CHARACTER · STYLE · JUDGMENT

The Petersen Leadership Model: An Overview

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PROFESSIONAL BUSINESS COACHES ALLIANCE | CPBL COURSE READING

Seven questions every leader must answer: Character, Style, Judgment, Culture, Execution, Life, and Legacy

Required reading for CPBL 401, Week 1. Retain this reading; it is referenced throughout CPBL 401, 402, and 403.

Why a leadership model?

Northouse defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (Northouse, 2024). That definition tells us what leadership is. It does not tell a working leader where to begin, what to develop next, or how the pieces fit together. The Petersen Leadership Model answers those questions. It turns the academic definition into a developmental path that a leader can follow over a career.

The model rests on a simple observation drawn from fifty years of leadership in the Navy, financial services, and business coaching: leaders who sustain results over time have developed seven capacities, and they have developed them in a recognizable order. Before you can influence others well, you must understand who you are. Before you can adapt to different people and situations, you must understand how you lead. Before you can build an organization others want to be part of, you must be able to decide well. Each capacity builds on the ones before it.

In the CPBL designation, Northouse provides the academic foundation, the Petersen books provide the practitioner perspective, and the Business Transformation Plan (BTP) applies both to a real organization. The Petersen Leadership Model is the through-line that connects all three.

The seven dimensions at a glance

Each dimension is framed as a question every leader must answer. Read in order, the questions form the CPBL storyline:

Who you are » How you lead » How you decide » What you create » How results are achieved » How you live » What you leave behind

Dimension	Question	In brief
Character	*Who you are*	*Character is the set of values, commitments, and habits that guide your choices, especially when no one is watching and the easy answer pulls the other way.*
Style	*How you lead*	*Style is the way your leadership becomes visible to others: how you communicate, build relationships, and adapt your behavior to people and situations.*
Judgment	*How you decide*	*Judgment is the discipline of making sound decisions: separating fact from assumption, recognizing bias, weighing alternatives, and choosing what matters most.*
Culture	*What you create*	*Culture is what people in an organization come to experience and expect.*
Execution	*How results are achieved*	*Execution is the discipline of turning direction into results through clear objectives, accountability, metrics, and an operating rhythm.*
Life	*How you live*	*Leadership is sustained by the person behind the role.*
Legacy	*What you leave behind*	*Legacy asks what continues because of how you led: the people you developed, the successors you prepared, and the institutions you strengthened.*

The seven dimensions in depth

Character: who you are

Character is the set of values, commitments, and habits that guide your choices, especially when no one is watching and the easy answer pulls the other way. It is the foundation for trust.

Followers grant influence to leaders whose words and actions match over time.

- **What it looks like in practice:** Keeping commitments; telling the truth when it is costly; using power to serve common goals rather than to protect yourself.
- **Where CPBL develops it:** Introduced in CPBL 401 (Weeks 2, 4, and 6) and tested again through ethical leadership in CPBL 403.
- **Companion reading:** *The Spirit to Soar*

Style: how you lead

Style is the way your leadership becomes visible to others: how you communicate, build relationships, and adapt your behavior to people and situations. Effective leaders adapt their approach without lowering the standard. Character supplies the standard; Style adapts the behavior.

- **What it looks like in practice:** Matching direction and support to a person's needs; listening before deciding; adjusting communication to the audience.
- **Where CPBL develops it:** Developed in CPBL 401 (contingency models, followership, servant leadership) and in the relationship weeks of CPBL 402.
- **Companion reading:** *Who Let the Dogs Lead?*

Judgment: how you decide

Judgment is the discipline of making sound decisions: separating fact from assumption, recognizing bias, weighing alternatives, and choosing what matters most. Strategy is applied Judgment; it requires choosing what to do and what not to do.

- **What it looks like in practice:** Testing your own assumptions; seeking evidence that might prove you wrong; setting clear priorities.
- **Where CPBL develops it:** The central emphasis of CPBL 402 (persuasion, strategic thinking, corporate strategy) and applied to ethical decisions in CPBL 403.
- **Companion reading:** *The Facts Don't Matter*

Culture: what you create

Culture is what people in an organization come to experience and expect. It is shaped less by what leaders announce than by what they repeatedly do, reward, and tolerate. Every leader is creating a culture, intentionally or not.

- **What it looks like in practice:** Modeling stated values; recognizing contributions; addressing behavior that undermines trust.
- **Where CPBL develops it:** CPBL 401 examines the leader's influence on Culture; CPBL 403 develops the ability to create, evaluate, and change organizational Culture through teams, inclusion, and leading change.

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- **Companion reading:** *Who Let the Dogs Lead?; The Sun Will Come Up Tomorrow*

Execution: how results are achieved

Execution is the discipline of turning direction into results through clear objectives, accountability, metrics, and an operating rhythm. A plan that is not executed changes nothing.

- **What it looks like in practice:** Defining measurable objectives; assigning ownership; tracking progress and resolving issues promptly.
- **Where CPBL develops it:** The focus of CPBL 403, where the BTP Objectives and Tactical Action Plan are built and the PBCA Business Operating System is introduced as an execution lens.
- **Companion reading:** *The Sun Will Come Up Tomorrow*

Life: how you live

Leadership is sustained by the person behind the role. Life addresses perspective, purpose, resilience, relationships, and well-being; the capacity to sustain yourself and your people through change and difficulty.

- **What it looks like in practice:** Keeping perspective under pressure; investing in relationships; recovering from setbacks.
- **Where CPBL develops it:** Developed in the closing arc of CPBL 403 (conflict, crisis, change, and the final week).
- **Companion reading:** *The Sun Will Come Up Tomorrow*

Legacy: what you leave behind

Legacy asks what continues because of how you led: the people you developed, the successors you prepared, and the institutions you strengthened. Effective leadership endures beyond the leader's own tenure.

- **What it looks like in practice:** Developing others; preparing successors; mentoring; building systems that outlast you.
- **Where CPBL develops it:** Foundations laid in CPBL 401 (succession planning) and CPBL 402 (mentoring); completed in CPBL 403.
- **Companion reading:** *The Spirit to Soar; Who Let the Dogs Lead?*

How the dimensions work together

The seven dimensions are not stages to complete and leave behind. A leader does not finish Character in one course and move on to Style in the next. All seven operate in every real leadership situation, and they reinforce or undermine one another. The order describes emphasis and development, not separation.

Consider a leader who must deliver an unwelcome decision to her team. Her Character determines whether she tells the truth. Her Style determines how she tells it and whether people feel respected. Her Judgment determined whether the decision was sound in the first place. The way she handles the moment shapes Culture; the follow-through determines Execution; her own steadiness reflects Life; and the example she sets for the next generation of leaders becomes part of her Legacy.

Three relationships are especially important:

- **Character and Style.** Character supplies the standard; Style adapts the behavior. Adapting your approach to a person or situation is effective leadership. Abandoning your standards to do so is not.
- **Style and Culture.** Culture is the accumulated result of repeated leadership behavior. What a leader consistently does, rewards, and tolerates becomes what the organization expects.
- **Judgment and Execution.** Strategy without execution changes nothing, and execution without sound judgment produces the wrong results efficiently. Choosing priorities is the bridge between the two.

The CPBL learning journey

The three courses form one integrated, 24-week leadership development experience, taken in the required 401 » 402 » 403 sequence. Each course emphasizes certain dimensions while continuing to practice the others.

Course	Theme	Central question	Primary emphasis
CPBL 401: Leadership	Foundation	Who am I, and how do I lead?	Character and Style, with the leader's influence on Culture and an early look at Legacy
CPBL 402: Strategy	Direction	Where are we going, and how do we decide?	Style in relationships and influence, moving into Judgment and strategy
CPBL 403: Leadershift	Impact	How do we deliver results and sustain success?	Culture, Execution, Life, and Legacy

The model and the Business Transformation Plan

The BTP is where the model becomes practical. Over the three courses you build a plan to transform a real organization, developing two components in each course (at Weeks 4 and 8) and carrying your approved work forward to the next course.

Course	BTP components	Connection to the model
CPBL 401	Values (Week 4); Mission grounded in Purpose (Week 8)	Character expressed as organizational Values; Purpose and Mission set the foundation for Culture
CPBL 402	Vision (Week 4); Strategy and Strategic Priorities (Week 8)	Judgment applied to direction and choice
CPBL 403	Objectives and Tactical Action Plan (Week 4); final consolidated BTP (Week 8)	Execution, with Culture, Life, and Legacy sustaining the plan

Values, Mission, Vision, and Strategy establish direction. Objectives and the Tactical Action Plan establish traction by translating direction into accountable action. Direction requires leadership; traction requires management discipline. The BTP asks you to practice both.

Completing the BTP. To pass the BTP, you must present your completed plan to your mentor in CPBL 403; your mentor provides feedback to the instructor. Choose your topic and your mentor with that presentation in mind.

Using the model in CPBL 401

This course concentrates on Character and Style. As you work through each week, use the model as a mirror rather than a set of terms to memorize. Each leadership theory you study in Northouse offers a way to ask what you rely on as a leader and what you overlook.

Reflection questions

1. Which of the seven questions are you most confident answering today? Which is hardest?
2. Think of a leader you trusted. Which dimensions made that trust possible?
3. Where have you seen a leader's repeated behavior shape a team's culture, for better or worse?
4. What would you want to continue in your organization because of how you led?

References

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