

Here is the full transcript of organizational psychologist Dr. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic's talk titled "*Why Do So Many Incompetent Men Become Leaders*" at TEDxUniversityofNevada conference.

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**Best quote from this talk:**

*"The best leaders are humble rather than charismatic, to the point of even being rather boring. This is why they rarely feature in the media or blockbuster movies."*

**TRANSCRIPT:**

Have you ever worked with people who are not as good as they think?

I know this will surprise you, but statistically, they are more likely to be male than female.

That's right. Men are typically more deceived about their talents than women are. They are also more likely to succeed in their careers. That's because one of the best ways to fool other people into thinking that you're better than you actually are is to fool yourself first.

This is why you may not just have worked with people who are not as good as they think, but also for them. Unfortunately, being unaware of your limitations increases your probability of being a boss.

I'm an organizational psychologist. I use science and technology to predict and understand human behavior at work.

One of the areas that fascinates me is the relationship between gender, personality and leadership. More specifically, how gender and personality shape our choices of leaders and how those leaders then impact organizations.

Discussions on gender tend to focus on the under-representation of women in leadership, which is more or less universal. Anywhere in the world — well, outside Iceland perhaps — the vast majority of leaders are male.

But a bigger problem is the fact that most of these leaders are incompetent. Indeed, whether in business or politics, most leaders have very negative effects on their followers and subordinates, causing low levels of engagement, trust and productivity, and high levels of burnout and stress.

Just google “my boss is” to see what most people think of their managers and maybe, just maybe, feel a bit better about your manager: “Crazy,” “abusive,” “unbearable,” “toxic,” and some other things that are just too rude to repeat here.

So the main question we should be asking is: not why there aren’t any more women leaders, but why so many incompetent men become leaders.

My research suggests there are three main reasons for this.

The first is our inability to distinguish between confidence and competence. Anywhere in the world, we assume that confident people have more potential for leadership, but in any area of talent, including leadership, there’s just very little overlap between confidence — how good people think they are at something — and competence — how good they actually are at something.

I grew up in Argentina where the gap between confidence and competence is particularly pronounced. In fact, one of the best

investments you can make in your life is to buy an Argentine for what he's worth and sell him for what he thinks he is worth.

ALSO READ: David Dunning: Why Incompetent People Think They're Amazing (Transcript)

As you can imagine, I can't crack this joke back home. We're just not self-aware enough to find it funny.

Unfortunately, though, most leaders have something Argentine in them, in that their self-perceived talents tend to surpass their actual talents.

The second reason is our love for charismatic individuals, particularly since the 1960's mass media explosion but this has been turbocharged by the recent digital age.

We appear to want leaders who are charming and entertaining. But there is a big difference between an effective leader and a stand-up comedian.

In fact, the best leaders are humble rather than charismatic, to the point of even being rather boring. This is why they rarely feature in the media or blockbuster movies.

For example, imagine a movie on Angela Merkel. She wakes up, has breakfast with her husband, goes to meetings well-prepared, lets other people talk without interrupting them, makes rational decisions, runs her country well, there are no scandals about her.

In contrast, there is a surplus of captivating biopics on charismatic leaders with a fascinating dark side, who end up ruining their countries and organizations.

The third and final reason for the rise of incompetent men is our inability to resist the allure of narcissistic individuals, people with grandiose and

megalomaniac visions that tap into our own narcissism.

We've always admired famous people, but our admiration for people who admire themselves or are famous for, well, just being famous, has been rising for decades.

At this rate, future generations will look back at Kim and Kanye and say, "Whoa! Weren't they modest?"

Remember Paris Hilton? Exactly; she's hardly newsworthy today. In line, much of the popular advice that focuses on helping people become leaders nurtures and promotes a narcissistic mindset:

*"Love yourself, no matter what!"*

*"Don't worry about what people think of you. If you think you're great, you are!"*

Unfortunately, this creates a surplus of leaders who are unaware of their limitations and unjustifiably pleased with themselves. They see leadership as an entitlement and lack empathy and self-control, so they end up acting without integrity and indulging in reckless risks.

In contrast, the best leaders manage to keep their narcissism in check. They care a lot about other people, including what they think of them, and spend a great deal of time worrying about their reputation, which is why there are very few scandals about them.

## **SO, HOW THEN DO WE STOP INCOMPETENT MEN FROM BECOMING LEADERS?**

The first solution is to follow the signs and look for the qualities that make people better leaders, especially when they don't usually make people leaders.

There is a pathological mismatch between the attributes that seduce us in a leader and those that are needed to be an effective leader. If we want to improve the performance of our leaders, we should start by focusing on the right traits.

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Instead of falling for people who are confident, narcissistic and charismatic, we should promote people into leadership because of their competence, humility and integrity.

Incidentally, this — this would also lead to a higher proportion of female than male leaders as large-scale scientific studies show that women score higher than men on measures of competence, humility and integrity.

But the point is that we would significantly improve the quality of our leaders.

The second solution is to distrust our instincts. Most of us love our intuition, but most people are just not as intuitive as they think.

In that sense, intuition is a bit like sense of humor. Ninety percent of people think they have a fantastic sense of humor. How many people are actually funny? 10% percent?

One implication is to focus less on the impressions people make during job or media interviews, which are just an invitation to project our own biases and prejudices.

Note that even when we have good intentions, it is not easy to overcome this. For example, unconscious bias training will rarely help you ignore that the person in front of you is white, female or attractive.

In fact, the more you try to suppress certain thoughts from your mind, the more prominent and present they become.

So, the last thing we should be doing, if we want to improve the quality of our leaders and help more women get to leadership positions, is to not lower our standards when we select women, but to elevate them when we select male leaders.

This means not asking women to behave more like incompetent men. For example... for example, asking them to lean in even when they don't have the talents to back it up, or spend more time on self-promotion or advancing their own personal interests.

It also means not ruling out men because they lack the traditional masculine features that match our flawed leadership archetypes.

To the extent that we can do this, we will end up with better leaders, but progress starts with each and every one of us. If we want to improve the competence level of our leaders, we should first improve our own competence for judging and selecting leaders, especially when they're men.

Thank you.

### **Resources for Further Reading:**

[Great Leaders Do What Drug Addicts Do: Michael Brody-Waite \(Transcript\)](#)

[How Legendary Leaders Speak: Robin Sharma \(Transcript\)](#)

[Lars Sudmann: Great Leadership Starts With Self-Leadership at](#)



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[TEDxUCLouvain \(Transcript\)](#)

[Bob Davids: The Rarest Commodity is Leadership Without Ego at TEDxESCP \(Transcript\)](#)

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