

# Achieving & the **LOOK** **SOUND** of **LEADERSHIP**

By Tom Henschel



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## **100<sup>TH</sup>** EXECUTIVE COACHING TIP



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**The Well-Balanced Executive ▶ 08/02/12**

### **Merciless executioner**

No one was neutral about Cary. In a global company that often moved slowly, Cary got stuff done. The chief executives to whom he reported loved that Cary could push projects to completion. His peers, on the other hand, were cautious. Cary was a beneficial ally, but when he started driving for results, he could cause a lot of destruction. His peers were constantly trying to contain him or avoid him.

The vast rank and file below Cary lived in fear of him. The saying was that, when working on anything involving Cary, you either had to execute perfectly or else you got perfectly executed.

It was legendary that once, when he had threatened to fire someone for a fairly minor infraction, people pushed back hard against him. He was told that the punishment far outweighed the crime and that the employee was in the “high potential” pool. And he was told, “Everybody likes her. Firing her would cause a riot.”

To which he famously replied, “That’s why I don’t get to know my people. Makes things easier when it’s time to fire ‘em.”

Contrast Cary with Kim.

### **Conflict avoider**

Kim is in charge of all North American call centers for her company. Kim’s twelve direct reports and their direct reports all love her—with reservations. Kim’s feedback report contained comments like this: “I love Kim. We all do. But I’d love her even more if we could cut our meetings down and stop waffling about decisions. Everything with Kim takes so much *time!*”

In her feedback report, at least one person in every group (executives, peers and direct reports) identified Kim as conflict-averse. People weren’t surprised that her group’s performance often missed the mark; she avoided holding people accountable and seemed unable to have hard conversations.

Can you imagine Cary avoiding a hard conversation?



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On the other hand, can you imagine Kim firing anyone in haste?

### **Predicting an executive's long-term effectiveness**

Cary and Kim exist on opposite ends of a long continuum. The end of the continuum where Cary lives is all about results. The other end, where Kim lives, is all about relationships. Cary and Kim are each far away from the midline of the continuum. Each is out of balance in their own way.

I believe an executive's placement on this continuum represents the single biggest indicator of his or her long-term effectiveness.

During my twenty years of coaching, I've talked with clients about many different things. But almost without exception, early in every coaching engagement I've ever had, I say something like this:

“ **To succeed as an executive there are two things you have to do every day. You have to achieve results. And, at the same time, you have to build and maintain positive relationships with everyone around you.** ”

Achieving balance between results and relationships is the hallmark of the well-balanced executive.

### **Where are you on the continuum?**

Nearly everyone prefers one side of the continuum over the other. If you have any doubt about which way you're calibrated, look to your last few performance reviews. I'm sure the clues are there.

If you find you over-value results at the expense of relationships, achieving more balance will require you to begin believing that people are important to your success. You will need to learn skills like [the art of chat](#) and [listening without an agenda](#). These behaviors will challenge your long-held beliefs. They won't be easy to adopt. But over time, you will move closer to the center of the results/relationships continuum.

If, on the other hand, you find you over-value relationships at the expense of results, achieving more balance will require you to begin to understand that you cannot control people's feelings or how they think about you. You will need to learn skills like [holding people accountable](#) and [not taking things personally](#) and [setting and holding boundaries](#). These skills will be difficult to adopt because they'll

challenge your long-held beliefs. But over time, you will move closer to the midline of the results/relationships continuum.

### **One factor dwarfs all others**

Let me make this case using a different example.

This edition of *The Look & Sound of Leadership*<sup>™</sup> is the 100th Executive Coaching Tip I've written. Months ago, in anticipation of this event, I began asking colleagues what topic they thought might be worthy of the 100th Tip. I got many great ideas (some of which will show up in future Tips, I'm sure), but one suggestion from several people resonated with me:

“What one factor do you think is most important for an executive's success?”

It didn't take me long to settle on my answer: the ability to balance behaviors that drive results with behaviors that promote relationships. That's how important I think this issue is.

I looked back through the [archive of Tips](#) using this lens. Except for Tips addressing specific tools like PowerPoint, virtually every one of the ninety-nine Tips I've written supports this idea of balancing results with relationships. While I wasn't consciously addressing that balance at the time I wrote each Tip, the framework is there; its constant presence reinforces how fundamental this issue is.

### **A well-balanced distribution**

Before giving you one final idea about how to balance results and relationships in your life, I want to acknowledge some results and some relationships relating to these Executive Coaching Tips.

Achieving the result of writing 100 Executive Coaching Tips gives me great satisfaction. But it has not been a solitary effort; many relationships helped me reach this milestone. I'd like to acknowledge a few of them.

Every month since August 2005, when the Tips began, Kathleen Noble and her team at NM Design have posted these Tips on the [Essential Communications](#) website, made the podcast available on the web, created the HTML email and the PDF. Every month they've transformed my text into formats that people all around the world can access. I am grateful for their great results and for a long, meaningful relationship.



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I also have a team of editors who challenge my thinking and polish my writing. Many people have rotated through the team over the years, but four have been with me a long time now and never fail to improve my work: Nancy Breuer, an amazing editor at [Facilio, LLC](#), Graham Burns, Tom Manheim and Nancy Shanfeld. Thanks to each of them.

Now, here's one final way to think about results and relationships in your own life.

Every act you perform in the workplace—from saying hello in the morning to not saying hello in the morning, from being the last to leave at day's end or being the first to leave—places you somewhere on the results/relationship continuum.

Should every act be perfectly poised at the midline? No. That's not realistic. It is inevitable—and appropriate!—that some of your actions will live more on one side of the midline than the other. That's fine. But ideally, many of your actions will contribute a bit to both. Maybe 80/20. Maybe 40/60.

Over time, a well-balanced executive creates a pattern that is distributed fairly evenly between results and relationships.

As a leader, you are highly visible. I guarantee that the people who work with you—not only your direct reports, but your peers and your senior leaders—are already well aware which side of the line you prefer. They know what your pattern looks like. It's no secret.

Strive for balance between results and relationships. An evenly distributed pattern is the hallmark of *The Look & Sound of Leadership*.

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