



The Operational Leader

by John C. Maxwell

In a previous edition of *Leadership Wired*, we talked about the four main types of successful leaders and the difficulties we face in surrounding ourselves with those who don't share our dominant aptitudes for leadership. In this edition, I want to talk specifically about one of those leadership aptitudes - the operational leader.

I'll help you determine if you are an operational leader. If so, I'll help you play to that strength. If you aren't - if you are more inclined to be a directional leader, a strategic leader or a team-building leader - then this lesson will help you identify one of the greatest needs you have: an operational leader.

We can identify operational leaders by six characteristics:

- 1. They provide stability to the organization.**
- 2. They devise systems to make things run smoothly.** They have a system for every problem in life.
- 3. They serve as a hub through which activity is coordinated.** Just like Atlanta is the hub for the airline industry in the Southeast, operational leaders are the hub of an organization. People turn to operational leaders because they truly know what is happening.
- 4. They share the bad news.** Generally, these leaders aren't paid to bring performance level up, so they often aren't responsible for the bad news. They are, however, aware of it because they are in tune with the organization.
- 5. They create new solutions to old problems.** Operational leaders are the best problem solvers. If you've got problems, you want to have one of these people around you.
- 6. They often complement the other three aptitudes.** This is the person who usually is not the true "out-front" person, but often shows strengths as a servant leader and, therefore, best complements the other three by far.

Operational leaders are essential to the success of an organization, but, like the other three leadership aptitudes, they have their weaknesses. And rather than trying to work on developing other aptitudes of leadership, their time is better focused on shoring up their weaknesses as operational leaders.



Operational leaders, for example, easily slip from leader to manager because they are usually more comfortable managing. They also tend to dislike conflict. They're usually very smart - they know the numbers, they know the realities, they know what needs to be done - but they often avoid getting in the middle of conflict.

Because operational leaders are focused on the details, they often fail to see the big picture and they sometimes lack motivational skills. And because they understand the negative realities, they can be viewed as a hindrance to progress. When the company's moving forward and everybody's seeing the mountain, the operational leader is the person who raises the flag.

Finally, the operational leader usually has the *least* amount of influence with the other three aptitudes.

In fact, if you're one of the other three, the first person you should seek to be on your leadership team is an operational leader because to a great degree, operational leaders support and serve the other three leadership aptitudes.

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