

Embracing and Improving Your Leadership Style

To achieve your highest potential, to be more “actualized,” you must embrace your leadership style (Table 1). What is your style? Are you an Achiever, Affirmer, or Asserter? What are your leadership shadow behaviors? Which of the *Nine Attributes of Actualized Leaders* do you need to focus on to improve your leadership, to be an *Actualized Leader*?

An “*Actualized Leader*” is someone who more effectively elicits the willing collaboration of others because he or she effectively manages his or her own behavior under stress. Unchecked behavior under stress is a person’s “leadership shadow.” The more effectively a leader manages this shadow, the less reactive and more resilient, and therefore, more *self-actualized* the leader is.

The *Actualized Leadership* framework and concept of self-actualization is based on the seminal work of Viktor Frankl, David McClelland, Carl Jung, and Abraham Maslow, from which two key concepts are derived:

- i. Our freedom to choose our response, attitude, and approach to anyone or any situation; and
- ii. The concept of paradoxical intent, which posits that the more one fears something, the more likely one is to experience it.

The latter concept is critical to understanding the connection between a leader’s unmitigated shadow to the leader’s experience of what he or she fears under stress. Each leadership style’s fear stems from the style’s motive driver, as set forth in Table 1. The Achiever, for example, is motivated by achievement and fears failure. When stressed, the Achiever leads by doing it him or herself, micromanaging, and being tedious, cautious, perfectionist, critical, and narrow minded, all but guaranteeing the team’s failure.

Table 1 briefly describes the three leadership styles along with corresponding motive drivers, underlying fears, strengths, shadows, and behaviors when self-actualized. Each leader has a dominant style and may have a secondary style.

Table 1: Leadership Styles

Leadership Style	Strengths	Under Stress (Shadow)	Self-Actualized
Achiever Motivation: Achievement Fear: Failure	Organized Detail-oriented Structured Thorough Analytical	Micromanager Tedious and cautious Perfectionist Critical Narrow-minded	Detailed, yet conceptual Organized, yet flexible
Affirmer Motivation: Affiliation Fear: Rejection	Friendly Helpful Trusting of others and trustworthy Humble Altruistic	Avoids conflict and confrontation Indecisive Devalues own needs and wants Sensitive and emotional	Friendly, yet courageous Empathetic, yet candid
Asserter Motivation: Power Fear: Betrayal	Confident Decisive Competitive Courageous Strategic	Controlling Arrogant Impatient Condescending Manipulative	Confident, yet humble Competitive, yet caring

Leadership Under Stress: The Shadow

Under stress, the strengths of each style can become exaggerated, bringing about the leader's underlying fear. If you're like most people, you've identified your leadership style and, like most, are chagrined by your shadow. Don't be. Everyone has shadows; the key to living to your greatest potential – to *self-actualization* - is to manage your shadow so that you are more resilient and less reactive.

Improving Your Leadership Style: The Nine Attributes of Actualized Leaders

The answer to the self-actualization question and the ability to mitigate shadow behaviors is found in the *Nine Attributes of Actualized Leaders* (Table 2). Happily, it's not a foregone conclusion that under stress a leader's shadow drives his or her behavior.

The *Nine Attributes* fall into two intertwined patterns: Level and Sequence (Table 2). The Levels are Cognition, Emotion, and Behavior. The three levels are organized in this manner because a person's thinking affects his or her emotions, which affects behavior. Typically, a leader can improve behavior by changing thoughts and feelings, the former being the root of the latter.

The Three Sequences are *Confidence*, *Performance*, and *Renewal*. If a leader wants to improve a *Behavior*, he or she will first want to consider the degree to which he or she experiences the attribute at both the *Cognition* and *Emotion* levels within that sequence.

The Nine Attributes of Actualized Leaders (Table 2)

Sequence	Level ->	Cognition	Emotion	Behavior
Confidence		<p><i>Objective</i></p> <p>Your judgment is based on the facts of a situation and is not influenced by personal feelings or preferences.</p>	<p><i>Courage</i></p> <p>You are willing to do something frightening and act in accordance with beliefs, judgments, and convictions.</p>	<p><i>Candor</i></p> <p>You are open, honest, frank, and sincere in your communications, especially when providing feedback.</p>
Performance		<p><i>Hyperfocus</i></p> <p>You engage in an intense form of mental concentration or visualization focused on a subject or activity, allowing you to be more immersed in the task-at-hand.</p>	<p><i>Trust</i></p> <p>You are trusting and are thus willing to develop and maintain a confident expectation in the reliability, integrity, and capability of others.</p>	<p><i>Flow</i></p> <p>You consistently engage in peak performance working on challenging tasks where you become so engaged that you lose track of time. You are "in the zone."</p>
Renewal		<p><i>Optimal Time Orientation</i></p> <p>You live primarily in the present.</p>	<p><i>Acceptance</i></p> <p>You totally and completely accept yourself – flaws, limitations, the aging process and all – and fully embrace your reality, not fighting, ignoring, or denying it.</p>	<p><i>Solitude</i></p> <p>You are comfortable being alone, and cherish rather than avoid this time. You don't passively pass the time; you actively plan, reflect, and renew.</p>

For how to improve your self-actualization and resiliency, while reducing your reactivity, consider the strategies identified in Table 3.

Strategies for Improving the Nine Attributes (Table 3)

Sequence	Level ->	Cognition	Emotion	Behavior
Confidence		<p><i>Objective</i> Practice describing situations factually and without judgment. Leave out the adjectives. Notice your assumptions; distinguish both implicit and explicit assumptions from what happened.</p>	<p><i>Courage</i> Consider the worst that might happen; is it so bad? What will happen if you don't take action? Consider how you'd like to be remembered as a leader and which action furthers that vision.</p>	<p><i>Candor</i> Use neutral, factual language when giving what might be perceived as negative feedback; frame such feedback in your commitment to the person's development.</p>
Performance		<p><i>Hyperfocus</i> Stop kidding yourself. You aren't multi-tasking; you're multi-switching. Work for 15 minutes on a project without distraction, then decide if you'll work another 15 minutes on it.</p>	<p><i>Trust</i> Ensure that expectations are clear, set milestones based on the person's experience, and use coaching skills to ensure that your colleague has identified and addressed obstacles to success.</p>	<p><i>Flow</i> Turn off email, your phone, your computer's volume and work on a project until you're out of ideas; switch to the next project and repeat.</p>
Renewal		<p><i>Optimal Time Orientation</i> Listen to others, focusing on the core message and the person's feelings and needs with respect to a situation. When you are distracted by the thought of a task, write it down and then continue working.</p>	<p><i>Acceptance</i> Choose to enjoy your life, flaws and all. Think about all that you have to be grateful for.</p>	<p><i>Solitude</i> Use the time to yourself to actively plan, reflect, and renew. Engage in an enjoyable activity such as exercise, reading, or cooking.</p>

Summary

Embrace your leadership style, including your shadow, and you can improve your leadership. It's as simple as engaging in one or more of strategies to improve one or more of the *Nine Attributes* (Table 3).

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