Case 2.2: A Remarkable Turnaround

# Case Synopsis and Analysis

Carol Baines took over her husband’s office supply store and grew it from a $200,000 business to one with sales over $3.1 million. She spent time learning the business and demonstrated persistence, intelligence, sociability, and determination. Based on the information in the case study, Carol seems well liked, compassionate, and considerate. She appears to have high levels of emotional intelligence and seems to be an extraverted, open, and conscientious leader who is somewhat agreeable with low levels of neuroticism.

The case study allows for discussion and analysis not only of Carol’s key leadership traits but also of emotional intelligence and the Big Five Personality Factors (Table 2.3).

**Learning objectives:**

* Students should be able to evaluate key traits vital to the success of a new leader.
* Students should apply the Big Five Personality Factors to a leader.
* Students should be able to debate/discuss emotional intelligence as applied to a leader.

**Answers to questions in the text:**

1. How would you describe Carol’s leadership traits?

Carol is resilient, persistent, intelligent, sociable, and determined. She seems well liked, compassionate, and considerate, and appears to have high levels of emotional intelligence. She is an extraverted, open, and conscientious leader who is somewhat agreeable with low levels of neuroticism.

1. How big a part did Carol’s traits play in the expansion of the company?

One cannot say with certainty how large a role her traits played in the expansion of the company. However, Carol took over the business with few applicable skills and no real knowledge of the industry. Given that, it seems as though her intelligence, determination, and emotional intelligence played a key role in helping grow the business. She used her openness to familiarize herself with the company and the overall business and persevered despite personal hardships. These traits did seem to play a major role in the expansion of the company.

1. Would Carol be a leader in other business contexts?

It seems as though Carol would be a leader in other business contexts. She was unfamiliar with the office supply industry before assuming the leadership role and made the company successful nonetheless. She could, presumably, use her openness, intelligence, sociability, and determination to succeed in other arenas as well. It is also important to keep in mind that success in one venue does not always guarantee success in another.

**Potential teaching approaches:**

This case study is conducive to group discussions and exercises.

Below is a way to structure a class based on the trait approach and Case Study 2.3:

* First, break the class into small groups and ask the groups to develop a list of the top 5 (or 10) major traits they believe are important for a strong leader. Students should prepare this list without referring to the book, based on their experiences.
* Large-group discussion of the top 5 (or 10) lists, followed by a lecture on the trait approach.
* Students then read Case 2.2 and list five key reasons why Carol Barnes is a leader (again, in small groups). Students should discuss her traits in these groups and touch upon the Big Five Personality Factors (Table 2.3) as applied to Carol as well.
* Professor then discusses the questions from the case study with the entire class. Large-group discussion should center on traits of the leader, Big Five Personality Factors (Table 2.3), and emotional intelligence.
* Finally, the professor may choose to conduct in-class exercises listed below.

Exercises for this case study:

1. Carol has decided to become a leadership trainer. In small groups, discuss what sort of training program she could offer to help others lead successfully. Students should spend 5 min brainstorming that concept. Then they should create a one-page outline covering the major components of a training session. Here, the professor could have some groups develop an outline for emotional intelligence training while others develop an outline for Big Five Personality Factors (Table 2.3).
2. Role-play: One student is “Carol” and the others are her sons. Carol and her sons should talk about leadership. Carol should explain how to best lead the company. Students playing her sons should ask questions about how to successfully lead the company for the next 20 years. Together, they should develop an informal list of goals to help develop the sons as leaders. Students should then report on these goals to the larger class.
3. Have students reflect and create a list of emotional intelligence (EI) leadership traits they feel they possess. Then, place them into pairs and ask that they share each other’s lists. Ask students to look for commonalities between their lists and the EI traits that Carol displays in the case.