

LEADERS: BORN THEN MADE

In a recent Wall Street Journal poll, 170 business leaders were asked the age old question, “Are Leaders Born or Made?” Forty-five percent (45%) of the respondents felt that leadership ability was an innate quality while fifty-five percent (55%) believed that leadership ability was acquired.

At The McQuaig Institute®, we have had the opportunity to assess the temperament of leaders across many industries for three decades using The McQuaig System™. We measure the natural tendencies that an individual is born with, such as competitiveness, patience, self-reliance or empathy. Your temperament determines your patterns of behaviour.

After reviewing research data we decided to test a hypothesis that runs contrary to the Wall Street Journal poll findings: ***Leaders are born as opposed to made.***

We reviewed two research studies we conducted in the last six years. A total of 2,153 leaders in the USA, Australia and in Canada were assessed. The leaders were CEOs and Presidents of small to mid-sized businesses.

Here is how we tested the hypothesis:

1. Most psychologists agree that your temperament is genetic. You are wired a certain way when you are born and your patterns of behaviour remain stable over time.
2. If a significant percentage of the leaders in our study have common temperament traits, then it would be reasonable to assume that leaders are born, since they have had these traits since birth.

McQuaig has identified a trait combination that we have found associated with leadership effectiveness in prior studies. If an individual scores strongly on these traits we refer to them as “natural leaders”:

1. Dominant > Competitive and Goal Oriented
2. Independent > Self-reliant and Unstructured

Of the 2,153 CEOs we assessed, 78% of them were “natural leaders”, well above the percentage found in the business population*. From this we might draw the conclusion that 78% of leaders are born and 22% are made.

We believe a more accurate conclusion is that leaders are born with the right raw materials. If they combine this with the skills, knowledge, values and aspirations they may become effective leaders. Leaders are born, then made.

Succession Planning Implications:

As baby boomers begin to retire, developing the next generation of leaders has become a key focus for many companies. Assessing high potentials is a critical step in the process. If you would like to know about how to identify “natural leaders” within your organization and to develop action plans to help them take it to the next level, please contact us by phone at 800 387 5455. ext 361 or by email.

* Combined studies by McQuaig indicate that 58% of the business population (including business administration students) are natural leaders. However, this sample is over-represented by managers and sales people and under-represented by administrative and skilled workers. If this were corrected we believe that the percentage would be lower.

For more information contact:

Michael Gravelle
Managing Director
The McQuaig Institute®
mgravelle@mcquaig.com
(416) 941-9418, ext. 361
(800) 387-5455, ext. 361