



The Advisory Alliance 60-Second Email™

Being A Versatile Leader ***March 28, 2007***

In this month's 60-Second Email™, we conclude 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: Is versatility similar to a trait that one is born with? Or can it be learned and developed over time?

Rob Kaiser: Yes! It seems to be both. As far as the genetics, we have not conducted any research ourselves. But the behavioral genetics research that is out there suggests that 30 to 50% of the variance in becoming a leader is related to heritable factors. They've further unpacked this and found that the genetics-leadership link is explained by personality and mental ability.

On the other hand, in our own practice we see where leaders who get feedback are able to increase their versatility by reigning in what they overdo and stepping up what they've given short shrift. Other research, like the Lessons of Experience work at the Center for Creative Leadership, also suggests that a history of challenging and diverse assignments over a career leads to a broader perspective and wider behavioral repertoire.

Harper: For a while, Emotional Intelligence, or EI, was all the rage. Leaders without it were supposedly doomed to extinction. However, experience has shown that although EI is important, it's not the only thing a leader needs to have to be successful. Can the same be said about versatility, namely, that it's important but not sufficient for effective leadership?

Kaiser: Absolutely. I would never argue that versatility is the whole game. But I'm quick to add that whatever else is important in leadership — and surely there is more — it can't be as important as versatility. This is not an opinion, but a statistical fact: since the research is clear



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that versatility accounts for half of what it means to be an effective executive, all the other factors combined can only add up to the other half.

Harper: If so, what else must a leader have to be successful?

Kaiser: Great question. We've given a lot of thought to this, but have yet to do the statistical research. My leading candidates are Integrity, Savvy/Sociopolitical skill, and Good Judgment, along with values fit with the organizational culture.

Harper: You've developed an instrument to assess a leader's versatility, the Leadership Versatility Index. Please describe it for us.

Kaiser: It is a step forward in 360 feedback. The key features are, first, a new rating scale. The 1-to-5 scale we all know has a major limitation: it assumes that "more is better" and overlooks the simple fact that sometimes leaders overdo it. Doing something often is different from doing it well. So our new scale, like Goldilocks' porridge, goes from "too little" to "too much", with "just right" in the middle.

Second, our model of leadership isn't a list of competencies; rather we follow the Noah's Ark principle and identify pairs of dimensions to reflect the dynamic tension among performance dimensions. At a high level, the big two are Forceful vs. Enabling leadership and Strategic vs. Operational leadership. Within each of these dimensions are more specific pairs of sub-dimensions. When you put it all together, you can identify how well rounded a leader's style is. Critically, it also shows you where the bulges and flat-spots are — the things leaders take to counterproductive extremes and the important things they neglect.

Harper: How is it different from other assessment tools currently on the market?

Kaiser: The too little/too much rating scale, for one, and the novel way of constructing a leadership model by pairing up the opposing but complementary dimensions that make leadership a balancing act. The report is also relatively brief — the 17 pages of largely graphical interpretation make it easy to grasp the headlines quickly, as opposed to having to wade through a tome of numbers.

I would also say that while the LVI is a behavior-based assessment, it opens the door to a



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leader's underlying psychology. That is, if you overdo something it raises the natural question: why do you go to the extreme there? What compels you? Conversely, if you underdo something it raises the other question: why are you holding back? What might happen if you were to step up in that area? The resulting conversation sheds light on underlying assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and fears that drive a leader's behavior. So you can work not only on making needed adjustments in behavior, but also at making corresponding changes in the "inner game" of leadership.

Now I've claimed that the LVI is a totally new approach. But this isn't just my opinion — this is what we hear from our colleagues who use the tool. In fact, the innovations I've described are so fresh that we were awarded a patent for this new approach to assessment in October, 2006. There really is nothing else like it.

Harper: How is it best used?

Kaiser: In a developmental context with a motivated leader and the guidance of a trained and competent facilitator. The facilitator needs to understand the ideas behind the tool and how to leverage the feedback to promote personal development to support adjustments in his or her leadership behavior.

If you'd like more information on the Leadership Versatility Index(R), 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 (TM), 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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