

# LEADERSHIP *Warren Bennis* Excellence



THE MAGAZINE OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

MAY 2010



**Ana Dutra**  
Leadership Consultant

**Wise  
Judgment**

**Collective  
Wisdom**

**Succession  
Success  
Transition Execution**



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—WARREN BENNIS, AUTHOR AND  
USC PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT

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## Virtual Teammates

*When dealing with diverse mates who operate in different modes, one from the country with feed corn and raw nuts and the other from the city with refined cuisine, learn from Aesop's fable and toast to each his own, or vive le difference!*

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# Young Leaders

Observe four seasons.



by Alan E. Nelson

**M**OST PARTICIPANTS in executive training programs are ages 30 to 55. But by this stage in life, our character is pretty much set. *What can we do to identify and develop leaders while they're more pliable?*

That has been my quest for the last five years as we've prototyped a training curriculum for 10 to 13 year olds. We're learning more about developing young leaders, ages 2 to 22. By targeting life stages, we provide future leaders with a 10- to 20-year head start.

*Four seasons emerge in a young leader's life*, each with strategies based on the unique conditions of that time.

**Spring:** Ages 2 to 9. *Strategies: Conditioning and Character. Description:* Moral and cognitive development begin at age two, when children discover their will, learn right from wrong, and formulate speech and thoughts.

*Metaphor:* Till the soil

*Conditioning:* Adults need to help young children discover their value and uniqueness. Leadership aptitude can be seen in early socializing, when children begin interacting during playtime, creating informal structures. Certain kids influence peers more than others, positively or negatively. The role of parents and teachers is to condition young leaders by enabling them to experiment with leading games, family chores, sports and school projects.

*Character:* Much of our character is formulated during this season, when we learn right and wrong, both from modeling and behavioral consequences. Family structure and parental values are reflected in what children say and how they act, alone and with peers. This is when moral training has its most enduring results, good or bad. The moral/ethical connection establishes a framework from which a person makes decisions, whether to lie or tell the truth, steal or respect another person's property, honor or dishonor another person, present or absent.

**Summer:** Ages 10-13. *Strategies: Character and Competency. Description:* Cognitions accelerate at age 10, but character is still pliable. Most rites of

passage to adulthood and/or moral maturity take place around ages 12-13 (bat mitzvah, bar mitzvah, Aboriginal walk-about, catechism, confirmation). *Metaphor:* Planting the seed

*Character:* Character is fairly set by the end of summer. So, this is the last chance in a young leader's life to concentrate on character issues that will impact their decision-making. Since leadership involves *power* and since a leader's decisions *influence* many others, the temptation to misuse power often skews a person's perspective. Pressures of leading create stress and reveal character flaws and ethical-moral weaknesses. Some suggest that *who we are as a 4<sup>th</sup> grader predicts who we'll be for life*. Emphasize character issues at home, in school and where preteens interact.

*Competency:* Cognitions elevate at age 10. While still concrete thinkers, preteens (8 to 12-year olds) are transitioning to conceptual thinking. The best methodology for teaching in this stage is active learning, where kids understand concepts by attaching them to tangible experiences. The overlap of



cognitive development with moral mold-ability is what makes the 10 to 13 window so critical. You can teach sophisticated social skills required for leading and yet still shape character. The combination of leadership skills and character diffuses compartmentalization (separating personal character from professional character). Our training curriculum (*LeadNow*) emphasizes this season in a young leader's life.

**Fall:** Ages 14-18. *Strategies: Competency and Confidence. Description:* Teen years (adolescence) are times for discovering independence, moving toward peers for identification, and awakening self-expression, sexuality, and responsibility. Teens are less impressed with adults and more distracted by activities. *Metaphor:* Cultivate the plant

*Competency:* Knowing how important it is for teens to remain in school and learn life skills, this remains a strong season for developing leadership abilities. Because there is more mobility

and access to leading opportunities, whether through work, student government, community service projects, or leading younger kids, skill training can include many practical applications in real-world situations.

*Confidence:* Redundancy enhances confidence, so that a young leader becomes familiar with what it takes to lead a project. Hopefully, a young leader by this season will have experienced "summer school" so that the newness of being in leadership situations wears off and confidence is heightened as the leader takes on more and larger and more complex leadership scenarios. Mentoring and coaching increase at this point, so that young leaders can see mistakes of predecessors and learn from failures before the cost of failing increases.

**Winter:** Ages 19 to 22. *Strategies: Confidence and Contacts. Description:* College and/or early career opportunities depict this stage. Making adult decisions regarding work, college, and transitioning into independence mark this final season in a young leader's life. *Metaphor:* Prepare for harvest

*Confidence:* As people gain experience in leading, they tend also to gain confidence. If competency was established in previous seasons, a young leader now can experiment with these skills in various settings, resulting in increased confidence that is grounded in reality, not ideology. The goal in this season is to continue mentoring and gaining feedback so that they can polish their ability and be ready for post-college opportunities as they come.

*Contacts:* Effective leaders use their networks to gain vital resources (information, relationships, expertise, money, talent, or position). At his stage, the goal should be to seek those who have access to people and opportunities and can open doors of opportunity where confident young leaders can establish themselves quickly. A framework for establishing these contacts could also benefit those seeking young leaders.

*There is a time and season for everything.* By developing leaders young, their adult lives can be perpetual fruit-bearing and harvesting. Since leaders are the primary makers of history, we must learn how to develop leaders earlier and get to the root of their leading, so that we can influence the influencers while they're most pliable. **LE**

Alan E. Nelson, EdD is a young leader development specialist, founder of KidLead and creator of the Social Influence Survey that assesses leadership aptitude in youth. He is the author of KidLead: Growing Great Leaders. Visit [www.kidlead.com](http://www.kidlead.com).

**ACTION:** Participate in developing young leaders.