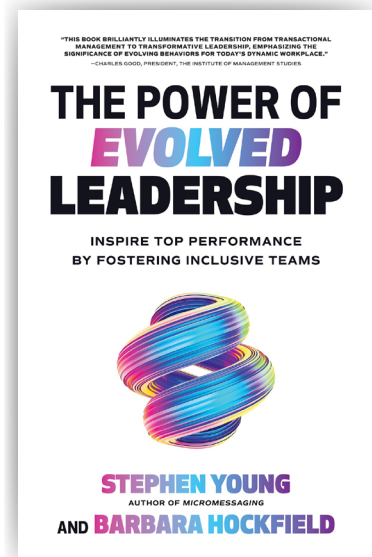# The Power of Evolved Leadership

Inspire Top Performance by Fostering Inclusive Teams

Stephen Young and Barbara Hockfield

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- As a leader, cultivate loyalty, commitment, and purpose by demonstrating genuine concern for your employees.

- Create an inclusive culture by treating all teammates consistently and equitably while celebrating their diversity.

- Be receptive to challenges. To embrace different perspectives, express gratitude for the person's insight and acknowledge the value it holds.

- Provide regular, actionable feedback regarding job performance, including technical and interpersonal skills.

OVERVIEW

Stop leading like a neanderthal. In **The Power of Evolved Leadership**, leadership development experts Stephen Young and Barbara Hockfield share how to break the ancient leadership mold and set a new standard. You'll learn how to move beyond power, command, and control and instead foster motivation, loyalty, and inspiration within your team to help them achieve their full potential.

SETTING THE STAGE

Leadership is a sociological concept that encompasses four key areas:

1. *Performance* is the ability to achieve quotas, targets, and other measurable objectives. Successful leaders are skilled at meeting measurable objectives and clearly communicating how performance will be measured to their team.

2. *Motivation* is the ability to cultivate commitment, engagement, and loyalty. Leaders who are skilled in motivation inspire employees to perform to their full potential.

3. *Vision* transcends the present by charting the organization's future direction and providing guidance for continuous growth toward that mission. Successful leaders articulate the company's vision and show teammates how they can help bring it to fruition.

4. *Values* shape the ethics and morality of a leader. Leaders and their teams should have a sense of pride in the company's values.

Leadership's Natural Selection

Neanderthals selected leaders based on size, strength, and intelligence, while subordinates did the leader's bidding until they showed signs of weakness and were violently deposed. Today, we subconsciously select leaders based on the same antiquated criteria.

Outdated and illogical thinking also manifests in a widespread fear of challenging the boss. Employees discuss detrimental behavior among themselves but rarely share it. The primary obstacle to successful leadership is ego. It's human nature to believe you're right and everyone else is wrong.

Being proven wrong is often seen as a challenge to your intellect and value. Great leaders push back against this outdated model that discourages criticism by inviting diverse opinions and motivating and inspiring others to reach their full potential.

Culture Takes Center Stage

Toxic workplace culture is a leading cause of employee attrition, with workers citing abusive managers and colleagues, a lack of integrity, and a failure to embrace inclusivity as key reasons for leaving. Most people are promoted to management positions because they excel at their current jobs. When sourcing talent for leadership positions, look for people who demonstrate essential leadership qualities, such as:

- Building relationships.
- Creating a vision.
- Taking risks.
- Committing to personal growth.

Connective Communication

While most business interactions are polite, engaging, and responsive, an evolved leader goes a step further. Use connective language to convey interest, engagement, worthiness, and respect by:

- *Demonstrating genuine concern*. When providing constructive feedback, demonstrate genuine concern for the listener's best interests by saying, "Let me offer some suggestions for next time."

- *Actively engaging*. Demonstrate that you value and respect another person's insight by summarizing your understanding of their key points, asking open-ended questions, and responding with honest commentary.

- *Not playing favorites*. Foster an inclusive culture by ensuring consistent and equitable treatment for all team members. This means avoiding signs of favoritism, such as allowing certain direct reports to take liberties like making inappropriate or overly familiar jokes.

Authenticity Is Not the Goal

Your *core self* is the authentic way you react to situations when alone, while your *persona* is how you choose to present yourself to others.

Instead of taking your true self to work, which may be tired, grumpy, and have preferences for some people more than others, consider the conditions in which you operate. Different languages, styles, and cultures require different personas. Embody the persona that accomplishes your goals without compromising your core values.

While personal relationships are based on emotional connection, workplace relationships are about skills, ability, and performance. These lines can blur because we spend so much time in the workplace. Avoid seeking emotional connection at work, as emotional relationships are prone to conflict.

Is Humility Overrated?

Your career trajectory is determined by your perceived value. However, humility—often seen as a virtue—can hinder your career if you don't actively showcase the value that you bring to the business. The following tips can help you accelerate your career through self-promotion:

- *Don't brag*. Bragging stems from arrogance and puts others down. Instead, highlight your strengths and accomplishments.

- *Build relationships*. Cultivate relationships with people who could help advance your career. Learn about the skills they value by asking questions about their department, culture, and the skills required to succeed on their teams. Follow up by sharing content that aligns with their interests and needs, and when your skills align with their needs, share your accomplishments.

- *Create a skills inventory*. Write down a list of skills required to succeed at your job and rank yourself on each. Then, meet with your manager to propose ideas to help you develop in areas where you need improvement.

Saving Face Versus Seeking Truth

Aphorisms like "trust your gut" and "follow your heart" interfere with decision-making. Intuition is too unreliable, and many gut decisions result in the exclusion of individuals based on differences like appearance, identity, or religion. Instead, set your trajectory using logic and intellect.

Evolved leaders analyze data to make fact-based decisions and promote diversity of thought by creating a sense of psychological safety. Many bosses are flattered by teammates who agree with their insights and vision. This is often a mask for disagreement, as most people are careful not to offend those who control their professional destiny. The real victim of this deception is the boss, who rarely receives honest feedback.

To overcome this hurdle:

- Make critical feedback a job requirement.

- Let your team know that performance appraisals and future opportunities hinge on their ability to demonstrate innovative and challenging thinking.

- Never be defensive or dismissive of challenges. Instead, explore differences of perspective and express appreciation for the value they bring.

The Paradox of Political Correctness

Political correctness is often used to prevent hurt feelings and lawsuits. Celebrate individual differences through respectful inquiries that highlight the other person's value, including:

- *Celebrating differences*. For people who have been marginalized based on easily detectable aspects of identity like accent and style of dress, "Where are you from?" can be a loaded question. To create a respectful conversation around someone's country of origin, start with a question such as, "I'm hearing something in your voice that sounds… Where are you from?"

- *Establishing rapport*. Conversations around disabilities require a foundation of trust and respect. After establishing a relationship, open the door to deeper learning by asking if they'd be comfortable discussing if or how their disabilities impact their workplace experience.

- *Not getting defensive*. When challenged, never respond defensively. Diffuse tension by seeking to learn more through follow-up questions. It can be as simple as saying, "Tell me more."

Value Protocols

A *value protocol* describes the behaviors and strategies that make you a productive and effective leader. To transform your team, present and build on these nine value protocols:

1. *Every criticism must include a recommendation*. Facilitate action by requiring every criticism to be followed up by a recommended change.

2. *Start with "yes."* When presented with a challenging viewpoint, begin your response with appreciation.

3. *Ask meeting attendees for input*. Encourage participation by calling on people who haven't spoken.

4. *Distribution information*. Anything that could be of value to others should be shared immediately.

5. *Routinely provide developmental feedback*. Constructive feedback should be shared regularly and as close to the related event as possible.

6. *Start broadly*. To address workplace problems, start broadly to capture all contributing causes and then narrow your focus.

7. *Don't wait—initiate*. When there's a significant issue, don't wait for someone else to address it. Bring it to the table yourself.

8. *Listen to understand*. When you listen to others, do so to comprehend the speaker's intended message, not to prove you're right.

9. *Validate, don't speculate*. Before acting, validate your interpretation.

RECRUITING AND KEEPING TALENTED PEOPLE

The following tips can help you recruit and retain top talent:

- *Cast a wide net*. When recruiting, look beyond the most prestigious schools.

- *Establish an internship program*. Create a well-structured program that provides real work experience and weekly feedback.

- *Interview for key skills*. Look for communication, creativity, initiative, and the ability to manage unpredictable circumstances.

- *Conduct stay interviews*. Monitor your team for signs of discontent by conducting 30-minute stay interviews. Start by outlining the individual's contributions, then ask the employee to assess their contentment at the organization, desired job changes, additional responsibilities they seek, curiosity about other business areas, pride in the organization, work/life balance, and what you could do to improve their experience.

AXIOLOGICAL SKILLS FOR EVOLVED LEADERSHIP

Effective leaders excel in these nine key areas:

1. *Respect*. Cultivate loyalty, commitment, and purpose by fostering a culture of mutual respect.

2. *Intelligence*. Stay on top of the latest trends and research, connect ideas in new ways, and anticipate future trends.

3. *Integrity*. Evolved leaders are honest, put the pursuit of truth above their own desire to win, and demand all ideas be listened to and evaluated based on their own merits.

4. *Predictive behavior*. Don't allow someone's reputation to bias you for or against their ideas. Good employees can have bad ideas, and vice versa.

5. *Communication*. Great leaders practice active listening and deliver clear and accurate messages.

6. *Charisma*. Charismatic leaders are confident and charming but maintain an undertone of humility.

7. *Sense of humor*. Evolved leaders use a sense of humor to create an upbeat atmosphere.

8. *Solicit perspective*. Evolved leaders present a concept and solicit insight before making a final decision.

9. *Creativity and innovation*. Creativity can be taught. To develop your team's creativity, bring a common household item to work and ask your team to think of three ways that

it could be used other than its intended purpose. Innovation moves ideas from concept to application. For every creative idea, ask your team questions like, "Who would want it?" and "How will it improve their lives?"

ACTIONS FOR INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

You can build loyalty, engagement, and an inclusive culture by:

- *Maintaining balanced interactions*. In your next few meetings, note how frequently you interact with different members of your team, then rectify any imbalance.
- *Building commitment*. During one-on-one meetings, explore team members' professional aspirations and the aspects of the job they enjoy least. Look for ways to align their interests and aspirations with work assignments.
- *Providing feedback*. Provide actionable feedback regarding job performance, including technical and interpersonal skills.
- *Discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)*. Demonstrate your commitment to inclusion by making DEI an agenda item for 20 to 30 minutes two or three times every year.
- *Eliminating bias*. We're naturally drawn to people who are similar to us. To eliminate this bias, job interviews should include a consistent set of questions, and answers should be evaluated using the same criteria.
- *Providing development opportunities*. Assign special opportunities, including leadership development, to all teammates, and recognize high performance in all areas—not just high-profile projects.

DO WE REALLY NEED LEADERS AT ALL?

We've experienced more technological advancement in the last century than in the entire history of humankind. Given the exponential pace of change, it's foolish to assume that over the next century, the workplace will bear any resemblance to the workplace of today.

Just a few decades ago, factors like race and gender were considered legitimate criteria for determining positions, salary, and promotions. Fifty years from now, the most sophisticated thinking of today will seem just as antiquated—if we even have leaders.

Whatever path leadership takes in the future, one thing is certain: It will look markedly different from the workplace we know and are comfortable with today.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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