Without a doubt, leaders need to be smart. They need to juggle different aspects of their leadership roles while retaining currency in their areas of technical expertise. They need to have answers – or be able to get them – and they need to motivate and direct the teams who follow them.

Not surprisingly, the study of leadership has become one of the biggest interest areas among academics, business people, public servants and trainers, with new ideas emerging every few years.

New approaches are needed to handle changing pressures in life:
- the constantly accelerating pace of change driven by the growth of new technologies and, more important, the applications they are finding
- new ways of working in all spheres of life from military to civilian, the social to the commercial, and from the sole practitioners to multi-nationals
- the wider contexts in which everyone now has to operate, which are moving towards becoming global for everybody
- the growing pressure for sustainability in everything we do and in all senses of the word

Mike Clayton explains why simply being smart as a leader is no longer enough
Wisdom lies in the ability to discern how a visionary insight can become a reality

Defining terms: what do we mean by a smart leader?
Smart leaders know how things work and how to get things done with the resources at their disposal. They have learned the rules - written and unwritten - and they know how to apply them. Sometimes, they know how to break them too. But what if the rules don't apply? What if you don't know them? What if there are no rules at all? Leading in that environment takes more: it takes wisdom.

The rules smart leaders follow have been covered in vast libraries of books, journals, training courses and blog posts. My own contribution is to highlight what I consider the 'four essentials' of good leadership:

- **individuals** A team is made up of individuals and a smart leader knows how to get the best from each one, by coming to respect them all for what they can contribute, by stretching and developing them, and by recognising their contributions. Smart leaders learn what buttons to push to win greater motivation and commitment and when to stop pushing. Smart leaders have learned that the power of the team that follows them is in its diversity and they know how to harness that power to achieve their goals.

- **plans** Leaders need to generate everything from their big vision, through a clear strategy, to working with their teams to ensure every last detail of the plan is ready and available to those who need them. Plans give confidence and assurance, yet a smart leader also knows that they quickly become out of date unless he and his team remain alert to changes and are flexible in their approach.

- **teams** Creating a common sense of direction for the team is something smart leaders work hard on – whether it is a handful of individuals or the staff of a multi-national corporation. They know when to generate creative tensions and when to unify with clear imperatives, and they can deploy numerous methods for building a cohesive, collaborative team spirit.

- **communication** All smart leaders place a lot of weight on the importance of communication. They find out what works best in their context, and they work hard to hone their skills and create processes and a culture that enable everyone to communicate among them. The exception to this, of course, is repressive leaders. I leave it to you to assess how smart they are being!

Smart styles
Another aspect of smart leadership is the ability to select the right leadership approach for a situation. Smart leaders may focus on a visionary style or a democratic style. They may exercise a high degree of control or grant a big chunk of autonomy. They may step forward and become conspicuous or choose a less charismatic style of behind-the-scenes leadership. They may be supportive or directive or merely facilitative.

Defining terms: what do we mean by a wise leader?
Wisdom requires the experience to understand the real world in all of its breadth and complexity – rather than the narrower context in which you grew smart. A wise leader must develop a whole array of sustainable qualities that people will look up to. We regard these qualities, cumulatively, as components of a wisdom that we want to have access to and follow.

In my book *Smart to Wise*, I identified seven pillars on which wisdom rests. These define, rather nicely, what it means to be a wise leader. If you can develop yourself in these seven areas, they will support increasing perceptions of you as wise.

They also set out the syllabus for a learning journey that we can all go on to develop wisdom in ourselves. *Smart to Wise* does not set out to tell you what is wise, merely the places to look. Learning and coaching professionals can use the framework to help guide learners, and individuals...
can use it as a basis for developing their own route to greater wisdom. In this article, I will contextualise the seven pillars for wisdom in the leadership domain. For each, I will suggest one route to developing wisdom, from among many.

**Self-mastery**
Self-mastery will always be an important aspect of wisdom and of leadership. When you can master your psychological, emotional and physical selves, it will manifest itself in enhanced levels of confidence, resilience and health. This will give you the resources to handle set-backs and challenges, and to make effective choices in how you respond to charged situations. It will also model to others the importance of looking after themselves.

It is impossible to develop self-mastery without a clear sense of how you come across to other people. Look for opportunities to gain feedback – informal or structured – from the people around you to uncover some of the aspects of your personality that you are blind to. Use this knowledge as the basis for further development.

**Perception**
Developing your ability to see past the surface layers of a situation is vital for effective leadership. It takes keen observation of details and, since leaders focus a lot of their attention on people, a keen understanding of how we work. Deep psychological insights into yourself and the people around you will enable you to read situations more accurately. This will enhance your perception of the wider context and of the deeper details, and therefore give you a better understanding of what is important and what things are secondary or peripheral.

Whatever you are considering, get into the habit of examining it from a series of different perspectives before you try to make an assessment. Think telescope and microscope, human and rational, change and constancy, for example. Use these different perspectives to build a more thorough understanding of a situation, rather than rushing towards judgment.

**Evolution**
Leaders can never remain static and one thing that characterises every individual widely regarded as wise is the way they constantly grow and develop their thinking and understanding of the world. As a leader, you must commit to this in yourself, and also facilitate it in your team. Wise leaders feel a powerful drive to find new and better ways to understand their world and interpret events, and make changes to create new ways of doing things.

Contemplation and reflection are powerful ways to trigger personal growth. Taking time to do nothing else frees your mind of its routine busyness and so gives you access to lessons, understanding and insights that have been developing quietly in the background processing of your unconscious mind. This mirrors the way we feel at our most creative on quiet walks, in the shower or at other ‘non-productive’ times. The
creativity you are seeking here is the integration of new experiences into an evolved world-view.

**Conduct**
Exemplary conduct must, of course be a given for a leader – although the source of the standards against which “exemplary” is measured will differ from context to context and culture to culture.

A leader is also required to be visionary, but is this enough? Wisdom lies in the ability to discern how a visionary insight can become a reality.

We follow people when we believe that they can deliver their vision – what the ancient Greeks called “phronesis”, or practical wisdom.

Exemplary leadership sets an example that others want to follow – inspiring by doing. Wise leaders know the importance of creating a succession of new leaders who can emulate, rise and then evolve in their own way, because they understand the criticality of building sustainable leadership.

Practising generosity is viewed as a route to righteousness and wisdom in many of the world’s traditions. It does not just mean giving material support, but also personal support in terms of time and commitment. Perhaps the most powerful form of generosity for a leader to cultivate is spiritual generosity: the virtues of tolerance, compassion, mercy, forgiveness and selflessness. Those who are smart know how to look after themselves and, for those who are merely smart, this is often their first and only priority. Putting yourself to one side opens up the greater objectivity of wisdom.

**Judgment**
Wise decisions need to be informed by a profound sense of purpose and a commitment to addressing priorities. Wise leaders must be prepared to abandon past dogmas and engage in an open decision-making process, which is inquiry-led rather than advocacy-led. This takes time; good judgment includes the art of patience and the insight to know when the time is right.

Reasoning well is an essential pre-requisite of good judgment, yet critical thinking is rarely taught. Adopting three values and then practising them will set you up for good judgment:

- **scepticism** – a close ally of perception – is the willingness to question everything with a mind open to surprise
- **rigour** is the ability to assess all of the evidence on its merits and eschew familiar but dangerous shortcuts in the reasoning process
- **courage**, a preparedness to stand by your conclusions no matter how uncomfortable – and also to change them quickly in the light of new evidence, regardless of a perceived loss of face.

**Fairness**
It is not enough to make wise judgments. How we implement them matters equally. Equity and fairness arise from respect and wise leaders show that respect. If leadership does not have an ethical or moral dimension, it can certainly produce smart outcomes but can it ever be truly sustainable – let alone wise?

“Parrhesia” is the concept, from ancient Greece, of speaking without fear. Leadership roles will often require this kind of courage, especially when presenting uncomfortable truths to people with more power or authority than you. However, the courage is not principally about diving in as much as facing up to the need to manage your emotional responses and to deal with theirs. Preparation is key, so leaders need to practise delivering difficult messages with equanimity.

**Authority**
Authority has a special place in the wisdom of leadership, as we will see shortly. Wise leaders create authority through engaging effectively with their supporters, their doubters and the neutrals alike, to create the perception in all of them that they have a right to lead. This needs to be especially true when the doubters remain unconvinced that the leader is right. I do not always have to believe you are right to perceive you as wise.

We communicate influentially when the impact of what we say increases in line with how much we communicate. When we bore people, the more we say; the less impact it has. Wisdom allows us to have significantly greater impact with every small increase in what we communicate. Paradoxically, the wisest among us find that the less we say, the more impact we have. Silence can be a powerful influencer! Practise saying only what is really important: leave the rest for others to speak.

**Wisdom and authenticity**
One of the most fruitful areas of research and discussion in the leadership arena over the last few years has been authenticity – the idea that leaders must, first of all, be true to themselves. It is hardly a new idea: Shakespeare got there first in *Hamlet*, →
Think telescope and microscope, human and rational, change and constancy

when Polonius says: “This above all: to thine own self be true.” Fiona Beddoes-Jones covered the topic of authentic leadership very well in this magazine. She, too, used the metaphor of pillars, so let’s see how the seven pillars of wisdom map onto authentic leadership.

Authenticity has two components: personal authenticity and moral authenticity. Personal authenticity is allowing you to be yourself. The focus is on who you are and understanding your place in the world. Moral authenticity, on the other hand, is about the choices you make and how you act upon them. In terms of the seven pillars:

personal authenticity = self-mastery + perception + evolution
moral authenticity = judgment + fairness + conduct

The coming leadership challenges
In whatever domain you operate, the coming challenges will make leadership more difficult and complex. The model of leadership you adopt will become less and less the principal determining factor of your success.

To help society and organisations face their challenges, we are increasingly going to rely on wiser leaders: people who are better able to understand themselves and the situation, people who are constantly evolving their skills and insights, and people whose conduct is exemplary and whose judgment is sound. People who can be fair and who can bring people with them: supporters or not.

How do your leaders, locally, institutionally and nationally, shape up to these challenges? How do you? TJ
**Smart to Wise** is the eighth book by Mike Clayton.

It was published in June 2012 and is available from all booksellers, including [Amazon](http://www.amazon.com).

There are regular articles and ideas about wisdom at the Smart to Wise website: [www.smarttowise.co.uk](http://www.smarttowise.co.uk) and you can get regular wisdom tweets [@smart2wise](http://twitter.com/smart2wise).

**Mike’s Other Books are:**

- The Yes/No Book
- Brilliant Time Management
- Brilliant Influence
- Brilliant Project Leader
- Brilliant Stress Management
- Risk Happens!
- The Management Models Pocketbook
- The Handling Resistance Pocketbook

All of these books are available from [The Wisdom Bookshop](http://www.thewisdombookshop.com).