



Simple Wisdom for Today's Leaders

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This article launches a new series focusing leaders on the "simple wisdom" needed to navigate in a world of overwhelming complexity. Wisdom has been defined as "the ability to make the best use of the knowledge available; wisdom is experience applied." At its best, it cuts to the heart of complex issues, identifying the best approach at a given point in time. Wisdom pierces through the clutter and often reveals obvious choices that have become obscured within the deluge of data and pressure of our daily lives.

Define each leadership context & act accordingly

Some of the greatest success stories of effective leadership involve the ability to assess a context, define related expectations and shift according to the need. Some of the greatest leadership failures include the inability to read a changing situation and adjust. Imagine playing a round of golf - but only using one favorite club simply because you were comfortable and familiar with that club. Effective leaders constantly examine, much like a good golfer, the numerous aspects of their environment and match the club, stance, and shot to the particular reality they find themselves in.

After a successful four-year stint as a manager for an R & D site here in the Northwest, a client recently accepted a transfer to another site. Not only was it a stretch for him, given his less technical background, but his role, expectations, and staff all changed. If that wasn't enough, the promotion required a move across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe. He faced the need to examine not only the cultural differences, but also the related expectations for his availability, meeting style and timing. Even the definition of "leadership" in that environment was unique. Doing what had made him successful in the past could prove his undoing in this new context. This leadership opportunity required wisdom - assessing the key aspects of this new context and applying the right approach.

Less obvious examples abound; moving to another organizational culture or market sector. It could be moving from a large corporate role to self employment or from a profit environment to a non profit culture. Often, it's a shift for leaders from being the technical expert to leading other technical experts. And some days, a leader must observe a changing context can vary from meeting to meeting!

To better assess and define the context, here are ten questions that can help leaders choose the "right club for the right shot" in any leadership situation.



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As a Leader, as I observe this particular context:

1. What will success look like for me and how will I measure it?
2. What can I provide that might be missing otherwise in this situation?
3. What expectations (written or unwritten) exist around my role with key stakeholders? (Includes board, boss, direct reports, other employees, customers)
4. What do I want to create in this situation? What is my charge, my mandate, my opportunity to create a positive outcome in this situation?
5. How does this organizational culture define leadership? Where will I need to be in harmony with that culture and what should I seek to change about that culture?
6. What strengths and styles have I relied on which could serve me well in this context? Which could actually limit my success now?
7. What new skills must I build and what specific adjustments must I make to effectively influence in this context?
8. Who can I go to for an honest and thoughtful assessment of this new context to gain additional perspective?
9. How can I "test" my approach first in a safe environment in order to refine my strategy?
10. Who will be my champions, my confidantes, my resisters and my "wild cards"? How can I lead each of them effectively and with integrity?