

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Jill Danzig, Danzig Communications  
212-579-5215; jill.danzig@earthlink.net

## **NEW BOOK SHOWS LEADERS HOW TO AVOID LETTING THEIR STRENGTHS BECOME WEAKNESSES**

***THE VERSATILE LEADER* by Bob Kaplan, with Rob Kaiser**

What happens when you have too much of a good thing?

Any leader who relies too heavily on his or her strengths will turn those strengths into weaknesses, explain leadership development experts Bob Kaplan and Rob Kaiser in their groundbreaking new book **THE VERSATILE LEADER: Make the Most of Your Strengths Without Overdoing It** (Pfeiffer/Wiley; May 12, 2006). Their decades of practice and research with leaders prove a solid connection between leadership versatility and effectiveness – and an equally strong connection between a lack of versatility and stalled or derailed careers.

Kaplan and Kaiser propose a new approach to leadership development, one that helps leaders avoid becoming “lopsided” – using too much of one attribute and in the process crowding out an essential complementary skill. **The Versatile Leader** shows leaders how to achieve the right blend of complementary skills and attributes at the right time to be consistently successful.

### **The Next Generation of Leadership Development**

Kaplan and Kaiser point out a curious omission in leadership assessment. Leaders owe it themselves to discover which strengths they overuse, but to date assessment tools fail to capture strengths overused. This eye-opening book offers a practical way to rectify this problem by introducing the principle of “volume control.” To perform effectively on any dimension of leadership leaders need to adjust the volume to the right setting for the situation – neither too low nor too high.

The principle of volume control also helps leaders avoid what the authors call “the gravitational pull of negative feedback.” Many leaders underestimate their strengths, and as a result are unaware that they are overdoing it – that the volume is too high. Feedback on leadership *positives*, and not just the negatives, will help leaders become more aware of the impact of their strengths. To correct a tendency to overdo it, then, leaders need to truly let their strengths sink in.

Kaplan and Kaiser point out that when a leader takes his or her greatest capability too far – when a strength is overused – the result is lopsided leadership: the strong, take-charge leader fails to empower his employees, for example, or the results-focused leader fails to plan for the long-term.

Leadership versatility, as defined by the authors, means achieving a balance between pairs of competencies or aptitudes that complement each other. The human tendency is to heavily favor one side or the other – to be, for instance, detail-oriented but never seeing the big picture or visionary but never paying attention to details. Versatile leaders learn not only how to have enough of both sides of the pair, but also how to avoid having *too much* of one side.

Although leaders are familiar with the idea of versatility, or balance, the field of leadership development has overlooked it. Leaders are assessed in terms of single dimensions, not pairs of complementary attributes. In **The Versatile Leader**, Kaplan and Kaiser offer practical methods to ensure a two-sided approach to leadership assessment and development – an approach that allows leaders to learn not only how to turn up the volume on weak skills, but when to turn down the volume on their overused strengths.

### **TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING? A CASE STUDY IN LEADERSHIP**

“Rich Spire” has all the attributes of a great leader. He is a sharp strategist, quick to identify or anticipate opportunities for the future. He’s not afraid of making bold moves, but knows the difference between being bold and being rash. He excites people with his vision and ideas. He exudes power and energy. And, finally, he doesn’t just talk: Rich knows how to turn ideas into action.

Despite these impressive attributes, Rich’s leadership is at times ineffective and counterproductive — and ironically it’s his very strengths that hurt him. His bold strategic moves sometimes overwhelm the operational capabilities of his company. And his power and charisma overwhelm attempts by his staff to influence him or contribute in meetings.

#### **About the Authors**

**Bob Kaplan** is a partner with Kaplan DeVries Inc., which specializes in leadership consulting for individual executives and management teams. Previously, Kaplan had a senior role at the Center for Creative Leadership, where he is presently honorary senior fellow. He has consulted to many top executives over the years and is the author of numerous articles as well as the book, *Beyond Ambition: How Driven Managers Can Lead Better and Live Better*.

**Rob Kaiser**, also a partner with Kaplan DeVries Inc., is director of research and development. He formerly served as an adjunct research scientist at the Center for Creative Leadership.

#### **THE VERSATILE LEADER: Make the Most of Your Strengths Without Overdoing It**

By Bob Kaplan, with Rob Kaiser

May 12, 2006

ISBN: ISBN: 0-7879-7944-9

Price: \$40.00; hardcover

## *KEY FINDINGS IN THE VERSATILE LEADER*

### **Two Major Oppositions in Leadership**

There are a number of competency pairs involved in leadership skills. However, two major oppositions stand out as the most important to a leader's effectiveness:

1. **Forceful and enabling leadership.** Forceful leadership involves taking the lead; enabling leadership creates conditions for other people to take the lead. Both types of leadership are virtues, as long as neither is taken to an extreme. Versatile leaders are able to do both optimally: they can take the lead *and* enable others to take the lead, be decisive *and* participative, make tough calls *and* provide support and encouragement.
2. **Strategic and operational leadership.** While forceful and enabling leadership involves *how* people do their work, strategic and operational leadership concerns *what* they work on. Strategic leaders focus on medium and long-term success. Operational leaders know how to get results in the short term. Versatile leaders balance both skills effectively. They can set long-term strategy but also get short-term results; they are aggressive about growing the business but also respect the limits of the organization's capacity to grow; they inspire people with a vision but also keep people on track.

Versatility does not mean working toward the muddled middle. The versatile leader is adept at being either strong or enabling (or strategic or operational) depending on the requirements of the situation. This adaptability is the very definition of versatility.

### **Major Implications**

The notion of versatility – the balanced use of strengths as appropriate – has major implications for the practice of leadership assessment and development.

1. *Overusing your strengths is no less of a problem than being deficient.* Leaders have to learn to modulate their strengths so that they don't do too much of a good thing. The first step is determining what you overdo. Standard leadership assessment tools, however, are designed to identify weaknesses, not strengths taken too far. This book introduces a way to capture both.
2. *Know your own strength as well as the effect it has.* Many leaders underestimate the full impact of their strengths on others. They think they're only going 55 miles per hour when in fact they're breaking the speed limit. Self-awareness is a first step — and not an easy one.
3. *When you overdo a strength, there's typically a complementary skill or quality that gets crowded out.* It helps to know how your leadership is lopsided. Unfortunately, most assessment tools fail to identify lopsidedness in leaders.

## **THE NEXT GENERATION OF 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK: A NEW TOOL FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND ASSESSMENT**

The concepts in **The Versatile Leader** are based on twenty years of research in leadership development and assessment. At the Center for Creative Leadership, author Bob Kaplan developed one of the world's first 360-degree feedback processes, an approach that revolutionized the traditional top-down performance assessment. At CCL, he also developed an executive coaching program long before the concept of executive coaching was popular. 360-degree feedback and executive coaching are still powerful tools for leadership development, but even these tools need to be improved to ensure the best results. 360-degree surveys determine the presence of a leader's strengths, but not whether that leader is overusing those strengths at the expense of equally important complementary strengths. Is the take-charge leader steamrolling talented subordinates instead of enabling them to use their talents and skills? Is the long-term strategic leader forgetting about the details required to implement the vision?

At the core of **The Versatile Leader** is a new leadership development tool called the Leadership Versatility Index (LVI) that specifically addresses how leaders can make optimal use of all of their capabilities and attributes.

Using its unique rating scale--a departure from the typical 1-5 type--the LVI:

1. *Assesses leaders for excesses and not just deficiencies, and*
2. *Examines their performance through the lens of two sets of complementary dimensions of leadership: forceful versus enabling leadership, and strategic versus operational leadership.*

There is a patent pending on the LVI. The reason it will be patented is that there is nothing else like it.

Contact: Jill Danzig, Danzig Communications  
212-579-5215; [jill.danzig@earthlink.net](mailto:jill.danzig@earthlink.net)