

Temperament: A Leader's Advantage

The term 'temperament' has been making a lot of headlines in the run-up to the United States presidential election. Donald Trump claims that his is much better than his opponent's, and indeed has asserted that his "strongest asset, maybe by far", is what he calls his "winning temperament". Meanwhile the Clinton campaign has repeatedly railed against Trump for what they say is an unstable temperament – one that is easily rattled by critique and responds by resorting to jibes and insults.

In political contestation, more often than not, if one is attacked, the likely impulse is to react with an equally, if not more, abrasive strike-back. Therefore, a self-declared winning temperament is an irony especially when words, tweets and retorts indicate otherwise. At the same time, some very seasoned politicians have managed to cultivate their public personas to appear polished, professional and, what some would call, 'presidential', in full recognition that such a temperament is what would garner them public support.

So why is temperament so important? Good temperament certainly appears to be a quality that the best leaders possess, but one that is probably not easily learnt (unlike other leadership competencies). In fact, it refers to a leader's innate nature and disposition particularly as it affects behaviour.

By definition, temperament is more than a matter of controlling one's temper. It connotes a leader's composure, grace and outlook on the world, as well as his or her sense of individuality that can

radiate strength and confidence. A good temperament also indicates a strong sense of self, where one would not feel threatened working alongside a diverse team with different opinions, skills and capabilities; and in fact can draw and harness the power of an amalgamation of strengths to the greatest advantage. Good temperament goes hand in hand with being good with people. And when a leader has this quality, it is clearly discernible.

Tempering temperament

Self-awareness is the mark of a good leader, where they are aware of their strengths and how to use them, as well as acknowledge their weaknesses and how to improve upon them. A model that offers an introspective look at one's temperament can provide insight into how a person views and exercises power and authority. Using personality inventories such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), can allow leaders not only to understand their personality types as it applies in an organisational setting, but also their temperament.

For those familiar with the MBTI instrument, identifying temperament is quite straightforward. The MBTI inventory looks at a combination of four preferences. In the temperament model, introversion or extraversion does not matter, but the combination of two preferences among the remaining three of the following variables do:

- **Information:** the preference between focusing on the information available (Sensing or 'S'), and interpreting and adding meaning (Intuition or 'N').

- **Decisions:** the preference between looking first at logic and consistency when making decisions (Thinking or 'T'), and looking first at people and special circumstances (Feeling or 'F')
- **Structure:** the preference between working within existing structures when dealing with the outside world (Judging or 'J'), and adapting and staying open to other options (Perceiving or 'P').

The temperament model based on MBTI thus offers four different variables of temperament based on the following combinations:

1. Intuition and Feeling (NF)
2. Intuition and Thinking (NT)
3. Sensing and Judging (SJ)
4. Sensing and Perceiving (SP)

Leaders under these four categories can generally be described as follows:

1. Intuition and Feeling (NF) – The People's Leader

NF type leaders are driven by relationships. They seek to make personal connections and win the commitment and dedication of their people. They are, therefore, inspirational, persuasive, charming and appreciative of others for their contribution. Their temperament will therefore be one that indicates amity and respect of others. Such leaders do not want people to simply follow them, but instead want a cohesive group that share the responsibility and commitment to a cause. What these leaders should be wary of however is their tendency to be too idealistic. They need to be aware of the need to step back to gain an objective view of the facts and parameters before making decisions or communicating action plans to their team.

2. Intuition and Thinking (NT) – The Competence-focused Leader

NT type leaders derive their authority from competence. They are focused on objective clarity and adopt a logical, strategic analysis of facts. As they are competence-focused, their temperament can demonstrate their tendency to be overly critical of others since they believe that this will help them improve. The challenge for NT types is therefore how other temperaments may respond to their quickness to criticise and their high expectations. Such leaders would benefit greatly from exercising greater diplomacy by highlighting the positives in others before pointing out what may be lacking.

3. Sensing and Judging (SJ) – Upholder of the System

SJ type leaders believe that that power resides in the structure and hierarchy of the organization. They staunchly uphold the systems, procedures, policies, culture and traditions their organisation has established. As they place great importance on hierarchy, their temperament may come across as serious, rigid decorous but can also have an air of superiority. They strive to impose order on their work, and pay close attention to details. Such leaders should be aware of the tendency to be too bureaucratic, and constantly remind themselves to take a step back, look at the bigger picture and ask themselves what the is the ultimate purpose with which they can align everyday activities and their relations with people.

4. Sensing and Perceiving (SP) – The Problem Solver

SP type leaders exercise their power by solving problems and acting with speed and ingenuity. They tend to live in the moment and are effective in crisis situations where they may even be willing to compromise personal relationships and organisational procedures in order to address present needs. Their temperament would reflect spontaneity and a sense of urgency, but can also

reveal impatience, rashness and fault-finding. They need to be mindful of their approach on the people they work with, as others may need more convincing and guidance on decisions taken or changes to be introduced.

Maintaining composure in difficult times

“Keep Calm and Carry On”, goes the famous motivational saying that was publicised by the British government in 1939 to raise public morale in preparation for World War II.

Regardless of their personality type, leaders need to make a conscious effort to keep their temperament in check, think clearly, be positive and keep calm.

Leaders are signal senders. When there is a problem, they need to be aware of what signals they want to send out to interested audiences. How leaders respond to problems and pressures is an indicator of their leadership maturity and acumen. If they remain calm, rational, and confident in their abilities, they can make those around them also feel confident, hopeful and secure and thus be better able to tackle the difficulty.

The following are five ways leaders maintain composure during difficult times:

- **Not getting emotional or defensive**

Seasoned leaders have such emotional self-control that their body language does not reveal any form of disconcertion. They can detach emotionally from the situation and still express concern and care, but not to the point that their emotions become a distraction.

When leaders take issues too personally or react defensively, they allow the noise and politics around them to suffocate their thinking and decision-making capabilities. When emotions get in the way, people interpret it as a sign of a lack of control or lack of rationality.

- **Projecting confidence**

During uncertain times, leaders must project confidence and a positive mental state that will, in turn, instil confidence in those they lead. Leaders set the tone for the organisation and positive attitude can neutralise chaos. Reacting with fear on the other hand puts leaders in a position of vulnerability where it becomes difficult to act think and act rationally and objectively. Seasoned leaders know how to consider the worst-case scenario and plan for its eventuality so that they can address it with confidence if need be.

- **Being accountable**

When leaders accept accountability, they have made the decision to assume responsibility and take the required steps to handle a difficult situation before it gets out of hand. This is a crucial step in neutralising the problem and disarming its source as well as his or her critics, and can help the leader display integrity as well as prevent such a situation from arising again in the future.

- **Showing grace**

Leaders who approach a problem with a sense of elegance and grace have an uncanny ability to show that they have seen it all before and will take any approach necessary to ease the hardships that others may be experiencing.

In crisis situations such leaders make it their job to make others feel that even the most difficult challenges can be easily resolved and there is no need for panic. Their demeanour and ability to soothe frustrations helps to make others feel that things are not so bad after all.

- **Being decisive**

To show composure in difficult times, good leaders speak decisively and with conviction, confidence and authority – giving followers a sense that everything is and will be under control.

This calls to mind former British Prime Minister, David Cameron's decision to resign following Britain's vote to leave the European Union. While it was not an easy decision to make, and human nature will tell us that it must have been quite a painful one for David Cameron to make, his decisiveness, immediate action and presence of mind made those that were watching him speak believe that Britain's future remained hopeful.

Conclusion

Successful leaders learn how to manage their own temperaments, in the way that suits them best, especially when dealing with negativity. Abraham Lincoln wrote what he called "hot letters" to his critics, then locked them in a drawer with the inscription: "Never sent. Never signed."

An admirable ability of leaders with good temperaments is how they look at tense situations as if they were observers who are removed in time. They see their interests and those of their critics, and because it doesn't feel personal they react as calmly as if they were mere actors on a stage – solid and unshaken.

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