

FEATURE ARTICLES

Developing Leaders for the Future: A Courageous Leadership Framework

J.R. Flatter, Flatter Inc.

My development as a leader began the day I went to Marine Corps boot camp in 1981. And I have journaled that journey ever since. As a result, I can now look back on 21-year-old J.R. to see what he was thinking on any given day; and 30-year-old J.R.; and 59-year-old J.R. And guess what? And guess what? I can literally see my leadership mature across the different phases of my life and career. From Private to Staff Sergeant to Lieutenant to Major; and then from new father to entrepreneur to Chief Executive Officer to Chief Learning Officer.

As my own leadership matured, my thinking on leadership development similarly matured. For, in addition to my practical 40+ years of leadership experience, I have also formally studied and taught leadership for over 20 years. Over that time, the *Courageous Leadership Framework* (Figure 1) emerged from the combination of my practical experience leading, my scholarly study of leadership, and my delivery methods to achieve enduring leadership development.

Leadership development happens best over time as it takes time to infuse new leadership behaviors (habits) into our lives (DePaul, 2021). As such, the Courageous Leadership framework this article describes is set across

Dr. John (J.R.) Flatter, Ph.D. (Major, USMC, Ret.) is an executive leadership practitioner, scholar, professor, coach, and consultant for government and commercial organizations across the globe. As the founding owner, J.R. has served as Flatter, Inc.'s Chairman since its beginning in 2002. In this position, he leads Flatter's global operations from the front - visiting each program personally to ensure his teams are motivated and performing up to Flatter's standards of excellence. Concurrently, as Flatter's Chief Learning Officer, J.R. oversees all leadership development and coaching projects and programs. J.R. complements his leadership skills, business experience, and analytical acumen with a strong educational background that includes a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration from the University of Washington - with a concentration in Organizational Design, a Master of Science in Management from the Naval Postgraduate School - with a concentration in Multi-Variate Regression Analysis, and a Ph.D. in Public Administration from The George Washington University - with a concentration in Leadership Development.

a timeline to provide sufficient time for the leadership competencies to soak in and set for long-term “muscle-memory” actions. Likewise, contemporary leadership studies identify the development of competencies as the best means of cultivating critical leadership knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences (Brownell, 2006). As such, the framework is competency-focused – delivering education, training, and experiential assignments to develop important leadership competencies.

While there are numerous leadership competencies from which to choose, the 10 competencies in the model are leadership’s “meta-competencies.” They are aggregated from across not only the leadership literature, but also from decades of leadership experiences.

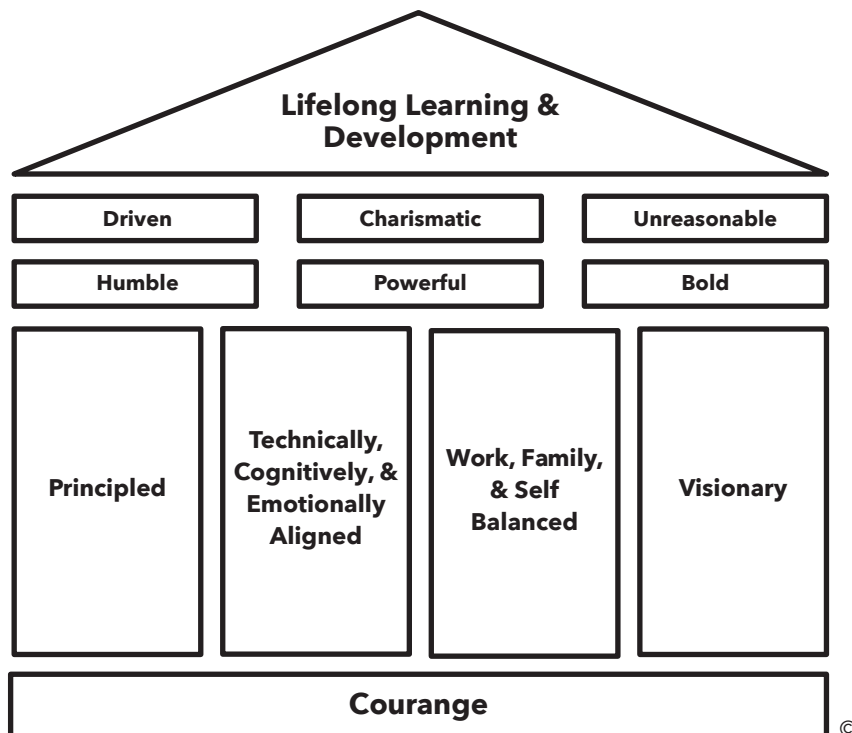
Purpose

The purpose of the Courageous Leadership framework—and thus this article—is about developing leadership knowledge, skills, willingness, abilities, and experiences for your service as leaders now and into the future. This article presents a developmental framework, which offers a re-invention of the way a leader can think, behave, communicate, and lead.

Your Own House of Courageous Leadership

I use the metaphor of “Building Your House of Leadership” to describe each person’s lifelong leadership journey. As you work through the suggested developmental activities, you will literally build or remodel a new wing of your own House of Leadership. Within the requirements of their work positions;

Figure 1:
Courageous Leadership Framework



within their responsibilities at home; and within the guidelines of the organizations you choose to align yourself, every person gets to build their own house – choosing their principles, finding their work-family-self balance, crafting their own vision, etc. As leaders, it is our responsibility to respect everyone’s house – as we will ask them to respect ours.

Courage as the Foundation

“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point” (Lewis, 1952, ch. 29).

C.S. Lewis

The renowned scholar and author C.S. Lewis accurately captures in his quote above that courage is the foundation upon which all other leadership beliefs and actions stand. For our purposes, courageous leadership is the demonstrated willingness & ability to communicate and accomplish specific goals and objectives for self, others, and organizations through adhering to a unique combination of technical, cognitive, and emotional courage characteristics.

Courage is purposefully placed as the foundation of leadership because any competency a leader may choose to demonstrate first requires the leader summon the courage to demonstrate the competency. Likewise, whenever your leadership is challenged – and it will be – courage is required to stand your ground. Finally, crafting a vision and asking others to come along with you on the journey required to fulfill the vision requires great courage.

The Courageous Leadership Competencies

“Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection, we can catch excellence” (Lombardi).

Vince Lombardi

Much like Lombardi’s quest for perfection on the football field, our life-long pursuit of courageous leadership mastery is equally elusive, yet nonetheless remains a noble and worthy ideal to pursue. As we identify and discuss the 10 courageous leadership characteristics in the next several sections, we must not lose sight of that fact.

Principled

“My opinions and principles are subjects of just criticism. I put myself before the public willingly.” (Woodhull).

Victoria Woodhull

As Victoria Woodhull led American women toward the right to vote, she certainly displayed a strong set of principles to guide her words and actions—often accompanied by significant criticisms. With courage as the foundation upon which leadership stands, principles are the guiding beacons upon which courageous leaders conduct their lives. As courageous leaders, we must identify and communicate our principles “before the public” as did Woodhull in her life-long fight to gain voting privileges for women in the United States.

Dictionary.com defines a principle as “a personal or specific basis of conduct or management...” (Dictionary.com, 2021). Being principled is not only the first courageous characteristic but it is also a foundational characteristic. Your principles are how you personally choose to bound and perform your personal and professional conduct. It is how you set your parameters between right and wrong. Concurrently, your principles simultaneously require you to exhibit certain behaviors while preventing you from exhibiting other behaviors.

When you are identifying your principles, you must first identify what actions you wish to demonstrate

going forward. Likewise, when you are developing the other courageous characteristics, you can only measure your development through your increased performance of each. Your principles will assist in filling in the white spaces between unknowns to consistently inform what decisions you should make.

Technically, Cognitively, and Emotionally (T•C•E) Aligned

“I started my life with a single absolute; that the world was mine to shape in the image of my highest values and never to be given up to a lesser standard, no matter how long or hard the struggle” (Rand & Salter, 1957).

Ayn Rand

Per Rand’s suggestion, as we perform leadership activities, we should appropriately shape our world using three broad categories of intelligence: 1) technical, 2) cognitive, and 3) emotional.

Technical (T) intelligence is the collection of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to function within your chosen profession. Technical actions are largely transactional in that you engage in a specific activity to produce a specific output. There is usually one way to perform the action to achieve the result. Once the transaction is completed, you then move on to another activity to produce another output. Likewise, technical activities are largely linear in that you progress in a straight line from predetermined action to anticipated product.

Cognitive (C) intelligence is your ability to problem solve through gathering data, conducting analysis, making decisions, and then writing execution plans. As there are likely established decision-making protocols and accepted research methods within your organization, cognitive intelligence is also largely

transactional. Cognitive intelligence is used principally for determining how to best manage things such as raw materials, office space, or time in an ongoing effort to minimize costs while maximizing value outputs.

Emotional (E) intelligence is your willingness and ability to create and strengthen relationships with people to gain and increase their enthusiasm to support and achieve the goals and objectives. As each person is different, with varied personalities and preferences, the methods of emotionally engaging them are equally as varied which are limited only by your willingness and abilities. Emotional intelligence is very transformational as it forever changes the relationships and mutual actions between participants moving forward toward the purpose of creating value beyond that which was possible beforehand.

Generally, there is a migration from T→C→E actions as we progress in our lives and careers but, ultimately that maturation is as varied as are people with no right or wrong path. The movement from one to another, or lack thereof, is a product of both willingness and ability. Likewise, regardless of position, there are times (hours, days, and even, years) when it is appropriate for each of us to be aligned in one or the other. However, the primary point is that if you are willing then you are likely able, but you must first understand and then strive toward the ideal T•C•E Alignment.

Work, Family, & Self Balanced (W•F•S)

“I shall be telling with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference” (Frost et al., 1991).

Robert Frost

As Frost correctly points out, choosing the right path for you and your life's goals is essential to achieving them. When my first child was born, and as I looked into his newborn face, I swore a secret oath to myself that I would do whatever it took to provide a better life for this tiny, new baby. As you can quickly surmise, such a promise required significant work on my behalf to achieve. So, my wife and I purposefully created a W•F•S balance that provided both the needed work hours and the family time.

Like many ideals, W•F•S balance is an objective worthy of pursuit, but most often actually achieved in short glimpses. The gigantic W seems ever-present, sucking all-available oxygen from our other life priorities. We yearn for more F time, but often feel compelled to W, W, W to provide for our families or significant others. The tiny S seems mostly ignored. However, those demonstrated facts do not absolve us from displaying the needed courage every minute of every day to achieve the appropriate W•F•S balance.

No one category of W•F•S should be absolute, nor should any be non-existent. In the short term, one category may legitimately push aside the other two. However, you must have the courage to evaluate on a regular basis if the short-term necessity still exists and not procrastinate getting back in balance. Life is a journey—not a destination. Thus, we must consciously avoid using “necessity” as an excuse to work for a lack of investment in family and self. Almost without fail, if you are going to achieve success in life, then you are going to have to work long hours, but not to the point of absolutely ignoring family and self.

One simple tool I use to achieve W•F•S balance is to color-code my calendar with a different color for each type of activity. Work at my headquarters is dark blue,

work on travel is orange, community service is silver, exercise is red, family activities are dark green and so on. With this method, I can quickly glance at my calendar to see my week-by-week or monthly balance.

Visionary

“All dream, but not equally.

Those who dream in the dusty recesses of their mind awake to find that it was vanity.

But the dreamers of day are dangerous, for they may act on their dreams with open eyes to make them possible” (Lawrence et al., 2004).

T.E. Lawrence

Courageous leaders are those visionary dreamers of day—as they dream with their eyes open to make their dreams reality. Within the leadership academic literature, vision is the most frequently cited characteristic of leaders. In practice, being a visionary courageous leader first requires the willingness and ability to think many years into the future and then take actions today and every day to make those visions a reality.

By definition, goals are the broadly generalized statements of your desired future (strong on clarity but short on details) that boldly imagine a new “realm of the possible.” Where do you want to be in 30 years? Are you retired and living in the Caribbean? Are you the CEO of a Fortune 500 company? Are you a philanthropist? There are no right or wrong answers, for each of us gets to envision our own futures.

Don't be intimidated by the blank page if you haven't yet thought much about what you want for dinner tonight, let alone what you want to achieve in your time on earth. But now is the time to start thinking and writing about just that, regardless of your age or

position. Begin to sketch out your visionary goals in broad terms. Don't worry too much about the details as the details will come later.

Ultimately, vision is the characteristic that separates leaders from managers. Managers act on things using highly reliable processes and mostly predictable outcomes—risk for them is often measurable. Leaders, on the other hand, tell visionary stories to people and convince these people to join them on their fanciful voyages to far off distant places.

Acting on vision is the part where courage quickly becomes especially relevant, as you will, probably for the first time, express to someone other than yourself what you are all about. I will never forget the first time I dropped my life's vision on my wife, and I will certainly never forget the look on her face as we sat at lunch, with our new baby beside us. But once shared it was much harder to renege than my vain dreams of night.

Humble

"In my walks, everyone I meet is my superior in some way, in that I learn from them" (Emerson).

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Courageous leaders purposefully develop and sustain a genuine humility within themselves, their teams, and their organizations that truly recognizes the valuable contributions of all with whom they interact. They do in fact learn from everyone they meet because they are humble enough to open their hearts and minds to everyone they meet. This humility is grounded in their recognition that they are the exception, gifted with the seeds of willingness and ability to lead. When leading, these humble leaders execute their responsibilities with empathy, calmness, and grace. They must regularly be willing to be second best, purposefully surrounding

themselves with people more technically, cognitively, and emotionally capable.

Of course, we can all easily recall leaders from history and from our own experiences that do not fit this humble description. The kinds of egotistical, arrogant people who almost everyone dislikes but who, nonetheless, realize outward success due to their achievements. In the definition of courageous leadership, such tyrannical activities are not leadership. Stated in another way, courageous leadership and tyranny are mutually exclusive, as they cannot exist in the same place at the same time. The fine line in the sand between tyranny and leadership comes down to humility.

Powerful

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" (Burke).

Edmund Burke

Under the scientific principal of entropy, left to its own design, the world tends toward disorder. Weeds encroach your yard without proper attention, ships rust without constant chipping and painting, and evil fills any vacuum left void of good. As power is the means through which leaders can enact their vision, courageous leaders must voluntarily create, collect, and use power to control entropy and create value.

Power is defined as the willingness & ability to influence the actions of self, teams, and organizations. It is generally created, collected, and used in seven ways:

- Positional – your position suggests that others should adhere to your intent
- Expertise – you have valuable knowledge, skills, or abilities

- Information – you possess scarce, valuable insights
- Coercive – you can inflict pain, harm, or death
- Reward – you can reward with money, gifts, etc.
- Connection – you can introduce people to other's they want to know
- Referent – others admire your leadership characteristics and want to follow you; referent power is the ideal means through which courageous leaders strive to lead.

Regardless of the type of power, all seven are, by default, assigned to the leader. Members of the team either do or do not respect the hierarchy of the organization, respect your expertise, desire your potential rewards, etc. Establishing a courageous vision requires that you influence others to pursue that vision with you. Given the ideal of referent power, courageous leadership is therefore, voluntary in both directions – as you must be willing to lead, and your team must be willing to follow.

Regarding ability, you must constantly hone your T•C•E alignment to ensure you are using the right power at the right time—always with an eye on maturing to referent power as your primary power. As you examine the types of power, you will notice they span the T•C•E gamut with referent almost entirely within the realm of emotional intelligence.

Bold

“It is not the critic who counts; not the one who points out how the strong... stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the one who is actually in the arena...” (Roosevelt & Thomsen, 2003).

Theodore Roosevelt

Courageous leadership requires that you regularly step out of your comfort zone and take bold action. Not by exception, but as the rule. Of course, you might be criticized for what others will call arrogance. You might be questioned for what others will call haste. But you will be the one boldly striving in the arena, thus your critics' comments will be muted by your successes. Acting boldly is done with informed risk taking. Courageous leaders must be comfortable making bold decisions with informed leaps of faith. With sufficient data gathered, risk adequately understood, and a course of action selected, these decisions are then executed with bold enthusiasm. An okay action plan executed with boldness is infinitely better than a perfect plan that never materializes. Additionally, courageous leaders boldly delegate critical tasks to trusted associates.

You must select goals that frighten you. If your goals are comfortable, then you are not being bold. If your goals are predictable, then you are not being bold. Only when your goals are on the edge of achievability are you exhibiting the boldness that you and your team deserve.

Driven

“The woods are lovely dark and deep;
But I have promises to keep;
And miles to go before I sleep;
And miles to go before I sleep” (Frost, 1969).

Robert Frost

We gain knowledge and wisdom over time and experience, but the synapses are popping at their maximum speed when we emerge from the womb. Of course, some people are born smarter than others as they can solve problems easier, they can memorize better, they can learn languages quicker, and/or their IQs qualify them for Mensa. But that smartness will not provide break-out value unless it is accompanied with a sufficient level of drive.

Drive is what most-often separates the exceptional from the average. Average levels of action will give you, at best, average results. It is logical then to assume that if you want to achieve above-average outcomes, you must contribute above-average inputs. But to achieve break-out outcomes worthy of your life-long commitment to courageous leadership, you must contribute sustained inputs that are consistently multiple times greater than merely the average—you must be driven!

Courageous leaders possess a self-motivated drive that compels them to achieve. Just as the absence of courage is not cowardice, the absence of drive is not a negative, rather, it is normalcy. Normal people do not have trouble sleeping because they are brainstorming the third-level effects of their five-year strategic plan and normal people do not initiate action today in fulfillment of a vision 30 years in the future.

In order to maximize their value contributions, driven leaders must ensure they are dedicating their sustained time and energy to those actions that will create the greatest outputs. Thus, they must continually align their T•C•E intelligence to ensure they are optimizing their opportunity costs.

Charismatic

“There can be no power without mystery. There must always be a “something” which others cannot altogether fathom, which puzzles them, and rivets their attention...” (de Gaulle, 1960).

Charles de Gaulle

The English Oxford dictionary defines charisma as “...a compelling attractiveness that inspires devotion in others...” Teams and organizations want and need courageous charismatic leadership. Throughout time, human beings have painted images on cave walls,

told stories about, and written about such memorable leaders. This kind of “compelling attractiveness” can, and should be, purposefully developed as another significant arrow in your courageous leadership quiver.

Ultimately, charisma is the unspoken recognition of your demonstrated admiration and respect (even love) for the individual members of your teams and organizations. When charisma is seemingly immediate, as is often the case with movie stars and politicians, it is the hope for this admiration and respect the giver projects onto the charismatic recipient. However, when charisma is genuine and sustained over time, it is the fulfillment of that hope through your delivery of admiration and respect as a courageous leader. Over time, as your power shifts from positional to referent, charisma will be central to the admiration and respect your teams and organizations will naturally associate to you and your leadership.

Your challenge is to recognize charisma’s legitimacy, accept the role, and purposefully utilize this charismatic characteristic with the same vigor with which you accept your other courageous leadership responsibilities. You, your teams, and your organizations deserve nothing less.

Unreasonable

“Reasonable people adapt themselves to the world. Unreasonable people attempt to adapt the world to themselves. All progress, therefore, depends on unreasonable people” (Shaw, 1903).

George Bernard Shaw

Often, a principled leader will be considered unreasonable by others. To align T•C•E and balance W•F•S—unreasonable. To live visionary, humble, powerful, bold, driven, and charismatic lives—

unreasonable. Embrace it. Cherish it. For you have chosen, in your pursuit of courageous leadership, to live a life of exception.

David Goggins tells us that the average person becomes exhausted at just 40% of their body's actual capacity (Goggins, 2018). Knowing this, he "unreasonably" expect himself to perform far beyond the *reasonable* levels of exhaustion. Your understanding of this fact presents the possibility of significantly greater performance, if you are simply willing to be regularly unreasonable. Of course, one must be careful, for these levels of performance are unsustainable over time and 100% exhaustion equals death.

Unreasonable courageous leaders recognize that change comes only from doing things differently. The primary component of vision is to identify a different reality at some point in the future and begin its creation. Doing so, by definition, requires you to unreasonably break from currently accepted routines. While being regularly unreasonable, the courageous leader accepts the inherent criticism that comes from coloring outside the lines.

LIFELONG LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step (Tzu).

Lao Tzu

Lao Tzu, recognized as the father of Taoism, correctly captures the requirement to begin a life-long path to mastering courageous leadership. With these courageous characteristics, you can take action starting today to build your own customized house of courageous leadership.

Development Sequence

There is no perfect sequence in which to develop these characteristics, as they are so interwoven and interdependent. However, as courage is the foundation of leadership, I suggest approaching that characteristic first. Your principles are discussed next as they inform who you are and what is important to you. Technical, cognitive, and emotional intelligence are discussed next as they determine where you wish to align along the continuum of knowledge. W•F•S Balance comes next as it identifies how you need to balance your life. Vision is then discussed to identify the goals & objectives you wish to accomplish – both personally and professionally – during the next 30-years of your life. Once drafted, these four pillars are massaged, shaped, and adjusted until they agree and support one another standing solidly upon your foundation of courage and prepared to support each other and the remaining enabling characteristics.

Journaling

As a matter of personal and professional development, courageous leaders should journal daily for somewhere between 15 and 30 minutes. In a quiet setting, this time includes contemplating the day's events and then capturing them in writing. The intent is that in doing so it will become a life-long practice. As you journal, take particular care to capture the emotions, surprises, and new insights you experience and gain.

Semi-Structured Conversations

Semi-structured conversations are a means of gathering information through focused discussions. In addition to regularly holding conversations with yourself in your journal, it is also recommend having these types of conversations with:

- Significant-Others: To ensure the courageous leadership path you are charting is agreeable

with your life-partners, it is suggested that you have conversations at every step of the way with the “significant others” in your life.

- Other Courageous Leaders: As you work through the focus areas, I challenge you to find a courageous leader who exemplifies the characteristic you are working on. Stretch yourself on asking leaders you might not otherwise have the courage to ask. I am confident the leader you ask will be complimented by your request, and eager to help.

Prior to these conversations, you should write out a few semi-structured questions to help guide the dialogue while not overly restricting the potential scope of the discussion.

Mentor Engagements

It is likely that somewhere in your circle of current personal and professional activities, is a leader you admire. Ask that leader to be your mentor for your courageous leadership journey. A mentor can be a valuable confidant along your developmental journey providing insights, information, and recommendations.

Individual Mission Statement (IMS)

An Individual Mission Statement (IMS) is a document that collects and communicates information regarding what you intend to do with your life (i.e., What is your life’s mission?). This document serves as the guiding text upon which you choose to live your life from this point forward. Don’t over-complicate it but also give it the magnitude of attention it deserves. Questions your IMS might include are:

- Who am I?
- What is important to me?
- What do I believe in?

- What are my deepest passions?
- Who do I aspire to be?

The answers to these questions will inform your courageous leadership journey as you define your principles, codify your technical, cognitive and emotional alignment, perform your work, family, and self-balance, and craft your vision. When in doubt about a simple or complex decision, refer to this document and it will inform your decision. Revisit and update your IMS on a regular basis as life happens and your leadership matures.

Individual Development Plan (IDP)

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is the document that tells you what developmental actions are needed in order to achieve your individual mission statement. It is usually phased at appropriate intervals to capture near, mid, and far-term developmental requirements. Likewise, as it transitions fuzzy goals into finite objectives, the IDP contains clear milestones that identify developmental completion points. The IDP is not a complicated document but will clearly define the question of “What’s next?” in your lifelong development. As with your IMS, revisit and update it often as life happens and your leadership matures.

Your Lifelong Journey Begins Here

Leadership Development is necessarily a lifelong journey as Marshall Goldsmith so eloquently points out in his famous book “*What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*” (2007). So, if you desire to get somewhere other than where you are today, start investing time and energy in your own courageous leadership today!

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