

# What are good leaders made of?



Frogs and snails and puppy dog tails? Or sugar and spice and all that's nice? Most of you will remember that poem from your school days. You'll also remember the outstanding leaders in high school who were somehow destined for ultimate success. But where are they now?

Interestingly enough, it's often those great leaders from our school days that have now faded into the background and the quiet gal or guy who surprises everyone at the class reunion and turns out to be that "natural born leader."

So what are leaders made of? What is the essence of leadership? Questions surrounding the personality, competencies and styles of effective leaders are an ongoing source of inspiration for books, videos, seminars and business education. There are two main schools of thought on this question:

## Raw ingredients

Elliott Jaques, a clinical psychologist holding a Ph.D. from Harvard and an M.D. from Johns Hopkins, believes an individual's cognitive capacity, which is roughly equivalent to IQ, is set at birth. He argues that an individual's leadership ability is inherently tied to cognitive capacity. Jaques' theory states that no amount of training, coaching or education can increase this attribute and consequently, leadership development is an oxymoron. You are either born with the raw ingredients or not.

Dominic Monetta, president of Resource Alternative Inc. and former undersecretary of defence for research and development, agrees with Jaques to a certain extent. While Monetta concurs that intellect is innate and set at birth, he doesn't believe that raw intellect alone can explain effective leadership. Environmental factors may facilitate or inhibit leadership potential.

## The leadership recipe

Over the last few years, research has led to the development of an intriguing concept; emotional intelligence. Pioneered by Daniel Goleman and others, emotional intelligence states that an individual's ability to recognise and regulate his or her emotions, and the emotions of others, accounts for 80 per cent of leadership success in organisations today. While IQ may be set at birth, EQ represents a set of personal skills that can be learned and refined throughout your life.

For the past 50 years, Gallup has conducted over 20,000 in-depth interviews with senior leaders, studied more than 1 million work teams and conducted even more Gallup polls on the subject of the world's most admired leaders. According to their research the most effective leaders invest time into developing their strengths, they surround themselves with the right people to maximize their team and they understand their teams' needs. The Gallup findings have led recent researchers to believe that the path to great leadership starts with a deep understanding of the strengths that you bring to the table.

So, what's the answer? Are leaders made of raw ingredients? Or are they made of a more complex combination? A sprinkling of EQ, topped with a dash of strengths awareness and whipped together with a few life experiences? While there is no definitive agreement among the experts, it seems that leadership is a function of both. IQ and aptitude, which are largely innate, may determine the field that you enter, but not necessarily your success in that field. A growing body of research suggests that effective leadership and personal success are due largely to our experiences, our self-awareness and our empathy for others. All of these factors can be learned and enhanced, suggesting that perhaps leaders are made largely from a recipe, and not raw ingredients.