

The Hazards of Personal Achievement in Leadership

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Aaron grew up in the Midwest with a passion for law. His motivation and strong drive to achieve helped him excel in law school and rise to the top of his class. Upon graduation, he was hired by a high-profile law firm, where he worked his way through the ranks until he became the firm's youngest partner.

Then something went wrong. Aaron struggled to effectively lead his team. He didn't listen when others suggested their own good ideas about how to do things better. He didn't see a need for the team to collaborate. And he didn't focus his attention on working to meet the firm's goals. Seen as aloof, he alienated his entire staff.

As a last-ditch effort, another of the firm's partners brought in a coach to work with Aaron. The results of his [Emotional Intelligence assessment](#) showed that while he excelled in Achievement Orientation, he lacked several other EI competencies, including Empathy, [Teamwork](#), and Inspirational Leadership. Through daily practice and feedback from his coach, Aaron worked to strengthen these competencies.

Over time, Aaron regained the trust of his team by fostering open communication and recognizing the perspectives and efforts of each member. Instead of focusing on his personal goals, Aaron shifted his attention to helping others and achieving organizational goals. In the process, he elevated his own performance as well.

Bring Balance to Achievement Orientation

[Achievement Orientation](#) is the ability to set measurable but challenging goals for ourselves and those we lead. We continually seek feedback to improve our own performance as well as our team's.

Early in your journey, Achievement Orientation is largely a Self-Management competency. Motivation and a drive to achieve can enable us to rise through the ranks and reach our personal goals. But once you're in a leadership role, self-centered Achievement Orientation often becomes a drawback. It can prevent us from listening to others' perspectives and pursuing goals as team. For leaders to make the most of Achievement Orientation, they need to shift from Self-Management to Relationship Management—from a focus on their own ambitions to working toward collective goals. To make this pivot from individual striving to leadership, strengths in [Empathy](#), [Teamwork](#), and [Inspirational Leadership](#) all help. In short, leaders enhance their own performance by pursuing team and organizational goals.

If you find it difficult to shift your focus from personal goals to collective ones, try small steps. For instance, make a habit of asking questions and soliciting feedback from the group. Ask team members about their personal goals and the contributions they'd like to make to the organization. And recognize and reward team members who go out of their way to help the group.

As a leader, a willingness to help others will not only foster growth on your team—it can also help prevent you from burning out. Self-centered achievement may let you rise through the ranks—just as Aaron quickly made partner at his firm—but it's not sustainable over the long-term.

Concern about getting and staying ahead can lead to exhaustion and insularity, which prevent us from fully engaging with our team. Shifting our focus toward helping others can enable us to find a sustainable speed that supports cooperation and innovation as well as our continued growth. And

balancing Achievement Orientation with Relationship Management competencies expands our circle of caring as we strive toward shared goals.

How Do You Use Achievement Orientation?

To assess whether your drive to achieve focuses on yourself or on your team, notice throughout the day whether you do the following:

- Do you equate personal accomplishment with happiness?
- When you're working on a project, do you find yourself more focused on finding a shortcut to the goal or on how well the group works together toward their goal?
- Does an attitude of achievement-at-all-costs drive you?
- Do you derive as much satisfaction from helping others succeed as from accomplishing your personal goals?