

Journal of Applied Christian Leadership

Volume 4 | Number 1

Article 2

2010

Overriding the Automatic System

JACL Editors

Andrews University, jacl@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editors, JACL (2010) "Overriding the Automatic System," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 4: No. 1, 8-8.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol4/iss1/2>

This Editorial is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

RESEARCH FOR ACTION

OVERRIDING THE AUTOMATIC SYSTEM

Have you ever met a math genius who has won advanced math competitions, but has difficulty keeping his checking account going without bouncing checks? If you feel like asking, How can people “be so ingenious at some tasks and so clueless at others?” you would not be alone. In their book *Nudge*, Thaler and Sunstein (2009) pursue this question in some detail (see book review in this issue).

Scientists think that they have found at least part of the answer to these seeming contradictions. They point to two distinctive kinds of thinking our brain engages in. The first kind, the *Automatic System*, is intuitive and automatic—not really conscious “thinking.” It kicks in as we get nervous when our airplane hits turbulence. The other, the *Reflective System*, is rational and engages in actual “thinking.” That’s when we tell ourselves, “Planes are very safe!” as we try to calm down.

The problem is that the Automatic System can often mislead you. A few years ago I learned the hard way that automatic decisions can be dangerous. During a visit in London I was almost hit by a car coming from the “wrong” side. Yes, you guessed right. Before crossing a busy road I *automatically* looked—the wrong way, despite the big letters on the pavement to look

right. My conscious thinking was just too slow to correct what I normally do automatically.

Fortunately the Automatic System can be trained, but it takes a bit of time and effort. How can you use this insight as a leader? Thaler and Sunstein invite you to become a choice architect. Design choice elements in your company in such a way that they will “nudge” people towards making choices that are in their best interest. Research has shown that small changes in the context can have dramatic effects. It can be as simple as putting the unhealthy food choices in your company cafeteria out of the first line of reach.

Source: Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2009). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. New York: Penguin Books.

DESIGNING LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Many Christian training programs for leaders are just simplified versions of academic programs. But are these programs effectively helping leaders to develop the skills and knowledge they need to be effective? Elliston and Kauffman (1993) suggest that one way to decide what type of program might be needed is to think about five types of leaders (Figure 1).

They make two important observations: (1) Effective churches need to invest the greatest share of

Type	Functions & Context	Characteristics
Type 1 leader	Small group or ministry	Intensive, face to face, not extensive
Type 2 leader	Coordinator of ministries	Intensive, direct and indirect
Type 3 leader	Pastor of the church/district	Less intensive, direct and indirect
Type 4 leader	Regional context	More extensive, mostly indirect
Type 5 leader	International context	Very extensive, mostly indirect

Figure 1. Five Types of Leaders (Elliston & Kauffman, 1993).

resources into training Type 1 and 2 leaders since they are the most likely to reach non-Christians.

(2) Designers of leadership training programs need to ask, what type of leaders are to be trained? Each type of leader has different needs.

- *Type 1 and 2 leaders* need short hands-on practical training in specific skills and knowledge. Informal or non-formal models of training, modeling and apprenticeships may be most effective.

- *Type 3 leaders* often need a formal seminary degree to function in a church setting. It should cover knowledge in management and leadership.

- *Type 4 leaders* may need a broader knowledge of theories and their application because they function in so many different contexts. Non-formal, less structured education models may be most helpful.

- *Type 5 leaders* need to have not only theories but to develop an ability in theory construction that allows them to modify theories of action when required by different contexts. Informal models, mentoring, and apprenticeships may be the best options.

What kind of leadership programs does your organization offer? And for what type of leaders? Does the design of your programs match the intended type of learner? Do you invest enough in equipping your Type 1 and 2 leaders? If not, what will you do about it?

Source: Elliston, E. J., & Kauffman, J. T. (1993). *Developing leaders for urban ministries*. New York: P. Lang.

MULTIPLIERS OR DIMINISHERS

Bringing out the best in people is something effective leaders aspire

to achieve. Yet some leaders seem to consistently hold teams back by draining their intelligence and underutilizing their collective capacity. Why are some leaders able to unleash the ideas, skills, and interests of their people, leading to superior performance and long-term success. The difference can be traced to distinctive leadership styles Wiseman and McKeown (2010) call *multipliers* or *diminishers*.

Diminishers may hold their teams back despite their good intentions, unaware of the restrictive impact they have on others. Researchers cite three signs:

- *Being a visionary*. Some leaders are good at laying out a compelling vision and persuading others to buy into the vision. But they leave little space for people to think through the challenges themselves.

- *Having the gift of gab*. Some leaders are passionate and articulate, taking up a lot of meeting time. But what they intend to be infectious is, unfortunately, stifling.

- *Being a creative person*. Some leaders are a sparkplug of creative thinking, continually generating new ideas. But team members suffer from organizational whiplash as they try to keep up with every new idea imposed by this “creativity.”

It may be time to listen to those who dare to stop you in your tracks to let you know how your leadership style is affecting them so you can develop ways to become a true multiplier.

Source: Wiseman, L., & McKeown, G. (2010). Bringing out the best in your people. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(5), 117-121.