
Five Fundamentals for Stellar Leadership

*“Active, influencing
relationships amongst
leaders and followers that
get results.”*

1. Introduction to Stellar Leadership

The Stellar Leadership model is an approach to leadership development that is informed by research and promotes what is commonly considered to be great leadership practice in a modern, developed and largely knowledge-based economy.¹

At Stellar, we have undertaken a major review and meta-analysis of published leadership studies and our findings show that:

- Although leadership is difficult to define precisely, it can be modelled in a meaningful way to provide guidance on what constitutes good and sometimes great leadership
- Leadership is necessary at all levels in an organisation and there is evidence that it does improve performance for organisations, teams and individuals
- Leadership is different from management although both are necessary for an organisation or a group of people working together to perform well and get results
- Leadership is present only when leaders act to do something that influences others and to do this requires competency in a range of personal and social skills that are associated with what is formally termed “emotional” and “social” intelligence
- Leadership can be learned, but it must come ‘from within’ and this learning is best achieved through a mix of self-awareness, experiential learning and practice
- Leadership development programmes, if properly designed and delivered, with attention given to allowing the transfer of learning from course to workplace, can create new and better leaders.

Stellar Leadership Defined

Leadership is a complex interaction between people (leaders and followers) and the context in which they find themselves. For Stellar Leadership, we use the following definition of leadership:

Active, influencing relationships, amongst leaders and followers, that get results.

Having a definition of leadership helps us to understand how it is possible to build leadership capacity in anyone who is serious about his or her development as a leader. It provides a standard that allows us to express whether or not a person is behaving in a way that shows leadership in any particular situation. How can we know if we are leading well unless there is a clear definition of what leadership means in the first place? And ultimately, the best test of leadership is to ask and observe followers’ experience of being led.

¹ See our Leadership Overview guidance notes for a wider discussion of theories and models that have informed the Stellar Leadership model

Having an agreed definition of leadership also makes it easier for us to recognise it, measure it and plan to improve it. See below for a more detailed explanation of our leadership definition.

Stellar Leadership Definition Explained

Key Words	Importance to Stellar Leadership
...active	<p>A leader has to act with purposeful intent in order to attract and retain followers. This means having a clear vision of a desired future that is compelling to followers.</p> <p>For sustainable leadership, a leader needs to demonstrate that the change they are promoting is meaningful to and in the interests of, followers.</p>
...influencing	<p>The result of a leader's actions must be to influence others to become followers and undertake the various roles and tasks needed to achieve objectives and realise the organisation's vision.</p> <p>This may be influencing how people see and think about things, how they feel and indeed how they act or react.</p>
...relationships	<p>Creating and maintaining relationships is at the heart of leadership. This means having the social skills necessary to develop common bonds, trust and understanding between leaders and followers.</p> <p>It is not possible to lead without followers and usually they can choose whether or not to follow. Think about it - no followers, no leader. Followers determine whether or not you can lead. That makes positive follower interaction important for a leader.</p>
...get results	<p>When all is said and done, leaders need to get results.</p> <p>To sustain follower engagement, a leader needs to show tangible progress towards achieving objectives and outcomes that are meaningful to the people they lead.</p>

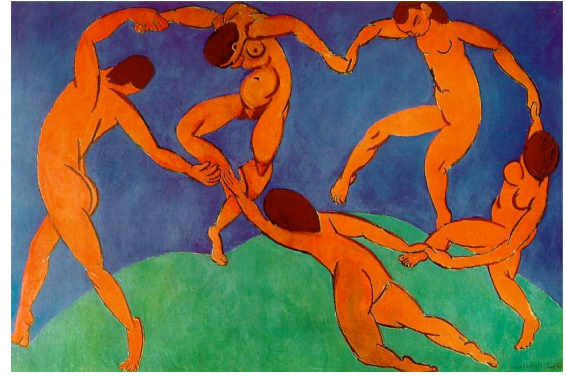
Leadership as a Dance

There are a number of well-known metaphors for leadership. A mountain conjures up an image of people working as a team to reach the peak together. An iceberg might encourage reflection on the importance of knowing what is hidden from view and below the surface.

At Stellar we like the metaphor of a dance.² As Warren Bennis has reflected,

² Our image of a dance is taken from Henri Matisse. (1910). *Dance (II)*. , Oil on canvas, Displayed in The Hermitage, St Petersburg

“[Leadership] brings to mind the idea of an energetic dance that binds the leader and followers, in which each side is fully present, active and able to shape the other”.³



Leadership as a Dance

A leader is entirely dependent on having and retaining followers in order to be a leader. Lose your followers and you no longer lead. This is a touchstone for leadership that research has supported. Studies suggest that the quality of the leader-follower relationship is directly related to levels of performance and employee satisfaction. The lesson is this: making the effort to develop high quality one-to-one relationships with individuals is as important as encouraging people to work collaboratively, as an effective team. Engagement with followers/employees, of which relationship building is a key part, has been proven time and again to be a key factor in achieving high performance.⁴

No One Best Way

It is important to understand the personal nature of a leadership journey and how much it is tied to context. Such an understanding helps to explain how different people can lead in different ways and yet how each is considered to be, in their own way, highly effective. In truth, **there is no one best way to lead**. Not only is leadership an intensely personal pursuit for the leader; it is equally so for followers.

2. Leadership Characteristics

Whilst each leader will approach the task of leadership differently, there is evidence of effective leadership characteristics held in common. Studies consistently show that good leaders encompass most, although not necessarily all, of the following personal attributes and qualities (listed in alphabetical order):

- **Active and Positive**
Setting personal example, infusing core values and building relationships as the basis of individual and team motivation
- **Authoritative and Visionary**
Inspiring others to commit to transformational change by developing, articulating and communicating a clear sense of purpose expressed enthusiastically as a vision and strategy to be shared and embraced by all who would follow
- **Challenging and Questioning**
Challenging the way things are at present and taking assertive and decisive action to influence and shape how things will be in future – and encouraging others to challenge also

³ Parks, Sharon, D. (2005) Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World, Harvard Business Press, Boston, MA

⁴ MacLeod, D. and Clarke, N. (2009) Engaging for Success

- **Decisive and Dependable**
Exercising good judgement and ensuring follow-through on decisions made
- **Encouraging Collaboration**
Building great teams and recognising the power and potential of people working together to achieve common objectives
- **Integrity**
Acting in a trustworthy, honest and fair way and being seen to be genuinely interested in getting positive outcomes for all stakeholders
- **Intelligent and Competent**
*On three levels: **cognitive** (strategic thinker and problem solver); **social** (networker, communicator, influencer and generally approachable and good with people); **emotional** (self aware, self managed, empathetic, and drawing on a range of leadership styles)*
- **Persistent and Tough-minded**
Dealing with difficult decisions, poor performance, complex problems and disappointments and the fear or anxiety that comes from making big decisions with serious consequences
- **Engaging the Individual**
Engaging people as individuals and in teams, with regular contact, feedback and coaching conversations.

3. Five Fundamentals for Stellar Leadership

The Stellar Leadership model aims to provide some form of coherent guidance to support the development of leaders in organisations across all sectors. It is designed as an approach to leadership development that involves five fundamentals that, if addressed, will help those assigned a leadership role to unlock their full potential as a leader.

The German philosopher Hegel once pointed out that one cannot eat fruit – it is only possible, he says, to eat, pears, bananas and so on. Viewed in this way, leadership is seen as a general, descriptive term that offers little help to those who need to know what they must do in order to improve as a leader.



To unlock leadership in ourselves, we need to identify the specific apples and pears of leadership and thereby be able to collect and use them to provide the sustenance needed to grow and maintain good or great leadership practice.

By developing the Stellar Leadership model we aim to provide each individual with the fundamentals they need to address to become an effective leader. The five fundamentals for Stellar Leadership are as follows:

- **Personal Qualities**
Demonstrating integrity, competence, judgement, decisiveness and behavioural flexibility as a leader
- **Purpose**
Articulating clear mission, vision, values and outcomes in a way that will inspire others to follow

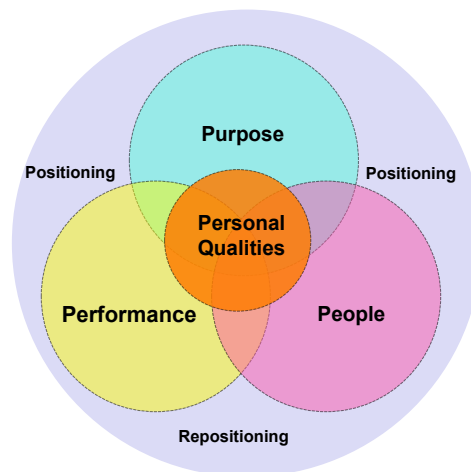
- **Positioning**
Knowing and understanding the context of the internal and external environment and formulating winning (blue ocean) strategies to realise the vision and achieve goals
- **People**
Engaging, motivating, empowering and supporting people to develop in their roles and execute strategies and plans where they have a contribution to make
- **Performance**
Planning, making things happen, reviewing progress and getting results.

These fundamentals are not frozen in a static model - they are in constant motion. They are affected by ever changing environmental forces. We think of the five fundamentals as a checklist against which you can test your leadership practices.



Using another metaphor, keeping faith with the five fundamentals is like the performance act of spinning plates. As each plate is given attention it speeds up and remains stable and afloat. Without attention, the others slow down, wobble and crash. The leadership role requires a great deal of skill and attention to keep all the plates spinning and therefore to maintain the momentum needed to make the whole act a success. This Stellar Leadership interplay is illustrated below.

Five Fundamentals for Stellar Leadership



This next section illustrates the range and complexity of leadership qualities, competencies and behaviours associated with the five fundamentals for Stellar Leadership. The core challenge it presents is: are you willing to change your leadership practice in order to become a better leader?

Personal Qualities

A leader needs to have well developed emotional and social intelligence. This is the ability to determine the requirement for leadership in a particular situation and select an appropriate response. This means being self-aware, self-managed and proficient in the exercise of key social skills such as communication, motivation and influence.



Let's be clear. This is not about being perfect. It is about how you understand, manage and develop yourself so that you can lead enough people (perhaps not all) to willingly work on the tasks you have set them and achieve the results you expect of them. This competency, to manage yourself and motivate others is called respectively, emotional and social intelligence. A leader needs to be sensitive to their own and others' patterns of behaviour and work to exploit strengths whilst making some allowance for individual weaknesses.

A leader needs three levels of intelligence:

- Cognitive
(as a strategic thinker and problem solver)
- Emotional
(being self aware, self managed, empathetic and behaviourally flexible)
- Social
(as a networker, communicator and influencer who is approachable and good with people)

Improving intelligences will require openness to personal change. It will mean being willing to self-disclose about fears and weaknesses and perhaps also embrace full surround - 360 degree - feedback in order to identify any hidden gaps.

It is considered to be a good thing for a leader to have self-belief, strength of conviction, passion and persistence in pursuing a vision. However, there is value also in having enough humility to recognise and deal with personal failings and limitations that may become apparent and affect follower relationships. Most leaders feel fear and anxiety at critical moments – it's how they respond to this that singles them out.

Where action is taken to address personal development needs, the result can be increased emotional and social intelligence and improved follower relationships. In our programmes we help leaders to think differently about people and the critical situations they will face. This is based on reaching a better understanding of personality types and preferred patterns of behaviour at work. Typical diagnostics to assist in this comes from, for example:

- Stellar Leadership Questionnaire (SLQ)
- SELF+ Profile
- Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
- Review of Leadership Styles
- Emotional and Social Intelligence Test.

In terms of Personal Qualities, a leader needs to:

1. Be enthusiastic and positive about the organisation and its mission
2. Have emotional intelligence with evident self awareness and self control
3. Apply social intelligence and have the range of social skills needed to influence others
4. Take care of his/her own physical and mental health and well-being
5. Work to a strong set of values, especially in relation to integrity and fairness
6. Demonstrate competency and political astuteness⁵ in dealing with difficult and complex situations and issues
7. Identify key influencers and decision-makers and build good relationships with them
8. Adapt to deal with different people and situations and use a variety of leadership styles as required
9. Follow through on decisions made and make sure action is taken and reported on
10. Use feedback to know, develop and manage him or herself as a leader.

Purpose

A leader must have or find a compelling vision and a clear sense of purpose if others are to be inspired. The vision needs to elicit passion if it is to attract followers. A leader should set a small number of important and challenging goals that give meaning to the vision. Studies show that leaders who model positive values gain the commitment of followers towards the organisation's purpose and goals.

A leader must have or develop the ability to capture and articulate a sense of purpose and state this - or somehow demonstrate this - to followers in the form of a shared vision. This could be in the form of words, stories, pictures or seeing-is-believing experience derived from visiting (best-in-class) exemplars elsewhere.

The vision will need to be put in context, with clear guidance on values and realisable goals, if followers are to see the scale of what is required to close the gap between where we are now and where we want to be. Clarity and belief in desired outcomes is a powerful driver for followers. This will require clear communication at all levels, ensuring that the vision is cascaded to and understood by, everyone in the organisation.

Leaders need to establish a healthy organisational culture if they are to create the conditions for an engaging and energising climate. If a leader is taking over where there is a negative climate and poor performing team, they will need to challenge existing and long-held sets of attitudes and behaviours that must change. This will require courage and conviction to see through change.

A leader needs to have a strong moral compass to guide their decision-making and in turn, command respect. People literally "follow the leader" and so establishing a set of core values will help followers understand what type of organisation/team the leader wants it to

⁵ This is the ability to understand what you can and cannot control, when to take action, who is going to resist your agenda and whom you need on your side.

be - “the new way we do things around here”. Most people will look to the leader’s values and behaviours as a guide to their own approach in the workplace. They will soon learn from experience what gets rewarded and what doesn’t.

In many organisations values are written down as ‘core values’ or ‘guiding principles’ but are not talked about. Making frequent references to values in discussion and performance review sessions is a great way of letting people know and understand what attitudes and standards of behaviour are expected of them.

In terms of Purpose a leader needs to:

1. Be positive about the future in a way that gets buy-in and excites others
2. Establish and describe a clear sense of purpose or mission
3. Be able to articulate and share his or her vision and have a version to hand that can be expressed in under two minutes⁶
4. Ensure that their team and other stakeholders are informed and appropriately involved in the envisioning process
5. Establish specific outcomes, expressed in a way that is understood and can be acted on by others
6. Cascade a sense of purpose in a way that provides meaning and direction at all levels (organisation, team and individual)
7. Create time and space for others to take in and understand the vision from their position and in their setting
8. Be adaptable and prepared to challenge and change their vision and goals as circumstances change
9. Ensure that strategies are in place that are clearly aligned to vision, values and goals
10. Model a desirable the organisational culture by establishing a set of core values that apply to all, including the leader.

Positioning

A leader must position the organisation within the prevailing context, by monitoring the surrounding situation with reference to both the internal and external environment. Positioning an organisation or team within it means exercising strategic leadership and therefore providing direction for others. This must result in a clear strategy and when necessary a repositioning to cope with disruption and change.

Strategic leaders network, make connections and build social capital so that they are alerted to change and can exploit opportunities that arise. This a major source for innovative ideas and developments. The external focus needs to be balanced with the leader also being seen to be active, accessible and engaged with his/her own team members. It’s hard to build productive relationships if you are never there. Paying attention to the wider external

⁶ Commonly referred to as an “elevator speech”

environment at the same time leaving time to lead and manage your own team is a demanding and necessary balancing act – back to those spinning plates.

Intuition will serve a leader well; however, a leader is well advised to periodically use market intelligence and hard data to identify and “confront brutal facts”⁷ in order to see new trends that are sometimes hidden from consciousness in a flood of enthusiasm or wishful thinking based on commonly held assumptions. A leader needs to guard against sugar coated reporting.

Seeing the big picture and responding to external trends requires a willingness to gather information, see patterns, make decisions, communicate and act quickly in the face of change. Typically, a leader will seek information and research that helps in making decisions about positioning the organisation in its marketplace. Leaders should involve others in this process so that there is commitment to new strategies and plans.

More than anyone else the leader needs to provide direction, usually in the form of a strategy that is ideally co-created but certainly shared and understood by all. Two popular and effective strategic processes can be used in the form of Blue Ocean Strategy (seeking high value, innovative strategies) and Balanced Scorecard (focusing on translating strategy into action) approaches to strategic planning.

A leader needs to balance a persistent focus on end goals, with the ability to be flexible and adaptable in managing disruption along the journey itself.

In terms of Positioning a leader needs to:

1. Continually scan, assess and help interpret the meaning of events in the wider environment
2. Be open to and bring forward ideas and opportunities for discussion
3. Stay up-to-date by interacting with knowledgeable people and events in the wider environment
4. Network and encourage others to network, so that the team is kept informed about the external environment and market trends
5. Develop a strategy for the organisation/team, preferably co-created using processes and models such as Blue Ocean and Balanced Scorecard
6. Look to the future in a way that raises questions about whether or not the organisation or team will need to change its strategy
7. Challenge the way things are in a constructive and positive manner
8. Be creative and look for ways to innovate by suggesting or accepting new ways of doing things
9. Encourage others to experiment with innovative approaches and take calculated risk
10. Be personally involved in endorsing and cascading the organisation’s strategy so that all stakeholders understand it in a way that has meaning for them.

⁷ A phrase used by Jim Collins in Good to Great

People

A leader must understand others and how they view the world around them. A leader needs to build high quality relationships with followers, as individuals, as well as in groups and teams. This requires high levels of engagement.

Although we live in a highly logistical and electronic age, we are all emotional, human beings and good leaders understand this. They use technology and quality systems to accelerate performance but they know that it is people who flick the switches and press the buttons. Performance, productivity and employee satisfaction are all affected by the level of employee engagement in an organisation.

Recent studies show that high levels of engagement results in employees having a set of positive attitudes and behaviours that are aligned to an organisation's mission, vision and values. It is usually evident where people are seen to be motivated and wanting to connect with the organisation and where people really care about doing a good job. It results in people using discretionary effort at work. Unfortunately, this same research suggests that only 30% of employees are fully engaged and this applies across all sectors. What is clear is that the actions of a leader can affect this, one way or the other. To achieve high engagement requires:

- Active leadership with attention to vision, values and culture
- Managers and team leaders who engage
 - Offering clarity or role and goal
 - Appreciating effort and contribution
 - Ensuring people feel valued and supported
- Employees with a voice i.e. where challenge is welcomed, people feel listened to and where opinions count
- Leader and organisational integrity in that the leaders are seen to live up to the values they espouse and follow through on promises made.

A leader must be able to communicate and build rapport with individuals. Understanding people's patterns of behaviour, preferred roles, motivational fuses and changing circumstances, is crucial to maintaining interest and performance. It is hard to get the best from people if you do not get to know or understand them. One way of looking at this, expressed from a follower perspective, is that, "my leader should: know me; inspire me; focus me; and care about me.

An emotionally and socially intelligent leader will keep people aligned and engaged by using appropriate styles of leadership based on the needs of the individual, the context they are in and the situations they face. This can only be achieved if there are good leader-follower relations. Good relationships result in good communication, knowledge sharing, responsibility sharing and commitment to organisational and/or team goals. People need to know and understand what is expected of them if they are to perform well.

There is no one best way to lead. In uncertain times a leader needs to be more transformational than transactional and this requires clarity of vision coupled with adaptability and openness to a change. On the other hand, where there is a high degree of

day-to-day certainty and routine, a transactional approach is more acceptable, which means laying down clear pathways for teams and individuals to follow. What people universally appear to find de-motivating is a laissez-faire (disengaged) approach to leadership.

People operate individually and as groups and so leadership competencies are required at both of these levels. Engaging with people, communicating with them, recognising their contribution and being seen to care about them are all proven factors in creating a healthy organisational climate resulting in high performance and satisfaction. Pushing for performance outputs without regard to the satisfaction of people is unlikely to be sustainable. Push people too hard and they will eventually push back or simply give up – in that case the organisation will be short-changed on discretionary effort.

Just to note: not all individuals, at all times, can be fully and emotionally engaged in their work. Things happen to upset their equilibrium and routine - both in and out of the work environment. This can create what the literature refers to an “in group” (those who are fully engaged and are willing and able to stay late and help sort problems) and an “out group” (those who have other obligations or interests and can only work to contract). There is an important point in this for a leader.

A leader should understand this dynamic and respect those who fulfil their contractual obligations only and get their job done efficiently and effectively. A leader may want more signs of engagement but in these circumstances he/she must at least ensure that those individuals are treated fairly and are recognised for the contribution they make. The ideal is that everyone moves into an expanding “in group” and this is worth striving for.

In terms of People a leader needs to:

1. Act as a positive role model to others – lead by example in matters of interpersonal relations
2. Make sure others know and act in line with agreed values, attitudes and behaviours
3. Energise people by creating an atmosphere and environment they find enabling and empowering
4. Make sure that individuals know what is expected of them in their role
5. Build appropriate, high quality relationships with individual team members
6. Foster collaboration, mutual trust and cooperation across the team
7. Create a sense of common identity, commitment and optimism in the team
8. Take time out to support, develop and recognise people as individuals
9. Give people a voice – show that their opinions count – and that it is ok to challenge and speak out
10. Find ways to celebrate success e.g. small wins such as project milestones.

Performance

A leader needs to make sure that plans and resources are in place to enable people to translate strategy into action. This is about delivery. People need to know what is expected of them if they are to work energetically and collaboratively towards a common purpose. A leader should seek to enable and empower people (in teams and as individuals) if they are to be able to participate and indeed innovate, in helping to achieve results. In terms of

performance improvement, the leader must also ensure that feedback is given on performance.

Leadership without action planning and the execution of those plans will not get the results that are the ultimate test of success. Without activity and results people become sceptical of vision, strategy and plans. If vision is to become a reality then a leader must ensure that action is taken based on clear objectives, processes, outputs and outcomes. This also means making sure that people have the resources necessary to fulfil the role asked of them.

This can be termed “modelling the way”⁸ and should include attention to small wins to encourage, motivate and energise people as plans unfold towards the shared vision. People - stakeholders and employees - should be involved in the planning process. It is important that they know and understand the organisation’s plans and their role in implementing them.

A leader needs to be able to express, in practical terms, what they expect of people. This means discussing and agreeing with followers (in teams and as individuals) a set of appropriate and challenging objectives, leaving them scope to act on the basis of their talent. One organisation terms this, “task, trust and tend”.

People will also want to give and receive feedback on a regular basis. Acting as a performance coach is one of the most important roles that a leader can adopt. Most people will find this to be a positive approach. What they object to most is seeing poor performance and bad attitude unchallenged – and where this persists, it’s the leader’s job to make the challenge.

To achieve high performance through others, a leader must enable and empower people to act. This will require the leader to understand their motivation, provide resources, support personal development and follow up with feedback through regular performance conversations. It is better to have frequent interaction through conversations than occasional and very formal performance appraisal although doing both can serve well.

Although we know from studies that leadership is primarily about relationships, with all the complexity this entails, it also has a very practical, results-oriented side. Leaders quite rightly expect people to work to a plan, achieve agreed outputs and eventually, desired outcomes.

One way of describing a leader’s main role is to see it as connecting people with purpose. To do this a leader must:

- Clarify **purpose** and articulate a clear vision
- Ensure that the organisation is strategically well **positioned**
- Engage, enable and support **people** in their roles
- Establish a **performance** pathway that positively encourages innovation, action and results.

⁸ A phrase used by Kouzes and Posner in The Leadership Challenge

Connecting People and Purpose



In terms of Performance a leader needs to:

1. Make sure that SMART plans are in place for individuals and teams
2. Ensure that policies, processes and resources are in place to support plans
3. Know how plans will be achieved by ensuring everyone operates to some form of 'plan-do-review' cycle
4. Get people to talk about plans and progress made against them on a regular basis
5. Focus on getting results through people by supporting them and recognising their contribution
6. Ensure that activities are assigned to 'responsible owners' who are held accountable for performance
7. Track performance and give people feedback on their performance, with special attention to positive feedback
8. Be prepared to challenge poor performance and coach for improved performance at individual and team levels
9. Offer support and guidance to individuals through regular one-to-one review sessions that incorporate personal development planning
10. Make a point of periodically reporting back to people on the overall performance of their team and the organisation.