

*Warr Bennis*  
**Leadership  
Excellence**

**ESSENTIALS**

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## LEADERSHIP 500 EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2015



miracles happen. Their parents call and say, “I don’t know what you did to my kid that week, but thank you—it was great.”

**LE:** *You have facilitated “extreme makeovers” in cosmetic dentistry, but this sounds like a special kind of “extreme makeover.” How do you account for the dramatic before-and-after difference?*

**Bill:** Well, first I need to say that the “Extreme Makeover” has been off the air for some time. I am currently appearing on a CBS Emmy Award-winning show called “The Doctors”. And I just started filming a new series for Lifetime called “Smile”. So, yes, the makeover process is similar. When we do these big dental makeovers, I see how it changes these patients’ lives. Similarly, LEAP changes our students’ lives. We help them get on and stay on a good path and to get rid of the “turkeys” in their lives—the people who are bringing them down—and we try to surround them with positive influencers. What we do so well in LEAP is analogous to the adage: “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” We don’t just give LEAP students a fish each day—we give them a fishing pole and teach them how to fish to feed themselves and their families for a lifetime.

**LE:** *You claim that in your cosmetic dental practice, you are restoring to people their most valuable asset—their smile. You likely won’t be surprised to hear that “appearance” is the top criteria in the selection and promotion of people into leadership positions. How are you restoring people to their best or real self?*

**Bill:** Well, sure, I mean, we are all born with teeth. Something has to go really bad for you not to have teeth . . . along with a smile to showcase them. Many of the people who come in to my dental office have no teeth, or few teeth or badly damaged teeth. So, yes, we are restoring their teeth and, in the process, restoring their self-confidence. Look, imagine that you have an accident today and lose your front teeth. How would you feel walking around and smiling at people? How would you feel at work? Even if you work at the cash register at McDonald’s, are you going to smile at people when you have no front teeth? No! So I understand why people with damaged teeth don’t want to smile. And when you don’t smile, people tend to think that something is seriously wrong with you. They don’t realize that maybe you are ashamed of your smile. They may think that you are unfriendly, conceited, shy or insecure. They don’t think positive things. So often, simply by restoring somebody’s smile, enabling them to socialize and function normally, we change their lives immediately. By restoring their smile, we restore other things: Their self-image, self-esteem, and social confidence.

**LE:** *Do you see LEAP restoring the smiles of the faces of your students?*

**Bill:** You know, it’s tough today being in the age group 15 to 24. We not only restore their smiles, we often hear from many of them, the vast majority of them, comments like: “Dr. Bill, LEAP has changed my life”—and I know it did. And once in a while, we hear: “LEAP has saved my life”—and I know it did. Some kids come into LEAP with no confidence—they have no support structure, nobody in the world that they feel comfortable with. And they are living on the edge, on the verge of taking their life, or wasting their life. And so, they say, “This program saved my life. I don’t think I could have gone on . . . until I met you and your staff, developed a support group and learned the skills you teach.”

**LE:** *When I called your office today, I listened to a recorded message to the effect that . . . “if you don’t like what you see in the mirror we can help”. I thought of Michael Jackson’s hit song, “Man in the Mirror” and of the tragic end to his life. Does LEAP help these young people to pass the “mirror test”—to like what they see in the mirror?*

**Bill:** Yes, we consciously try to do that for them. I’ve seen kids who, when they come to us, look like they are afraid of their own shadow—or hate their own image in the mirror. By the time they leave, they no longer have that look of fear or hate or sorrow.

**LE:** *How do you change the look on their faces?*

**Bill:** The first thing we do is put them in a group with 10 other students their age, so they are always with people. Loneliness is a horrible thing, and a lot of people young and old suffer from it. At LEAP you are never alone—you are always in a group of peers—and hopefully the friendships you make in the program last a lifetime. I’ve seen it! In fact, my wife and I just witnessed another wedding of a couple who met at LEAP. So, yes, LEAP has the potential to be a real life-changer for many of these students.

**LE:** *Having served as editor of Leadership Excellence magazine for 30 years, I too have witnessed the similar accelerated development of confidence and self-esteem in the best of leadership development programs. How can young people best boost their confidence and self-esteem?*

**Bill:** The short answer, if you are 15 to 24, is to experience LEAP. By the way, if you want more information on LEAP, go to [www.LEAPfoundation.com](http://www.LEAPfoundation.com). This website will give you much more insight into what we do. I think one of the most important factors in building your self-confidence is surrounding yourself with people who elevate you as opposed to bring you down—having a caring support group that lets you know when you are on track and off track and gives you positive affirmations when you are doing good things. I believe that having such support makes a world of difference.

**LE:** *Is it possible for people who don’t fit the LEAP profile to simulate such accelerated personal and professional development?*

**Bill:** There are many good programs out there, but I’m bias: There is no substitute for LEAP. So, if you are a parent, coach, teacher or friend and want to make a positive difference in the life of some young person, please sponsor them and send them to LEAP. I promise you that if you send me your son or daughter, I will send you back a better son or daughter.

**LE:** *You have a good track record of doing just that, not only on these “makeover” shows but in your dental office every day.*

**Bill:** That’s what I try to do. We all have our lot in life, and I feel that mine has been the smile; in fact, I just shot this show called “Smile” for Lifetime, which is all about changing people’s lives for the better. It’s like “Extreme Makeover” but deals only with the smile. This show was proposed to me several years ago and I said, “I can’t imagine people will want to watch smiles being made over all the time.” So I passed on the original show, which oddly enough I am doing now, and talked to them about a show I would rather do. I said: “I really want to change kids’ lives—and teach them how to change other kids’ lives so they pay it forward.” Through these discussions, we developed my new show, called “The Dr. Bill Show”, which we filmed this past summer. We’ll be taking it out though Netflix and other channels soon. Perhaps it will be a way to help more people accelerate the development of their inherent potential. I believe that people can (and should) change their lives and improve their leadership at any age. **LE**



Since 1984, **Ken Shelton** has served as editor and publisher of *Leadership Excellence* magazine, a monthly publication dedicated to developing leaders of teams and organizations; *Personal Excellence*, the magazine of self-leadership and *Sales and Marketing Excellence*, the magazine of market leadership. For over 20 years, Ken Shelton has edited and published the best thinking in the world on every aspect of personal, team, and organizational leadership. He is the author of *Beyond Counterfeit Leadership: A New Paradigm of Leadership*, *Real Success*, and *One-on-One* with Stephen R. Covey.



