

# Who Are Our Future Leaders? 5 Consistent Themes and Emerging Trends Uncovered

*By Marshall Goldsmith*



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Many qualities of effective leadership - characteristics such as communicating vision, demonstrating integrity, focusing on results, and ensuring customer satisfaction - will never change. But five new factors have emerged as clearly more important in the future:

## **1. Thinking globally**

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The trend toward globally connected markets will become stronger. Leaders will need to understand the economic, cultural, legal, and political ramifications. Leaders will need to see themselves as citizens of the world with an expanded field of vision and values.

Two factors making global thinking a key variable for the future are the dramatic projected increases in global trade and integrated global technology, such as e-commerce. Future leaders will have to learn how to manage global production, marketing, and sales teams to achieve competitive advantage.

New technology is another factor that makes global thinking a requirement for future leaders. New technology will make it feasible to export white-collar work around the world. Computer programmers in India will communicate with designers in Italy to help develop products that are manufactured in Indonesia and sold in Brazil. Technology can help break down barriers to global business. Leaders who can make globalization work in their favor will have a huge competitive advantage.

## **2. Appreciating cultural diversity**

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Future leaders will also need to appreciate cultural diversity, defined as diversity of leadership style, industry style, individual behaviors and values, race, and sex. They will need to understand not only the economic and legal differences, but also the social and motivational differences that are part of working around the world. Understanding other cultures is not just good business practice - it is a key to competing successfully in the future.

An appreciation of cultural diversity will need to include both the big and the small things that form a unique culture. Religion is one of the most important variables affecting behavior in a region. Smaller issues, such as the meaning of gifts, personal greetings, or timeliness, will also need to be better understood.

The ability to motivate people in different cultures will become increasingly important. Motivational strategies that are effective in one culture may be offensive in another culture. The same recognition that could be a source of pride to one could be a source of embarrassment to another. Leaders who can understand, appreciate, and motivate colleagues in multiple cultures will become an increasingly valued resource.

## **3. Demonstrating technological savvy**

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Many future leaders who have been raised with technology view it as an integrated part of their lives. Many present leaders still view technological savvy as important for staff people and operations, but not for them. We need not all become gifted technicians or computer scientists, but we need to:

- ◆ Understand how the intelligent use of new technology can help us
- ◆ Recruit, develop, and maintain a network of technically competent people
- ◆ Know how to make and manage investments in new technology
- ◆ Be positive role models in leading the use of new technology

Organizations with technologically savvy leaders will have a competitive advantage. Without technological savvy, the future of integrated global partnerships and networks would be impossible.

#### **4. Building partnerships and alliances**

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More organizations are forming alliances today. This trend will be even more dramatic in the future. Reengineering, restructuring, and downsizing are leading to a world where outsourcing of all but core brand-related activities may become the norm. The ability to negotiate complex alliances and manage complex networks of relationships is becoming increasingly important. Joint leadership of new business models is vital to a successful global venture.

The changing role of customers, suppliers, and partners has implications for leaders. In the past it was clear who your friends (customers and collaborators) and enemies (competitors) were. In the future, these roles will become more blurred. Building positive, long-term, win-win relationships becomes critical.

#### **5. Sharing leadership**

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Sharing leadership is a requirement, not an option. In an alliance structure, telling partners what to do and how to do it may quickly lead to having no partners.

In dealing with knowledge workers - people who know more about what they are doing than their managers do - old models of leadership will not work. Future leaders will operate in a mode of asking for input and sharing information. Knowledge workers may well be difficult to keep. They will likely have little organizational loyalty and view themselves as professional free agents who will work for the leader who provides the most developmental challenge and opportunity. Skills in hiring and retaining key talent will be valuable for the leader of the future.

Most high-potential future leaders see the value of these new competencies and are willing to have their performance measured by them. Future leaders may be recruited to help mentor present leaders. If future leaders have the wisdom to learn from the experience of present leaders, and if present leaders have the wisdom to learn new competencies from future leaders, they can share leadership in a way that benefits the organization.

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Linkage is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. We provide clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized leadership development and training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research. Linkage's mission is to connect high-performing leaders and organizations to the futures they want to create.

With a relentless commitment to learning, Linkage also offers conferences, institutes, summits, open-enrollment workshops, and distance learning programs on leading-edge topics in leadership, management, human resources, and organizational development. More than 200,000 leaders and managers have attended Linkage programs since 1988.

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