

Achievements that Matter: Perspectives of Awakened Leaders

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This article presents an overview of sixty-nine leaders' opinions on their greatest achievement in life so far. The leaders were selected through criterion- and snowball sampling, and resided predominantly in the Los Angeles area, with some in other parts of the US as well as other major producing nations of the world, such as India, Japan, and China. After a brief literature on leadership and some of the perspectives on this dynamic topic, the study will be described and the findings presented. It turned out to be that the achievements listed by the interviewed leaders could be clustered into three main theme categories: personal mastery, professional growth, and wellbeing of people. The value of these findings is that it brings to the surface a potential shift in awareness amongst leaders, which will hopefully spread and be followed by others.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership remains a fascinating topic, regardless of the number of books, papers, presentations, workshops, seminars, conferences, and courses that get created on this topic. The ever-present interest in leadership may very well have to do with the fact that it is such an identifiable and dynamic topic that has some solid core principles embedded in it, but also a wide variety of variables that speak differently to the imagination of different groups.

In this paper, a study of the opinions of sixty-nine leaders on their achievements will be presented. These leaders, all well-respected members of their society, were interviewed over the course of six years (2006 – 2011). The purpose of the interviews was to find out what made them stand out in their organization as well as in society. One of the questions asked pertained to the leaders' self-perceived greatest achievement. The question, which was part of a more comprehensive structured interview, was presented as follows: "What did you consider their greatest achievement so far?" When analyzing the leaders' responses to the question, some interesting perspectives surfaced, which will be shared in this article, after a brief literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership is one of the most frequently and divergently studied topics in social science. It is a dynamic topic that has significantly transformed over time. Trehan (2007) presents a nice overview of leadership throughout the past eighty years, starting with the "great man" approach, in which physical and gender factors were the main determinants, and where task and behavior orientation from leaders were considered uniform for all cultures, through the 80s and 90s where an emerging awareness of variations, to a period where vision, charisma and transforming abilities were applauded, and up to the current view

of leadership as a dynamic concept in which moral, political, emotional, and cultural aspects are influential. Karp (2009) concurs that leadership might best be perceived as “a dynamic process which occurs between people rather than depending on the individual characteristics of the leader - appointed or not” (p. 883).

While Trehan and Karp make solid points, we cannot get around the fact that certain behavioral traits and qualities of leaders are more appreciated in contemporary times than others. Based on a large number of factors among which increased exposure to other cultures due to more frequent traveling and expansive global communicating tools (Internet); shifting family structures; greater diversity and higher levels of education within the workforce, we have been experiencing an entire restructuring of the workforce, leading to entirely different expectations from our leaders today as those from fifty years ago. Much of this altered perception is also directly linked to the occurrences in the leadership field, particularly the business leadership field.

Yet, the call and the attention are there, but the actual progress is not holding the same pace. In their review of post-scandalous leadership manifestations as they appeared at the dawn of the 21st century and the effect of these manifestations on the media, Hannah and Zatzick (2008) find that, while a significant increase in attention to ethical leadership traits can be detected, there is still a lack of true integration of ethics in the portrayal of leaders. Hannah and Zatzick believe that this should be attributed to the fact that new views are not encouraged to deviate too much from the worldview, otherwise they will not be considered a viable part of the business media. The above implies that paradigm shifts, while applauded, should be phrased and interlaced with ultimate caution in media publications, otherwise they will not reach the eyeballs of the reading masses.

Nevertheless, it seems that, as the numbers, shapes and sizes of corrupted, selfish, bottom line, short-term oriented leaders increased on our radars, awareness has risen that something was wrong with this picture. That “something” was not merely affecting our immediate environment, but often entire communities. A saturation of the earlier mentioned leader type led to the changes that are now increasingly promoted in Business Schools, corporate seminars, conferences, and executive coaching sessions. A desire for more people-oriented, caring, balanced, responsible, yet still passionate leaders has been painting our research horizon for the past decade or more. Littlefield (2004) agrees, “The definition of leadership is no longer categorized as autocratic, democratic, and free reign. Within progressive organizations, leadership has been redefined to incorporate integrity, reliability, collaboration, trust, and empathy” (p. 23). Indeed: the unified call, albeit phrased differently by different researchers, is that leaders of today should be wakeful and mindful of stakeholder needs and not merely shareholder needs. Marques (2010) labels these leaders “Awakened leaders” and describes them as follows: “Awakened leaders [...] are those who lead from the heart and soul. They are the corporate, community, and household leaders, official or unofficial, who refuse to put on different hats when it comes to their personality” (p. 308). These leaders are further profiled as practicing a holistic and authentic approach in every environment and at every time. Mostovicz, Kakabadse, and Kakabadse (2009) confirm, “Leadership calls for total commitment to the perpetual process of purpose seeking. While leaders are usually concerned with their legacies, their commitment to purpose has to go far deeper” (571).

In an effort to detect leaders’ commitment to purpose, and in hopes to find some common patterns, the author of this paper set out to interview sixty-nine well-respected leaders who were sampled on basis of certain criteria. In the next section, this will be discussed.

THE STUDY

Selection Criteria and Demographics

The leaders were predominantly located in the US, and selected on basis of the following criteria: 1. They had to be currently and actively involved in a for-profit or non-profit business endeavor; 2. They had to be involved in their leadership activity for at least 5 years; 3. They had to be recommended by at least one person who had either worked under their leadership, or done business with them.

In order to obtain a broad scope of viewpoints, the leaders were selected from a wide variety of industries. They were in banking, entertainment, securities, food, education, design, engineering, airline, publishing, distribution, information technology, and more. The size of their venture was not a determining factor. Some leaders were heading corporations that were operating in multiple continents involving hundreds of employees, while others were engaged in a local venture with about thirty to fifty co-workers. Sixty percent of the leaders were in their third career, thirty percent in their second, and ten percent in their first career. All leaders had performed in several jobs and positions prior to engaging in their current passion. The average age of the leaders was forty-five years old. The youngest interviewee was twenty-seven and the oldest eighty-five. Sixty-three percent of the leaders were male, and thirty-seven percent were female. Sixty percent of the leaders were Caucasian, thirteen percent Asian (Chinese, Japanese, and Indian), ten percent Hispanic, eight percent African-American, five percent Jewish, and four percent classified themselves as “other” since they represented multiple ethnicities. Sixty-five percent of the leaders were involved in for-profit business ventures and forty-five percent in non-profit. The ten percent that was overlapping was involved in multiple ventures, of which some were for profit and others non-profit.

Data Analysis and Findings

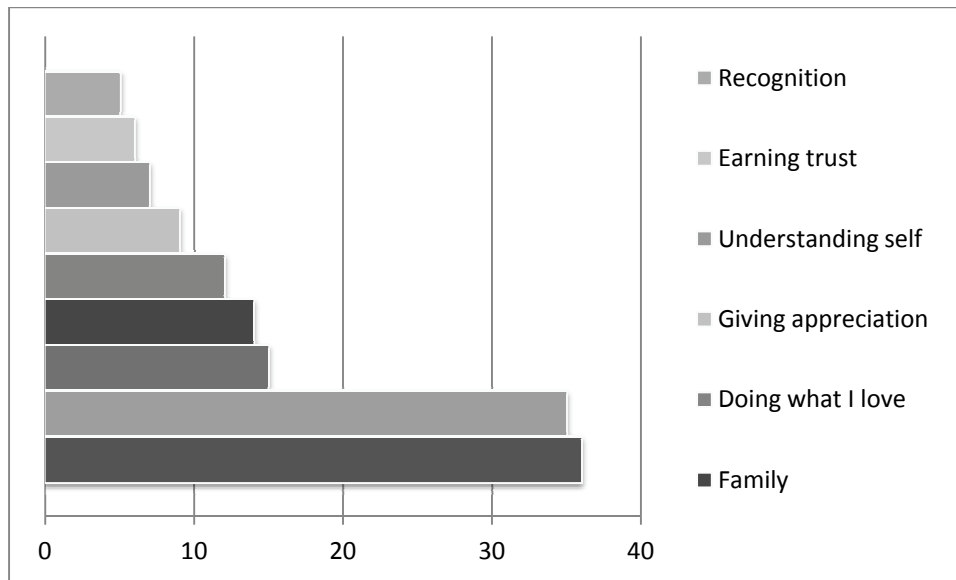
The leaders approached this question in various ways. Many of them did not limit their focus to one particular area, but considered various areas of life in their responses. For example, some leaders considered their family their greatest achievement in private life, but felt that in their career, the most important achievement was the start of their non-profit entity, which was now serving large parts of the community. Others mentioned the progress of those they mentored in their professional life as their greatest achievement in one area, but also included their elevated awareness, which led them to be appreciative of everything they could do for others in this review.

The data was analyzed according to the phenomenological procedure, which is qualitative in nature. Due to the fact that the responses were not offered in simple “yes” or “no” format, but in rich textual descriptions, this analysis method seemed most appropriate, even though the number of study participants was much higher than the three to fifteen that Creswell (1998, 2007) recommends in describing this study line. The phenomenological approach entails a process of horizontalizing data, which means that all responses to a question are placed on one line for comparison purposes. By doing so, similarities can be detected and listed as emerging themes. Based on the multiple answers many leaders provided, the number of factors listed added up to more than just 69. The initial list of emerging themes is presented in table 1 and figure 1.

TABLE 1
WHAT THE LEADERS CONSIDERED THEIR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT

Greatest Achievements	
Wellbeing of people	36
Start, turnaround or complete venture	35
Family	14
Doing the right thing	14
Doing what I love	12
Giving appreciation	9
Understanding self	7
Earning trust	6
Recognition	5

FIGURE 1
WHAT THE LEADERS CONSIDERED THEIR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT



Discussing the Themes

Wellbeing of People

From the initial analysis it became obvious that a majority of the interviewed leaders reflected on the wellbeing of people as their most important achievement. Below are some examples of how this perspective was worded:

“I think the most important achievement is to see that the people that I have interacted with fulfill their mission and become successful in their own right.”

“My staff set this goal and then worked their tails off to achieve it. This is the greatest achievement of my 30-year career with [this company]”

“The Association will be able to offer daily feeding programs, as well as training and literacy programs that will help the people move out of abject poverty.”

“Completing so many projects in my lifetime is certainly a great accomplishment. But perhaps even more than that, my greatest achievement is really having made so many good friends along the way.”

“My greatest achievement would be coordinating the diverse constituencies of [my organization] in order to balance the specific needs of the faculty, administrators, students, alumni, trustees, donors, community leaders and parents.”

“My greatest achievement is helping clients overcome their financial difficulties.”

Wellbeing of people should not be underestimated as an achievement and a leader’s purpose. McMurray, Pirola-Merlo, Sarros, and Islam (2010) conducted a study in which they found that there is a direct link between employees’ wellbeing and their leader’s behavior. Prior to the study by McMurray et al, a similar finding was published by Van Dierendonck, Haynes, Borril, and Stride, (2004), who conducted a longitudinal study in the UK and found that followers with active, supportive leaders, reported higher levels of wellbeing.

Start, Turnaround or Completion of a Venture

Close to the most often mentioned theme was one that comprised of the start, turnaround or completion of a venture. The leaders who included these action-oriented accomplishments often combined them with other themes. However, when focusing on this aspect, they provided feats such as the following:

“Opening my own business: my restaurant. I had wanted my own restaurant for many years. I worked in a large chain for 32 years, but to start from the bottom up after all that time, create my own dream, develop a menu, decide on a theme and décor set up, the kitchen... this was very challenging and rewarding.”

“I started from scratch 17 years ago and my mission was not profit or lucre but to build quality human capital for the service industry and other economic activities. During these years more than 20, 000 students passed out from our institution and fortunately all of them are now occupying suitable positions in the country and even many are happily settled overseas.”

“[...], my greatest achievement so far is moving beyond uncertainty and fear and starting multiple businesses that help others find their own success.”

“My greatest achievement so far is still a "work-in-process". I'm not the brilliant inventor of our technology [...]. Rather, as my partners describe it, I'm the inventor of the relationship amongst all of us.”

What has turned out to be a recurring factor in many of the responses from leaders who mentioned the start or completion of a venture or project was their involvement of the people aspect in that, as can be gleaned from three of the four sample statements above.

According to Fernald, Solomon, and Tarabishy (2005) leaders should maintain an entrepreneurial spirit as well. They add that vision, problem-solving skills, decision making, risk taking, and strategic initiatives are imperative in this regard. The leaders who mentioned achievements in the area of starting, turning around or completing a venture also considered these qualities essential and applied them in attaining their goals.

Doing the Right Thing

While not as abundantly mentioned as the first two themes, “doing the right things” still turned out to be embedded in many of the perspectives of the interviewed leaders on their achievements. The researcher intended the theme category “doing the right thing” to include statements that implied a sense of gratification from doing something that had a positive effect on the self and others in the same trend of what is referred in Buddhism as “right livelihood.” Valliere (2008) defines right livelihood in line with the perspectives of the Right Livelihood Association and the Vipassana Fellowship translations of the Pali Canon, and presents it as follows, “[E]arning a living responsibly, accepting the consequences of one's actions; in a righteous way, acquired only by legal means and taking only a fair share of the earth's resources; peacefully, without coercion or violence; honestly, not by trickery or deceit; and in ways which do not entail harm and suffering for others” (p. 174). Capturing this perceived achievement happened, for example, this way:

“In business perspective [my greatest achievement] would be the process of redefining myself, from a very conventional multi-business entrepreneur [...] to a more holistic oriented and spiritually attuned social entrepreneur...”

“I think my greatest achievement has been to remain faithful to my vision and the promise of change in each career I have pursued. This has not been the easy path, as this secular, money driven world does not tend to welcome individuals with a vision or and it does not tend to welcome individuals with a passion that surpasses ‘practicality’.”

“I am particularly proud to number among my closest friends, people who, though once required to report to me in a professional or business context, still kept in touch with me even when I’m no longer the “boss.” Building teams through the years required some “tough love” and when folks who I mentored or trained, with the belief that I was perhaps being too tough, tell me they were grateful for the “education” and remain my friends, that’s the achievement that gives me the greatest pleasure. As one’s career progresses, one has to come to terms with one’s mortality. Material goods become less and less important and the intangibles are all that’s left.”

From the responses above it may become clear to the reader why the researcher needs to immerse in this type of data in order to distill the themes. Not all themes are as apparent at first glance, but require interpretation of the way they are described, since different people use different words to indicate something similar.

Doing the right thing is more critical today than it has ever been before. When contemplating on this theme, leaders should be reviewing their actions from a macro view, and forego the traditional tendency to prioritize. Pearson (2010) discusses the issue of doing the right thing as a conscious question to leaders that earn their livelihood in the sustainability sector, but his reasons are applicable to leaders in any industry. Pearson shares the viewpoint that, if leaders sell a product or service - regardless of how important, superior, or responsible - without educating people at the same time on how to live more responsibly overall, they are not doing the right thing. Pearson’s point is, indeed, important food for thought to all of us.

Family

The fact that the theme “family,” was not as frequently mentioned as the two outliers may be explained by the fact that many of the leaders may have thought that they should limit their responses to the professional area of their lives. Those who explicitly included their family as an achievement presented statements such as the ones below:

“Even more important than business is the pride I feel in being a successful father. My relationship with my children is wonderful. Each of them possesses admirable qualities and they lead successful lives. I am blessed to have a lengthy marriage characterized by love and respect.”

“My greatest achievement would most definitely be becoming both a husband and a father. I came from a difficult situation in my past, which led to my being homeless and isolated. The thought of becoming a father seemed like an impossible dream. The fact that my wife and kids love me is a testimony of God’s power to change lives.”

“Raising two wonderful daughters that are happy and successful and the relationship I have with my wife.”

“In personal perspective [my greatest achievement] would be, raising my three children to adulthood, and contributing to the wellbeing of several more.”

While the influence of family in leaders’ lives is not one of the most popular research topics, there has been some examination done in the area of employees’ family in relation to their work environment. Culbertson, Huffman and Alden-Anderson (2010) affirm that leaders are considered highly influential in their employees’ lives, so their willingness and understanding toward family relationships will enhance workers’ loyalty, input, and general wellbeing. Along similar lines, Hsu, Wan-Yu, Wang, and Yen-Yu (2010) stress that work-family conflicts cause a broad scale of negative effects, while facilitation can help boost production and overall wellbeing. These research findings underscore the assertions that leaders who recognize their family as a great asset will have similar perspectives toward their employees and their families. Hence, these leaders may be able to establish deeper relationships and maintain happier co-workers.

Doing What I Love

From the earlier presented definition of right livelihood it may become apparent that this is not necessarily the same as doing what one loves. A person could engage in rather destructive activities and love that. Fortunately, there were no signs of destructive behavior in these leaders. The way they phrased this theme can be garnered from the following examples:

“... [M]y greatest success has been my ability to successfully participate in so many different roles - whether it was running my own consulting practice, being part of the entitlement team for Staples Center, running a casino, starting a corporate foundation. I have been blessed with wonderful opportunities.”

“I’ve re-invented myself according to my interests three times in the 20 years since I graduated college. I spent seven years in technology working in international business development and also in the internal M&A group, six as a partner in a management consulting practice, five as a non-profit executive, and now in addition to consulting again, I am developing alternative energy, energy-efficiency and sustainability projects. I’ve had the good fortune to be able to do each of the things professionally that I have thus far felt inspired to do and I consider that a great achievement.”

“... I take great delight in speaking at conferences, working with teams, and doing one-on-one coaching. I am building an international organization with affiliated consultants and coaches, and seldom feel much fear at all.”

When leaders do what they love, they are able to make huge leaps ahead, even though they are not free of stress and occasional setbacks. Secretan (2006) makes a strong point about leaders who exercise and nurture their passion, and can instigate tremendous changes that way. As an example he mentioned John Kennedy, who had a dream, which became his passion, and ended in a man actually walking on the moon. While the dreams of many leaders may not have such a historical impact, they contribute to a happier world, because leaders who do what they love carry less stress and exude more happiness and understanding to others.

Giving Appreciation

The theme of “giving appreciation” was not as easily noticeable as others, because it was interwoven into others. However, there were leaders who made it very clear that they considered their appreciation for their life and work their greatest achievement. The statements below provide an example:

“The absolute and total experience of my long-held belief that love is everything. Of course, this has not been my achievement – it has been my experience -- and for that illuminating gift I have deep gratitude.”

“Well, I was born in a good place at the right time. That's my achievement. If I had been born earlier, people would not have understood what I am trying to do. And if I had been born later, what I am doing might not seem so unusual. So I was born at the right time, in the right place, as my father's and my mother's son -and with enough background, and enough financially to help me do well in business. So that's my greatest achievement - and I myself had nothing to do with it!”

“This is a very difficult question to answer because all of my achievements can be contributed to a team effort. I have done nothing totally alone but numerous goals have been reached through the efforts of many.”

Appreciative leaders are well aware of alternatives, which is why they appreciate their lives, circumstances and those around them so much. Appreciation is also becoming an increasingly important quality looked for in leaders. In a survey among mid-career business professionals in the Boston area, Quaglieri, Penney, and Waldner, (2007) found that one of the traits these workforce members considered

important in leadership was appreciation, especially when it pertained shifting trends in the workplace, such as diversity.

Understanding Self

The leaders that provided this aspect in their answers, oftentimes alongside other themes, referred to a sense of awakening to their preferences and talents, and focusing on those as their achievement. The following examples illustrate that:

“In my thirties I realized that I am an out-of-the-box thinker: curious, progressive, and a quiet leader. All these years later, I believe I have used these qualities to their highest good and I continue to do so with peace and confidence.”

“Early in my career [...] I discovered that many of my colleagues were dissatisfied with leadership in the workplace. Yet, they were hesitant to explore other employment opportunities because of a fear of change or a potential loss of income. So, my greatest achievement so far is moving beyond uncertainty and fear and starting multiple businesses that help others find their own success.”

“I think my greatest gift is to help others connect to their inner greatness, to help others discover their authentic voice, and to help others be fulfilled. This is what I do best. That's my niche. I think there comes a time when one starts focusing more on helping others achieve their goals rather than building one's own resume.”

Fernald, Solomon, and Tarabishy (2005) accentuate the essence of understanding oneself, especially when in a leadership position. They assert that leaders are “twice born” (p. 3), because they go through critical challenges, which drive them to turn inward and then re-emerge with a newly defined identity, which seems to be a critical aspect for successful leading. They conclude, “Leaders have self-confidence growing out of the awareness of who they are and the visions that drive them to achieve” (p. 3).

Earning Trust

While many of the leaders' statements alluded to trust relationships, some made this theme more prominent than others. Examples are below:

“To have the trust of others is, I believe, a great achievement and something to live up to and to treasure. If I died today, I would feel my greatest achievement is the wonderful people I have in my life. If I die 10, 20, 30 years from now, I would hope to feel the same.”

“Learning to relate to a dramatically different culture and to contend with unfamiliar codes and techniques was fraught with risk, and yet, due to the deeply held values we shared with our client, and the significant degree to which he trusted our architectural judgment, the project was an outstanding success. One we are sure will continue to enliven the narrow Tokyo streets of Shinjuku for a long time to come.”

“Guided by the concept of ‘The letter killeth and the spirit keepeth alive,’ I have been successful in handshake and trusting agreements in America and the world at large. Whether dealing with vary large labor unions in North America or Pacific Rim companies, I have never felt the need for litigious and unnecessary written agreements to achieve consensus. Lyndon Johnson, while in no way my idol, seemed to work effectively in this mode. My approach is often scoffed at and criticized but it works for me and has carried me through when compromise seemed impossible. One caveat: I would suggest that none adopt my philosophy on a situational basis.”

Without shortchanging any other quality or achievement, trust may be considered one of the most critical aspects in successful leadership. When a leader has earned the trust of his or her co-workers, there

is so much more possible, because the people don't question every step the leader takes anymore. Ceri-Booms (2010) likens the concept trust to interpersonal trust in its nature. Similar to the awareness of family-facilitation, employees will be more appreciative and supportive toward leaders whom they feel to be trustworthy. Trust is not something we attain lightly, so it should be cherished and carefully guarded. Plinio, Young, and Lavery (2010) express their concerns about the low levels of trust that still exist in business corporations today, and link this factor directly to ethics: when ethical behavior is questionable, stakeholders lose trust in their leaders.

Recognition

The theme of "recognition" was a very diverse one, as it pertained to recognition received by individuals or institutions, and on personal or professional grounds. The examples below may illustrate:

"I consider it a major achievement when after 21 years a leading community activist remarks at a luncheon that she was introduced to [our publication] when we published a story on her, which she read while recovering from an illness in a local hospital. After being discharged, she stopped by the office for extra copies, commenting that she had talked to my secretary and how pleasant she was. I commented that that wasn't my secretary, but my wife. We have become dear friends since, just like we have with many others throughout the community we serve."

"Two years ago, my team launched the Parent Center Institute that continually reviews current research and seeks to improve the practice of the 85 schools we serve in the area of parent education and engagement. This year, the institute won a national award for its work in the district."

"I think another significant achievement was that I was decorated by the emperor of Japan. That was a very humbling experience: to be decorated as a non-Japanese by the emperor of Japan. An acknowledgement of what I had done in terms of Japan - US relationships. That was very humbling."

Recognition is not just wonderful to receive but even greater to give. It establishes a mutual sense of appreciation or, as an old adage goes, "a little bit of the fragrance sticks with the hand that gives the flowers." Drennan and Richey (2012) remind us that there are five leading strategies for motivating a group toward a common goal: "1) Giving positive recognition; 2) Building teams; 3) Setting team goals; 4) Keeping score publicly; [and] 5) Positioning supervisors as trainers" (p. 61).

Further Clustering the Themes

In order to enhance clarity in the data analysis process, the researcher critically examined the initial list of themes in order to engage in what is known in the phenomenological study trend as "phenomenological reduction" and "theme clustering" (Creswell, 1998, 2007). In a phenomenological study, the researcher is considered the main instrument. For that reason, he or she should exclude ("bracket") his or her opinions in the data gathering process. However, once the data is transcribed, the researcher has to immerse into the findings, in order to interpret these and cluster themes with similar meanings. The intention of this process is to arrive at overarching results, which can be presented as the main findings.

Main Theme 1: Relationships

When reviewing the themes discussed above, the researcher found that the themes "Wellbeing of people" and "family," shared the main aspect of care for other beings. What exuded from the comments in both categories was the fact that these leaders considered their relationships, whether at work or home, to be important. The resulting theme was therefore simply labeled as "Relationships" and can be seen as one that bridges the leaders' personal and professional performance.

Main Theme 2: Professional Growth

Along the same lines, the researcher concluded that the themes, “Start, turnaround or completion of a venture” and “Recognition” were consistently referring to professional attainments: heights in the leaders’ careers that they were rightfully proud of. Therefore, these two themes were clustered as the main theme, “professional growth.”

Main Theme 3: Personal Mastery

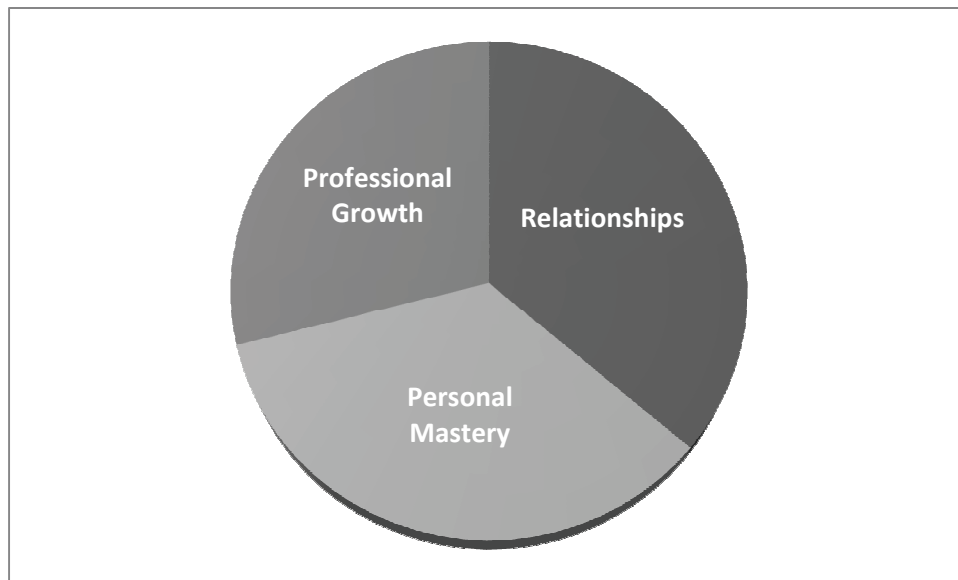
Once the two main themes above were extracted, it turned out that all other themes shared the core feature of personal growth. These themes were, “Doing the right thing,” “Doing what I love,” “Giving appreciation,” “Understanding self,” “Earning trust,” and “Recognition.” It needs to be stated that there are fine lines between many of the themes. For example, the theme “Earning trust” could easily be included in main theme 2, but was included here instead because it referred to an internal awareness as well, in a similar vein as “Doing the right thing”.

Table 2 and figure 2 present the ultimate results of the theme clustering process. It should be, again, underscored that the number of themes exceed the number of leaders interviewed, because many leaders referred to multiple themes as their greatest achievements.

**TABLE 2
LEADERS’ ACHIEVEMENTS CLUSTERED**

Greatest Achievements	
Relationships	50
Personal Mastery	48
Professional growth	40

**FIGURE 2
LEADERS’ ACHIEVEMENTS CLUSTERED**



CONCLUSION

If there is one important conclusion to be drawn from this study, it is the fact that none of the leaders attached a dollar value to their achievements. They did not refer to financial windfalls or major bank accounts as their greatest achievements. Rather, their perceptions on achievements were concentrated in creating something new or bringing a project or venture to fruition (professional growth), learning to understand themselves and their passion and focusing on that (personal mastery), and establishing constructive relationships, whether in the professional or private areas of their lives.

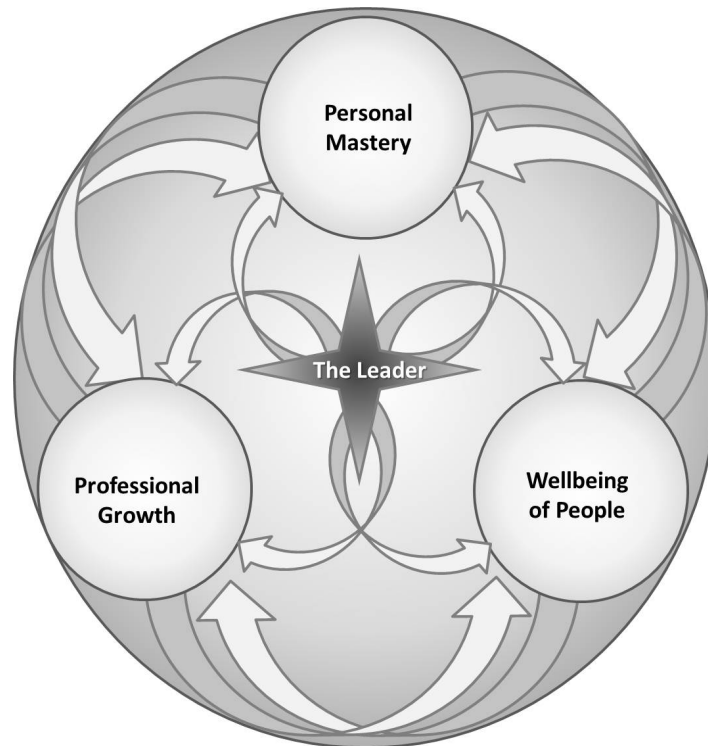
This key finding, which is a direct result of reviewing the clustered achievement categories of the leaders interviewed, is an important finding, as it indicates that these individuals were well-aware of what really mattered in their own lives, those they interacted with, and those whom they did not know, but whose lives they influenced in the short or long term. These findings also indicate that the leaders interviewed were capable of transcending the trivial day-to-day strife and focus on the biggest picture of what they considered their life's purpose. They then connected their achievements to this self-formulated purpose, and presented a mosaic of themes with a remarkably consistent theme: doing well by doing good.

In their review of leadership as a developmental process, Mostovicz, Kakabadse, and Kakabadse (2009) affirm, “[I]n leadership theory the “what” represents the goal that the leader looks to attain, the “how” explains the way the leader reaches the goal, and the “why” explains the reasons behind selecting this particular method for attaining the goal” (p. 565). When mirroring these three aspects on the three main achievement theme clusters that emerged from this study, it turns out that there are multiple substitutions possible:

- Focusing on professional growth (goal), leaders should engage in constructive relationships (how), in the awareness that this also enhances personal mastery (reason).
- Focusing on personal mastery (goal), leaders should engage in constructive relationships (how), in the awareness that this also enhances professional growth (reason).
- Focusing on constructive relationships (goal), leaders should engage in personal mastery (how), in the awareness that this also enhances professional growth (reason).
- Focusing on constructive relationships (goal), leaders should engage in personal mastery (how), in the awareness that this also enhances professional growth (reason).

Each of these three themes should, of course, be implemented with consideration of the other two. Figure 3 illustrates this interplay.

FIGURE 3
GOAL, PATH, AND PURPOSE OF THE LEADER



The intention of this article was to illustrate the overarching themes that leaders listed as their major achievements in life, representing a broad divergence of areas, but a common lack of short-term, profit-driven feats. The hope is that future researchers will consider engaging in similar studies in other parts of the world or on a larger scale to find out if the responses are comparable. It is also the hope that scholars and leaders will decide to consider these achievement themes as potential options for a possible revision of their own, in case they have been dissatisfied so far with their prior achievement criteria.

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