

# THE FIVE INTELLIGENCES OF LEADERSHIP

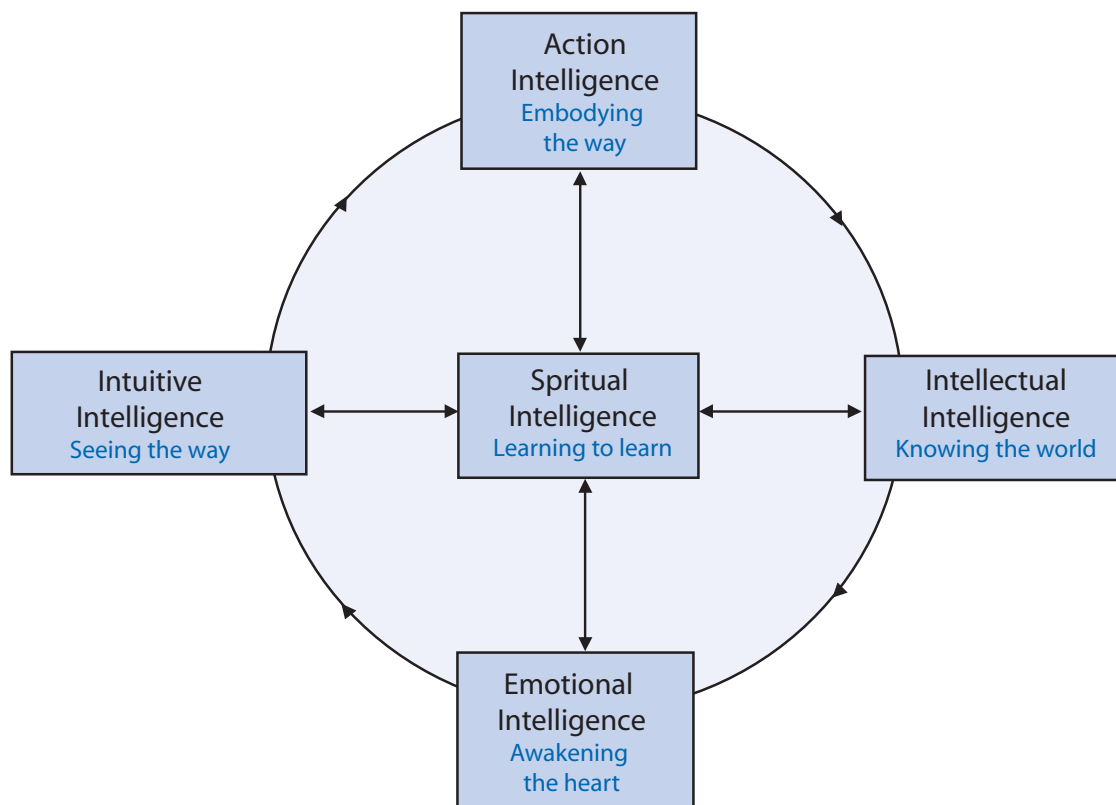
*by Clint Sidle*

Leadership is a particular way of approaching life, one of being committed to a lifelong process of growing toward human fulfillment. Framed in this way leadership becomes a vehicle for personal transformation as well as an agent for positive change. Perhaps more than in any other era of our history, the social, environmental, and ethical challenges of our time demand such a perspective on leadership. We need more leaders who are inspired not only by doing well for themselves but also by doing good in the world.

But how do we develop such leaders? Although leadership development has received a great deal of attention in recent years, we still lack a common framework for understanding what leadership is and how it is developed. As James McGregor Burns once put it, “Leadership is one of the most often studied yet least understood phenomena on earth.”

A number of years ago, I came across a unifying framework that I found intuitive and compelling, both for its elegant simplicity and for its inherent potential for addressing human fulfillment. This framework emerged from the study of indigenous cultures across the world—Native American, African, Celtic, and Tibetan, among others. Anthropologists and psychologists found these cultures share unmistakable similarities in their views of what it takes to be an effective human being: four or five archetypal intelligences portrayed through the cardinal directions of the compass. More commonly known as a Mandala, or Medicine Wheel, this ancient framework provides a guide for personal growth and effectiveness that has withstood the test of time for thousands of years.

Each direction represents a particular intelligence for learning, relating, and living in harmony with the world. Taken as a whole, the directions symbolize perfection and balance;



**FIGURE 1. THE FIVE INTELLIGENCES OF LEADERSHIP.**

they provide a guide for understanding the self and realizing one’s full human potential. An individual is held to have been born into a single direction, and so entered the world dominated by a root preference. Yet the purpose of life is to seek self-understanding and grow to completeness by accessing the intelligence of the other directions, and in so doing reach a place of balance and goodness from which to lead and influence others. (See Figure 1.)

According to the ancient paradigm, each intelligence has both a wisdom aspect and a shadow aspect. Wisdom turns into shadow when it is used to validate the ego and serve self-interest—usually because of a fear or insecurity. As a result, people tend to overplay their view to the point of turning a strength into a weakness, creating obstacles to developing personal influence, learning, and effective relationships. Thus the framework

provides insight not only into personal effectiveness but also personal derailment.

Although no perfect parallels exist, the similarities between the five intelligences and the research of 20th-century psychologists and management thinkers are remarkable. There are clear parallels, for example, with the four Jungian personality types, the five dimensions of the Five Factor Model used in modern psychological research, and much of recent management literature, including the work of Peter Senge, Kouzes and Pozner, and Peter Koestenbaum and others. It seems, then, that our modern age is rediscovering this ancient wisdom.

The key difference, however, is the utter simplicity and intuitive appeal the five intelligences have for understanding leadership and how to develop leaders who do well while doing good in the world.

## The Five Intelligences of Leadership

*EAST: Intellectual intelligence—knowing the world.* The first is intellectual intelligence. People with strong intellects seek, acquire, and hold knowledge.

The influence of leaders rests in part on their expertise and their intellectual grasp of their profession and industry. Their technical skill, rational thought, and objective, data-driven minds enable them to see reality clearly and objectively. They lead by being attentive to detail, asking critical questions, sharing their insights, and teaching others. They also capture and share their expertise for the prosperity of all. *This is leader as expert, and also leader as coach and mentor.*

### Wisdom

- Intellectual curiosity
- Logic and rationality
- Objectivity
- Methodicalness and order
- Focus on the real, present, specific, and concrete
- Business and technical knowledge and acumen

Orit Gadiesh, chairman of Bain & Company, is an example of the powers of intellectual intelligence. Gadiesh is a widely acknowledged expert in developing corporate strategy, but she gets results for her clients by first establishing a set of facts as the point of departure. For her, “Information is the foundation to the right solution, one that must be practical and collectively obtained.” For a strategy to be successful, it must be based on facts and not wishful thinking. She is concerned with finding the truth and developing solutions grounded in that truth. Therefore she spends most of her time listening to clients, asking questions, and analyzing data to develop an intellectual grasp of the situation. And she engages every level of the organization in that process so that understanding is shared. “It means working with people at all levels, building a partnership that gives clients ownership, and sometimes telling them what they do not want to hear.”

The shadow of intellectual intelligence comes from a fear of being wrong or not knowing. When something arises outside the current range of understanding,

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*Wisdom turns into shadow when it is used to validate the ego and serve self-interest.*

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people of this type feel thwarted, even threatened. So they hold on to their view and become rigid, righteous, and overly critical of others. They become obsessed with detail, lose sight of the big picture, and when pushed they become annoyed, even angry. Research shows that rigidity, insensitivity, and inability to see the big picture are common reasons for leadership derailment.

### Shadow

- Fixated and tight
- Rigid and inflexible
- Uncomfortable with ambiguity
- Subject to analysis paralysis
- Unable to see the big picture
- Bugged down in detail
- Apparent insensitivity

*SOUTH: Emotional intelligence—awakening the heart.* The next is emotional intelligence. It is the place where the intellectual stimulus of the first direction is enriched and deepened through feeling and emotional reaction. Those dominant in this intelligence are focused on people and forging strong and supportive relationships. For them, *how* things are done is just as important as *what* is done. They are able to recognize and manage their own feelings and emotions and those of others. They care about people and are socially skilled: good listeners, communicators, networkers, and team players. They are also concerned with helping others and empowering them to be the

best they can be. *This is leader as servant and leader as a people person.*

#### Wisdom

- Emotionally aware and empathic
- Values driven
- Good at relationship building
- Service oriented
- Team player, collaborative
- Good listener and communicator

Mike Krzyzewski, coach of the Duke Blue Devils basketball team, provides a great example of emotional intelligence. Coach K says he does not coach winning the game; rather, he coaches a winning culture. For him, coaching is not just teaching basketball—it is about values, honesty, teamwork, and transcending self-interest to support others in serving a greater cause. As an example of his team orientation, he tells the story of one early season where two freshmen were late for the team bus. No one knew where they were; no one called. Eventually they arrived and after hearing that they overslept, Coach K wondered why others had not checked up on them. So rather than reprimand them, he talked to the team as a whole about what it means to be a team. “If one of us is late,” he told them, “then we are all late.” For Krzyzewski, teamwork is about mutual respect and caring for one another, not simply winning the game.

The shadow of the emotional intelligence arises out of a fear of inadequacy, and manifests as feeling that is turned inward—other-feeling turns into self-feeling. So, whereas shadow intellectuals are hung up on their *ideas of things*, shadow emotional intelligence people get hung up on their *feelings of themselves*. They take themselves too seriously, becoming dependent on others for approval and overly sensitive to criticism. And since harmony is so important to them, they also avoid conflict. Unassertiveness, oversensitivity, and dependence are their key derailment factors.

#### Shadow

- Oversensitivity
- Unassertiveness
- Prone to take things personally
- Apt to feel guilty about differences
- Dependent
- Excessively proud
- Avoidance of conflict

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*Vision serves to uplift aspirations, foster commitment, and galvanize others.*

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*WEST: Intuitive intelligence—seeing the way.* The west is about intuitive intelligence and the vision for attaining the highest goals in life. People with strong intuitive intelligence are able to assimilate the intellectual and emotional impressions of the first two directions to discern what is most important and to form a conceptual understanding. They are able to see the big picture and to think creatively and strategically in a way that helps them see the opportunities and the possibilities. They also have a clear purpose and vision for what they are doing, and that vision serves to uplift aspirations, foster commitment, and galvanize others. This is leader as visionary, leader as architect, or leader as designer.

#### Wisdom

- Creative and innovative
- Change-oriented
- Able to connect the dots and see the big picture
- Able to see what is most important
- Conceptual, abstract thinker
- Inspiring and uplifting
- Spontaneous

John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems, is a good example of an intuitive leader. Chambers is considered one of the most dynamic and innovative chief executives in the country, and although Cisco has lost some of its luster in the last few years, Chambers has nonetheless left a positive mark. His vision is to build the country's most influential company—“not just successful financially, but successful in changing so many aspects of our lives and developing a supportive culture.” He wants Cisco to do for networking what Microsoft did

for personal computers and IBM did for mainframes. To get there, his vision is to develop a culture that fosters value-centered management, teamwork, and respect for people. He wants to make Cisco a place where people *want* to come and do good work. “If you take my top managers,” he said in an interview, “I know what motivates all of them and what is important to them, and we align their goals with company goals.” Chambers, then, not only has vision for his industry and his company, but also for his culture and his people.

The shadow side of intuitive intelligence arises out of a fear of meaninglessness or loss of purpose. Shadow intuitives compensate by constantly pursuing new possibilities. As a result they lose sight of the detail, lack follow-through, and compulsively chase dreams as they jump from one idea to the next. Their distractions spread them too thin and leave no time for their discriminatory faculties to function. They derail from inattention to detail and inability to maintain focus and see something to completion.

#### Shadow

- Unfocused
- Overcommitted
- Impulsive and addictive
- Unable to follow through
- Inattentive to detail
- Easily bored
- Impractical

*NORTH: Action intelligence—embodying the way.* The intelligence of the north is action intelligence. People with action intelligence are driven, task- and result-oriented, and able to get things done. They assume control, challenge the process, take risks, and experiment to make things happen. More important, they walk the talk, model the way, and align their actions with their words and deeds. *This is leader as model, or leader by example.*

#### Wisdom

- Task and result oriented
- Courageous and willing to take risks
- Full of drive and ambition
- Disciplined
- Authentic—walks the talk
- Strong and persevering

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## *Feuerstein’s stand on doing the right thing remains an example for others.*

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Aaron Feuerstein, former CEO of Malden Mills, makers of Polartec, is a remarkable example of action intelligence. Feuerstein made news in 1995, when a fire burned most of Malden Mills to the ground, leaving 3,000 people out of work. Rather than lose his employees and devastate the economy of the small town, Feuerstein spent millions of his own money to keep all 3,000 employees on the payroll for three months while he rebuilt the company. Where he could have cashed in on insurance settlements or sold the company, instead he invested millions to save livelihoods and the local economy. In contrast to others of our time, Feuerstein lived up to his words and took care of his people. He is dedicated to being clear on what is most important to him and acting accordingly. So he did “what was merely the right thing to do.” The outpouring of employee and public support were so great that shipments were double within a few weeks after the plant reopening. Malden Mills is still not out of trouble, as the company has refused to follow the industry trend of exporting jobs, but his stand on doing the right thing remains an example for others.

The shadow of the action orientation arises out of fear of being left behind, or of losing control. Action-oriented leaders can become so attached to accomplishing goals that they constantly compare their output to the achievements of others—and become ambitious, aggressive, and controlling to the point of being insensitive and bulldozing. They become busybodies, doing for the sake of doing, and as a result they often charge off in the wrong direction. Insensitivity, abrasiveness, and micromanagement are often hallmarks of a derailed leader.

## Shadow

- Busyness
- Excessive competitiveness and aggression
- Insensitivity
- Micromanagement
- Bulldozing
- Tendency to proceed by “ready, fire, aim”
- Controlling

*CENTER: Spiritual intelligence—learning to learn.* Finally there is spiritual intelligence. It is the place of consciousness where the governing urge to learn, grow, and realize our full potential awakens. Effective leaders know themselves and what they have to offer. They have a desire not only to learn but to learn how to learn, to take charge of their own development. They know themselves, and they are open, candid, and humble in their striving to grow and develop. They are optimistic and feel empowered to make the most of any experience. This makes them calm and serene, because situations approached in this manner become workable. This also makes them agile and able to adapt to changing situations. *This is leader as learner.*

## Wisdom

- Self-awareness and understanding
- Personal agility and balance
- Eagerness to learn
- Openness and candor
- Calm
- Optimism

Colin Powell displays the powers of the learner. The child of a humble immigrant family in the Bronx, Powell had an extraordinary career of both professional success and personal contribution. Powell is noted for his self-effacing style and apparent ease in dealing with crisis and power, but what may be most important is the way his leadership is distinguished by what he calls “optimism as a force multiplier.” For him, optimism is not based on our external reality; rather, it is determined by how we regulate our inner world. It is an attitude toward life that encourages us to continue where pessimists would give up. It is not unbounded; rather, it is disciplined. For Powell, good leaders ground their optimism in an awareness and knowledge of themselves and the situation, and are able to learn and adapt based on their

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*Awareness helps us see  
our patterns, and  
compassion helps us see  
their impact on others.*

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experience. This optimism becomes a “force multiplier” when the seemingly impossible is achieved and motivates people to even greater standards in the future.

The shadow of the spiritual intelligence arises out of a fear of powerlessness over life. The shadow is disempowering, making people feel victimized and withdraw from taking responsibility for life. In this case people want to hang out and not be bothered, leaving the details of life unattended to, uncared for, and neglected. They shrink from reality and lose focus on who they are, and they tend to become complacent and ignore important signals or feedback in their lives that would call on them to change, grow, and develop. In effect, they fall asleep.

## Shadow

- Doubt
- Spaciness
- Complacency
- Victim mentality
- Dullness
- Denial
- Conclusion

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Having taken this tour, we begin to see why balance among all five intelligences is important to personal effectiveness and leadership. Each direction offers a unique and important way of knowing and relating to the world; taken together, they move us toward our full potential. In this sense, the five intelligences are not only a framework for understanding self but also a framework for understanding learning. Action intelligence, for in-

stance, without the compassion of emotional intelligence could be insensitive. Likewise, action without the perspective of intuitive intelligence could be misdirected. And finally, action without the hard questions of intellectual intelligence could be premature. All sides of the compass are necessary for effective learning and action.

The five intelligences also offer a five-step action learning cycle leading to progressively higher states of knowledge and action. Intellectual intelligence takes in information objectively; emotional intelligence adds



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depth to that experience by reacting with feelings of pleasure, pain, or indifference; intuitive intelligence assimilates this data and conceptualizes a plan for action; action intelligence follows through by closing the gap between idea and reality, and spiritual intelligence reflects on the lessons learned for the next cycle.

Finally, this framework also underscores the importance of selflessness for achieving this balance. The shadow is transmuted into wisdom through openness and having the courage to let go of this solid sense of self, step through the fear, and dare to try a new view. Instead of negating or ignoring fears, fears are turned into vehicles for personal growth. Openness is a combination of awareness and compassion. Awareness helps us see our patterns, and compassion helps us see their impact on others. Together they help us suspend the sense of self and open us to new possibilities. In the process we move from selfishness toward selflessness, become more whole and complete, and learn to lead from a place of basic goodness.

The basic strategies for practicing and developing the different intelligences and transmuting the shadow into wisdom are the following:

| Intelligence              | Wisdom              | Shadow            | Strategy        |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Intellectual              | Knowing the world   | Tightness         | Objectivity     |
| Emotional                 | Awakening the heart | Oversensitivity   | Equanimity      |
| Intuitive                 | Seeing the way      | Compulsive desire | Judgment        |
| Action (Volitional)       | Embodying the way   | Competitiveness   | Self-discipline |
| Spiritual (Consciousness) | Learning to learn   | Dullness          | Awareness       |

Thus the wisdom of the five directions provides us with a useful framework for understanding leadership as well as a balanced and integrated path for personal growth and development—one that results in the wisdom and balance necessary for acting in the most effective manner for the benefit of all.

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