadership Versatility Index®, a revolutionary and patented 360-degree feedback instrument. The Advisory Alliance is pleased to partner with Rob and Kaplan Devries in offering this cutting edge leadership development instrument to our clients.

David Harper: Your book deals with the "versatile" leader. What specifically do you mean by "versatile"?

Rob Kaiser: In a word, we mean well-rounded. But we've defined well-rounded in terms of specific, opposing—but complementary—ways of leading. So a versatile leader is one who can take charge and set expectations, but also empower the troops; a leader who sets the bar high and holds people accountable, yet is also supportive and sensitive to people's needs and feelings. On the organizational side, a versatile leader sees the big picture and sets direction but also drives execution and manages the details.

Harper: Why did you decide to study versatility? And why is versatility so important?

Kaiser: Consulting to executives on their development over the last 20 years, we've observed two things. First, many leaders go overboard with certain approaches to leading. Some drive hard—to the point of burnout. Others go for growth—but reach too far. Some are supportive—and are "too nice." Strengths can become weaknesses, as the saying goes. But the other side—the hidden cost of overkill—is that they don't just go overboard in some respect; they also neglect the opposing area. Our in-depth study of and consulting to executives led us to the simple conclusion that many leaders are lopsided—they do too much of this, too little of that.

We think versatility is important because leadership is a complicated balancing act. All business people know about trade-offs. Lopsided leaders make extreme tradeoffs without really thinking about it. It is more of a habit. Versatile leaders, on the other hand, don't try to maximize one thing, they try to optimize by applying the appropriate approach needed for the specific situation. Complex times call for versatile leaders.

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Harper: What are the components of versatile leadership?

Kaiser: First and foremost, versatile leadership is about behavior, and concerns being able to freely use opposing styles with equal ease, unencumbered by a bias in favor of one side and prejudice against the other. Versatility requires judgment—knowing when to use what approach; motivation—the willingness to use a given approach; and skill—being good at using that approach.

Harper: Is it connected to effective performance as a leader?

Kaiser: Absolutely. And I don't mean this anecdotally. Our program of statistical research shows that versatile leaders have employees who are more satisfied, engaged, and committed, while their teams are more cohesive and more productive. Perhaps most astonishing is the research we've done linking versatility to how leaders are regarded overall. We find that versatility accounts for about half of what separates the most well-regarded leaders from the least well regarded. So yes, there are profound linkages to effectiveness.

Next month, Rob discusses whether leadership versatility is inborn or learned, and provides detail on how the LVI is different from any other 360-degree instrument on the market.

If you'd like more information on the Leadership Versatility Index®, and how your leaders and company will benefit significantly from using it, please e-mail us at: LVI@advisoryalliance.com

You can access this and previous 60-Second Emails™, as well as subscribe to our mailing list, via this link to our website: <http://www.advisoryalliance.com/newsletter.php>

Until next month,

David

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