

Superior Leaders – What’s Different About Them?

As the leadership author Blaine Lee noted, [“The great leaders are like the best conductors - they reach beyond the notes to reach the magic in the players.”](#) But what really makes a “great” leader?

As a world-famous management professor and consultant, Peter Drucker worked with thousands of business leaders, and noted that effective executives are not necessarily the same. For example, according to Drucker, **“Harry Truman did not have one ounce of charisma, yet he was among the most effective chief executives in U.S. history.”** Drucker also said that **“... some of the best business and nonprofit leaders I’ve worked with were all over the map in terms of their personalities, attitudes, values, strengths, and weaknesses. They ranged from extroverted to nearly reclusive, from easygoing to controlling, from generous to parsimonious.”**

In 2004, Drucker listed eight practices that he saw in “effective” executive leaders. These practices included executives who consistently asked, **“What needs to be done?”** and **“What is right for the enterprise?”** as well as **focusing** on opportunities rather than problems, developing action plans, and taking responsibility for their own actions.

Although these practices may still be relevant, many things have changed in the business world since 2004. Today’s **“leaner” companies are looking** for more than simply effective leaders, they need **“superior leaders,”** said Dr. Gier.

Over the past 15 years, E·A·S·I·Consult® has worked with thousands of leaders in organizations throughout the world. Based upon data obtained from these leaders, Gier led a detailed study to identify the characteristics that differentiate *superior* executives or senior leaders from *average or effective* executives.

After reviewing the results of this effort, three key capabilities that *superior* executives demonstrated were identified. These capabilities include:

1. **Leading Across the Enterprise.** Superior executives effectively lead and collaborate **across the entire enterprise. These senior leaders always consider their companies’** entire operations, not simply their own business unit or department. And these days, that often includes operations around the globe.
2. **Demonstrating Strategic Foresight.** Superior senior leaders are able to consistently **“foresee” the future, including what the likely changes will be throughout an industry**

or with their competitors, for example. More importantly, these executives are then able to identify the actions that will best allow their companies to prosper as these **changes will be occurring. As Gier describes it, “Superior executives accurately forecast the future, and then ensure that their company acts so that they always stay ahead of their competitors.” Steve Jobs is a good example of an executive who really excelled in this characteristic, Gier noted. “Jobs foresaw the digitization of so many things, including music and movies, and put Apple at the forefront of all of those technological changes.”**

- 3. Establishing and Communicating the Organization’s “Brand.”** The third differentiating characteristic of superior executives relates to their ability to lead in **the establishment of the organization’s brand, and then ensure that all units of the company operate to uphold that brand. Most importantly, superior executives are able to communicate a clear link between each employee’s behavior or actions and how those behaviors support the brand of the organization. “Nike, and its CEO Phil Knight, epitomizes this characteristic. The ‘Just Do It’ slogan has driven every aspect of Nike’s brand - its products, sponsors, partners, everything. It’s now one of the most recognizable brands around the world,” explained Gier.**

Understanding the characteristics of superior executives is critical for all organizations.

“In today’s more competitive environment, companies can’t afford to place ‘average’ performers into their executive positions,” Gier said.

In its work with clients, E•A•S•I-Consult uses an enhanced leadership assessment process - the EAQ[®] - to help organizations better understand the capabilities of each of their senior leaders in these three critical characteristics. The EAQ allows companies to compare several executive candidates before making a hiring decision, or to tailor a development effort for current executives, Gier said.

He also believes that understanding each leader’s critical capabilities can result in significant improvement throughout a company’s senior leadership team.

About the Author

E•A•S•I-Consult[®] works with Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and mid-sized corporations to provide customized Talent Management solutions. E•A•S•I-Consult specialties include individual assessment, online employment testing, survey research, competency modeling, leadership development, executive coaching, 360-degree feedback, online structured interviews, and EEO hiring compliance. The company is a leader in the field of providing accurate information

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