



# Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders A Better Way to Evaluate Leadership Potential

*Jeffrey Cohn, Jay Moran*

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**Almost 70% of Americans believe that we are suffering from a crisis of leadership, but rather than asking, why are leaders failing, we need to ask, "Why aren't we choosing better leaders?"**

Ever wonder what goes on behind closed board room doors when organizations pick their top leaders? It can be a contentious, secretive, even brutal process. Most of our leaders look good on paper—they have charisma, credentials, and confidence—yet they lack the real qualities that are necessary to succeed. In *Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders?*, Cohn and Moran share the same insights and ideas they use to help organizations make better choices. Revealing seven essential attributes of all great leaders, they offer a fresh and powerful evaluation technique anyone can use to assess leader potential.

Through dynamic, first-hand accounts from the business world, entertainment, sports, politics, education, and philanthropy, the authors offer the ultimate insider access and reveal how top organizations find and choose the best talent.

- Offers multiple ways to evaluate leaders, and how these 7 leadership attributes combine to create the best (and worst) in leaders
- Features interviews with with Mike Krzyzewski, Coach, 2008 US Men's Olympic Basketball team, Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon; George Steinbrenner, Scott Davis, CEO of UPS; Peter Loscher, CEO of Siemens; Toby Cosgrove, CEO, Cleveland Clinic; Hollywood movie directors, and many others
- Includes academic study and field training at institutions such as Harvard, Yale, INSEAD, and IMD for developing future leaders.

Fresh and compelling, *Why Are We Bad at Picking Good Leaders?* shows how great leaders can be spotted and why they succeed – and is soon to be the definitive resource guide for about choosing better leaders.

## Q&A with Co-Authors Jeff Cohn and Jay Moran



Co-Author Jeff Cohn

### Why are we bad at picking good leaders?

The reason is simple: we just don't know what to look for. As a result, we focus on the wrong things. We get seduced by charismatic personalities, a savvy style, where someone went to school, or often we just like the way someone looks or talks. We fall victim to false predictors of leadership success, such as past achievements and recommendations. Yet even when we do intuitively understand what we should be

seeking, we don't know how to determine if potential leaders possess these qualities. It seems obvious that good judgment and integrity, for example, are essential for leadership. But most of us don't know how to determine if someone possesses these.

### **What leadership attributes should we be focusing on?**

After looking at nearly one hundred potential attributes, we boiled our list down to the essential seven—these are the fundamental building blocks of all effective leaders. Each is critical, but the appropriate starting point is integrity. Integrity is the most fundamental leadership quality. It cuts across everything that a leader does. Integrity is like the foundation of your house. All of the bricks and mortar and marble countertops and oak wood floors are nice — and this is what others see — but without a good foundation you might as well tear the place apart and start over. Many of the scandals we read about every day are evidence of this. Leaders with enormous brainpower and persuasive talents nonetheless destroy their organizations due to a lack of honesty and ethics, which are all part of integrity.

### **What happens if a leader possesses only 3 or 4 of the attributes?**



Co-Author Jay Moran

We often see this, and things might look good for a while. The leader might even be lauded on magazine covers for his or her brilliance or ability. But without all seven attributes, effective leadership can never last. For example, many business and political leaders are celebrated for early successes, but then take a 180-degree turn when issues with character or judgment later surface. Others lose control of their emotions or can't handle adversity, and eventually buckle under the pressure. This is why it is so important to focus on all seven of the essential attributes ahead of time, before we choose leaders.

### **You give examples of leaders from many fields. What most surprised you about these women and men?**

At the beginning of our research, we weren't sure how much leaders in different fields might have in common. What most surprised and impressed us was how consistently a leader's success —regardless of his or her field—flowed from the same set of qualities. (And when a leader went awry, one or more of these was missing!) For example, we interviewed Fortune 500 CEOs, a Hollywood movie director, the national teacher of the year, an esteemed Manhattan chef, America's top counter-terrorism official, an award-winning prison warden, and leaders from many other fields, and the same evidence of good judgment, integrity, passion, empathy, and so on jumped out again and again. Effective leaders are not one-dimensional. A great example is right here at Amazon. Many people attribute Jeff Bezos' success at building the company to his captivating vision. But Bezos possesses many other leadership qualities that are essential. In the early 2000s, after the dot.com crash, many experts thought that the company would never last. It was only due to Bezos' unwavering passion and tenacity that Amazon did. Going back even further, his courage and willingness to take risks is what enabled him to quit a successful career in New York and start Amazon.com from scratch. Vision alone does not define Jeff Bezos, just as no single attribute defines any successful leader, regardless of his or her field. Whether it's in the boardroom or on the battlefield, leadership requires a balanced mix of the seven attributes we describe in our book.

**Will this book help readers become better leaders?**

Absolutely. It will also help them get promoted. In addition to explaining how readers can make better leadership choices, we show how leaders are selected. We reveal what goes on behind closed boardroom doors or in corner offices when senior-level candidates are evaluated, and this insight gives readers what they need to focus on to advance their own careers. Our explanation of the seven critical attributes of leadership will also help readers take a self-inventory of their own talents and skills. After reading the book, they will have a much clearer understanding of the areas in which they most need to improve.

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