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## Do you have what it takes to be a great leader?

A top executive coach says that leaders are made as well as born, and that leadership can be learned. The first step: Have a clear (don't yawn!) vision. Then, take our quiz.

By **Anne Fisher**, FORTUNE senior writer

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(Fortune) -- We often hear someone described as a "born leader," but what if you didn't happen to arrive on the planet with the skills it takes to rise to greatness? "Some leaders are born, others are made," says [Karin Sloan](#), who has coached executives at [Allstate \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#), [Eli Lilly \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#), [Citigroup \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#), [JP Morgan Chase \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#), [Pepsico \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#), and many other companies.

Sloan's new book, *Smarter, Faster, Better: Strategies for Effective, Enduring, and Fulfilled Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, \$24.95) is a thought-provoking handbook for anyone who wants to kick a management career up a notch to the leadership level. Some excerpts from our recent conversation:

### [Quiz: Are you a good leader?](#)

#### Q. What's the difference between managing and leading?

A. Management is certainly part of leadership. But leadership requires that you create a strategy, a vision, and then exemplify it.

#### Q. So many companies have "vision statements" with little bearing on day-to-day reality. Haven't people gotten cynical about the whole vision thing?

A. Definitely! But when I say "vision," I mean the ability to talk about the future as if it were already here. Steve Jobs often does this. He creates a clear picture in people's minds of how a new product will change the world -- before it's even launched. He gets people excited about the future he sees in his mind. That's an innate talent. Stepping out on a limb like that comes much more naturally to some people than to others. But if you haven't got that skill, you can develop it. It's not so much about your own technical expertise as it is about inspiring other people to be better at what they do.

#### Q. Let's say I want to be CEO of [Time Warner \(Charts, Fortune 500\)](#) 15 or 20 years from now. What's the most important thing I have to start doing today?

A. There are really three things. First, get to work on building relationships that lead you upward, both externally and internally. Start becoming visible to senior decision-makers in your company and to influential people outside it. There are lots of ways to do this -- volunteering for in-house task forces, finding opportunities to give speeches, joining nonprofit boards, taking a leadership role in a trade association. Then, analyze what makes for success at the highest levels of your company and think about how you can apply your talents at that level.

### [Top 10 Companies for Leaders](#)

You can't succeed by copying or imitating others, but you can find a way to bring your own stamp. There will never be another Jack Welch, but there is a Jeff Immelt, and he's great in his own way. And third, have your own clear vision of the future of the company. I'm working with a client right now who will probably be tapped as the next CEO -- not because she has much experience at that level but because she has clearly articulated ideas about the future of the organization.

#### Q. What do you do if you believe you're ready to move up into a leadership position, but higher-ups disagree and the bigger job goes to someone else instead?

A. Do an audit of your performance and try to analyze why other people don't see that you're ready to move up. I worked with one executive who was extremely smart -- so much so that he tended to intimidate or alienate other people. He had a very rapid, manic way of speaking that really freaked everybody out. We had to teach him new ways of communicating with people. He eventually did get promoted.

If you are passed over for a promotion, it may also be because you're perceived as being out for your own gain only and not devoted enough to the well-being of the company. Even if you're a superachiever, a lot of companies won't reward that.

#### Q. In the book you write about great leaders being willing to stop being "the expert" and start asking more questions. How does one know which questions to ask?

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#### QUIZ

#### Are you a good leader?

Think you have the skills it takes to succeed as a leader? Take our quiz and find out if a climb to the top is in your future.

**1. You have lots of training and experience managing people, but have trouble keeping up with the latest technology. You:**

- a) Try to learn as much as you can about new advances in your spare time.
- b) Sign up for extra training on how to motivate employees, evaluate their performance, and improve your public speaking skills.
- c) Assume that, if there's anything you need to know about new office technology, the IT department will tell you about it.

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A. You want to ask questions where the answers aren't obvious -- questions that puzzle people and get them to think. The best leaders are always asking, "What should we do? Where should we be headed?" It's a great way to communicate trust. People who make great leaders -- the kind of leaders who, if they leave a company, others will jump ship to follow -- are those who say, "Tell me what's on your mind. Give me whatever you've got."

They're open to learning, and they're always looking for ways to learn. They never think they know everything there is to know. And they're right. ■

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