CHAPTER

1

Portrait of a Leader

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WANTED: Elementary principal for progressive suburban school district.
Must have master's degree and relevant state certification,
strong leadership qualities.

Ads like this appear thousands of times each year, symbols of every organization's search for leaders. What are these school districts looking for? How will they know when they've found it?

At a minimum, we can be sure they want someone who can carry out a long list of specific duties. The new principal will be expected to arrange class schedules, resolve discipline problems, administer a labor contract, evaluate teachers, and apply the oil of public relations to points of friction with the community. And that's just in the morning.

In short, school leaders must first of all be skillful managers—at worst, getting through the week without major disasters; at best, keeping the school humming with happy activity. Whatever else a district may want from its leaders, managerial skill is essential; without it, no school leader will last long.

But in asking for "strong leadership qualities," this district hints it may be looking for something beyond managerial competence. The search committee might have trouble defining this "something," but they undoubtedly hope to recognize it when they see it: a knack for inspiring trust, perhaps, or a talent for creating enthusiasm, or the ability to provide a sense of direction in a confusing world.

Most of us know people like that; if we're lucky, we work for them. But just what is it that we sense in them? Could we, on hearing a description of an utter stranger, recognize the qualities that make a leader? More to the point, could we work our way through a long list of applicants and be confident of making the right choice?

The Characteristics of Leaders

Scholars have been exploring this question for over a century, often with the assumption that leadership comes with the person, that certain individuals have some set of inherited or acquired traits that enable them to leave their mark on the world. Thomas Carlyle summed up an early version of this attitude with his claim "the history of the world is but the biography of great men."

For many years this belief led social scientists to concentrate almost solely on the personal traits of leaders. They studied the characteristics of corporate executives, football captains, or Girl Scout leaders and frequently came to different conclusions. Their research produced no shortage of candidates: intelligence, self-assurance, enthusiasm, good health, initiative, sociability—the list is almost endless. In fact, it became too large to be of any use.

Critics of the "trait" approach pointed to the unwieldy nature of the list and to the widely varied characteristics to substantiate their claim that there is no "essence" of leadership that will hold for all cases. As Warren Bennis remarked of the leaders he studied, other than demonstrating certain similar abilities, they were "tremendously diverse. They were tall, short, fat, thin . . . . They evinced no common pattern of psychological makeup or background."

Because of this disappointing result, researchers after World War II abandoned trait theories in favor of situational theories of leadership based on the belief there are no inherent leadership traits, just leader styles or behaviors that may change radically from one setting to another. "Situationists" believe that a person who is a leader in one situation may be a follower in another; traits useful in one situation may actually be disastrous in others. Hence, leaders are not born with any particular traits that determine leadership. Situationists have less interest in who a leader is than in what he or she does in a given situation.

A Role for Traits

It may be a bit premature, however, to throw out trait research. Edwin Locke and associates argue that while the situation plays an important role, "it now seems clear that certain traits and motives do indeed influence a leader's effectiveness." The difficulty is that certain traits are necessary, but not sufficient, for effective leadership; that is, they work in combination with other factors.

Thus, if a large number of trait studies yield modest generalizations, they may still point us in the right direction. One report that leadership is correlated with intelligence does not mean much; if twenty studies about

twenty different types of leaders indicate a correlation, the findings are more convincing.

It also makes sense to use findings about a particular leader to make generalizations about this kind of leader alone. Each kind of leader has a number of unique characteristics. Studies about Girl Scout leaders are quite valuable to Girl Scout leaders—and those of school leaders most valuable to school leaders. Personal traits are part of any leader's resources—a kind of "human capital" on which he or she can draw. Focusing on these traits can simply make us aware of how a particular leader gets results.

And even if we fail to find any universal generalizations, knowledge of leader characteristics is useful. Just as our actions tell others much about "who we are" and "where we come from," so do our definitions. Daniel Duke puts it this way: "By identifying the properties associated with leadership, an understanding may be gained of prevailing structures of social meaning. How people make sense of leadership can tell us a great deal about how they regard themselves, their society, and the future."

This chapter explores the most significant findings of previous trait research as well as more recent research on educational leaders to paint a portrait of an effective leader.

Limiting Assumptions

As we sort through these findings, we should keep in mind some of the inherent limitations of this kind of research. "Leadership" is a broad abstraction, incorporating everything from Harry Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb to a quiet parent's volunteering to be a room mother. Researchers can't measure it precisely without making a number of assumptions.

1. Many studies define a leader as anyone occupying a position with formal authority over others. If there is a difference between leadership and managerial competence, these studies may not capture it.

2. Many studies define leadership as whatever leaders do, without distinguishing between effective and ineffective actions.

3. Some studies define leadership by performance on short-term tasks in a laboratory setting (often using college students as subjects). But real-world leaders operate in real-world institutions, over long periods.

4. Some studies define leadership through peer ratings; that is, a leader is someone who is perceived to be a leader. While there is good reason to respect human judgment, there may be important differences between perceived leadership ability and objective leadership skills. (For example, a number of studies have shown that taller men are more likely to be

perceived as leaders. There is no reason to think this trait has anything to do with actual leadership skill.)

5. Finally, many generalizations are based on a leadership cadre that has never fully reflected society at large: No matter how the leadership portrait is drawn, it seems to include pale skin and a Y chromosome. Many studies may accurately describe the way these leaders behave but overlook the behavior of women and minority leaders simply because it is different. In other words, leadership as we have known it does not exhaust the possibilities of leadership as it might be.

It is also important to remember that none of this research reveals any single characteristic that *determines* leadership. Rather it suggests there are groups or constellations of qualities that appear to correlate with leadership. Not all leaders have these traits, and not even effective leaders have all of them. Many nonleaders have many of these characteristics, and still more have at least a few. Yet having many of these traits does appear to give one a better chance at leadership effectiveness.

Finally, it is important to remember the leader does not exist in a vacuum, but in an environment made up of people (subordinates and supervisors), who are acted upon by historical, philosophical, religious, cultural, social influences/assumptions/biases, and who in turn bring these influences and pressures to bear when they interact with the "leaders." Leadership is not simply the impersonal delegation of duties and responsibilities from machine to machine, and no matter how scientific our studies appear to be or how objective we try to be in our dealings with others, it remains a human activity, subject to all the complexities of human interaction.

What follows, then, is at best a picture, a still life, a portrait in time of what we now assume to be the qualities that make up a leader in our culture. Readers may want to accompany this chapter with an imaginary checklist to see how they compare with this portrait of an effective leader.

Energy and Involvement

Edmund Morris tells how the young Theodore Roosevelt approached his daily work as police commisioner of New York City. He would come striding briskly down the street, "goggling his spectacles enthusiastically at everything around, about, and behind him." Arriving at headquarters, he'd fly up the stairs, rush to his office, and, in one motion, sit down, take off his hat, and attack the nearest pile of documents, swiftly making decisions on major policies and minor details. After a day's worth of that, he'd prowl the streets at night, appearing like an apparition before malingering officers and sending them scurrying back to their posts.

Roosevelt was probably in a class by himself, but leadership has often been associated with high levels of energy and involvement. This energy may be physiological (the result of good health or lucky genes) or it may come from a desire to be at the center of things. This latter trait is sometimes called "dominance"; according to researchers like Harrison Gough, it correlates significantly with leadership.

Arthur Blumberg and William Greenfield describe effective principals this way:

> They appear to have a high need to control a situation and a low need to be controlled by others. They rather like being in charge of things, proposing ideas, and initiating action. They strongly dislike it, and tend to reject it, when constraints are put on their prerogatives or when their freedom of action and initiative are restricted in any way. They prefer to find their own solutions to ambiguous situations than to be told how to do it by others, particularly their organizational superiors.

Shirley M. Hord and Gene E. Hall likewise found that in facilitating instructional improvement, the most effective principals are those who are most actively involved. Labeling three styles in order of increasing effectiveness—responder, manager, initiator—they found that the principal who was most actively involved with teachers was the most effective.

One result is high visibility; involved principals walk the hallways and poke their noses in classrooms rather than sequestering themselves in their office. Blumberg provides a memorable example of one principal's five-minute trip to get a sandwich, during which she flushed smokers out of the washroom, asked a teacher how things were going in a particular program, chatted with a cafeteria worker, checked with a teacher about a discipline case, complimented a student on some work he had done, picked up pieces of paper from the floor, and hustled some lingering students off to class. The value of episodes like that is not just in their immediate practical results, but in the aura of leadership they create.

Competence

Having an aura of leadership is an obvious asset, but it quickly fades if the leader fails to deliver. People like their leaders to have energy, but they demand competence. Researchers have explored a number of types of competence; three are summarized here: intelligence, technical skill, and interpersonal skill.

Intelligence

Intelligence is such a fundamental human trait that researchers have often looked for a connection with leadership—and have usually found it. Bernard Bass, reviewing recent work in this area, reports a fairly high correlation (.5) between intelligence and the likelihood of being perceived as a leader. He also cites a number of earlier studies that found positive (but somewhat lower) correlations between intelligence and leadership.

These studies don't show *how* intelligence facilitates leadership, but we can make some reasonable guesses. Since most IQ tests contain a substantial verbal component, high scorers may have a mastery of the language that allows them to articulate ideas in a persuasive way, aiding in the essential task of communication.

Additionally, leadership of complex, dynamic organizations requires considerable abstract-thinking ability. Eliot Jaques, in his extensive studies of executive leadership, says the key variable is "cognitive complexity," the ability to handle many variables at different degrees of abstraction. At the highest level, for example, a leader can deal with multiple streams of information at a high level of abstraction. The higher the level of thinking, the more a leader can step back from the immediate situation and see long-term, large-scale patterns and trends.

Although the importance of intelligence is undeniable, its role needs to be qualified in several important ways. First, we may want to reserve judgment on how well the general findings on intelligence and leadership apply to schools—an issue that has not been much studied. Because school leaders have proved themselves capable of earning a master's degree, most of them are likely to have above-average intelligence. As a matter of simple statistics, correlations are likely to be lower when a trait has a narrow range. (It's a bit like examining the relationship between height and basketball success. If we study the whole population, height will obviously have a lot to do with it; if we study only NBA players, height will be less important in distinguishing superstars from everyday players.)

Second, the literature suggests there may be a point of diminishing returns. Bass notes a number of studies that suggest leaders who are far more intelligent than their followers are less likely to be successful. The reasons aren't clear, though one guess is that highly intelligent leaders use higher level concepts and vocabulary that may place a barrier between them and their followers.

Third, some researchers have challenged the validity of traditional intelligence tests for complex real-world environments. Richard Wagner and Robert Sternberg, for example, have suggested "street smarts" may be far more important in handling real problems. They note that unlike

the problems encountered on tests, real dilemmas are typically ill-defined, don't come with all the information needed to solve them, and may not have one best answer.

Such problems are solved through the application of tacit knowledge—practical know-how that is usually learned informally on the job. Tacit knowledge includes such things as how to manage oneself (for example, avoiding procrastination); how to manage others (such as motivating); and how to manage tasks (such as communicating ideas clearly). While much of this knowledge is learned through experience, Wagner and Sternberg emphasize that some leaders are simply better than others in acquiring it. Their early studies (using simulated problems) have found that tacit knowledge is a better predictor of performance than intelligence.

Technical Knowledge and Skill

Every job requires mastery of certain ideas and processes. Research in a variety of fields indicates that those who master these core technical skills are more likely to be seen as leaders, and that subordinates readily accept "expert power" (Bass).

In education, this common-sense notion is embodied in certification requirements that require school leaders to have teaching experience. This experience provides the foundation for the role of "supervision," a term that implies principals will be closely monitoring teachers.

But expertise is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, principals need to demonstrate it to gain the respect of their staff, since teachers sometimes nurse a suspicion that administrators have lost touch with classroom realities. Some principals deliberately make periodic guest appearances in classrooms just to prove they haven't lost it.

On the other hand, teachers have traditionally operated in an isolated, semi-autonomous way, tailoring their approach to the particular students in their class. Detailed directives from above are seldom appreciated. The result, according to Blumberg, is a "territorial imperative" that makes principals reluctant to deal with curriculum and instruction in a top-down manner.

With the recent emphasis on teacher empowerment and facilitative leadership, this dilemma has sharpened. Nona Prestine, studying schools engaged in restructuring, found some principals frustrated at having their substantive ideas on curriculum ignored by a newly empowered faculty. Thus, it appears that while knowledge of teaching and learning are valuable assets for principals, this expertise has to be employed with tact and discretion.

Interpersonal Competence

School leadership is people-intensive; principals rarely go more than a few minutes without interacting with someone. Being friendly and outgoing isn't enough; getting along with others requires specific skills.

Communication

Most of the literature on school leadership agrees on the importance of communication. Richard Gorton and Kenneth McIntyre, in their study of the principalship, found that "significant others" (those knowledgeable about the principal's performance) see effective principals as strong in oral communication. Blumberg and Greenfield found "extremely well-developed expressive abilities" among the key characteristics of the eight outstanding principals they studied. "All of these principals had very well-developed interpersonal skills and were able to communicate effectively in face-to-face interaction with a diverse range of individuals and groups." Speaking and listening are also among the essential skills identified by experienced superintendents interviewed by Robert Crowson and Van Cleve Morris.

What accounts for successful communication? Howard Gardner, after examining the lives of great leaders, concluded the prime ingredient is the ability to tell a story that resonates with the deepest ideals and aspirations of followers. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., told a story of ordinary people vanquishing oppression through steadfast, courageous actions. Leaders who tell such stories—and embody them in their lives—forge a deep bond with their followers.

William Foster offers another perspective by arguing that a chief function of the leader is to clear away the distortions that enter language through some people's desire to maintain domination and power. For example, student failure may be casually explained by "unmotivated students" or "poor home environment," thus blaming the student rather than examining the school's failure to meet that student's needs.

Some labels are accurate, but others are not: leadership is telling the difference. Leadership involves the penetration of labels and communicative structures, of taking freely constituted democratic participation seriously, of assisting the growth of individuals caught in the cycle of domination through language. Foster, then, would have us reexamine what we mean by communication and leadership.

More prosaically, successful communication depends on finding the appropriate words, words that will convey the essential meaning and provide just the right tone. More than one promising leadership initiative

has been smothered beneath a sea of verbal sludge; jargon, clichés, and dry statistics rarely inspire enthusiasm.

What does work? Bass found evidence that employees tend to remember brief messages that neatly summarize organizational values (for example, "If you're not helping, you're hindering"). Coleen Armstrong urges principals to communicate through stories that highlight the work and achievements of teachers, students, and parents. "People stories make dry concepts vivid and personal. They convey your affection for students, your respect and admiration for teachers, and even your passion for learning itself."

But communication is more than a matter of finding the right words—the message has to be delivered in a timely and appropriate way. Peter Wright and David Taylor argue that effective communication requires leaders to understand the situation (What are the issues?), be able to read people, and tailor the message accordingly. They identify a number of basic communication patterns, such as "tell," "tell and sell," and "problem-solving." Knowing which of these is appropriate is a key skill.

In addition, Bass notes a number of other factors that may be critical: timing, style (formal vs. informal), linguistic form (directive vs. request), nonverbal language, concern for individual differences, and the amount of time spent on communication.

Listening

Most researchers comment on the good listening skills of effective principals. Gorton and McIntyre found that effective principals listen to students, community, and staff. Blumberg says, "Every time I asked an administrator what was most important for him or her to be able to do well, the response was, 'Listening'."

Good listening goes beyond hearing the words. Rather, it demands complete attentiveness to the other person. A high school principal interviewed by Blumberg explained his approach this way:

> So a stranger, a parent, comes into your office. There are lots of things I pay attention to, 'cause I have to make a judgment about what to do. First, I try to remember if I've seen them in other places, in other settings. I watch how they approach me. I listen to the kinds of things they say, the adjectives they use, their tone of voice. I try to get a sense of whether or not they seem inclined to be even-handed or whether they seem to be exaggerating. And all those things put together helps me understand the kinds of things I may be able to do in the situation. Whether, for example, we can

hold a dialogue with each other or I just have to use my authority to shut them off.

This kind of attentive listening has two advantages. First, it communicates care and consideration, qualities usually associated with employee satisfaction, according to Bass. The principal's "personal touch," said one teacher in a restructuring school, "helps build my sense of empowerment because it establishes a foundation for mutual respect. It helps make you feel comfortable about discussing classroom problems because you feel that she values your feelings and opinions" (Joseph Blase and Jo Roberts Blase).

Second, careful listening may keep the administrator from making snap decisions based on false assumptions. Principal B. J. Meadows found that it allowed her to find common ground with parents who complained about misbehavior at bus stops. "In the past, I had sometimes proposed a solution before I understood a problem completely. I then became invested in my way of solving the problem and unconsciously set up a power struggle."

Personality

Some people assume leadership is an offshoot of "personality," a rather ill-defined term that usually refers to the distinctive ways people handle tasks, interact with others, and structure their lives. The problem for researchers is the overwhelming number of traits that can be considered a part of personality: enthusiasm, aggressiveness, sociability, self-confidence, emotional balance, sense of humor, emotional expressiveness, empathy, flexibility, and many, many others. (Jaques claims to have identified 2,500 adjectives describing different dimensions of personality.)

Although researchers have found correlations between leadership and many of these dimensions, they have never found anything that could be called a "leadership personality." Leaders come in all flavors, an insight that has been partly responsible for the enthusiasm about "styles." However, certain traits are worth a closer look.

Sociability

In their national study of the principalship, Gorton and McIntyre found that effective principals have as their strongest asset "an ability to work with different kinds of people having various needs, interests, and expectations." The researchers added:

> They seem to understand people, know how to motivate them, and how to deal effectively with their problems. It is primarily this factor, rather than a technical expertise, that caused the "significant others" to perceive these principals as accessible and effective administrators.

The same seems to be true for successful superintendents. Even sitting in the central office, seemingly far removed from students, teachers, and parents, they appear to profit from good social skills and abilities. Robert Wilson, in a study of successful Ohio superintendents, found that the successful superintendent "is a very personable and friendly individual who believes in the importance of human relations skills and demonstrates them daily."

These outstanding Ohio superintendents also participate widely in the community—in church, PTA, civic, social, and hobby clubs—because they depend heavily on face-to-face contact for building rapport with citizens. One of the superintendents interviewed by Crowson and Morris had this to say about the job: "But the really critical thing is dealing with people. If you do this well, you can learn all the rest."

This kind of interest in people also surfaces in studies of other types of leaders. Bass cites research showing strong correlations between leadership and extroversion—and a negative correlation with shyness. While this is unsurprising, we should be careful about equating "sociability" with gregarious, back-slapping camaraderie. Mary McCaulley, reporting on a number of investigations using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, found sizeable numbers of introverts among leaders in a variety of fields. She concluded that "it is wise for leadership research to allow for successful leaders with both the extraverted and introverted orientations." Apparently, one may like and be able to work with people without necessarily wanting to party with them.

In fact, it may be better to think of sociability as the recognition that people are at the heart of things, and the desire to work effectively with them. According to one high school principal interviewed by Blumberg:

> I want to know whom I'm working with, what touches them, what motivates them, why they are in education. I want to know what's going on in their lives because so often things that are affecting their lives outside of school affect their performance in school. I spend a great deal of time trying to figure out my subjects as if they were models on a tapestry. Like each one is a small part of that tapestry, but yet everyone of them has to fit together for the total tapestry to be complete.

Psychological Health

Psychological studies of great leaders often show them to be driven by forces that border on the pathological. For example, biographers have suggested that Lyndon Johnson's extraordinary will to dominate others was the result of deep-rooted insecurity, and that Woodrow Wilson's career was a lifelong attempt to escape his father's shadow. Collectively, accounts like this may create the impression that pathology is a leadership asset.

But Bass argues that psychoanalysis tends to focus excessively on personal flaws and neuroses, and that leaders, while subject to the normal human frailties, also have many healthy and creative impulses. He cites the views of Erik Erikson and Abraham Maslow that leadership results from a drive to be happy and healthy.

One problem (for researchers as well as leaders) is that with some traits, more is not always better. Robert Kaplan, for instance, has found that executives' "expansiveness" (highly focused energy and drive) is a valuable leadership trait, but only up to a point. Excessive levels of expansiveness turn the leader into a rigid, domineering tyrant with little sensitivity to others' feelings. Recognizing the dividing line can be difficult, says Kaplan. "Some excess is virtually unavoidable. It is too much to expect high-powered individuals to be finely calibrated at all times." Yet he notes that some executives consistently go over the line while others are able to "throttle back" and keep their drive in balance.

The importance of balance is echoed by Gough, whose work with The California Psychological Inventory has led him to develop a scale for measuring "integration." According to Gough, those who have integrated their traits into a balanced whole are more likely to be seen as leaders—no matter what their basic predilections.

Closer to home is the testimony of a number of Blumberg's principals. Like Kaplan's expansive executives, they had great energy and a strong determination to get things done. Yet they repeatedly mentioned the importance of not pushing too far, too fast. They talked of "planting seeds" and "dangling bait," and freely told stories of how overeagerness had gotten them into trouble. For these leaders, patience was not a natural condition, but they had learned its value from experience, and their psychological balance allowed them to make the adjustment.

Charisma

Sometimes the leader's personality is so striking it earns the name "charisma." Originally the term was coined to describe leaders whose authority was based on personal characteristics rather than official posi-

tion. In recent decades, it has come to mean something akin to a magnetic personality.

Bass finds that leaders described as charismatic do have some common personal traits. They are emotionally expressive, self-confident, free from inner conflict, independent, insightful, eloquent, and energetic. They present a clear vision for the future and the conviction that it can be fulfilled.

However, he also notes that personality alone does not explain charismatic leadership; followers must be receptive to forming a strong identification with the leader. This identification may occur for psychological reasons (for example, low self-esteem) or for social reasons (a national state of crisis). To cite a classic example, Adolf Hitler had the necessary personal traits, but he also needed a crisis in German society (economic trauma and political instability) to become fully charismatic.

A leader who has charismatic traits but whose followers are not receptive to that kind of relationship may become what Bass calls an "inspirational" leader. Inspirational leaders create excitement and enthusiasm about social or organizational goals, but their followers invest loyalty in the ideas, remaining free to criticize the leaders.

While some scholars are leery of using the word *charisma* (fearing it has been overused and distorted), the concept plays an important role in the recent interest in transformational leadership (see chapter 2).

Character

Before social scientists talked about "traits," most people judged leaders by their "character," a word that implies humans are not just bundles of skills but embody a particular outlook on life, a certain integrity of belief and action. Some research studies have suggested that effective school leaders have particular character qualities that make them different from less effective leaders.

Beliefs

We've seen that the research linking intelligence with leadership indicates success depends on how—and how well—leaders think. But what leaders think may be equally important.

Samuel Krug, in arguing for a "constructivist" perspective on leadership, points out that surface behaviors may disguise deep differences in outlook that lead administrators to respond to the same event in very different ways. He gives an example of two principals required to person-

ally supervise the cafeteria. One principal saw the duty as a time drain that interfered with "important" tasks; the other saw it as an opportunity for publicly recognizing student achievements, thereby reinforcing the school's academic mission and building school-parent relationships. In each case, the duty was the same, but one principal's beliefs turned it into something much more meaningful.

Are there particular beliefs that lead to success? The early effective-schools literature identified one: The best schools had principals who sincerely believed students could and would succeed. More recently, researchers interested in restructuring have suggested that school change requires leaders with a specific set of beliefs. Sylvia Mendez-Morse says effective change agents share a number of common beliefs and values. They have a distinctive vision, a mental image of what the school is capable of becoming. They believe the contributions of staff members are vital. They believe schools are for learning and students come first.

Leaders also have certain beliefs about themselves. Bass notes successful leaders have a high degree of "self-efficacy"—they believe they can make a difference and they have confidence in their actions. Not surprisingly, most studies show leaders to have high self-esteem (though there may be some cases in which leadership is an attempt to overcome low self-esteem).

Security

A related finding by Blumberg and Greenfield is that effective educational leaders are secure; that is, they are not threatened by new ideas or confrontations with others. "Their sense of themselves as people and what it is they are about seems rather highly developed." The authors believe this feeling of security and sureness about themselves fosters a high tolerance for ambiguity. They can survive in a confusing situation where rules are ill-defined, and they can live with uncertainty.

Similarly, Edward Wynne and R. Bruce McPherson argue that one of the categories or traits of an effective principal is "courage," by which they mean not so much physical daring (though that may not be irrelevant), but rather the willingness to consciously expose oneself to circumstances that may generate serious harmful consequences—economic, emotional, or physical. The research suggests that the leaders who follow rules to the letter, who never make waves, and who never challenge authority are probably less effective than leaders who stretch the rules a little or fight to accomplish goals important to them.

None of this means that leaders are free of self-doubts and anxiety. James Autry, a successful consultant and publishing executive, tells of a lunch conversation with a fellow executive:

> At this lunch, he stopped eating abruptly, put down his knife and fork and asked, "Do you ever get the feeling that one day they are going to come into your office and say, 'Okay, Autry, we found out about you'?" "Yes, yes," I said, almost shouting, "I frequently get that feeling. You, too?" He nodded, and we both began to laugh.

Autry concludes that even the highest leaders are never as self-assured as they seem, because they are always contending with the expectations of others. He suggests that effective leaders define success by their own standards of importance, realizing that "if you can achieve satisfaction and fulfillment in the very effort of trying, rather than in the accomplishment of *everything* you set out to do, you will have achieved 99 percent of the value of what success really means."

Goals

The beliefs of effective leaders are not limited to the here-and-now. Blumberg and Greenfield found that excellent principals seem to be "highly goal-oriented and to have a keen sense of goal clarity." These effective principals "were continually alert for opportunities to make things happen, and if the opportunities didn't present themselves, they created them."

Kenneth Tye, studying a curriculum innovation at eleven schools, found that principals had three ways of dealing with goals. "Focused" principals had a few strong goals that were clearly articulated to staff and community. "Diffuse" principals were quick to adopt goals but ended up with overlapping and conflicting initiatives. "Coping" principals responded to whatever goals were thrust upon them but showed more interest in keeping things running smoothly. Tye discovered that the curriculum change was most successful in schools led by focused principals.

In recent years, goal-orientation has evolved into "vision," a word that emphasizes the imaginative thinking required in a turbulent age. It has become virtually axiomatic that principals and superintendents interested in restructuring must generate and share a dynamic vision of the new direction.

Indeed, virtually every current study of leadership makes this point. And when you think about it, it makes perfect sense. To lead means to take somebody someplace. If you don't know where you're going, you can't really be leading someone "there"—and you won't know when you've

arrived. Hence, the ability to visualize goals is a prerequisite for leadership. "Leadership," says Sylvia Mendez-Morse, "requires vision. It is a force that provides meaning and purpose to the work of an organization. Leaders of change are visionary leaders, and vision is the basis of their work."

Moral Strength

What do people value most in their leaders? Is it competence? Warmth? Flexibility? No, the word that shows up most often is "honesty" (James Kouzes and Barry Posner; Michael Richardson and others).

For a long time, twentieth-century images of high-powered leadership didn't leave much room for this traditional virtue. It was either taken for granted or ignored by social-science researchers who preferred to deal with more objective and measurable traits. But the 1990s have seen a surge of interest in values and morality. Words like "covenant," "stewardship," and even "spiritual" have been popping up regularly in discussions of leadership.

Empirical research in this area is still limited, but a growing school of thought says the leader's job is inherently moral: it is not just a matter of doing things right, but of doing the right things. Thomas Sergiovanni argues that this responsibility extends beyond personal ethics, and that the principal must be dedicated to creating a "moral community" and "virtuous school." Leaders who see themselves as stewards will be able to create school communities that are both collegial and responsive to the needs of community members.

The Genesis of Leadership

If leaders do have traits and characteristics that separate them from followers, these traits must be acquired somewhere. Some, like intelligence, come from a poorly understood combination of genetic endowment and early nurturing. Others, like cooperativeness and ease in groups, are believed to spring chiefly from parental influences. Many specific leadership skills are obviously learned through experience.

Heredity

One of the oldest debates in psychology is how much human behavior can be attributed to heredity. After decades of trying to untangle the threads of nature and nurture, the issue is still unresolved—and probably unresolvable.

In general, most modern researchers stress nurture over nature. For example, in their study of effective leaders, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus say it is a myth that "leaders are born, not made":

> Biographies of great leaders sometimes read as if they had entered the world with an extraordinary genetic endowment, that somehow their future leadership role was preordained. Don't believe it. The truth is that major capacities and competencies of leadership can be learned, and we are all educable, at least if the basic desire to learn is there and we do not suffer from serious learning disorders. Furthermore, whatever natural endowments we bring to the role of leadership, they can be enhanced; nurture is far more important than nature in determining who becomes a successful leader.

It may well be people are born with certain genetic predispositions to behave in one way or another, but these tendencies are modified and shaped by experience.

Birth Order

Any child with siblings can tell you about the trials and tribulations of being the first-born or last-born or in-betweener. In recent years, popular psychology has made much of the "birth-order factor," but its relation to leadership is ambiguous. Some studies show the oldest child to be more socially maladjusted, more conservative, less aggressive, less self-confident, more introverted, and less inclined toward leadership than other children, perhaps because parents of firstborns are inexperienced and less secure in their marriage and finances, or because older children must adjust to decreased attention when siblings arrive (Bass).

At the same time, in some families (especially in stable, one-parent households or two-parent households where both work) the firstborn may be encouraged to take on leadership roles and thus may well acquire more leadership abilities than the younger siblings. Moreover, in extended families, where other adults are present to provide support for the new parents, the oldest child may not suffer from the lack of security and parental inexperience that hampers the parents of "nuclear" families.

Bass concludes: "In all, taken by itself, it would seem that birth order may or may not make a difference, depending on other aspects of family life."

Family and Community

Whenever people are asked to name the greatest influences on their lives, parents are at the top of the list. So it seems reasonable to ask how childrearing might affect the development of leadership.

Bass reviewed a number of studies that linked childrearing practices to traits believed to be valuable in leadership. In one study, children allowed to participate in family decision-making were more resourceful, self-reliant, cooperative, and at ease in groups. Another concluded "sociability and cooperativeness were greater when parents were clear and consistent, explained decisions to their children, offered opportunities for decision-making, had rapport with their children, and better understood their children's problems."

Studies of successful leaders also show that their parents instilled high standards, especially a strong work ethic, and provided opportunities to act independently. Leaders often report having at least one strong parent who provided a positive role model.

Going beyond the immediate family and into the community, Wynne and McPherson point to "an important preliminary hypothesis" that has emerged from their research: "Good principals may tend to come from family and community environments which socialize them to the skills and values associated with fostering community and comfortably exercising strong authority." Similarly, Crowson and Morris note that the suburban superintendents they interviewed seemed especially attuned to community values; they suggest this quality may be related to the rural and small-town roots of most of their subjects.

Socioeconomic Variables

Many studies over the years have found that leadership positions tend to be filled by those from higher socioeconomic groups. In spite of the myth that great presidents are born in log cabins, Bass says few have come from lower socioeconomic groups. He also mentions a study that found that town leaders tend to be children of town leaders and that 70 percent of the fathers of businessmen are businessmen.

As it happens, determining parental socioeconomic status is notoriously difficult because the different elements of status (occupation, income, education, and prestige) are not perfectly correlated. We need to be especially cautious about drawing conclusions about school leaders. Dan Lortie, in his landmark study of teachers, observed that teaching (the starting point for most administrators) has long had a reputation as a convenient path for the upwardly mobile. Using figures from the 1960s, he estimated

almost a third of the teaching force had parents who were blue-collar workers. Emily Feistritzer, examining data from the mid-1980s, found that 20 percent of teachers' fathers had unskilled or semiskilled occupations, while another 15 percent were farmers.

On the other hand, those who go on to become administrators may differ from those who remain in the classroom. John Hemphill and colleagues, in comparing 232 elementary school principals to the population as a whole, found that disproportionately more were children of business or professional men and appreciably fewer were from laboring or farming families.

Hemphill's study applies to a previous generation, so we should be cautious in drawing conclusions about today's administrators. In any case, it's important to remember socioeconomic status is only associated with reaching a leadership position—not necessarily with distinguished performance. Class and wealth can smooth the way to the top but are less helpful in solving the problems that come with that territory.

Education and Training

If you ask superintendents and principals where they learned to do their job, the universal answer is "on the job." Blumberg agrees. His conversations with principals have convinced him school administration is a craft, learned inductively in hundreds of little episodes. School leaders don't operate from scientific principles or rigid rules, but from informal "rules of thumb" that have been tested in the fires of real life.

This is not to suggest it is easy to learn to be a leader. There is no simple formula, no rigorous science, no cookbook that leads inexorably to successful leadership. Instead it is a deeply human process, full of trial and error, victories and defeats, timing and happenstance, intuition and insight. Learning to lead is somewhat like learning to be a parent or a lover: your childhood and adolescence provide you with basic values and role models, books can deepen your understanding, but you can become proficient only by doing it.

Of course, not everybody survives this plunge into the deep end of the pool. Those who do, says Blumberg, are the ones who learn from mistakes, develop and trust their "sixth sense," and encounter both positive and negative role models.

And what of formal preparation programs? Blumberg suggests they play a modest (but useful) role by providing future administrators with a perspective—a way of thinking about their craft. Unlike dentists, who learn and hone their core skills in courses, school leaders get a more philosophical orientation. While some are frustrated by the lack of explicit skill train-

ing, Blumberg believes learning *what* to do may be more important at the initial stage than learning how to do it.

What We Don't Know About Leadership

We've learned a lot about leadership in the twentieth century. Compared to the simplistic beliefs of earlier times, current views seem diverse and sophisticated.

But simple fairness compels that we also ask what *isn't* known about the traits of leaders. Are there major gaps in our understanding? The answer seems to be "yes."

No Magic Bullet

The most obvious disappointment with the research is the lack of simple answers. Kenneth and Miriam Clark, summing up extensive research, say, "Our studies have found no single comprehensive list of leadership qualities. Every investigator who studies dimensions of leader and manager behavior comes up with a slightly different, or substantially different, list." They add, "Our studies have found no best measure to differentiate leaders from managers, or leaders from followers, or to identify those who will some day be leaders."

So there is no leadership gene, no ideal incubator for nurturing the kind of leaders we need and want. Who gets to be a leader, remains a leader, and thrives as a leader results from a complex process that eludes easy description.

New Faces, New Approaches

We noted earlier that current descriptions of leadership are built on a largely white, male population. Will the infusion of women and minorities into leadership positions force us to rethink our conceptions of leadership?

The answer thus far is "possibly." Charol Shakeshaft, reviewing a large number of studies, found evidence that female administrators interact more often with teachers and students, communicate in a more personal style, and use a more participatory approach to decision-making. Catherine Marshall reports that "atypical" administrators (mostly minority and/or female) use persuasion rather than top-down directives, are strongly sensitive to the needs of children and teachers, and willingly take risks when human needs collide with bureaucratic demands.

Other studies suggest gender differences do not apply to all administrative tasks. For example, Lee Bolman and Terry Deal reported relatively

little difference between male and female administrators in the ways they conceptualized leadership dilemmas.

Because women and minorities come to leadership with a different set of experiences, there is reason to think these experiences may give them a unique perspective on the leadership role—a valuable asset at a time when the whole educational enterprise is being rethought. However, the enthusiasm for new models should be tempered by the need for more research; the ultimate irony would be creating new stereotypes just after getting rid of the old ones.

The Person Behind the Mask

Traditional social-science research gives us a fairly detailed picture of the leader as leader, operating professionally and authoritatively to get the job done. In recent years, a growing number of less formal studies have allowed us to hear the unfiltered voices of principals and superintendents. These voices remind us that every leader remains a human being, bringing to the job an individual history and a full range of passions, frailties, and idiosyncracies.

We don't know nearly as much as we should about how personhood affects leadership. For example, does parenthood affect leadership? Psychologist Abraham Maslow once said that a few months of watching his infant son convinced him behaviorism could never explain human behavior—thereby changing his philosophy, and the course of American psychology. Do school leaders rethink their craft for similar reasons?

More generally, we know little about how a person's life journey affects leadership. Charles Palus, William Nasby, and Randolph Easton contend every life is a story that seeks to reconcile "who I was, who I am, and who I might become." Working out that story—finding love, making one's place in the world, coming to terms with parental ghosts—is bound to affect the way people lead, but how?

The answers to these questions may lie more in biography than in correlational studies, but without them our portrait of the leader will always seem just a little bit hollow.

Implications for Administrator Selection

We return now to the advertisement that began this chapter. What can we say to the school in search of leadership? As members of the search committee wade through the stacks of applications and grill the sweaty-palmed applicants, what clues should they be looking for? Can we offer them a formula for success?

The short answer is "no." As we've seen, there is no sure-fire litmus test. The longer answer is more complex, but more hopeful. The portrait we have drawn does suggest some starting points for search committees.

1. *Good leaders are good thinkers, whether this is expressed as intelligence, technical knowledge, or basic beliefs.* Interviewers will want to engage applicants in a vigorous exchange of ideas on a variety of issues. The best candidates will not only *have* many ideas, they will be able to articulate them clearly.

2. *Good leaders are people-oriented.* Measuring such skills is tricky, though a number of instruments can provide a rough-and-ready estimate. The personal interview can be especially helpful in gauging how well job candidates or current administrators communicate and listen, especially if the questions are posed by a variety of people and stakeholders.

3. *Character is a crucial element in leadership.* Selectors must ask themselves some basic questions about the person before them. Is this someone who can be relied on? Someone who can stand up to the buffeting that every leader must take? Someone who is the kind of human being they'd be proud to know?

4. *Since so much of school leadership seems to be self-taught, selectors might want to discover how candidates view their craft.* What mistakes have they made and what have they learned from them? What are the most important things they know now that they didn't when they started? Who was the best (or worst) role model they had? The goal here is to decide whether this is a person who will continue to learn from experience. (Or, to borrow a well-known witticism, is this someone who has had ten years of experience or one year of experience ten times?)

The literature also offers a few insights into the training of administrators. School leaders often criticize their preparation programs as "impractical" or "too theoretical," and it's now easy to see why. So many of the characteristics of leaders—social orientation, initiative, psychological balance—are not easily taught (nor would most universities feel comfortable in using these traits to select candidates). Just as important, leadership is highly dependent on context. Effective principals don't just know schools, they know *their* schools—the history, the personalities, the sights, sounds, and smells. (Blumberg gives the example of a principal who detected something on the floor above that didn't quite sound right. She couldn't specify just what she was reacting to, and an observer hadn't heard anything unusual, but a quick investigation revealed several students who didn't belong in the school.)

So while training programs might do a better job of teaching specific skills (perhaps through simulations or case studies), whatever is learned

will not have quite the flavor of the real thing. Any generalized skills will eventually have to be adapted to a highly specific environment.

Current training programs may not be that far off the mark when they provide candidates with an intellectual and philosophical perspective on the school system. As we've seen, leaders are good thinkers, with a particular set of beliefs and a strong sense of purpose. There may be no better time to confront future administrators with difficult questions. What is the purpose of the educational enterprise? Who are schools meant to serve, and how well are they doing it? And what are they, the future leaders, doing here? What can they accomplish as administrators that they can't do as teachers? While there is always a danger such speculations may become sterile, abstract exercises, it should take no great effort to connect them with the very practical problems school leaders wrestle with every day. Certainly, once administrators get caught up in the maelstrom of a working school, there will be precious little time for leisurely reflection.

Conclusion

A small part of our leadership portrait has been revealed by each of the research studies and reviews mentioned here. Now, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, all the fragments can be assembled to reveal a more coherent (though by no means complete) portrait of an effective educational leader.

This portrait shows leaders are competent, both intellectually and socially. They have a high degree of energy and initiative, but have also learned the value of patience. They get along well with people and are skillful communicators. They are psychologically well-balanced, integrating their diverse traits into a smoothly functioning whole. They have a distinctive set of beliefs and values that they communicate clearly.

As children they were probably challenged by high standards and the opportunity to exercise responsibility. Much of what they know about leadership has been learned on their own, through practical experience.

As portraits go, this one is rather impressionistic, displaying nebulous shadings of color rather than sharp edges. There is much we don't know, and much of what we think we know will eventually prove to be misleading or just plain wrong.

Moreover, the sketch itself is not of a real leader but only of an imaginary one. The leader whose characteristics are set down here is a pure "form," who in actuality does not exist. Like the "typical voter" or the "typical consumer," the "typical leader" is only a composite of common characteristics. No real flesh and blood counterpart exists.

And even if we could find someone with all the traits we've listed, there is no guarantee he or she would be a leader. As Daniel Duke has said,

> It is conceivable that there are individuals who manifest all the behaviors associated with leadership, yet fail to embody leadership. Those who attempt to "train" leaders long have recognized this problem. Some master all the necessary operations—from planning to decision making—but they do not convey the impression of leadership.

Leadership seems to be a gestalt phenomenon, greater than the sum of its behavioral parts.

So what then is the point of this incomplete portrait of a nonexistent leader? Simply this: Becoming a leader is ultimately a do-it-yourself project. Examining views of leadership can teach us much about ourselves and our culture, our conceptions and preconceptions. The hope is that leaders, or future leaders, can find in these pages themes that resonate in their own lives and that can help them reflect more deeply on their own journey to leadership.

When things get rough and they are tempted to lock themselves in their offices, such a vision can remind them that human-relations and communication skills are important. When they are coasting along, day-by-day, not going anywhere in particular, it can remind them that being goal-oriented does make a difference. When they are criticized by superiors for breaking unnecessary rules and cautioned not to make waves, it can give them the courage to continue doing things their own way—as long as that way has been successful in accomplishing their highest priorities.

In short, the most important use for this portrait is the function performed by any ideal. It can caution us while at the same time offering us something to strive for.