

# Leader as Coach

The art and science  
of modern leadership

A **Facet5** publication

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The art and science  
of modern leadership

**Grant Gemmell**

A **Facet5** publication

# Foreword

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I'm very pleased to have been asked to write the foreword to this book for a number of reasons. As it stresses, coaching, leadership and personality inform each other more now than ever before. All these areas are developing and changing in exciting ways.

Over the past two decades more and more people have employed coaches and coaching. There are a number of reasons for this. Technical developments make rich coaching at a distance possible despite some coach's initial scepticism. Coaching is often a hybrid activity. Many factors, from COVID to the economic situation, increased anxiety and certain mental problems in the general population. In turn this fed a growing interest in lifestyle issues and in psychology, an area which has informed on-line influencers and more traditional entertainments such as novels, films, plays and TV programming. But the biggest trend has been the increased numbers of leaders employing coaches.

As this book points out, leadership has changed dramatically, for the same reasons that coaching has grown. Traditional models of leadership no longer seem to work. Leaders face unrelenting complex, uncertain challenges with teams they may not know, who have very diverse motives, aims and talents. People call on coaches to cope with change and uncertainty: it is therefore no wonder that leaders increasingly rely on professionally qualified coaches to try out ideas, to make key decisions, to act as a sounding board.

And both leadership and coaching are intimately bound up with the personalities of those practising those skills and those who they are dealing with. How we measure personality, our models of how human personality expresses itself in behaviour, is changing dramatically. We increasingly understand that, although we do have core personalities, we change, adapt and flex to meet the requirements of different situations and different people. We have characteristic ways of dealing with stress (and, indeed boredom) which are particularly important in the case of leaders who often face almost overwhelming demands on their time, their decision-making and their ability to take in information.

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My working life has been spent dealing with these three areas: as a coach, as a leader (most recently of myself!) and as a publisher and user of personality and other tests. I've spent many years creating, publishing, marketing and writing about psychometric tests of which Facet5 is an example. Facet5 is based (as the text says later) on the most robust, best researched model of human personality and I've always been impressed by the range of materials Facet5 has produced to support test users and test takers. It also sticks to its core interest – human development – and interprets five factor results in a particularly interesting and useful way.

But what really impresses me about Facet5, the assessment and the company, is that neither has stood still. COVID, the advent of AI and on-line testing, changes in the world economy and politics, new thinking about organisations, marketing, production and other organisational disciplines have left many thinkers and leaders totally confused. Facet5 has focused on data, information and how they can be used to improve our understanding of personality and leadership, rather than simply moving its products on-line and claiming that is an adequate solution.

There is still a long way to go. We are still in the middle of the most far-reaching technical revolution human beings have experienced. This will impact testing and development and will require equally revolutionary solutions if we are to treat human beings with genuine empathy, humanity and consideration while enabling them to deliver world class results in their work. I hope and expect Facet5 to be at the forefront of this as they move to an increasingly virtual, data-driven world.

Leadership, coaching and personality are closely linked subjects and this book, rather than just discussing their connections, shows how you can work on them to improve your leadership.

I wish I'd owned it all those years ago: I'd have been a better leader.

**Ian Florance**

Executive Director, European Test Publishers Group

Managing Director, OnlyConnect Ltd

# Contents

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Foreword	2	Section 3	
Introduction	6	<b>Leading with humanity</b>	
		Chapter 11	
		Leading through the inner critic	90
		Chapter 12	
		Leading the whole person	98
		Chapter 13	
		Empathetic leadership without burn out	108
		Chapter 14	
		Coaching through conflict and disagreement	117
		Chapter 15	
		The rise of quiet confidence	122
		Chapter 16	
		Leading through diversity	133
		Section 4	
		<b>Leading for development and growth</b>	
		Chapter 17	
		Feedback that fuels growth	142
		Chapter 18	
		Challenging the comfort zone	148
		Chapter 19	
		Asking better questions	154
		Chapter 20	
		Creating a learning culture	160
		Chapter 21	
		Coaching for inclusion and belonging	166
Section 1			
<b>Understanding your leadership style</b>			
Chapter 1			
Leadership truths revised	12		
Chapter 2			
The core of coaching	14		
Chapter 3			
Self-awareness in leadership	16		
Chapter 4			
Your Key Qualities	18		
Chapter 5			
Flexing your leadership style	50		
Chapter 6			
Defining your leadership legacy	53		
Section 2			
<b>Leading in a complex world</b>			
Chapter 7			
Leading in a hybrid world	60		
Chapter 8			
Leading in an uncertain world	66		
Chapter 9			
Leading through decision fatigue	74		
Chapter 10			
From 'overwhelm' to clarity	81		

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## Section 5

### **Tools and resources**

Chapter 22	
General coaching questions	176
Chapter 23	
Four weeks of coaching moments	181
Chapter 24	
Five coaching moves to try	186
Chapter 25	
Micro-coaching moments	188

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# Introduction

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Hello Grant

Welcome to your Leader as Coach – the art and science of modern leadership.

As a leader you know that there are plenty of books, of varying quality and usefulness, offering 'brand new' models and theories of leadership. Do you really need another one?

I suppose only if it offers a different approach and that's what we are trying to do with this book. What makes this book different is that it has been written for you. Your leadership is as unique as your personality. Your unique approach will also influence how you coach. This book focuses on the art of coaching, combined with the science of personality to support you to grow your leadership aspirations.

Interestingly, over the last 38 years of working with leaders like yourself, we can see no evidence of one, universally applicable leadership model which works in every industry, organisation and culture. But, working with leaders around the world has led us to a number of conclusions.

First, we believe personality is at the heart of leadership. It shapes different styles, recognises individual leaders have different strengths, blind spots and delegation needs. When you think of great leaders you have known or admire, you'll realise that they are a diverse set of characters, engaging, encouraging (and sometimes controlling), all leading in many different ways. They had and have very different personalities. They might range from people who founded charities to football managers to innovative, successful CEOs to teachers and tutors who opened the door to your later life and career. The key to this diversity is personality.

Great leaders are often described as authentic: their style expresses their true personality rather than an artificial performance. Their personality often helps define their leadership identity and when combined with their knowledge, experience and wisdom they are able to understand how far they can and should, flex their style and how to meet others where they are, ultimately helping others become successful. A leader's personality is like the software which manages how their preferred approach, knowledge and soft skills are displayed and received by others.

Second the old universal models of leadership (leader as hero, as sage, as guru etc) no longer work. Given the revolution in technology, social attitudes, economy and the focus of organisations – and the sheer complexity of the leadership role – this won't be a surprise to you. One person cannot do everything, so leaders increasingly have to take on the role of development champions, connecting individuals and creating environments in which colleagues and followers thrive.

Third, to achieve all this, successful leaders learn and use many of the attitudes and techniques of coaching. And that's what this book provides: those tools, techniques and approaches that you can use to sharpen and deepen your personal style to meet the challenges of modern leadership.

### **Why us?**

Why should you trust us to provide ideas about how to lead in this 'brave new world'?

Facet5 knows about personality. You could say it's our long-term obsession. And we are passionate about development.

As you'll see from Section 1, Facet5 has been involved in personality measurement and research for over 38 years. Our core measure is based on the best researched personality model in the world and we've used it to develop individuals, teams and organisations and to inform coaches and coaching approaches. Our focus is on helping people, especially leaders, use their personalities to realise their true potential and in turn help others do the same.

Facet5, is based on a model of personality that allows comparison between different people. This helps you to understand how your leadership style compares with others': what are your strengths and areas to look out for when you overlay your strengths; how far you can flex your style while remaining a values-driven individual and where, by contrast, you need colleagues to play to their strengths to support the work of the team. This approach helps with sense making about why we are the way we are and encourages individuals to see difference as a place of learning and opportunity.

Our other obsession is data. Our aim has always been to take trusted, reliable data and make it meaningful. To honour this commitment we have purposely kept this book simple and action-oriented. It's not weighed down by references, long abstract arguments and numbers. But this doesn't mean we've worked out our position in a ten-minute conversation on the back of a napkin. It draws on the ideas

of many authors, developers, users and test subjects as well as our own data-driven research into personality and organisation. Some of those great thinkers have provided their stories throughout this book.

Ultimately, we want you to use it, not just read it.

## **Book structure**

You can use the book in a way that best fits in with your own schedule, preferred ways of learning and what opportunities there are to try ideas out. You can read this book in short sections, starting where it speaks to you, taking what fits, leaving what doesn't. You can share it with colleagues. The material in the final section can be adapted to fit your role, your personality, your context.

Section 1 outlines how we see leadership, coaching and personality come together; how they interact and some of the ways you can use information about them. It directly addresses your situation and capabilities, not those of a generalised leader in an abstract world.

You will also find ways of investigating your own personality and style and what your leadership strengths are. We call these Key Qualities. They are unique to you and will give you a language and easy way of understanding your core personality traits and how they influence your leader as coach approach.

Within Sections 2 to 5, chapters outline a challenge you might face or a way you might develop your style. They suggest questions you can use and practical techniques with which you can experiment. We've covered 18 important topics, but that list is unlikely to be exhaustive, and we plan to add to them.

At the end of each chapter, we have provided information that is specific to you and your personality. Here you will find the strengths of your approach, what may happen if you overplay those strengths and strategies to adopt that support the topic being discussed. Think of this as the 'so-what!' bit, where we give you direct advice and tactics based on your unique personality.

Section 6 offers a more general toolkit of actions and approaches from which you can pick and choose, depending on your personality, your particular industry and the sort of organisation or team you lead.

Throughout we've aimed at keeping things short and practical as well as introducing ways of customising how you approach this material.

Some techniques and tools appear in more than one section because they can be used to address a variety of different issues. Over time you'll find you develop your own selection of approaches that work for you and help energise your particular team.

If you're being coached, this book can help you practice techniques between your formal sessions with your coach or you can share the book with them as extra information they might find useful.

Ultimately, we believe coaching gears up leadership not as a job title or formal process, but as a mindset.

It's a way of helping people feel seen, heard and capable. It shapes a leadership style that invites clarity, builds trust and moves things forward even when the path ahead isn't clear. You're a leader, not a coach but learning to lead with a coaching attitude is a game-changer.

## Section 1

# **Understanding your leadership style**

Leadership starts from self-awareness.

Understanding yourself – how you view yourself and how others might view you – leads directly to understanding other people. In turn, this will help you develop strategies, a culture and a leadership style that gets the best out of different people.

Equally importantly, it will build on your own strengths to get the best out of yourself. It will help you cope with your demanding role.

**Possessing self-awareness is both a leadership essential and a starting point for growth.**

As we stress throughout, leadership is driven by personality as much as competencies, knowledge and actions. Your personality influences how you listen, respond, give feedback, handle discomfort and even how much space you leave for others to grow.

Your own growth matters as much as that of your team members. The more consciously you lead, the more powerfully you coach.

**Self-knowledge empowers; it does not limit.**

In this section we use Facet5, our trait-based personality model to create a practical lens for understanding your style.

# Chapter 1

## Leadership truths revised

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As we mentioned, we see no evidence that there is one universal model or theory of leadership which will be successful wherever it is applied. However, across every programme, sector, or stage of career, there are certain truths about leadership that hold steady. They are not tied to a single model or theory, but rather to the lived experience of leaders everywhere. These truths are the foundations on which trust, clarity and impact are built. We trust you will recognise many of them.

### **1 Self-awareness: the foundation of growth**

At the heart of great leadership is self-awareness. Leaders who understand their personality, strengths and blind spots can better recognise how others see them and interpret their actions. This awareness creates choice: the ability to flex their style without losing authenticity, to meet others where they are and to grow continuously. Self-awareness is not a one-time achievement but an ongoing discipline that underpins every other truth of leadership. Knowing yourself is the foundation of knowing others.

### **2 Presence – and being present**

Effective leaders bring presence and with it a sense of steadiness and authenticity. Presence is not about status or physical proximity; it is about how leaders show up in conversations and moments that matter. Being present means listening fully, paying attention and holding space for others to contribute. People quickly recognise when leaders are distracted or performing rather than engaging authentically. Presence also rests on clarity of values: leaders who are clear on what matters to them and are willing to defend those values when challenged, create consistency that others can trust.

### **3 Awareness of bias and emotion**

All leaders carry biases and emotional triggers. What sets great leaders apart is their ability to recognise these patterns, pause and regulate their responses. Emotional regulation does not mean suppressing feelings but understanding

them well enough to act with intention rather than impulse. This awareness equips leaders to make better decisions, respond constructively under pressure and create psychological safety for others.

#### **4 The art of asking and the courage to voice**

Great leaders know how to ask questions that cut to the heart of meaning – uncovering what is really being said and what is left unsaid. This skill brings clarity, surfaces motivation and deepens understanding. Alongside questioning is the courage to voice opinions with respect and candour. It is not about complicity or avoidance, but about constructive challenge that broadens perspective. When paired with empathy, this balance of asking and voicing creates the conditions for growth and innovation.

#### **5 Realistic humility**

Finally, successful leaders carry a sense of realistic humility. They know their strengths and influence, yet they do not need the spotlight. They celebrate the excellence of others, create space for teams to thrive and recognise that the best measure of leadership is when people outperform their leader. Realistic humility also means being comfortable with ambiguity and insecurity – recognising that not everything can be controlled or predicted and that overconfidence often leads to poor decisions. This steadiness in uncertainty builds resilience and fosters trust.

Together, these truths highlight a mindset. Leaders who embrace them create trust, clarity and space for others to bring their best. They set direction and deliver results, but also foster growth, experimentation and resilience. And most importantly, they model a coaching mindset: asking rather than telling, challenging with care, voicing with authenticity and continuously learning themselves. Coaching is not a technique layered on top of leadership – it is the mindset that turns these truths into daily practice.

As one leader told us: 'I'm in back-to-back meetings all day, but I don't feel like I'm having real conversations.' Another admitted: 'I want to lead with more impact – but I don't always know how.' These voices remind us that leadership is not about perfection. It is about showing up with awareness, presence, curiosity and humility – and choosing to lead with a coaching mindset, even when the path is uncertain.

## Chapter 2

# The core of coaching

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Many modern leaders work with coaches to negotiate change, overcome blocks to performance, improve personal skills, or set and achieve goals. In some cases, isolated leaders simply need someone to talk to try out an idea, to get advice. Therefore, you may have a reasonable idea of how coaching works and its basic principles. It's a discipline that draws on techniques and ideas from a number of different areas: It breaks artificial boundaries and looks for practical ways of overcoming problems and creating a more rewarding, successful future.

This book will not make you a coach rather than a leader. They are two different jobs. But adopting a coaching mindset enriches leadership effectiveness. In our view it's essential if leaders are to survive and flourish in modern organisations.

What do we mean by this: what is the idea behind the tools we suggest in this book? What do coaching approaches offer leadership?

Coaching, as opposed to many other psychologically-informed approaches, is future-focused; it concentrates on goals, not on mending or forgetting earlier achievements or mistakes. The past is seen as a springboard for the future: 'You made a mistake here: how can we avoid it in the future and do things better;' 'You did very well here; are there ways we can achieve even better results; how can we build on this?'

Coaching is also focused on action-planning, not on analysis and theory. It asks 'What is your goal and what do you need to do to get there?'

Rather than offering packaged solutions from a position of expertise, coaching is based on one simple, common-sense understanding: if you help someone to make up their own mind (to change, to address a project, to decide on a course of action, to actually start a long-discussed project or whatever), it is more likely they will do what they've decided themselves than if you've ordered or told them then to do it. Coaching techniques help people decide for themselves. The result is that people grow to maximise their potential, to work to the absolute peak of their ability.

In the previous section we've already mentioned some of the coaching techniques that leadership might adopt. These include:

- asking questions after learning how to phrase and time them to help the person being questioned answer honestly and thoughtfully.
- listening to what is really being said (rather than the words someone is saying), by empathising, but also challenging.
- coaching leaders never collude with self-serving excuses. Coaches don't just listen; they observe behaviours – gestures, posture, etc – to understand what is really being communicated.
- many coaches and successful leaders, learn to use silence. They don't jump in and drown out an answer. They wait and the silence allows the person being questioned time to think and, often, say what's really on their mind.  
It's a surprisingly difficult but powerful skill.

Perhaps the coaching technique leaders find most difficult to adopt is the equalisation of power. Coaching is something done with a person, not to a person. It works if the person being coached can answer honestly and does not feel threatened. Of course, coaching leaders have to exert authority in certain situations by the nature of their jobs but in the sorts of development areas we're discussing here, the creation of trust and psychological security through the leader's value-driven and empathetic presence can generate hugely successful development.

**And coaching leaders use the same techniques on themselves, to ensure they can perform their increasingly challenging job to the best of their abilities.**

Sections 2–6 provide tools, techniques and a huge library of questions which will help you adopt this coaching mindset. But, to reiterate, the start of this process is self-awareness. Just as there are many ways of being a leader, so there are many ways of coaching. Which way you will find works best for you and therefore which techniques you'll find easiest to adopt, will depend on your particular personality. We'll use Facet5 to look at your personal style.

## Chapter 3

# Self-awareness in leadership

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It's easy to offer coaching as a leader from habit: to give feedback in ways that you would find helpful, but which would disengage the team member you're talking to. The pace that suits you will not suit everyone. To overcome this tendency, you first have to see yourself clearly. This involves being conscious of your patterns and preferences: how you show up, how you listen, how you react and what you unconsciously encourage or shut down. Leaders often underestimate just how much their presence shapes the dynamic of any work situation. You're not a neutral observer; you're an active part of the system.

### Why it matters

Intent isn't always impact. You might believe you're being supportive, but your team may experience you as controlling. You might think you're giving people space when they feel like you've gone missing. Leadership style isn't one-size-fits-all. What works for one team member may land poorly with another. Our personalities differ, often profoundly. Coaching presence is rooted in awareness. If you're unaware of your default habits, preferences and patterns of behaviour, they'll drive your behaviour, especially under pressure.

### What is Facet5 and why use it

Facet5 is built on the internationally-accepted Big 5 trait-based framework of personality, one which has been researched globally, used by organisations for decades and which has proved most robust in both development and recruitment. It helps you understand your personality across five core dimensions each with detailed subfactors.

It increases leadership effectiveness by:

- Offering a language for self-awareness without judgement or typecasting.
- Helping you see how your personality shows up in relationships, decisions, and team dynamics.
- Encouraging insight into how others may experience you.

- Because of how it was created, it allows you to compare yourself with others, to see where your strengths and development areas are; to identify where you might clash or cooperate with someone else.
- Enabling you to stretch your style more consciously; not by becoming someone else but by adapting when it matters.

You don't need to change who you are to be a leader using coaching techniques effectively. But you do need to know who you are and how that shapes the space you create for others.

### Reflection prompts

Use these to begin building greater awareness of your coaching presence as a leader:

- When people come to me for support, what's my first instinct: to offer a solution; create space; push for action?
- What do I believe makes a good coach? Where did that belief come from?
- Under pressure, what parts of my personality become more visible or more extreme?
- How do I respond to people who lead or think differently from me?
- What feedback have I received, explicit or implicit, about how I show up in conversation?

### Practice: pause, check, reflect

Build this self-awareness habit into your leadership rhythm:

- **Pause** – before a coaching conversation, ask yourself what state of mind, emotion and commitment you are bringing to the situation.
- **Check** – during the conversation, stay attuned to your behavioural patterns. Am I dominating, distracted, withdrawing?
- **Reflect** – afterwards, ask: Did I show up the way I intended? Did I make space for the other person's growth, or fill it with my own style?

When leaders understand their own personality, they create the conditions for others to thrive. And when you coach from awareness, not assumption, you don't just lead better. You unlock the full potential of the people around you.

## Chapter 4

# Your Key Qualities

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Leaders coach in many ways. You may naturally take charge or listen quietly before speaking. You might be structured, free-flowing, emotionally attuned, or laser-focused. These patterns are shaped by your personality traits. Understanding those traits helps you coach not by default, but by design.

Facet5 offers a powerful framework for making that understanding practical. It helps you explore how your personality shows up in coaching moments; what you emphasise, what you overlook and where you might stretch to be more effective.

When you understand your style clearly, you can:

- Play to your coaching strengths.
- Recognise your blind spots.
- Understand how others might experience you.
- Adjust with intention, not guesswork.

Your Key Qualities are those unique strengths that help you bring your leadership and coaching to life. There are 13 Key Qualities that are derived from the completion of your Facet5 Personality Questionnaire. They all measure a different aspect of your personality and we have grouped them together into five broader domains to help with understanding.




These five domains relate to the five factors that we measure.

Each of these five broad domains are broken into 13 subfactors. These provide a richer nuance to your personality and are what the Key Qualities describe.




# Your Key Qualities

## Summary

### Decision Making & Goal Setting

-  Goal Focused ***You bring pace, conviction and drive to what you do. You quickly make decisions and set direction, committing to your personal goals with purpose and determination.***
-  Assertive You confront the issues you feel strongly about, speaking up and stating your case clearly. You choose your battles quickly and wisely, being keen to get things sorted out.
-  Democratic **You openly receive advice and direction from those around you and align yourself to the views and goals of a group. You readily consult and discuss ideas to reach a shared agreement.**

### Engaging & Consulting

-  Enthusiastic ***You bring animated energy and dynamism that helps to kick-start new activities. You are excited about what is new and different, seeking out variety and welcoming change.***
-  Outgoing You connect with people easily and spontaneously involve others in your work. You make the most of any chance to collaborate and socialise, keeping things friendly, fun and inclusive.
-  Collaborative ***You actively bring others into your thinking, enjoying how ideas flow and develop through discussion. This helps to explore a breadth of ideas and blend together different points of view.***



***Statements in bold and italics show where you are most likely to differ from other people.***


**Statements in bold show where you differ slightly from other people.**

Statements in regular font show where you are similar to other people.

Task & People Focus

 People oriented

*You give careful consideration to the needs of others, ensuring a person-centred approach in your work. You believe in what you do having meaning, and in the good of everyone.*

 Helpful

*You respond to the needs of others and give your help and support freely. You see the good in people, allowing for mistakes and believing each individual can often contribute in their own way given the chance.*


 Trusting

*You take people at their word and build relationships based on implicit trust and openness. You believe in giving people a chance, sharing openly in service of the common good.*

Managing Work & Commitments

 Creative

*You bring innovation and imagination, having a fresh, big-picture perspective and enjoying change. You give others free reign to be individual and adapt to the situation.*

 Non-judgemental

*You reinterpret rules and guidelines for each situation, forging your own novel and distinctive path. You resist rigid and restrictive approaches and can deliberately challenge the status quo.*

Identifying Risk & Managing Stress

 Confident

*You remain consistent under pressure, accepting things as they are without undue anxiety. You cope well with stress and can be a source of stability and reassurance to others.*

 Mature

*You are realistic about situations and your capabilities, considering potential risks while not feeling the need to over-prepare. This brings a healthy balance between reasonable concern and over-confidence.*

## Goal-focused

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This key quality looks at your inner drive to commit to your own ideas and set goals for yourself and others. It can help you understand how quickly you form your opinions and your willingness to consult others and make decisions.

### As a leader

The brilliance of your style lies in your ability to make decisions quickly and confidently, then show an unwavering commitment to them. You develop your opinions and set goals for yourself and others without the need for direction. You are strong-minded, highly goal focussed and will act purposefully much of the time.

### As a coach

As a coach this style can bring clarity, decisiveness, and action to your approach. You can help individuals define clear objectives, commit to decisions, and maintain focus on execution. Your ability to move quickly and assertively ensures that your conversations remain productive, structured, and results-driven.

### Your style supports

- You can support individuals in setting ambitious goals, ensuring they align their efforts with long-term objectives.
- Your decisive nature can streamline discussions, helping team members avoid overthinking and stay focused.
- You have the potential to challenge others to commit to their decisions and take purposeful action.

### Strengths overplayed – what to watch out for

While your clarity and decisiveness help drive action, overusing this strength may present challenges. Some people may require more space for exploration, reflection, and shared decision-making before they commit to a path forward.

#### Things to consider

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You may push for results too quickly, making individuals potentially feel rushed or unheard.

Build in deliberate listening checkpoints: after stating a goal or suggestion, pause and ask, “What’s your perspective before we move on?”

Actively reflect back what you hear so clients feel ownership of the outcome.

Use silence as a tool—resist filling the space so clients can process and speak up.

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Your strong goal focus may lead you to prioritise efficiency over deeper discussion, missing out on alternative perspectives and conclusions drawn by the individual.

Reframe exploration as part of efficiency, not separate from it: “Taking a few minutes to consider alternatives now could save time later.”

Use open prompts: “What possibilities are we not considering yet?”

Encourage brainstorming before narrowing down to ensure the individuals shape the direction.

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Some team members may feel they haven’t fully processed their thoughts before being encouraged to take action or decide.

Adapt your tone and questioning style: soften directives into invitations.

Ask: “What feels like a natural first step for you?” instead of “What’s your next action?”

Offer options: “Would you like to map possibilities together, or define a concrete action straight away?”

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# Assertive

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This key quality measures how you put forward and defend your point of view. It will help you understand how quickly you react to issues, your preferred approach to resolving them and your willingness to hold your ground on issues important to you.

## As a leader

The brilliance of your style lies in your ability to create a climate of straight-talking diplomacy. You are prepared to state your case clearly and unambiguously as necessary when dealing with matters that are important to you. You prefer to get things 'sorted out' as they arise - even if this means tackling something head on. You allow and encourage others to have their say but will still want to make sure you've got your point across.

## As a coach

As a coach this style can bring clarity, directness, and a willingness to address important issues head-on. You can help individuals articulate their needs, set clear goals, and navigate challenges with confidence, ensuring that your coaching remains straightforward, action-driven, and solution-focused.

## Your style supports

- Help others express their perspectives more clearly, ensuring they feel heard and understood in their personal and professional environments.
- You to raise sensitive topics with confidence, ensuring that conversations are productive and do not avoid difficult but necessary discussions.
- You to foster healthy debates and constructive dialogue, helping to navigate differing opinions while creating clarity and maintaining your own stance.

### Strengths overplayed – what to watch out for

While your direct and assertive communication style can help with clarity and confidence, overusing this strength may present challenges. Some people may require a more nuanced, patient, or diplomatic approach rather than a direct, head-on coaching style.

#### Things to consider

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Your desire to address things immediately may cause you to push to action before others are fully ready.

Use a “pace check”: pause before pushing forward and ask, “What timing feels right for you? Are you ready to move on?”

Build in reflection space—encourage individuals to sit with their thoughts overnight and revisit the action plan at the next session or meeting.

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You may struggle to hold your ground in situations where others are even more assertive, leading to potential inconsistencies in how you apply your conviction

Reframe confrontation as joint exploration: rather than matching force, invite deeper thinking. Ask, “What evidence makes this so compelling for you?”

Use curiosity instead of counter-assertion: demonstrate strength by drawing out reasoning rather than escalating.

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Your ability to pick battles strategically may cause others to view you as unpredictable – assertive in some cases but willing to yield in others

Establish a principles-based consistency strategy: clearly articulate the values or non-negotiables that guide when you assert and when you flex.

Share these explicitly: “Here’s what I will always hold firm on, and here’s where I’m open to adapting.” This reduces ambiguity for others.

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## A leader's story

### Ian Florance

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Too many years ago to mention I was sent on a two-week Middle Management course at one of the UK's management colleges. The delegates all displayed very different personalities. This was at a time when diversity was rarely acknowledged and most delegates were white, middle-class males. Despite this gender, class, age and ethnic similarity, a proportion of the delegates focused on control, deadlines, process, having an absolutely right answer and win-lose negotiations; they seemed to see people as a disposable resource. Others saw their role as upping quality factors, reacting to customer wants but also developing and keeping talent while accepting a range of opinions. They seemed to value others' achievements and excelled at win-win negotiating.

As part of the course we all took a then-popular personality test. We were astonished at the range of types we represented even though we were all working as middle managers of people and processes. Rather naively I had thought the course was intended to give us the one secret of leadership but in a one-to-one session our main tutor pointed out that no such thing existed. Leading, he suggested, reflected personality and, in my case, he thought a less directive, more consultative approach would allow me to make a difference. My high introversion and exploration scores were rarely identified among middle managers all those years ago!

More recently I started working for myself and studied on a year-long course to become a qualified coach. Almost immediately several things struck me. I wished I'd known many of the techniques I was being taught when I was leading a 50-strong marketing department and an industrial psychology consultancy. It was suddenly obvious to me that I'd have been a more effective leader if I'd been more conscious of my style, trusted its genuine effectiveness more and learnt more of the sort of techniques that I can see are included in this book.

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The leaders I coached during my training faced a very different, more complex, more human-centred task than I ever had: coaching techniques were even more relevant to their role than they had been to mine. Grand theories of leadership had come and gone since then. None offered sure success in every situation.



It also became clear to me that self-coaching is an invaluable activity for anyone working in an increasingly hybrid, often lonely situation.

Finally, right at the beginning of the coaching course, its creator warned me: 'It's a year long but the first six months concentrates on the most difficult skill: shutting your mouth and actually listening'. That's something leaders and coaches have to learn.

Coaching and leadership overlap to such a great extent I tend to think of them as nearly the same thing.

## Section 2

# **Leading in a complex world**

Leadership today is more challenging than ever. You make complex decisions instantly, often without a clear map. You lead people you might rarely see in person and certainly don't 'know.' You manage unclear boundaries and teams that need clarity as well as flexibility. The people you work with have hugely varying attitudes to, and expectations of their role; what they expect from it, how long they will commit to it. This is the leadership landscape which is evolving every day.

The idea that we need to control virtually everything was a mistaken belief that has been disproved by experience (and scientifically) countless times. Great leaders ride the wave of uncertainty and stay connected: to their purpose, to people, and to themselves. That's where coaching becomes a powerful lens for leadership.

In complex times, leadership needs to be more thoughtful, human and coach-like rather than being louder and faster.

## Chapter 7

# Leading in a hybrid world

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The hybrid world creates problems, but these are balanced by real opportunities.

Hybrid work has transformed the rhythm of modern work and demands on leadership. For many teams and organisations, the shift to a blended model of remote and in-person working has brought newfound flexibility, but also a sometimes-growing disorientation. It questions where work happens, whether people are showing up to it, how they see themselves in it and how you lead others through it. We hear comments like: 'I feel like I'm always on, but not really present'; 'I go from meeting to meeting, but I can't remember the last time I had a meaningful conversation'; 'I used to feel clear about who I was at work but now the lines are blurry'.

These are signals of something deeper than time management problems. They suggest a shift in identity, a loss of structure, a need to work in an environment without clear rules. There is no clear start or end to the day, just an endless stream of tasks. Visibility and recognition, once reinforced by physical presence, have become elusive. The cues that used to tell us we were making progress (being seen, included, praised) are harder to read. And for many, there's an unspoken pressure constantly to demonstrate value in a digital space that never sleeps. Freedom has come at a cost: the quiet burden of proving you're always available, always contributing, always performing.

And this doesn't just affect others' work. It shapes how you lead. You connect with people in the very environment that contributes to their stress. Kitchen tables double as desks. Notifications ping mid-meeting and on the journey home.

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‘Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.’

Warren Bennis

### The challenges of hybrid working

- **Boundary erosion:** the line between work and life is going or gone.
- **Presence fatigue:** they’re visible on screen but not really there.
- **Disrupted identity:** the old cues for leadership, progress and recognition don’t work anymore.
- **Isolation:** digital connection hasn’t replaced emotional connection.
- **Performance guilt:** freedom comes with an invisible weight – the constant need to prove value.

But, as we noted, these challenges also offer huge opportunities. This new reality prompts you to adapt your leadership focus. You’re not just supporting performance; you’re helping people come back to their true selves, the ones that find satisfaction in delivering and performing at a high level. Hybrid work creates space for considered choice. It gives you the opportunity to step back, rethink and get agreement about a better way to work. With fewer external structures, there’s more room to create internal alignment. Your team can pause and ask how they want to work now and what needs to change to get there.

You can help your team design this new world of work, guiding them in reshaping boundaries that value ambition and wellbeing and create rather than waste energy. You can lead with empathy and presence, even when you’re not in the room. And you can encourage the kind of forward-facing self-awareness that allows people not just to survive in a hybrid world but to thrive in it.

The leadership edge involves not just helping people do more, but helping them do it with intention, clarity and connection. In a world that's increasingly flexible but emotionally fragmented, leadership can be the space where people remember who they are, what matters most and how they want to move forward from there.

These challenges go to the heart of how people see themselves, relate to others and define what success even means.

## **Opportunities for leaders**

You can lead virtually without losing presence or depth by supporting people whose structure, routines and feedback loops have disappeared. This will help others reconstruct their sense of identity in a world that won't stop shifting.

Leaders who understand the power of coaching offer empathy, clarity and emotional insight into situations that often strip those things away. This can be achieved in a new context: one in which you redefine what growth, progress and impact look like when work happens across time zones. This will help people reclaim rhythm and boundaries that reflect who they are now, not who they were pre-2020. You can encourage more intentional, empathetic and influential communication even at a distance.

The ultimate win here is to watch your team develop real self-leadership, not just reactive coping.

Hybrid work has stripped away a lot of the scaffolding people once relied on. But that means what's underneath – the self, the intention, the values – can finally come into focus. That's where your leadership can truly make a difference.

This is deeper than performance management; it's re-grounding leadership. People need to come back to who they are and how they want to lead and be led, even when the external environment keeps changing.