

## Room at the top

Wealth, power and influence - the allure of a senior business role is undeniable. If you have innovative ideas, the capacity to inspire others, boundless self-belief and plenty of raw ambition, you could become the next Richard Branson

**Marianne Curphey**  
**Monday May 17, 2004**

You have a burning desire to become the next Anita Roddick, Bill Gates or Tony Blair - but how can you tell whether you'll make the grade? What's more, how do you know that becoming a leader is what will bring you the greatest career and personal satisfaction?

"Quite often people know early on that they are interested in leadership roles," says Siobhan Hamilton-Phillips, senior consultant psychologist at Career Psychology, which specialises in personal and career development.

"Academic attainment is not necessarily a factor - many successful leaders never went to university," she adds.

"Instead, what sets them apart is their physical energy - the ability to work long hours and remain positive when things around them are falling apart."

Richard Branson has said that every day in business has its challenges and you have to relish the inherent uncertainty. Indeed, leadership can be demanding and stressful and you have to be sure you can cope.

"Good leaders are able to counter stress in a practical way rather than succumbing to it," says Hamilton-Phillips.

"Making rational decisions at times of stress is very difficult. You need masses of energy - can you get up early in the morning, work out at the gym, do a day's work and then entertain in the evening, day in and day out?"

### **What sort of person makes a leader?**

If you want to know whether you've got what it takes, compare your own personality and aspirations against Hamilton-Phillips' checklist of leadership skills:

- Leaders generally take good decisions
- They remain positive in adversity
- They have above-normal levels of energy
- They are great communicators
- They have targets, aims and ambitions
- They look ahead rather than worry about the past
- They enjoy solving problems
- They do not rely on good luck
- They have imagination but remain practical

Hamilton-Phillips says a great leader selects the right people, enables others to achieve common aims and inspires loyalty. This means setting a personal example that inspires others. You must have the charisma to lift morale with a smile.



Richard Branson says every day in business has its challenges and leaders have to relish uncertainty

## Success stories

**Seán Brickell**, 36, spent the first part of his professional life as a network and regional TV reporter and newsreader and a national newspaper and magazine reporter and writer.

After deciding he wanted a career change, he visited Career Psychology for advice a year ago and has become an after-dinner, business and motivational speaker and a host and presenter at conferences and events. His new role involves inspiring people to take control of their lives and leading them towards a career or pathway they will find fulfilling.

Brickell says: "My father used to say: 'Always be your own man and don't be afraid to stand on your own feet'. If I have any fear, it is of not having lived life to the full.



Seán Brickell

"I think leading yourself is the hardest thing - when I am speaking I am in charge of the audience and I have to think about how I handle and adapt to them so they get the greatest benefit. Leaders tend to have a taste for adventure and I love to challenge myself personally and professionally

"When I went to Career Psychology for tests and advice they concluded I was a '10 out of 10 maverick... who was put on this earth to perform and entertain people' and should become a professional speaker. The idea of doing something I love and getting paid - sometimes very nicely indeed - appealed to me greatly.

"A leader needs courage, energy, self-belief and self-discipline. I have to be my own motivator and resource when I am feeling down. I also think there is an element of luck - I have achieved everything that I set out to do, I love entertaining people and making them laugh.

"Even before I changed jobs I used to tell people: if you don't like what you are doing, take control and find another job. I was more single minded than any other person I knew in my age group.

"As a leader you need to be able to keep going, even in those moments when you doubt yourself. You definitely need a clear vision and to be able to overcome the seemingly impossible with energy and enthusiasm.

"You must have real drive and not be brought down by setbacks or disappointments. You've also got to work really hard and be passionate about what you do."