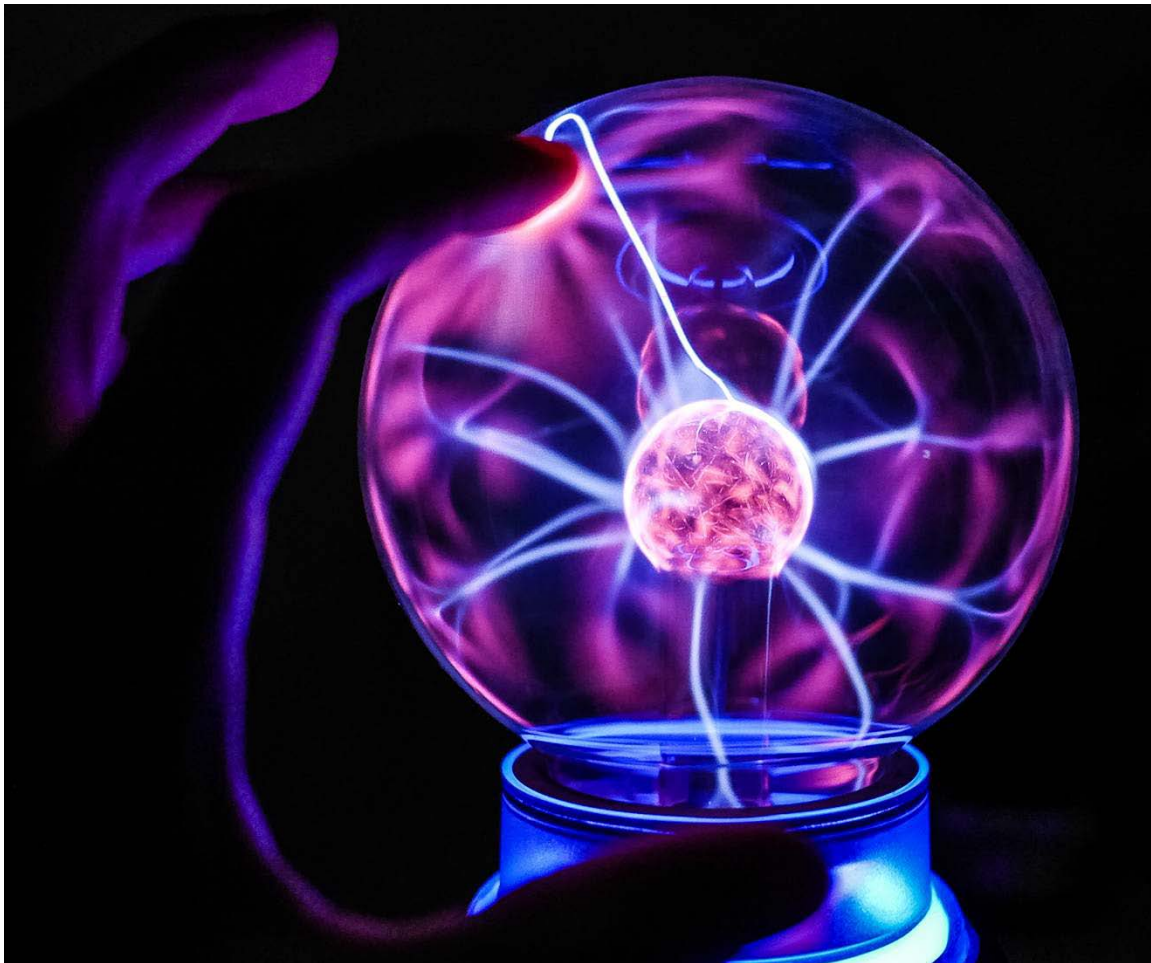


# Grace Judson



## Leadership Communication Skills Assessment

detailed results report

*a leadership resource  
from Grace Judson*

~ empowered leadership ~



## Leadership Communication Skills Assessment Results Report

*Did you make a  
note of your final  
score?*

*Write it here for  
future reference:*

\_\_\_\_\_

### Introduction

Thank you for requesting this report – and for taking the Leadership Communication assessment in the first place!

Communication is *the* single most important factor in leadership. There's simply no way around it: to be an effective leader, you must be an effective communicator; to be a great leader, you must be a great communicator. Every aspect of leadership – strategic planning, tactical execution, crisis management, team development, on and on – requires communication to be fruitful.

The assessment may be just nine brief questions, but those nine questions touch on the three key aspects of leadership communication:

1. *Strategic direction and change management*
2. *Tactical execution*

### 3. *Team development*

This report will help you understand your personal leadership communication skills, allowing you to acknowledge and celebrate your strong points and pointing you toward areas where you have opportunities for growth.

*Please note that the online assessment doesn't capture how you answered each question, and nor does it retain your total; it only tracks the segment into which your score falls. Hopefully, therefore, you remember – or wrote down – your responses!*

## **The Questions, the Answers, and the Analysis**

### **Question #1**

When telling employees about a significant upcoming change (strategic direction, a big new project or client acquisition, a reorganization, a major milestone, changes in senior leadership, etc.), it's best to:

- 2 Send out a company-wide email blast.
- 3 Conduct an all-hands meeting, either in person or via a conference call or video.

*Which answer  
did you choose?  
Write the points  
here:*

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- 0 Don't make a fuss. The less people know about change, the less resistance and anxiety they'll feel.
- 3 Have senior leadership inform their direct reports, who then inform theirs, and so on.
- 5 Combine multiple methods and multiple timings for your communication.
- 3 Hold division or department meetings with senior leadership.

### **Analysis**

Intellectually, we know that people receive and process information in different ways.

However, we often fail to use that knowledge when we communicate.

The four answers with a score of **3** are all perfectly valid. Each of those steps is necessary for effective communication. But they are *not sufficient*.

Because people receive information in different ways, not everyone will "get it" if you use only one of those four channels.

Similarly, if you choose only one single point in time to send your message, there will inevitably be someone on vacation or out sick who won't be available to receive the information.

Equally inevitably, there will also be people who choose to skip the meeting or not read the email because they're in the midst of a crucial task and "don't have time."

All these people will resort to the inaccuracy of the office grapevine for their information – and that leads to confusion, lack of focus, and a breakdown in employee morale.

The **5**-point answer, "combine multiple methods and multiple timings for your communication," appears deceptively simple – and when fully implemented, is remarkably effective.

If you chose the **0**-point answer, I urge you to think of a time when you felt out of the loop on an important issue or event. I doubt you enjoyed the experience, or felt empowered to act in the most effective way in completing the tasks assigned to you.

While it may seem simpler at first to limit the spread of information about change (and in some cases may be necessary for regulatory and/or confidentiality reasons), it is *never* a good long-term practice.

As Marine Corps General Alfred Gray observed,

*Communications without intelligence is noise.  
Intelligence without communications is irrelevant.*

## Question #2

To give positive feedback, you:

- 5 Offer in-the-moment specifics about what they did especially well.
- 3 Say, "Thanks! great job!"
- 2 Make a note to include a commendation for a job well done in their next performance review.
- 0 People are smart enough to know when they've done well. It's better to reserve feedback for times when correction is needed.

*Which answer  
did you choose?  
Write the points  
here:*

\_\_\_\_\_

## Analysis

It's easy to say "thank you."

It's less easy to explain *why* you're saying "thank you."

And it's even harder to *remember* to explain why you're saying "thank you."

Yet your explanation of *why* is substantially more meaningful for both you and the recipient, for several reasons.

1. You've taken the time to explain what you're thanking them for, so they know you're not just giving them lip service or being "nice."
2. You have an opportunity to shape their behavior – not in some weird manipulative way, but through genuine appreciation. Letting them know exactly what they did right means they'll be more likely to do it right again next time – and able to extrapolate from this into other situations as well.
3. You personally will feel better if you're specific about your appreciation than if you just toss off a quick "thank you." Seriously. Try it and see!

It's also important to give your feedback immediately, or at least as soon as possible following the behavior you're marking. People are more able to take an immediate response to heart than if it comes hours, days, or – as in the case of the **2**-point answer (include the feedback in their next annual review) – months later.

(This is just one of several good reasons why the annual performance review is gradually disappearing from many organizations.)

Margaret Cousins, whom Wikipedia calls “an educationist and suffragist,” put it this way:

*Appreciation can make a day, even change a life.*

*Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary.*

Unconvinced about this? In a recent episode of Deloitte’s *Resilient* podcast, the interviewee talked about how one CEO’s habit of giving written notes of appreciation to his employees changed their lives – including one recipient who, *years later*, still had the note folded into his wallet.

### Question #3

To give corrective feedback on a serious issue (a poor decision or a significant mistake – we’re talking more than typos in an email here!), you:

- 0 Let them know without question that they missed the mark. Being too forgiving leads to more problems down the road.
- 5 Make sure they understand what went wrong and ask what led to the mistake.
- 2 Make a note to include your displeasure in their next performance review.

*Which answer  
did you choose?  
Write the points  
here:*

\_\_\_\_\_



- 3 Calmly explain exactly what they did wrong and let them know you expect them to do better.

### Analysis

Just as with positive feedback, you want to be as clear and specific as possible when delivering corrective feedback, and you want to do so as close to the event as you can. (Of course, unlike positive feedback, corrective feedback should always be given in private.)

Note that the **5**-point answer includes asking *why* they made the mistake.

Note also that this question refers to a *serious* error.

Executives and managers often forget that their teams don't have the same breadth and depth of knowledge and experience as they do.

Asking *why* someone made a mistake is the first step in being able to coach them into better choices in the future, and can also reveal a need for training that might apply to more than just this one employee.

People truly want to do a good job; workplace mistakes are far more often due to a lack of knowledge or understanding than to laziness, carelessness, or some sort of deliberate act or omission.

Again, this is not about typos in an email. Obviously, asking someone why they didn't proofread better is more likely to create frustration, defensiveness, and even anger. In the case of a minor, low-impact error, the **3**-point answer, simply letting them know what went wrong and explaining your expectations, is the better option.

Author Peter McWilliams puts it this way:

*Mistakes, obviously, show us what needs improving.  
Without mistakes, how would we know what we had to work on?*

#### Question #4

Your department is in the middle of a big, exciting project, and one of your team asks about the long-term goals and expectations. You:

- 0 Are surprised to realize you don't have a good answer.
- 2 Give them the answer that was given to you.
- 5 Ask questions to learn what they currently know and to help them understand more fully.
- 0 Really? They don't already know? They should know by now!
- 4 Base your explanation on their role on the team.

*Which answer did you choose?  
Write the points here:*

\_\_\_\_\_

## Analysis

Understanding the long-term strategic objectives of a project is often difficult – sometimes even for the leaders who helped set the strategy in the first place.

For the team members responsible for implementing the project, it's still more challenging. Unless you're part of a company that's masterful at communicating strategy, team members (and even middle managers) are typically uninformed about the bigger picture.

Yet when we know *why* we're doing something, we're so much more engaged in (and even excited about) doing things *well*. We know how the end result will impact us as well as the company as a whole. And since we know the desired outcome, we're also far more likely to have useful ideas for improvement.

As I've said before in this report, operating in the dark is never helpful!

So the **4**-point answer is good: it requires you to take the time to offer an explanation that will make sense to the questioner.

The **5**-point answer is better: it involves coaching the questioner into a deeper-than-intellectual understanding – a “felt sense,” so to speak – of the desired outcome.

As Sir Winston Churchill said,

*However beautiful the strategy,  
you should occasionally look at the results.*

Which means looking at the *actual, in-the-moment* results, not the planned outcomes that haven't happened yet.

### Question #5

You're frustrated by a disconnect with a colleague – it seems like you're constantly at odds with each other. In trying to resolve it, you:

- 2 Take a stand. It's important to have boundaries and not appear to be a pushover.
- 0 Know it's not the best option, but you can't help thinking about how much this person annoys you.
- 4 Invite your colleague to have an honest, open conversation about what's going on.
- 2 Swallow your pride and act like a team player – that's what's expected of you.

*Which answer  
did you choose?  
Write the points  
here:*

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5 Separate your feelings from the facts, consider how you've contributed to the problem, and modify your behavior accordingly.

## Analysis

I love this concept from spiritual teacher Byron Katie:

*Defense is the first act of war.*

When we feel as if we have to defend ourselves and our position, we enter into the conversation with our barriers up. The other person can and will feel that. Their barriers go up in response, and suddenly you're in conflict – sometimes without even having said a word to each other.

Boundaries in the workplace (and in your personal life) are important; being a doormat is not a great career move. But neither is being a prickly porcupine.

Finding the right middle ground starts with honesty and understanding – and honesty with yourself comes first. Disentangling your feelings – frustration, anger, hurt, resentment, or whatever may be part of your experience – from the facts about what's happening is seldom easy, but it's a necessary step in changing the situation.

Getting clear with yourself about how you've contributed to the problem is also hard, but let's be real here: in any encounter between people, *everyone* contributes in some way. If you're clear about your part in the situation, the next step could be to have a conversation with the other person ... but it might not be; it might be that this would only create additional tension, *especially if you haven't taken the step to be clear about your role*. That's why having the conversation is a **4**-point answer instead of **5**-point.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, while it's true that we can't change other people, we *can* influence them – and the single most powerful way to influence others is by changing how we interact with them.

Stepping aside, even if only temporarily, from the complex emotions surrounding a conflict gives you a new perspective. Honesty with yourself about the facts and about your contribution to the problem also helps clear away the fog.

Remember, you don't have to share everything you've learned about yourself or about the causes and results of the disconnect. Simply by knowing more – being more self-aware – you can start making changes in your own behavior, both actions and words. And that will inevitably cause changes in the behavior of the people you're interacting with.

As Wayne Dyer wisely observed:

*When we change the way we look at things,  
the things we look at change.*

### Question #6

To be effective in a negotiation, you:

*Which answer  
did you choose?  
Write the points  
here:*

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- 2 Anticipate the worst-case scenario so you can rehearse what you'll say.
- 5 Take time before the meeting to get clear about what you really want.
- 5 Try to understand the other person's point of view, based on what you know about them and the situation at hand.
- 1 Listen carefully to what they say so you can negotiate your position more effectively.
- 0 *Don't* try to understand their perspective, because you don't want them to think you agree with them.

### Analysis

This question and its answers get to the heart of several key myths about communication in a conflict, disagreement, or negotiation.

The first myth is that if we really, truly *understand* someone's point of view – why they believe what they believe, why they want what they want – we will somehow automatically end up in agreement with them.

We don't like this idea, because we have our own beliefs and wants. So we tend to avoid trying to understand.

However, the reality is that *understanding does not equate to agreement*. While we *might* come to an agreement (and if we do, what's wrong with that if it's an authentic change of heart and mind?), the chances are much greater that we'll simply have ... a better understanding of the situation.

And that gives us several important advantages.

- ✓ We can now address specific points in the negotiation rather than arguing in generalities or repeating our own point of view. Understanding doesn't weaken our position; it strengthens it considerably.
- ✓ Empathy (being able to say, truthfully and with feeling, "Yes, I understand you!") is disarming. It's hard to stay angry or confrontational when someone reflects back their sincere awareness of your position.

So don't hold back from trying to understand. Instead, be curious, ask questions, and be as empathetic as possible.



And while it's useful and important to know where your "do not cross" line is (the **2**-point answer), it's even more useful to understand what you want with great precision and clarity (the other **5**-point answer).

Author, executive coach, psychologist, and FBI hostage negotiation trainer Dr. Mark Goulston puts it this way:

*When people feel felt, they feel less alone, and when they feel less alone, they feel less anxious and afraid – and that opens them up to the message you're trying to send.*

### Question #7

When an employee gets emotional (upset, angry, etc.), you generally:

- 2 Try to discuss the matter rationally.
- 1 Encourage them to calm down.

0 Think to yourself that at this point in their career, they should be aware that these emotions don't belong in the workplace.

- 5 Listen to what they say and reflect back what seems to be bothering them.

*Which answer  
did you choose?  
Write the points  
here:*

\_\_\_\_\_

- 1 Find yourself empathizing with their upset state and getting upset as well, or feeling attacked and defensive in response to their anger.

## Analysis

Another commonly-held myth is that emotions don't belong in the workplace.

Yet we work because we want to feed ourselves and our family, keep a roof over our heads, and turn the lights on when it gets dark. We work to maintain a lifestyle that we enjoy. And hopefully, the work we do is fulfilling and meaningful; we feel as if we're making a difference in the world.

How, then, would we *not* experience emotions, sometimes strong emotions, in the workplace?

But when someone is obviously upset, angry, passive-aggressive, or whatever other less-than-helpful emotion they may be expressing, it's hard to know what to do – and it's easy to get pulled into their over-wrought state. It's natural, then, to suggest that they calm down, or to try talking rationally with them about the situation.

However, brain science tells us that this is unlikely to succeed. (Our own experience also tells us this. Think back to a time when

you were upset and someone told you to calm down. I'd be willing to bet this made you feel more perturbed, rather than less!)

In a very small nutshell (because this is a much larger topic than can be covered here), what's happening is what Daniel Goleman, author of the book *Emotional Intelligence*, calls the "amygdala hijack."

The oldest part of the brain, which you may have heard called the "reptilian brain," has no capacity for logic or rational conversation. Its only purpose is to keep you safe, and its repertoire is fight / freeze / flight. And when it's activated, it's got almost total control. You literally cannot think rationally or logically.

So when someone appears out of control emotionally, they're in the throes of an amygdala hijack. And then, because our brains are wired this way, we will tend to join them down in that reptilian brain, as described in the last answer for this question.

Your best option is to stay as calm as possible (*don't* go down there with them!), and avoid giving rational advice and "calm down" counsel (they can't hear it). Instead, encourage them to explain why they're so upset. The simple, curious question, "What's the worst part about this for you?" can work wonders.

Of course, once the amygdal hijack has passed (which can take a few hours on up to a day or two), you'll obviously want to have the

rational discussion about what happened to see what you may need to help resolve.

As the British World War II motivational poster suggests,

*Keep Calm and Carry On!*

### Question #8

When you need to make a significant decision – or when you’re coaching an employee through the process – you typically:

- 2 Consider which of the available options would be the most interesting for you and your team.
- 0 Trust your gut instinct.
- 2 Evaluate the risk factors for each option.
- 2 Think about what resources are available to bring the different options to successful completion.
- 5 Measure each option against company values, vision, and mission to determine strategic alignment.

*Which answer did you choose?  
Write the points here:*

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### Analysis

Oh, how we love to believe our instincts are infallible!

But unfortunately, relying on gut alone doesn't typically get us the best results. While there's certainly a place for intuition in decision-making, it should never be your first or only signpost.

Meanwhile, the **5**-point answer – measuring your options against the values, vision, and mission of the organization – requires that you have *real* values, *real* vision, and a *real* mission in place.

I emphasize “real” because all too often organizations' values, vision, and mission are a lot more like marketing claims than they are about their true, enacted values, vision, and mission. (By “enacted,” I mean lived out in the world, not just pretty posters on the wall.)

The **2**-point answers are all part of traditional decision-making and planning processes. As such, they're perfectly valid responses. The problem is, a choice can appear 100% on target from the perspective of risk, resources, and fun factor, but still be the wrong decision for the organization.

Or, as one of the characters in the movie *Pirates of the Caribbean* pointed out:

*Even a good decision, if made for the wrong reasons,  
can be a wrong decision*

*Which answer  
did you choose?  
Write the points  
here:*

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### Question #9

The relationship between communication, strategy, and culture is:

- 0 There is no relationship; each can be managed independently of the others.
- 5 Communication is the thread that ties all of it together.
- 3 Without good communication, you can't implement strategy.
- 5 You need effective communication to build your culture and implement strategy.
- 4 The organizational culture must be solid before you can have good communication or effective strategic execution.

### Analysis

One of the primary ways businesses go astray is by ignoring the importance of culture.

Culture can be hard to measure. And oftentimes executive leadership isn't sure that the results of such measurement will be what they want - so because they also aren't sure how to create cultural change, they avoid the whole issue.

Needless to say, that's not especially effective.

How *do* you build a strong culture?

Communication, of course, along with (as indicated in the analysis for the previous question) a solid platform of values, vision, and mission.

How the company communicates, both internally and externally, defines who and what it is in the marketplace.

Real communication builds trust in leadership, in their employees, and in their customers.

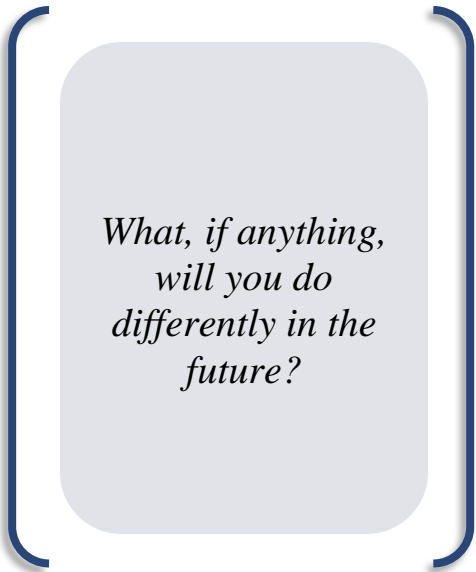
Real communication spreads ideas up as well as down the chain of authority.

Real communication aligns the entire company around values, vision, and mission – and therefore around strategic goals.

All of which are obviously key factors for success, in the near term as well as in the long term.

Business author Gary Burnison puts it this way:

*For a leader, communication is connection and inspiration  
– not just transmission of information.*



*What, if anything,  
will you do  
differently in the  
future?*

### **What, if anything, will you do differently?**

Pop open a Word document or grab paper and pen.

Go back and review your answers to the quiz questions.

Which ones do you feel good about?

Do you agree with the analysis? Why and why not?

Where do you think you have opportunities to explore and grow?

What about these questions makes you feel uncomfortable?

Do more than just *think* about what this analysis means to you. *Writing your thoughts* helps you process more deeply, and gives your brain a chance to offer insights and ideas that won't otherwise be able to come to the surface.

Or, as the well-known executive coach Martha Beck says,

*Writing isn't just a task. It can be a confidant, a therapist, a good parent, a best friend, a channel to wisdom you didn't know you had.*

### **What's Next?**

Obviously, you took this assessment because you were curious.

If the assessment and this report have satisfied your curiosity – great! I'd love to hear from you and learn what was most helpful.



*Click  
[HERE](#)  
to email me*

*Click  
[HERE](#)  
to schedule time  
to talk*

On the other hand, if you'd like to learn more about how you can grow your leadership communication skills, and thereby take significant steps forward in your leadership capacity, let's talk.

My contact information is in the sidebar on the left. Email is easy, or you can go to the link shown there to schedule time directly on my online calendar.

My mission is to help leaders, teams, and individuals become masterful communicators.

I'd love to help you.

Thanks for reading, and happy communicating!

## About the Author: Grace Judson



I'm a leadership trainer, speaker, coach, and consultant focusing on first-line and recently-promoted managers and supervisors, helping them cross that daunting gap between being *part* of a team, and *leading* a team.

Drawing on my 25 years of corporate experience – including 16 years of executive leadership – plus 13 years of leadership coaching, I work with individuals, teams, and leaders to develop their skills, helping them become the empowered leaders they want to be – and their teams deserve.

I hasten to point out that I'm not as old as all those years of experience might indicate. After all, I started my career as a two-year-old, turning my parents' faces toward each other when they argued, wanting them to see each other instead of fighting. That was the beginning of my lifelong quest to understand what makes people tick – and what makes a good, or even great, leader.

As a recovering executive myself, I know very well what it's like to be in the trenches as a leader and manager, trying to make the best-possible decisions in the heat of the moment – and trying to figure out how to manage challenging employees. Without experience, those moments are difficult, but they make the difference between an on-time, top-quality project with a motivated, inspired, high-performing team ... and missed deadlines with demoralized employees.

Experience is essential.

It doesn't have to be painful.

You can short-cut the process with the right support.

I was in the corporate world for over 25 years, 16 of which were in leadership and senior executive roles. I've been an executive coach since 2005, and I've helped more clients than I can count – helped them discover their leadership style, let go of feeling like a fraud or imposter, develop the skills to be confident leaders – and find meaning and joy in their leadership role.

The tools presented in this guide are part of a powerful, confident leader's repertoire. And they're just a small taste of the learning available.

## WANT MORE?

Are you seeking to become a respected, effective, strong leader?

Your next step is to schedule your Personal Leadership Profile at <https://www.gracejudson.com/personal-leadership-profile/>

In this 30-minute session, we'll:

- Identify the biggest challenges facing you right now
- Explore what success as a manager, supervisor, and leader looks and feels like – for YOU
- Wrap up with a 30 – 60 – 90 day action plan for how you can overcome the challenges and become the leader you want to be (maybe even the leader you wish you'd had in the past!)



Find us on 



[click here to schedule your Personal Leadership Profile](https://www.gracejudson.com/personal-leadership-profile/)