

# SIGMA

## Leadership Series



**Great Leaders  
Are Ambitious**



## GREAT LEADERS ARE AMBITIOUS

“

**Intelligence without ambition is a bird without wings.**

**– Salvador Dali**

Ambitious leaders demonstrate the desire for increased influence and promotion in the organizational hierarchy. Highly ambitious leaders tend to be assets to the organization they belong to. These leaders strive towards difficult goals, achieving success for both themselves and the organization. They thrive in the face of challenges and tend to devote substantial effort and time towards work, making them good candidates to lead during times of crisis. Finally, ambitious leaders also tend to be lifelong learners, inspiring others in the organization to also work on their personal and professional development.

Research shows that ambition has various benefits for leaders. For one, those who are more ambitious tend to take charge of their surroundings, leading to greater job satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> Taking charge includes acting assertively when making suggestions for ways to improve the workplace (e.g., taking part in strategic direction committees). These ambitious behaviors also help to improve an individual's reputation within the organization, and this increased recognition helps to improve their job performance ratings.<sup>2</sup> Given that ambition helps employees achieve positive work outcomes, it is a valuable competency for leaders to develop.

In assessing your level of ambition, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I strike a good balance between pursuing rewards, knowledge, and results at work?
- Am I spending time around ambitious coworkers?
- Do I use my past achievements as motivation to achieve more in the future?
- What methods can I use to keep learning and motivating myself at work?

### Increase Your Ambition

**Know the three kinds of ambition:** Healthy ambition is a balance between three kinds of ambition: performance, growth, and achievement.<sup>3</sup> You should strive equally for good results, improved knowledge, and satisfying rewards. Striving towards only one of these goals creates an unbalanced kind of ambition that can make it harder to achieve objectives. For example, if you're only ambitious when it comes to meeting challenging performance targets, your team may begin to resent your perfectionistic tendencies, making it harder to work collaboratively towards goals. On the other hand, if you are balancing a desire to perform, grow, and achieve rewards, your team might be motivated to achieve goals because they recognize your drive for personal development and also want to receive recognition for their efforts from the company.

**Surround yourself with ambitious people:** You can feel inspired to strive for more at work if you spend more time around ambitious coworkers. Rather than working on your development alone, consider asking to have coffee chats or form mentorship relationships with coworkers you look up to for their perseverance and drive. Ask them how they currently feel about work and get to know what motivates their ambition. You may feel encouraged to become more ambitious by spending time with high achievers.

**Reflect on your previous achievements:** Leaders can sometimes feel discouraged from pursuing ambitious goals if they feel they haven't had any success in a long time. During these moments, it can be helpful to reflect on your previous accomplishments. By thinking about past situations when you've been recognized for doing a great job or attained promotions at work, you may feel more capable of future success as well.

## Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Become More Ambitious

The following steps can help you become more ambitious:

- 1. Keep learning.** The drive to better yourself is closely linked with an attitude of openness towards continual learning experiences. Learning experiences can be found in many forms. For example, some people enjoy listening to motivational podcasts to encourage themselves to achieve more at work. Others prefer to sign up for professional development, such as courses offered by LinkedIn Learning or by attending workshops at conferences. Whatever form of learning you enjoy, try to make more time for it as it can inspire you to create new, challenging goals to strive for at work.
- 2. Volunteer for initiatives at work.** Start being recognized for your efforts and ambitious drive at work by volunteering for various initiatives. For example, if an executive asks for volunteers to lead a new project team for a high-profile client, you can volunteer you and your team for it. Similarly, non-performance-related initiatives can also help raise your profile at work. For example, you can volunteer to organize the annual company holiday party to build team bonds. Once you become comfortable taking more initiative at work, try to stretch yourself by volunteering for opportunities that you have little previous experience with to grow your confidence and knowledge.
- 3. Compete against yourself.** A good way to spark ambition is to challenge yourself to beat past standards you've set for yourself. You might find examples of these standards in your past performance reviews. For example, if there are clear performance metrics at your company that you've been commended for in past performance reviews, such as sales made or customer satisfaction, try to work towards beating your past self in those metrics (e.g., work towards making 10% more sales this year than last year). You can also work towards improving in areas of development in past reviews, such as increased communication with your direct reports. Whatever the goal is, it can be satisfying to see yourself making progress over time, creating a positive feedback cycle of continuous improvement.

## Resources



[How to Ask for a Raise](#)



[How Ambitious Should You Be?](#)



[Develop](#) your ambition by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: [support@SigmaHR.com](mailto:support@SigmaHR.com)

Call: 800-265-1285

## References

<sup>1</sup> El Baroudi, S., Fleisher, C., Khapova, S. N., Jansen, P., & Richardson, J. (2017). Ambition at work and career satisfaction: The mediating role of taking charge behavior and the moderating role of pay. *Career Development International*, 22(1), 87-102.

<sup>2</sup> Hirschi, A., & Spurk, D. (2021). Ambitious employees: Why and when ambition relates to performance and organizational commitment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 127.

<sup>3</sup> Carucci, R. (2020, April 13). How ambitious should you be? *Harvard Business Review*, <https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-ambitious-should-you-be>