



The Relationship Builder

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**I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today,
it means getting along with people.**

-Mahatma Gandhi

Leadership is the art of creating followers. It is not a solo performance, but a partnership, a dance between leaders and their followers. I may think of myself as a leader, but if I go charging up the hill shouting and carrying the flag and no one follows – am I a leader or a fool? To be effective, leaders must gain the support of others.

To bring people along, I can threaten them with salary cuts, demotions, termination;

I can coerce, manipulate or buy their allegiance with financial incentives – the practices of a dying paradigm. If I am a Visionary Evangelist, I can inspire them with the power of my vision.

Or, I can build a bond with them and engage them with my approachable style and respectful, considerate behavior. I can demonstrate that I care about them by sitting down and talking, listening to what they say, responding to their concerns, appreciating their good

work, and being so likeable and supportive that they want to work with me and for me.

This is the art of leadership as practiced by the Relationship Builder. It is a way of being and behaving that involves cultivating relationships, accurately reading people, understanding their needs, listening to their input, negotiating mutually beneficial agreements, and building cohesive teams and strategic partnerships.

Unlike the more flashy and out-in-front Visionary Evan-

gelist, we looked at in the previous article, Relationship Builders often operate more quietly and behind the scenes. They don't crave the spotlight and are often more concerned with empowering employees, building buy-in and consensus, and fostering team spirit than crusading for an idea or a product. However, some of today's top leaders are surely Relationship Builders, people like Dave Thomas, the foun-

“In organizations, real power and energy are generated through relationships. The patterns of relationships and the capacities to form them are more important than tasks, functions, roles, and positions.”

- Margaret Wheatly

der of Wendy's; William Hewlett, co-founder of Hewlett-Packard; John Chambers, CEO of Cisco; Herb Kelleher, founder of Southwest Airlines; and the brilliant and multi-talented Oprah Winfrey. Others, such as Jamie Dimon of JP Morgan Chase;

Ed Zander, former president of Sun Microsystems and current CEO of Motorola; IBM's CEO, Sam Palmisano; and Carlos Ghosn, CEO of Nissan, are all probably Relationship Builders too. In the following pages we will talk about some of these powerful leaders and try to understand what makes them tick. Using our extensive HCG database, we will attempt to answer questions like, “What are the traits that make Relationship Builders Successful? What holds them back? How is their role different from the Visionary Evangelist's, and how can they make their greatest contributions to the organizations they work in and lead?”

Importance of the Relationship Builder

Relationship Builders (RB) are the “heart” of every organization. They are the ones people come to when they “need to talk,” whether about a business problem, a difficult relationship, the political dynamics at the office, career decisions, or personal crises. Leaders with RB skills and qualities are accessible and inspire loyalty and trust. Their openness and sensitivity create a comfortable, supportive, “family” feeling on the

teams they lead.

Visionary Evangelists can mobilize and energize an organization with their vision and the persuasiveness of their

“Leadership is not domination but the art of persuading people to work toward a common goal.”

-Daniel Goleman

speech. Relationship Builders are equally gifted leaders who succeed by forging a personal connection with followers, winning their respect as well as their affection, and drawing them into a loyal, harmonious, cohesive unit.

In the entrepreneurial stages of a company, Visionary Evangelists (VE) envision something new – creating an innovative product idea, launching a new business approach. They paint the picture that draws in investors and sets the wheels in motion. However, for the organization to grow, the leader needs loyal and committed followers: people to take on the hundreds and thousands of tasks required to make things happen.

The passion and eloquence of the VE are often sufficient to kick things off, but when the initial enthusiasm wears thin, when internal conflicts arise, when the company faces lean times financially, when an unpopular initiative comes down from above or leadership takes a new direction and people are having a hard time adjusting, it is often Relationship Builders who possess the leadership style to overcome the crisis and not lose valuable employees. Good listeners, they will meet with the doubting and disgruntled and allow them to voice their con-

“Our priorities in business are changing, and it’s now more clear than ever that the quality of our relationships with our colleagues, our clients, and our competitors is key to the success of our businesses and of our individual careers.”

*-Ronna Lichtenberg,
author of It’s not
Business, It’s
Personal*

cerns, then patiently explain the reason for the change and how it will be good for the entire organization and everyone in it. They have an innate gift for reading people, responding to their needs and fears, and getting their buy-in.

A big part of the magic of the Relationship Builder is that, in the impersonal world of business, they are personal. To them, you are not a “human resource,” a number or an asset, but an individual.

RB’s genuinely care about others. They don’t resent spending time cultivating relationships. They actually look forward to it. They soothe, harmonize, mediate, and in general serve as the glue that holds the organization together and allows it to move forward.

They do all this partly because it is natural for them, but also because they see clearly the strategic value of leveraging the hands, hearts, and minds of other people in order to get things done.

In the words of author, former publishing executive, and corporate consultant James A. Autry, “Business is of, by, about, and for people.” People are crucial to getting results and problems with people are the biggest obstacles to

“America is moving from a manufacturing to a value-added, service-oriented economy. And at the heart of service is relationships: interpersonal relationships, intergroup relationships, and interdepartmental relationships.”

*-James E. Perella,
former Chairman,
President and CEO
of Ingersoll-Rand*

getting results. According to a recent article on office politics, “Eighteen percent of an administrator’s time – more than nine weeks out of every year – is spent resolving conflicts among employees”

Neither Visionary Evangelists, with their heads in the clouds of inspiration, nor Managers of Execution, with their eyes narrowly focused on details and processes, are renowned for their people skills. Therefore, people who have those skills are a critical

How important are emotional intelligence and the social skills we are discussing in this paper?

Here are some recent research findings:

- 85% of people laid off are fired because they cannot get along with others; only 15% are fired because they lack competence
- IQ accounts for no more than 25%, and perhaps as little as 4% of the variance in job performance; it contributes no more than about 20% to success in life.
- Social and emotional abilities are four times more important than IQ in determining professional success and prestige.
- Leaders who are able to establish mutual trust, respect, and rapport are more effective.
- People who perceive, understand, and empathize with other people's emotions are more successful in their professional as well as their personal lives.
- Forget the drill sergeant stereotype. The most effective leaders in the U.S. Navy tend to be “warmer, outgoing, emotionally expressive, dramatic and sociable.”

Source: Steven M. Sultanoff, Ph.D., Workshop Material on Emotional Intelligence.

part of every leadership and management team.

Relationship Building: A Vital Role in 21st Century Business

The leader who excels at relationship building has an increasingly crucial role to play in today's interconnected and rapidly-shifting international marketplace. With a diverse workforce to manage, expectations on the part of increasing numbers of people that their jobs be sources of meaning as well as livelihood, and a complex web of relationships with vendors, customers, regulators and the media to navigate, the job of the leader has more to do with relationships than ever before.

“Corporations have gone through a radical revolution,” says Harvard Business School professor Shoshona Zuboff.

There was a long period of managerial domination of the corporate hierarchy when the manipulative jungle-fighter boss was rewarded. But that rigid hierarchy started breaking down in the 1980s under the twin pressures of globalization and information technology. The jungle fighter symbolizes where the corporation has been; the virtuoso in interpersonal skills is the

A New President Comforts the Nation



Just days after being inaugurated president in 1933, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was faced with a severe crisis in the nation's banking system. The country was in the grip of the Great Depression, nearly a third of the people had no jobs, the banks were collapsing, and the nation was in a panic.

To restore confidence, FDR held a “Fireside Chat,” an informal radio talk to the people. According to the National Archives, “During the 1930s almost every home had a radio, and families typically spent several hours a day gathered together, listening to their favorite programs.” The president's talk – which he began with the words, “My friends” – was relaxed, informative, and without any political rhetoric; it made the people feel that he was talking directly to them. As one commentator remarked, “Roosevelt's first ‘Fireside Chat’ demonstrated the new president's remarkable capacity to project his personal warmth and charm into the nation's living rooms.” It was so successful that he did 30 more during his tenure as president.

FDR's Fireside Chats “allowed the public to think of him as a friend and confidant,” as one historian put it, and helped to sustain the nation through the difficulties of the Depression and the Second World War. FDR was so well loved that he was re-elected three times.

corporate future.

From business to government to religious institutions, today's organizations function on the basis of interdependent teams and partnerships. Now, as Peter Drucker has pointed out, "teams become the work

Relationship Builders see the best in people and treat everyone with respect and consideration. They don't leave a trail of hurt feelings behind them.

unit rather than the individual." Leaders must work with teams of experts in various aspects of the organization – finance, production, marketing, etc. These cross-functional teams, as well as collaborations between business units and alliances with other organizations, have become the norm. An effective leader in the 21st century has to build teams, motivate them, guide their activities, and have the skill to pilot them through their inevitable ups and downs.

Every day, leaders have to work with and through others, often people from different parts of the organization

over whom they have no formal authority. You may head up a marketing workgroup, for example, but you can't get your job done without R&D. You can't just say, "Do it!" – you have to create buy-in; you have to work it out. In the words of Ken Blanchard, "The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority."

These changing trends are bringing the business practices and cultures of the Western world more in the direction of the East. Debashis Chatterjee, a consultant and educator recently named by Harvard Business School as one of the fifteen thought leaders of the world, points out that leadership in Eastern societies is often driven by the attempt "to bring harmony in human relationships." In these cultures, says Chatterjee, "the age-old human value of harmony still serves as the core leadership principle in politics and business."

Does all this talk of "warmth" and "harmony" make you feel a little uncomfortable in a discussion of effective leadership? Do you share the widespread view that these "soft" values and behaviors have little place in dynamic, top-level leaders? Then come along with us – and keep an open mind – as we explore the ca-

reers of such high-level achievers as Herb Kelleher, founder of Southwest Airlines, the most consistently profitable carrier in the industry; Dave Thomas, founder of

"You don't have to be brilliant to be a good leader. But you do have to understand other people – How they feel, what makes them tick, and the best way to influence them.

*- "Leadership"
January 19, 1993*

the Wendy's chain; William Hewlett, multi-billionaire co-founder of HP; and that quintessential Relationship Builder, Oprah Winfrey. Check out the biographies of modern presidents such as Ronald Reagan, "the great communicator," or Bill Clinton, a Relationship Builder whose approval rating remained exceptionally high even through the scandals of his second term.

The fact is, many top leaders are either strong examples of the Relationship Builder pil-

Herb Kelleher: “Nothing Comes Ahead of Your People.”



Herb Kelleher started Southwest Airlines in 1971 with four planes and fewer than 70 employees. When the fledgling company ran into financial problems, Kelleher had to make a tough decision: sell one of the planes or lay off people. The choice he made – sell the plane – set the tone of the company for the next three decades.

Kelleher’s people-centered philosophy of running a business is almost a textbook model of The Relationship Builder. In answer to the often-asked question, “Who comes first, your

employees, your shareholders, or your customers?” Kelleher responds, “Your employees come first. If your employees are satisfied and happy and dedicated and inspired by what they’re doing, then they make your customers happy and they come back, and that makes your shareholders happy.” He instructs Southwest employees, “Don’t worry about profit. Think about customer service. Profit is a by-product of customer service.”

The Southwest corporate culture is known for its frequent parties and celebrations. But, Kelleher is

quick to point out, “It has to be an event that praises the goodness of the soul and brings out the idealism and altruism in people.” And he adds, “What we do communicates itself to the outside world in better service and warmer hospitality.”

Southwest’s top leadership team communicates with everyone in the company. “I’m talking about personal communications,” Kelleher said a few years ago, “cards, notes – ‘I’m sorry to hear about the death of your grandfather,’ that sort of thing. I would estimate that everybody at Southwest – all 27,000 – hear from us probably five times a year.” Cards are sent not just for Thanksgiving and Christmas, but also for births, deaths, and marriages. At one time, most were signed personally by either Kelleher or his then executive secretary Colleen Barrett – now Southwest’s president.

“We try to value each person individually,” Kelle-

her says, “and to be cognizant of them as human beings – not just people who work for our company. We try to memorialize and celebrate and sympathize with and commemorate the things that happen to them in their personal lives. What we’re really trying to say is, ‘We value you as people.’”

About as far from an ivory-tower executive as it gets, Kelleher is famous for flying on Southwest's planes in order to

talk to customers and employees, handing out snacks and asking for feedback on Southwest's performance.

Here, in his own words, are some of the principles by which he ran Southwest:

“You learn how to communicate with large numbers of employees by using videotapes, newsletters, weekly updates, frequent visits to the field.... You go to meetings not to issue orders or

instructions; you go to learn the problems people are having and to see if you can help. You remember that systems are not masters -- they're servants in helping you carry out your mission. And that nothing comes ahead of your people.”

“If you take an ongoing, genuine interest in the well-being of your people, outside as well as inside the workplace, you eventually create trust.”

lar, or people whose relationship-building skills complement and support their visionary or managerial expertise. This is an important point that we will discuss later: the power of combining relationship building with one of the other Pillars of Leadership.

Let's look now at what our research at HCG over the past two decades has revealed about the characteristic strengths and challenges of the Relationship Builder.

Natural Strengths

Friendly and Approachable

The first thing that needs to be said about Relationship Builders is that these are genuinely nice people. They are warm and welcoming, open, approachable, and non-judgmental. They tend to see the best in people, and treat everyone with respect and consideration. They have kind and sympathetic natures and give people their full attention. Their reward is that they are well liked by almost everyone. “Lou is very easy-

going and approachable,” a co-worker said. “He has a warm and friendly personality and is instantly liked. I can't think of anybody who doesn't like him.”

Relationship Builders value and enjoy people, and devote a substantial amount of time and attention to cultivating relationships. From an early age, people are drawn to them and feel comfortable with them, not only because of their amiable personalities, but because their way of relating to others is forthright and respectful. They care about people, and are sensitive to

their needs, concerns, and perspectives. “John projects a feeling of caring and concern,” someone who works for him told us. “He demonstrates his caring by being an excellent listener.” You can share your problems, your feelings, and your dreams with a Relationship Builder, who will listen attentively.

You can also share your ideas. As managers and leaders, RB’s show their respect for others by being open to their ideas and views, even if these ideas are different from their own. Often they actively solicit input from their peers and subordinates. “What do you think about this?” they will ask. “Will it work in your department?” And because they are warm personalities who are not intimidating, people are not afraid to volunteer their opinions.

Relationship Builders are relatively easy-going and “laid back.” They are rarely anxious, and rarely react defensively or with anger. Also, they are not overly competitive; it’s more important to them to have a relationship of cooperation and harmony, a feeling of “family” or “team,” than to come out on top of the heap. Because of these factors, they don’t leave a trail of hurt feelings behind them.

Socially Skillful and Astute

The second key to the RB personality and leadership style is that they are *socially astute*: they know what makes people tick. Relationship Builders are experts at accurately reading people, understanding their motivations, and correctly gauging their reactions. They are sensitive to others’ feelings and quick to adjust their approach to fit the other person’s mood, need, or style. They not only understand individuals, they also grasp the “politics” and social dynamics of work groups and the organization as a whole.

Relationship Builders also have outstanding social *skills*. They listen attentively and don’t interrupt. They hear what is being said, and when they don’t understand, ask questions to clarify meaning. They communicate their interest and create a bond by offering feedback that shows that they understand and care.

Because they’re so highly attuned to other people’s feelings, moods, and reactions and are aware of their impact on others, their words and responses tend to be very carefully chosen and diplomatic. They know what to say to win friends – and *not* create

enemies. Their approach rarely puts people off and is effective in enlisting support.

Another valuable social skill that RB leaders naturally possess is their tendency to recognize, praise, and reward others for good performance. “Ron has a talent for making people feel important, and he genuinely cares,” one grateful employee said of his boss. “Unlike other people I’ve worked for who only let you know when you screw up, he takes the time to thank us when we do a particularly good job.” Everyone likes to be appreciated. Leaders who express their gratitude for a job well done not only encourage better performance, but also inspire loyalty and engagement.

Know How to Get Buy-in and Build Followership

Leaders have an agenda. In order to accomplish it, they need the help of others. The larger and more ambitious the enterprise, the more indispensable are the time, energy, efforts, and support of many people. The leader who cannot get co-workers to support his or her initiatives will inevitably be frustrated, and probably will fail. Although this is surely true in all times

and places, it seems particularly critical today, when building teams and partnerships is such a fundamental aspect of the business environment.

Today's leaders also have to contend with an increasingly savvy and mobile workforce. Employees are prepared to explore alternative employment opportunities and willing to move on if they are not treated with respect. In another time, loyalty was a core value that made people reluctant to risk changing jobs and careers. In an age of layoffs and mergers, individuals have learned that they must look out for their own interests and career development. Leaders can no longer take employee retention for granted; they have to earn the loyalty of their workforce and develop skills to achieve buy-in to their agendas.

Generating the necessary buy-in requires a high level of interpersonal savvy and the ability to persuade others. Thus it is no surprise that Relationship Builders excel at it – they are masters at getting other people to like them and to work with them to accomplish their objectives. While some leaders can count on their personal charm and charisma to entice followers to fall into step behind them,

Relationship Builders rely on a set of skills both natural and learned. They know that in order to get buy-in they have to:

Read others' moods, needs, and motives and shape their appeal accordingly.

“To sustain the inspiration that comes from leadership, you need teamwork. Good leadership involves not just personal evolution, but also co-evolution. A team of stars does not make a star team unless the stars draw the best from each other and work as a team.”

-Debashis Chatterjee

Be patient – persuading people takes time. Pushing too hard can be self-defeating.

Stay upbeat. People are drawn to the optimism and confidence of a leader who “knows” the effort will succeed.

Trust others. Before you can genuinely seek the support of others, you have to believe they can be relied upon – and convey that belief.

One of the best ways to engage followers is by developing a sense of shared fate, the feeling that “We’re all in this together.” When people feel this way, they become willing to rise to any challenge, endure hardships, and make personal sacrifices (such as working long hours, accepting deferred financial reward, etc.) for the cause.

Leaders who inspire this level of engagement get maximum leverage to accomplish their objectives. Visionary Evangelists can generate this sense of shared fate and common purpose through the force of their vision and persuasive power. Relationship Builders achieve it in a more humble and personal way – by encouraging others, lifting spirits, and drawing people together as a caring family.

History serves up numerous examples of leaders who worked their magic in engaging followers. Hundreds of thousands of Frenchmen marched on foot through the perils of a Russian winter in support of their beloved leader, Napoleon Bonaparte.

They were captivated by his vision of bringing the ideals of the French Revolution – “liberté, égalité, fraternité” – to the peoples of Europe. But it wasn’t his vision alone: Napoleon was renowned for his ability to make a personal connection with his soldiers. In a more contemporary example, 30,000 employees of Southwest Airlines are fiercely loyal to an organization that demonstrates how much it values and appreciates them, even in lean times.

Excel at Building and Leading Teams

We mentioned at the beginning of this article that teamwork – functional and cross-functional, within organizations and between networks of organizations, for production or problem-solving – is an inescapable fact of corporate life today. As leadership guru Warren Bennis noted, “The Lone Ranger is dead. Instead of the individual problem solver we have a new model for creative achievement. People like Steve Jobs or Walt Disney headed groups and found their own greatness in them.” Anyone who aspires to effective leadership today must – by nature or by training – know how to build and pilot teams.

As might be expected, Relationship Builders are particularly effective here. They understand the value of bringing people together to solve problems, make decisions and plans, and take collective action. They enjoy working with others and know how to get people cooperating and communicating. Putting together collaborative work relationships and structuring a harmonious work environment comes naturally to them.

This contrasts strongly with Visionary Evangelists, who conceive of themselves as the “go-to” person, the star of the show. They’re not interested in listening to others’ points of view or hammering out compromises and mutually acceptable plans and goals: they want things to be done *their way*! Similarly, Managers of Execution are often unwilling to relinquish control, power, or authority. They are quite certain that *they* know best how to do it: whatever *it* may be. But Relationship Builders are comfortable not taking center stage or being in control – actually, they prefer it that way. They are good team players, naturally supportive to others, and quite willing to pitch in and do whatever’s needed in order to get results.

Here are seven ways Relationship Builders contribute to the successful functioning of teams:

They foster a sense of shared goals and common purpose.

Relationship Builders have a knack for making people feel a sense of shared fate and common purpose. This is especially valuable in the early stages of team building, when the team is defining itself, setting goals, and figuring out how to integrate all the members into a cohesive and effective unit. When they become aligned and able to mobilize their individual energies and passions to contribute to the group effort, a synergy is born in which the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

They facilitate open and clear communication between people.

Good communicators themselves, socially astute Relationship Builders are skilled at getting people to talk and express themselves, opening up lines of communication. Open communication – the sharing of ideas, insights, alternative lines of action, etc. – is essen-

tial at every stage of planning and execution. It is also absolutely necessary in order to keep the air clear of hidden agendas, unexpressed antagonism and other forms of counterproductive feelings.

“People organize together to accomplish more, not less. Behind every organization impulse is a realization that by joining with others we can accomplish something important that we could not accomplish alone.

-Margaret Wheatley

They create an atmosphere of safety and trust.

Relationship Builders know that mutual trust among team members and focused, collective effort don't happen automatically, just because people are working together. With their natural warmth and openness, RB's create a working environment where it is safe for employees to open up to fellow team members, to candidly express their views,

exchange ideas, and disagree with each other or even with management.

They cultivate cooperative relationships. In an atmosphere of trust and open communication, with a sense of shared fate and team spirit, it becomes natural for people to support each other and lend a helping hand without being asked or told to do so. Just like in a harmonious family, an effective team thrives on mutual trust, concern for others, generosity, and a willingness to make personal sacrifices for the good of the whole.

They value and encourage diversity of opinions.

Relationship Builders communicate comfortably with people from diverse backgrounds, who may come from different areas of the organization or have different perspectives and goals. This enables them to draw ideas and improve processes by talking to people with different types of knowledge and experience. It also helps them gather across-the-board support for their initiatives. Here's a description (from a 360 report) of how a high-ranking executive at a large trucking company relates to people in his company: “Rick has a keen

ability to talk with all walks of life and all job titles. He is as comfortable being with the drivers as he is with other executives. His relationship and bond with our drivers has been outstanding since day one. They feel comfortable walking up and initiating a conversation because he is interested in them. Customer Service reps and drivers feel very comfortable walking down to Rick's office just to say ‘Hi.’”

They encourage a wide and balanced participation among team members.

Relationship Builders know that each member of a team brings something valuable to the table. Because they are so well liked, so respectful and non-threatening in their approach to people, and are able to connect with such a wide range of personalities and backgrounds, RB's quite naturally draw all members of a team into the mix. Soliciting everyone's input and getting all team members involved in every aspect of the team's activities brings out the best ideas and efforts.

They are able to manage conflict.

One aspect of the RB personality that we will be discussing

shortly is that, because they are so sensitive to other people's feelings and are driven by the need to be liked by all, they don't like to deliver bad news or be involved in conflict and disharmony. However, all teams have moments of distrust and disunity, especially when they feel stuck and frustrated. People point fingers, blame others, and anger just below the surface may rise up in confrontation. In such situations, the RB's natural interpersonal expertise and the trust people have in them can be called upon. If anyone can get people talking, so that problems can be put on the table to be looked at openly and resolved, they are the ones who can do it.

Relationship builders are the harmony-creators, discord-dissolvers and emotion-smoothers that all teams need in order to be maximally effective.

It's absolutely vital for team members to work through their conflicts and negotiate positive outcomes, so they can restore their comfort level and

get back to productive work. As Daniel Goleman points out in *Emotional Intelligence*, while a group can be no "smarter" than the sum total of all the specific strengths of its members, "it can be much dumber if its internal workings don't allow people to share their talents." When there are "high levels of emotional and social static," Goleman says, such as from rivalries, fear, or resentment, "people cannot offer their best. But harmony allows a group to take maximum advantage of its most creative and talented members' abilities."

The Relationship Builder's natural leadership style helps to cultivate team spirit and build a unified strength within an organization. They are the harmony-creators, discord-dissolvers and emotion-smoothers that all teams need in order to be maximally effective.

Build Effective Partnerships and Alliances

RB's are also effective at creating alliances and synergistic relationships between different functions within an organization, or between entire organizations. Building this type of alliance is similar to,

but substantially different from building teams. If you're a leader of a team within your own organization, you have formal authority over others. But in an alliance you are working with people over whom you have no authority. You have to:

- network with potential partners
- develop their trust
- find common interests
- negotiate agreements and priorities
- put together a plan that utilizes the unique strengths of each organization
- exchange information and ideas

The Relationship Builder's ability to understand others' needs, communicate diplomatically and build trust is priceless.

A successful alliance has to be structured so that everybody wins – or they simply won't play the game. Working collaboratively in such situations requires superior relationship skills. Here all the Relationship Builder's social awareness, social intelligence, and social adroitness come into

William Hewlett of Hewlett Packard: “A Great and Gentle Man”

Everyone knows the story of HP’s startup in a Palo Alto garage in 1938, and how it grew to one of the largest and most successful corporations in the world; when Bill Hewlett passed away a couple of years ago, his fortune was estimated at \$9 billion.

What most people don’t know is that William Hewlett was not only an inventor and entrepreneur with a brilliant intellect – “he could listen to something and get the gist of it very quickly, even with Nobel Prize winners,” according to Tandem CEO James Treybig – but he was also a humanitarian, philanthropist, and compassionate executive. Bill



Hewlett said that of all his achievements, he was most proud of the way HP treated its employees. The company initiated – long before these things were necessary or fashionable – a profit-sharing plan, health insurance, employee stock ownership, and flexible work hours. During a particularly difficult period when HP figured it had to lay off 1,000 people, Hewlett opted to keep them, but required all employees to

take Fridays off for six months, without pay. He included himself in that arrangement.

Carly Fiorina, HP’s current CEO, praised Bill Hewlett as “a great and gentle man.” Others who knew him honor him for his “remarkably hu-

mane outlook,” “amiable character,” and lack of pretense. Even after he became wealthy, he was not above sitting down side-by-side with employees in his shirtsleeves to work on a new project. “He had the ability to relate to people, so everyone would have respect for him,” said Treybig. “He was a regular person....He wasn’t a stand-alone president, aloof.”

play.

These skills do not go unnoticed by others. One person said, “Cindy’s greatest strength is her ability to build and cultivate relationships, which pave the way for harmonious work between organizations and people. She is good at breaking walls down.” Or in another’s words, “Gopal is great at building long term relationships with his team as well as internal and external customers.”

Harmonizers Who Are Skilled at Negotiation and Conflict Resolution

Leaders have to negotiate all the time. It goes with the territory. You have to negotiate with vendors, customers, partners, employees, unions, other functions or units, regulatory agencies, bankers and venture capitalists, and hardest of all: spouses! Suppose I work for you, and you think it’s important for me to move to Milwaukee because the company just lost somebody there, but I don’t really want to go! Or, I come to you and say, “I need a raise, I just bought a new house and my mortgage payment is higher. If you want to keep me, you have to pay me more.” When

it comes to this sort of negotiation, the Relationship Builder’s ability to understand others’ needs, communicate diplomatically, and build trust, is priceless.

In addition, as we touched on in the previous section, conflicts and disagreements are inevitable on any team, and they can be difficult and unpleasant to resolve. People who are gifted at relationship building prefer harmony and shy away from conflict, but they also tend to understand that meeting disagreements head on and dealing with them is necessary and can be productive in the long run. When individuals or groups confront and work through something they are in conflict about, doing so brings the sides together. It’s when conflict is *not* dealt with, yet the negative or antagonistic feelings are still there, that the two sides are driven apart.

When you don’t come to grips with conflict, trust is undermined, and politics – such as manipulateness or other ways of jockeying for power – increases dramatically. So, within teams and organizations, just as within a marriage relationship, it’s vital to provide candid feedback, to clarify your position, to bring conflicts to the surface, and to

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

-John Quincy Adams

talk about it with a willingness to compromise.

It makes intuitive sense that RB’s would excel at both negotiating and helping to resolve conflicts. Our research data confirms this. The primary reason seems to be that they are experts at creating buy-in. Because of their capacity to build friendships and gain the trust of others, they’re able to get people to listen and go along with them.

Closely related is their social astuteness – their ability to read the nuances of social relationships, be aware of what is motivating people, and find ways to skillfully move individuals and groups forward.

RB’s are also very adaptable; in both conflict resolution and negotiation, being rigid and stubborn sets up obstacles that are very difficult if not impossible to surmount.

If you think about any con-

flict situations you've been involved in, you'll immediately see that another major obstacle is anger. People who yell and lose control of their emotions are at an immediate disadvantage. Relationship Builders tend to be calm and emotionally controlled. From that stance of equanimity they can listen, respond with fairness, and help create a positive outcome for all parties involved.

Put People before Task

In today's fast-paced, resource-constrained business world, the pressure to accomplish tasks and get financial results drives many managers to view time spent on cultivating relationships as a distraction and even a waste. Some Visionary Evangelists and Managers of Execution become so focused on achieving their objectives that they disregard or damage relationships by treating people as little more than means to the organization's ends.

By contrast, Relationship Builders allocate a substantial portion of their time and attention to people. Rather than resent giving their time to others, they enjoy it. As we have seen, they not only take an active interest in people's

needs, growth, and career development, but they are also careful not to undermine relationships with the very people they will need to help them accomplish their objectives. They realize that in order to work through others, you have to pay attention to them. You need to invest in building relationships of trust. You need to make connections. Thus, they view relationship building not as wasted time, but as a vital part of personal life as well as organizational strength and effectiveness.

Simply put, Relationship Builders do not live and breathe their jobs. They do work hard; they are conscientious and have a strong sense of responsibility. But relationships, whether with family, friends or co-workers are of equal or even greater importance to them. And they understand that this is true for others. Life is not solely about work and getting things done; people have families, relationships, worries, dreams and concerns outside the office. Part of what makes RB's so well-liked by colleagues and co-workers is that they are more than willing to relate to others on that fundamental human level. "Steve always makes time to listen to my concerns, both project specific and company/department

specific," a manager said of his boss, "and with his busy schedule, this is not always easy or convenient. No matter who you are, you always feel welcome in his office to come in and talk to him."

We have abundant data to support these observations. For example, on the personality assessment tools that we have developed at HCG, Relationship Builders consistently score lower on test items which indicate a strong need for achievement, such as the desire to be the best in their field, or being highly goal or task oriented. Their self worth doesn't come primarily from demonstrating competence. They don't particularly care if they accomplish great things in their lives. They may, in the end, accomplish a great deal, like William Hewlett, Herb Kelleher, Oprah Winfrey, and many others. But achievement is not their sole or primary motivator.

What does motivate them? Making people happy. Fulfilling their responsibility. Doing what is right. Being liked by others. Creating an environment that is harmonious.

Oprah Winfrey told an interviewer: "What other people view as successful is not what my idea of success is. And I

don't mean to belittle it at all. It's really nice to be able to have nice things. What material success does is provide you with the ability to concentrate on other things that really matter. And that is being able to make a difference...in other people's lives. That's really all it's good for."

The Relationship Builders' natural ease and skill with people and their willingness to help others develop their careers or improve performance make them excellent coaches and mentors – a valuable asset for any organization. They are patient teachers as well as caring friends and colleagues.

Because of these "warm" qualities, RB's are well-represented in what are often called "the helping professions" – they are teachers, therapists, nurses, physicians, social workers or leaders of not-for-profit organizations whose aims are to serve (individuals, communities, the environment) rather than simply to make money.

Of course, this desire to make a positive contribution to people's lives isn't the exclusive domain of social workers. Many business leaders possess a deep caring for others. John

Chambers, the billionaire head of Cisco, is known world-wide for his efforts to create a corporate culture that shows appreciation for employees, and those who know him say that he exemplifies his values in his personal behavior. According to a company legend, when Chambers learned that an employee needed a surgical procedure that only three doctors in the country could perform, he picked up the phone and made the necessary arrangements. "John takes a personal interest in his employees and their well-being," says Paul Mountford, a Cisco V.P.

Because of this kind of behavior, leaders who are Relationship Builders command a great deal of loyalty in their followers. RB's make people feel appreciated and a vital part of a team. They put their people first, and their people know it.

Feelers not thinkers

If you are familiar with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, you have already figured out that Relationship Builders tend to be *feelers*. In a business setting, feelers work best in association with other people. They enjoy meeting peo-

ple's needs, even in small matters. They are sympathetic, they sense how other people will feel and react, and so they dislike delivering bad news. Rather than always making the logical choice (such as in hiring someone for a job), they tend to let their decisions be influenced by their own and other people's likes and dislikes.

Because their own inner life is rich with feelings and emotions, RB's are comfortable around the feelings of other people. Unlike many managers who try to keep as far away as they can from other people's problems, RB's are willing to listen. They don't shy away or rationalize that "it's none of my concern." They have big hearts and they empathize with others.

But their ability to empathize and their concern for their people often puts them between a rock and a hard place.

Like all leaders, Relationship Builders want to get the job done effectively and deliver results. They feel an obligation to customers, shareholders, and the bottom line. But, being who they are, they never want to meet these obligations by damaging the dignity, feelings, or well-being of

“The Archetype of Future Business Leadership? John Chambers of Cisco

John Chambers is an outstanding example of a Two-Pillar leader – strong as a Visionary Evangelist and a Relationship Builder. As one publication put it, he has been praised “worldwide for his visionary strategy, his ability to drive an entrepreneurial culture, and his warm-hearted, straight-talking approach.”

“My dad had the vision,” says Cisco’s CEO, “and my mom had the people skills and the gentle side. I was kind of a blend of the two.” The Visionary Evangelist is evident in Chambers’ presentations, which have what one reporter called “the preacher-like flair with which he addresses audiences.” Perhaps it also took a bit of vision to pilot Cisco from 300 employees and \$70 million in annual revenue to more than 30,000 employees and \$20 billion in revenue in less



than ten years, for a time ranking as the most valuable company on the face of the earth!

The “people” side pervades both his personal life and his operating style as a leader. Chambers, who says, “I try to treat people like I’d like to be treated myself,” still maintains friendships with people he went to college, law school, or business school with more than 35 years ago.

He is close to his parents, and calls his dad “my best friend.” He describes his wife, Elaine, as “the joy of my life,” and says that his family “is first, second, and third in terms of my priorities.”

Of his MBA studies at the University of Indiana he says, “What I enjoyed most was the camaraderie and how the class worked together.” This experience solidified his appreciation of the value of relationships and teams. Indiana, he said, was a time “to build the relationships which help you later in life, as well as working on projects that focused on how teams work together.”

His management philosophy, Chambers says, is driven by two core issues. “The first is fanatical focus on customer success.” To accomplish this, “I spend over 50% of my time with customers, listening to what they

think we're doing right and where we can improve.”

The second core issue is “that I require teamwork. I don't believe in individuals. I don't play individual sports. I play all team sports. Even in tennis I play only doubles and I believe you win or lose as a team.”

“You form relationships with people, either in your personal life or in business, that last forever,” Chambers told an interviewer. “I'm a partner for life – I'm old fashioned in that way. With my customers, I'm not aware of one that I had earlier that I couldn't go back to. I'd do everything never to let them down. The trust that I developed with my management team at IBM and later with Wang and now with Cisco, is that my word is my bond.”

Even before he became CEO, Chambers began building teams based on open communications. Teams are so important at Cisco that compensation is tied to team success.

Although Chambers has been described as “a relentless competitor” – and the huge number of competitors Cisco has gobbled up over the past decade confirms this view – he is also empathetic. While at IBM, he had to lay off several thousand people, and said it was a traumatic experience he would never forget.

“These were good people whose lives were needlessly thrown into turmoil.” Unfortunately, in the bursting tech bubble of 2001, he had to lay off 8,500 Cisco employees.

Nevertheless, Cisco is extremely good to its employees. Fortune magazine has rated Cisco in

the top 100 best places to work for seven straight years. In 2002, the company was named the number one best employer in Australia. Whether it's the company's people-centered culture or the fact that many of the employees, between their salaries and stock options, are multi-millionaires, company headquarters has been described as “a workplace of shiny, happy people.”

In an article about Chambers, *Chief Executive* said, “the company's strength isn't about technology. It's about values, culture, and an organization built around speed and change. In mastering the soft skills, Chambers, a naturally empathetic communicator, is more coach than boss—and the archetype of future business leadership.”

others. Yet, it is often necessary, in order to drive a project to completion, to push others, and to make tough decisions. Thus, they may find themselves painfully con-

flicted when the need for getting results comes at the expense of employees.

If the company is in trouble, for example, leaders may have

to downsize, or replace long-time employees with new blood. For most Visionary Evangelists and Managers of Execution, these are unfortunate situations that simply

have to be dealt with, though they may have to steel themselves a little before taking drastic action. “These layoffs are going to help us survive,” they’ll tell themselves. “Even though it may create some unhappiness, that’s the way it has to be.”

But Relationship Builders will *always* have a hard time. They may take the necessary action, but it doesn’t come without a price. They feel guilty, they feel torn between their loyalty to the organization and their loyalty to the individuals with whom they have formed a bond of teamwork and trust – and they may become highly stressed by this internal conflict.

It isn’t easy to be soft-hearted in the business world! But how dry and cold that world would be without those people who live from the heart.

Upbeat Attitude

Relationship Builders describe themselves as happy, upbeat people, which is generally how others see them. They tend to be optimists who believe things will get better, natural, unfeigned positive thinkers who are likely to see opportunities where others see obstacles and problems. Non-judgmental, they see the

good side of life and of the people they interact with. “Marty is refreshing in his approach to people,” an executive said about his colleague. “He is cheerful and optimistic and always sees the glass as half full as opposed to half empty. He’s able to laugh in hard times without losing sight of completing difficult tasks.”

A decade ago, a description like this would not have indicated much. Of course, we all prefer to be around upbeat people rather than grouchy and pessimistic folks. But in the last ten years, hundreds of studies have shown that optimism is also a great predictor of high performance. For example, the scores of 500 freshmen at the University of Pennsylvania on a test of optimism vs. pessimism were a better predictor of their actual grades than their SAT scores or high school grades. Another study showed that new salesmen who were optimists sold 37% more in their first two years on the job than pessimists.

Our work with leaders has delivered even more impressive results! Our data indicate that of the 46 leadership dimensions we currently measure on our 360 evaluations, 45 are positively correlated with optimism: as optimism in-

creases, these 45 measures (from adaptability and decisiveness to strategic focus and visionary thinking) also go up.

Closely related to this is the fact that RB’s rate themselves high on job satisfaction. Numerous studies have shown that being content or fulfilled at work is less about the job itself and what’s in it or not in it, and more about the individual’s attitude. People with high job satisfaction, the studies indicate, tend to be positive people. Individuals who are depressed and whose attitude is on the negative side rarely rate themselves high on job satisfaction. As a friend of ours said, “If you put an unhappy man in a green room, he will rebel against green. Move him to a blue room and he will rebel against blue.” Relationship Builders have a personality and a leadership style that makes it easier for them to be content regardless of the external circumstances.

Even-Tempered

“In all of the years I’ve known Tanaka, I have never seen him rattled, angry, or confrontational. Only once did I ever see him frustrated and even then he was able to manage the situation in a positive manner without allowing

it to degrade to confrontation.” Comments like this are common in the co-worker assessments of people who are Relationship Builders.

Typically unflappable and composed, Relationship Builders are not likely to blow up or get in arguments. Unlike high-strung VE’s, they have a long fuse. They are not powder kegs ready to explode; it takes a lot to get them upset. Even in times of stress, when they’re under pressure, they still manage to avoid unproductive confrontations. “Chris is very even-tempered,” said one peer reviewer. “He doesn’t swing to right or left. He is a pleasure to work with...very easygoing.”

Although RB’s are emotional people, they manage their emotions well. They maintain the ability to think clearly in challenging situations, and as a result, they almost never act in ways that create tension or friction or drive teams apart, such as angry outbursts or undiplomatic comments. Even if they feel upset inside, they keep their cool and seldom act without thinking.

Psychologists might look at this behavior and label it “conflict avoidance,” and to some extent they would be correct. RB’s typically do de-

sire to have everybody approve of them, so they don’t want to ruffle any feathers or damage any relationships. The downside of this, as we will soon discuss, is that they may be *too* tolerant and easygoing in leadership positions, and not sufficiently demanding of top-level performance.

At HCG, we have speculated that one reason RB’s receive such rave reviews on their interpersonal behavior is that they very, very rarely attack colleagues or subordinates. Most of us remember angry outbursts and sharp words for years; they make a deep impression that is not easily overcome. Because RB’s don’t damage relationships in this way, people think of them with warmth.

People are not intimidated by RB’s, or feel that they have to be on their guard around them. Even when RB’s are in high leadership positions, colleagues and reports are not afraid to voice their opinions and concerns. RB’s rarely react defensively, even to critical feedback, and they are not predisposed toward retaliation.

These people have steady nerves and are not prone to anxiety. They are not worriers. No doubt this is linked to their naturally optimistic na-

ture. If you figure things are going to work out well – why worry?

Visionaries and Managers of Execution have expectations and models of how things are going to turn out. When there’s a gap between expectation and reality – when life doesn’t conform to the picture they’ve been carrying around in their heads – they often lose their patience, blame others, or flare up in anger. RB’s rarely do that. The most flexible and adaptable of the Pillars, they “go with the flow and ride with the tide” – even if they don’t live in California! They have an air of acceptance about them that people are attracted to. At their best, RB’s trust life and accept what is, as is.

Trusting and Trustworthy

Trust is one of the basic building blocks of the RB style. To them, the world is a safe place, and people are basically good. They assume, in their typically optimistic way, that people are trustworthy and sincere and will do as they say. They have an implicit faith that others are not interested in doing them harm. This inherent tendency to trust reflects back on them, earning them the respect and

Wendy's Dave Thomas: "I just make hamburgers for a living."



Perhaps more famous even than the 800 TV commercials he made for his Wendy's restaurant chain is the story of the time somebody stopped Dave Thomas on the street and said, with a puzzled look, "Aren't you somebody famous?" Thomas, the story goes, said, "I'm nobody, really. I just make hamburgers for a living."

Though this sounds like it was concocted by a PR firm, it rings true to Dave Thomas' character. Born to unmarried parents and adopted at six weeks of age, Dave started working

at 12 (in a restaurant, of course.) At 30 (after marrying a waitress!), he opened a hamburger restaurant named after his daughter. Today there are more than 6,000 Wendy's worldwide.

People who knew Dave Thomas speak of him as an "ordinary, no frills" kind of man, "a really good guy." "It was so easy to work for Dave," a friend and business consultant said; "all you had to do was work hard and do the right thing." Jack Schuessler, Wendy's current chairman and CEO, said that "Dave was our

patriarch, a great, big, lovable man."

Dave Thomas founded numerous charities, notably the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and was the driving force behind an adoption tax credit, passed by Congress in 1996, that makes it easier and more affordable for people to adopt. "Dave Thomas was a hero to adoptees," said an educator, himself adopted as a child. "I thank God every day for both my parents and adoptive parents. Dave Thomas understood their sacrifice of love."

trust of others. “In my experience, in direct relationships Diana has never been anything but open, friendly, and approachable,” one executive said of his colleague. “She extends trust in all her interactions, and therefore usually receives it.”

People perceive Relationship Builders as eminently trustworthy. There are many reasons for this. Perhaps most importantly, RB’s are often what we call in our research a “model of values” – that is, they have high moral and ethical standards, and consistently try to live up to them. Their behavior reflects high principles. They try to be just and fair; including the rare willingness (especially in executives) to take responsibility for their mistakes rather than automatically blaming others when things go wrong.

They are forthright, sincere and genuine, and have no hidden agenda. With them, “what you see is what you get,” so you can trust what they say and the image they project. “Chuck’s sincerity makes him trustworthy,” a team member reported. “He can be taken for his word. In a short time, he has built trust in the team by being straightforward and direct about his expectations.”

RB’s are also adept at model-

ing the principles and values central to the organization’s culture and mission. For them, the mission statement is not just a bunch of fine words, but a standard to uphold. They set the bar high for themselves in terms of dedication, hard work, energy, and commitment. Others see this, respect it, and come to their support. As one reviewer said of his boss, “Tony has a strength of character and personality which attracts folks and makes them cooperative”

Flexible

Relationship Builders seem to be born with a high degree of adaptability. They listen to what others have to say, and are open to input. Just because they have seen things one way and pursued one course of action, doesn’t mean they won’t listen to other opinions or consider other options. This attitude of openness and flexibility is very useful for navigating the shifting currents of the modern business world. And it makes for smoother interactions within teams and organizations.

Of course, one reason RB’s are willing to be so adaptable is that they do not like to fight. In fact, they would

rather accommodate than set up battle lines. To maintain harmony, they will adjust themselves to different people and situations. This is partly strategic. RB’s understand that you can get more with honey than with vinegar, and if they run into obstacles with one line of action, they will – like a chameleon – readily adapt their behavior to achieve their ends.

But it also points to a critical problem area for Relationship Builders: When does being adaptable shift into being *too* adaptable? There are times to discuss and negotiate, and times when the leader must simply draw a line and do whatever is required in the moment to secure an achievement. Relationship Builders have trouble doing this. Too often, they are not willing to put a stake in the ground and stand firm. They don’t want to say “yes” to one side at the expense of saying “no” to the other. They don’t want to disappoint anyone.

Challenges and Areas of Vulnerability

Indeed, Relationship Builders have a cluster of leadership problems which revolve around their warm and sympathetic natures. We have already noted that they have

trouble making tough decisions or taking strong actions like firing or disciplining employees. They have a particularly hard time with layoffs.

Compounding this problem is the RB's need to be liked. If a decision could make them unpopular, they don't want to do it. This pressing need to be liked by others can stand in the way of firm and decisive leadership. It is a definite obstacle when it comes to holding people accountable and driving for results.

Depending on the circumstances, compassion – like adaptability – can be either a plus or a minus for a leader. It is another one of those double-edged swords that can cut both ways. This points to a crucial understanding that we do our best to impart to all our clients, whether their need is for team building or succession planning: *Different styles of leaders are required for different situations.* For results-oriented leadership at crunch time, for example, a Relationship Builder may not be the best choice. If the survival of the company is dependent upon getting results and focus in the short term, a Manager of Execution is what you need. If the company is starting out, or has lost its focus, there's nobody better than a Visionary Evangelist.

We will return to this important topic at the end of the article, and in future installments.

Not Creative

Relationship Builders do not tend to be especially creative or innovative. Naturally, there are outstanding exceptions to this rule – HP co-founder William Hewlett, for example, although very much a Relationship Builder, was also a fountain of creative ideas. But as a general rule, our data paints a clear picture.

Why should this be so? We have already looked at one reason – RB's are neither visionaries nor change agents. In fact, many RB's say quite openly that they *dislike* change; they feel little need to move or switch jobs; they're inclined to take their vacations in the same place every year. And yet, the essence of creativity *is* change: developing something new, disrupting the existing pattern.

A typical RB does not challenge the status quo, support fresh perspectives, or try out new approaches. You probably won't find them championing change initiatives or opposing the powers that be. Their values are conservative.

They respect authority and tradition, and if there is a tried-and-true path, they will follow it. They often feel there is a “right way” to live. They play by the rules and do what is socially desirable.

This is in stark contrast to Visionary Evangelists, who, you may recall, we described as being “a pain in the ass” because they are unconventional, boundary-breaking non-conformists. They couldn't care less what people think about them, or whether people like them or not. Next to them, Relationship Builders (and Managers of Execution, too) appear quite conventional. For the Visionary, rules exist only to be challenged and broken; they are revolutionaries who are never content with the status quo but want to push the envelope outward. The question a Visionary leader is always asking (in the words of Cisco CEO John Chambers with his Visionary hat on) is “How do you get your team to rally around changing the world, the way it works, lives, plays, and learns?”

Relationship Builders do not ask such questions. They are not big risk takers. They are more likely to be loyal followers than visionary leaders. But they provide a social cohesiveness that enables the

organization to function smoothly.

Another reason for the RB's apparent lack of creativity is that they spend most of their time actively involved in relating to other people. But, as an abundance of research has shown, creativity demands a substantial amount of inwardness, of reflection and quiet thought. Relationship Builders are just not built that way. Where a Visionary Evangelist will spend Saturday evening reading a book or a stack of journal articles to help her gain a deeper strategic understanding about the world and its impact on her business, the relationship-oriented RB is far more likely to go to dinner with friends and take in a movie, and then go out for coffee to talk about it.

RB's are not very interested in the realities of the broader world; rather, they tend to focus on what's happening in the village, around the hearth. Their attention is on what's in front of them – their family or their co-workers, the part of their organization that concerns their daily activities. Rather than having their focus “out there” on the broader picture, keeping abreast of developments that might spark creative ideas or affect organizational strategy, they prefer to go one to one, right

here. Trends and events outside their personal network or organizational family are far less important to them than the people in their lives.

To give Relationship Builders the benefit of the doubt – as they would surely do for us – rather than saying that they are not creative, it might be more fair to say that their creativity is of a different kind. True, they don't tend to be inventors, world class artists, pioneers of scientific breakthroughs or technological innovation. But resolving a conflict between two people or two factions on a team is a creative act; projecting optimism, brightness and positivity into a tense group environment, being supportive and encouraging to someone who doubts his abilities – these are creative acts of real value and significance. It's creativity on a *personal* level, an intangible or spiritual level, whereas in our culture, we tend to value creativity only if it results in *things*, like paintings, iPods, and SUV's.

Make Mediocre Presentations

The RB's people-centered orientation and typical disinterest in being by themselves has an adverse effect on their abil-

ity to make compelling presentations. Visionary Evangelists are often eloquent speakers, whether to groups within the organization or to the public. Passionate about their vision, they take the time to formulate their ideas in depth, plan their talk in detail, and practice delivering it. Then they can stand before a group and make a powerful impression. As we just pointed out, Relationship Builders are so caught up in social interaction that they rarely sit still long enough to reflect deeply, come up with visionary solutions, or formulate their ideas thoroughly and persuasively. As a result, their presentations often lack depth.

VE's love the spotlight. Poor team players, they're happiest making a solo performance. And they are always certain that other people can't wait to hear what they have to say. On the other hand, RB's would rather listen to others than call attention to themselves. When they do speak to groups, they may over-rely on their ability to connect with an audience, and not make the effort to craft a cogent and convincing talk.

Although they read an audience well, their tendency is to want to be themselves, to be real – rather than devise an effect potent enough to attract

engaged followers. Thus, they may be perceived as warm-hearted, likeable people with nothing much to say.

Too Nice

To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln: “You can please all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot please all the people all the time.” And yet, pleasing everybody all the time, if they could do it, would be at the top of a Relationship Builder’s agenda.

This desire to please is part of the RB’s constellation of warm, human qualities. They are, as we have seen repeatedly, kind, considerate, and caring. They enjoy helping others, and at work are often found in coaching and mentoring roles, even informally – “Where are you stuck?” they may ask a colleague or report. “How can I help?” They are supportive, diplomatic, careful not to hurt anyone’s feelings, reluctant to rock a comfortable boat

This kind of behavior can come from genuine concern, as it does, for example, when we look after the needs of our children. But when it stems from a compelling *need* to be liked by others, it can cripple the leader’s ability to set and

enforce high standards, make tough decisions, and hold people accountable for their performance. RB’s have a very hard time playing the role of the tough guy, the enforcer, but that role has to be in the repertoire of any leader – or leadership team – that wants to get results.

Closely tied to the RB’s inability to lay down the law is the equally troubling inability to say “no,” to take a stand and hold to it. They want to be liked and to make everybody happy.

Nobody explains this better than one of the great relationship builders of our time, Oprah Winfrey. In an interview conducted several years ago, she said,

I was the kind of child who was always searching for love, affection and attention, for somebody to look at me and say, “Yes, you are worthy.” Part of the process for me as an adult has been recognizing that my inability as an adult female to say “No,” my disease to please, is the same thing that caused me to be victimized as a child. I would get myself into situations as an adult where I didn’t want to say “No” because I didn’t want to hurt anybody’s feelings. I didn’t want anybody angry with me. I didn’t want

people to think I’m not nice.

Like many Relationship Builders, Oprah overcame this handicap not only through hard work on herself (which she certainly did) but also by putting people on her leadership team who could take that hard line when needed.

Duck Conflicts

Is it any surprise, considering the Relationship Builder’s propensity to try to please everybody and their instinctive aversion to disharmony, that when they become leaders, they do their best to avoid dealing with conflict and disagreement? However, working through disagreements is an essential aspect of every relationship, whether between two individuals, a group of team members, or factions within an organization. And it’s an essential role that leaders must play.

When leaders duck conflict – and as consultants to hundreds of organizations both large and small, we can tell you unequivocally that it happens all the time – serious problems are created in the organization. The leader who refuses to address conflict openly is setting the stage for hypocrisy, secrecy, cliques,

back-stabbing, and all kinds of negative and devious “political” behavior that poisons the atmosphere and undermines productivity.

People who work together must be able to talk openly and freely, and this kind of dialogue can’t take place if conflict is simmering but being avoided and tiptoed around.

Relationship Builders possess the necessary people skills to deal effectively with interpersonal issues – but they may have to overcome their habitual fear of rejection and unpopularity to bring those skills to the table. When they do it, they grow personally and help their team and their organization.

Don’t Set High Standards

Here’s another instance where the RB’s compassionate nature – and their need to be universally liked – can stand in their way. In leadership roles, they often fail to set high standards, or even if they do, they don’t follow through by demanding accountability; thus, they can be far too accepting of mediocre performance. Their desire not to hurt others’ feelings prevents them from being tough when the situation calls for it. They

don’t push people. After all, if they pushed, somebody might not like them!

This laxness about accountability differentiates Relationship Builders from both Visionary Evangelists, who do set challenging goals and demand high standards of excellence (though they may not follow up to see if those standards are being upheld), and Managers of Execution, who refuse to accept mediocre or substandard performance.

RB’s are easygoing, accepting, and patient. These are great qualities to have in a friend and, up to a point, in a leader. But it doesn’t always work, especially when there’s some urgency for tasks to be accomplished. RB managers and leaders can be overly patient with employees who don’t do what’s expected of them, who don’t honor their commitments, fail to complete projects and tasks on time, or have trouble making decisions. Sometimes a little impatience helps people meet their deadlines: “*Let’s go! Let’s get this done!*”

Not Brilliant at Hiring

Another double-edged sword is that the Relationship Builder’s high level of trust, which makes them so appreci-

ated by colleagues and reports, gets in their way when they interview. They tend to accept what people say at face value. This leads to a certain lack of discipline in the hiring process. They will make a personal connection with the applicant they’re interviewing and “feel good about the person,” but they may make the wrong choice. They tend to make hiring decisions based on their feelings rather than facts and objective measures.

It’s paradoxical. These individuals are the most astute at reading people and their motivations; they understand the organization’s culture and style. So, you would expect them to be great at finding and attracting talent and hiring the right people for the job. And sometimes, they do a good job. But too often they fail to put systems in place to evaluate candidates objectively. They’ll take on the people they resonate with, people they like, rather than making an analytical assessment.

Part of the story here is that RB’s tend to be very optimistic; their propensity is to see connection, harmony, and oneness with others, rather than distinctions, boundaries, and what could go wrong.

Not Seen as Forceful, Take-Charge Leaders

For a number of reasons, people often don't consider Relationship Builders to be confident, decisive leaders.

Whether or not they actually *feel* confident – and a great many do – and whether or not they are capable of effective leadership – and a great many certainly are – they are not perceived that way.

In the business world, as we all know, there is a built-in bias toward people who are outspoken and assertive. These forceful, take-charge individuals are seen as secure and self-assured; their commanding presence creates the impression that they know what they are doing. RB's are not this way. Their sensitivity and concern for others may lead some people to consider them too "soft" for leadership. Their openness to input can be viewed as weakness, lack of conviction, or inability to take a stand. They would rather listen than bark out orders. Their relative imperturbability – they're not volatile, they don't explode and yell at people – can be seen as a lack of passion and excitement.

Several other components in the RB's personality and leadership style contribute to the

common belief that they are not strong leaders:

They do not appear to be ambitious. Because job, status, and achievement are not central to the Relationship Builder's life, they rarely push hard for career advancement. They are not driven to be the best in their field. They don't have a need to be king of the hill.

They tend to be humble people who are willing to admit their shortcomings. They are modest about themselves and their abilities; even in high positions of leadership they generally don't try to give the impression that they stand above others. They don't see themselves as superior, don't put on airs, and don't feel a need to be the center of attention. They may feel the *responsibility* to take a leadership role in a particular situation, but they don't feel driven to be the person in charge.

RB's seldom try to call attention to themselves; they don't crave the spotlight. They do not want or need to be the star. They are more than willing to let other people have the credit and the glory.

As we have seen, they are relatively non-competitive – that is, they would rather co-

operate, work out a compromise or accommodate than fight.

It is a sign of the times we live in when qualities like humility, compassion, and the spirit of compromise and cooperation must end up listed among the vulnerabilities rather than the strengths of a leader: but that is how much of our culture views it. RB's are not people who toot their own horn. They are not cousins to the football players who prance in the end zone after scoring a touchdown. Rather, they are like the players who actually mean it when they say, "It's not important that I was the one who scored the touchdown. It was a team effort. What's important is the team."

Conclusions and Recommendations

As we hope is clear by now, leadership, for Relationship Builders, is less about controlling, directing, and being in charge, than it is about guiding and caring for people. It's less about gaining and maintaining position, turf, and power and more about building community, being useful and serving the needs of others. These are their natural values and predilections. That's why careers in the so-

cial services, such as being a therapist, a social worker, an educator or even a politician, come naturally to them. In those professions, where the focus is on interaction and being of service, they thrive.

But business, as it is conceived and practiced in our culture, is not primarily about making a meaningful contribution to the community, it's about selling stuff – whether services or goods – and making a profit. This reality can create conflict and discomfort for Relationship Builders. That's one reason they often end up in human resources departments, where their natural concern for others and high level of people skills fits well and serves the needs of the organization.

Because they do not have a drive to run the show, and may not feel completely at home in the high-pressure, get-it-done atmosphere of business, they rarely rise to senior executive positions. However, without them on the management team, the team can become cold, ruthless results engines! Relationship Builders bring compassion and humanity to business. They may not have the visionary zeal or the managerial rigorousness – but they are essential ingredients in the mix that makes a successful

organization. Without a Relationship Builder in an active leadership role, an organization can become an uncomfortable and dry place to work – sustained by a Visionary Evangelist who can't connect or draw employees into committed teams, or driven by a results-obsessed Manager of Execution whose only concern is the bottom line.

Sometimes people think that the only thing RB's bring to the table is a basketful of warm fuzzies. They do bring that. But their contribution to the organization goes way beyond. Leaders who are Relationship Builders help to cement the relationships and weave the social fabric of the organization. By linking employees to them, they connect them to the organization. By creating personal bonds, they promote followership, buy-in, and employee engagement.

What can RB's do to improve their competency? Our research and consulting experience indicate that what RB's most lack are certain "hard" skills and strengths such as pushing aggressively for results and productivity, and holding people accountable for what they do. They often fail to be sufficiently decisive. They rarely take it upon themselves to study and re-engineer the processes by

which things get done in the organization, in order to improve effectiveness. And as we have seen, they do not excel at either visionary or strategic thinking.

In our opinion, some of these deficiencies can be remedied by conscious effort, but some probably cannot. For example, RB's in leadership roles can make a point of focusing less on how people feel, and more on how productive they are. In most industries, measurements of productivity are readily available; they just need to be used, and the results held up to the employee with the understanding that lack of productivity has consequences.

This, of course, is exactly what RB's don't like to do. The key to development, for them – and this applies to their personal lives as well as to their careers – is to become less dominated by the fear of hurting other people's feelings or having others not like them, and more capable of taking a stand and pushing for what needs to be done – yet without losing their sensitivity to others' feelings and concerns.

Some RB's simply need to speak up and be more forceful in pushing for their ideas and agendas. In general, they are

reluctant to take strong positions (they like to harmonize, not take sides) but if they are going to influence the direction of the team or organization, they need to vigorously and courageously push for what they see as right. A leader must stand for something. Followers look to their leaders for strong, clear messages about what is important.

Because power is often abused in hurtful ways, many RB's have an aversion toward telling people what to do. But giving direction and focus to others does not mean that you are – or will be seen as – power hungry or autocratic. It is a vital and necessary function. And if you are the leader – it is your job. Executives are expected to take the initiative to identify problems, seize opportunities, and assume a leadership role.

If we were coaching a Relationship Builder leader or manager, here are a few points and suggestions we might make:

You have a right, even an obligation, to express your ideas and opinions. Others are looking to you for direction. Don't be reluctant to take charge and exert influence. If you see a problem or opportunity, tackle it! Be more outspoken and forceful, and let

your voice be heard! Become part of the solution by speaking up or taking charge. If you don't, somebody else's vision will prevail.

Your caring, sympathetic nature draws people to you, but if it hinders you from making difficult personnel choices, it can impair your effectiveness. Remember, leaders get paid to make decisions. Try not to base your decisions on personal connections with people, or fear of hurting someone's feelings. Look at the facts, and ask yourself what is best for the well being of the organization or the team.

Your compassion for others and your trusting nature may lead you to believe that everyone is like you, and that selflessness will always come back in the form of good will. Unfortunately, it does not always work that way. Be careful! Be discriminating about people and their motivations, or you will find yourself disappointed and hurt.

Effective managers or leaders must meet commitments and accomplish objectives *and* pay attention to people's needs and feelings. Some people lean too far to one side, some too far to the other. Try to maintain a balance.

So, the first thing RB's can do

is to be aware of how their personality and leadership style may be weakening their effectiveness, and work to overcome those challenges. This may involve executive coaching, therapy, or rigorous self-analysis and disciplined change. (RB's, of course, would be less likely to engage in "rigorous" and "disciplined" behavior changes on their own than in partnership with a coach.)

The second thing RB's can do is to team up with people who have strong Visionary and/or Managerial skills. This applies to small teams as well as on the top level of organizations. RB's would, for example, greatly increase their effectiveness in partnership with hard-driving visionaries like Bill Gates or Larry Ellison. Herb Kelleher, a Relationship Builder, was fortunate to have Colleen Barrett, a Manager of Execution, as his executive assistant at Southwest; she is now the airline's president and COO.

If RB's are at the top of an organization or a team and are not willing or able to act with sufficient firmness and resolve, they would be wise to use someone as their "hatchet man" or enforcer. In this way, they can maintain their warm public image and avoid dealing with conflict personally,

yet handle the situation appropriately.

Context and Preview

In our earlier article on the Visionary Evangelist, we looked at the strengths and deficiencies of the creative

geniuses who innovate and bring advances to humanity through their vision. This article has focused on the Relationship Builders, those people-centered, socially astute individuals who excel at building teams and partnerships, and who are the heart

of organizations.

The final article in this examination of the Three Pillars of Leadership will focus on the Manager of Execution, the one everyone relies on to make sure things get done.