

SIGMA

Leader Character Series



**Great Leaders
are Transcendent**



GREAT LEADERS ARE TRANSCENDENT

“**Transcendence is transformation.**
— Peter Watts

A lack of time is the most common reason cited by leaders for why they do not prioritize strategic planning.¹ This happens even though leaders know that strategic planning is critical for the future success of their organization.² When you are under pressure and feel like time is running out, you are more likely to have tunnel vision and stay focused on what is in plain sight. You are also less likely to feel inspired or hopeful, and may lose your appreciation and sense of creativity.³ All of these issues derive from a lack of transcendence. Transcendence involves taking an expansive view of a situation, allowing possibilities that aren't ordinarily in view to be noticed and appreciated. This can encourage you to find a bigger sense of purpose in life. In finding a bigger sense of purpose and perspective, you're more likely to be optimistic, appreciative, and come up with creative solutions. Indeed, exercising transcendence and being more positive improves your mental and physical health, your relationships, and your success at work.⁴

In addition to the traits listed above, transcendent leaders are purposive and appreciative. They see possibility where others do not, and are able to integrate long-term and broad factors into their plans. Transcendence is important for providing employees with both a clear direction and a sense of what is possible. Without transcendence, organizations are less likely to innovate and more likely to lose high-achieving staff who want to be inspired by a vision for the future.

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

- Do I relate to events with realistic optimism?
- Am I able to get out of the weeds to see the big picture?
- Do I look for cutting-edge and creative solutions to problems?
- Do I appreciate the work of others, including competitors?
- Do I have a strong sense of purpose, and share it with others?

Ways to Improve Your Transcendence

Believe in yourself and others: An optimistic approach to issues is so important for performance that it is taught to Navy SEALs to boost their motivation and aid in their ability to achieve goals.⁶ An optimistic outlook means that you think of what is possible and perceive

obstacles as impersonal, localized, and temporary.⁷ This approach fosters perseverance and hope in the face of challenges.⁸ Practice seeing difficulties as temporary setbacks and convey this mindset to the people around you. To communicate optimism and encourage problem-solving, ask others what they need, what is going well, and what small steps can be taken when facing a challenge.

Share your vision: The most successful leaders are able to inspire others with their vision and sense of purpose. Make a point of sharing your enthusiasm for the future with others, and let them know that you think achieving big goals is possible. Take time every week to shift your attention from your present concerns to focus on what lies ahead. What are you excited about? What are you hopeful about? Who is doing excellent work that could serve as a model for others?

Enhance your creativity: Creativity involves putting ideas and information together in different ways to solve problems. Take time each week to deliberately seek out different perspectives and new ideas. These new ideas don't have to be directly connected to your area of work or expertise. Enhance your creativity by building routines into your day that support creative thinking; daily walks, exposing yourself to new ideas and information, and adequate sleep all support the brain's ability to learn and make new connections.

Consider These Tips to Moderate Your Transcendence

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

Don't ignore your better judgment. Creative inspiration can be helpful for your work, but if it's not balanced by temperance and accountability, you may end up spending too much time thinking of unrealistic approaches instead of moving forward with a solution that is good enough. After brainstorming new ideas and approaches, evaluate your options critically and seek feedback from others to make the best use of the proposed options.

Avoid harmful positivity. A common tendency when trying to be optimistic is to dismiss negative or difficult feelings and experiences, both in your own reactions and when talking to others. Remember that being optimistic about the future and focusing on the good things around you is possible without avoiding the full spectrum of reactions and emotions, and it doesn't mean you have to feel happy all the time. Strive to recognize and acknowledge even the difficult feelings in yourself and others.

Stay grounded. Ideas need to be fleshed out, vetted, and carried out in order to make an impact. If you struggle to translate your ideas into reality, set time limits on how long you spend seeking out new ideas and being inspired, and try to get more comfortable with the logistics and details involved in seeing a project through to completion. Remember that it takes perseverance to see your ideas come to fruition.

Resources



[The Happy Secret to Better Work](#)



[How To Be Creative](#)



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

Contact SIGMA for more information about leader character.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

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References

¹ Kabacoff, R. (2014, February 7). Develop strategic thinkers throughout your organization. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2014/02/develop-strategic-thinkers-throughout-your-organization>

² Ibid.

³ Driskell, J. E., Salas, E., & Johnston, J. (1999). Does stress lead to a loss of team perspective? *Group dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 3(4), 291-302.

⁴ Lyubomirsky, S., King, L., & Diener, E. (2005). The benefits of frequent positive affect: Does happiness lead to success? *Psychological Bulletin*, 131(6), 803-855.

⁵ Malouff, J. M., & Schutte, N. S. (2017). Can psychological interventions increase optimism? A meta-analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(6), 594-604.

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⁷ Seligman, M. E. (2006). *Learned optimism: How to change your mind and your life*. Vintage.

⁸ Peterson, C. (2000). The future of optimism. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 44-55.