



From Technical Expert to Corporate Executive

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Emerging Leadership
Competencies

...the most
rewarding
journey
of your career

Why the skills that got you here may not drive success in your new role

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So you've been given the keys to corporate management. Congratulations. Now, you must prepare for what may become the most rewarding journey of your career.

Congratulations are in order because others have seen the application and impact of your technical expertise. You've earned their trust and confidence, and their recognition of your hard work and special abilities has inspired them to imagine how you might excel in a broader leadership role.

Now it's your turn to visualize what you're capable of doing, and to make the commitment to acquire new skills, build on your education, and leverage your technical experience to deliver the results that will affirm their confidence in you.

But now more than ever before, preparation is the key to thoughtful, game-changing management. That's because the demands of leadership – and the pressure that comes with it – have never been higher. Organizations increasingly expect more of their leaders, for reasons both in and out of their control, from a new regulatory environment, to mounting foreign competition, to evolving marketplace demands. No matter what the challenge, the stakes will be high for shareholders, employees, and your career.

That's true no matter what route your career has taken you on to your new executive-level job. Whether your ascendancy to this top job was something you've aspired to for years, or whether circumstances beyond your control have simply delivered the demands of leadership to your front door, it's important to understand that other people within the organization are watching and waiting to see how you'll lead them. From the words you speak to the tacit capabilities you bring, you're about to change the footprint of the organization.

Whether you're leading a new business unit or an entire organization, your every move is now symbolic; your decisions strategic; and your example paramount in setting a new tone for those who will follow you, and in so doing, challenge themselves much in the same way your new leadership role will put you to the test.

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You'll need to bring an open mind and broad, strategic thinking to bear now that you find yourself in a top management role with enterprise-wide responsibilities after having worked as an engineer or architect for most of your career. And it's important to understand that the skills that got you to this point in your career may not be the same ones that will drive success in your new job. Your performance will be closely tied to your ability to recognize and manage risk, to deliver services and solutions on a global scale, and other challenges you may not have faced to this point in your career.

While much of your professional career to this point has been "technical" in nature, your new leadership position will undoubtedly be more "social," perhaps even more political, and this will require a flexibility and emotional connectivity to the business issues of the day that aren't usually prerequisites for a demanding technical role in the organization.

The technical skills that helped build your career may not be of much help to you now, but your mastery of them should give you the self-confidence to acquire new, non-technical skills, so long as you understand that acquiring those new skills and deciding to learn new things every day requires a conscious decision to do just that.

If there's anything that we have learned from our many years of recruiting executive talent in the engineering disciplines, it's that, no matter how they got there, great leaders make a constant, conscious decision to learn what they can from others and adapt to the challenges and opportunities that business presents them with every day.

To this point, we're reminded of an advertisement we saw recently on a billboard as we hustled from one plane to another at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport: *"Success is the sum of the confident decisions you make."*

We believe a person's passion drives their career choice and will eventually determine the force of their effort to achieve the professional goals they set for themselves and their organizations. We believe that hard work, an open mind, the ability to inspire the best in others, and the commitment to learn from our failings are especially important leadership attributes and ones that will determine a leader's feeling of self-fulfillment. We at Avery James believe the choice and ability to bring these competencies together to make sound business decisions is a hallmark of a great leader.

So how do we identify outstanding leadership talent? While some retired CEOs and academics debate whether great leaders are made or born, we spend every day carefully assessing the organizational needs of our client employers, building a network of world-class talent within the engineering disciplines, and looking for people who have the right combination of experience, education, and skills that can make a difference at the executive level.

We align potential leadership candidates with our own experience and perspective as your organization's external leadership consultants, and we believe the leaders of today and tomorrow are already embracing some of these emerging leadership competencies:

Leading with Emotional Intelligence

While a high IQ, or Intelligence Quotient, has long been a prerequisite for senior technical jobs within the engineering discipline, today's broader executive leadership positions require a high degree of Emotional Intelligence, or an understanding of how your decisions as a leader will impact other people's behavior, and by extension, the entire organization. Emotionally intelligent leaders aren't threatened by others' leadership competencies. Rather, they understand that success comes from surrounding themselves with smart people and they're comfortable enough to recognize their own strengths and weaknesses. Emotionally intelligent leaders also know they must lead by example, and they have to find ways to motivate, to reward and reinforce organizational behaviors that drive positive performance outcomes, and also to move others to change disruptive behaviors and/or those that don't drive the expected results.

Respecting and Building Diversity in the Workplace

At a time when many organizations' customer bases are becoming more global in scale, their workforces are becoming increasingly diverse. The new face of the organization is actually made up of many faces, requiring (and drawing informed insight and perspective) from a broad range of individuals who bring myriad talents, languages, educations, and professional experiences to your organization. We believe the best leaders are those who understand the value of diversity in the workplace and who have both the sensibility and sensitivity to build organizations that better reflect their customer base to better serve an increasingly expanding marketplace.

Knowing that Talent Drives Competitive Advantage

The competition can copy our strategy, and they can borrow our technology, but they simply can't copy our people. At Avery James, we've come to learn that human capital drives competitive advantage. We know the impact one great leader can have on an organization. And the most outstanding organizations have come to realize that their ability to deliver results for shareholders is tied inexorably to their ability to attract, recruit, develop and retain individuals who continually push themselves to excel and thrive in an environment where teamwork and talent continually set the stage for success.

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