KEEPING COOL WHEN THINGS GET HOT!
Grace under pressure what an important attribute for anyone aspiring to be in a leadership role. Here is a simple six-question test developed by psychologist Donald A. Laird to measure a person's leadership potential:

- Can you take a reprimand without blowing up?
- Can you take a turn down without becoming discouraged?
- Can you laugh with others when the joke is on you?
- Can you keep your spirits up when things go wrong?
- Can you keep cool in emergencies?
- Can you tune out gossip and negative comments from others?

If your answer is yes to all six questions, you're on your way to being a leader. Dr. Laird, however, singled out one great quality of a leader "poise."

"Poise is what makes you a master of situations," Dr. Laird said. "Although we call some persons natural-born leaders, usually the poise of leadership is a trait that has to be developed, and anyone can develop poise a little bit at a time."

The way to develop poise, he says, is to destroy its enemies "nervousness, anger and the habit of speaking before thinking."

It's easy to show poise when everything is going well. It's a lot tougher to maintain your poise when things are not going well. But the minute you lose your composure, the chances of defeat increase. You are giving the mental edge to your opponent.

If you maintain your composure, good things can happen. Focus on what you can do or control. Forget the past.

Look at pro football quarterbacks. The great ones, like Peyton Manning, don't ever lose their cool, even when they're behind with two minutes to go. They just keep their poise and often lead their team to victory.

Terry Bradshaw, the Hall-of-Fame quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers and now a TV analyst, said: "Quite often, the mark of an experienced quarterback one who has poise is the amount of time he holds on to the ball before releasing it. The quarterback who can be patient
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enough for lanes to open and receivers to clear will be more successful. I played a long time before I had poise, and I suffered for it, and so did my team."

It's similar for other professions.

President Ronald Reagan said: "I have learned that one of the most important rules in politics is poise which means looking like an owl after you have behaved like a jackass."

Many of us live and work in hectic and pressure-ridden environments, so it's wise to remember the words of the psychiatrist who said to his assistant who was trying to answer two telephones at once. "Miss Smith," he said, "just say we're terribly busy not it's a madhouse here."

There's a story that circulates in the sales profession about a sales rep who was ready to demonstrate his company's state-of-the-art computer software to a group of important customers, when the screen went blurry and finally crashed. His efforts to re-establish a link to the office systems failed. He called tech support and every number he had available, but without luck. Unfazed, he turned to his customers and said, "This has been a demonstration of our competitor's product. Next week, I'll show you what ours can do."

Now that's poise under pressure.

Travis Graham, the class valedictorian of the University of Tennessee Law School, promised to take only two minutes of the audience's time and he got to the heart of his thinking right away.

He began his remarks by acknowledging that he had had difficulty deciding what "wisdom" to impart to his fellow graduates. He said he had reviewed all the cases of law the class had studied and had found nothing that he felt was appropriate to such an important occasion.

At a loss for any inspiring thoughts, Travis sat at his kitchen table eating a student's breakfast of biscuits made from packaged dough. And there, right in front of him on the opened roll of refrigerated biscuit dough, he spotted the belief that he knew he and his fellow graduates had in common and that he felt was worthy of the occasion. The package, he said, had this message, "Keep cool. But do not freeze." And with that he thanked all assembled and returned to his seat, amid rousing applause.

The Moral of the story: The Hotter things get, the more important it is to keep your cool.