

THE ONLY
LEADERS
WORTH* FOLLOWING

*Why some leaders succeed, others fail,
and how the quality of our lives hangs in the balance*

TIM SPIKER

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atlanta

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*To everyone who wants to be led well
and everyone who wants to be worth following*

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It has long been held that leadership is all about execution. Leaders set direction and strategy, determine resource allocation, and develop talent while motivating the troops. Historically, these skills set the table for most leadership curricula. To be sure, they are critical skills that can't be ignored, but they exclude one simple truth: leaders cast far more than a strategic web. They project themselves onto and into everything and everyone they lead.

The *Who* of leadership reveals itself not in what leaders say (though that is important), but in what they value, where they focus, and how they treat the most vulnerable people on the team. It even shows up in the balance of inclusion versus exclusion that characterizes the leader's organizational habits.

The *Who* of leadership is often obscured by ambiguity, imprecision, and uncertainty. It seldom lends itself to precise measurement. Its applications can vary widely based on individual leaders' circumstances, capabilities, and capacities. There are no action lists to apply and no handy formulas to use. Instead, there are principles to explore that challenge conventional notions of the relationship between leaders, followers, and the endeavors they pursue.

More than 30 years ago, I was asked to journey down the road of personal development that shaped the *Who* of my leadership. My guide suggested that the same person acting in the same

ways would fail identically to how I had failed in the past. So I was asked to change . . . and to do so as quickly as possible. Pulling it off required acceptance, faith, courage, and vulnerability. Though my journey is neither perfect nor complete, I can tell you from personal experience that it has been well worth the effort. If you choose to pursue growth in the *Who* of your leadership, I believe you'll find it worth the effort as well.

In this book, Tim Spiker launches leaders into a developmental journey similar to the one I began 30 years ago. In *The Only Leaders Worth* Following*, he explains the *Who* Not What Principle* and in doing so captures the essence of the tension between leadership and followership. Based on a broad consultancy as well as organizational and hands-on experience, Tim pulls together the crucial but almost subliminal leadership qualities required to find “Whoville” (with a bow to the genius of author Theodor Seuss Geisel). This is where effective leadership flourishes based on its understanding of the roles that fear and trust play in personal and organizational performance. Leaders who learn and apply these truths to themselves will release the type of discretionary effort that is only seen when followers are engaged and unafraid.

For 48 months, Tim worked directly with Boral's Global Executive Committee taking them through the content of his *Who* Not What* leadership methodology. This has included offsite deep dives with Boral's top 100 executives discovering the impact of worldview on our outlook, judgments, and most profoundly our interpretation of the world as it presents itself through our lenses. He and his team have engaged multiple division leaders and their teams from Sydney to Singapore to Atlanta providing insight into the power of being Others

Focused once you are Inwardly Sound. These, of course, are terms of art that require detailed reflection and exposition . . . and a guide for the uninitiated.

This content is not for the faint of heart. It requires a long hard look at the imperfection that is the stuff of “us”—not perfect, broken in parts, mending in others, but trying and at times getting it right. We are best judged, of course, by our followers, not ourselves.

I have known Tim for over 15 years as a colleague and friend. He continues to teach me about important things in life. Our dialogue on the human condition will, I hope, follow me to my grave. Let him lead you for a while and see if his insights can help inform who you are and, in doing so, help you reach your potential as a leader.

MIKE KANE

Husband to Kathleen; Father of McHenry, Padraic, Heather, Anna, James, and Daniel; Grandfather of Brendan, Cathan, Kieran, Claire, and Tessie; Son, Brother, and Friend;

and also,

Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director
Boral Limited
North Sydney, Australia

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"It can even be a single note which defines the entire song."

LEON REDBONE

INTRODUCTION

I'd just moved into a new office in my company's Southeastern U.S. headquarters in Atlanta. It was a nondescript room with neutral-colored paint, a coordinated desk and filing cabinet, and a tall skinny window looking out on the parking lot. There was nothing on the walls yet, save that most essential and splendid of all office items: the whiteboard.

Drawn on that whiteboard was a graphical depiction of leadership. Some people snuggle up with a good book. Others settle in to watch a well-directed movie. I get cozy with leadership models. Not many people spend their afternoons doing such a thing. Truth is, I wasn't supposed to be doing that either. I was supposed to be working on a weekly report. But there I was instead, doing what I'd done for most of my professional life: pondering leadership.

I gazed at the circles, lines, and words in that diagram. I'd discussed and debated them with many colleagues over the years. I stared and thought and thought and stared. I wasn't a sleuth attempting to solve a mystery. I wasn't trying to uncover a new insight. I was just thinking. And then the insight found me. It hit me as clearly as hearing a single note on a piano—a strong, resonant middle C. It felt as if a divine message had arrived simultaneously in my gut, heart, head, and soul. It was simple. It had been true all along. How had I not seen it before?

I rushed down the hall to my mentor's office. It was fitting to

be in his presence at this moment. He, more than anyone else I'd ever worked for, encouraged me to press forward in this work even when my efforts were complicated and clumsy. I scribbled on his whiteboard as quickly as I could, my hands unable to keep up with the ideas in my head. My arrows and lines were drawn so sloppily they could have passed for modern art. I concluded the flurry of drawing and writing with the divine message that had struck the whole of myself. I spoke it rather than writing it. It was three simple words: *Who* Not What*.

I didn't invent the *Who* Not What Principle* any more than I invented gravity. It simply is. And just like gravity, *Who* Not What* has affected every person in every country in every age since the beginning of time. It is a seminal truth within leadership. The reach of *Who* Not What* extends as far and wide as the impact of leadership itself. And it does so whether we're conscious of it or not. We are hit squarely and tangibly by the reality of *Who* Not What* in our lives each and every day.

Yet we rarely talk about it.

It's my vocational calling to pull back the curtain on *Who* Not What*—to expose its hidden existence, identify the masks it wears, and foster dialogue about it. In doing so, I hope to enable leaders and followers alike to experience better leadership, better results, and better lives.

Please know in advance that this is not a how-to book. Not because there aren't methods and practices available to help us become more effective leaders, but because I want us to stay focused on understanding these concepts in depth. Moving too

quickly to “how-to” diminishes the long-term impact of the truths presented because it lessens the depth of our understanding of them. So for now, put away the to-do lists and checkboxes and give yourself the freedom to immerse yourself deeply in understanding every aspect and nuance of the *Who* Not What Principle*.

As you read, take a look for yourself. Consider your own experiences and test if *Who* Not What* accounts for much of what you've seen, heard, and experienced about leadership. If it does (and I have no doubt it will), it will then be your turn to share the truth of *Who* Not What* with others and leverage it in your own life as well.



Tim Spiker

CHAPTER ONE

You Already Know

WHAT YOUR GUT-LEVEL INTUITION ALREADY UNDERSTANDS
ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND THE *WHO* NOT WHAT* PRINCIPLE

"Intuition will tell the thinking mind where to look next."

JONAS SALK



Let's begin by putting the most important idea in this book on the table right here and right now. If you remember nothing else from this book, please (as in, I'm begging you) remember this next statement:

***3/4 OF YOUR EFFECTIVENESS AS A LEADER
COMES FROM WHO YOU ARE, NOT WHAT YOU DO**

This is the *Who* Not What Principle*. It explains why some leaders reach their potential while other leaders don't. It tells us why some leaders help create fulfilling lives for those they lead while other leaders suck the life out of their followers. It clarifies why some leaders consistently achieve bottom-line results while so many other leaders can't. In short, *Who* Not What* tells us who's worth following and who isn't.

After 15 years of studying leadership, I'm convinced the principle of *Who* Not What* is the single most important truth about leadership. It also happens to be one of the most underappreciated, and therefore neglected, truths about leadership.

When you read “3/4 of your effectiveness as a leader comes from who you are, not what you do,” I don't know whether your defenses went up, your spirit said, “Yes!” or you wondered, “Could that possibly be true?” Regardless, what follows is a series of real-life examples, psychology, and data (yes, data!) that reveal that the single greatest determiner of our success and failure as leaders is how well developed we are as people. We'll investigate what it means to be a well-developed *Who*. (Spoiler alert: It's about a whole lot more than having good character.) We'll also explore a metaphor for leadership that displays how *Who* Not What* influences every action a leader takes. We'll finish by addressing common misunderstandings about *Who* Not What* and WIIFY . . . ATROTW (What's In It For You . . . And The Rest Of The World) when you understand and apply this truth about leadership.

Footnotes, by their very nature, do not take center stage. They live in the background even as they shape and support the conclusions we come to. Likewise is the relationship between the *Who* Not What Principle* and leadership. So I've decided to leverage the footnote concept to help us stay conscious of the *Who* Not What Principle*. On the front cover of this book beside the word “worth” and throughout its pages, you will see numerous asterisks. Each one is a visual cue to remember that the *Who* Not What Principle* is at work behind the scenes in every leadership story. *Who* is what makes us worth (or not worth) following.

The leaders chronicled in this book run the gamut from ex-

tremely effective to grossly deficient. Please note that I routinely alter the specifics of their stories—names of people and companies, genders, industries, departments, job titles, locations—to maintain anonymity wherever appropriate. I change only the inconsequential particulars of these stories. Their substance and critical details have been preserved as valuable examples from which to learn.¹

MY STORY

If you're the type of person that requires statistically significant evidence to begin exploration of a concept or idea, I encourage you to jump to Chapter 3 and start there. Once you've consumed the data there, come back to read Chapters 1 and 2. For everyone else, our first step on this journey is for you to see that you don't have to study leadership for decades to see the truth of *Who* Not What*. You already understand it. You intuitively recognize it as soon as you have an opportunity to see who a leader is as a person. To illustrate this, let's dive into a leadership story that's personal to me.

I'd just landed what I considered to be my dream job 10 to 15 years earlier in life than I'd thought possible. I was excited as I packed up my car to leave Phoenix, Arizona, to work for the marketing and brand management division of a technology firm based in Charlotte, North Carolina. But within six months of the move, my excitement was gone. I loved the content of my work, but life was difficult within the company. Dysfunction and poor communication reigned. Numerous talented colleagues left or planned to leave. The corporate environment felt toxic, especially in our division. In three short years that felt like three *long* years, no fewer than five different people led our team.

A TALE OF TWO LEADERS

Of those five leaders, Martin and Dave created a dichotomy that put *Who* Not What* on clear display. One of them turned out to be the best leader for whom I’ve ever worked. The other was . . . well . . . he was closer to the opposite end of the spectrum. They led me in virtually identical environments: same company, culture, colleagues, projects, and economic conditions. The only variable was who was leading me. It was the perfect experiment to answer the question, “How much difference does a leader make?”

Rather than me telling you who the better leader was between Martin and Dave, let’s play a game. Table 1 (below) contains

Martin	Dave
Political Science, United States Naval Academy	Liberal Arts, Northern Iowa University
Master of Philosophy, Baylor University	JD, Loyola (Chicago) University, School of Law
Managing Director, Boutique Marketing Firm	South American Division Executive VP, International Chemicals Company
Exceptional at convincing his constituents to buy into his ideas	Expert in value creation through deals (acquisitions, divestitures, joint ventures, and negotiations)
Excellent public speaker and an acceptable business strategist	Excellent business strategist and acceptable public speaker

Table 1: Martin vs. Dave

selections from Martin’s and Dave’s résumés. Read these and then guess which leader was not only the best leader I’ve ever worked for, but also one of the best leaders I’ve observed in all of my years of leadership consulting and coaching.

So, what’s your guess? Who was the exceptional leader? This isn’t a rhetorical question. I really want you to guess. Actually, don’t just guess. Let’s do one other thing as well. After choosing Martin or Dave, indicate on the scale below (Figure 1) how sure you are of your answer. Don’t skip logging this piece of information. It’s a critical part of what comes next.



Figure 1: Who Was the Exceptional Leader?

The late commentator Paul Harvey was famous for offering intriguing, improbable opening lines. The titles and first few sentences of his radio stories made listeners think, “How on earth could that be true?” Then Harvey would say, “And now, the rest of the story.” In the minutes that followed, he would tell the full story, weaving its nuances until his unbelievable opening lines morphed into the only plausible explanation for what had happened. Harvey left his listeners thinking, “Now I get it. It all makes sense.”

And now, the rest of *my* story.

In the table that follows (Table 2) you’ll find more details about Martin and Dave. These are real experiences with and observations of each leader.

Martin	Dave
During my first week of employment, Martin left me to manage a room full of potential clients—company presidents, no less—whom I had just met. He returned 15 minutes later and whispered in my ear, “That’s all the development you’ll ever get from me.”	After stepping into leadership of the division, Dave immediately ascertained I was unhappy and requested a meeting to hear my concerns and frustrations.
Martin required me to cancel a vacation the day before it began—I’d scheduled it a year in advance—because he wanted me to fix a miscommunication issue for which he was the primary player. Before the week ended, he forgot I’d canceled my vacation to resolve the issue.	Rather than passing pressure down the chain of command as senior leaders placed it on him, Dave absorbed it. This created space for his subordinates to do their best work, unfettered by the pressure and politics of the organization. He did this without concern for how it might negatively impact his compensation and upward mobility within the firm.
Martin didn’t once admit fault or contribution to any difficulties within the division or with our constituents.	Dave had a clear understanding of his personal shortcomings and shared them with the team.
Martin routinely got excited about the magnitude of potential revenue from new customers but rarely displayed passion for the art and craft of our work.	When offered a job opportunity outside the company that perfectly fit his talents and experience, Dave called me to ensure I would be okay if he left the company.

Table 2: Martin vs. Dave—The Rest of the Story

Now guess again who the exceptional leader was. Then, just as you did the first time around, indicate how sure you are of your answer on the scale below (Figure 2). If you tend to be suspicious, let me assure you this is not a trick question.



Figure 2: Who Was the Exceptional Leader?—Round #2

Who did you choose as the exceptional leader this time? We both know you chose Dave as the exceptional leader. And you’re correct. He was the exceptional leader. Not only are you correct, but if you’re like most people, your confidence in your answer was also much higher the second time around. This displays two things:

1. The truth of *Who* Not What*
2. Your intuitive understanding of its existence

When people see the first table, they’re divided about whether Martin or Dave was the exceptional leader, and confidence in those guesses tends toward the “I’m totally guessing” section of the scale. But after “the rest of the story,” nearly everyone identifies Dave as the exceptional leader, and they do so with an extremely high level of confidence in their answers.

The first table lists titles, education, and skills—things we often associate with effective leadership. But it didn't tell you definitively whether Dave or Martin was the better leader, did it? The second table reveals a little bit about who Dave and Martin were as people. And that made all the difference in helping you decide.

THE QUALITIES OF A GREAT LEADER

If you were to create a list of qualities to describe Dave as a person based on the second table, your list might include emotional maturity, compassion, security (as opposed to insecurity), willingness to sacrifice on behalf of others, thoughtfulness, humility, and transparency. An identical exercise with Martin might include self-centeredness, inconsiderateness, greed, lack of self-awareness, and insecurity.

But you didn't need to make a list weighing the attributes of Martin and Dave to know who you'd rather follow. You understood intuitively who the better leader was once you knew who the more well-developed person was. We know in our guts who we'd run through the proverbial wall for and who we wouldn't. You don't have to read a book about leadership to know that Dave was the better leader.

I still remember the first one-on-one conversation I had with Dave. We had a division meeting where he was introduced as our new leader. After the usual project review conversations, Dave asked to meet with me about a key project.

About 37 seconds into the conversation he said, "We can talk about the project stuff later. Tell me, how frustrated are you?"

By the end of that conversation, I knew Dave was a man worthy of trust. I decided to share with him something I hadn't

shared with anyone else: I was in the process of updating my résumé. I planned to begin a job search within a couple of weeks. I also told him that in order to endure the current situation, I'd need more money. Dave asked me to hold off on looking for a new job for a couple of months and told me he'd look into the raise. He asked me to give him a chance to make some changes. I agreed.

What ensued was a massive change for me as a follower. In just 60 days, Dave created an entirely different atmosphere within the division. He shared who he was, faults and all. He openly encouraged the group regarding the work we did. And he did all that while maintaining a high value on quality work and profits. Over the course of those 60 days and the months that followed, can you guess what happened to my need for more money? It disappeared. It turns out, more money wasn't what I needed. What I needed was a better leader.

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For the year that followed, I reported to Dave and enjoyed my work exponentially more than I had in my first year at the company. Then, one evening, I got a call from Dave. He was seriously considering a job offer and wanted to talk to me about it. His description of the opportunity sounded tailor-made for him—a familiar industry, a major leadership role, and significantly improved compensation. It was obvious he should take it. So why was he calling me? He wanted to make sure I'd be okay if he took the job. That's right. Knowing how much internal

support he was giving me behind the scenes, he wanted to make sure *I* would be okay if he left. That's the kind of person Dave was. He's still that kind of person today. That's the kind of leader for whom people run through walls. And that's something you intuitively understood when you learned a little bit about who Dave was as a person.

So you've now been introduced to the principle of *Who* Not What* and your intuitive ability to recognize its importance in leadership. But let's not stop with my experiences. Every person I have ever worked with has stories both good and bad that point to the existence of *Who* Not What*. That's why we're now going to switch gears and focus on you. Let's take a look at how your experiences as a follower point to the truth of *Who* Not What*.

*“The human heart feels things the eyes cannot see,
and knows what the mind cannot understand.”*

ROBERT VALETT

CHAPTER TWO

Heartfelt

HOW YOU HAVE FELT THE IMPACT OF *WHO* NOT WHAT*
IN YOUR EXPERIENCES AS A FOLLOWER



I'm not the only one who has experienced the truth of *Who* Not What*. You have, too. To show you how, let's do a survey with a sample size of one (that one would be you). Take a few minutes to make a list of the best leaders you have personally followed. Most people write down between one and three names. If you've been blessed to follow many great leaders, limit your list to your top five. Ready? Go.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

If you're like many people, your list included the names of bosses early in your career, parents, high school teachers, middle

school sports coaches, aunts, uncles, clergy, and college advisors.

But *why* did you choose those particular leaders? Was it because of their stalwart strategic capabilities or their excellence in producing quarterly results or their skill in scheduling and project planning? Probably not. If you look below the surface, you'll see that those leaders took the time to care about you. They selflessly invested in you. They were authentic and honest with you. They cared more about what they were giving to the relationship than what they could get from it. You wrote down those names because of who those people were to you.

These are your *Who* Not What* stories.

COACH SHONDA

I was once facilitating an exercise with a couple hundred people. It was similar to the one I just asked you to do. I gave each person in the room five minutes to share with two other people at their tables about a leader that had personally and positively impacted them. As they began to share with one another, the energy level in the room rose tangibly. Their quiet discussions grew into a din.

As they finished the exercise, I asked for volunteers to share a few stories. One employee named Makaila spoke about Coach Shonda, her high school basketball coach. Coach Shonda had experienced a storied coaching career. State championships and consistently high performing teams were the norm. As Makaila described her coach's approach to basketball, it appeared on the surface that Coach Shonda knew a lot about two things: (1) basketball and (2) motivating high school girls.

But as Makaila continued to describe Coach Shonda, the focus of her comments shifted. Makaila began to speak about Coach Shonda's humility and genuine care for her players. It

became clearer and clearer that what landed Coach Shonda on Makaila's list wasn't her strategic mind or rah-rah speeches, but her heart and soul. In a not-so-surprising twist, Coach Shonda's love for her players was the very thing that enabled her to push them hard toward success without producing rebellion or resentment.

Makaila's story isn't unique. Time and again when I ask people to reach into their pasts to identify the leaders who have most positively impacted them, the truth of *Who* Not What* comes out. The conversations start out about successes, strategies, and techniques. But we don't stay there. Inevitably, the inner qualities of our "All-Time Best Leaders" shine through as the true drivers of their leadership success. And all in attendance nod their heads in understanding.

When we work for well-developed people who carry inside them the best humanity is capable of, we *feel* the difference. You do. I do. We all do.

JUAN'S CRISIS

I knew an up-and-coming leader named Juan. Juan had everything going for him in a large, prestigious marketing firm in New York City. He had a history of leading successful projects, was working for an outstanding boss, and was on track to one day become a top leader in the company.

One day Juan received a call from Suyin, a former colleague at the firm. Suyin had branched out to start her own marketing firm four years earlier in the trendy city of Austin, Texas. The first years of Suyin's new venture had gone well and her company was starting to hit critical mass. She needed a strong leader who understood the internal operations of a well-run

marketing agency. Suyin wanted Juan to join her as her new Chief Operations Officer. Juan had a positive history with Suyin that included closely-aligned values. With a desire to help build something nearly from the ground floor up, Juan decided to join Suyin.

Within 15 months of moving to Austin, Juan's leap had become a full-fledged free fall. Suyin hadn't been in a position of significant leadership when she and Juan worked together previously. Now that she was, Juan saw a different side of Suyin. Suyin took small pieces of information and made inaccurate assumptions about Juan's motives and character, which included believing Juan was intentionally trying to undermine Suyin's authority and leadership within the company. Suyin's fears, rather than Suyin herself, seemed to be leading the company. It was stunning to Juan.

Juan called me in the midst of his crisis. His pain and frustration were evident. Juan isn't a guy normally given to overt emotion, but the magnitude of how his life was affected by Suyin's leadership was so great he was brought to tears a number of times while sharing his situation with me. I heard his sadness and felt for him unlike any other leader with whom I'd ever interacted.

In his dark professional moment, Juan wasn't listening to his gut-level intuition about *Who* Not What*. He was *feeling* the impact of it. Profoundly and personally, he felt what it was like to follow a fearful and suspicious leader. Just as I felt the posi-

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tive swing of following a healthy, well-developed leader in Dave, Juan felt the opposite in following Suyin.

The repercussions weren't limited to the realm of feelings and emotions. Juan decided there was only one sane course of action in response to his experience: He resigned and moved on. In the end, Juan wasn't the only one who paid the price for Suyin's lack of development as a person. So did everyone within Suyin's organization, including Suyin herself. They lost the opportunity to work with and for Juan, an immensely talented and high-potential leader.

We don't just intuit *Who* Not What* in our guts. We feel it with our hearts. When underdeveloped people lead us, their lack of wholeness affects us as followers. And when we follow leaders who have done the hard work of becoming whole people, we feel that as well.

But the truth of *Who* Not What* is not confined to personal experiences, emotions, and intuition. It's more robust than that. There's data to back it up. Let's break out our calculators and crunch the numbers.

“Most discoveries even today are a combination of serendipity and of searching.”

SIDDHARTHA MUKHERJEE

CHAPTER THREE

Stumbling Into Significance

ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED DATA THAT POINTS TO THE REALITY OF WHO* NOT WHAT



Early in my career I was part of a consulting group that brought executives and other leaders to the west side of Pikes Peak for a week-long leader development experience. The picturesque setting and spotty cell phone coverage were perfect for getting professionals out of their everyday atmospheres so they could fully contemplate and evaluate themselves as leaders.

A critical component of the experience was a set of assessments. One was a leadership assessment that gave participants both quantitative and qualitative opportunities to hear how subordinates, peers, superiors, and others experienced them as leaders. These assessments are called “360s” because they give feedback from 360 degrees around the leader. Accompanying the leadership 360 was an assessment that measured natural abilities and another that focused on personality style.

Participants routinely asked our consultants questions like,

“Is there a particular personality profile that produces better leadership? Is there a set of natural abilities that enables leaders to perform better than others who don’t have them? Is there a way for us to use assessments to predict which leaders have the highest probability of becoming exceptional leaders?”

Over the years, our firm had collected a couple thousand data points through these assessments—more than enough to investigate our clients’ questions with statistical integrity. So we decided to run the numbers. I fully expected to find a valuable correlation. As it turned out, I was right . . . and wrong. We found something huge. But we found it by accident. And we didn’t find it where we thought we would.

The leadership 360 measured our clients in eight categories of leadership. Influenced and informed by leadership experts such as Warren Bennis, Robert Greenleaf, and John Kotter, these categories represented a broad set of leadership principles that applied to any leader at any level of an organization.

They were:¹

- Set Direction
- Think Strategically
- Align Resources
- Motivate and Inspire
- Others Focused
- Execute and Follow Through
- Inwardly Sound
- Develop Talent

If we assume that these eight areas of leadership carry equal importance, we’d expect each area to account for 12.5% of the variability in a leader’s performance on the 360 assessment. Any two areas of leadership should account for 25% of a leader’s performance. But what we found was quite different.

AN UNEXPECTED RESULT

Armed with graduate-level experience in statistical analysis and a degree in Industrial Organizational Psychology, our resident number cruncher, Vanessa Kiley, took more than 2,000 data points and commanded the SPSS software to do its thing.

I still remember the night I sat down to talk with Vanessa about the results of her analysis.

“So, what did you find?” I asked.

“Nothing,” Vanessa said.

“Nothing? Really? No correlations at all?”

“Nothing,” Vanessa said. “There is no statistically significant data to suggest any particular personality trait or natural ability or any combination of personality traits and natural abilities creates better leaders overall or better results in any particular aspect of leadership.” She took a deep breath and said again, “Nothing.”

“Well, at least we know,” I said.

I was surprisingly satisfied with the results despite my expectation that we’d find some kind of correlation. At least now I’d be able to quickly and confidently give our clients a statistically verifiable answer. I immediately began looking forward to the next time one of our clients posed one of those common questions. There was no personality profile that led to better leadership. No secret code of human DNA that created better leaders. No magic combination to unlock the door of successful leadership.

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH DATA, THERE ARE NO NATURAL ABILITIES OR PERSONALITY STYLES THAT AUTOMATICALLY MAKE LEADERS MORE EFFECTIVE.

I stood up, turned around, and started to walk out of Vanessa’s office. And then she spoke up.

“But I did find one other thing.”

I turned around. “Oh yeah, what’s that?”

“I found that nearly 70% of the variability in the leadership 360s is driven by just two aspects of leadership.”

“What?” I said as I walked back into her office and sat down nearly breathless. “Which two?”

THE BIG REVEAL

Vanessa made the answer public in July 2008 when, armed with over 20,000 data points and a second pass at the analysis, she published the results in the company’s quarterly publication (Figure 3).² As the volume of data points grew from just over 2,000 to more than 20,000, the impact of the two most influential leadership categories climbed from just under 70% to 77%. The influence of these two categories on a leader’s performance was even bigger than we’d originally discovered. It now exceeded by more than three times the 25% influence you’d expect to see from any two categories if each of the eight leadership categories were equally important.

So which two categories were driving over 3/4 of a leader’s effectiveness?

INWARDLY SOUND & OTHERS FOCUSED

In her article, Vanessa described the qualities that live with-in these two areas. Ideals such as personal disciplines, integrity, authenticity, health in all areas of life, self-awareness, a clearly understood sense of purpose, humility, emotional intelligence,

and unconditional love all made the list. Such ideals are the foundation of what makes a well-developed human being. Apparently, they were also the foundation of what makes leaders exceptional.

The study’s conclusion was simple and unambiguous: well-developed people make more effective leaders.

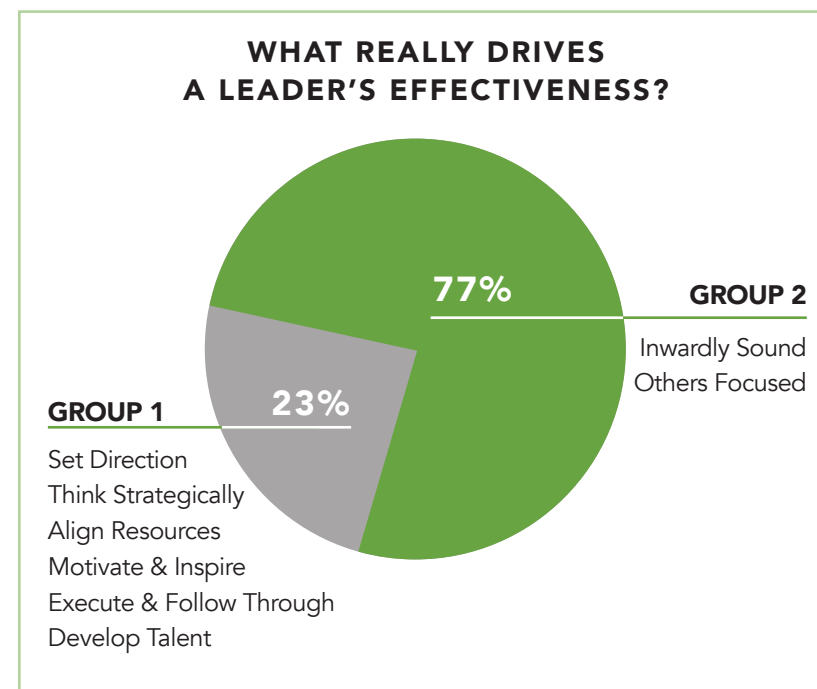


Figure 3: Drivers of a Leader's Effectiveness³

This was extraordinary stuff. But somehow, this discovery got buried. What should’ve been “Extra! Extra! Read all about it!” news ended up living on page 24 of the publication. Vanessa’s article had no visual header to speak of and limited graphics. It didn’t even qualify as a feature story. If you thumbed through the magazine, it would have been easy to miss it.

Why wasn't it given more attention? I really don't know. Maybe it was too far outside normal leadership thinking. For some, its uniqueness may have been too scary to champion. What was revelatory and statistically provable ended up languishing in obscurity even within the very publication in which it was printed. Like having an original Monet under a dust cloth in the attic, this priceless information sat hidden away and out of sight. Thankfully, there were others who were willing to pull this information out of the shadows and put it on display for the entire world to see.

THE STUDY'S CONCLUSION WAS SIMPLE AND UNAMBIGUOUS: WELL-DEVELOPED PEOPLE MAKE MORE EFFECTIVE LEADERS.

MORE EVIDENCE

A few years ago, the *Harvard Business Review* published the results of a study by KRW International, a leadership consultancy based in the United States.⁴ The study, led by KRW founder Fred Kiel, was created to determine if the positive inner qualities of leaders produce better bottom-line results.

Using anonymous follower ratings, Kiel and his associates calculated the quality of CEOs and their senior teams on integrity, responsibility, forgiveness, and compassion and then compared those ratings to each organization's financial performance (Figure 4). They found that the bottom 10 CEOs and senior leadership teams as measured on integrity, responsibility, forgiveness, and compassion experienced a return on assets (ROA) of 1.93% where the top 10 CEOs and senior leadership teams as measured on those same qualities experienced an ROA of 9.35%.^{5,6} That's

nearly a 400% increase in ROA. Said Kiel, "I was unprepared to discover how robust the connection really is."⁷

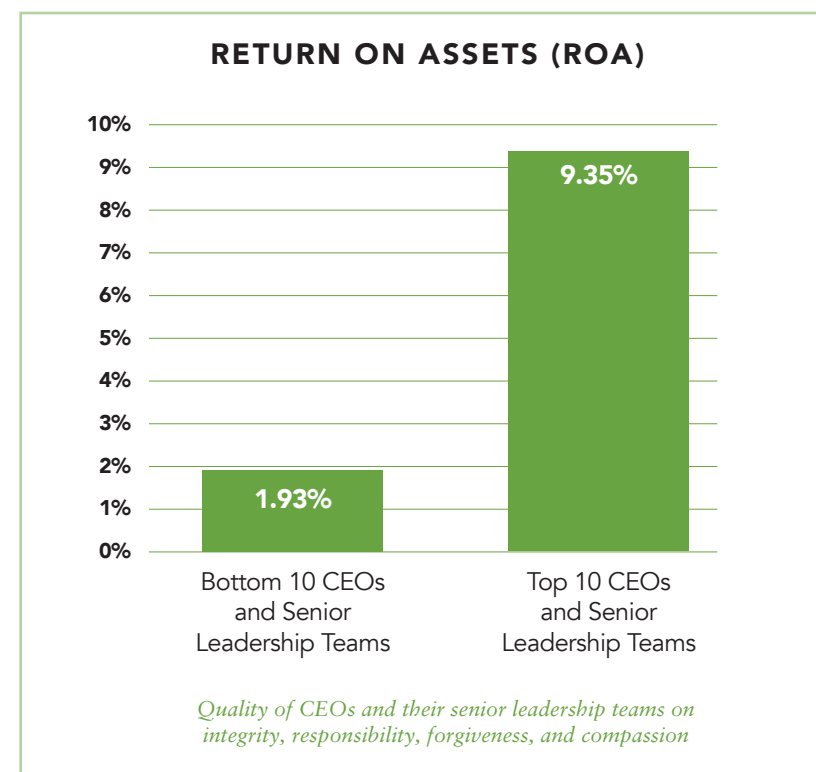


Figure 4: ROA and Well-Developed Leaders⁸

I have to admit my eyes popped out just a little bit when I first discovered KRW had the boldness to rate leaders on those four qualities, most especially on forgiveness and compassion. These simply aren't concepts regularly discussed alongside financial performance. I was further entranced when I saw that KRW's four characteristics precisely aligned with the categories of Inwardly Sound (integrity and responsibility) and Others Focused (forgiveness and compassion). Without any coordination or col-

laboration, we were singing off the same sheet of music as KRW.

2,000,000 CONFIRMATIONS

I had the good fortune of being introduced to David Byrum, a Senior Consultant at Human Synergistics Australia. (Human Synergistics Australia is part of the Human Synergistics International Group. The company is known on multiple continents for its research and unique developmental exercises.) David and I had a common client. Through that client David got exposed to the *Who*Not What Principle*. We met in Chicago to discuss how our work might fit together.

In rather short order, I learned from David that Human Synergistics had a treasure trove of data that pointed directly to the reality of *Who*Not What*. During the 1970s, Dr. J. Clayton Lafferty, founder of Human Synergistics, along with Dr. Robert A. Cooke of the University of Michigan, created the Life Styles Inventory™ (LSI). Though originally created to help individuals maximize the quality of their own lives, the LSI uncovered meaningful insights regarding leadership effectiveness.

Data from the LSI found a statistical correlation between what Human Synergistics calls “Constructive Styles” and leadership effectiveness (Figure 5). In Australia, where David consults, they found that leaders with the most constructive styles (top 10%) outperform leaders with the least constructive styles (bottom 10%) in what Human Synergistics identifies as three important aspects of leadership:⁹

- + 33% task effectiveness
- + 33% quality of relationships
- + 38% overall effectiveness

Human Synergistics went on to create two new leadership-

focused assessments, each of which produced compelling data that further connected the Constructive Styles to leadership effectiveness.¹⁰

Naturally, my primary question for David was about what comprises the Constructive Styles. He shared that the Constructive Styles are made up of behaviors that encourage leaders to be comfortable with who they are as people, establish and achieve goals, support and develop others, and cooperate with and seek the views of others. These ideals are strikingly similar to what it means to be Inwardly Sound and Others Focused.

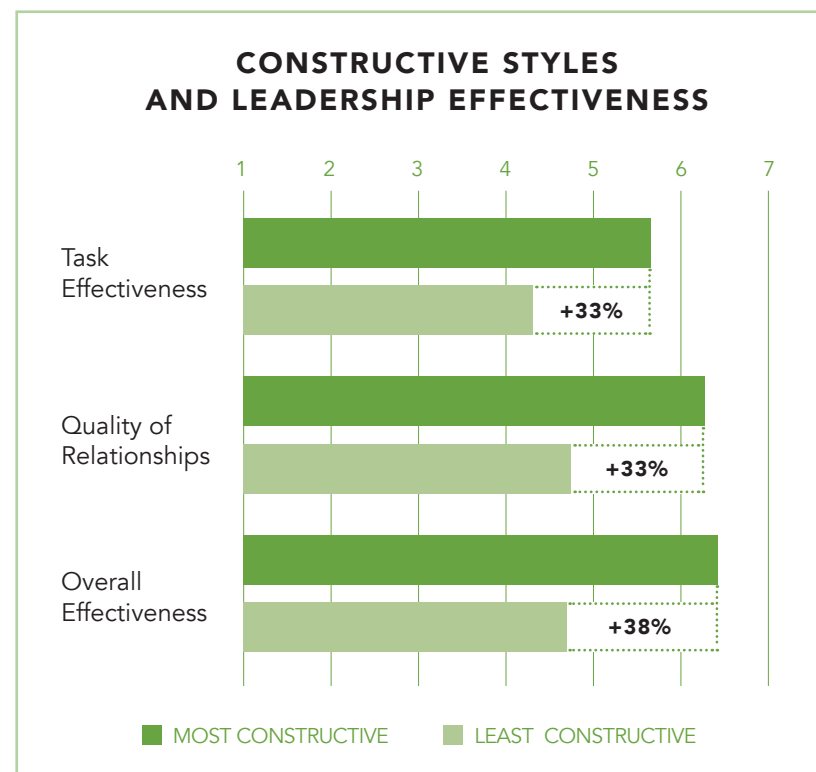


Figure 5: Constructive Styles and Leadership Effectiveness¹¹

Said David, “When I read about the data that pointed toward *Who* Not What*, I felt like I was reading our [Human Synergistics] data. The similarities were uncanny. When leaders are truly Constructive—or in your vernacular Inwardly Sound and Others Focused—their teams feel no need to defend themselves and can focus on achieving goals without the fear of failing. This brings out the very best in teams and team members individually.”

Recall now that Vanessa’s findings were based on a little over 20,000 data points. (That’s more than enough to provide statistically valid conclusions.) I asked David how many data points Human Synergistics had to support its findings. His answer: over two million.¹² On top of that, Human Synergistics had enough data to produce what’s called a “normative group.” This group of 14,000 leaders, which yielded more than 112,000 data points, was selected specifically for its ability to represent a large variety of demographic possibilities—men, women, old, young, from various countries around the world, in a variety of industries, and across the gamut of levels of leadership. Human Synergistics’s normative group data confirmed that no matter the demographic split, the story is the same: How well-developed we are as people is the most significant determiner of how effective we will be as leaders.

CULTURAL NEUTRALITY

A few months after meeting with David for the first time, I had the opportunity to personally witness the cultural neutrality of *Who* Not What*. I was in Malaysia with the leaders of the \$1 billion (USD) joint venture of my client. In the room were 50 leaders of business units in various countries throughout Asia and the Middle East. I asked them, as I do many groups I address, to de-

scribe the best leaders they’ve ever followed. Their answers were no different than what I had heard previously in North America and Australia. They described leaders who were Inwardly Sound and Others Focused. Their descriptions mirrored what Human Synergistics’ normative group had already proven. As the CEO of that joint venture said,

“I have shared the concept [of Who Not What] with many people in Asia: they get it right away.”*

There is nothing culturally biased about *Who* Not What*. It is simply a truth about leadership and humanity.

The data Vanessa had analyzed, though scientifically verifiable on its own, was not on its own at all. Human Synergistics had multiple decades and millions of data points across numerous cultures and levels of leadership that supported it. KRW had hard financial evidence for it. The verdict was—and is—in: *Who* Not What* is a statistically verifiable reality.

Given all this evidence, you might think that when people first encounter this data they would immediately begin restructuring their own leadership development efforts and that of their organizations to take the simple truth of *Who* Not What* into account. But often they don’t. There’s a hesitation. And though I might want to be frustrated with that hesitation, I must remember my own reaction when I was first confronted with the statistical facts about *Who**

I ASKED DAVID HOW MANY DATA POINTS HUMAN SYNERGISTICS HAD TO SUPPORT ITS FINDINGS. HIS ANSWER: OVER TWO MILLION.

Not What. Though I was enthralled by what the data said, I didn't fully grasp its significance . . . not at first, anyway. I characterized the dominant two leadership categories of Inwardly Sound and Others Focused just as others in our consulting firm did, as mere behaviors and skills of leadership.

It wasn't until years later, in the quiet of my office one afternoon, that the differences between what leaders do and who they are hit me. And it took another five years after that for me to thoroughly grasp the connection between the two. Understanding both the differences and connections between the *Who* and *What* of leadership is essential if we are to put the truth of *Who** *Not What* to work. So that is where we will turn our attention next.

*The goal is to turn data into information,
and information into insight.*

CARLY FIORINA

ENDNOTES + APPENDIX

The web references in this book were live and correct on May 25, 2020, but may be subject to change.

CHAPTER ONE: YOU ALREADY KNOW

1. If I ever share a story that is *based* on a true story, I explicitly state as much. I do it just once in this book: the story of Greg in Chapter 4 is based on a true story.

CHAPTER THREE: STUMBLING INTO SIGNIFICANCE

1. Based on knowledge and experience gained after these categories were initially created, some terminology has been modified to more accurately reflect reality as I understand it today.
2. Winzenburg, Vanessa, “Maximize Your Leadership Potential,” *FMI Quarterly*, Issue 3, 2008, 24, https://www.fminet.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2008_3_whole_issue.pdf.
3. Adapted from *ibid*.
4. “Measuring the Return on Character,” *Harvard Business Review*, April 2015, <https://hbr.org/2015/04/measuring-the-return-on-character>.
5. Fred Kiel, Return on Character: *The Real Reason Leaders and Their Companies Win* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015), 133.
6. KRW’s study began with 121 companies but was ultimately narrowed to the 44 companies for which they had complete data sets. Their

data tracked these companies for two years. For some people the smaller company sample size and relatively short duration of the study might be a deterrent to leaning into KRW's findings. I disagree, which is why I cite their work. There are two realities that make KRW's findings worth paying attention to: (1) Their data found a statistically significant result through a vetted process. They could not have published their findings in any journal of note, most especially the *Harvard Business Review*, if their process and findings were not scientifically sound. (2) KRW adheres to a causality model of financial performance that identifies leadership as a 30% contributor to final financial results. Macroeconomic realities and the business model of the companies they study account for the remaining 70%. This means that KRW takes into account other factors besides leadership in assessing the financial results of the companies they studied. Therefore, it would not be accurate to suggest that KRW's results were skewed by non-leadership factors. For these two reasons, I believe that, despite the small sample size and short duration of the study, KRW's findings are valuable and worth noting. If you have concerns regarding a lack of explanation of causality in a study such as this, I offer Chapter Eight of this book as an explanation on the causality between the inner development of the leader and the production of results.

7. "Measuring the Return on Character," *ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Human Synergistics Australia, *Why Leadership and Culture Matter—Proving the People and Performance Connection* (Australia: Human Synergistics International, 2014), 17. As a side note, those that employ the "most Constructive Styles" not only excel in being constructive but are also very low in less effective styles, which Human Synergistics calls Defensive Styles—Passive Defensive and Aggressive Defensive.
10. Leadership/Impact® aimed at senior executives, developed by Dr. Robert A. Cooke, and Management/Impact® aimed at middle managers, developed by Dr. Janet Szumal. Each of these produced additional data pointing to a positive relationship between

Constructive Styles and leadership effectiveness. Data from the Leadership/Impact calculated that leaders who most exemplified Constructive Styles outperformed leaders who least exemplified Constructive Styles on average by 23%. Data from the Management/Impact calculated that leaders who most exemplified Constructive Styles outperformed leaders who least exemplified Constructive Styles on average by 36%. These statistics can be found in *Why Leadership and Culture Matter – Proving the People and Performance Connection*, 31 and 51.

11. Adapted from *ibid.*
12. Each LSI survey filled out about a leader (known as a "focal manager"), including the leader's self-evaluation, counted as a data point. With an average of 8 responders per leader assessed, Human Synergistics International Group has had more than 250,000 leaders take the LSI, resulting in over 2 million data points.

CHAPTER FOUR: CHASM AND CONNECTION

1. I've modified some of the language in this book from the leadership model that was used in the original 360 leadership assessment. This is what I was referring to in endnote #1 from Chapter 3. Let me explain further.

The original language in the model was authored quite intentionally to indicate that the eight leadership categories were things that leaders did. They were actions and behaviors they took—"Behaviors and Skills of Leadership" as they were referred to. The categories of Inwardly Sound and Others Focused weren't in the original model. Instead, Inwardly Sound was "Lead Within" and Others Focused was "Focus on Others."

This might be the time where you find yourself saying, "Tim, I think you're about to drown me in detail. Why does any of this matter?" I'm glad you asked.

I've changed them after the epiphany moment I described in the Introduction, because when you look at what lives inside each of