

# **SIGMA** **Leader Character Series**



**Great Leaders  
Are Judicious**



## GREAT LEADERS ARE JUDICIOUS

**“When a leader shows consistently good judgment, little else matters. When he or she shows poor judgment, nothing else matters.”**

**— Noel Tichy & Warren Bennis**

How are some organizations able to cope with constant changes and challenges, even thriving through change, while others struggle to adapt? The analyses and subsequent decisions made by leaders underlie every organization’s performance, for better or worse, making the development of good judgment crucial. While it’s not possible to predict the future, it’s possible to obtain insights that enable better outcomes for businesses using judgment.<sup>1</sup>

Judgment entails making good decisions in a timely manner based on relevant information and critical analysis of facts. This includes reasoning in uncertain situations or situations with incomplete or changing information. Making good decisions is ultimately the most important thing a leader does, and judgment sits at the heart of the leader character framework this resource is based on. Acting as a central piece in an individual’s character, judgment moderates and mediates the use of all other character dimensions, much like an air traffic controller.<sup>2</sup>

In assessing your ability to use your judgment to make effective decisions at work, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I pause to reflect before I come to a conclusion?
- Am I able to adapt my strategy or tactic when problem-solving?
- Do I consistently make good business decisions?
- Do I seek diverse perspectives when tackling a big issue?
- Am I resistant to changing my opinion in the face of new facts?

### Ways to Improve Your Judgment

**Develop your expertise:** While experience is the best teacher, becoming better acquainted with different topics relevant to your role, organization, and industry will also enhance the decisions you make. Stay up-to-date with what is happening in your field by reading newspapers or other publications. Keep your eyes and ears open for insights as you go about your daily life, and when you encounter an opinion or perspective that is new to you, ask questions and seek to understand. While this can be time consuming, in the long run you will gain valuable expertise that will help you to make good decisions.<sup>3</sup>

**Take stock of your decisions:** Think about the judgments and decisions you need to make on a regular basis as part of your role. Are you responsible for hiring and training people? For deciding which projects to focus on each quarter? Budgets? Whatever the areas, create an inventory of them. Take notes on any struggles or opportunities you have to make better decisions in these different areas. Who can you ask for help? What would you like to do differently? Make time on a regular basis to review upcoming decisions so you aren't caught off guard when the need arises.

**Understand the cycle of making judgments:** A simple cycle (Analyzing, Deciding, Implementing, and Sharing)<sup>4</sup> is helpful to consider when seeking to improve one's judgment and decision-making abilities. Often people rush through the analysis stage or take too long and get stuck considering which path to take. Some may lose steam at the implementation stage, while others forget to slow down and take the time to share their decision and communicate the process. Think about where your past projects have gone well and where they've needed help — could any of these components be improved? Try using a simple task to practice walking through the judgment and decision-making steps before tackling a larger project.

## Consider These Tips to Moderate Your Judgment

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 judgment, use the tips below to help you balance the expression of this character dimension.

**Remember to use all character dimensions.** Keep in mind that judgment is the mechanism for calling upon all other dimensions, and it's rare for a situation to require the use of only one or even two character strengths. For example, while good judgment is of the utmost importance in making decisions, judgment without humility can be perceived as arrogance, resulting in team members being less receptive to your message.

**Watch out for analysis paralysis.** For leaders who enjoy analyzing problems and gathering lots of data, one common issue can be getting stuck in the thinking stage and not putting enough emphasis on making a decision. Those who have an over-reliance on the analytical element of the judgment dimension often fail to implement a chosen solution or gain buy-in from others. Commit to thinking deeply about an issue and then move forward with the necessary steps. Give yourself a deadline and remember it's okay to pivot from being analytical to being decisive.

**Reduce decision fatigue.** Leaders are faced with a dizzying array of decisions on a daily basis, so it's no surprise that leaders like Steve Jobs were known for simplifying their lives in small ways. This simplification allows leaders to focus on their most important decisions (Jobs wore the same "uniform" of a black turtleneck and jeans every day). Consider what decisions you can automate or reduce, especially during busy times, and remember that removing even small decisions can have a helpful impact on your ability to make good decisions and reduce judgment fatigue.

## Resources



[Why “Scout Mindset” Is Crucial to Good Judgment](#)



[Judgment: How Winning Leaders Make Great Calls](#)



Develop your best judgment by taking advantage of SIGMA’s coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for more information about leader character.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

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Call: 800-265-1285

## References

<sup>1</sup> Ramezani, J., & Camarinha-Matos, L. M. (2020). Approaches for resilience and antifragility in collaborative business ecosystems. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 151, 119846.

<sup>2</sup> Monzani, L., Seijts, G. H., & Crossan, M. M. (2021). Character matters: The network structure of leader character and its relation to follower positive outcomes. *Plos one*, 16(9), e0255940.

<sup>3</sup> Chi, M. T., Glaser, R., & Rees, E. (1981). Expertise in problem solving. Pittsburgh Univ PA Learning Research and Development Center.

<sup>4</sup> Tichy, N. & Bennis W. (2007, October). Making Judgment Calls. HBR. <https://hbr.org/2007/10/making-judgment-calls>