

# SIGMA

## Leadership Series



**Great Leaders  
Are Thorough**



## GREAT LEADERS ARE THOROUGH

“ It’s attention to detail that makes the difference between average and stunning.  
— Francis Atterbury

Thoroughness is a crucial component of leader success. Research shows that people who are meticulous, detail-oriented, and well organized are more likely to be not only better employees, but more effective leaders.<sup>1</sup>

**Thoroughness** means not only having a plan but knowing its elements — at every stage. This helps a leader ensure that everything is proceeding on time and according to plan. It also makes the leader better equipped to facilitate the execution of their plan by helping to manage and organize all the moving parts as needed. Knowing the details helps a leader in planning ahead and identifying problems that may arise in the future. This allows the leader to prepare solutions to potential problems, and implement these solutions quickly and effectively.

Being thorough and detail-oriented will improve a leader’s decision-making abilities.<sup>2</sup> The more fully a leader gathers information, the more thorough their decisions. Accumulating a lot of information about a scenario will help a leader to make better, well-informed decisions, especially without having to rely on others for additional input.

### Are You Thorough?

In assessing your ability to effectively remember details, ask yourself the following questions:

- ☐ Do I remember small details of plans?
- ☐ Do I know how the work we’re doing fits in the bigger picture?
- ☐ Am I able to effectively answer my employees’ questions about the task at hand?
- ☐ Do I rely on others to fill me in on important details?
- ☐ Can I anticipate the potential issues or complications in my work?
- ☐ Do I have enough information to make informed decisions?

## Improve Your Thoroughness

**Use your communication skills.** Communication is an essential tool in applying thoroughness to your work, and to the work of your direct reports. Ensure you have gathered all the information from other stakeholders before designing and implementing a strategy, plan, or solution. Communication can help you not only gather enough information and background on issues; it can also help you convey your plan to others. Effective application of thoroughness involves communicating fine details, and the importance of these details, to others around you.

**Avoid multitasking.** An important component of thoroughness is your ability to focus on details. Of course, this focus will be reduced if you are overloaded or attempting to work on too many tasks at any one time. While leaders often have a heavy load of responsibilities, when thoroughness is needed, it is best to focus on one part of your task at a time. Slowing down and giving your full attention to a task ensures you can give your full consideration to the matter at hand. Of course, some tasks will require more thorough care than others, so be sure to consider your priorities when choosing where to devote your limited time and resources.

**Be mindful in your work.** Given the importance of attention to detail, mindfulness can be a great personal resource to improve your thoroughness. Research suggests that individuals who are more mindful are more alert, and less likely to get distracted at work.<sup>3</sup> When you find yourself short on attention or unable to focus, take a moment to pause, close your eyes, and focus on your breathing. Mindfulness is about letting thoughts and feelings arise and pass by without judgment, and focusing on your breathing can help bring your attention back from distraction to the matter at hand.

## Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Become More Thorough

The following steps can help you be more thorough in your role:

1. **Get organized.** Make lists, take notes, use a calendar, and as many spreadsheets as you need to help you organize your work. Design a system to help you streamline your workflow. This will not only help you become more thorough and detail-oriented, but it will also help you improve your performance and efficiency at work. Having quick access to all the details of a given project plan, schedule, or meeting agenda will increase your knowledge of things happening around the office.
2. **Plan your day before diving in.** Planning your day, and generating estimates of how much time you intend to allocate to each of your duties will help you get more out of your time. It will help you be more thorough in your coverage of work-related duties and also allow you to maximize the amount of time you intend to spend on each task.
3. **Keep detailed notes for your review.** For some people, it can be hard to keep track of every detail of each task in their head. To help you with this, consider carrying around a notepad or using digital note-taking software on an electronic device. Take notes as you

go about your day. Keeping detailed records of projects, meetings, and events will help you remember everything. Finally, setting aside some time each day to review your notes will help you keep important details at the forefront of your thoughts.

## Assess Thoroughness With the LSP-R®

The [Leadership Skills Profile – Revised® \(LSP-R\)](#) is a personality-based leadership assessment that measures 50 core competencies, including Thoroughness. The assessment can be administered online in 25 minutes, and comes with an automatically generated Focus Report, including scores, personalized feedback, and templates for creating competency-based leadership development plans (view a [sample Focus Report](#)).

### LSP-R® Free Trial

*See how you score on THOROUGHNESS.*

Experience the LSP-R for yourself and see how you score on Thoroughness. Receive customized feedback and templates for creating a personalized action plan. Take 25 minutes and experience the impact that data-driven personality insights can have.

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[How Detail-Oriented People Approach Tasks](#)



[10 Things Only Detail-Oriented People Do](#)



[Focus! An Interview with Daniel Goleman](#)



Develop leadership competencies with SIGMA's one-hour, high-impact [Leadership Development Workshops](#), led by our experienced coaches.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Judge, T. A., Bono, J. E., Ilies, R., & Gerhardt, M. W. (2002). Personality and leadership: a qualitative and quantitative review. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 87*(4), 765.
- <sup>2</sup> LePine, J. A., Hollenbeck, J. R., Ilgen, D. R., & Hedlund, J. (1997). Effects of individual differences on the performance of hierarchical decision-making teams: Much more than g. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 82*(5), 803.
- <sup>3</sup> Dane, E., & Brummel, B. J. (2014). Examining workplace mindfulness and its relations to job performance and turnover intentions. *Human Relations, 67*, 105-128.