

# How the World's Greatest Game Can Build Better Leaders

How many times have you seen a professional services firm use chess pieces in their promotional materials? This is because chess is a perfect analogy to managing a business. But rarely do these professionals actually play chess with business decision-making in mind. Practicing strategy and tactics in chess helps you become a much better business leader.

While business leaders typically practice one of the many leadership styles based on their own personalities and the training they have received, the great leaders learn how to shift styles when circumstances change. This shifting of leadership styles is one of the most difficult management disciplines to learn. Fortunately, chess is the perfect training ground for three of the most powerful leadership styles: transformational, situational, and results-based.

## Transformational

The opening of a chess game, like a business startup, requires a leader who has a vision of how the enterprise



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will transform the market. When setting up FedEx, Fred Smith had the foresight to position his pieces like a chess player taking control of the center. He discovered that Memphis, Tennessee, provided a central location within the US, a willing airport administration partner, and the best chance to avoid the worst weather conditions from snowstorms to hurricanes.

## Situational

After a number of moves, every chess game becomes unique and a transition occurs that requires use of middlegame situational leadership. General Patton was a master of the situational style. This understanding of rapidly changing battlefield situations allowed him to drive the Third Army across France in World War II and to relieve American troops trapped at Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge.

## Results-based

Chess players know how the game should end and use endgame results-based leadership to see the goal and reason backward on how to get there. Bill Gates envisioned a PC in every home and plotted backwards to launch a new industry that positioned Microsoft to change the world.

Chess players have to use the information they can recall when making their decisions so they keep it simple, easy to remember, and useful for the future. Since there is no "practice" in business, chess gives you a place to rehearse your business decision-making skills. The functional areas of a business degree all come into play with chess. It requires business knowledge that is used and developed through the power of gamification.

My 25 year corporate career, MBA degree and 40 years of rated chess tournament experience, convince me that the same strategies and tactics that work on the chessboard work in the business world. Leaders who are strategically stronger and tactically sharper, and who have a place to practice, are better prepared to win the battles of business.

