

# HOW TO TELL YOUR TRUE LEADERSHIP STORY

There's more to your leadership story than a simple plot of what's happened in your career. Understanding your temperament and showcasing your traits creates a more compelling picture of your true leadership capabilities.





## The myth of the ideal leader

There is no ideal leader. Though a picture of the “ideal leader” persists in the media and mainstream business culture as driven, independent, and equal parts brilliant and charismatic, this picture sheds more light on cultural trends rather than the truth about what real leaders are. In fact, after more than five decades of empirical research studying leadership, leadership scholars are still unable to produce a clear profile of the ideal leader.<sup>1</sup>

This is a good thing, for employees and executives alike. Each person has a unique story to tell about how they’ve led specific projects, company-wide initiatives and teams at various stages of their career. These stories are personal and reflect an individual’s experiences. In dispelling the notion of an ideal leader, research now points toward how various manifestations of leadership can flourish.<sup>2</sup>

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## A straightforward story just isn’t enough

Your personal leadership story will often get told at job interviews. As a candidate, you prepare your story by constructing a plot held together by a storyline’s basic elements—beginning, middle and end (i.e., employment to date). You present the progress of your career according to the contents listed in your resume: your industry knowledge, acquired skills, formal training, responsibilities, job experience, education and credentials. Chronologically ordered, these are the things you have done and can do.

However, this storyline alone fails to satisfy what an interviewer is really looking for: a concrete sense of your *self-awareness*, which demonstrates your style or disposition.<sup>3</sup> As a potential candidate, despite telling a detailed story of your leadership, you’ve likely failed to describe the way in which you’ve done things and the *character* in which you’ve performed your roles; in short, your *temperament*.

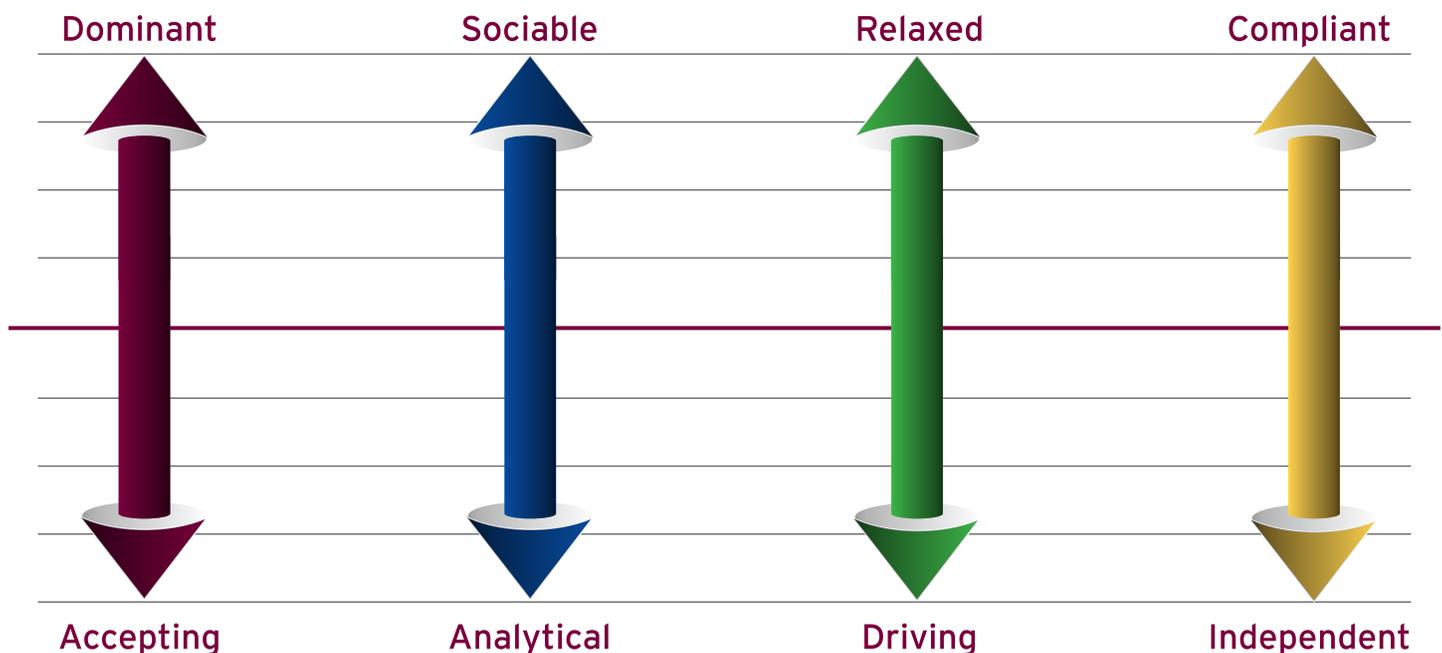
## Describing your temperament in the language of traits

Industrial psychologists have identified, developed and refined a set of universal traits that people possess irrespective of culture, language, time and context. You hold these traits in various combinations and ranges of intensity. Psychologists have organized these traits under what's commonly known as the "big five" personality types.

To precisely match personalities with the psychological demands of the workplace, The McQuaig Institute has narrowed down the "big five" into four trait scales. These four scales work as a tool for human

resources management best practices and may be used to improve overall organizational effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> Each end of the four trait scales comprises a cluster of traits grouped according to a kind of family resemblance.

Identifying the pattern in which you fall within these trait scales will empower you with a precise vocabulary for describing your temperament. Being able to describe your temperament will also provide you with a robust framework for understanding the way you skillfully cope in different situations.



## The four trait scales and where you fit in

Leaders seeking to cultivate the skill of self-awareness must ask themselves two simple, yet fundamental questions to begin to communicate their temperament:

- **How do I think other people see me in my current role?**
- **What am I really like?**

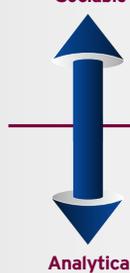
The traits you choose in response to these questions will fall within the four trait scales. Below is a breakdown of each scale. Each one is like a spectrum. You can review each scale to help you determine where you fall on each one, thereby determining your overall temperament.

### THE POWER TRAIT



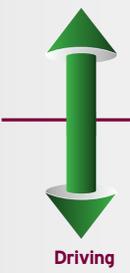
- Dominant**
  - I am goal-oriented
  - I am a risk-taker
  - I seek challenges and recognition
  - I am competitive
  - I am willing to take charge
- Accepting**
  - I am accommodating
  - I am a team player
  - I seek consensus
  - I am cautious
  - I am supportive

### THE PEOPLE TRAIT



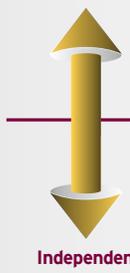
- Sociable**
  - I am people-oriented
  - I am a relationship builder
  - I am trusting
  - I am empathetic
  - I am emotional
- Analytical**
  - I am task-focused
  - I am fact-oriented
  - I am objective and logical
  - I am unemotional
  - I weigh the pros and cons

### THE PACE TRAIT



- Relaxed**
  - I am easy going
  - I am patient and steady
  - I am calm and even-paced
  - I plan ahead
  - I am consistent and predictable
- Driving**
  - I am restless and impatient
  - I have a high sense of urgency
  - I am change oriented
  - I enjoy variety
  - I am energetic

### THE RULES TRAIT



- Compliant**
  - I am detail-oriented and thorough
  - I am organized and systems-oriented
  - I am conscientious
  - I work within guidelines
  - I respect authority
- Independent**
  - I am persistent and determined
  - I like freedom of action
  - I show initiative
  - I am strong-minded
  - I am self-directed

## Telling your leadership story

Your personal leadership story is much deeper than a simple plot of what's happened throughout your career and when. It reveals to an interviewer a behavioural pattern or style, where your temperament showcases your unique mix of traits.

Leveraging the vocabulary of your traits—such as risk taking or accommodation, relationship building or fact-finding, patience or restlessness, organization or spontaneity—will demonstrate to others a high level of self-awareness and illuminate leadership qualities that will flourish once you've been given a chance to shine.

The McQuaig System is a simple, accurate talent assessment system that helps organizations and employees understand the role of temperament in the workplace. It empowers individuals to showcase their traits to create a truly compelling leadership story. The McQuaig Institute provides business owners, HR personnel and hiring managers with solutions to hire, retain and develop the right people.

<sup>1</sup> See B. George, P. Sims, A.N. McLean and D. Mayer, "Discovering Your Authentic Leadership," *Harvard Business Review* 85, no. 2 (February 2007): 129-138

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> See G. Togel and JL Barsoux, "How to Become a Better Leader," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 53 No. 3 (Spring 2012): p. 57

<sup>4</sup> See Hackett & Associates Human Resources Consultants Inc., *The McQuaig Word Survey Technical Manual*, 2012: p. 3