

# 7 SECRETS



## to Standing Taller in Your Leadership Role

SPECIAL REPORT

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# SEVENTH SECRETS

**Have you ever noticed how many leaders walk around with stooped shoulders?** Not literally, of course, in most cases... although some of them can't stand up straight because of limiting physical conditions...In this report I'm talking about "stooped shoulders" that result from fear, lack of confidence, fatigue, minimal preparation, underdeveloped skills, overwhelm, job mismatch, poor behavior, mediocre character, ignorance, tunnel vision, burnout, and stagnation. We've all seen examples of these in every environment we've worked. Sometimes we observe this "stooping" posture in the top tier of management; other times in the middle; occasionally in both. No matter where it exists, we SEE it, right? We don't have to be brilliant to perceive, sense, or notice it.

I want to begin by asking YOU what leadership position you hold right now. Are you a business owner, CEO, senior vice president, department head, team leader, or committee chair? It doesn't really matter what you are: everything in this report applies to you. No exceptions. Why do I say that? I say it because each and every leadership role, prestigious or small, is important. Each and every leadership role impacts other people and the organization at large. Whatever role YOU have is like a piece of a complex jigsaw puzzle. Any puzzle is not complete without every individual piece in its proper place—playing its appropriate role to make up the whole. So whatever role you play influences company dynamics and results in ways you often can't imagine.

Where do you see yourself in the list of "stooped shoulders" manifestations? If you're honest, you probably know that you show up in at least a couple of them. My concern is not that you show up in the list but rather what you decide to do about it. Hiding, denying, and coasting are not options for leaders. Your job, first and foremost, is to figure out how you can increase your stature in your role. Exactly what do you have to do to burn brighter? To feel better about your contributions? To stand taller?

The purpose of this report is to provide you with seven secrets to standing taller in leadership, wherever you are in the organization. While these secrets are not the only secrets I could discuss, they are ones I believe can make a huge impact across the board. Think of them as the "biggest bang for the buck" secrets. Even if you choose to focus on one and ignore the rest, you will increase your confidence, function more effectively, attract opportunity, and inspire others to greatness just by implementing that single secret. I can pretty much guarantee it. Let's take a look:

## 1. Model the behavior you desire in others.

I vividly remember a forty year old male CEO who prided himself on running a medium sized professional organization with polished skill, unusual creativity, and keen vision. He wore beautiful, expensive suits to work every day, was perfectly groomed, and exuded significant personal charisma. This man established clear goals and didn't rest until they were achieved. He enjoyed a hard working, seriously dedicated staff. Unquestionably, he moved the organization forward over the course of a decade, and his Board of Directors ate out of the palm of his hand. With that said, you may wonder where the problem lay.

The problem was exclusively behavioral. He screamed, bullied, and threatened his employees behind closed doors. His leadership style wasn't collaborative. It was punitive. That was how he got things done: by scaring his people into doing what HE wanted when HE wanted it. He didn't ask them what they thought should happen. He told them. He didn't finesse; he forced. He didn't respect them as human beings; he used them. This is how I see it many years later. It wasn't pretty.

If you desire thinkers who express ideas freely, staff who feel valued regularly, people who view you as a willing resource consistently, committee members who take action appropriately, then you've got to model behaviors that grow these traits. This type of modeling has to be something you do naturally. All the time. It can't be episodic. It has to be WHO YOU ARE at the core.

Now the logical question for you is this: exactly what are you modeling? What are others observing in you? What do they think of you? How do they feel toward you? You need to find out what they are observing and thinking and feeling. Staying in the dark about it doesn't help you, your people, or your organization. It's risky to find out, though, isn't it? Your ego is at risk. Your reputation is at risk. Your job may be at risk.

But not learning the truth is an even bigger risk. I believe it's always easier to deal with reality than fantasy in the long run. The price for dealing with hard reality is less than the price for continuing your fantasy. Once you know the truth, you can do something about it. Knowing the truth opens the door to growth and development.

How do you find out the truth? There are several strategies you can use. You can ask open ended questions during individual staff meetings or team meetings; you can issue an anonymous survey; you can provide a suggestion box; you can hire a consultant or coach to conduct a 360 degree assessment that focuses on YOU. Any or all of these are viable approaches to uncovering truth. Putting these into practice demonstrates that you care about what people think of you and the way you do business. Trust me: a lot of good will come out of that!



# WE G A N A M

## 2. Manage yourself.

It's tempting to limit this secret to the issue of learning to control your emotions in a variety of situations. While that is part of the dimension of emotional intelligence known as "self management", there is much more to it. Self management demonstrates personal competence in a number of areas. Examples include: ability to direct your behavior positively regardless of the people and circumstances involved; ability to tolerate uncertainty in life; ability to be flexible; and the ability to value larger, more important goals over inconsequential, momentary needs or desires. There is a close connection between self management and good judgment.

Years ago I had a female boss who devoted more hours a day holding private girl talk sessions in her office than she spent working her job. Seriously. This thirty-something departmental manager craved personal conversation, gossip, friendship, and approval. She unequivocally needed to feel loved and accepted by a small band of her direct reports. Further, she needed this "fix" on a daily basis. It was a disaster. As a result of these ongoing tete-a-tetes, everybody else's work got stymied because she hadn't completed her piece of the process. Frowning upon interruptions in her chats with favorite staff, she was rarely accessible as a resource. The primary problem—outside of relationship compromises—lay in the department failing to meet our billing and payment application quotas as dictated by the organization. Clearly, this was an example of someone in a leadership role who could not self govern. Instead, she gave in to her immediate need for socialization at the expense of getting the work done on time. All of us, both individually and collectively, paid a big price. And I couldn't wait to leave. Unfortunately, this woman wasn't terminated for years—not until irreparable damage had been done.

How can YOU improve your own self management capability? You may want to try things like: slowly count to ten; breathe deeply; sleep on a situation before responding; smile and laugh more often; recharge mentally; align your emotional tone and body language; and monitor your self talk. Other ideas include: take time to solve your problems rather than allowing them to fester; visualize success rather than failure; learn lessons from everything that happens; become comfortable with change; and focus on your freedoms instead of your limitations. Perhaps the most important strategy is to do whatever it takes to center yourself on a regular basis. You may want to reserve certain times each day for inspirational reading, meditation, day dreaming, prayer, exercise, yoga. Take responsibility for grounding yourself in something solid.

### 3. Tell memorable stories frequently.

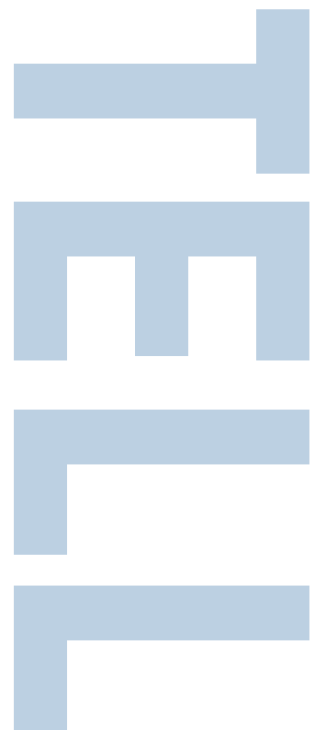
Stories are powerful. In fact, few things in life are as powerful as a good, meaningful story. Think about it. When you listen to a speech or attend a workshop, what do you remember most after the event is over? You probably remember the stories the presenter told. Stories affect us at our deepest level. They cause us to feel and think and ponder and wonder, don't they? They teach us important truths.

They stir our imaginations. They inspire us. Often, they temporarily lift us out of our current circumstances to a place where we can see something "old" with fresh eyes. This is the beauty of stories.

I don't recall many leaders in my life who told stories that stayed with me. However, I do recall a clergyman from childhood who used this strategy very effectively. Story telling was a large part of who he was. Although I don't remember any of the fancy exegesis that accompanied his stories, I certainly do remember lots of the bare bones tales themselves. Sticking with me over decades, I've benefited immensely from the points they relayed. There is power in that.

As a leader, YOU can share stories that influence your staff, colleagues, or committee members. You can use stories to change somebody's behavior, jump-start the flow of new ideas, help people adjust to change, equip them to cope with crisis, and motivate folks to grow. Uncomfortable with this suggestion? Why is that? Maybe it's because you haven't done it in the past. It's not part of your repertoire of leadership strategies. You know, you can change that. Start today. Regard it as an experiment. Identify an occasion where a well told story fits. Then watch the impact upon your listeners. How does your story alter the environment, the dynamics, the work, the results?

*A final piece of advice about the criteria for good stories in the workplace: they have to be simple, direct, brief, and relevant. Follow this formula, and miracles can happen.*



## 4. Talk like a true professional.

Verbal expression includes attributes and characteristics such as word choice, volume, inflection, pitch, clarity, speed, and tone. All of these together help to make us who we are. People think of us in a certain way because of how we speak. They judge our character, our intent, our knowledge, our skill, our general competence, our commitment, our goals, our needs, and our mental/emotional health. The way we talk determines a large portion of our professional image. That's why we can't take this lightly. We must consciously plan how we want to come across to others. Often the way we think others perceive us is not at all how they do. A sobering thought, isn't it?

In my opinion, lots of folks today consider themselves to be professional. Maybe their education, salary, experiences, offices, cars, clothes, and job titles imply they are. But when you hear them talk, you get another impression. These same people curse, swear, holler, whisper, and mumble. They give you instructions you can't understand. They talk in circles. They intimidate you. They interrupt you. They over-use slang. They don't say what they mean. They employ a filler word repeatedly like it's an obsession. They sound false. These communication faux pas indicate something less than professionalism. In some cases, a great deal less.

I once knew a woman who said "ummm" and "you know" so many times a day that I could scarcely listen to her talk anymore. All of her credentials conveyed that she was a professional. Over a period of months I stopped regarding her as professional, and I no longer took her contributions during meetings seriously. I found myself thinking of her as incapable, underdeveloped, and rough-edged. That was my judgment, and I may have been wrong. Nonetheless, I judged her in this way. I honestly believe many others did too. While she was a middle manager, she wasn't going to go any farther. People put a lot of stock into how we talk.

How do YOU talk? To find out, try recording your end of a conversation when you're on the phone. Then play it back afterwards. Most likely, you will be surprised to hear exactly how you sound. With few exceptions, all of us are. We now have proof that we speak too loudly or too softly, we don't finish sentences, we have an off putting high pitch, we rudely butt in, we laugh offensively. The recording doesn't lie. Test your elephant hide before you try this, because you're going to need it. The odds are you aren't going to appreciate how you sound. You're going to say: "Is that really ME?"

Another strategy you can use to learn how you sound to others is to ask them directly. Simply ask. Tell you boss or direct report (or both, ideally) that you sincerely want to know how other people hear you. Ask them to comment on all of the characteristics listed above and give you candid feedback. Make sure you help them feel safe enough to do it with the honesty it requires. You can also ask them to give you suggestions for enhancing your speaking style. And take the time to thank them for whatever they offer.

TALK



## 5. Make decisions with bold confidence.

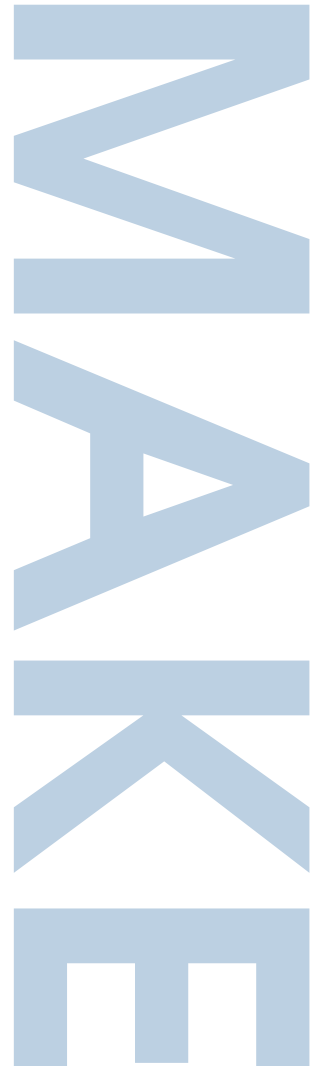
Leaders make decisions every day. It doesn't mean they like to make them, and it doesn't mean they make wise ones. Frequently, leaders make mediocre, hasty, or plain down bad decisions timidly, apologetically, and unwillingly. They do it from a place of fear and weakness rather than a place of confidence and strength. They second guess themselves later. This particular secret to standing taller in a leadership role recommends that leaders make decisions with courage, freedom, and a sense of adventure. Wow! What a novel idea! It's certainly not how most are used to doing it.

Back in the 90s I had a supervisor who was required to make a lot of important decisions for a lot of different reasons in a short period of time. I noticed that she was able to make all of these decisions. I also observed how she did it. She approached the process by gathering as much information as she could, studying the potential impact of one choice over another, obtaining input from her staff, and then implementing the decision. She wasn't always right, but this woman could definitely make a decision. In my opinion, she used a credible process, and she stood firm in her choice. I admired that. The only downside I saw was that, on occasion, she had trouble admitting she was wrong after we watched the fallout of a certain decision.

How do YOU make decisions? Can you make decisions easily? Or do you struggle with them? Do you view yourself as capable of making good decisions? Do you doubt yourself while you're working through it and then again later down the road? Why? Where does this struggle and doubt come from? Think about how you made decisions as a child. Did your parents allow you to choose your clothes for the day? What you ate for meals? What toys and games you played? Which friends to invite to your birthday party? Or did they insist upon making these sorts of decisions for you? Your personal history with decision-making impacts your ability to make decisions today. Absolutely.

As a person in a leadership role, you must learn to make decisions. In a single day you may have to make scores of them: whether or not to confront a colleague, what office supplies to order, which emails to answer before noon, whether or not to interview a fifth job applicant, how to respond to your boss's voice mail request, what time to leave work that afternoon. Make no mistake: every hour is filled with decisions. You have to get comfortable with making them since not making them isn't usually an option. Constantly I am amazed and saddened to hear leaders say they dislike making decisions. I find myself wondering how they can hold leadership positions and be crippled in this way. Actually, it scares me.

The only way you get more comfortable making decisions is by making more of them. Lots of them. Little ones and big ones. Short term and long term. Minor and major impact. Mundane and extraordinary. Daily. Weekly. Monthly. Annually. Just do it. *Trust yourself.*



# GROW

## 6. Grow your staff to their full potential.

In my late thirties I was lucky to land a boss who encouraged me to do great things. Under her leadership and guidance I blossomed like a flower opening its petals in Spring. As a result of this exceptional experience my entire career moved in unexpected directions. I tackled tasks I had never tried. I learned new skills. I offered my opinions. I reached a new level of self confidence. My boss praised me generously and criticized sparingly. Though always real with me, she was gentle. Thus, I felt safe to spread my wings. The environment she cultivated provided fertile soil for healthy growth. Quite frankly, it inspired me. Because this person stood tall, I stood taller than I ever had before. I cannot tell you how happy I was during those years of unique community service.

This type of work environment is rare. Do you know that most employees leave a job because of their boss? It's sad, but true. Bosses drive good people out the door. What a waste of talent when this happens! Bosses are supposed to energize and support people, not drain or discourage them. So how can they inspire the folks they supervise?

While there are an unlimited number of possibilities, here are several strategies that are guaranteed to yield excellent results: desire to exceed expectations; simplify processes and procedures; remove unnecessary obstacles; discover individual learning styles and appeal to them; invite reasonable risk taking; give people permission to find their passions. You can also incorporate motivational language into every form of communication, design a culture of mutual trust, create memorable experiences, and demonstrate genuine belief in each person. Implement even a couple of these suggestions, and you will be astonished at what takes place. No kidding.

You'll witness changes in relationships, shifts in beliefs, improvements in project quality. You'll experience more meaningful, comprehensive conversations, see evidence of greater initiative, benefit from expanded buy-in during times of change, and enjoy the fruits of deeper loyalty. Investing in your people is a win-win-win situation. You win, the employees win, and the entire company wins. Nobody loses in this.



## 7. Manage your relationships in all directions.

The seventh secret to standing taller in your leadership role is managing your relationships above, below, and alongside you. This means caring about the quality of the relationships you have with bosses, Boards, employees, and peers. When you show people that you can successfully manage your relationships, you actually demonstrate social competence. This type of competence includes handling interactions with others appropriately, making lemonade out of lemons occasionally, and building bonds solidly. This isn't always easy.

Remember that stress plays a role. When you are tired, frustrated, ill, or overwhelmed, your ability to manage relationships decreases. Diminished capacity looks like any or all of these: terse responses, inaccessibility, lack of empathy, avoidance, poor manners, or excessive displays of emotion. Can you relate to one or more of them? How do they impact your relationships when you find yourself exhibiting them? How do you feel when you realize that your tears caused a colleague to leave a meeting, your tightly closed office door for two days frightened your staff, or your unusually sharp reply annoyed your supervisor? Here's the reality about human relationships: they can be marred in a moment. Trying to repair them could take months or years. Thus, learning to deal with various sources of stress is a huge investment in your relationships both at work and at home.

The best ways to build, nurture, and secure positive relationships include the following strategies: show genuine interest in others and share information about yourself; communicate with people according to their dominant communication style; acknowledge feelings; observe verbal and nonverbal cues; be courteous. It's also wise to curtail your anger and diffuse anger in others; face challenging conversations head-on; explain your decisions; avoid giving mixed signals when you talk. The bottom line? do whatever it takes to develop mutual trust. You can't go wrong. Perhaps forging trust is the number one thing you can do to stand taller as a leader.





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