



# In a nutshell...

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The wisdom of leadership, Mike Clayton, Training Journal, March 2013. pp18-22.

## Seven pillars of leadership wisdom

Can you learn leadership? And what is wisdom? These are teasing questions for many of us so an article looking at both wisdom and leadership is almost irresistible. Mike Clayton says leaders need to be smart – they need to know how things work and how to get things done. They need to motivate their team, turn their vision into plans, create a shared sense of direction and understand the importance of communication.

But that's not enough. Leaders also need to understand the real world, in all its complexity and develop qualities that people will look up to. This is where wisdom comes in.

But if you think wisdom accumulates simply with the passing of years, the author disagrees. Borrowing from the title of the book by T.E. Lawrence, he identifies seven 'pillars of wisdom' which learning and coaching professionals can use as a framework to help guide learners, or individuals can use on a DIY basis:

1. *self-mastery* can be acquired by looking for opportunities to gain feedback from others, in order to uncover aspects of your personality that you are blind to
2. developing *perception*, or the ability to see below the surface, requires keen observation of detail and understanding of how people work, so as to read situations more accurately
3. constantly *growing* your understanding of the world through contemplation and reflection results from feeling a powerful drive to find new and better ways of interpreting events
4. personal *conduct*, and an evident ability to deliver, set an example to others, as do ethical and spiritual values such as generosity, tolerance, compassion and selflessness
5. *judgement* requires a profound sense of purpose and commitment to address priorities; critical thinking needs scepticism, rigour and courage
6. *fairness* is based on respect, and requires the ability to manage your own emotional responses and those of others
7. *authority* means influential communication, when the less we say the more impact we have.

But the article focuses on wisdom in the specific context of leadership and here the author plumps for authenticity as the key: as Polonius says in Hamlet, 'This above all: to thine own self be true'. While accepting this, some readers may feel that it is the hardest advice of all to follow, not least since it needs to be underpinned by most of the author's 'seven pillars'!

Although the advice in this article offers a useful checklist for monitoring the development of wisdom, it will probably take most of us the best part of a lifetime to feel we are getting anywhere near achieving the kind of results we would like.

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**Mike Emmott**  
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Mike's special fields of interest are employee relations and employment law. Central to his work is the way in which economic and social changes are affecting employee attitudes and working practices. Recent work has focused on employee voice, global employment relations, industrial relations skills and HR in the public sector.

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