



**"Steep thyself in a bowl of summertime"**

Virgil

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## **Are Leaders Born, Raised or Do They Evolve?**

At a recent conference, several leadership researchers presented papers indicating that leadership attainment may have biological and evolutionary components. One paper examined leadership structures among primates and showed that apes will only follow a leader in a crisis situation or if they believe he knows where a watering hole is. Another presented the "need" for leadership as an antidote to anarchy and a way to maintain order in specific situations. Finally, using a large database of twins it was shown that leadership attainment between identical twins was more highly correlated (but not perfectly so) than leadership attainment between non-identical twins.

Taken together, these ideas have many implications for leadership [selection](#) and [development](#). The twin study strongly suggests that leadership, like other traits, is partially heritable (otherwise the correlation between identical twins who have nearly the same genetics would not be any stronger than the non-identical twins who share less genetic material). This is one reason why we can reliably measure leadership ability (for instance, in an [assessment center](#)) and observe that there are individual differences (some people have it, some don't).

The other two papers suggest that for those who have ingrained leadership ability it must be used judiciously. For example, leadership is only effective when a) the *followers* deem it to be effective/necessary and b) the followers want to be led (there are situations when they feel the need for leadership and prefer to be left alone the rest of the time). This means

that having the leadership 'gene' doesn't ensure success without some learning or experience. However, those with good leadership skills may be able to sense/know the limited situations in which they will be effective.

Practically speaking, these papers seem to indicate that some people have leadership skills like other people are tall---it's a trait that is fairly immutable, except under extreme conditions. The implication is that companies are better off identifying leadership talent than developing it from scratch. Also, rather than asking leaders to lead people most of the time, organizations would be more effective if they allowed people to be more self-sufficient.

For more information on [selecting](#) and [developing](#) your leaders, contact [Warren Bobrow](#).

## **Hooray For Simulations**

It's fun to see someone else share your beliefs....especially in print. The most recent case occurred in the March/April edition of Human Capital Magazine where they extolled the value of simulation-based assessments for hiring and promotion decisions.

It jumped out, because we've seen first-hand the value and impact of assessment center exercises for evaluating the technical, supervisory, management, and leadership capabilities of candidates for well over ten years. According to the article, "day-in-the-life" simulations are gaining popularity as a result of: the increased cost of hiring mistakes (especially at the higher levels of the organization), difficulty in comparing diverse resumes, and more focus on risk management. For example, a full day assessment may cost 3-4% of a potential manager's salary versus replacement costs which are estimated at 2-3 times the salary in recruitment fees, salaries, benefits, management time, etc. When looking at it from a dollars and "sense" perspective, the benefits seem pretty clear.

If you have considered [simulations](#), [assessment centers](#), or [performance tests](#) for your organization or would like to learn more about how they could be added to your selection/promotion program, please contact [Kammy Haynes](#).