

# STRATEGY AND THE FAT SMOKER

CHAPTER

The list of desirable character traits, attitudes, skills and philosophies... **CONTINUE**

BY **DAVID MAISTER**

**THE LIST OF DESIRABLE CHARACTER TRAITS, ATTITUDES, SKILLS AND PHILOSOPHIES** that firms seek in a leader seems endless. The desired characteristics that are listed are in conflict with each other.

It is hard to hold a leader accountable if there is not a clear, unambiguous understanding of the role. Many leaders prefer it this way: they like the freedom of action that comes from an ambiguous role. However, wouldn't it be better for all concerned to know, in advance, and with clarity, what the true, real expectations are?

#### A DIAGNOSTIC TOOL

Here's a simple diagnostic tool that can be used to facilitate your firm's discussions of the characteristics it seeks in a leader.

The questions that follow include a series of "paired" qualities that a good leader your firm might possess. In each pair, either quality may be desirable. However, the point of pairing these qualities is to ask: if there *had to be a choice* between the two items in the pair, which would each respondent really prefer in a leader?

Do you want your chief executive to be someone who:

- Focuses on working inside firm *versus* focuses on a high profile with clients and marketplace
- Is good with numbers *versus* good with people
- Leads in accordance with a strong personal ideology of his or her own *versus* leads through tolerance of different views, values and approaches

- Has a track record of generating business *versus* a track record of managing people well
- Thinks we need to make big strategic moves, even if they involve bigger risks *versus* thinks we should make small, incremental changes
- Has personal strategic acumen *versus* has the ability to facilitate and let others innovate and make strategic choices
- Has the best business qualifications *versus* has the best character qualifications
- Prefers to confront problems early, even if this can be disruptive *versus* prefers to avoid conflict until it's necessary to tackle it
- Focuses on preserving the firm's historical culture *versus* focuses on changing the culture to adapt to meet new challenges of the marketplace
- Moves fast *versus* acts deliberately

**An important educational, bonding and strategy-setting function will be served by using the results for a discussion of the differing views. The point of the survey tool is not to suppress debate, but to identify the subjects most worthy of debate.**

Naturally, it is possible to adapt this questionnaire to your own firm, inserting pairs that I have omitted and deleting ones you think are less critical to your firm. The key is to make the choices difficult, so that people are forced to reflect on what are the *key, top-priority* characteristics for the right chief executive for your firm, right now.

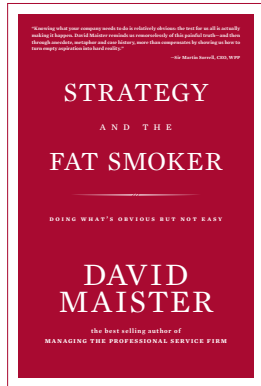
**This approach forces many people to reflect in depth for the first time what kind of leader they truly think is best for the firm and, perhaps more importantly, what kind of leader they are prepared to accept and be guided by.**

An important educational, bonding and strategy-setting function will be served by using the results for a discussion of the differing views. The point of the survey tool is not to suppress debate, but to identify the subjects most worthy of debate. Areas of consensus can be quickly noted, and discussion focused on topics where there is a disparity of views.

This approach forces many people to reflect in depth for the first time what kind of leader they truly think is best for the firm and, perhaps more importantly, what kind of leader they are prepared to accept and be guided by.

After this exercise, your firm will be ready to examine your candidates, and choose the right leader for where your firm is today and where your organization wants to go.

## INFO



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Click here to get more details or buy a copy of David Maister's *Strategy and the Fat Smoker*.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Maister is widely acknowledged as one of the world's leading authorities on the management of professional service firms. For two decades he has acted as a consultant to prominent professional firms around the world, on a wide variety of strategic and managerial issues. In 2002, he was named as one of the top 40 business thinkers in the world (Business Minds, by Tom Brown, PrenticeHall/Financial Times). He is the author of the bestselling books *Managing the Professional Service Firm* (1993), *True Professionalism* (1997), *The Trusted Advisor* (2000), *Practice What You Preach* (2001) and *First Among Equals* (2002). These books have been translated into 14 languages. For seven years, he served as a professor on the faculty of the Harvard Business School (1979-85), prior to launching his consulting practice. He lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

In March of 2005, he finally took his own advice, gave up smoking and lost 30 pounds.

Visit his website at [www.davidmaister.com](http://www.davidmaister.com).

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