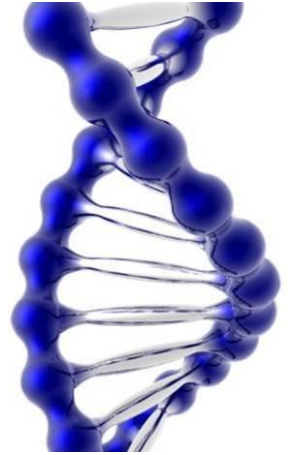


# What is your Leadership DNA?

## How to distill the foundations of your success and life

By Michael McQueen

The statistics are compelling – currently one baby boomer turns 60 every 6 seconds. What's more, within 6 years almost half of current middle-and senior level managers in our workforce will have moved into retirement.



We are staring down the line at the single biggest transition of power and leadership our workplaces and society have ever witnessed over the coming years. In light of this, it is more important than ever that leaders are taking steps to ensure that the lessons they have learned throughout their careers can be passed on to the next generation. A failure to do so would be as professionally reckless as it would be tragic.

Undoubtedly one of the most profound scientific discoveries in recent centuries has been that of DNA – particularly how it functions as a foundational building block of every living cell and organism. Except in the case of family businesses, most leaders will not pass their biological DNA onto the next generation, but in this article I want to encourage you to consider how you can pass your character DNA on to the next generation of leaders.

*The 3 elements of every leader's character DNA:*

**D**efining Experiences  
**N**on-Negotiable Values  
**A**xioms for Living and Leading

### Defining experiences

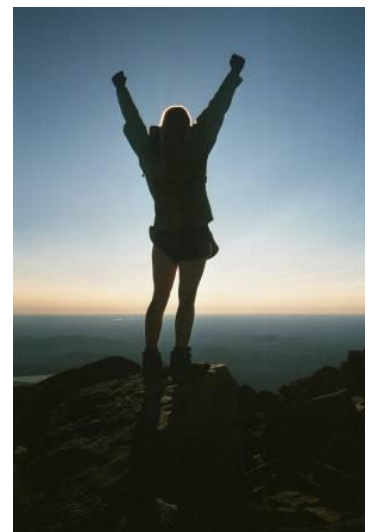
If you laid your career and life out on a timeline, there would undoubtedly be a number of key moments and experiences that stand out as turning points. These defining moments shape our character and profoundly shift our view of life, ourselves and others.

So what have these been for you? What moments and events have shaped who you are as a leader and a person? They may have been incredibly **positive experiences** such as:

- Financial windfalls
- Game-changing business connections
- Marriage
- Becoming a parent
- Getting a promotion
- Taking a massive risk that paid off.

Or perhaps they were experiences that have been **testing, challenging, and painful** even to look back on. Perhaps they were experiences of:

- Monumental failure,
- Despair or depression
- Betrayal by friends
- Divorce or relationship breakdown
- Personal loss and tragedy



Naturally the above lists are only a guide. My encouragement to you would be to seriously consider what events have shaped you as a person and as a leader. The key point to take away from this though is that the experience itself is not what matters – rather it is the lesson you learnt through the experience.

### **Non-Negotiables**

This second element of your character DNA relates to the core values you have based your life upon. These values would be ones that you would not be willing to compromise even if it were popular, profitable or justifiable to do so.

In reflecting on what your non-negotiable values may be, I would encourage you to consider the following questions and the hints that the answer to each provide;

#### **a. Who are 3 people you admire and what is it that you admire in them?**

I. \_\_\_\_\_ because of their \_\_\_\_\_

II. \_\_\_\_\_ because of their \_\_\_\_\_

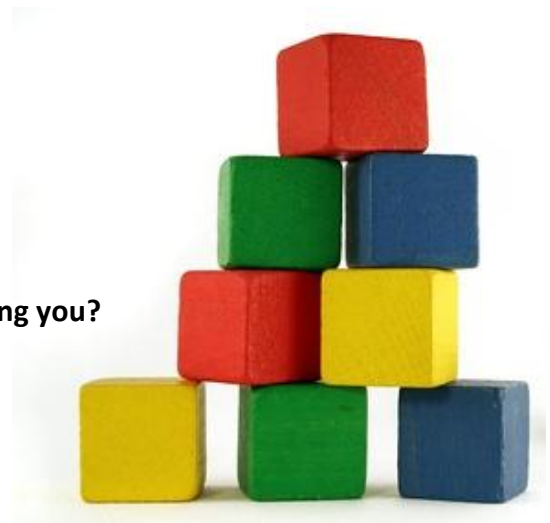
III. \_\_\_\_\_ because of their \_\_\_\_\_

#### **b. What are 3 character traits you CANNOT stand in others?**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

#### **c. What are 3 words you would hope people use when describing you?**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



Bearing the answers to the above questions in mind, reflect on the list below of common core values. Which of those would you describe as being non-negotiable values for you?

- |               |                   |               |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Unity         | Originality       | Balance       |
| Quality       | Education         | Passion       |
| Fun/Enjoyment | Community service | Innovation    |
| Teamwork      | Flexibility       | Authenticity  |
| Empowerment   | Sustainability    | Inclusiveness |
| Integrity     | Ownership         | Creativity    |
| Compassion    | Accountability    | Work ethic    |
| Family        | Fairness          | Equality      |

A key point to remember is this; core values are **ingrained** not **intentional**. In other words, your true core values are not the ones you think you should have, but rather the ones that you already do.

## **Axioms for Living and Leading**

In case you are unfamiliar with the term, an axiom is defined as a principle or core truth which forms the basis for decisions or actions. Put more simply, axioms are the core beliefs that are often labeled as 'personal philosophies'. They are the mentalities and assumptions that guide the way we view ourselves and the world around us.

Below are the 35 most common axioms that leaders and people in general base their lives on. I would encourage you to spend a few moments and reflect on at least 5 of those which you would describe as personal philosophies for you:

1. People are inherently good
2. You can achieve anything in life if you work hard enough
3. What goes around comes around
4. The most important thing in life is to be happy
5. Never completely trust or rely on any person
6. Failure is not an option
7. It's who you know not what you know
8. If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all
9. Life was never meant to be easy
10. There is a higher power who created us and loves us
11. If you want something done right, do it yourself
12. Choice not chance determines our destiny
13. God helps those who help themselves
14. Honesty is the best policy
15. Family always comes first
16. Spare the rod, spoil the child
17. Love conquers all
18. Failure is an event not a person
19. Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me
20. God's delays are not his denials
21. Anything a man can do a woman can do better
22. Life isn't fair
23. Success is 99% luck
24. Integrity is what we do when nobody is watching
25. Every cloud has a silver lining
26. It's what is inside that counts
27. Anything that can go wrong will go wrong (Murphy's law)
28. A change is as good as a holiday
29. The love of money is the root of all evil
30. You reap what you sow
31. A real friend is your greatest possession
32. No pain no gain
33. This too shall pass
34. Time is money
35. Nothing ventured, nothing gained

As organisations worldwide consider the challenge of succession and generational transition that they will inevitably face in the coming years, it will be more important than ever for leaders to be able to identify the implicit and often unconscious things that have contributed to their success in life and business – their character DNA.

Perhaps the most important legacy these leaders can leave is to pass this DNA on to the next generation and in doing so provide a firm foundation upon which leaders of tomorrow will be able to build. May your life and example as a leader become the stars by which the next generation can steer.



Michael McQueen is a 3-time bestselling author speaker and social researcher.

Having presented to over 140,000 people across 5 continents since 2004, Michael has his finger on the pulse when it comes to emerging trends shaping business and culture.

To find out more or to purchase one of Michael's books, visit [www.TheNexgenGroup.com](http://www.TheNexgenGroup.com).

