

The Path to

PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

**The 5-Step Process to
Becoming a Better Leader**

By J. Bryan Bennett



**Professional
Leadership
Academy**

The Path to Professional Leadership:
The 5-Step Process to Becoming a Better Leader

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ISBN-13: 978-1546597223

ISBN-10: 1546597220

Published by:

Healthcare Center of Excellence, LLC
San Diego, CA 92120

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Chapter One - Leadership is a Process – Not a Skill

*“Outstanding leaders go out of their way to
boost the self-esteem of their personnel.
If people believe in themselves,
it’s amazing what they can accomplish.”
- Sam Walton, Founder, Wal-Mart*

We are facing a leadership crisis which impacts all aspects of our lives. It affects us in healthcare, government, business, education and in the church. Lack of leadership is shown when a person in a leadership position puts their own needs or personal agenda ahead of those they are charged to lead. Just because someone is in a leadership position does not make them a leader. You can be in a leadership position (supervisor, manager, director, executive, etc.) and not have any leadership abilities. This is called Positional Leadership and occurs when someone has some position of authority but is not practicing any form of leadership. These people are not usually very effective at what they do and only accomplish what they do because of their authority. They were probably promoted to their position because they did their job well at a lower level, but little evaluation was given to their potential for leadership. The better word to describe them is manager, not leader. We have all known people who fall into this category and, unfortunately, many of us may have worked for them.

**Being a
Leader**



Leadership

One is a Position

The Other is a Process

Figure 1: Being a Leader Does Not Equal Leadership

For purposes of this book, leadership is defined as:

“A process by which an individual or organization directs and inspires a team or organization to reach a goal or follow a vision in a particular environment.”

A further examination of this definition reveals:

- A process – Leadership is not a skill. It is a process that must be worked at daily for a person to become a better leader.
- Individual or organization – There are many individuals who are leaders, but an organization can also be a leader. For instance, Apple has been a leader in several technology areas for years, as well as Amazon in online retailing. Their competitors follow them, copy them and try to pass them in the marketplace.
- Directs and inspires – There are leaders who are good at directing people but not very inspirational, as well as leaders who are very inspirational but couldn't properly direct a team to cross the street with a green light. A favorite analogy is that of a baseball centerfielder running into the wall to make the catch for his team. He realizes that he might hurt himself (and many have), but he believes that helping his team win the game is more important

than his personal safety. A leader must inspire people to willingly want to 'go to the wall' for the team because they may have to someday. Good leadership will help them feel good about making that choice.

- Team or organization – These are the followers in the equation. The team is the immediate staff or project team and the organization is the entire company.
- Reach a goal or follow a vision – The leader must have a specific goal for the team to achieve whether it be a sales or income goal, technology implementation or cultural change. Whatever it is, in addition to being specific, it should be measurable and have a defined time period.
- Environment – This represents the area that is largely out of the leader's control. It could be the industry, government regulations or other changes impacting the organization.

As previously mentioned, true leadership is a process that must be practiced every day to be effective. It's like a maintenance drug for high blood pressure that must be taken daily to avoid potentially dire consequences. It's like athletes, amateur or professional, who continually works hard to improve their already exceptional abilities in order to become better and more competitive. It is the same way any other professional works to become better, including:

- Physicians
- Musicians & Singers
- Artists
- Professors

This process leads to what is called **Professional Leadership**, which is a personalized, continuously-improving leadership development process based on innate qualities, personality and abilities that is practiced every day incorporating regular reflection and coaching.

The Great Leadership Debate

The great debate about leadership is whether leaders are born or made. The correct answer is “Yes.” Some people have certain innate qualities that gives them a high potential for leadership (born). They can still become better leaders though through training. On the other hand, others without all of the innate qualities can become better leaders through training (made). Keep in mind that not everyone will be a good leader which is logical because society couldn’t exist if everyone was a leader.

Based on research, interviews and self-reflection, the innate leadership qualities are identified as:

- Humility – putting the needs of others ahead of their own
- Empathy – knowing how to get things done through people
- Vision – the ability to see things others don’t see or before others see them
- Risk-Taking – comfort with being out front and charting new territory



Figure 2: The Innate Qualities of Leadership

Humility is the recognition of one’s own importance or standing. It is the self-awareness that you are no better than the person next to you or across from you. Sometimes known as modesty, humble people make everyone feel special. Humility is the quality that is most natural. It can be learned to a certain degree, but authentic humility is hard to duplicate.

Leaders exhibit humility by making themselves available to the people they work with. Their time is valuable, but it is not so valuable that they can’t take the time to listen or discuss something that is important with others. It is very easy for people to identify leaders with authentic humility. They are the ones who return phone calls, respond to e-mails and engage with others not as a leader-to-subordinate, but as a person-to-person.

Humility is also the recognition of what a person knows and doesn’t know. A humble leader accepts what he or she may not know and is comfortable hiring people around them to help fill in any knowledge gaps.

John Couris, CEO of Tampa General Hospital, learned this early on in his career. He thought he had to always have the right answer coming out of the gate. He learned that “it is more important to admit that you

don't know something and then commit to learning, rather than telling people what they want to hear.” (Couris, 2019)

Dr. Toby Cosgrove, CEO and President at Cleveland Clinic, is a firm believer in the need for humility in healthcare leaders. He considers humility “the ultimate wisdom.” Leaders don't know it all and should be aware of their own limitations. It “is not the absence of self-worth, but the validation of self-worth.” (Cosgrove T. , 2016)

Empathy is the ability to mentally identify with the feelings, thoughts or attitudes of others. It is not the same as sympathy which implies feeling sorry for someone. It involves knowing people and knowing about the people you work with, especially your direct reports. On a business level, this includes understanding their motivations, career goals, education, etc. On a personal level, it includes knowing their entertainment interests, marital status, children's ages, etc. This information can be used to help establish a sincere relationship with the person which makes that ‘go to the wall’ moment easier to accept.

Empathy is not just for direct reports but should also be included with relationships with indirect reports and peers. Some executives like to ‘walk the floors’ and listen to people to get to know them especially when they start a new position. (Heller, 2017) This quality can be learned somewhat especially by adding notes to a contacts file, but that only provides a ‘robotic’ approach to empathy. Sincere empathy comes from the heart and is easily distinguishable from insincerity.

Leaders exhibit empathy by getting to know and understand the people they work with. They have to generally like people and like

working with people to be the most effective. It is also a considered one of the requirements for effective leadership by Dr. Cosgrove. (Cosgrove T. , 2016)

Vision is being able to see things others don't see or before others can see it. People with vision can sometimes see the endgame before it even begins. The challenge for such visionaries is getting others to see the vision and gaining their buy-in. This process can be very frustrating for people with this natural quality because the people they work with, especially in healthcare, are so used to doing things a certain way and can be reluctant to make any changes. This is a quality that can be learned to a degree using decision making processes and tools, but those with natural vision can reach the same or better direction more efficiently with a better understanding of the most important variable – the human factor.

Leaders with vision can effectively chart the course for where they need to go and communicate that vision in a manner that everyone can understand. This is where the direction and inspiration come in. Good leaders chart the course by providing direction. Great leaders make their followers feel good about where they are going.

Risk-Taking is built in to becoming a leader. By accepting the position, the leader has fundamentally accepted a certain amount of risk. The leader needs to be prepared to accept the good as well the bad outcomes that may occur. There are several types of risks the leader must be prepared for including: reputation risk, career risk, interpersonal risk and financial risk. Being at the front of the team or organization opens the leader to “arrows” potentially pointed at their back. If the leader can't

accept criticism or negative feedback, maybe they should consider another position.

Leaders who take risk aren't just taking risks for risk's sake. The risk is calculated and weighed against the potential for success or failure. They must be ready to try new things when necessary and adapt their leadership style to the situation. Calculating risk is a skill that can be learned, but the nature of leadership requires the leader to accept a certain level of risk with the position.

The Mixology

The next questions most people want to ask is how many traits they need to have and how much of each trait should be innate versus learned. At this time, there is no mathematical formula to unequivocally answer these questions, but, just like leadership, you sometimes just have to have a 'feel' for it.

Based on interviews, observations and research, the best leaders are the ones who possess, and are good at, all four traits. Some possess three traits while others only two. Even though they may not be gifted with all four traits, they may have other compensatory abilities that make up for what they are missing.

Although the best leaders have most of these traits innately, there is a room for some learning, but in most cases, it needs to be less than 40%. A person can learn some of the qualities, but there is only so far they can go with humility or empathy that is not authentic.

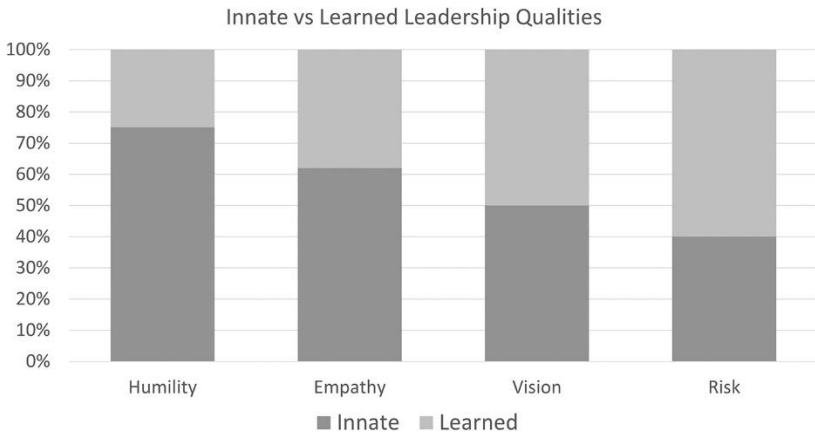


Figure 3: Leadership Qualities Mixology

Why Most Leadership Training Fails

There is a plethora of leadership development programs being offered. Most are designed to keep the participants coming back again and again. Ironically, when leadership is taught at the university graduate school level, it is completely different. It is taught as a process that is personalized to the individual with appropriate feedback and mentoring. Consequently, the primary reasons most leadership training fails are because:

- Training is skills-based versus process-based. Possessing the skills without the process only addresses a portion of what is needed to become a better leader. It's like the chef and the ordinary cook setting out to make the same dish. They may both have the same ingredients, but the dish created by the chef will usually be much better because the chef knows the process intimately based on extensive practice in making the dish.

- They use a one-size-fits-all instead of an individualized approach. Not everyone has the skills taught in the classes or can be good at them once they've learned them.
- There is no follow up or feedback loop to see if what was learned was properly implemented. This approach is contrary to that used in most academic programs and is supported by the Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle. Kolb views learning as a multi-stage integrated process with each stage supportive of and feeding into the next. Effective learning only occurs when a learner is able to execute all four stages of the model. (McLeod, 2013)

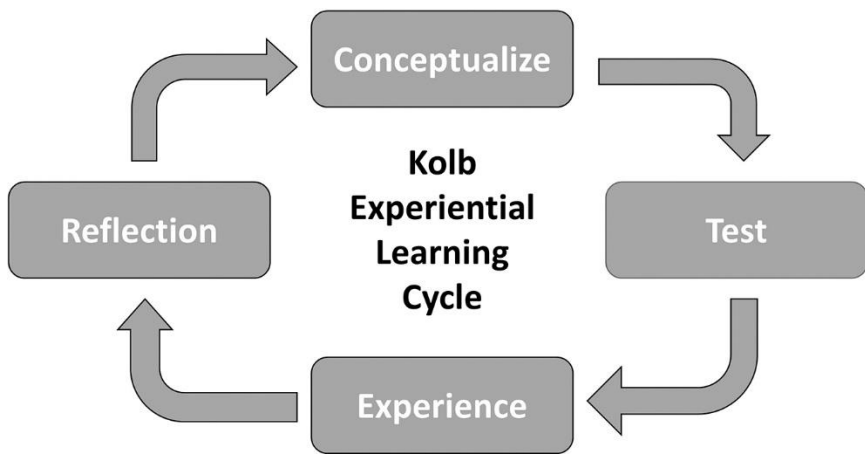


Figure 4: Kolb Learning Cycle (McLeod, 2013)

The Professional Leadership Process™ detailed in this book is designed to be learned once and adaptable to almost any situation the leader or potential leader may encounter.

Primary Leadership Influences

There are three primary influences that impact a leader's effectiveness. They are the:

- Leader – includes his/her personality, abilities and expertise.
- Followers – the Leader's constituents and is comprised of their values, norms and status.
- Environment – the atmosphere in which the Leader and Followers interact with and includes the culture, tasks, change and government impact.

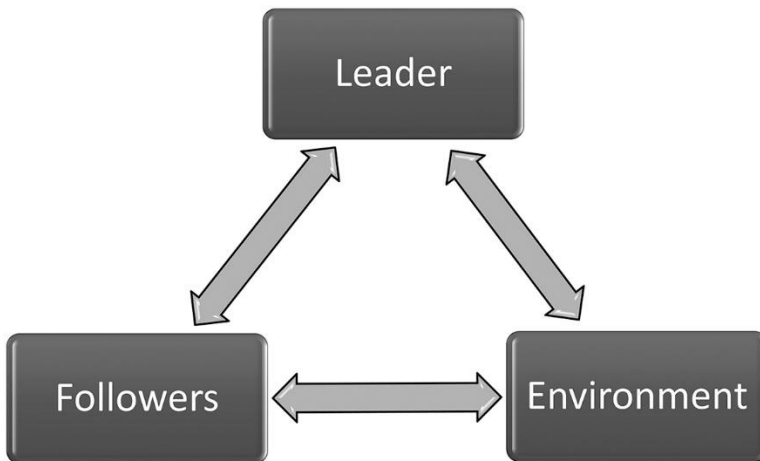


Figure 5: Primary Leadership Influences Model in Equilibrium

These influences must work in equilibrium for the leader to effectively lead. If any of the influences fall out of equilibrium, the leader cannot lead effectively. When any of the three influences exert a stronger or weaker influence, the leader must adapt to bring the model back into equilibrium. This is illustrated by the influences being the same size in the figure above.

The influences can get out of equilibrium, such as when the Leader is working with strong or powerful Followers. This can occur in working with doctors at a hospital, tenured professors at a university, professional (versus collegiate) athletes and even some volunteer organizations. All of these scenarios can make it difficult for a leader to be effective.

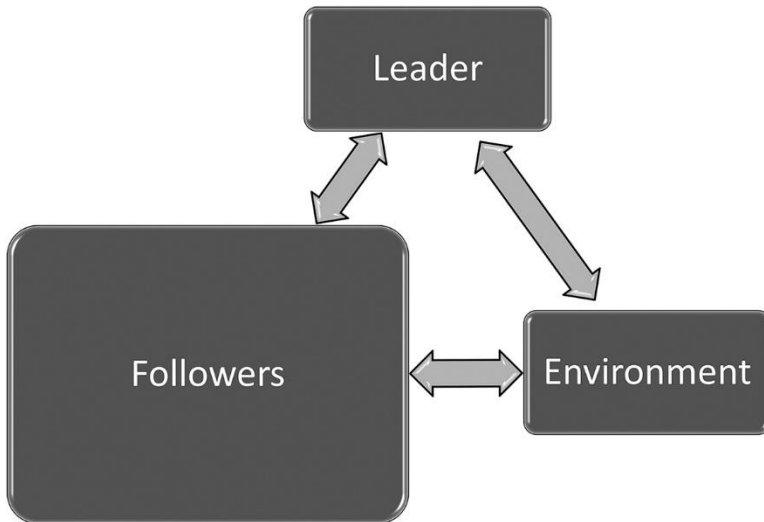


Figure 6: Primary Leadership Influences Model with Powerful Followers

The influences can also get out of equilibrium when the Leader is facing a challenging Environment. This can occur when the industry is facing dramatic changes like what currently exists in healthcare. A shift in how consumers shop has also caused a challenging environment for brick and mortar retailers. They either have to adapt or go out of business.

Law enforcement officers regularly face challenging situations. One minute they could be directing traffic or handing out speeding tickets. The next minute they could be faced with a domestic or hostage situation.

They have to know how to adapt to the seriousness of each situation. These challenging Environments can make it difficult for a Leader to be effective.

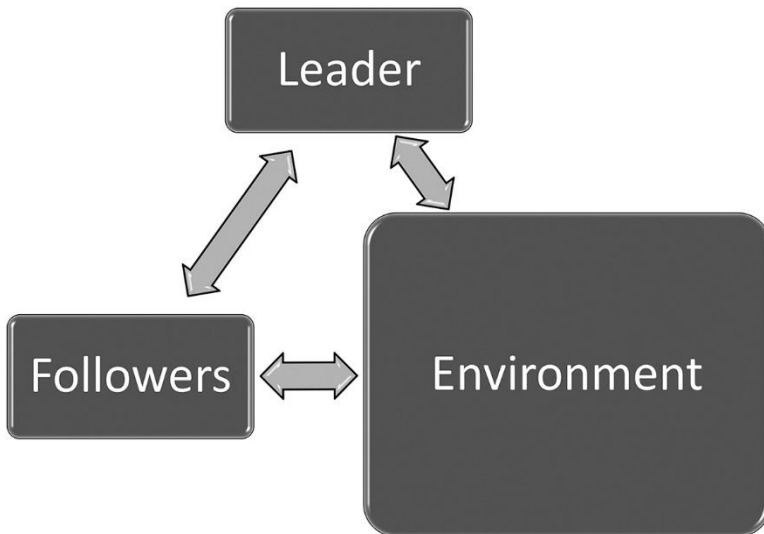


Figure 7: Primary Leadership Influences Model with a Challenging Environment

Another way the influences can get out of equilibrium is when the Leader overwhelms the Followers and the Environment. This is not leadership in any form; it is simply intimidation. Not much can be done in this situation until the Leader becomes self-aware enough to want to change. Until then, the Leader will most likely experience a steady exodus of Followers leaving the organization and the decline of the department or organization.

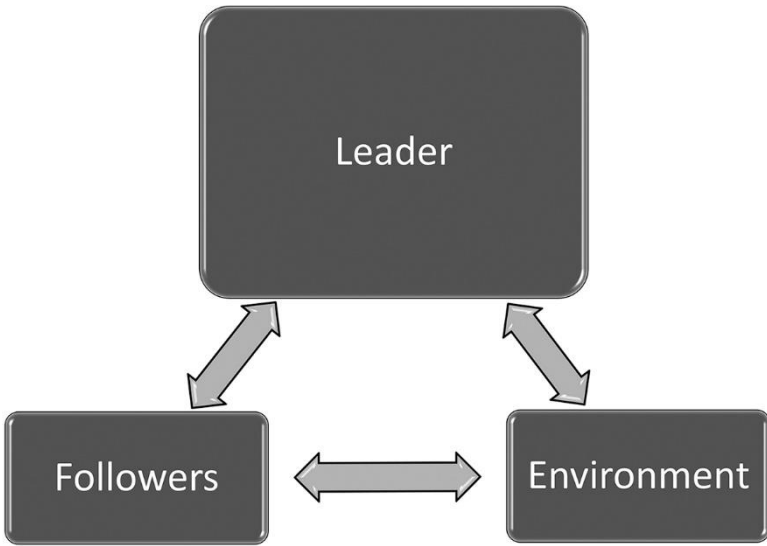


Figure 8: Primary Leadership Influences Model with an Overpowering Leader

Whatever the situation, to be effective, the leader must adapt to return all the primary influences back to equilibrium.

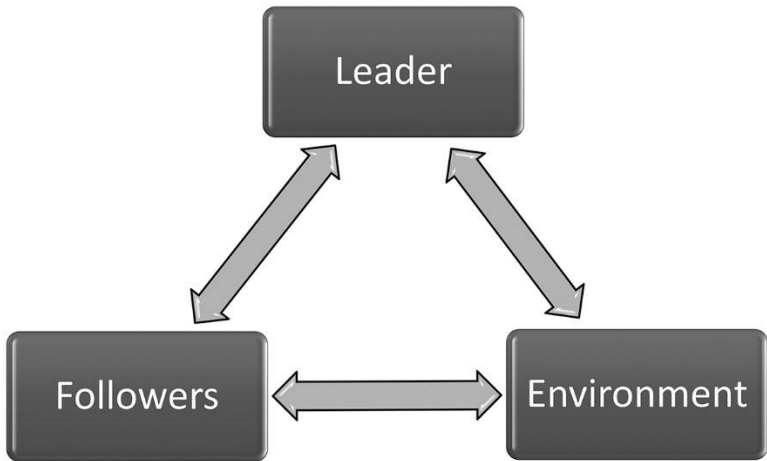


Figure 9: Primary Leadership Influences Model Returned to Equilibrium

Secondary Leadership Influences

In addition to the Primary Leadership Influences there are other influences at work that a leader must be cognizant of to be effective. Even if the leader is at the top of the organization, he or she still reports to a Board of Directors. If the person in the Leader position is in middle or senior management, they need to also work with their Manager and/or Peers. The most effective leaders are the ones that are not only adept at managing their primary leadership influences, but also handling their managers and peers. A Leader provides leadership of the Primary Leadership Influences and manages the Secondary Leadership Influences. Consequently, the total leadership influences model for any position in an organization should include all five influences.

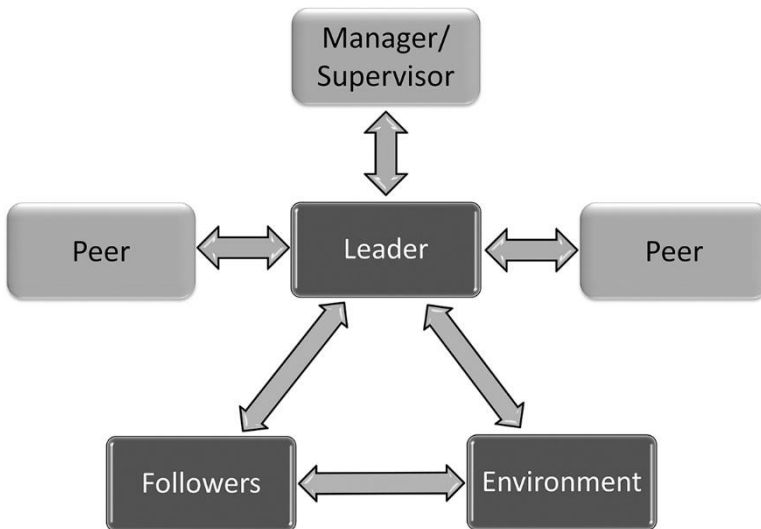


Figure 10: Primary Leadership Influences Model with Secondary Influences

“Leadership is not a skill to be learned, but a process to be refined.”

- J. Bryan Bennett

Tales from the Leadership Front - My Leadership Journey

This book has been as much about helping others become better leaders as it has been about me and my leadership journey. I was one of those people considered a “natural-born” leader throughout my life. I held leadership positions in high school and college clubs. I started chapters of professional organizations in the cities I lived in and eventually rose to become president of my graduate school alumni club Chicago chapter, the largest alumni club chapter in the world for the school and the first and only African-American chapter president in its history.

When I began teaching leadership courses at the university, I had to reconcile the fact that the material kept stating that leaders are made and not born. I wondered how this could be if I was considered a leader all my life and I had never taken a leadership course. It was only until I read an article about the importance of being an empathic leader that it began to dawn on me that leaders are born and made. They are born with certain innate qualities and they are made through certain life circumstances that ‘activate’ those qualities and propels them to become a leader.

I related to the empathy in leadership article (Naseer, 2016) and determined it was an attribute that set me apart from others. The second attribute was vision. I don’t see the world and the situation for what they are but see them for what they could be. Once I see what can be, I invest the mental cycles into figuring out how it can happen. That is how I developed a plan to utilize barcodes in the library to track locations of books 10 years before they were widely put into use. That is how I co-developed a customer relationship marketing implementation model that

was recognized by Gartner, the world's leading research and advisory company, as being one of the top visions in the industry. That is also how I developed a plan for implementing electronic data in healthcare almost 2 years before it was signed into law.

Empathy and vision were great starts, but I knew there was more. I stumbled upon humility during my conversation with Dr. Cosgrove. I was surprised by how humble of a person he was. He put the patients and the Cleveland Clinic way ahead of any accomplishments he has personally achieved in his illustrious career. After our interview, I thought about other great leaders I knew, including one of my mentors, and determined that humility was also a necessary quality. The leader must put the organization ahead of themselves which is something I also try to do daily.

Humility is also manifested in the leader recognizing what he or she knows or doesn't know. A humble leader will identify the gaps in their knowledge and surround themselves with good people with complimentary skills that in turn makes them better overall leaders.

Lastly, I contemplated what else about me made me a good leader and could I find that quality in others. That's when I arrived at risk-taking. By the very nature of being a leader, they are taking risks every day. They have to convince people to follow them knowing full well that they could be leading the team to success or failure. As the leader, they recognize there are naysayers with arrows pointed at their backs ready to launch them if they don't succeed (and sometimes, even if they do succeed). I have always been one comfortable not following the crowd.

I loved the “road less travelled” and embraced the uncertainty with the certainty. That is what has made me into the effective leader I am today.