



Don Eash Coaching

THE ALTIMETER

THE RIGHT ALTITUDE

The Gap Reading

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Leader Track — Director > Senior Director

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Your Reading

Leader Track — Director > Senior Director

Reliable | Thorough | Steady | Indispensable | Demanding

senior-director Presence Analysis

How You See Yourself Landing

Here's the through-line in your five words: Reliable, Thorough, Steady, Indispensable, Demanding. This is the profile of someone people count on. When the work has to be right, you're the one they hand it to. That's real, and at the Director level it has carried you a long way.

But read those words back as a set. Four of them describe weight - being heavy, being depended on, being the anchor. Only one describes how you act on others, and it's Demanding. I want to walk through each, because the same qualities that built your reputation are the ones that can cap it.

Reliable maps to Reliability and Follow-Through. At Director, this is table stakes done well - you do what you say, results show up. The asset is obvious. The liability is subtle: reliability at scale isn't about you delivering, it's about the system delivering whether or not you touch it. If your reliability is personal, it doesn't transfer to your org. At Senior Director, they're watching whether your team is reliable without you in the room.

Thorough maps to Depth and Execution Discipline. You don't miss things. That's a real credibility builder - and at Director it earns trust. But thoroughness has a tax. At the next altitude, the question shifts from did you cover everything to did you know what to leave alone. Senior Directors operate in ambiguity where thoroughness isn't possible, and trying to be thorough anyway becomes the bottleneck.

Steady maps to Composure Under Pressure and Consistency. This is one of your strongest cards. People know what they get from you. Steadiness is exactly what senior rooms reward - it reads as gravitas. The only watch-out: steady can tip into static. If steady means predictable and unchanging, it stops signaling presence and starts signaling plateau.

Indispensable is the word I want to stop on. It maps to Track Record and, more dangerously, to the bottleneck trap. You wrote it as a strength. At Senior Director, it's a liability dressed as a compliment. If you're indispensable, you can't be promoted - there's no one to backfill you, and you've made yourself the ceiling on your own team's growth. The 70% rule applies hard here: if someone else can do it at 70%, that's better than 100% of you, because their 70% becomes 80% while you go do the work only you can do. Indispensable means you never gave anyone that room.

Demanding maps to Accountability to Others and Feedback Delivery. It's the one outward-facing word, and it has power - high standards build strong teams. But demanding without the other half (development, safety, generosity) reads as pressure. At Senior Director, you're being assessed on whether you build leaders, not just whether you extract output. Demanding alone develops compliance, not capability.

What's Not in the Room

Look at what's missing. There's nothing here about influence - not one word describes how you move people who don't report to you. At Senior Director, influence without authority is the whole game. Cross-functional peers, your boss's peers, the rooms where you have no positional power - that's where the next level lives, and your words don't touch it.

There's nothing about strategy or altitude. Every word you chose is operational. Thorough, Reliable, Steady - these are the language of execution, not of shaping direction. Senior Directors are paid for judgment under ambiguity, for narrative, for enterprise thinking. None of that shows up.

And there's nothing about developing others. Demanding is the closest you get, and it's the pressure end, not the growth end. The absence of any word about building people tells me where your identity sits - you see yourself as the doer, the anchor, the one who carries it. That's a Director's self-image. It's the exact thing you have to let go of to move up.

The cost is this: you could be the most reliable Director in the building and still not get the Senior Director title, because the role isn't a heavier version of what you do now. It's a different job.

The 5 Traits That Matter Most at senior-director

Influence Without Authority. This is the single biggest differentiator at your transition. At Director you can drive results through your team and your function. At Senior Director, your impact runs through people who don't report to you - peers, partners, your boss's peers. Your words describe someone who delivers through ownership and pressure. That doesn't scale sideways. Demanding works on your team; it backfires on a peer. You need to learn to move outcomes through relationship and framing, not weight. This is the muscle that's completely absent from your five words.

Developing Leaders. Senior Directors are measured on the leaders they grow, not the work they finish. Your Indispensable is the direct enemy of this trait. As long as you're the one who can't be replaced, you're not building anyone who can replace you - and succession readiness is table stakes at this level. The shift is from being the answer to building people who find answers. Take the energy behind Thorough and redirect it into developing thoroughness in others. Your standards are an asset only if they live in your team, not just in you.

Strategic Narrative. This is how senior leaders shape what an organization believes about where it's going. Your words are all execution - Reliable, Steady, Thorough. None of them describe vision or framing. At Senior Director, you have to translate your function's work into a story the enterprise cares about. Quiet and effective has a ceiling, and that ceiling sits right between where you are and where you're going. You can't narrate your way past it without learning to narrate at all.

Judgment Under Ambiguity. Your Thorough assumes there's a complete answer to find. The Senior Director world is incomplete by definition. The skill is making strong calls with partial information and owning them - not covering every base, but knowing which base matters.

Gravitas in Senior Rooms. Your Steady is the raw material for this. Composure reads as presence. But gravitas at this level isn't just calm - it's having a point of view and bringing it without flinching. Steady plus perspective equals gravitas. Steady alone is just quiet.

The Gap

Your words describe an operator at the top of his craft. Not a strategist. Not a leader of leaders. Every word points inward or downward - what you deliver, how heavy you are, the standard you hold. None of them point outward to influence or upward to enterprise thinking.

That's the gap in one sentence: you've optimized to be the best version of the job below the one you want. The Senior Director role isn't a stronger Director. It's a different altitude - judgment over thoroughness, influence over authority, building leaders over being indispensable.

Here's a framework to carry. At senior levels, the 40% rule kicks in - people remember your negative 40% more than your positive 60%. For you, the risk lives in two words. Demanding, if it tips into pressure without development, becomes the thing people remember. And Indispensable, if it tips into bottleneck, becomes the reason you can't move. Your strengths and your risks are the same words pointed in different directions. The whole game is which way they point under pressure.

The One Thing

Make yourself dispensable on purpose.

That one move hits everything. The second you stop being the irreplaceable doer, you're forced to develop leaders. You're forced to delegate decisions, not just tasks. You free up the capacity to influence sideways and think at the enterprise level. And you remove the structural reason you can't be promoted - there's finally someone to backfill you.

Indispensable is the word you're proudest of. It's also the one holding you back. Flip it, and four other dimensions move at once.

What to Do With This

Week 1. Pick one thing only you currently do - a decision, a deliverable, a relationship you personally hold. Hand it to someone on your team this week. Not the task, the ownership. Tell them it's theirs, name the standard, then leave the room. Watch what happens when you're not in it. The discomfort you feel is the measure of how indispensable you'd made yourself.

Weeks 2-3. Deepen it. Track two things: how often you got pulled back in, and how often you resisted the urge to fix. Then go talk to a peer in another function - not your boss, a lateral. Ask them one question: Where do you see my function from where you sit? You're building the influence-and-narrative muscle by listening before you assert. Notice how different that conversation feels from a Demanding one.

Week 4. Self-check. Did the thing you handed off survive without you? Is the person more capable, or did you take it back? And run the 40% test: ask yourself whether Demanding showed up this month as pressure or as development. If your team would describe you as someone who builds them rather than leans on them, your 40% is shifting in the right direction. If you can name one decision your team owned that you used to own, you're moving toward Senior Director - not just doing Director harder.

Your code is saved. When you retake this, the comparison will show what moved - and I'd expect the biggest shift to show up right where Indispensable used to be.

— *Don*