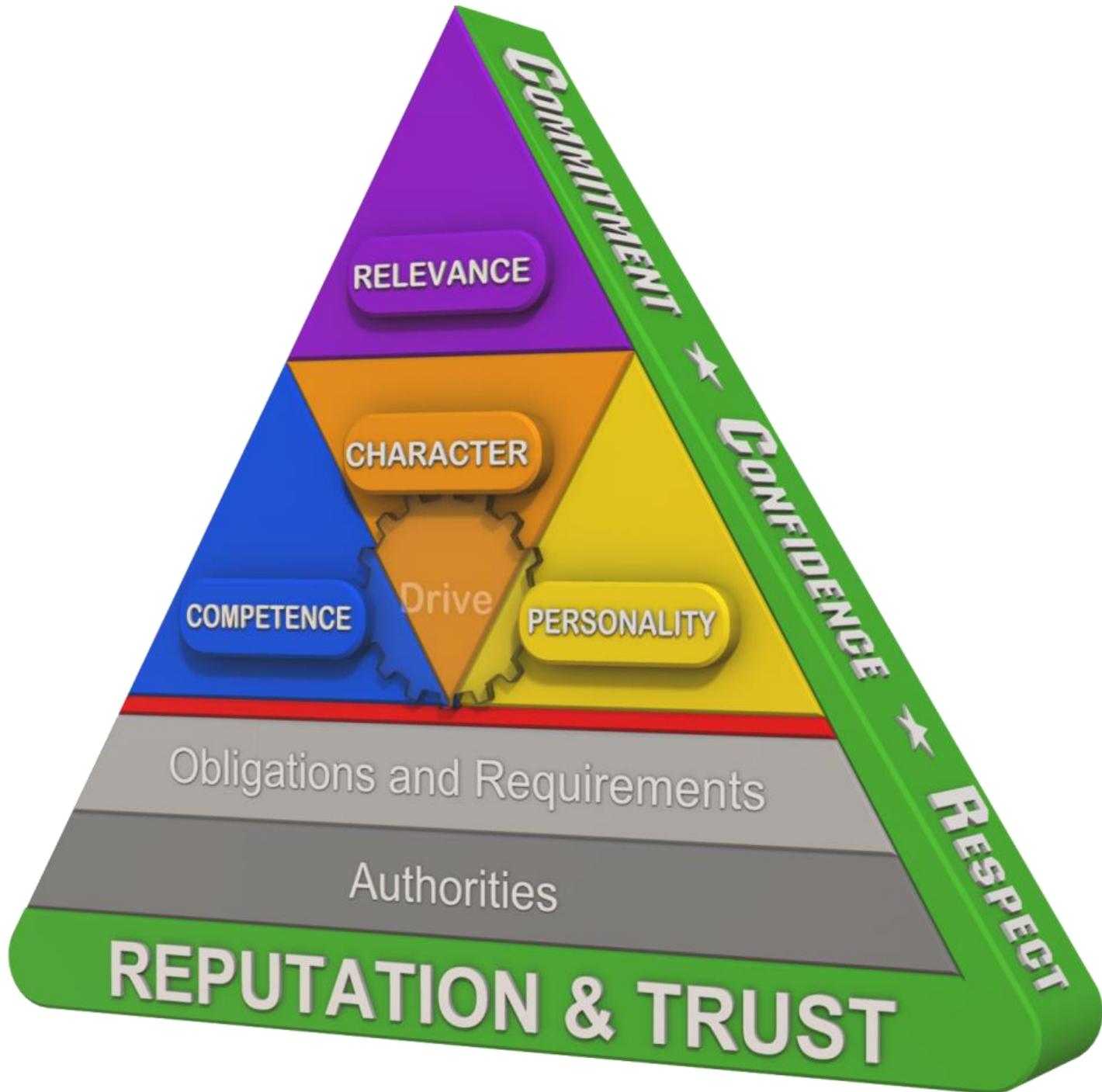


Self-Assessment and Your Right to Lead: A Leadership Primer
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Right to Lead Assessment Model (RLAM) ©Kamena, 2012

“The unexamined life is not worth living.” Socrates¹

Leaders are busy people who spend much of their time investing in others, bettering their organization and ensuring ‘things’ get done to standard - it’s what good leaders do. From time to time, however, leaders, especially busy leaders, need to take a step back and make time to reflect and think deeply about leadership, their own leadership; the process, the results and their connection to other people. To Socrates’ point above, you should make time to think about what you are doing and why you are doing it.

Let’s make this personal. When was the last time you asked yourself, “What gives *me* the right to lead?” Although a straight-forward question on the surface, a meaningful answer is difficult to discern due to personal biases and blind-spots. Although difficult to accomplish, the time and energy spent thinking critically about who you are as a leader is time well spent, because good leaders are also lifelong learners who have the ability to self-correct when needed. Moreover, personal reflection and self-awareness support continued growth and maturity, not only as a leader, but also as a person.

The purpose of this leadership primer is twofold: first, to provide you with a framework for self-reflection, and secondly, to offer a structured approach to self-assessment in the area of leadership. Structure is helpful in the amorphous process of thinking about your own strengths and weaknesses. Enhanced self-assessment, however, is only useful if it leads to improved self-awareness as a leader.

The Model:

The RLAM is an organized way of thinking leadership. This model is read bottom to top, beginning with *Reputation & Trust*, at the bottom most part of the triangle and working up to *Relevance* at the triangle’s apex. Please remember, the intent of this model is merely to facilitate ordered thinking and does not constitute a challenge to you or your leadership. No one is questioning your right to lead. You are already a proven leader in many aspects of your life; but even proven leaders should take time to reflect and think.

Thoughts behind this model:

The RLAM strives to achieve a balance between providing sufficient structure, without imposing restrictive detail. Diverse audiences can use this model: international officers, leaders from all services and all ranks, civilians from differing agencies, as well as doctors, nurses, lawyers...it is flexible enough to allow personalization without losing meaning. The elements comprising the RLAM are designed to be universal in nature, yet meaningful to you. In the end, the RLAM is just a model, one of many available to you. What makes the RLAM unique, however, is that it is crafted to address specific facets military leadership. Hence, don’t fight the model, make it work for you. Please note that the elements contained within the RLAM are italicized from this point forward for the sake of emphasis.

Elements contained in the RLAM:

Reputation & Trust: A leader's personal reputation either reinforces or diminishes the notion of trust.

Reputation: The leader's calling card

When established as a leader, your reputation precedes you in assignments, as well as follows you when you depart an organization. Stoic philosophers argued that one's reputation is outside of one's control.² I disagree; in fact, I posit that it is absolutely in a leader's best interests to safeguard and protect their personal reputation (as well as the reputation of the organization and institution.)

Trust: The strength of the bond between you and those you lead

The author Stephen M. R. Covey posits that we lead at the *Speed of Trust*.³ The element of *trust* is indicated as a green arrow on the bottom and along right side of the RLAM. The concept of *trust* is unique and complex in that it is essential for leadership to exist, difficult to measure, takes time to establish, and is extremely fragile. *Trust* is both a byproduct of leadership and an enabler of leadership. The three levels of *trust* reflected in the RLAM are *respect, confidence and commitment*.

- **Trust and Respect:** A modicum of *trust* must exist before a leader can accomplish even routine business. This modicum or initial kind of *trust* is represented by the green base or foundation of the RLAM. The idea is that if you do well as a leader, *trust* between you and the led will grow as indicated along the right side of the RLAM triangle. *Respect*, the lowest level of trust in the RLAM, is often rendered based on rank, position and institutional credentials, whereas *trust* is more personal. The *trust* you garner is a reflection of who you are as person and leader. The people you lead will show appropriate *respect*, but they do not have to *trust* you.
- **Confidence:** Your followers will listen to what you have to say, but more importantly, they will watch what you do. What you say and what you do should be congruent. Your actions, the decisions that you make, how you interact with people, and your demonstrated *competence*, will determine the amount of *confidence* granted to by those you work with and lead. Remember, you must lead above the "Red Line" (described in detail below) to earn people's *confidence*.
- **Commitment:** If you have a positive impact in the lives of your people, your organization and in the environment, people will *commit* to where you are taking the organization and your efforts. They will "buy-into" your vision.

Authority: What you are allowed to do

Your *authority* as a military leader flows from the constitution, the congress, and powers vested in you by the President, as Commander-in-Chief. These powers allow you to accomplish specific missions, and to maintain good order and discipline. Constitutional and legislative authorities, such as Title 10 of the U.S. Code, codify, in greater detail, what you are allowed to do, as well as what you are prohibited or restricted from doing. Moreover, the lineage of your *authority* is as old as the republic itself. Always be aware of the limits of your *authority* and strive to never abuse the power vested in you by our nation and your superiors.

Authority, based on rank, position and duty is always present. However, good leaders also generate their own *authority*. This personal brand of *authority* emanates from the type of person that you are and has nothing to do with rank, position or title. It is the most influential authority available to a leader.

Obligations and Requirements: What you must do

Leaders incur *obligations* and assume responsibility for *requirements* in a variety of ways. Although easily conflated, *obligations and requirements* are not necessarily the same thing.

Military leaders first incur a personal obligation after taking the oath of office and accepting the terms of a commission. Leaders accept obligations knowingly and freely, binding them to a higher purpose; whereas requirements are imposed. Requirements may be varied, onerous, routine, but never optional. Regulations, operating instructions, policies, orders, and job descriptions are a few examples of requirements.

The Red-Line: Remain safely below it, or make a difference above it.

The *red-line* separating the *obligations and requirements* block from the upper part of the RLAM is a notional point of commitment. It is also something of a risk indicator. Leading 'below the line' is safe, one does what is required, but little more. Leaders, who lead 'above the line,' however, are more exposed to observation and criticism. They expend the effort required, regardless of risk or discomfort, to succeed and accomplish the mission. When you lead above the line you assume more personal risk, because you allow others to assess your *competence, personality and character*. Leading above the line is required, however, if you are to make and keep your organization relevant. Successful leaders spend most, if not all, of their time above the *red-line*.

Drive: Why you do what you do

What motives you to lead and serve? Your followers may guess at your motivations, but only you know (if you are honest with yourself) why you take on the responsibilities of leadership. The element of *drive* is represented by a semi-transparent gear sprocket. The notion behind this is that true motivation is difficult to observe and assess though

many will try. When thinking about motivation, begin by asking yourself this question, "who do I serve and why?"

Competence: What you are capable of doing

At first glance, the topic of a leader's *competence* seems straight forward. Upon deeper examination, however, it is not easy to state with certitude what comprises a leader's *competence*. People tend to have their own ideas and perspective as to what *competence* is and what it looks like. The words "*competence*" and "competency" are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference.

Think of "*competence*" as the actual state (level) of skills and abilities that you currently possess, whereas "competency" includes the specific skills and abilities required by a particular job or position.⁴ In other words, *competence* is the current state of your ability, what you are able to do; competency is what is demanded of you by a position, duty, or situation. When the skills required (competency) are greater than your present abilities or skills (*competence*), you must either develop the required skills or risk failure. It is not wrong to be in a position where the competency required is greater than your current abilities; this is the very essence of being "stretched" as a leader in order to grow and develop.

Character: What you will do

Character is significant to any leadership discussion. Numerous definitions exist for the notion of a person's *character*; some stress a psychological perspective, others lean heavily on moral or legal considerations. It might be helpful to think of *character* as a balance sheet, one that takes into account the positive and negative aspects of who you are as a person and a leader. Since everyone has *character*, the balance sheet analogy is apropos. People either possess overall positive (good) or negative (poor) character. Remember, no one is perfect. One definition that rings true, at least for me, is one from the United States Air Force Academy as stated in a 1996 (summer) article in *Airpower Journal* by Major Brian Hall and Colonel David Wagie; these authors defined *character* as:

"...the sum of those qualities of moral excellence that stimulates a person [leader] to do the right thing, which is manifested through right and proper actions despite internal or external pressures to the contrary."⁵

Your *character*, to a large extent, is determined by your decisions, choices, and actions. Maintaining strong character requires work, commitment and sometimes sacrifices.

Personality: How you do what you do

Your *personality* is developed and defined by your DNA, environment, and experiences. “*Personality* is a leader’s delivery system.”⁶ *Personality* is also the filter through which all talent, qualities, and skills pass when delivered. *Personality* for the purpose of this primer can also be thought of as emotional maturity or emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman, who pioneered the term “emotional maturity,” attributed four competencies⁷ (Goleman’s Framework) to a balanced and mature *personality*:

- Self-awareness: the extent to which a leader has a realistic understanding of their own being.
- Self-management: the ability to control one’s emotions and actions.
- Social-awareness: the level at which a leader understands the value of relationships and other people.
- Relationship-management: the ability to establish a meaningful connection and bond to others.⁸

Your *personality* goes a long way in determining who are as a leader. If you have a toxic *personality*, or a poor delivery system, you will find that it adversely affects how your *competence*, *character*, and other positive qualities are considered by others, thus reducing your overall effectiveness. Leadership is the business of people; your *personality* matters a lot.

Relevance: The difference that you make

Relevance resides at the apex of the RLAM. A leader’s *relevance* is directly proportional to the cumulative effect of all the other elements in the model: trust and reputation, *authorities*, *obligations and requirements*, *competence*, *character*, and *personality*. *Relevance* is both an outcome and an act, the act of being relevant.

Relevance occurs when all the elements of the RLAM are brought to bear in a manner appropriate to the environment, organization and people. The paragraphs below relate how the concept of *relevance* applies to each of these areas:

- Environmental-*relevance*: Environmental *relevance* is more encompassing than organizational *relevance*; good leaders have areas of interest that are larger than just the organization to which they belong. For instance, they not only understand the needs of their boss, but also the needs of their boss’s boss, as well as, the needs of their peers. To be relevant you must possess the ability to build bridges, represent your organization, and operate within the interest of adjacent, higher, and lower organizations.
- Organizational-*relevance*: Every unit, business, or organization has a personality, temperament, and culture. You are *relevant* when you understand the organization, meet the needs of the organization and the needs of your people; or, when required, intentionally change the organization's structure and

culture. Some leaders, unfortunately, are overly rigid in their approach, thinking that the organization must adapt to their needs, when in fact, give-and-take is usually the best approach. If you are not able to fit within the culture of the organization, or do not meet the needs of the organization, you risk becoming irrelevant as a leader.

- *People-relevance*: Good leaders have a positive impact in the lives of people. To be relevant, you must care for, encourage, coach, guide, develop, and mentor: followers, peers, and sometimes even your boss.

Applying the model:

Every element in the RLAM is important. Initially, you might want to assess each element independently. However, in the end, the RLAM must be considered holistically. Although read from the bottom up, when considering areas for self-improvement begin with *Relevance*. Here is an approach:

- What makes you a *relevant* leader in your area of expertise or field of endeavor?
- What *drives* you to be *relevant* in the lives of those you lead?
- List the skills, traits and attributes needed to be *relevant*. Ensure you consider the elements of *competence, character and personality*.
- Consider how you might build and maintain *trust* between yourself, peers, subordinates and your bosses.
- Determine the any areas or elements of the RLAM might require additional work or strengthening.
- Make a plan to do so.

Summary:

The RLAM and this primer provide a framework to help you answer the question “what gives *me* the right to lead?” Self-assessment, however, is only useful if it leads to self-improvement. Please remember that your right to lead is earned daily, one person at a time.

¹ Plato, The Apology,

² Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*. Epictetus was a stoic philosopher who lived 55-135 AD

³ Stephen M. R. Covey, *Leading at the Speed of Trust*, Free Press, 2008.

⁴ The Social, Return Company, (Minner.org Ltd), "Competence vs. Competency,"

<http://www.minney.org/competence-vs-competency>, accessed on 2 June.

⁵ Hall and Wagie, "The US Air Force Academy's Cutting-Edge Character Development Program," *Air Power Journal*, Summer, 1966. PP 35-39.

⁶ Gene Kamena, Prof, USA (Retired)

⁷ Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston MA, 2002.

⁸ *Ibid*, Appendix B