



# Transformational Leadership

By Julian Barling

What is it that wonderful leaders do that elevates us? Can we learn to do it, too?

Even before we assume our first full-time jobs, we all encounter numerous leaders in different contexts, whether teachers, sports coaches, parents or organizational leaders, who hold in their hands the power to influence us. And influence us they do, leaving many of us wondering what magic do they have that eludes the rest of us?

### **Transform Your Leadership Style**

- Do what is right, rather than simply what is quick and easy
- Convey meaning through relatable stories
- Challenge others to solve problems
- Recognize and celebrate individual efforts and accomplishments

## **WHILE WE MAY NOT ALWAYS BE ABLE TO PRECISELY DEFINE WONDERFUL OR DREADFUL LEADERSHIP, WE KNOW IT WHEN WE SEE IT!**

Simply put, wonderful leaders elevate us, leaving us believing that as long as we try hard enough there is virtually nothing we cannot do. In contrast, dreadful leaders demean us, leaving us feeling that no matter how hard we try, we will not succeed. But what is it that wonderful leaders do that elevates us? And can we learn to do it, too?.

### **Transformational Leadership – What is it?**

Transformational leadership is the dominant leadership theory today, attracting more research than any other leadership theory over the past 20 years.

Transformational leadership involves four critical components or behaviours:

- **Idealized influence** – building respect and mutual trust by choosing to do what is right rather than what is expedient.
- **Inspirational motivation** – conveying meaning through stories and symbols with which followers can identify; helping followers attain more than they thought was possible by setting high expectations.
- **Intellectual stimulation** – challenging employees to think for themselves, to answer their own questions.
- **Individualized consideration** – recognizing that people are at their best when their individual needs are considered, and their efforts and accomplishments encouraged and recognized.

## **Transformational Leadership**

### *2-day program*

Transformational and charismatic leadership behaviors are essential if leaders are to thrive in a time of ever-increasing change and relentless competition. This 2-day online program helps participants understand the behaviors involved in transformational and charismatic leadership, and instills them with the confidence to use them to enhance their leadership presence.

For more information or to register for this program:

1.888.393.2338

[execed@queensu.ca](mailto:execed@queensu.ca)

[smithqueens.com/transform](http://smithqueens.com/transform)

## **How does transformational leadership impact an organization?**

Academics have been studying transformational leadership for decades, with hundreds of studies since the 1980s demonstrating that transformational leadership affects critical organizational outcomes and attitudes.

Specifically, research has shown that transformational leadership is positively linked to:

- Subordinate work attitudes (i.e., loyalty and commitment, job satisfaction)
- Subordinate work performance (i.e., sales)
- Employee creativity
- Employee well-being (mental and physical health, occupational safety)
- Financial performance
- A strengthening of the leader's influence networks

We now know how transformational leadership affects work outcomes. Just because someone has a transformational leader does not directly and immediately translate into higher performance. Instead, higher levels of transformational leadership translate into commitment to the organization and trust in the leader. In turn, it is that deep commitment to the organization and trust in leadership that motivate employees toward superior performance.

## **Are leaders born or made?**

Whether leaders are born or made is a question that has captured the attention of management practitioners, organizational scholars and the lay public for decades.

## **WHEN WE ARE BEWILDERED BY THE CHARISMA OF SOME LEADERS, IT IS EASY TO BELIEVE THAT IT MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING THAT THEY WERE BORN WITH.**

Fortunately, there is now a growing body of research identifying the environmental and genetic influences on leadership development, from which we learn that both parental socialization and genetic factors contribute approximately equally to whether children will come to hold leadership positions.

## **Can we teach leadership? Leadership development in organizations**

In the mid 1990s, some colleagues and I worked together with a major Canadian financial institution to see if we could train transformational leaders. We identified 20 bank (i.e. branch) managers and assigned them randomly to either an experimental or control group.

Branch managers in the experimental group attended a one-day workshop on transformational leadership, followed by four individual counseling sessions. Control group managers received neither the training nor counseling. Subordinates whose leaders had attended the training reported significant differences in their leaders' transformational leadership behaviour within weeks, and themselves showed significant increases in organizational commitment; subordinates of the untrained managers saw no such changes. Most significantly, branch-level credit card sales and personal loan sales increased *only* in those branches where

the managers were trained in transformational leadership. Since then, we have replicated these findings in other organizations, and most recently showed that teachers can also be taught transformational behaviours, with significant benefits for their students.

### **Queen's Leadership Program**

#### *4.5-day program*

Queen's Leadership Program provides insights and coaching that will change the way you think about leadership and the way you are perceived as a leader. This interactive online program takes you through an intensive week of self-discovery, one-on-one coaching, class discussions and team exercises. You will leave the program with a better understanding of yourself and a powerful personal development agenda.

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### **So how do you do it?**

The good news is that when we listen to people whose lives have been touched or changed by awe-inspiring leaders, we learn that it was the smallest things that their leaders did that made such a difference. These were things their leaders chose to do rather than had to do. And the leaders did not engage in these behaviours because they were not busy; they chose to do them despite the fact that they were busy, making their followers feel even more appreciated.

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS DO NOT REQUIRE THE IMPOSSIBLE FROM LEADERS. SMALL BEHAVIOURS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN THE LONG TERM.**

Some examples of the four transformational behaviours include:

- **Walk the talk** – Employees trust and respect leaders who consistently choose to do the right thing, rather than the merely expedient. Doing what is right rather than what is expedient might even leave you in a difficult position, but you do it anyway, because you appreciate that leadership is not about benefitting you personally, but about elevating those around you.
- **Optimism is infectious** – Telling employees that “I know you can do it!” inspires them to go the extra mile and accomplish great things. You also inspire your employees when they can share stories and symbols that unite them around a core value.
- **Empower decision making** – encourages subordinates to think about work-related problems in new ways, provides opportunities for them to develop and grow, and prepares them for their next position in the organization. Remember that when employees ask you how to do something, they often already know the answer; they are really just asking for permission.
- **Show gratitude** – involves compassion, appreciation and recognition, and establishes a relationship; Listen, say thank you, use names in conversations and emails. None of this takes time, but all of it serves as the glue that will bind you together in a lasting relationship within which your leadership will be sought after.

## About the Author



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Julian Barling is Professor of Organizational Behaviour and Borden Chair of Leadership at Smith School of Business. His research interests focus on the nature and development of transformational leadership, and employee well-being. He is the author of well over 150 research articles and book chapters, and the author or editor of several books.

In 2002, Dr. Barling was elected to as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and was awarded one of the inaugural Queen's Research Chairs in recognition of his distinguished accomplishments in research and scholarship. Dr Barling is also a Fellow for the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, the European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology, the Association for Psychological Science, and the Canadian Psychological Association.

## Transformational Leadership in practice

In my teaching, I often cite examples of transformational leaders, none more inspiring than Nelson Mandela. Mandela characterizes the four transformational leadership behaviours. He used his moral authority to inspire a nation to rise above its terrible history, to attain heights most did not think possible. His ideal was of a non-racial society, and he spent his life creating opportunities to show all South Africans that they could achieve it. In a sense, as one commentator said, "Mandela was deliberately constructing himself as the embodiment of an ideal he wanted all South Africans to follow."

But how did he do it? "He would pick up the phone and call them on their birthdays. He would go to family funerals. He saw it as an opportunity. When Mandela emerged from prison, he famously included his jailers among his friends and put leaders who had kept him in prison in his first Cabinet. 'Yet I well knew that he despised these men,'" said Cyril Ramaphosa, a colleague of Mandela's, in a 2008 interview with Richard Stengel of *Time* magazine.

Why would Mandela do this after suffering through all the years of apartheid? Because wonderful leaders know that they are not there just to fulfill their short term needs (for revenge), but to elevate others.

## LEADERSHIP IS NOT ABOUT HELPING THOSE WHO ALREADY LOVE YOU TO LOVE YOU MORE – IT'S ABOUT CONVINCING THOSE WHO DOUBT YOU THAT YOU CAN BE TRUSTED.

So what have I learned from working with and studying transformational leaders, and my research on transformational leadership? People are remarkably responsive to the way in which they are treated, and respond in kind. Faced with wonderful leadership, people will aspire to superior performance. Given the behaviours we have demonstrated to inspire growth in others – perhaps the most important message to aspiring leaders is actually quite simple, "you can do it".