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Does Your Team Have the Four Essential Types?

By ADAM BRYANT

*This interview with **Paul Maritz**, , president and C.E.O. of the software firm VMware, was conducted and condensed by **Adam Bryant**.*

Q. *What are some important leadership lessons for you?*

A. I've learned that when you go from being an individual contributor to being a leader of a small group of 5 to 10 people, to leading 100 people, to leading 1,000 people, to leading 10,000 people, the nature of your job changes at each of those points.

Q. *Talk more about that.*

A. As you manage bigger groups of people, you cannot be as closely connected to specific underlying issues and challenges. Your contribution has to become more of making sure that you're getting the best out of others, that others are really thinking the issues through, and that you're creating the broad framework in which they can get their jobs done and be as productive and focused as they can be. What makes it a challenge is that every time you cross one of those boundaries, you become less of a specialist, less knowledgeable about specific issues.

You have to realize that your contribution becomes more symbolic, in the sense that you're trying to set a general direction. People want to see you as representing the general mission, not just yourself.

And, as the groups get bigger, the period over which you measure your own performance gets longer, and the way you get your feedback changes. The bigger the group, the easier it is to spend days wondering whether you had any impact at all. You really have to take a longer-term view. So you're going to have to discipline yourself and take a step back to ask yourself the question, "Are we moving in the right fundamental direction?" And, if so, take satisfaction from that.

Almost at any level, the really successful people in organizations are the ones who try to structure their lives to learn and get feedback and be self-aware. That's not necessarily a natural thing to do, so you have to be very mindful of it.

Q. *So how did you learn this?*

A. I started at [Microsoft](#) in the mid-1980s. In 1986, I was managing a group of 13 people. When I left, it was close to 10,000 people. It was not an environment where we got a lot of management coaching. It was one where you just had to learn as you went along. Inevitably, we made mistakes, but fortunately we had such a wind behind us that we had the luxury of being able to make those mistakes and learn from them.

Q. *What are some other leadership lessons?*

A. One of the things I've learned over the years is that there is no such thing as a perfect leader. If you look at successful groups, inevitably there's an amalgam of personalities that really enable the group to function at a high level.

Q. *And what are they?*

A. At the risk of oversimplifying, I think that in any great leadership team, you find at least four personalities, and you never find all four of those personalities in a single person.

You need to have somebody who is a strategist or visionary, who sets the goals for where the organization needs to go.

You need to have somebody who is the classic manager — somebody who takes care of the organization, in terms of making sure that everybody knows what they need to do and making sure that tasks are broken up into manageable actions and how they're going to be measured.

You need a champion for the customer, because you are trying to translate your product into something that customers are going to pay for. So it's important to have somebody who empathizes and understands how customers will see it. I've seen many endeavors fail because people weren't able to connect the strategy to the way the customers would see the issue.

Then, lastly, you need the enforcer. You need somebody who says: "We've stared at this issue long enough. We're not going to stare at it anymore. We're going to do something about it. We're going to make a decision. We're going to deal with whatever conflict we have."

You very rarely find more than two of those personalities in one person. I've never seen it. And really great teams are where you have a group of people who provide those functions and who respect each other and, equally importantly, both know who they are and who they are not. Often, I've seen people get into trouble when they think they're the strategist and they're not, or they think they're the decision maker and they're not.

You need a degree of humility and self-awareness. Really great teams have team members who know who they are and who they're not, and they know when to get out of the way and let the

other team members make their contribution.

Q. *And which of those personalities describes you?*

A. I'm very much aware of who I am not, as much as who I am. At least I try to be. I'm not the enforcer. I'm not the champion of the customer. Those two things don't come naturally to me, so I need to make sure that I have partners who can supply that.

Q. *What about leadership lessons from earlier in your life?*

A. I grew up on a ranch in Central Africa, where, out of necessity, I spent a lot of time on my own. And then I went to a British-style boarding school. That gave me a certain self-reliance and thick outer skin. I also gained a certain ambition in life because I was very aware, growing up, of being on the periphery of the civilized, technical world. Everything that was new in technology was exciting, and happening in very distant places from me. So I had to drive myself to get to the center of that.

My self-reliance is something I have had to learn to deal with, because it's my nature to be an introvert. And being a leader, you can't just be an introvert. People want to know that they can emotionally connect with you — that you're, in some deep way, going on a journey with them and that you recognize them. And that requires you to open up to people and reach out to them and connect with them. Left to myself, I will retreat into my office, so I have to be aware of that.

Q. *What about different styles of leadership you've seen through the years. How did those influence you?*

A. It's very hard to talk about these things without becoming trite or corny, but the best leaders are those who get the best out of other people.

I've learned that you only really get the best out of other people when you do things in a positive way. There are negative styles of leadership, where you do things by critiquing and criticizing and terrifying other people. But in the final analysis, it doesn't get the best out of people and it doesn't breed loyalty. Because no matter how much we think we've got things figured out, we haven't got things figured out. Inevitably, we're going to go down blind alleys. We're going to run into problems. We're going to make mistakes. And when that happens, you have to ask people to help you and to overlook the fact that you've messed something up.

Great leaders, in my view, are those who have built up that reservoir of loyalty, so that when the time comes to say to folks, "We have to change direction," people are willing to make an extraordinary effort. If you're the kind of leader who cuts people down and humiliates them, you leave scars on people that can eventually come back to haunt you.

Q. *How do you hire?*

A. I think that in almost any position, you want to have the following attributes: First of all, you want to make sure that people have the necessary intellectual skills to do the job. Second, you want to see if people have a track record of actually getting stuff done. Then, third, you want to look for people who are thoughtful, and that ties into learning and being self-aware.

Often, when I'm interviewing people, one of the most interesting parts for me is when I'll just pick anything that they've done in the past and I'll say: "Thinking about it now, what would you have done differently? What did you learn from that?"

You learn a lot from people's answers to that. If they blame everything that happened during that period on somebody else, that tells you that the person is probably not thoughtful or self-aware.

If they can talk in length about what was really going on, why they made the decisions they did and how they would perhaps make the decision differently now, that tells you that this person thinks deeply and is honest enough to really be objective, or as objective as they can be about themselves.