

Leadership Interview With Andrew Harvey

Conducted by Randy Sydnor of COACH

SYDNOR: People who manage by consensus often climb to positions of leadership quickly. Their bosses usually view them favorably because they make life easier by helping their divisions, departments, or groups run smoothly. After all, few senior executives and administrators enjoy spending their time playing peacekeeper or referee. But I have found that such people do not make exceptional leaders. In fact some of the best leaders are usually not team players and feel little need to work in a group.



HARVEY: People who manage by consensus are often successful, however this type of leadership is not necessarily best. I think of good leadership more in collaborative terms. The leader is a collaborator who works to achieve consensus where possible, but ultimately will not allow the desire for consensus to paralyze efforts for decision-making and action.

Wise leaders involve people in decisions that affect them, because people who are actually doing the job have a much greater grasp of its intricacies. Leaders don't always wish to admit this, but the smart ones do. Involving people in a decision also communicates trust and respect to people. Lastly, the more people have participated in a decision, the more it becomes a decision that is "ours" versus "yours". This often means the

difference between someone making a token effort toward a decision, and actually putting his or her heart and soul into making it work.

SYDNOR: I would think that the "consensus" leader might have trouble making a decision unless everyone is in general agreement with the decision, a trait that could be to his or her undoing. And of course, as you mentioned in *The Call to Lead* the problem of the "phony consensus builder" which could be the worse brand of leader.

HARVEY: Consensus leaders can run into trouble when they confuse democracy with consensus. In a democracy people vote to determine outcomes. A consensus leader, while always working to gain consensus, must recognize that not all votes are the same, and ultimately he or she must take action to move things forward in a timely fashion.

The phony consensus builder is even more problematic. This individual already has a predetermined outcome, but fails to share it. Manipulation occurs whereby people are led to believe the outcome was achieved through consensus, when in fact it was not. These individuals may be able to get away with this technique temporarily, but ultimately people will see through it, and the credibility of the leader will be adversely impacted. Of course, once you've lost your credibility as a leader, you're just about finished.

SYDNOR: Consensus leaders seem more predisposed to assembling teams of people who are more like them and therefore creating a homogenous group. Could there be a problem of synergy here?

HARVEY: Although this can be a problem for consensus-type leaders, almost anyone can fall into this trap. It's a bit of human nature to surround yourself with people who think and act as you do. Leaders must resist this temptation though. The best approach is to put together a group that will have a balance of strengths and weaknesses, along with some diversity of viewpoint and approach. This will create a situation wherein there is more potential for conflict, but there will also be more potential for balance and synergy. The wise leader accepts this and works to manage the conflict and maximize the diversity of talent.

As human beings, leaders have weak points, frailties, and blindsides just as everyone else does. The leader should be cognizant of this, and should continually work to improve these areas. Still, one of the best ways to compensate is by surrounding yourself with people who help to balance you. It may not always be as comfortable as it would be if you chose everyone who is just like you, but in the end it will make you a much more effective leader.

SYDNOR: Some leaders like hands-on coaching and developing others through close mentoring relationships; however, many excellent leaders prefer to select strong people and delegate fully to them, providing them with various opportunities to grow through their own experience and make their own fair share of mistakes. There seems to be merit in both approaches.

HARVEY: There is great value in both approaches, and the best leaders are able to do both effectively. This is true even though they might have an inherent affinity for one approach over the other.

Similar to the concept of situational leadership, the leader should select which approach will work best given the situation and the individuals who are to be mentored and coached. Key is the leader's recognition that people respond in their own way to different approaches. People learn in different ways, and have a variety of personalities and life experiences. For some, "hands-on" coaching works well. For others, thoughtful delegation may produce the maximum growth. The best leaders are able to shift almost seamlessly between the two approaches depending on the interests of the individual and the organization.

SYDNOR: Do you subscribe to the notion—shared by many leadership experts—that much of leadership talent is hardwired in people before they reach their early or mid-twenties; in essence, as far as leadership is concerned, people are reasonably complete packages by the time they arrive to corporate environment?

HARVEY: This question goes a bit toward the traditional inquiry of whether leaders are made or born. I believe people can learn to lead, but I also think that leadership potential varies a great deal from person to person, just as people have different athletic potentials. Almost anyone physically able can learn to play basketball, but there will be a great variance in potential and ability. The same is true with leadership or any other skill.

The goal for the organization should be to develop everyone as a leader to the degree possible. There will of course be differences in how far you can go with someone in developing them as a leader, but I do think most everyone can learn to lead more effectively. Like many other endeavors, leadership is in part a learned set of skills, but it must be understood there will sometimes be vast differences in individual aptitude.

SYDNOR: You have written extensively in *The Call to Lead* on leadership “soft” skills and characteristics like personal integrity. In fact, when assessing a candidate for a position of leadership, I agree with you that these skills are critical along with an integrated view of the candidate drawn from various perspectives held by the people who have managed and worked with the prospective candidate throughout his or her career. But this does not seem to be the hiring practice with most organizations. They seem to overvalue certain characteristics like being a team player.

HARVEY: True, but let’s not undervalue being a team player either when assessing someone as a potential leader. The team player as a matter of practice puts the good of the team above his or her own interests. This is particularly important to consider in a leadership role, as generally speaking, the leader will have more power to exert influence. Of course with power comes temptation, something a team player-type of person can often resist.

When assessing someone for a leadership role, I believe competence and character are at the top of the list. One without the other is not enough, no matter how competent a person may be, or how great one’s character. These two components form the foundation for all good leaders, that is, proven skill coupled with an earned reputation for integrity and fairness. Beyond that, I believe leaders should possess ample amounts of common sense, logic, and concern for people.

SYDNOR: Good foot soldiers do not necessarily make good leaders yet good foot soldiers tend to be the people blessed with good problem solving skills and are hired for skills these rather than their decision-making talent. Foot soldiers certainly succeed until they rise to very senior positions, where their need for regimentation tends to alienate others and stifle innovation. Although valuable to an organization, I’m not so sure they can step out of that mindset to make an impact as a leader.

HARVEY: There is a difference between doing the work, and ensuring the work gets done. Leadership is the ability to get things done through others. When work products and results can be produced in a positive and supportive environment, effective leadership has occurred.

Good foot soldiers are vital to every organization. Whether they can make the transition from foot soldier to leader depends at least in part on their recognition and understanding of these principles. Some will be able to effectively make the transition; others will not.

SYDNOR: Most organizations value people for how they comport themselves in front of others in dynamic public speaking situations i.e., stand-up presentation skills rather than for their one-on-one social skills. You seem to suggest in *The Call to Lead* that the ability to engage, convince, and inspire others in large public and private settings is necessary for leaders to enlist people they need to support their causes.

HARVEY: Standup presentation abilities, and one-on-one social skills are both important for leaders to have in their toolbox. The degree of importance depends on the setting and the organization. If someone is the CEO of IBM, obviously their standup presentation skills will be critical. For a leader who is the foreman of a work crew, the ability to deal effectively one-on-one with his or her people may be key.

Leaders should always be striving to improve. As such, if one recognizes a serious weakness in either of these two areas, consideration should be given to improving in that area. Even if that particular skill is not needed at the present time, it may very well be needed in the future.

SYDNOR: I believe that organizations and companies spend too much time focusing their energies on developing leaders rather than on accurately identifying them in the first place. I am not so sure that formal leadership development programs will automatically transform people into leaders if they don't have raw materials for leadership.

HARVEY: I believe everyone can become a leader to some extent if they have the desire. Beyond that, there is great variance in aptitude and potential for leadership.

It makes good sense to try and identify emerging leaders, and give them as much development as possible. Others can still be provided with more limited opportunities, and if they show promise, consideration can be given to increasing their development. In this way you avoid missing the “diamond in the rough” or “late bloomer”, whose aptitude for leadership may have been overlooked at first glance.

SYDNOR: Coaches are always searching for that player and assistant coach blessed with the skill to inspire and lead. What advice would you give coaches for selecting young team leaders?

HARVEY: Although criteria in this category can be extensive, I will provide my top five.

1. First, look for demonstrated competence. Even in our world of perpetual change, in this area, the past is still the best predictor of the future.
2. Second, look for character; strong moral fiber coupled with honesty and integrity.
3. Third, look for desire. The best leaders are people who have a burning desire to be in a position of leadership. Conversely, we have probably all known people who were placed in a leadership position against their wishes. Generally, these situations do not turn out well.
4. Fourth, seek someone with strong people skills. At its essence, leadership is about relationships with people.
5. Finally, I would suggest determination as an important characteristic in assessing potential leaders. Winston Churchill said, “Some people succeed because they are

destined to succeed, but most succeed because they are determined to succeed". Determination to succeed is critical to almost any endeavor, and leadership is no different. Leaders must be able to inspire hope and confidence, even during times where it appears all is lost.

Assessing and selecting new leaders is not always an easy task, and it can be a very personal one, as each individual may approach the process a little bit differently. These five characteristics though may be of assistance in guiding leaders toward good choices in these most critical selections.