

Gallup is Wrong, and You Should be Happy

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Gallup is a very smart organization and they do many things well. They also provide great services to organizations and those that lead them, especially in understanding the problem, challenges and solution to employee engagement.

But their findings in some recently reported research could potentially be a major disservice to those same leaders.

Here's my point: you shouldn't be happy that Gallup is wrong, only be aware that the point they are making is very incomplete.

Some of their research, as reported on the Harvard Business Review Blog in a post titled *Why Good Managers are So Rare* (link to the [full article here](#)) states that great managers have these talents:

- They motivate every single employee to take action and engage them with a compelling mission and vision.
- They have the assertiveness to drive outcomes and the ability to overcome adversity and resistance.
- They create a culture of clear accountability.
- They build relationships that create trust, open dialogue, and full transparency.
- They make decisions that are based on productivity, not politics.

There is nothing inherently wrong with this list (though I would say they are leadership skills more than management ones – which is a whole different, but important article).

The article continues:

Gallup's research reveals that about one in ten people possess all these necessary traits. While many people are endowed with some of them, few have the unique combination of talent needed to help a team achieve excellence in a way that significantly improves a company's performance. These 10%, when put in manager roles, naturally engage team members and customers, retain top performers, and sustain a culture of high productivity. Combined, they contribute about 48% higher profit to their companies than average managers.

Again, I have no real reason (and certainly no empirical data) to dispute these findings – this rigor is part of what makes Gallup so good at what they do. And I do agree that natural gifts or strengths are important and real.

It is what comes next where we disagree.

It's important to note that another two in 10 exhibit some characteristics of basic managerial talent and can function at a high level if their company invests in coaching and developmental plans for them.

Really?

Coaching and development plans can only help another 20% deliver on the five skills they have listed? I guess that means that 70% of people don't have what it takes to be an effective manager/leader. (Boy, I hope I am in the 30%!)

There is a difference between *can* and *could*.

The items in the bullet list above are all skills – which means that *they can be learned*. Do all leaders/managers exhibit them? Of course not – in this way Gallup is right and their ongoing research on employee engagement continues to prove we have a long way to go.

There was a time you couldn't walk, read these words, or drive a car. But now, you can do all of them. They are skills and were learned. Is the skill of “[having] the assertiveness to drive outcomes and the ability to overcome adversity and resistance” something that is a strength or comes easier to some people?

Of course.

Does that mean others can't learn it?

Of course not.

To be clear – the list of manager talents listed above are skills (as are the hundred other great lists of leadership attributes you could find in a google search or research), and skills can be learned.

I know, in the whole population there will always be people who won't learn what they could – that will choose, consciously or not, to not devote themselves to learning what would help them be more successful, more productive, happier and healthier.

There is also a difference between *could* and *will*. But just because some won't doesn't mean they couldn't. ([Tweet that.](#))

Gallup got a lot right here – there are important skills (a few have them as a part of their strength set), and developing them will be easier for some than others (based on their strength mix), and not

everyone will develop them. Knowing this can even be helpful in hiring. If you have someone with the natural strengths, hiring them makes sense.

But those abilities are not preset by nature, nurture or DNA.

The potential disservice in their assumption is that if we look for those that “have it” and ignore the rest, we have created a self-fulfilling prophecy – and we will always have few who can be successful leaders.

In the big picture there will always be many who won't; that doesn't mean any individual (including you or those you want to see successful as managers/leaders) can't – given desire, opportunity and support.