

# SIGMA

## Leader Character Series



**Great Leaders  
Act Collaboratively**



## GREAT LEADERS ACT COLLABORATIVELY

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**Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.**

**— Helen Keller**

In today's working environment, collaboration is valued — and required — more strongly than ever before. Leaders are becoming more aware of the benefits that come from encouraging collaboration, from innovative decision-making to increased work engagement in employees.<sup>1</sup> For example, leveraging the diversity of others' knowledge, experience, perceptions, judgments, and skills can help make better-informed, wiser decisions.<sup>2</sup> Further, research suggests that a key predictor of work engagement is feeling like part of a team.<sup>3</sup> In a competitive world where there is a constant need to have an edge, collaboration is a critical ingredient that can make a difference.

Collaboration is an integral aspect of leadership character that involves two or more individuals working together to generate ideas, make decisions, execute project plans, and revise team strategies as needed. To ensure a smooth and efficient teamwork process, collaboration requires elements of cooperation, collegiality, open-mindedness, flexibility, and interconnectedness.

In assessing your ability to act collaboratively, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I open to hearing opinions different than my own?
- Do I ask team members for input on important decisions?
- Am I comfortable working in a team environment?
- Do I value the ideas of others?
- Do I make time in my schedule for collaborative discussion?
- Do I agree with prolonging brainstorming phases to prioritize collaboration?

### Ways to Improve Your Collaboration

**Get to know your colleagues:** It can be intimidating to work collaboratively on a task with colleagues you do not know very well. To make these situations more comfortable, have informal discussions with colleagues from all areas of your organization. Striking up “small talk” conversations with unfamiliar colleagues can build up a network of friendly faces to go to when a cross-functional task arises. This can also help you learn about everyone's unique areas of expertise, so you know who to turn to regarding specific problems or concerns.<sup>4</sup> In fact, meta-

analytic research suggests that communication both inside and outside of your team can help foster innovation.<sup>5</sup>

**Set aside time for collaboration:** A common reason why leaders don't collaborate more is a lack of time. Busy schedules can make it harder to find time to connect with others and can also make it hard to focus on the collaborative task at hand even if you do find time to meet. Try to set aside time for collaborative work in your weekly schedule — this could involve reserving time in your schedule each week for team discussions, protecting “flex-time” where others can drop in with questions, or carving out the space to review documents from others.<sup>6,7</sup>

**Open yourself up to new perspectives:** Once you've made time for collaboration, it's also important to prepare yourself mentally, particularly if you're used to being an individual contributor. Before beginning a project with others where collaboration is the goal, ensure that you're open to considering different perspectives and adopt a mindset that is conducive to collaborative work. Research suggests that diversity in thinking can lead to more innovative problem-solving, so fostering an open mindset will benefit everyone.<sup>8</sup>

## Consider These Tips to Moderate Collaboration

Effective leaders are able to balance the 11 leader character dimensions rather than focusing on just a few. As you develop your leader character, look for places where strengths may need to be moderated. If you scored a 4 or higher on collaboration, use the tips below to help you balance the expression of this character dimension.

**Balance openness with critical thinking.** Collaboration in excess, ungoverned by the leader character dimensions of judgment, drive, and integrity, has the potential to lead to unproductive meetings where decisions don't get made in the pursuit of trying to please everyone. It's important to make room for differing opinions while remaining aware of the most critical factors and the need for results. In practice, this may look like giving all team members a chance to voice their ideas. It's important to be selective with which ideas to pursue and to avoid spending time considering unrealistic solutions.

**Remember to always bring it back to the work.** While it can be easy to get carried away when talking to a colleague, it's important to remember the reason for the conversation in the first place. Be sure to avoid oversharing during work conversations as the goal of these conversations should be to generate good ideas within a given timeframe. Keep conversations friendly and positive, but remember that the conversation should ultimately be about work.

**Remember to prioritize your individual goals as well.** While it is understandable if collaboration in the planning stages bleeds into your individual work time, it is important to not get so caught up with collaboration that you lose sight of your individual priorities. In addition to excessive collaboration potentially harming individual productivity, some may find the added socialization time to be particularly draining. To mitigate this, set agendas in advance of meetings and avoid meetings that could be more efficient as emails.

## Resources



[6 Steps Building a Collaborative Team Environment](#)



[3 Ways to Build a Culture of Collaborative Innovation](#)



Develop your ability to collaborate by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for leader character coaching.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

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

Call: 800-265-1285

## References

<sup>1</sup> Lechner, A. (2012). Better teamwork through better workplace design. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2012/04/better-teamwork-through-office>

<sup>2</sup> Thayer, A. L., Petruzzelli, A., & McClur C. E. (2018). Addressing the paradox of the team innovation process: A review and practical consideration. *American Psychologist*, 73(4),363-375. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000310>

<sup>3</sup> Hayes, M., Chumney, F., Wright, C., & Buckingham, M. (2018). The global study of engagement. *ADP Research Institute*.

<sup>4</sup> Ibarra, H., & Hansen, M. T. (2011). Are you a collaborative leader? *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2011/07/are-you-a-collaborative-leader>

<sup>5</sup> Hülsheger, U. R., Anderson, N., & Salgado, J. F. (2009). Team-level predictors of innovation at work: A comprehensive meta-analysis spanning three decades of research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 94, 1128 — 1145. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0015978>

<sup>6</sup> Adler, P., Heckscher, C., & Prusak, L. (2011). Building a collaborative enterprise. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2011/07/building-a-collaborative-enterprise>

<sup>7</sup> Isaacs K., & Ancona, D. (2019). 3 ways to build a culture of collaborative innovation. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2019/08/3-ways-to-build-a-culture-ofcollaborative-innovation>

<sup>8</sup> Post, C., De Lia, E., DiTomaso, N., Tirpak, T. M., & Borwankar, R. (2009). Capitalizing on thought diversity for innovation. *Research Technology Management*, 52(6), 14-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08956308.2009.11657596>