

Leadership Myths and Truths. How Much Do You Know?

There are many misconceptions about leadership. Test your knowledge.

Published on June 1, 2014 by [Ronald E. Riggio, Ph.D.](#) in [Cutting-Edge Leadership](#)

Social scientists have been studying [leadership](#) for over 100 years. As a result, we know quite a bit about leaders and what makes for effective leadership. See how accurate you are in identifying these basic leadership myths/truths.

- 1. Is Leadership More Born or Made?**
- 2. Leadership and Management are Fundamentally Different. True or False?**
- 3. Leaders Lead and Followers Follow. True or False?**
- 4. Who Leads Better? Men or Women?**
- 5. Most Leadership Development Programs Fail. True or False?**

Before we review the answers, bear in mind that in many cases in social science, the answer is “both” or “it depends.” In any case, let’s see what the latest research tells us about each of these key leadership issues/questions.

1. Leadership is more made than born. Based on twin studies (which is the methodology used by psychologists to answer the “nature vs. nurture” question), the best estimate is that leadership is about two-thirds made and one-third born. What this means is that when it comes to getting the best leaders, we put some emphasis into leader selection, but more emphasis into developing better leaders.

2. False. Although it’s a controversial issue, in today’s world, effective leaders/managers have to have both sets of skills. That is, they have to manage and pay attention to details (e.g., HR and legal issues), but they also have to be leaders to set direction and motivate followers. [Read more detail about this question here.](#)

3. False. It is a myth that leaders and followers do very different things. In reality, it takes leaders and followers working together to “co-produce” leadership. Without followers, there is no leadership, and someone has to lead, even if it is the followers who are sharing the leadership without an identified leader. Read more about [shared leadership](#) and [followership](#).

4. Sorry guys, but the best research evidence that focuses on leadership potential suggests that women have more leadership potential for leading in today’s modern organizations. In particular, women have better relationship skills, are more ethically minded, and are getting more educated than men. [Read some of the research evidence here.](#)

5. False. A recent meta-analysis of 100 years of leadership development/training programs finds that overall leadership programs tend to work, although some work better than others, and it depends to a great extent on the length of the training program and if participants are highly motivated to develop. [Read about this research here.](#)

It is a myth that leadership is “mysterious” and we really don’t know much about it. Volumes of leadership research have discovered quite a bit about what makes leaders effective, although there is still a lot to learn.

How did you do? Share with a friend.