

Championing Innovation

The Essential Leadership Qualities for Creating
New Value in Your Organization



bates

Question: How does a leader transform their organization into one that continuously innovates and creates new value? What leadership qualities are most common in leaders of teams who create groundbreaking products and services that generate demand and profit?



1. These leaders lay in bed at night dreaming up big ideas, and then use command and control to drive execution of them.



2. These leaders cultivate great ideas within their teams and organization, and then motivate people to execute on the best ones.

While #1 may work occasionally, the vast majority of organizations need leaders who can *champion innovation through their people*. But does championing innovation require creativity, technical know-how, or deep industry expertise? Not necessarily. Our research is revealing very specific, often ignored leadership qualities that are likely to shape an environment of continual innovation.

What Behaviors Correlate with Driving Innovation?

Hundreds of leaders and teams across the globe from almost every industry have taken the Bates Executive Presence Index (ExPI™). The ExPI measures perceptions of a leader's ability to build trust (character), establish credibility (substance), and drive execution through others (style).

We've analyzed ExPI data to determine which qualities and behaviors of leadership positively correlate with driving innovation. What we found was that out of 90 behaviors measured on the assessment, 57 had statistical significance. On the next few pages, we've highlighted a few of these behaviors and provided insights on what they suggest for leaders.



Bates Model of Executive Presence

Within these dimensions are 15 facets proven to enable leaders to engage, align, inspire, and mobilize others.

They Create the Right Environment

Leaders who drive innovation create a safe environment that enables people to think clearly and creatively even in challenging times. Their deliberate style helps people share ideas and creates a stable environment for people to express opinions and concerns.

Leadership Behaviors that Create a Safe Environment

Even when giving hard-hitting feedback, his/her positive intentions are clear.

Others find that his/her deliberative style clarifies their thinking.

Frequently a source of stability when others are flustered.

Often able to help others clarify their concerns or feelings.



They Align People around a Vision

Leaders who drive innovation are able to align people around common vision, goals and strategy. They help people find ownership in the vision and motivate people to find ways to achieve even challenging goals.

Leadership Behaviors that Create Alignment

Helps us find common cause to accomplish challenging goals.
Creates an enterprise-wide view of challenges and opportunities.
Goals and plans are both credible and inspiring.



They Leverage Differences and Encourage Constructive Conflict

Leaders who drive innovation know how to not only work through differences, but leverage them in the service of a common purpose. They seek differences of opinion and encourage teams to disagree without being disagreeable. They model the art of encouraging constructive conflict for the benefit of generating great ideas and effort.

Leadership Behaviors that Leverage Differences

Does not shy away from making his/her opinions, views, and reactions known.

Speaks his/her mind and can be firm without seeming harsh or shutting down discussion.

Challenges other points of view for a purpose and expects a reasonable response.

Believes we can disagree without being disagreeable.

Actively involves those who have a stake in the issues and a relevant viewpoint to offer.

Recognizes that inclusion implies a tolerance for different ways of doing things.

Expresses a refreshing curiosity and interest in the ideas of others.

Seems to always ask the right questions.

Strategies for Driving Innovation through Your Leadership Behaviors

Encourage great debate. Instead of shying away from differences, create an expectation that people will bring different points of view to the table, even if they clash. You can make it safe for people to debate different perspectives and even encourage your team to do so for the sake of the greater good. In meetings and team discussions, encourage constructive conflict and model the art of how to deal with it. Even when you aren't present, your team will know debate is not only acceptable but expected, and they'll know how to leverage it to produce extraordinary ideas and results.

Shepherd great ideas. Leaders who drive continual innovation see themselves as facilitators or guides who shepherd ideas every day. Think of this as business as usual, rather than a separate, ad hoc activity. When you approach your leadership from the lens of championing innovation, you can leverage the collective knowledge and expertise of your team to drive real results. Your team will produce more than you could alone.

**“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” –
African proverb**



Authors

Andy Atkins is a Principal and Leadership Consultant at Bates. In 2014 and 2015 he was named a Top 100 Thought Leader by Trust Across America. He has been published in *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company*, and *Training Industry Magazine*.

Michael Seitchik is Director of Research and Assessment at Bates. His work on executive development has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and *The Globe and Mail*.

About Bates



We enable leaders to inspire action and drive business strategy through the art and science of communicative leadership. Through executive coaching, facilitation, consulting, and leadership development programs, we help leaders shape the world.

For a more in-depth analysis of the leadership qualities that drive innovation, see our article in the Fall 2016 issue of *Rotman Management Magazine*, a publication of the University of Toronto.