

Personality Leadership

Dr. Connie L. Ingram

Ingram & Associates Counseling & Consulting, Inc.

Since the beginning of psychological inquiry the question of personality development has been one of nature vs. nurture. What predicts our behavior, our success, our relationships, our understanding of the world and our destiny? Is it the generational internal construction of our DNA or the environment in which we have been engaged since birth? What is it that ultimately forms our personality? What is it that determines our “calling”? Is our behavior learned or innate?

As individuals we are born with an inimitable and personality forming bent. The way in which our DNA is structured offers us a unique way of experiencing the world around us. Our experiences – at least our view of those experiences- offer us a framework with which to organize our thoughts, belief systems, responses to stimuli and relationships.

So, then, the question of leadership is; are leaders born or raised?

Step back and clear your mind of today’s trivia for a moment. Let your thoughts wonder into a world where leadership reigns. About whom are you thinking? Who is it in your mind whose behavioral practices are synonymous with your definition of leadership? As you picture that person or persons in your mind’s eye ask yourself what makes you think about that person in a leadership context? How do you define leadership? From where does your definition come; from your experiences with that leader; from your perception of what behaviors compose leadership; from your pedagogical upbringing? The “what” that constitutes leadership may be somewhat subjective albeit many have written about the practice of leadership. John Maxwell (1999) has based his book, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader, Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow*, on the premise that leadership qualities are within the person, the qualities that make them who they are as people (p.x). We can list the words of many leadership gurus who offer us bullet point characteristics of leaders including:

- Courage
- Strength
- Servanthood
- Creativity
- Vision
- Focus
- Team player
- Charisma
- Talent
- Organization
- Motivated and motivational
- Purveyor of talent and potential
- Ethical

- Moral
- Risk taker
- Humility
- Confidence

And so goes the list. I am sure that no one reading these words would argue that on the leadership characteristic list each of those mentioned would make the cut. So, then, are leaders born or bred? Assuming the behaviors to be borne from an internal belief system of authenticity, can one become a leader (in the more defined sense of the word – as we are all leaders to some extent) simply by acting upon leadership behaviors?

Shift your thoughts for a moment to yourself as a leader. Do your leadership behaviors come from years of practice or from your innate drive; your very personality? Are your leadership behaviors practiced or instinctive?

Over the years, I have coached and interviewed many men and women in leadership positions. I have made observations about their leadership beliefs, practices, and comfortability. I have witnessed, first hand, the difference between leaders who lead from a place of internal self confidence in a way that is so natural and comfortable that it appears to originate from their DNA and those whose behaviors emulate comfortability yet stem from a place of performance orientation and people pleasing. Thus the term *Personality Leadership*.

Let me further paint the picture of the *DNA* leader whose ability is such that it flows from her internal river of personality. Her leadership ability is so natural and unrehearsed that she finds it curious that everyone does not share the same characteristics. In fact, she does not even consider herself unique. Her unconscious assumption is that others are equally confident, ambitious, driven, and accomplished. She does not readily see that education, position, title, or power does not –in and of itself- connote innate leadership. Her ability to motivate and promote others is so natural that when her “boss” arrives to take “inventory”, she has no pangs of stress, tension or worry. Her *DNA personality leadership* style is such that she simply welcomes her boss-guest as she would a house-guest. No fearful thoughts of performance, failure or not measuring up. This is just another opportunity to extend herself in that natural way that catapults others toward excellence. No pretense, no strain, no doubt; no concern; simply enjoyment in the relationship.

This type of *personality leadership* is contagious and immeasurable. It focuses on what Rosamund and Benjamin Zander, authors of *The Art of Possibility* (2000) call the “central” self.

The nature of the “central” self is to “aim for the openness and reciprocity of a level playing field-away from a mind-set of scarcity and deficiency and toward an attitude of wholeness and sufficiency” (p. 90). Thus, the *personality leadership*

style that flows from this “central” self sets its sights on seeing leadership in everyone and measurements of no one; including oneself.

Albeit the *personality leadership* of measurement may look like its counterpart because of its natural tendencies to behave in the same way, its internal forces create angst and self doubt. This type of leadership is clothed in the “calculating” self. The Zander’s define the calculating self as a “ladder with a downward spiral. The ladder refers to the worldview that life is about making progress, striving for success, and positioning oneself in the hierarchy” (p. 83). This type of leadership is not set upon reduction of others in order to gain for oneself. It pursues excellence for others as well as for self. However, a self-imposed internal assessment causes cognitive dissonance and internal intimidation created by a need to please or measure-up to the assumed expectations of others. The conversation in the head of such leaders wanes between confidence in their leadership ability and fear of missing the mark. Thus, this leader is prone to burnout, stress, and psychosomatic distresses that may remain undetected, that is, until his body creates a physical stop-gap.

I am not trying to paint a picture wherein the measured *personality leadership* style seems fatal or unproductive. What I am trying to do is suggest that a different frame for the same picture may be in order. A frame that allows this leader to choose to alleviate fear of performance, measurement, assessment, and a paint-by-number affect in favor of freedom, contentment, and no numbers within, which to paint; in a word, liberty. The liberty to BE a leader rather than to DO leadership! (Hesselbein, F. 2003, *Hesselbein on Leadership*).

So, are leaders born or made? The answer is “yes”. As leaders, you can learn to disengage from your calculating selves. You can consciously engage in measurement free excellence and service to others. The task is to change your belief system from the restriction of measurement to the freedom of acceptance. To change your belief system may be difficult at best. Therefore, as you aspire to be measurement-free *personality leaders* you must learn to live consciously and purposefully setting aside your internal fear of judgment. In turn, you will enjoy emotional, mental and physical contentment.

The question, then, is how do you, as a leader, transform and renew your mind? Watch for the answer in my next articles: *Incubators and their influence on personality leadership styles* and *How to live consciously*.