

Becoming a Strategic Leader is a brilliant intersection of proven science and astute observation. The authors' program has the potential to radically transform leadership training and development. This will be must-have reading for my team.

—**KARL C. JOHNSON JR.**, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER,
DIVERSIFIED CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGIES, INC.

Becoming a Strategic Leader provides a clear invitation for leaders to do something powerful with the insights from their personality as it drives value. This book will empower leaders to make the best choices for their lives and careers as they grow as leaders.

—**BRADLEY BRUMMEL, PhD**, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY,
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON, HOUSTON, TX

Becoming a Strategic Leader goes beyond offering a leadership model that others should imitate. It also offers insights and tools to help leaders recognize when they are at their best, and leverage those strengths to add strategic value to their teams and organizations. This strengths-based approach is the key to developing authentic leadership skills that last!

—**TAMARA S. LYN, PhD, ABPP**, WARDEN (RETIRED),
FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS

This book is filled with tools, including simple yet thorough self-assessments, an understandable and usable model for strategic leadership, and practical, implementable actions readers can take to be better individuals and leaders.

—**JILL B. SMART, MBA**, (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO, CHICAGO, IL); BS (BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN); FORMER CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCES OFFICER, ACCENTURE; PRESIDENT EMERITUS, NATIONAL ACADEMY OF HUMAN RESOURCES

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1 LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FLAWS

We've studied many leadership development programs and platforms, and we contend that there are two main failings in conventional leadership training:

1. Many programs have a fundamental basis in positive psychology, but their application in leadership development has an inherent flaw. Every strength is countered by its shadow—the immature and dark attributes of the strength. When you focus only on the positive aspects of strengths and ignore the shadows, you fail to address critical derailing issues that can sabotage a career.
2. Training for leadership development and strategic thinking is often delivered through a one-size-fits-all approach. This method encourages you to change or to imitate an ideal. Long-term results don't occur when you're asked to use a thought process or take a set of actions that aren't natural to you. It seems obvious, but asking people to be more like someone else doesn't work. It's like telling someone that they just need to get better at math!

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Becoming a Strategic Leader: Capitalize on the Power of Your Personality, by G. W. Watts & L. Blazek

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IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT STRENGTHS

Our first major departure from conventional leadership development stems from many years of experience successfully coaching senior executives who are either striving to be more effective leaders or aspiring to make it to the C-suite. These leaders are always looking to gain two insights: (a) how they can be as successful as possible and (b) what can derail them. The latter insight is one that positive psychology ignores.

Positive psychology as the basis for leadership development misses a fundamental truth. Every personality strength has a shadow, the contradictory opposite embedded within the strength. Failing to consider the shadow of your personality strength is like studying religion and focusing only on good while ignoring evil, or studying math and focusing only on positive integers and ignoring negative integers. The Chinese philosophy of yin and yang applies here. You cannot simply wish away the shadow because you want to acknowledge only the light, or the positive aspect of your personality.

In the early 1900s, the great psychoanalyst Carl Jung grasped the concept of the shadow. Jung defined the *shadow* as “the hidden, repressed, inferior, guilt-laden, morally reprehensible tendencies that lead to impoverishment in the personality.” Personality measurement now has a more refined road map for how we think about human development. From this road map, we have developed a simple, science-driven methodology that will help you pinpoint the shadow to your personality strength. By knowing this, you can take a much more direct and forceful set of actions to maximize your natural gifts and reduce the influence of your shadow.

The shadow is the dark aspect of the personality strength, the paradox. When your personality strengths are evolved and mature, the shadow diminishes and becomes relatively inconsequential. It's when your personality strengths aren't mature that the shadow strongly manifests and becomes an impediment to success.

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You see the shadow every day in business settings. It's the extroverted person who is a great networker but has terrible listening skills and misses opportunities because they talk too much. It's the conscientious person who is great at managing detail and creating processes but is so focused on minutiae that their rigidity prevents them from seeing the big picture. It's the person

who is great at objective reasoning but is so critical and judgmental that they lack the ability to effectively communicate. You can't simply look at strengths and ignore that the shadow exists.

You can't take advantage of your full potential unless you acknowledge and understand what can sabotage your career. You may feel good about the exercise of identifying and reading about your strengths, and why not? We all like to reflect on what's good about ourselves. The problem is that you won't grow and mature if you focus only on positive attributes and ignore potentially derailing characteristics.

Mahatma Gandhi is a perfect illustration of the power of light versus shadow as applied to leadership development. He matured in his personality strength, his agreeable nature, and his ability to resolve conflict to the point where he was able to lead millions to join a higher level, almost spiritual movement. But he was able to do this only by overcoming his shadow, which was allowing others to control him because he lacked an assertive nature. Gandhi was described as shy and withdrawn, often depressed, and unable to be critical of anybody. He even said, "I was a coward." How could a coward become one of the most fearless men in history? By overcoming his shadow! The beauty of this story—and it will be your story, too—is that he never had to change. He just needed to be more of who he was when he was at his very best.

Without exception, executives in our coaching program are interested in exploring the personality characteristics and behaviors that will hinder them from maximizing their potential. When people come to understand the concept of the shadow and the fact that it represents the immature aspect of their strongest traits, a natural phenomenon, it becomes an Aha! moment. Because the shadow phenomenon is based in science, people need not view the acknowledgment of their own shadow characteristics as stigmatizing or shameful. Viewing the shadow this way removes the discomfort and stress of identifying their so-called weaknesses. As a result, people can look at themselves more dispassionately and objectively and with less defensiveness. It's a completely different approach to professional development when you create this dynamic in a coaching discussion.

Our model of leadership development takes the whole you into account. Evolved leaders want to gain insight into their personality strengths, but they also want to know the downside of their strengths and how to negate it. Our model takes what you already know to be true about yourself and helps you take advantage of your truth. We give you practical tools in this book for shifting your thinking in order to succeed. By the time you finish reading this book, you will view your personality as a strategic weapon—a weapon that will ensure your success.

DON'T CHANGE—GROW INSTEAD

Corporate executive training and even quality MBA programs present a variety of methodologies on how to improve leadership skills. Areas taught are broad ranging and include applying strategic frameworks, acquiring innovation techniques, improving confidence in decision-making, and a host of other topics. Case studies are analyzed and often highlight how amazingly a particular leader behaved under a certain set of circumstances. The takeaway is that you should emulate those traits and behaviors.

Here's the problem (the second failing in conventional leadership training): The use of generic material and case studies perpetuates the illusion that if you only changed and imitated an ideal, you'd be more successful. We contend that training must align with the innate characteristics of the individual and should not be modeled on an abstract ideal. In other words, unless the situations, concepts, strategies, or solutions resonate and connect with you on an individual and personal level, your long-term behavioral patterns will remain the same. Imitation is never as strong as the power of internal awareness.

When you're engaged in learning that relates to something you're naturally good at, you're always more open to new ways of thinking and behaving. People tend to dislike change, and this resistance is often unconscious. Temperament, habits, and specific ways of thinking are ingrained early. So, it makes sense that unconscious resistance diminishes and even disappears when learning is aligned with personality strengths and is something that feels natural to you.

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Would you rather learn more about a topic of interest, something that comes easily and naturally, or about a topic you have little or no interest in? The answer is obvious. Our point is to illustrate how your first instinct is almost always to want to learn more about or improve at something you enjoy and are already are good at. This makes sense because intuitively, you understand that you should focus your energy where it will have the greatest impact.

This point is important because tapping into your desire for personal development is where your power and potency arise. For that desire to be

activated, you must personally connect to the material. This connection occurs only when you are tapping into your natural personality strengths.

Think back to when you took a course that was interesting, but you never felt a desire to continue to study or learn more deeply about that particular subject area. Compare this with a training experience on a subject you related to instantly, picked up intuitively, and wanted to learn more about. Odds are, the subject area you related to was in some way tapping into your personality strengths.

Much off-the-shelf leadership development material is not effective because it isn't customized to you. It's based on the premise that you should change and adapt to the material. Change is uncomfortable and feels unnatural; that's why people resist it. The new findings in personality research don't encourage people to change or to alter their genetics or life experiential journey. Rather, each of us has unique, genetically driven signature strengths that are reflected in our personality. With proper training, practice, and coaching, these strengths can be honed, leveraged, and used strategically to drive success.

Great leaders know that their achievements were derived not by imitation but by bringing forth their own individual best, whatever that may be. It's a huge mistake and a waste of time to bet your success on imitating someone or something that you're not. You've likely coached someone or even been coached to "just be yourself." So, we ask the obvious question: Why should leadership development be any different?

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A common objective of leadership development is to transform tactical managers into strategic leaders. Globally, this type of transformation is a big challenge for business. It's time for a new approach.

When I look around, I always learn something, and that is, to always be yourself and express yourself. To have faith in yourself. Do not go out and look for a successful personality and duplicate [them].

—Bruce Lee, *The Warrior Within: The Philosophies of Bruce Lee*