

# Critical Leadership Attributes

**A Review of Leadership Attributes and Skills for the Retail  
Industry 2010 and Beyond**

**White Paper**

**By Derek C Stamoulis**  
Leadership Learning Dynamics  
**& Service Skills SA**

October 2010

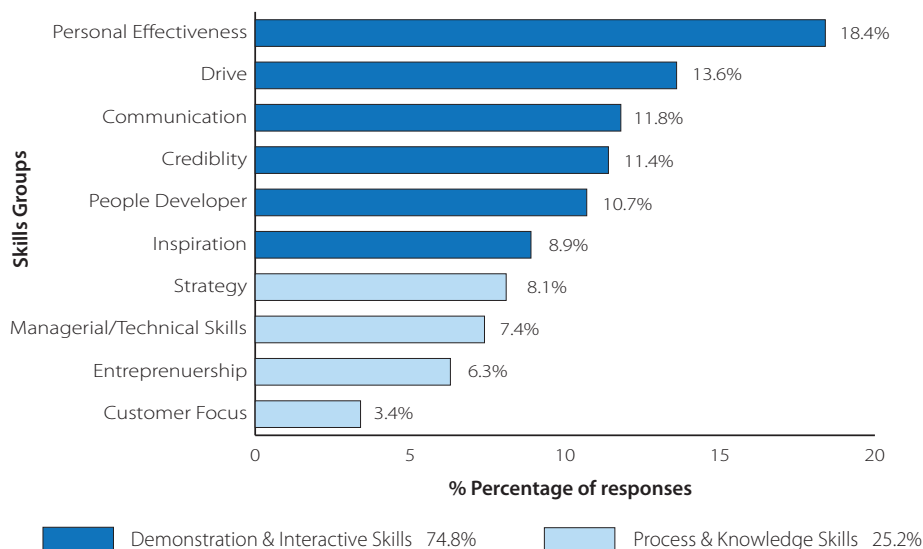
# Critical Leadership Attributes in the Retail Industry

## Introduction

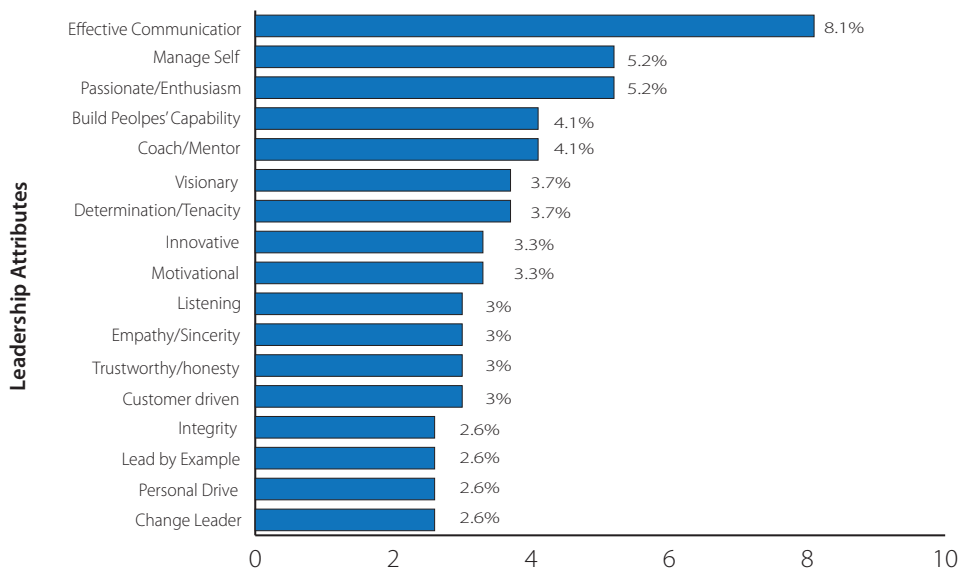
During a recent 2<sup>nd</sup> Retail Executive Forum focussed on retail leadership, approximately 250 South Australian retail industry stakeholders worked together at their 27 tables to define the attributes and skills required of retail leaders from 2010 forward. Participants were asked by Derek Stamoulis of *Learning Leadership Dynamics* to list their 10 top critical leadership attributes and skills. A summary of the results has been compiled by *Leadership Learning Dynamics* and *Service Skills SA* below.

The clustering of these skills is an attempt to gather together the data to give an indication of the most critical leadership attributes. While the data has been clustered into attributes for the purposes of providing meaning for retail leadership, the table at the end of this paper contains the full list of skills allowing people to undertake their own analysis.

## Critical Leadership Attributes



## Highest Ranked Individual Leadership Skills



## Interpretation of the Results

While it is acknowledged that these results may be open to significant interpretation, there appears to be some trends emerging in both the attributes and skills that will be required of retail leaders in the years from 2010.

The leadership attributes represent, for stakeholders, the critical characteristics or qualities required of current and future leaders across industry. Aligned to each of the attributes is a cluster of skills. The mind map below clusters skills against leader attributes.



The key leadership attributes for current and prospective leaders in the retail sector include:

- *Personal Effectiveness* – The ability to understand and manage self, show empathy and manage relationships
- *Drive* – The ability to inject high energy and enthusiasm into achieving results
- *Communication* – The ability to use effective communication to build relationships and enable others to deliver results
- *Credibility* – The ability to lead by example and be a role model for others
- *People Developer* – The ability to coach, mentor and build the capabilities of people
- *Inspiration* – The ability to inspire and motivate others to perform at their best
- *Strategy* – The ability to set direction and create possibilities.
- *Managerial/Technical Skills* – The ability to utilise management skills to run the business
- *Entrepreneurship* – The ability to “think outside the square” in order to create new opportunities for the business
- *Customer Centric* – The ability to understand and meet the needs of customers.

Applying a *Whole Brain Thinking* approach to the future of leadership in the retail sector, it would appear clear from the responses of stakeholders that current and future retail leaders will need to demonstrate competency in attributes and skills that can be described as more right brain than left brain dominant. These attributes, which include effective communication, credibility, inspiration, drive, personal effectiveness and the building of relationships, may arguably be the very factors that motivate people to perform at their best and that distinguish leaders from managers. Industry stakeholders, for example, cited the following as essential leadership attributes:

- Personal effectiveness
- Communication
- Credibility
- Building relationships with, and developing, others
- Inspiring and motivating employees

The findings from this forum are not inconsistent with current trends and research on leadership at an international level. Research is tending to suggest that more people today appear to be seeking leaders who:

- Are effective communicators;
- Are credible;
- Build relationships;
- Engage and inspire their people;
- Encourage innovation; and
- Lead by example.

These are characteristics that have, for some time, been admired and valued by people across all industries, yet have not always been delivered by managers and those in positions of responsibility.

The graph "Leadership Attributes" on page 2 shows that the attributes relating to capability demonstration and people skills cover about three quarters of the critical attributes listed compared to the more obvious process and knowledge skills. These results have significant implications for providers of leadership training.

Whereas many management courses today focus largely on text and classroom learning of management techniques, knowledge and processes, this will not be enough to equip leaders for future success. Arguably, there is a need and a place for dedicated leadership training designed to build the capabilities of current and future leaders to deliver on the attributes and skills highlighted at this forum.

This paper provides considerable opportunity for individuals and training organisations to redesign their learning/training programs that build leader capability by mapping them against the critical attributes and skills listed in this paper. This requires work to be completed on:

1. How to develop a learning strategy that will deliver the required attributes and skills;
2. How to acquire and/or deliver the attributes that are missing, particularly when many of these tend to be the less "tangible" demonstration and people skills; and
3. How to measure the demonstration of these critical attributes across the retail sector.

In responding to the second question, one may argue that this is where work based projects, team activities, mentoring, coaching and peer based activities are so critical.

*Service Skills SA in conjunction with Leadership Learning Dynamics is proposing to hold a workshop in early 2011 on how to embed leadership attributes into high level training. The outcomes of this will be delivered at the 2011 Retail Executive Forum.*

Please contact *Leadership Learning Dynamics* through [www.lld.com.au](http://www.lld.com.au) or [contact@lld.com.au](mailto:contact@lld.com.au) to be involved in future research on leadership and for information on:

- Whole Brain Thinking and/or the mapping of retail leadership skills against hemispheres of the brain
- Creating a leadership brand/matrix for your leaders in your organisation.

Derek C. Stamoulis is Chief Executive Officer of *Leadership Learning Dynamics*, an international speaker, executive coach, leading educator, management consultant, published author and leading facilitator with over two decades of theoretical and practical learning experience. He has held several executive positions and currently lectures in the Master of Business Administration program in Leadership, Strategic Human Resource Management.

We would like to acknowledge the following Retail Executive Partners & Forum Sponsors for making this possible.

#### Partners



#### Forum Sponsors



## Table of Retail Leadership Attributes

Below is a list of critical leadership skills that were identified at the second Retail Executive Forum. They have been clustered into attributes to aid analysis.

<b>Communication</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Effective communication skills	22	8.1
Good listener	8	3.0
Acknowledges others	1	0.4
Able to negotiate / resolve conflict	1	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>11.8</b>

<b>Credibility</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Trustworthy/Honesty	8	3.0
Leads by example	7	2.6
Integrity	7	2.6
Accountable / Responsible	3	1.1
Fair & Equitable	2	0.7
Loyalty	1	0.4
Reliable	1	0.4
Ethical	1	0.4
Social responsibility / Corporate Citizenship	1	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>11.4</b>

<b>Customer Centric</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Customer driven – Builds customer loyalty	8	3.0
Relationship Management	1	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3.4</b>

<b>Drive</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Passion/enthusiasm	14	5.2
Determination/purpose/persistent/tenacity	10	3.7
Personal drive	7	2.6
Commitment/dedication	3	1.1
Rises to the challenge	1	0.4
High work ethic	1	0.4
Achieve targets	1	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>13.6</b>

<b>Entrepreneurship</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Being Innovative	9	3.3
Lead/ open minded to change	7	2.6
Forward-focussed	1	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6.3</b>

<b>Inspiration</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Motivates others	9	3.3
Inspires/builds teams	5	1.8
Belief in people/self – putting people first	4	1.5
Empowers others	2	0.7
Engages others – knowing your people	2	0.7
Recognises + rewards others	1	0.4
Creates positive environment	1	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>8.9</b>

<b>People Developer</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Coaches, supports & mentors people	11	4.1
Builds peoples' capability – knowledge & skills	11	4.1
Provides training and development opportunities	3	1.1
Manages talent	2	0.7
Manages people performance	2	0.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>10.7</b>

<b>Personal Effectiveness</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Self-management – time, goal setting, delegating, organising	14	5.2
Empathy - sincerity	8	3.0
Sense of humour/fun – energetic & personality	6	2.2
Approachable/ Flexible / Resilient	6	2.2
Develop self – life long learner	4	1.5
Perception / Insight	3	1.1
Positive attitude	3	1.1
Develop relationships – rapport/camaraderie/networking	3	1.1
Self-regulation – composure/calmness/organisation	3	1.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>18.4</b>

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Visionary	10	3.7
Think strategically	6	2.2
Growth/diversification focussed	2	0.7
Analytical/critical thinking	2	0.7
Solutions-focussed	2	0.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>8.1</b>

<b>Managerial/Technical Skills</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
Financial management/skills	4	1.5
Able to solve problems	4	1.5
Business Acumen	3	1.1
IT savvy - keeps up with learning technologies	3	1.1
Decision making skills	2	0.7
Product/Industry knowledge	2	0.7
Ability to implement	1	0.4
Common sense	1	0.4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>7.4</b>