



The 2008 presidential campaign is coming to a close on November 4, 2008. I encourage you to vote for the leader you believe will do the best on behalf of our country. In addition, I encourage you to think about the leadership lessons you can take away from this historic campaign season.

I've been intrigued by the confidence, competence, and courage it takes for these women and men to stay on the campaign trail. I've been equally intrigued by the many assumptions these candidates have faced during this campaign. I believe we are witnessing the most diverse group of candidates in history vie for the highest office in our country. Their diversity alone has contributed to the assumptions they've faced, having to do with race, age, gender, geography, education, experience, religion and one of my favorite topics, fashion. These assumptions make me think about the sub-conscious and conscious stereotypes we all carry about leadership. I submit we each have an image in our minds of what leaders should look and act like. What is the "look of leadership" in your business or organization? Is there a prevailing assumption about who gets to lead and who doesn't? Are pathways to leadership truly open to everyone in your business or organization?

These are important questions to ask as you engage in leadership development and succession planning because stereotypes about "the look of leadership" might prevent you from tapping talent in your organization. Jim Collins, author of the best selling business book ***Good to Great***, observes many organizations go from "good to great" when a specific type of person takes the lead. This is a Level Five leader. Level Five leaders do not possess characteristics we stereotypically identify with excellent leadership. They are not Donald Trump or Lee Iacocca types. In fact, when I read the book I never heard of most of these leaders. These men and women quietly emerged to positions of leadership and made history by leading many of the best business transformations in our time.

Many articles have been written about Level Five leaders. One of my favorites is *Best of Harvard Business Review on Leadership: Stealth Leadership*. The cover reads, "Put away your charisma – the best leaders are quiet, humble and decidedly unglamorous." Wow! Now this is "a look of leadership" many of us seldom consider. We are trained to believe that excellent leadership is loud, overtly confident and very glamorous. This is true in some cases, however I love that these articles provide a different point of view. It is important to think strategically about who we propel to positions of leadership and why, challenging stereotypes as we develop next generation leaders. Is it possible someone is being overlooked because their leadership manifests outside of the stereotypes?

Now is the time for human resources teams and top leaders to engage in strategic discussion about this important business topic. We are living in volatile times. Like our country, businesses and organizations need highly skilled leaders to thrive. I encourage you to look beyond leadership stereotypes to find the best and brightest. You may be pleasantly surprised to discover that your next best leader is packaged in a way you least expected.