

"A leader's job is to create more leaders A must read!" — TOM PETERS

SCOTT K. EDINGER • LAURIE SAIN

THE
HIDDEN
LEADER

DISCOVER AND DEVELOP
GREATNESS
WITHIN YOUR COMPANY

ADVANCED PRAISE

“Having every employee in a company behave like an owner is a competitive advantage, and the keys to making that happen are found in *The Hidden Leader*. If you are interested in creating a culture where leadership flourishes in every part of your business, read this book.

— **Jake Orville**, President and CEO, Cleveland HeartLab

“Finally a book that illustrates what we have been teaching: you don’t have to be in a formal leadership role or have a leadership title to be a leader. The insights delivered in *The Hidden Leader* provide clarity about how to identify and develop leadership skills at all levels of an organization, not only at the top.”

— **Mary B. Coburn**, Vice President for Student Affairs, Florida State University

“Too often leaders focus only on their senior managers. Edinger and Sain have recognized the value of leaders at all levels of the business. *The Hidden Leader* makes leadership accessible and beneficial for everyone, regardless of their position or title.”

— **Joe Robinson**, President, Catapult (#1 Shopper Marketing Agency, as ranked by the Hub, 2014, 2013)

“Leaders come in all shapes and sizes, and sometimes where you least expect to find them. We often look upward to position and title for leadership, but Edinger and Sain explain how to find it everywhere in your company, from the front line to supervisors and managers who aren’t traditionally thought of as company leaders. I hear a lot of CEO’s talk about not having enough true leaders in their business... *The Hidden Leader* will show you how to find and develop them everywhere.”

— **Joe Brancucci**, President and CEO, GTE Financial

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



SCOTT EDINGER

Companies like AT&T, Lenovo, and The Los Angeles Times, hire Scott Edinger to work with their senior leaders. He is recognized as an expert in helping organizations achieve measurable business results.

Scott is co-author of *The Hidden Leader* (AMACOM), *The Inspiring Leader* (McGraw-Hill), and this Harvard Business Review article, called by HBR a “classic in the making.” He is also a contributing author

to *The American Society for Training and Development Leadership Handbook*, (Berrett-Koehler & ASTD Press). Scott has authored dozens of other articles and white papers, and is a blogger for Forbes and the Harvard Business Review.

As founder of Edinger Consulting Group, Scott has worked with leaders in nearly every industry sector, helping them formulate and implement growth strategies, develop leadership capacity, increase revenue and profit, drive employee engagement, and attract and retain talent.



Laurie Sain

Laurie Sain is a professional writer and consultant, whose clients span virtually every major industry and include Fortune 1,000 companies such as Apple, IBM, the Union Pacific, Weyerhaeuser, and Charles Schwab Corporation. Laurie leads clients through strategic planning at the conceptual level, and then develops realistic executive and front-line solutions that enable each

company’s vision to thrive. Former director of content for Ninth House Network, Laurie lives in Lander, Wyoming.

THE HIDDEN LEADER

**DISCOVER AND DEVELOP
GREATNESS
WITHIN YOUR COMPANY**

SCOTT K. EDINGER • LAURIE SAIN

Enable Integrity

Each of us likes to believe we have integrity. Many of us do. But how does an organization ensure that its corporate culture recognizes, supports, and enables high integrity? When hidden leaders demonstrate integrity, they provide an opportunity for everyone to demonstrate and support integrity, too. By knowing integrity when you see it demonstrated by these leaders, you can determine the best ways to personally support it. You can also determine how well your company culture supports it and use specific tactics to enable integrity throughout the culture.

HOW DO YOU RECOGNIZE INTEGRITY?

When a hidden leader demonstrates integrity, she courageously and consistently adheres to a strong ethical code. Whenever one meets a hidden leader, the integrity is obvious in the leader's conversations, suggestions, responses, and actions. While hidden leaders display integrity in all their activities, sometimes much of their work is done in solitude or within a small group. This can make it difficult for those uninvolved in the team to see the leader's integrity in action.

The challenge for managers is observing visible evidence of integrity when the hidden leader is not in the immediate vicinity. In many cases, the manager must watch and listen for this evidence in the comments, responses, and actions of others—those who depend on hidden leaders in the organization and know the leaders' integrity can be depended on in the toughest situations.

For example, Scott was helping a boutique training firm develop and implement a cohesive strategy, part of which was a new training program

created by the firm's owners. They were very proud of it and planned to make it their keystone product.

A number of the employees in the firm had privately confided in Scott that they felt the program, as designed, could not deliver on its promise. In their opinions, it did not address the learning objectives and performance outcome it promised. These employees were concerned that clients would not be happy with the result.

At a meeting to discuss the program's launch, most employees of the firm, including the ones who had confided in Scott, feigned praise or said nothing. They were concerned that the owners would not take their criticisms well.

One client representative, Susan, was the only person to take a hidden-leader approach. Courageously, she pointed out that from her perspective as a client representative, the program was not in the best interests of the company's clients because it would not produce the improved business results the firm touted.

Just as the rest of the employees suspected, the owners of the firm did not respond well. They began to argue hotly with Susan that she didn't know what she was talking about and they had done a lot of research and careful development to make the program work. In spite of these arguments, Susan maintained her position, citing examples of client issues that supported her argument.

Susan's courage and integrity in making an unpopular argument for the sake of the customer galvanized others in the room. Other employees rose to defend Susan's points and share their own criticisms. The owners became quiet and ultimately listened. Faced with the overwhelming anecdotal evidence that the program needed more work, the owners agreed to revamp the program before launching it.

Susan's ability to stand up for what she felt was right—making an unpopular argument for the sake of the customer—led to a better product and ultimately more satisfied clients. Being a hidden leader was not easy for her, but in the end she gained the respect of her peers and senior management and ensured that customers got a better result. She also changed the

beliefs of many in the company about acceptable ways to disagree with the company's founders and still collaborate to create a productive end result.

While the owners of this company were slow to heed Susan's leadership, the support garnered from others finally enabled them to see its value. The redesigned program, once launched, was successfully adopted by many of the organization's current clients and a significant number of new ones. Careful observation and listening in situations like these can point to hidden leaders in an organization. Following are a few examples of situations where we believe hidden leaders can be discovered through the comments, actions, and recommendations of others.

Because hidden leaders demonstrate integrity, others trust that those leaders will meet their commitments. In the business world, this makes hidden leaders a dependable resource when deadlines are tight or situations are difficult. Because hidden leaders also have the courage to act, they can be counted on to help solve problems. Some of those problems may be outside of the leaders' immediate areas of responsibility.

When a manager hears employees suggest solutions that consistently include asking for help from a specific individual, that individual may be a hidden leader known to everyone on the front line. For example, suppose a team is overloaded and needs to offload a specific task or decision, or find a way to get more resources for the job. When those teams consistently point to one person not on the team who can help address the issue, investigate that person as a potential hidden leader.

Because of the leader's integrity, team members know they can depend on this person to get a task done, ask management for resources, or tell the team the truth about other options for handling those tasks. For example, Laurie was facilitating a strategy session with a number of frontline supervisors and lower-level managers who were asked to develop a competency-training plan for a new sales force. One of the managers proposed that a large group of skills was necessary before a salesperson could even begin to speak with customers. The group hesitated but generally concurred.

Another manager pointed out that training newly hired salespeople to succeed would be expensive and time consuming. In light of recent market

challenges, it would negate the company's products' competitive advantages. After a short silence, one of the supervisors took an alternate stand. She proposed that with only a few of those skills, a newly hired salesperson could at least go out on sales calls and shadow an experienced salesperson to learn more about how to interact with customers. In that way, the new person could potentially contribute to the sale and would learn critical skills quickly. Further, if new salespeople were then offered a group of simpler products to sell, with shorter sales cycles, they could practice critical skills in less competitive arenas. At the same time, they could continue their training to build more complex skills.

The hidden leader in this situation—the supervisor with the alternate plan—listened to everyone's points of view, proposed a solution that did not negate the need for highly trained salespeople, and enabled the company to bring new hires along faster. She presented her ideas freely, although the final proposal in front of the group came from someone higher in her organization. Her courage to speak up enabled the group to address a challenge effectively.

Many decisions in organizations do not entail clear or obvious choices. That's why such decisions are important and difficult. Someone must judge or weigh the alternatives to identify the best result for the largest number of people and the goals of the organization.

Most decisions offer a range of possibilities, including options that blur distinctions between right and wrong or best and worst. These ambiguous situations make many people uncomfortable. Evaluating a situation and identifying the critical elements before beginning the decision-making process requires a clear sense of one's own ethical code. It also requires an ability to acknowledge and accept the unknowns related to the decision. These unknowns create ambiguity, a lack of certainty that, to some, makes these decisions tantamount to flipping a coin.

In our experience, hidden leaders manage this ambiguity well, both personally and professionally. For example, pressed by deadlines but without full knowledge of a customer's needs, a team was struggling with how to proceed. One faction wanted to stop the project until all information



could be obtained; another felt that some kind of progress had to be made now. A hidden leader on the team suggested identifying what was already determined and presenting that by the deadline while approaching the customer for more information to be included in a later version.

Hidden leaders may not make the right decisions every time, but they are able to make decisions, a trait that in high-level executives is a signal of future success. Doing something—anything—achieves results faster than trying to eliminate ambiguity with facts, research, or knowledge. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter points out, perfection is unattainable anyway.¹ Hidden leaders know this. They depend on their integrity to help them bridge the gap between knowledge and ambiguity.

When a manager hears a group suggesting that a specific individual would have good advice for an ambiguous decision, that person is worth viewing as a hidden leader. The leader's integrity means that the situation will be considered carefully. The hidden leader will give an honest opinion about what is important to know and what can be ignored. Because hidden leaders are secure in their ethical codes, they can manage ambiguity. They know they are doing their best, and they trust their ethics to carry them over potentially dangerous ground.

Hidden leaders with visible integrity think about more than their own needs and concerns. Because they adhere to a strong code of ethics, they think about the impact of actions on others. Faced with the opportunity to help, hidden leaders choose to support others' development, careers, and decisions that improve the situation for the largest number of people.

These hidden leaders are often the ones others suggest newly hired employees talk to about working successfully within the company. When people struggle with their positions and want a third-party opinion of their skills, they often go to these hidden leaders for advice. Employees caught in a spiral of conflict with a group or individual also often ask these leaders for help. They may ask about how they can successfully handle others' anger issues, power struggles, or apparent destructive behaviors. In all of these situations, hidden leaders are seen as appropriate resources because everyone knows they will tell the truth, even if it isn't what the person

seeking advice really wants to hear. They know the leader will be fair and will couch negative feedback in a way that makes it easy to accept and work with. They also know that the hidden leader will strive to maintain an overarching view that fairly considers everyone's needs in the situation.

Those without this strong sense of fairness and integrity may appear to be helpful, but they might work behind the scenes to derail others' achievements or progress in a career or project. These are the secret tellers, backbiters, and problem originators in an organization. They are often described as having hidden agendas or motivations for their actions. They are looking out for themselves. Most people in the organization know who these people are, but others may be blinded by personal relationships or a lack of awareness or exposure. A wide-ranging evaluation of people who seem to have integrity to some, but are mistrusted by others, may uncover the discrepancies.

When people feel the support of hidden leaders, on the other hand, they trust those leaders fully. Managers will hear about recommendations made by a specific person, or notice individuals asking that person's advice on how to advance in the organization or improve skills and abilities. That person is the hidden leader who is open about helping everyone progress, for the benefit of each person, the organization, and the leader as well.

Early business organizations were structured by function. Few employees crossed the lines between functions to work with or interact with others. Today, that structural bias has changed. Innovative companies create cross-functional teams to develop products, organize systems, and solve problems. New structural systems are emerging that are flatter, meaning people with very different skills work together and have the same positional influence. Whether an organization has chosen to eliminate levels of management or several firms are working together virtually for short-term projects, more and more employees must work across functional boundaries and gain the respect of people in other fields and specialties.

For some people, this transition is difficult. Many people don't bother to understand others' work challenges and contributions and tend to think of their own functions as the sole anchors of a company's achievements.

But as you know, every function contributes to the success of an organization. Building bridges between functions so people understand how and what each one contributes is a major challenge. These bridges can mean the difference between reacting and innovating.

Hidden leaders naturally cross these functional boundaries, both in person and by reputation, because their integrity assumes that everyone is working toward the success of the company. They project their integrity on others. When they work with other functions, they ask questions to understand how that person or department fits into the entire structure that is the organization. They credit others for having expertise and trust that others speak the truth, unless proven otherwise.

One midlevel product manager we know was frustrated by his company's information technology (IT) department. The manager needed to enable a client company to access data stored on his company's servers. IT refused to allow this. In a cross-functional meeting to resolve the problem, the manager met one of the frontline programmers.

The meeting didn't resolve the issue, but the programmer, who was a hidden leader, took the initiative to talk in detail with the product manager. He learned why client companies needed to access certain company information behind the firewall, and he educated the project manager about the challenges of enabling such access to people outside of the company. During the conversation, both the product manager and the programmer realized the negative customer experience that would result if access created a data security breach. With this understanding, the hidden leader was able to work with customer-facing staff and internal IT colleagues to provide the critical data without allowing live access past digital security measures.

When colleagues in one function refer a problem or a challenge to someone in another function, it is possible that other person is a hidden leader. Through the leader's relationships and integrity as a person, the leader's reputation has seeped out of the functional area. People known across an organization—whether for honesty, integrity, ingenuity, or collaboration—

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are often the hidden leaders who are truly concerned with others' success as well as their own.

WORKSHEET: IDENTIFY INTEGRITY

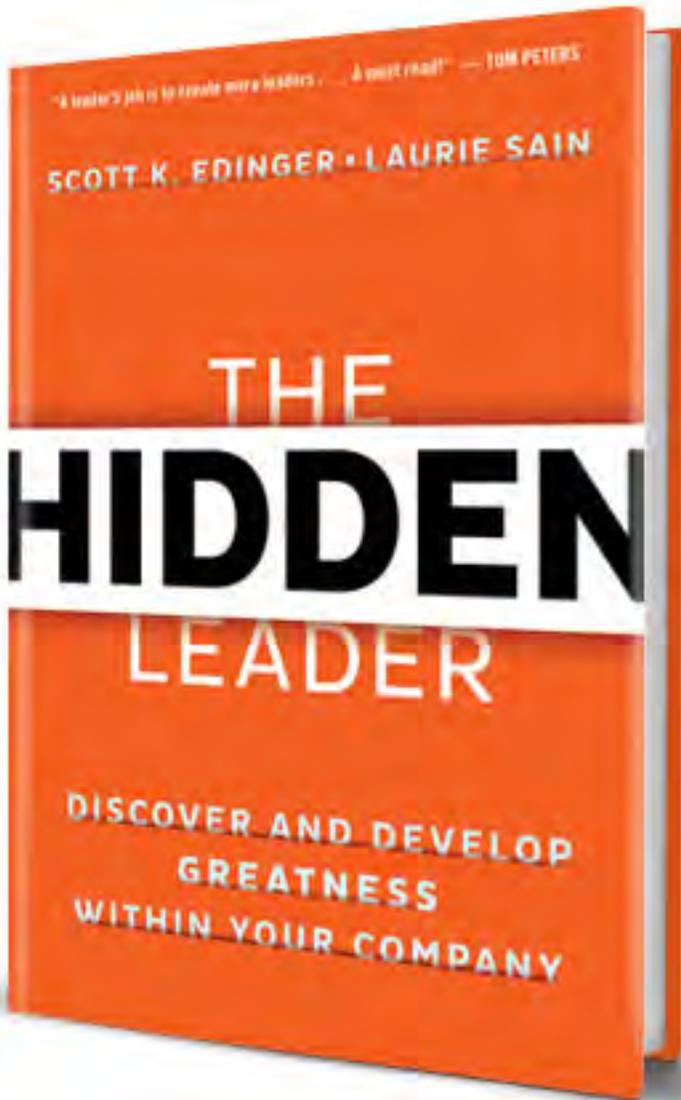
Use the worksheet below to help identify potential hidden leaders who demonstrate integrity in your organization. Answer each question without too much thought. You will remember the hidden leaders you've unknowingly interacted with or heard about. The online worksheet enables you to print or share your results.



bit.ly/GFJUpm

Answer this question... (Answer by identifying the first person who comes to mind.)	By identifying a specific person (Write a function or job title if you wish to protect the person's identity.)
A work team is stuck with a process problem. Who would its members ask outside of the team for help?	
A project faces a potential conflict of interest. Who raised the issue in the first place to the project team?	
When your team must make a decision without all the facts, to whom do the members go for advice?	
Who in your work group will dependably make decisions or act to address a problem?	
Who in your work group would you ask to identify someone who might be good for a specific role or project?	
Who in your organization is known for honesty? Collaboration? Ingenuity?	
If you wanted to understand what someone in another function does, who might you ask in your company?	
Who did you name most often?	

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