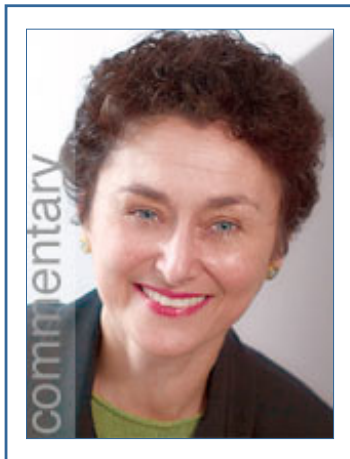


The Third Opinion

## New Leadership Qualities You Need In This New World

Saj-nicole Joni, 03.16.09, 03:30 PM EDT

**Your executive abilities will have to change. Here are four ways to change them.**



No one in leadership today has led through a time of such pervasive global economic reversal. We all built our careers during years of systemic growth. Our instincts, skills and experiences were honed with global growth as a given. What does it mean to lead in this unprecedented time of broken finances, recession and strategic uncertainty?

People at every level of leadership realize that they are in uncharted territory even as they put on their bravest faces. Are quick wits, steady nerves and commitment enough? We look at our colleagues and ourselves with new eyes. Many an executive has privately asked me, "How confident am I that I know what to do next? How confident should I be? How do I know what from my past experience to throw out and what to rely on now?"

We already know that that there are no simple fixes. Once we find the bottom, rebuilding a viable economy will be slow, hard work. We are going to have to focus on the creation of value—value that can be implemented with tight budgets and thin resources. We are going to have to collectively get good at determining what really adds value without the assumption of growth, at asking what is truly essential. What are our core strengths? How can we do things better? What can we stop doing, because it's nonessential or based on false assumptions or can be accomplished in a different, more effective way? Are we blindly protecting the ways we do things because we don't want to hurt good people (including ourselves)?

What we need now are leaders who straddle both sides of the old world and can both spark innovation and execute it with efficiency. We have to get unnecessary costs out of the system, but we must do so in a way that leaves a business more able to innovate and adapt, not less.

It's no longer good enough to have great creative ideas without a grounding in the processes that bring those ideas to market efficiently. Leaders will have to have an instinct and appetite for innovation along with the skill and curiosity to develop the end-to-end capability that delivers efficiently. Neither will do on its own.

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Here are four steps for turning your own personal leadership ability toward today's reality:

First, honestly check out what's missing from your personal leadership portfolio. If you need more background in finance, technologies, risk management or operations, go make that investment now. If you are an operational or financial whiz, make sure you develop your ability to understand where innovation drives the business. You may think you don't have time to learn, as your job has gotten harder, often with less pay. But think again. It's your responsibility to make sure that even if the pace of your career slows, your growth in capacity can never stop. No one will do this for you, but if you demonstrate proper commitment, no one will stop you, either.

Second, take an inventory of the people around you. Who has insight about how to manage a complex system? Who has shown new ways of thinking and interest across many areas? Who delivers through thick and thin? Who has resilience, stamina and curiosity? These people may not be your direct reports.

You even need to carefully watch people higher up who were perfectly fine before the crash, who built their careers doing good work within the bounds of conventional thinking. Can they really deliver now? For many, the answer will be no. They will sense this, feel threatened and get in the way of those below them who can deliver. Don't let this happen. It's an insidious form of value destruction when you can least afford it.

Third, check out your ability to productively engage in debate and conflict. No one likes conflict, and many organizations have gotten good at avoiding it. But today, in a no- to low-growth time, delivering sustainable value requires debate, diversity of view and dissenting opinion. Where and when do you usually avoid tough conversations? Can you afford to continue to do so as you focus on total value? Investing in your capacity to lead productive conflict is well worth it. It will be the name of the game for those who succeed.

Fourth, don't go it alone. Facing unprecedented change and uncertainty is lonely and seeing in new and uncomfortable ways is hard. Make time to talk to an appropriate confidant. Make sure it is someone who has no reason to spin you.

These times call for a different kind of leadership fitness: steady comportsment, thoughtful optimism, patient discipline, self-knowledge and a long view. You will know you have let go of the past, and are fully committed to leadership for the future, when you find your energy and curiosity rising as you rebalance your personal leadership portfolio.

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