



Feature Article: Eight Competencies to Develop Now to Maximize Your Leadership Success

Seventy-eight million boomer retirements will create a gap or void in leadership in the next 5-10 years. Some of you or the leaders in your company might be saying, “Oh my!” What do I say? “Woo hoo!”

From my perspective, women now have an amazing opportunity to stand tall and take charge – literally! And, while the recession may have delayed the impact of retirees it certainly has not eliminated the pending leadership gap. Although many companies have tabled this issue due to more urgent economic issues, it’s an issue that most organizations will be grappling with in due time.

So what can you do to put yourself in the path of the opportunities that may be coming your way? Here are the key competencies that have been ranked most critical for leaders in the coming years.

1. **Communication.** We all think we’re experts here but if the studies are right, then business professionals need a lot of work in this arena. Communication is your ability to express yourself clearly and to listen to others effectively. And, the studies are showing that this is a critical problem particularly with higher work loads and more electronic communication. Remember, it’s all about building relationships to get the job done. The key to communication? Listen, listen, listen!
2. **Problem solving & decision making.** This is your ability to analyze a situation, identify alternative solutions and make appropriate decisions. Now, if decisions that some of the “too big to fail” companies made are any indication of what’s going on in companies today, then this competency obviously needs some work on everyone’s part. And for women, there’s always the issue that studies show that our collaborative, relational approach to problem solving and decision making can make us appear indecisive and unsure of ourselves. So, it’s up to us to develop this competency and change those perceptions.
3. **Personal integrity.** Sounds like a no-brainer, doesn’t it? Yet you’d be surprised at how many do not operate with personal integrity. What’s this? It’s your ability to gain the trust and confidence of others by interacting in a fair and honest manner. If you’re not sure how important this one might be, simply look at some of the issues that the U.S. Government is currently facing. Transparency is critical or we may fall victim to erroneous perceptions. Let’s not be victims!
4. **Vision.** This one is somewhat overdone and feels almost trite, but your ability to create and describe an ideal state or condition and align others toward its accomplishment is critical to your success as a leader. On the surface it sounds so simple, doesn’t it? Think again. It truly is an art to align others behind your vision. Here’s something to consider. Inspiration is an external condition and motivation is an internal condition. Your job as a leader is to inspire people so that they become motivated to act. Now think of those individuals you work with who frustrate you and get in the way of accomplishing your goals. Then think about your ability to promote your vision. Now ask yourself, does this competency need work?
5. **Planning & goal setting.** Simply put, this is your ability to plan and organize work, and set realistic, measurable objectives for a work unit or a project. If you hope to be successful, then you need to be able to figure out how to get things done and in such a way that you can get and measure the results that are most important to your organization.

6. **Initiative & risk taking.** This is one of my favorites. This is your ability to demonstrate individual drive and accept responsibility for your actions. This is one area that we as women need to do a better job. What do I mean by that, you say? Don't get all bunged up on me. What I mean, specifically, is raising our hands when opportunities present themselves and taking more risks. As women we tend to play it safe and stay way inside the box on the playing field. What we need to do is really stretch ourselves and push the limits and make that box bulge or break.
7. **Quality results.** It's all about the bottom line in most business environments today, isn't it? That's why your ability to produce high quality work consistently over time is critical. With increased demands and more work with fewer resources, this is a challenge for many leaders today and a source of frustration and stress. Remember, delegate tasks whenever possible but keep in mind that it's still your responsibility to make sure that things get done. In addition, don't be a perfectionist all the time. Use "GEPO" when getting things done. Ask yourself, is this good enough (GE)? If it is, then press on (PO)!
8. **Team work.** This is your ability to work effectively with others to achieve a common goal. On the one hand, women are well suited to team work because we tend to bring a more relational style to our work activities. On the other hand, where we sometimes run into challenges is when it comes to delegating work. Doesn't it seem like when someone else drops the ball that we are always the one picking it up? As you climb the corporate ladder your job is to get things done through others. That can be a big change for women who are used to doing it all themselves.

What's the key challenge leader's face when it comes to all of these competencies? You need to be competent in all eight of them, or have a plan to mitigate those areas where you are less competent.

What can you do today to position yourself for future success? Determine where you have strengths and where you have opportunities for improvement. Then pick one and start there. What are you waiting for?