

SIGMA

Leadership Series



**Great Leaders
Are Ambitious**



GREAT LEADERS ARE AMBITIOUS

“ Intelligence without ambition is a bird without wings.

— Salvador Dali

Leaders with **Ambition** demonstrate the desire for increased influence and promotion in the organizational hierarchy. Highly ambitious leaders tend to be assets to their organization. These leaders strive toward difficult goals, achieving success for both themselves and the organization. They thrive in the face of challenges and tend to devote substantial effort and time to work, making them strong candidates to lead during times of crisis. Ambitious leaders tend to be lifelong learners, inspiring others in the organization to also work on their personal and professional development.

Research links ambition with positive outcomes for leaders. In particular, more ambitious people are likelier to take charge at work, which is associated with greater job satisfaction.¹ Taking charge includes acting assertively and proposing workplace improvements, for example by serving on a strategic planning committee. These behaviors can also strengthen an individual's reputation in the organization; in turn, that recognition is associated with higher performance ratings.² Given that ambition helps employees achieve positive work outcomes, it is a valuable competency for leaders to develop.

Are You Ambitious?

In assessing your level of ambition, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I balance pursuing results, learning and rewards at work?
- Am I spending time around ambitious co-workers?
- Do I use my past achievements as motivation to achieve more in the future?
- What can I do to keep learning and stay motivated at work?

Increase Your Ambition

Know the three kinds of ambition. Healthy ambition balances three forms: performance, growth and rewards.³ You should strive equally for good results, improved knowledge, and

satisfying rewards. Striving toward only one creates imbalance that can undermine results. For example, if you focus solely on hitting tough performance targets, your team may come to resent the perfectionism, making collaboration toward shared goals more difficult. On the other hand, if you are balancing a desire to perform, grow, and achieve rewards, your team might be motivated to achieve goals because they recognize your drive for personal development and also want to receive recognition for their efforts from the company.

Surround yourself with ambitious people. You can feel inspired to strive for more at work if you spend more time around ambitious coworkers. Rather than working on your development alone, arrange coffee chats or mentorships with high achievers you respect. Ask how they approach current goals and what drives them. You may feel encouraged to become more ambitious by spending time with high achievers.

Reflect on your previous achievements. Leaders can sometimes feel discouraged from pursuing ambitious goals if they feel they haven't had any success in a long time. In those moments when big goals feel out of reach, revisiting prior wins and promotions can restore confidence in future success.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Become More Ambitious

The following steps can help you become more ambitious:

1. **Keep learning.** The drive to better yourself is closely linked with an attitude of openness toward continual learning experiences. Learning experiences can be found in many forms. For example, some people enjoy listening to motivational podcasts to encourage themselves to achieve more at work. Others prefer to sign up for professional development, such as taking LinkedIn Learning courses or attending conference workshops. Whatever form of learning you enjoy, try to make more time for it as it can inspire you to create new, challenging goals to strive for at work.
2. **Volunteer for initiatives at work.** Start being recognized for your efforts and ambitious drive at work by volunteering for various initiatives. For example, if an executive asks for volunteers to lead a new project team for a high-profile client, you can volunteer to lead a new project team. Other initiatives can also raise your profile — for example, organizing the annual company holiday party. Once you become comfortable taking more initiative at work, try to stretch yourself by volunteering for opportunities that you have little previous experience with to grow your confidence and knowledge.
3. **Compete against yourself.** A good way to spark ambition is to challenge yourself to beat past standards you've set for yourself. You might find examples of these standards in your past performance reviews. For example, if there are clear performance metrics at your company that you've been commended for in past performance reviews, such as sales made or customer satisfaction, try to work toward beating your past self in those metrics (for example, work to make 10% more sales this year than last year). You can

also work toward improving in development areas from past reviews, such as communicating more with direct reports. Whatever the goal is, it can be satisfying to see yourself making progress over time, creating a positive feedback cycle of continuous improvement.

Assess Ambition With the LSP-R®

The [Leadership Skills Profile – Revised® \(LSP-R\)](#) is a personality-based leadership assessment that measures 50 core competencies, including Ambition. 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 AMBITION.

Experience the LSP-R for yourself and see how you score on Ambition. 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 Ambitious Should You Be?](#)



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

References

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