



There is no shortcut to maintaining a consistent level of high achievement. It is a lengthy and continuous process that involves growth and learning. And yet, the myth that good leadership skills are a function of personality or natural talent persists.

### The Personality Factor

Leaders are made rather than born. Personality influences how you succeed, not if you succeed. A hard-charging director personality can learn to become considerate of others' feelings. The person who prefers to work alone in their office and crunch the numbers can learn to be more outgoing. While it is easier to succeed when we play to our strengths, there are an infinite number of ways that right of way professionals can utilize their personal style to build on their weaknesses.

### The Natural Talent Factor

Research now confirms what many have long observed - that even talented individuals often fail to reach the pinnacle of their chosen profession.

Keepers of the talent myth often point to Mozart – composing at age five; performing in public at age eight; composing hundreds of works prior to his death at age thirty-five. Clearly this proves that you can become a leader in your field based on sheer talent, right?

Not so fast, piano man. Mozart began his composition and performance training at age three. And, this wasn't the same kind of one-hour a week piano practice that you may remember from your childhood. Mozart's father, Leopold, was a master musician in his own right. He was also

# Leaders are Learners, Too

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young Wolfgang's live-in teacher. So one of the great musical talents of all time was, in fact, largely the product of excellent instruction and hard work.

### The Only Sustainable Advantage

The National Football League Hall of Fame wide receiver Jerry Rice was not the biggest or fastest person to ever play his position. Yet, his name is at or near the top of every list of the best-to-ever-play the game of football. Rice's secret weapon was how hard he worked in the off-season to learn and grow as a professional. It was this lifelong commitment that gave him a competitive advantage and set him apart.

Here are three ideas to help you do the same as a right of way professional:

**Stay current.** When I got married, my wife said to me, "Randy, I'll never ask you to change." I thought, "Cool!" She then went on to say, "I do expect that you will continually adapt."

The principles for becoming a respected professional never change. Yet, the technical, legal, and interpersonal knowledge and skills required to maintain that position are constantly evolving. Experience allows you to see similarities and chart a course of action when new situations arise. But, how well you fare in these new situations rests on your ability to adapt, which requires current knowledge and skills.

**Stay connected.** Lennon had McCartney. Fred Astaire had Ginger Rogers. Even Albert Einstein, despite his reputation as a solitary thinker, surrounded himself with friends, family and colleagues that served as a sounding board for his theories.

No one becomes a leader in isolation. Attend chapter meetings, region forums and international conferences. Develop your network of trusted peers and mentors who can serve as your sounding board. Leadership is an interactive pursuit.

**Become credentialed.** Nothing demonstrates your commitment to learning and leading like earning and maintaining the credentials of your chosen profession.

Consider this: What would you rather see on the wall when you walk into your physician's office – something that says "Board Certified," or something that says "Participant?"

Credentials tell the marketplace that you are committed to your profession. They enhance your professional image and demonstrate your desire for continuous learning to your peers.

Einstein noted, "We cannot solve the problems of today with the same mind that gave us those problems in the first place."

We can count on the leaders of the future to take the right of way profession to new heights—but only if they have made a commitment to continuous learning and growth.

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