

# The Trusted Executive

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# You are the Company you Keep

The leaders in your professional and personal network are either role-modelling the warmth, light and moisture of level 5 leadership or they are role-modelling something colder, darker and dryer. Either way, you will be influenced by their presence. The American entrepreneur and speaker, Jim Rohn, took this principle to an extreme when he said, 'You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with'[19]. Rohn went as far as to suggest that if you want to work out how much income someone earned all you need to do is to work out the average income of their five closest friends.

It's a scary concept even if it is only 50% true. So what has science to say on this matter? American psychologist Professor Lawrence Rosenblum concluded that 'humans are incessant imitators' [20]. Rosenblum researched how people sub-consciously imitate the speech patterns of those around them commenting that 'Sometimes we even take on the foreign accent of the person to whom we are talking, leading to embarrassing consequences'. Having worked internationally for many years I know exactly what he means; I have often found myself talking French, Dutch and German accents of English in various management meetings.

Taking Rohn's assertion and Rosenblum's research and applying these to level 5 leadership, it should prompt us to ask ourselves the following questions:-

- Who are the five leaders in my personal and professional life that I currently spend the most time with?
- Do these leaders exhibit the characteristics of level 5 leadership in terms of choosing to be humble?
- How can I spend less time with those leaders who do not choose to be humble?
- Who are the five leaders who I regard as the most humble in my wider personal and professional network?
- How can I spend more time with these people?
- What is the first step I am going to take to effect this change?

I personally experienced the power of this approach when I first became a Vistage Chair. Vistage has 20,000 CEO members worldwide and upwards of 400 Chairs who mentor the member CEOs in peer groups of 12-16. Vistage attracted me to the Chair role through its strap line - 'from a life of success to a life of significance'. I now realise that this phrase sums up a level 4 to level 5 transition whereby you exchange the personal glory of level 4 leadership for the understated yet more sustainable trusted stewardship of level 5 leadership. When I attended my first Vistage Chair conference in New Orleans I realised I was stood in a room with 400 leaders who were practising trusted stewardship. It was a unique and intimidating experience. It humbled me, yet I knew as I mingled with that clan, that it was subtly re-wiring my brain: You are the company you keep.#



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