While different situations demand different styles of leadership, a consensus around basic leadership essentials has emerged, it is a demand for well centred leadership skills. Irrespective of function or organisation, where previously technical competency, specialist knowledge or perceived wisdom was often a sufficient reason to hire, candidates who cannot demonstrate these prerequisite skills are now rejected.

While firms may place different emphasis on each, five core competencies are consistently in demand. These apply to assignments within our Science and Technology, Corporate and Professional Services or General Leadership Practices. They are in short a universal underpinning successful performance for all leaders, who deal daily with the shifting sands of commerce, competition and culture.

1. The ability to create a compelling vision.
At Department, Function or Enterprise levels, organisations seek executives who can develop an aligned and exciting vision for their remit and bind others to it. These are Leaders who engage their teams in the development of that vision and can sell back the outcome to all stakeholders.

2. The authenticity to build a results culture.
Once vision is communicated, leaders must be able to break down the path to achieving it into personal and employee level objectives. This means being able to measure the implementation of strategy as well as overall delivery. It is also about keeping employees connected to the vision by reminding them of the alignment between their ‘purpose’ and that of the organisation. Being clear about how their roles contribute to the success of the firm.

3. Being able to manage through breakdowns.
Decision making and critical thinking, particularly under pressure are essential leadership capabilities. The ability to manage conflict is fundamental. We know from our own research that a leader staying calm at moments of crisis or intensity is one of the most highly regarded attributes by their employees. Effective problem solving and engaging the opinions of others in doing so are key engagement factors for a leader with their team.

4. Demonstrate empathy.
Much is written about authentic leadership and how it creates sincere and trusting relationships with employees. Being supportive of others, showing genuine, appropriate concern while looking for insights and understanding through intuition and perception can help a leader ward off destructive blockers to performance.

5. Earn your respect.
Leaders who feel entitled to their employees respect based on their authority alone are amongst the most ineffective. Relying on title and status to have others follow you is a redundant strategy. Truly effective leaders show passion, demonstrate consistent confidence and work extremely hard to engage their people. Earning respect takes time and employees judge a leader on what they do and not what they say. Companies tend to experience high staff turnover when there is a large variance between those two aspects.