

9 Competitive Leadership Styles

You Are A Highly Competitive Person

Your self-description on the Competitive scale indicates that you consider yourself to be a highly competitive person. Your score indicates that you may be experiencing some negative consequences as a result of this view of yourself.

The Competitive scale measures the need to establish a sense of self worth by winning, seeking recognition and gaining attention by competing against others. The idea that winning equals a sense of worth is central to persons scoring high on the Competitive scale. Because such individuals adopt winning as a key idea, losing at anything diminishes their sense of worth.

Competition is widely accepted and receives daily attention in the media, in various contexts within organizations and in the way we generally account for success or failures. Yet, interestingly enough, having a competitive style is not an effective predictor of success in business, sports or life.

You seem to have a love affair with the idea of being a competitive person. It would be reasonable to assume you have adopted the view that highly competitive people are effective; however, as a style of thinking in management, sales and life in general, competition is not associated with effective performance. In fact, competitiveness actually detracts from the very thing it seems to court: Success.

Your high score on the Competitive scale suggests that you are very likely to associate your sense of self worth with winning or losing. In other words, you feel great when you win and depressed and angry when you lose. Out of self-doubt, you have a constant need to prove yourself. You need continual recognition and praise from others, which you seek through engaging in competitive activities. You tend to turn every encounter into a competitive situation. This extends to situations involving your spouse, children, friends, subordinates, and other acquaintances.

You are very likely to have a severe win/lose orientation: You are capable of distorting real goals and turning life into a game. You may tend to be aggressive or at least capable of putting down others. You will tend to see the world as divided into “winners” and “losers,” although your black-and-white distinction may not be an accurate interpretation of reality.

Excessive competitiveness often reveals a fear of failure. Out of a prevailing sense of inadequacy, you compensate for this fear by engaging in competitive activities. You also frequently overestimate your skills, abilities and experience in your efforts to impress others. As a result, you tend to rush into projects without fully realizing their complexity.

You probably have a strong need to be recognized by others as “the best” and your behavior is likely to come across to others as self-enhancing. You like to be the center of attention and are therefore susceptible to feelings of jealousy and envy when others draw attention from you. Rather than working with others cooperatively to achieve a goal, you tend to work against them in the hopes of emerging as “better” than they are. This can put considerable strain on your relationships.

Your very high score on Competitive scale indicates that you are really hooked on competition. You are motivated to compete in order to gain admiration and attention from others, as well as feelings of superiority.

This section of your report will help you to explore the series of choices you have made as a result of your tendency to be competitive. It describes the characteristics of competitive behavior, discusses the origins of such an idea and suggests ways you can reduce or eliminate this ineffective approach.

How You See Yourself

Your very high score on the Competitive scale indicates that these characteristics may describe you:

- The tendency to associate self worth with winning and losing.
- A need for recognition and praise from others.
- A tendency toward aggressiveness.
- Reckless “hip-shooting” behavior and unnecessary risk-taking.
- A “win-lose” orientation that distorts perspective and goals.
- An extreme fear of failure.

More About the Competitive Style

While competitiveness is thought to be an effective motivator, research would suggest that use of this style does not foster excellence. A highly competitive person will focus on winning instead of on achieving a superior performance. Wanting to win is one thing; being good enough to win is something else. The competitive person’s attention to the concept of winning acts as a distraction that can prevent him or her from performing well enough to actually “win.”

The competitive person attaches his or her sense of self worth to winning and sets up an all or nothing proposition. The need to constantly establish self worth by winning clearly communicates rather severe self-doubts. These will spread to doubts about one’s capabilities and generate a continual need to reaffirm one’s adequacy through the vehicle of competition. These insecurities frequently lead competitors to turn every situation into a contest and consistently strive to “beat” others, regardless of the consequences.

While it’s easy to assume that if a person wins consistently he or she must be competitive, the so-called “winning attitude” is more likely composed of factors commonly found in the Achievement (11 o’clock) style.

Competitive people focus on obtaining self-aggrandizement; achievement- oriented people focus on accomplishing tasks excellently. Achievement is effective where competitiveness is not.

Contrasting some of these ideas for you might help make the difference clear.

In Competition

- A sense of superiority
- Self-oriented
- Egotistical, boastful
- Performing for others to see
- Expects to be seen/noticed

In Achievement

- A sense of responsibility
- Concern for the task at hand
- A realistic view of things
- Self-contained motivation
- Earns respect from others

As a motivator, competitiveness is not deep enough to produce real excellence, which is the reason that competitive individuals do not do well in sports. Life constructs a great many competitive situations. Persons who do well in competitive situations focus upon excellence in performance and not upon “beating the other guy.”

Because highly competitive people tend to measure their self worth according to their triumphs over others, losing at anything can be especially destructive. In fact, those who are driven to compete run the risk of becoming so preoccupied with winning that they are distracted from the task at hand. This can not only limit their productivity but also jeopardizes the quality of the end result.

Understanding Your Score

Perhaps answering a few questions can help you determine the degree to which the self-defeating aspects of competition might be fully operating in yourself. Read the following descriptions and decide which, if any, apply to you.

- You will tend to use the language of competition: Your speech will have many references to the issue of winners vs. losers. You will see the world divided that way. Your speech patterns will reflect that winning is everything and losing is nothing. These are more than just habits—they reflect your basic ideas about the nature of things.

- Even over the most trivial things or in the most friendly, cooperative situations, you will take a position of needing to be better than the other person: To win, or to show your superiority. You may get polite feedback from others about this which you will tend to ignore.
- Despite your concentration on competition, you probably have some proof that you are not top-ranked in what you do for a living: You are not a star performer.
- You tend to compete even in the most intimate situations. You need to keep proving yourself, over and over again. You are competitive with your spouse/ significant other, children, parents, neighbors, colleagues, even your own subordinates. To you, everything is a contest.
- If the full truth were known, you actually enjoy being seen as competitive. You like the image, the assumed proof of your pride and self-sufficiency.

Your Competitive Style on the Job

As a leader, you are typically concerned with how you are perceived by others. Your strong need for recognition leads you to establish unrealistically high goals for subordinates and to sometimes take credit for what others do. Although you usually have a fixed idea of what you need to do to “win,” you often become so preoccupied with keeping tabs on the competition that you lose sight of a plan’s goal.

To instill the competitive instinct in those who work for you, you frequently pit staff members against each other - destroying any possibility for effective teamwork.

Becoming More Effective: Steps to Change

A tendency to rely on winning to build self-esteem can reduce your effectiveness in the long run. Your score for this style is a good indication of your orientation toward competitiveness.

Although you may be using this behavior with satisfactory results, you have alternatives that could lead to greater success. The following suggestions will get you started.

- Try to drop the idea that your sense of worth depends on winning or losing: This is the central issue in your competitiveness.
- Learn to focus on achievement-oriented thinking. Focus on pursuing your own goals and on accomplishing excellence in results. A healthy desire to do things well is what makes achievers successful.
- Seek a standard of excellence for yourself. Forget about winning. If it happens, wonderful - but stop taking it so seriously.

- Pinpoint the areas in your performance where your efforts really count and explore these areas in depth. Focus on doing things well, and forget the competition.
- Realize that there is a cause-and-effect relationship to most things.
- Create your own goals. Too much competition changes the focus from inside you to the outside world. This difference is what separates an outstanding performance from a so-so performance.
- Seek feedback from others on how you are doing as you work to drop your preoccupation with competition.
- Observe yourself when you are playing recreational sports. Pay special attention to the ideas you hold about winning and losing. Participate in sports strictly for personal satisfaction: Try and reduce the competitive motives.
- Accept the fact that you do not need to continually prove yourself against all comers and situations: Life is not a game. Learn to appreciate what you do well.
- Do not get obsessed about losing when you make a mistake or perform poorly. Accept the situation, learn from it and move on. Avoid blaming yourself when you lose.
- Do your best to produce excellent results. This is far more effective and productive than focusing on winning. The twist is that you are likely to do better in a competitive situation when you focus on the quality of your performance rather than on winning.
- Remember that you are a valuable person, whether you “win” or “lose.” “Losing” does not mean that you did not perform well.

Action Steps for Change

Now that you have reviewed the Competitive Style, review the following suggested actions, and rate them in terms of your perceived need for change, where 0 is little or no need and 3 is a strong need.

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| 1. Compete less; cooperate more. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 2. Stop comparing myself to others. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 3. Focus on the quality of the end result rather than on winning. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 4. Focus on doing things well rather than “beating” others. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 5. Recognize that my self-centered behavior drives people away. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 6. Analyze why I am constantly trying to impress others. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 7. Focus on doing things well rather than on outperforming others. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 8. Learn to work with others toward a common goal, rather than competing. | 0 1 2 3 |
| 9. Realize that I don’t always have to be “right.” | 0 1 2 3 |

Changing Your Behavior Can Result in These Benefits

- A more effective approach to accomplishing tasks.
- Increased productivity.
- Higher quality results.
- The ability to relax and enjoy life.
- A reduction in stress.
- The ability to cooperate with others more readily and easily.
- Closer, more reciprocal friendships.
- A greater sense of self worth.
- Less concern with impressing others; more concern with pleasing yourself.
- A realistic attitude toward winning and being the best.
- More acceptable behavior with others; less need to dominate, show off and/or belittle others.
- More satisfaction from intimate contact.