

Chapter 9 What has Birth Order got to do with Leader Traits?



Pirate's Island

This chapter is about leader traits in theatre of leadership. Pirate's Island is where one recruits their traits as a leader. "Ye First Born?" In leader trait studies, first-born children are more often leaders. Parents expect them to lead the younger ones. In Part I I tell you a story about my birth order (good model for doing your story assignments). Part II, is summary of what are the predicted traits of only child, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and last child in the birth order. Part III looks at ways to change the traits you are scripted to have by your family. Part IV applies birth order to Sam Walton (founder of Wal-Mart).

Warren Bennis, a leadership author says there is relationship between leaders and birth order.¹ A number of other leader authors say the same thing about the effect of child-rearing practices and birth order on leaders (Bass, 1960; Bird, 1940; Stogdill, 1948, 1974).

We learn a *life script*, in our family. It is reinforced, or slightly modified in our education and our work career. Life scripts of first-born children differ from those of second, or third, or last born. Of course it all depends how you grew up, and how far apart in age you are. In organization, people script roles, leaders play roles scripted by the organization. The chapter begins with a story-example, then gives you some background of birth order traits. Keep in mind you can restory those traits whenever you make the choice to act differently.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one in his time plays many parts. . . . (Shakespeare's *As You Like It*).

The organization provides a splendid stage on which to perform birth-order scripts. Our birth order, without modification, can become a role we learn to play in organizations. The leader is also the director and an author of scripts that others are contracted (or otherwise influenced) to follow. Study your family script's impact upon your life script. Compare the life scripts your parents had, and the one you grew up in. How did your leader traits get scripted? Did you learn to play a role, one you kept playing in your life? What were the turning points in their life?

What is the Relationship between Leadership and Birth Order of you in your family?

Our birth order and personality traits as they shape the way we cope and interact and develop as leaders. You can write a story about your own family and a situation of conflict that involves you and yours (if

¹ More on Bennis and birth order <http://www.pfd.org/leaderbooks/l2l/spring99/bennis.html>

only child you and your parents). Then in the application of references, you can look at how similar or different you are to the Birth Order of the Leader you are studying.

Birth Order Definition: “Birth order” refers to whether we were perhaps the first child born in a family or maybe one of many, or maybe even the last. Many researchers think that where we are in relationship to our brothers and sisters helps influence how we develop. Thinking about birth order is one way we get some good clues as to why we are the way we are. Of course, there is no way to always accurately predict how one person may turn out — we are all too different, complex, and unique. Source University of Maine Coop Extension²

We learn our Life Script in our family situation.

Our parents, our grandparents, uncles, aunts, and our friends and siblings -- they all enroll us into a life script. We learn to play a scripted role that meshes with the roles of the other family members. We there is one smart child, and then we learn not to compete with them and play a different strength (e.g. creative artist). Or we compete head on, mimic same talent, and all kinds of sibling rivalry results. Or second born will pick a different area in which to excel.

DEFINITION: Life Script

Eric Berne (1964), author of *Games People Play*, says we write a life narrative (or script) for ourselves with a Beginning, Middle, and End. I abbreviate this to BME narrative. A BME narrative, such as Boje’s family break-up, becomes a guide for future choices, such as friends, partners, and even our occupation. We recruit people into our lives so we can act out the BME narrative, learned as a child, over and over as we get older. I divorced, so did my two brothers, and my sister. Our BME narrative becomes our survival strategy. It’s good to write out our early BME narratives. They tell us how we ‘set ourselves up’ to keep reenacting the same life script (for more on this topic, see (Cheshire Therapy web site).³

We reenact a BME script, learned in our childhood, to re-live the ‘strokes’, those emotional events that branded our makeup. The problem is when the script becomes, not a survival game, but an entire way of life. This can mean setting ourselves up to keep reenacting a BME over and over (when we don’t need it to survive).

Your life script develops from an early age. Parents tell you “be seen, not heard” or “you are the most precious gift in the world.” Your birth order has a guiding impact upon your leader behavior. Parents treat kids differently. Brothers and sisters take on roles, leaving the next born fewer options. Parents expect firstborns to take care of the younger ones, to watch out for them. Sometimes standards change, and the last-born do not have such responsibilities. What follows next are guides, not molded in stone. Each family is different. We will look at the birth-order traits, and then in the following section suggest ways you can change traits, and write your own story, become whatever leader you desire to be.

SCRIPTS OF BIRTH ORDER

This section is a distillation of insights from several available web resources. E.G. Alfred Adler, a neo-Freudian argues, “Each child is born on a different theatrical ‘stage. We learn in the family home, to

² Marine Corps view on birth order <http://www.umext.maine.edu/onlinepubs/htmlpubs/4359.htm>

³ For more on Parent-Adult-Child and Eric Berne’s Life Script, do web search. E.g. Cheshire Therapy Web site Accessed Sep 4 2005 <http://www.cheshire-therapy.co.uk/>

perform a ‘script’ with the help of parents who try to direct the play” (Birth Order Forum).⁴ The Medicine Net Website (with article by Cynthia Hanes) tells you about traits of birth order, based on Eckstein as well as Adler’s work.⁵ There is a birth order chart of child character traits at (Child Development Info web site).⁶ If you want to do this before reading about it, stop here, and take the Birth Order Quiz (its short, at Patacake.com).⁷ Or take the TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS: A LIFE SCRIPT QUESTIONNAIRE (Charles Thompson).⁸ I will summarize here, what these sites have to say (caution, these are guides, and each family is different; you can change a script).

Only-Childs Only Child can feel quite pampered and spoiled. They get lots of attention, and can be treated by parents as the ‘little adult.’ May feel incompetent because adults always are more capable. Yet, they have the center of attention in the family, and enjoy it. They seek that center, and can become, you guessed it, ‘self-centered.’ They rely on others, rather than their own efforts (may not learn to do the most simple tasks). When they don’t get their way, only-childs can feel very unfairly treated. They may refuse to cooperate, and play divide and conquer games, similar to how they manipulated their parents. If child feels parents are just too competent, they may elect to have only role left, and be incompetent or too overly self-critical to try. Kristen Collett finds in a study, “only children exhibit seven characteristics that are representative of leadership. Research will also explore if these children possess these qualities as a result of birth order or because of a variety of independent reasons, such a parenting style, education, and environment.” (The Relationship Between Leadership Qualities of Only Children).⁹ In what follows, if there is a gap of five or more years, then that child can be just like the only child.

First Borns Firstborns, in the small family, or those who are the only child for a long period of time, are also used to being the center of attention. They tend to be high achievers, perfectionists, and natural leaders. They get real comfortable with predictable routines and structures.¹⁰ As perfectionists they can be quite critical of self and others, and feel responsible for everything. When parents are over-critical, then the first-born feels inferior. If nurtured, and given high expectations, the firstborn becomes the achiever, perfectionist. They want to focus of attention to remain on them, especially when the second-born enters the family stage. The second born is competitive, and struggles with the first-born for the family spotlight. The firstborn becomes vocal, telling the second-born what to do, how to do it. First-born keeps trying to regain parent’s attention (from 2nd borns and all other borns) by engaging in conformity to parent’s wishes. Or, will become the most competent child, the most responsible. A recent book by Frank J. Sulloway, argues in a book called, *Born to Rebel : Birth Order, Family Dynamics, and Creative Lives*, that “firstborn children identify more strongly with power and authority and are more conforming, conventional and defensive, whereas younger siblings are more adventurous, rebellious and inclined to question the status quo.”¹¹ If the competent at power and authority route does not work out, then the 1st born acts out, misbehaves. First born will try to protect and help the other children, as long as they do not steal center stage. First borns are people-pleasers (parent-pleasers). There are gender differences to consider, such as between firstborn sons and daughters.¹² Firstborn sons expect to work

4 Birth Order Forum <http://inst.santafe.cc.fl.us/~mwehr/genpsyc/FMBirOrd.html>

5 See Medicine Net for more on Birth Order Traits <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=51928>

6 See summary chart at Birth Development website http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/birth_order.htm

7 Patacake.com Birth Order on line quiz <http://patacake.com/Parents/birthorderquiz.htm> and see summary of birth order traits at <http://patacake.com/Parents/birthorder.htm>

8 Thomas questionnaire on life script (some terms undefined) <http://web.utk.edu/~thompson/ta.html>

9 Karen Colletti’s abstract is available at <http://cas.bellarmino.edu/chemistry/RW/kc.doc>

10 Are you a perfectionist? It could have something to do with birth order

<http://www.brown.edu/Students/Catalyst/fall2001/articles/features/roman-birthorder.html>

11 See Amazon.com for this book <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0679758763/103-6436436-1281425?v=glance>

12 For Son and Daughter differences of 1st born, see

<http://www.ancestry.com/library/view/columns/george/2453.asp>

with the father, to provide for the family, or be seen as the one who will inherit the family ranch, or take over the business. This happened to me: my dad invented the trash compactor business, and I came out of the Army, entered the Business college expecting to take over the family business. Problem was it was bankrupt within one year, so I just stayed at university (still there). An eldest daughter is too often expected to run the household, to care for younger kids, and do all the motherly tasks, like sewing and cooking. Sometimes they get to inherit the family fortune. Two-thirds of entrepreneurs (& those in Who's Who) are firstborns. Presidents Truman, Johnson, Carter and George W. Bush are first borns. So are entertainment personalities Bill Cosby, Geraldo Rivera, and Oprah Winfrey. Jackie Onassis is firstborn.

Second Borns Never has parent's undivided attention. Firstborn grabbed the good role (or became the bad role), so must either compete, or second born picks the opposite role. So second will develop personality traits different than the firstborn (or feel they just don't belong, cannot fit in). That means the second is constantly competing with the firstborn. So if the oldest is into routine, then the second will be flexible. If eldest is extroverted, the second will be introverted, etc. Second born and firstborn compete for parents' attention and affection. If the older child is good in school (the pace setter), the second one goofs off (or just the opposite). One will choose one sport, and the other a different sport (or no sports at all). Sometimes, second born is competitive and tries to overtake the first child, by developing abilities firstborn did not manifest. If first child is the people-pleaser, second child becomes the rebel (or vice versa). This gets the second-born onto center stage where the parents do applaud. When a third child is born, the second one can feel quite squeezed. May push down third and other siblings, even harder than the first pushed them. David Letterman and Donald Trump are second-borns.

Third Borns (Middle Child) Being middle child means not having leader rights of elders or the privileges granted to the youngest (third born). Third born and first will ally against the middle child. Life is just so unfair to the middles (all sandwiched-in). They can feel unloved, more 'squeezed' out than the second-born. Family stage is too full already; no place to stand, or they get lost in the crowd or just leave the stage altogether. Often, they just can find no traits left to emulate, no place at all. When that happens, they become the problem child, trying to push out the other siblings from the 'rebel' throne. On the plus side, middles are able to adapt, to deal with the older and younger siblings. Second child keeps teasing the third (to pass along their own inadequacies). Like the second child, the third can be flexible, diplomatic, generous, and even outgoing (if that gets them the stage. If all else fails, be competitive. If that does not work, just leave. Third (or youngest) will ally with eldest to take out the middle.

Last Borns (Youngest Child). In huge families, the dynamics start over, behaving like the only child (on their own). Others just won't play with them, so the young ones become the risk-takers, more outgoing. And to them older siblings are just more parents: all of them are bigger and more capable. But by this time everyone is tired of playing the parent game, and they just forget to watch and disciplining the last-born. Still everyone is there do things for them, to make the decisions, to take responsibility. No one is really pushing them to achieve, so the youngest learns to play weakest and smallest, does not have to be a high-achiever, and learns not to be taken seriously. So why not just relax and enjoy? Or be the comedian (a way to get attention). Yet, the youngest expects service, and to have their own way. They learn to question authority, to demand things. See that they are so far behind all the accomplishments of all the older siblings; they get speedy, and make the big plans to get to the top quicker (to overcome inferiority feelings), but the plans often don't work out. Still they remain the 'baby' till they can become the boss of everyone. Or just stay in the baby role forever (do more manipulative gaming, with more psychiatric disorders, and prone to substance abuse). Ross Perot, Goldie Hawn, Jim Carrey, Jay Leno, Katie Couric, and Billy Crystal are last-borns.

HOW TO CHANGE YOUR BIRTH ORDER TRAITS?

Restorying It is possible to restory your birth order scripts. To restory is to examine your birth order leader traits, the ones you learned to enact in your family. This is the first step in getting to what I call storyability. Not every event in your life is storyable. Sometimes you just keep enacting scripts, without having willful storyable control over them.

Life Script Rap Song (by Edward Ian Armchair, 2002)¹³

Try to change you life script,
If you know your faults,
If you know your feelings
If you know it's false.

Don't you know your life script,
Pre-determined acts,
It is your suppressor
Pre-arranged facts.

Let's have a new beginning,
Simply plan our lives,
That way there is no problem,
Developing our minds.

STORYABILITY IS NOT SAME AS RE-ENACTMENT Here is a bit of story theory. Storyability, means the ability to story events into experience. Storyability is the ability to shape events into memory (to remember events differently). To story means to take charge of a reenactment, to change the story (to restory) so that we shape events (reenacted over and over) into a new script, and into an experience. Storyability theory is that events just get reenacted (re-lived moments of emotional trauma), but in story, we willfully shape events into experience. Without story, there is no experience, only more reenactment. In reenactment we re-live the moments. I relive a 14 year old's remembrances of marble furniture breaking (divorce, then welfare), over and over, until such time, as I story those events into experience, into wisdom. That is what it mean to say that reenactment of BME trauma, just sets us up to maintain a problematic life script. We can choose to story those events, to see them through a lens of wisdom and maturity. We can change our life script.

Trauma and Reenactment Under times of stress, even after restorying a childhood trauma, we may revert to the 'strokes' that helped us survive as a child. For example, as a welfare child, I learned people treat you like 'dirt.' I got a chip on my shoulder the size of Mount Rushmore. When stressed, that chip sits on my shoulder, and I will react to it. When relaxed, there is no chip. I can restory this. I can shrink Mount Rushmore to the size of a kid's marble. I can release the chip on my shoulder and replace it with wisdom. For example, being on welfare, I learned how the government and society treats its poor. I would later do volunteer work in South Central Los Angeles, in public housing, in one of the world's largest welfare communities, helping mothers and children do economic development (between 1988 and 1996).

¹³ Armstrong's Life Script Rap Poem at http://www.eddiearmchair.com/armchair/songs/reliants1/life_script.html

How does one Restory a life script?

Example: **John Davison Rockefeller** (1839-1937) Born into a family where a devout Baptist mother sheltered her children from their abusive bigamist father, John Davison Rockefeller learned to bear responsibility at an early age ([Source](#)). JDR had a younger brother named William.

Parents : William Avery Rockefeller and Eliza Davison
Married : Laura Celestia Spelman
Childern : Elizabeth "Bessie" (Rockefeller) Strong
Alta (Rockefeller) Prentice
Edith (Rockefeller) McCormick
John Davison Rockefeller Jr.

John Davison Rockefeller 3rd was born in New York City on March 21, 1906, the eldest son of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller. He was the brother of Abby Mauze, and Nelson, Laurance, David, and Winthrop Rockefeller ([source](#)). "In December 1929, Rockefeller, who had been reared to assume the lead role in his generation's philanthropic endeavors, began working in his father's office at 26 Broadway in New York City." John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was father of David, Nelson, and John D. Rockefeller III ([source](#)).

We become mired in life scripts that hold us back from reaching our leadership potential. We work in life scripts scripted by others around us. How do we restory our life script?

Table 1 Life Script Diagnosis

SCRIPTS (GAMES)	EXAMPLES from Personal Experience
1. What are your Birth Order Scripts?	
2. What are the positive outcomes of the Birth Order scripts for leadership?	
3. What script changes do you want to make to improve leadership?	

One approach to life script diagnosis is to engage in prayer and/or meditation.

Life Script Mediation Exercise (Hypnoticworld.com)¹⁴ – They have a meditation exercise to help you reflect upon your life script. They regress you back to your birth, so you can reflect on

¹⁴ Hypnoticworld.com for the past life regression meditation see http://hypnoticworld.com/regression_pastlife/life_script.asp

your life script, and if you like, you can reflect back to past-life-scripts. The premise is, here-and-now, we are ad-libbing, not only the present life script, but are affected by life scripts of past lives. Some spiritualities believe in living many lives, until we learn our lessons. The good news is we can change our life script. This meditation gets you to reflect upon how to rewrite your life script, noting the lessons learned and not yet mastered. Lessons needing to be learned are carried forward from one life to the next. Nietzsche called this the Eternal Return. Jains (India religion) believe in living many lives. The idea of the meditation is to become master of your life script, to learn the lessons, and write your own plot. It also relates to defining the traits that stem from lessons learned, and releasing any traits remaining from lessons not learned in this life of the last ones. I happen to be Catholic, living one life, but also Jain, believing in the eternal cycle of many past lives; and practice Native (American, Danish-Viking, & Scottish) ancestral traditions that come from many generations ago. You can reflect upon life script from whatever your own spirit paths you are into.

Another approach is to sit down and write a story journal. Record stories of your life script. Record stories of events that provided you lessons. And stories of traits you have now as a leaders (positive & negative ones).

You can also look at restorying your life script story. Table 2 gives you 7 steps, with some questions to fill-in. It is a self-assessment.

Table 2 Restorying Methodology from Boje & Rosile ¹⁵

Seven Steps for Restorying	Questions
1. Characterize – Describe the life script at its best, as if it were functioning perfectly and living up to all ideals	Write example here:
2. Externalize the problem –What problems does your life script create? (Separate problematic life script from you as a person; Problem becomes its own story character)	Steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · The problem is the problem, not you · Make the problem into a character (“overwork”) that the person, as character, can affect
3. Sympathize – What benefits does this life script (game) derive? E.g. it’s a way of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study the construction of dualisms (right/wrong; us/them; me/them, etc) – how they are two sides of the same coin.

15 Source: Rosile, Grace Ann and David M. Boje (2002b). Restorying and postmodern organization theatre: Consultation to the Storytelling Organization. Chapter 15, pp. 270-289. In Ronald R. Sims (Ed.) Changing the Way we Manage Change. Westport CONN: Quorum Books.

Also see Boje & Rosile’s 2002 Metatheatre book [http://business.nmsu.edu/%7Edboje/theatrics/manual/CH07METATHEATRE INTERVENTION TOOLS.DOC](http://business.nmsu.edu/%7Edboje/theatrics/manual/CH07METATHEATRE%20INTERVENTION%20TOOLS.DOC)

surviving; it served a purpose in the day	
4. Revise (Commitment to Change) – Explain the ways in which this life script has had negative effects. Would people really like to be rid of this life script Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Disadvantages of the life script.

5. Strategize (Unique Outcome) - Tell about a time when there was a “unique outcome,” when this life script was not as strong or when it was completely eliminated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Realize that multiple stories and outcomes are possible. · Expand the alternative story – what thoughts and feelings, what happened before, after?
6. Re-historicize (Restory) - Take the unique outcome and instead of it being the exception, make it the rule, the NEW story. What evidence is there to support this “alternative” story?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Choose the preferred new “story.” · Choose the past “unique outcomes” that support it?
7. Publicize - Who would say they could already see the basis for, or that they would support, this new story? Enlist the support of other stakeholders to ensure continuing success?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Stakeholder letters to recognize and encourage the storytellers’ efforts. · Provide tangible evidence of support and interest.

Source: Rosile, Grace Ann and David M. Boje (2002b). Restorying and postmodern organization theatre: Consultation to the Storytelling Organization. Chapter 15, pp. 270-289. In Ronald R. Sims (Ed.) Changing the Way we Manage Change. Westport CONN: Quorum Books.

For a biblical view of changing life scripts, see Sherri Langton’s web site.¹⁶ Langton’s view, like that of Boje and Rosile, is that there are positive and negative life scripts.

¹⁶ Sheri Langton’s website at <http://www.cog7.org/BA/NowWhat/Articles/PersonalStruggles/YourLife.html>

Positive Life Scripts - Many people derive positive leader traits from their birth order, and family experiences. Parents who are loving, caring, and have spent time helping each child realize a positive relation to their brothers and sisters are to be applauded. Their work as parents helps to boost self-esteem, and create positive self-image (Langton, para). Teachers and friends who help you find a positive life script are also helpful.

Negative Life Scripts - Eric Berne (1962), emphasizes the negative life scripting. In many families there are abusive verbal games, as well as physical abuse. Often in a family, parents can only give limited attention to children. Many children did not find positive teachers or many friends to help them restore, and gain willful control over negative life scripts. Eric Berne also wanted to help people develop positive life scripts. A positive life script develops our capacity for intimacy and spontaneity. We do not have to follow the life scripts that were handed to us.¹⁷ For more degrees of negative life scripts see Fontiernet.net.¹⁸ The idea is the negative scripts we wrote in our childhood, we not act in (like a play) in our adulthood. Some of these scripts are conscious (we can story them). Others operate at a more unconscious level of awareness. We re-enact the scripts, and get into the same problems (or successes) over and over again, but are not aware of the script (game). The premise is that by becoming more aware of our traits, tracing these into our life scripts, we can begin to redesign (reauthor) our scripts, and exhibit different traits as leaders.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT BIRTH ORDER TRAITS

There are formative (sometimes traumatic) life events that we “spin” into stories that shape our identity (traits). At an unconscious level, we have scripts, whose story we have not bothered to formulate at a conscious level (or its still to raw). In such cases we reenact a script, over and over, without changes. We just reenact (re-re-create) the emotion, trauma, and act out the scripts. It is possible to engage in meditation, or journaling, and to be more conscious about the scripts we reenact. We can also restore events into a new life script, and thereby create new identity, and new traits (behavior ones). We can therefore write a new plot for our lives. We can become leaders quite different than our family prescribed.

Our storied memory of the past, is subject to spin. We story events into experience and remember in them in particular ways. There are always other ways of storying and restoring events. There is always more than one side to a story. We gain wisdom when we willfully story our life story in ways that are Growthful and healthy, for our selves and for others.

We learn to script our lives at an early age. Some believe, we are scripted by past lives. Others believe that when we are born, and find other siblings there (or not), and based upon parental expectations, we fall into roles. Sometimes those life script roles are rather constraining. We are left to exhibit traits that we may want to reconsider as we grow up, go to college, and develop our careers. Some people never do. They fall into a life script rut and never crawl out.

¹⁷ For more on Berne, see <http://www.uktherapists.com/articles/lifestream/2000/2/04.htm>

¹⁸ Ffontiernet.net, a counseling service: <http://www.frontiernet.net/~lscriptc/ls1.htm>