

# LEADERSHIP IQ

‘Optimal Hours with the Boss’ Study

North America Research Overview

Mark Murphy, Founder & CEO  
Leadership IQ  
[www.LeadershipIQ.com](http://www.LeadershipIQ.com)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary
2. Study Methodology Summary
3. How Much Time Do People Spend Interacting With Their Leader?
4. How Much Time Should People Spend Interacting With Their Leader?
  - a. Inspiration
  - b. Engagement
  - c. Innovation
  - d. Intrinsic Motivation
5. Research Note: Is This An Artifact Of Something Else?
6. How Should Time With Your Leader Be Spent?
7. Do Executives Need More Or Less Time With Their Leaders?
8. Commentary by Mark Murphy, CEO of Leadership IQ
9. Appendix: Study Demographics
10. Contact Leadership IQ

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From January-May, 2014, Leadership IQ surveyed 32,410 American and Canadian executives, managers and employees about these two big questions:

- How many hours per week DO people spend interacting with their direct leader?
- **And, how many hours per week SHOULD people spend interacting with their direct leader?**

Here's what we found:

Nearly half of people spend 3 or fewer hours per week interacting with their direct leader. In fact, 20% of people spend just 1 hour per week interacting with their direct leader. By contrast, fewer than 30% of people spend 6 or more hours per week interacting with their direct leader. The median time people spend interacting with their leader is 3 hours.

But 3 hours spent per week interacting with one's leader is not enough. For the 32,410 people in this study, **the optimal amount of time to spend interacting with one's leader is 6 hours.**

We discovered that...

- People who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader are **29% more inspired** than people who only spend 1 hour per week interacting with their leader.
- People who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader are **30% more engaged** than people who only spend 1 hour per week interacting with their leader.
- People who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader are **16% more innovative** than people who only spend 1 hour per week interacting with their leader.
- People who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader are **15% more intrinsically motivated** than people who only spend 1 hour per week interacting with their leader.

We also discovered that managers and executives need even more time interacting with their leaders than frontline employees.

- Executives experienced their highest levels of inspiration when they spend 7-8 hours per week interacting with their leader.
- Middle managers felt their highest levels of inspiration when they spend 9-10 hours per week interacting with their leader.

## 2. STUDY METHODOLOGY SUMMARY

From January-May, 2014, Leadership IQ surveyed 32,410 American and Canadian executives, managers and employees about dozens of aspects of leadership and organizational life. Respondents were invited to complete an online assessment comprised of 127 questions, and respondents were drawn from a wide range of industries, ages, and organizational and compensation levels.

The average survey participant took 21 minutes to complete the assessment.

For purposes of this study, we selected for analysis only those questions relevant to discovering the following:

- How many hours per week do people spend interacting with their direct leader?
- How do they spend those hours (email, face-to-face, phone, etc.)?
- And most importantly, how many hours per week SHOULD people spend interacting with their direct leader?

Among the specific survey questions we selected for analysis were the following:

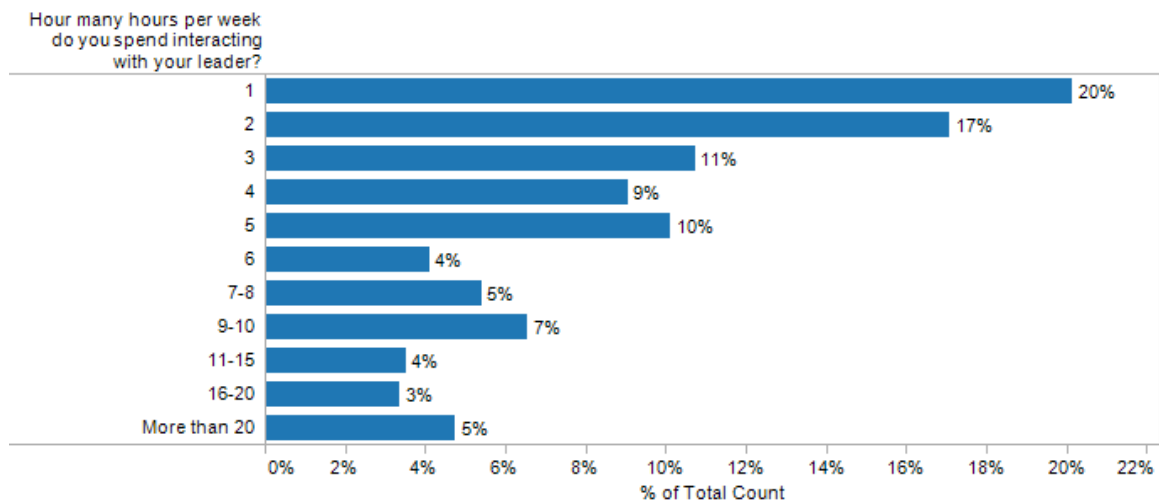
- How many hours per week do you spend interacting with your direct leader?
- What percent of the time you spend interacting with your leader is spent via face-to-face, email, phone, etc.
- Various demographics, including position, sex, age, industry, location, and more.
- Scaled questions, asked on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always), including...
  - Working here inspires me to give my absolute best effort.
  - I recommend our company as a great organization to work for.
  - I keep generating great ideas every week to help the organization improve.
  - I find something interesting in every task I do.
  - I feel that my work is valued by my direct leader.

A more detailed demographic breakdown of the survey respondents can be found in Section 9-Appendix: Study Demographics.

### 3. HOW MANY HOURS PER WEEK DO PEOPLE SPEND INTERACTING WITH THEIR DIRECT LEADER?

Across the 32,410 participants in this study, almost half spend 3 or fewer hours per week interacting with their direct leader, while less than 30% spend 6 or more hours.

Here's a chart with the breakdown...



In this study, 3 hours is the median time that people spend interacting with their direct leader.

## 4. HOW MANY HOURS PER WEEK SHOULD PEOPLE SPEND INTERACTING WITH THEIR DIRECT LEADER?

While it's nice to know how many hours people ARE spending interacting with their leader, it's even more important to know **how many hours people SHOULD be spending with their leader.**

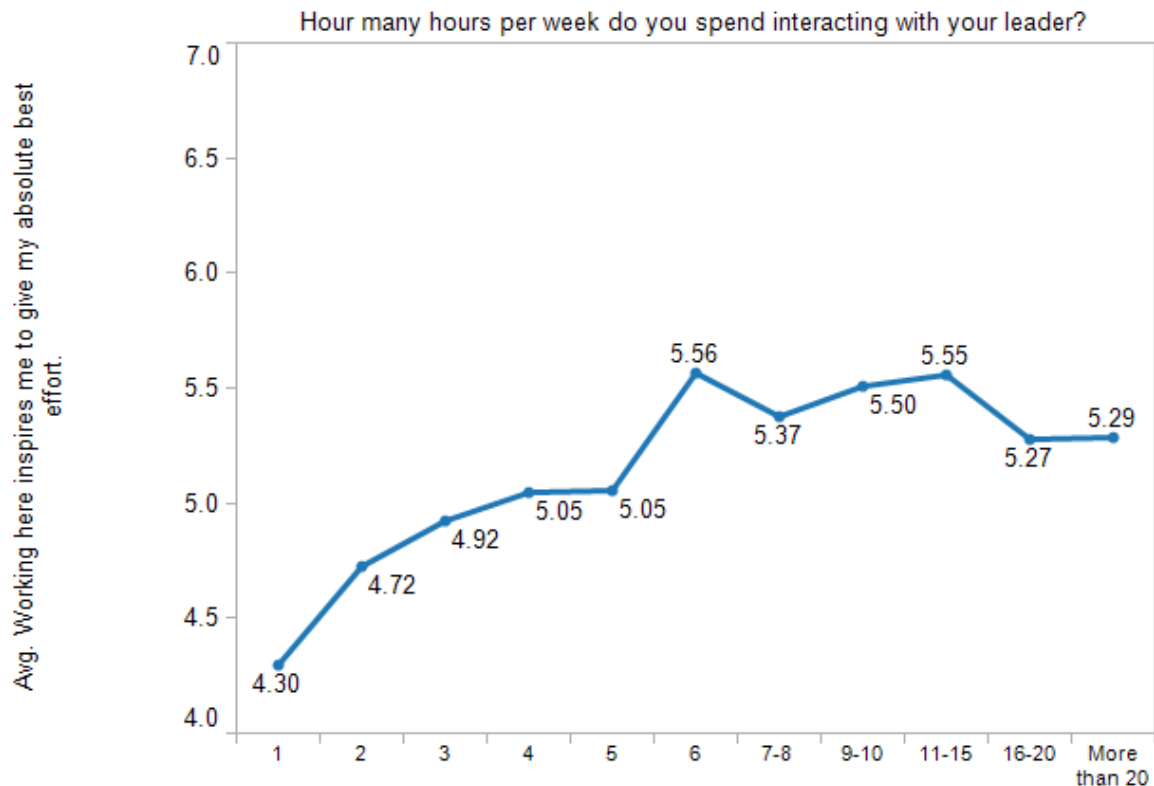
To answer this question we analyzed how inspired, engaged, innovative and intrinsically motivated people are compared to how many hours per week they spend interacting with their leader.

### A. INSPIRATION

We measured inspiration by asking respondents the question *“Working here inspires me to give my best effort”* on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). So we can say that as the score moves closer to 7, the more inspired that person is to give their best effort at work.

When we analyzed whether people feel inspired to give their best effort at work against how many hours they spend interacting with their leader every week, we found that their inspiration increases significantly every hour they spend interacting with their leader, up to 6 hours.

Here's the chart...



You can see a very clear upward trend from hours 1-6. As people spend more hours interacting with their leader every week, the more inspired they are to give their best effort at work.

**In fact, there is a 29% increase in inspiration as people move from spending 1 hour to 6 hours interacting with their leader.**

It's also interesting to note that when it comes to inspiration, there appear to be diminishing returns to spending more than 6 hours per week interacting with one's leader. (This is not to say that there might not be other benefits to interacting with one's leader more than 6 hours per week, but in this study, levels of inspiration remained the same or declined beyond 6 hours of interaction).

These numbers are generally highly statistically significant. For example, the differences in inspiration scores between 1 vs. 2 hours, 2 vs. 3 hours, 3 vs. 4 hours and 5 vs. 6 hours are all significant at the  $p < .01$  level or greater.

Here's a full chart of statistical significance:

Working here inspires me to give my absolute best effort.	Statistical Significance
1 hour vs. 2 hours	p < .0001
2 hours vs. 3 hours	p < .0001
3 hours vs. 4 hours	p < .01
4 hours vs. 5 hours	***
5 hours vs. 6 hours	p < .0001
6 hours vs. 7-8 hours	p < .01
7-8 hours vs. 9-10 hours	p < .01
9-10 vs. 11-15 hours	***
11-15 hours vs. 16-20 hours	p < .0001
16-20 hours vs. more than 20 hours	***
2 hours vs. 6 hours	p < .0001
3 hours vs. 6 hours	p < .0001
4 hours vs. 6 hours	p < .0001
5 hours vs. 6 hours	p < .0001

\*\*\* Scores are not significant at the p < .05 or greater level.

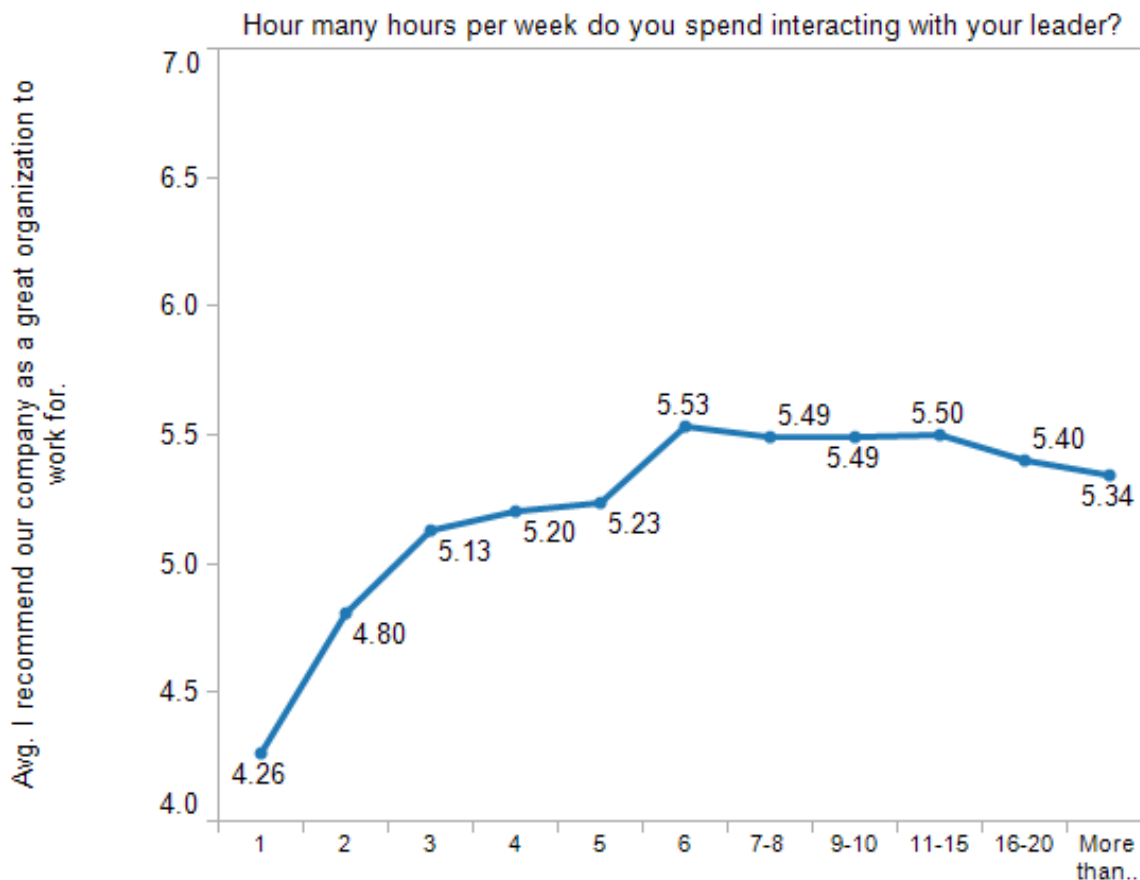


## B. ENGAGEMENT

We measured engagement by asking respondents the question *“I recommend this company as a great organization to work for”* on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). So we can say that as the score moves closer to 7, the more likely that person is to recommend their company to others.

When we analyzed whether people will recommend their company against how many hours they spend interacting with their leader every week, we again found that their engagement increases significantly every hour they spend interacting with their leader, up to 6 hours.

Here’s the chart...



Again, you can see a very clear upward trend from hours 1-6. As people spend more hours interacting with their leader every week, the more engaged they are (i.e. likely to recommend their company as a great organization to work for).

**In fact, there is a 30% increase in engagement as people move from spending 1 hour to 6 hours interacting with their leader.**

Similar to inspiration, when it comes to engagement, there appear to be diminishing returns to spending more than 6 hours per week interacting with one's leader.

These numbers are generally highly statistically significant. For example, the differences in inspiration scores between 1 vs. 2 hours, 2 vs. 3 hours, 3 vs. 4 hours and 5 vs. 6 hours are all significant at the  $p < .05$  level or greater.

Here's a full chart of statistical significance:

I recommend our company as a great organization to work for.	Statistical Significance
1 hour vs. 2 hours	$p < .0001$
2 hours vs. 3 hours	$p < .0001$
3 hours vs. 4 hours	$p < .05$
4 hours vs. 5 hours	***
5 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
6 hours vs. 7-8 hours	***
7-8 hours vs. 9-10 hours	***
9-10 vs. 11-15 hours	***
11-15 hours vs. 16-20 hours	***
16-20 hours vs. more than 20 hours	***
2 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
3 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
4 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
5 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$

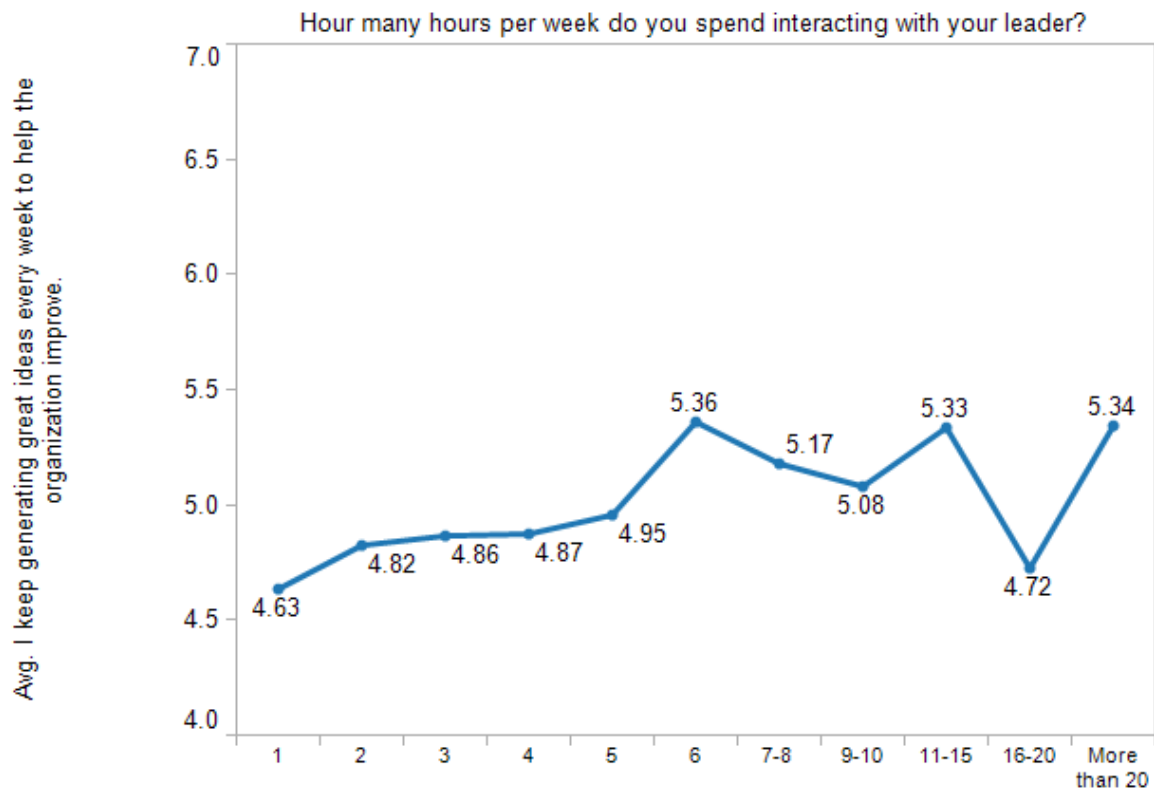
\*\*\* Scores are not significant at the  $p < .05$  or greater level.

## C. INNOVATION

We measured innovation by asking respondents the question ***“I keep generating great ideas every week to help the organization improve”*** on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). So we can say that as the score moves closer to 7, the more that person is generating great improvement ideas every week.

When we analyzed whether people will keep generating great improvement ideas every week against how many hours they spend interacting with their leader, we again found that their innovation increases significantly every hour they spend interacting with their leader, up to 6 hours.

Here’s the chart...



Again, you can see a very clear upward trend from hours 1-6. As people spend more hours interacting with their leader every week, the more they keep generating great improvement ideas.

**There is a 16% increase in innovation as people move from spending 1 hour to 6 hours interacting with their leader.**

Similar to inspiration and engagement, when it comes to innovation, there appear to be diminishing returns to spending more than 6 hours per week interacting with one's leader.

These numbers are generally highly statistically significant. For example, the differences in innovation scores between 1 vs. 2 hours, 4 vs. 5 hours and 5 vs. 6 hours are all significant at the  $p < .05$  level or greater.

Here's a full chart of statistical significance:

I keep generating great ideas every week to help the organization improve.	Statistical Significance
1 hour vs. 2 hours	$p < .0001$
2 hours vs. 3 hours	***
3 hours vs. 4 hours	***
4 hours vs. 5 hours	$p < .05$
5 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
6 hours vs. 7-8 hours	$p < .01$
7-8 hours vs. 9-10 hours	$p < .05$
9-10 vs. 11-15 hours	$p < .0001$
11-15 hours vs. 16-20 hours	$p < .0001$
16-20 hours vs. more than 20 hours	$p < .0001$
2 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
3 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
4 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
5 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$

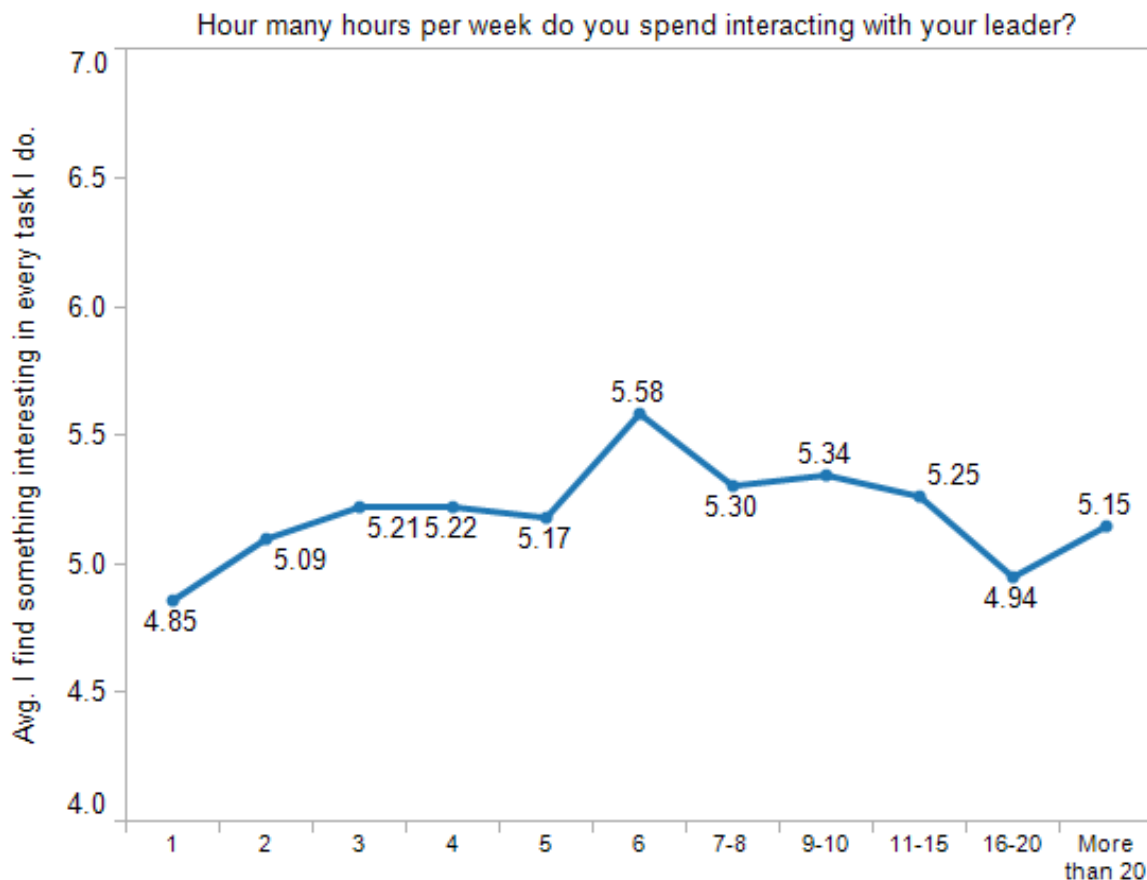
\*\*\* Scores are not significant at the  $p < .05$  or greater level.

## D. INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

We measured intrinsic motivation by asking respondents the question *“I find something interesting in every task I do”* on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). So we can say that as the score moves closer to 7, the more that person is finding interesting things in their work (which is a key component of intrinsic motivation).

When we analyzed whether people will find their work interesting against how many hours they spend interacting with their leader, we again found that their intrinsic motivation increases significantly every hour they spend interacting with their leader, up to 6 hours.

Here’s the chart...



There's a very clear upward trend from hours 1-6. As people spend more hours interacting with their leader every week, the more they find their work interesting.

**There is a 15% increase in intrinsic motivation as people move from spending 1 hour to 6 hours interacting with their leader.**

And once again, similar to inspiration, engagement, and innovation, when it comes to intrinsic motivation, there appear to be diminishing returns to spending more than 6 hours per week interacting with one's leader.

These numbers are generally highly statistically significant. For example, the differences in innovation scores between 1 vs. 2 hours, 2 vs. 3 hours and 5 vs. 6 hours are all significant at the  $p < .01$  level or greater.

Here's a full chart of statistical significance:

I find something interesting in every task I do.	Statistical Significance
1 hour vs. 2 hours	$p < .0001$
2 hours vs. 3 hours	$p < .01$
3 hours vs. 4 hours	***
4 hours vs. 5 hours	***
5 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
6 hours vs. 7-8 hours	$p < .0001$
7-8 hours vs. 9-10 hours	***
9-10 vs. 11-15 hours	$p < .05$
11-15 hours vs. 16-20 hours	$p < .0001$
16-20 hours vs. more than 20 hours	$p < .01$
2 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
3 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
4 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$
5 hours vs. 6 hours	$p < .0001$

\*\*\* Scores are not significant at the  $p < .05$  or greater level.

## 5. RESEARCH NOTE: IS THIS AN ARTIFACT OF SOMETHING ELSE?

A very legitimate question is whether this positive relationship between hours spent interacting with one's leader and people's feelings about inspiration, engagement, innovation and intrinsic motivation is just an artifact of the quality of leaders or how people feel about their leader. For example, if people like their leader and want to spend more time with them because they like them, then perhaps all this study would be saying is that people want to spend time with leaders they like.

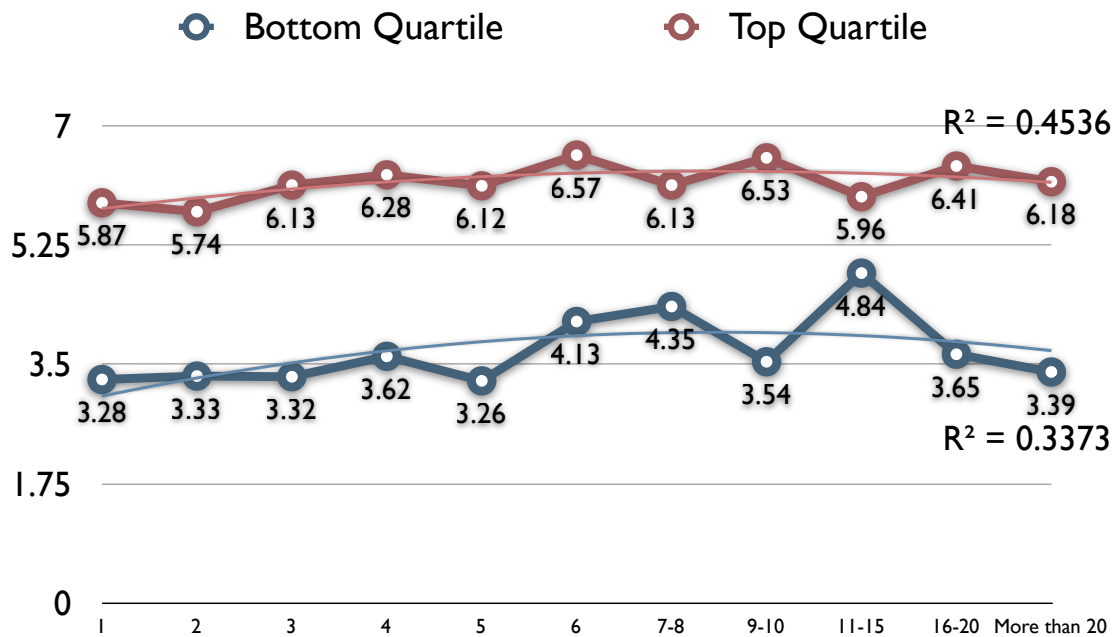
But we're making a more substantive claim than that. We're saying that whether your feelings about your leader are good or bad, increasing the time spent in interactions with them is, up to a point, associated with being more inspired, engaged, innovative and intrinsically motivated. So how do we prove that our assertion is true?

In essence, we need to control for people's feelings about their leader and then see if the relationship between time spent and inspiration still holds true.

We needed to find a measure of whether a leader was perceived as good or bad. So we used the question "I feel that my work is valued by my direct leader" rated on a scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 7 (Always). While not necessarily a perfectly comprehensive proxy for whether someone likes or dislikes their leader, this question does get to the issue of whether someone feels positively or negatively about their leader.

We took the top quartile of people (who always or almost always feel that their work is valued by their leader) and the bottom quartile of people (who never or almost never feel that their work is valued by their leader) to see if the positive relationship between time and inspiration still held.

The following chart shows that for both the top and bottom quartiles, the positive relationship between time and inspiration still exists...



What this chart shows is that for the people in the top quartile, who feel positive about their leader (they feel like their leader values their work), the more time they spend with interacting with their leader, the more inspired they feel. In fact, the people who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader are 12% more inspired than the people who only spend 1 hour per week.

Similarly, for people in the bottom quartile, who do not feel positive about their leader (they feel like their leader does not value their work), the more time they spend with interacting with their leader, the more inspired they feel. So even though these bottom quartile people don't feel very good about their leader, the people who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader are 26% more inspired than the people who only spend 1 hour per week.

Essentially, even after controlling for peoples' feelings about their leader, these findings show a robust relationship between time spent interacting with one's leader and increased inspiration.

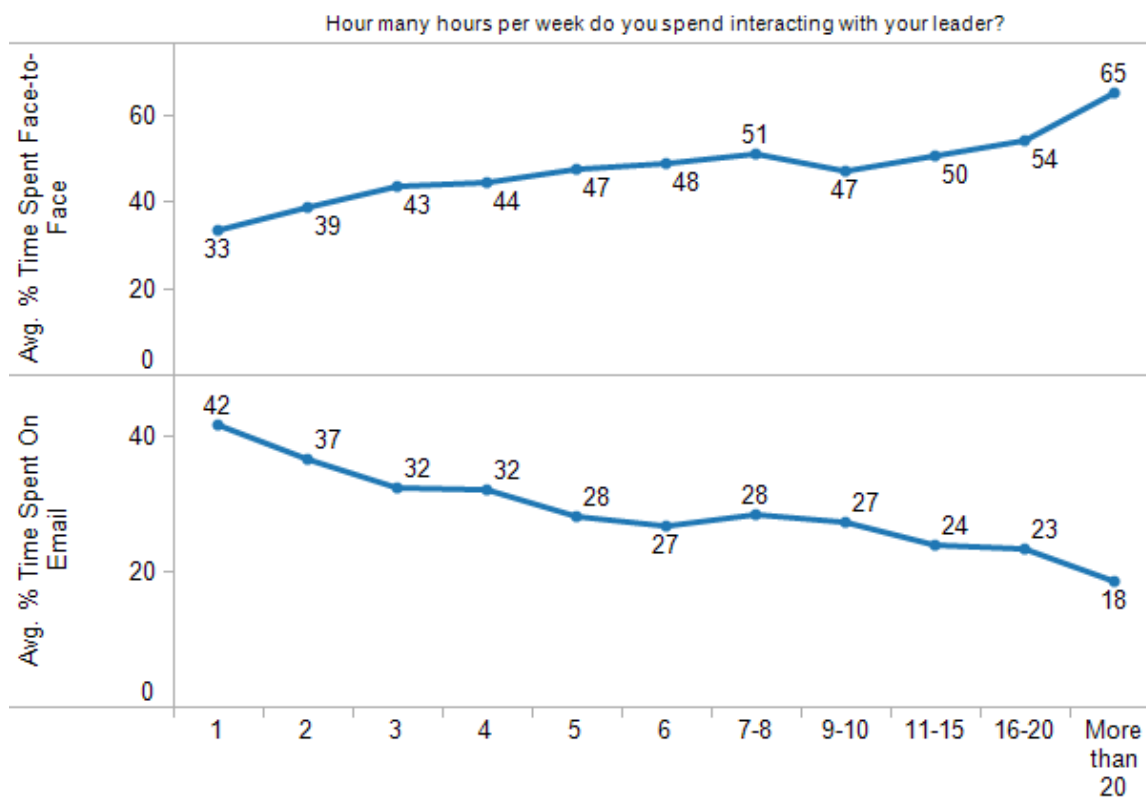


## 6. HOW SHOULD TIME WITH YOUR LEADER BE SPENT?

There are many ways that people communicate with their leaders; face-to-face, email, phone, video conferencing, texting, social media, and more. But notwithstanding our present technological age, face-to-face and email communication are by far the most common ways that people interact with their leader.

We wanted to know whether the mix of those two communication modalities differed based on how much time someone spent interacting with their leader.

The following is a chart that shows the percent of time people interact with their leader via face-to-face and email...



You can see that for people who only spend 1 hour per week interacting with their leader, 33% of that time is spent in face-to-face interaction and 42% is spent via email.

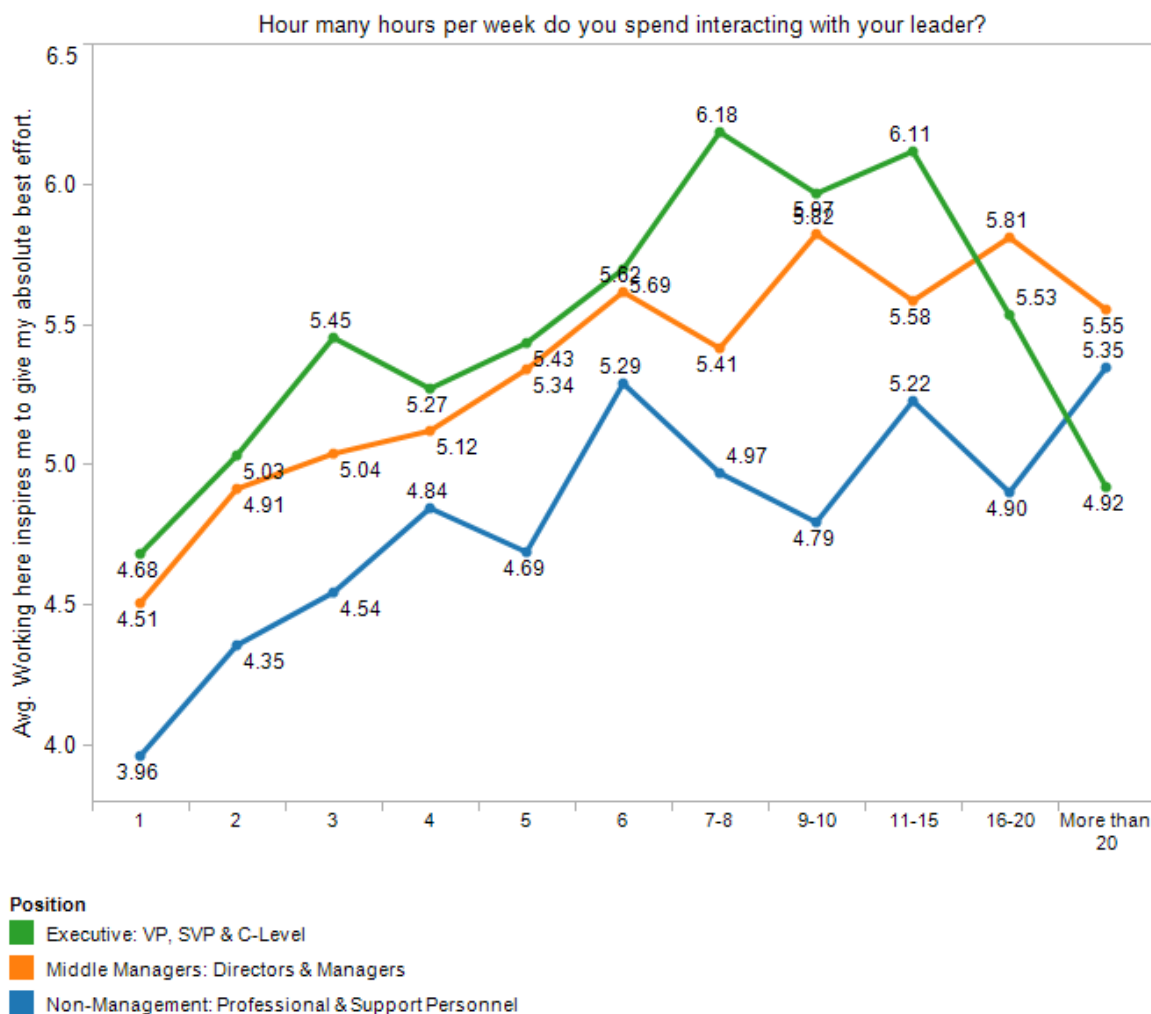
By contrast, the people who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader spend a far larger 48% of their time in face-to-face interactions, and a far smaller 27% of their time interacting via email.

So it appears that not only is the amount of time spent interacting with one's leader important, but increasing the percentage of face-to-face interaction matters as well.

## 7. DO EXECUTIVES NEED MORE OR LESS TIME WITH THEIR LEADERS?

It's natural to wonder whether the positive linkage between time with leaders and feelings like inspiration hold true at all organizational levels (i.e. non-managers, middle managers and executives).

We gathered fairly granular data about respondents' position, so we grouped them into 3 broad categories (non-managers, middle managers and executives) for ease of analysis. Here's what we found...



What's striking is that unlike the overall analysis, the inspiration of executives and middle managers didn't peak with 6 hours per week interacting with their leader. In fact, executives experienced their highest levels of inspiration when they spent 7-8 hours per week interacting with their leader. And middle managers felt their highest levels of inspiration when they spent 9-10 hours per week interacting with their leader.

While we might have expected that executives and middle managers would need less time interacting with their leader, this analysis clearly shows that the opposite is true.

## 8. COMMENTARY BY MARK MURPHY, CEO OF LEADERSHIP IQ

The most obvious finding from this study is that people generally aren't spending enough time every week interacting with their leader. If the median time is 3 hours per week and the average optimal time is 6 hours, there's a lot of room for improvement.

And this finding is relevant for both leaders and employees. If you're a leader trying to improve the inspiration, engagement, innovation and intrinsic motivation of your employees, it would be wise to assess whether you're presently spending enough time interacting with them.

And if you're a career-minded employee (whether an individual contributor, middle manager or executive) who wants to be more inspired, engaged, innovative and intrinsically motivated, then you need to assess whether you're presently spending enough time interacting with your leader.

But I do want to caution both the leaders and the career-minded that there can be too much of a good thing. Don't forget that there was some drop-off in inspiration, engagement, innovation and intrinsic motivation once people reported spending 10, 15, 20 hours per week interacting with their leader.

Another key finding is that the people who interact with their leader 6 hours per week spend a much smaller percentage of that time on email than the people who spend 1-2 hours per week. And the 6 hour people spent a much larger percentage of their time with their leader in face-to-face interactions.

Does this mean that email is always bad and face-to-face is always good? Of course not. But there is such a clear drop in the percentage of time spent via email as time with leaders increases, that if you intend to increase the time you interact with your employees or leaders, I would suggest trying to increase face-to-face time rather than email time.

This study also has big implications for employee engagement and leadership development. When it comes to employee engagement, companies spend billions of dollars every year trying to fix this issue with little to show for their efforts. And yet, this study shows clearly that people who spend 6 hours per week interacting with their leader are 30% more engaged than people who only spend 1 hour per week. If companies are worried about engaging and retaining their people, this would seem to be an amazingly simple and cost-effective place to start.

And when it comes to developing leaders, both middle managers and executives are more inspired when they spend more time with their direct leaders. So as you consider development opportunities for managers and executives, be sure to include more time (especially face-to-face time) with the leaders to whom they report.

If anything, this study shows that one simple intervention (more time with leaders) can have a significant impact on many issues.

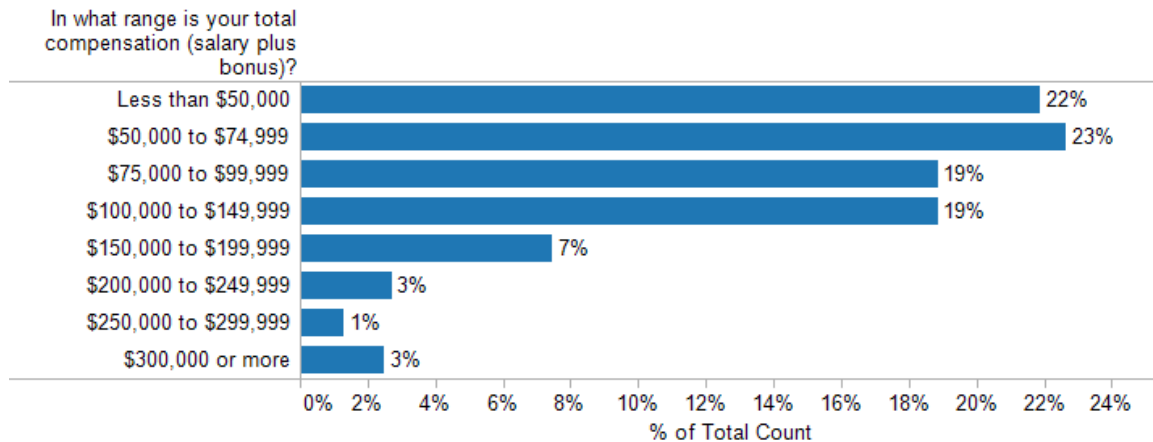
Finally, this study has some implications for organizations' current span of control (as well as the flattening of management that has taken place over the past decades). If leaders have so many employees that they can't devote sufficient time to interacting with them, inspiration, engagement, innovation and intrinsic motivation will suffer. If a leader has 60 employees, for example, how will they find sufficient time to interact with all of them?

And if an organization adopts a "player-coach" kind of leadership, in which leaders function both as titular leaders and individual contributors, how will they find the necessary time to drive inspiration, engagement and more?

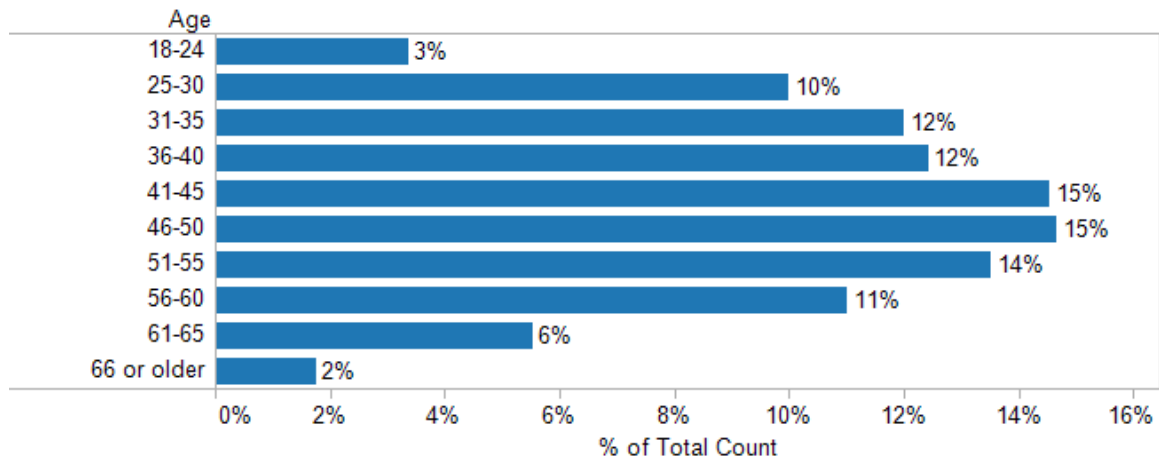
## 9. APPENDIX: STUDY DEMOGRAPHICS

The following charts show the various demographic breakdowns of the 32,410 participants in the study.

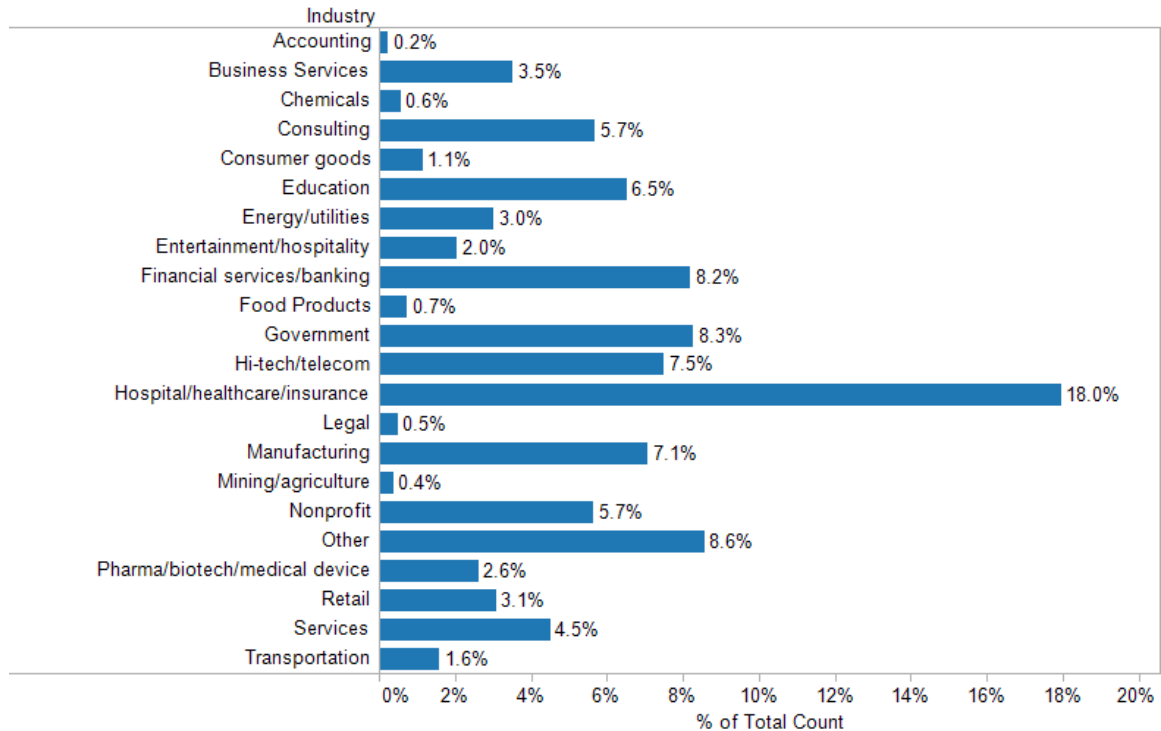
### By Compensation



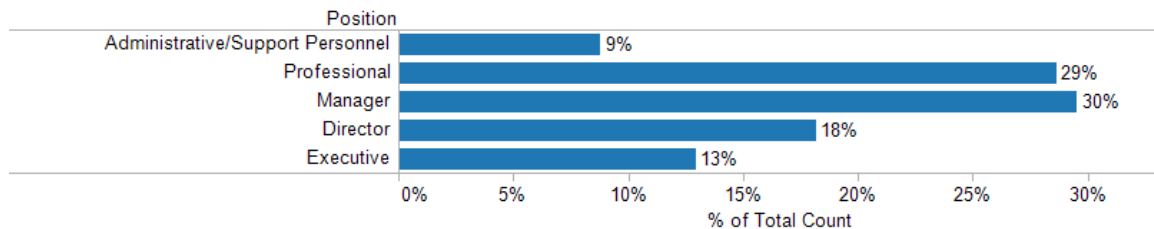
### By Age



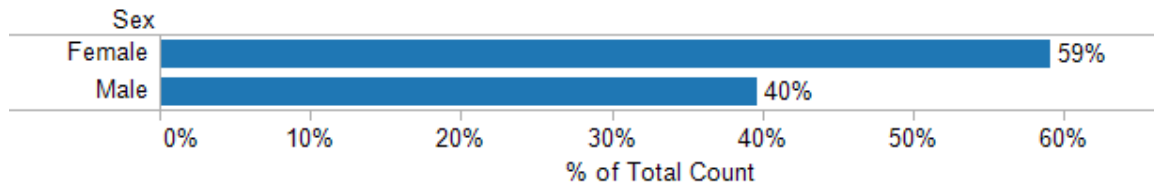
## By Industry



## By Position



## By Sex





## 10. CONTACT LEADERSHIP IQ

Leadership IQ is a leadership research and training firm. Founded by New York Times bestselling author Mark Murphy, Leadership IQ leads one of the world's largest leadership training and employee engagement studies.

Among our many well-known research studies are "Job Performance Not a Predictor of Employee Engagement," "Are SMART Goals Dumb?," "Why CEO's Get Fired," "Why New Hires Fail" and "Don't Expect Layoff Survivors to Be Grateful."

Leadership IQ's work has appeared in such publications as the Wall Street Journal, Fortune, Forbes, Bloomberg BusinessWeek, U.S. News & World Report and the Washington Post. And Mark Murphy has been a featured guest on programs including CBS News Sunday Morning, ABC's 20/20, Fox Business News, CNN International and NPR.

Leadership IQ's clients include the United Nations, Harvard Business School, Aflac, Charles Schwab, Microsoft, IBM, MasterCard, Merck, Ocean Spray, Stanford University, Transamerica, Microchip, and more.

Mark Murphy's best-selling books include Hiring for Attitude, Hundred Percenters, and HARD Goals.

**For Media Inquiries, please contact:**

Fortier Public Relations  
Mark Fortier  
(212) 675-6460  
[mark@fortierpr.com](mailto:mark@fortierpr.com)

Norbert Beatty  
(917) 886-8119  
[norbert@fortierpr.com](mailto:norbert@fortierpr.com)

**For inquiries about Leadership IQ's services, please contact:**

Jeffrey Sherman  
VP of Administration  
Leadership IQ  
800-814-7859  
[jeffrey@leadershipiq.com](mailto:jeffrey@leadershipiq.com)