The short article written below was my response to questions posed in a discussion type assignment for a class I am currently taking in a graduate degree program in *Organization Development & Leadership M.S.*

The following was the assignment:

Discussion - Leadership Assumptions

Over the last three decades, the research on effective leadership has challenged assumptions held true the prior 60 years. For example:

- Good leaders are born that way
- Smart is good enough
- A leader's mood does not matter
- Good leaders can handle constant pressure
- The higher a leader's position, the more aware he/she is of his/her impact on others

What other leadership assumptions have you encountered at work? Share your own experience(s) and how the assumption was challenged.

The following was my contribution to the discussion.

As a participant in the world of work, I've labored in various industries; a few examples include telecommunications, pharmaceutical, healthcare and the information technology industries. During this period, I can say without hesitation that the leadership assumption I encountered most frequently was the assumption that past performances should incur automatic reverence for, and obeisance to, any idea or direction proffered for current consideration. In fact, it usually seemed as if the ideas put forth by leaders suffering from this form of leadership assumption, were not merely 'for consideration' but more precisely for eventual implementation in some form or another.

In the Summer of 2015 while in the employ of a pharmaceutical company I was a member of a project team tasked with developing a new Customer Relationship Management {CRM} system. My role on the team was primarily to make sure that the end user interfaces built were user friendly, easily navigable, and content relevant for business units spanning two states. While on this team I encountered a leader whose confidence in her past successes, led her, in my opinion, to feel entitled to override or challenge any idea which did not conform to her knowledge base.

(See this article from the Harvard Business Review titled Selection [Bias and the Perils of Benchmarking](), for a look at how reliance on past performances could be a trap)

In one meeting, after going over slides of proposed system interfaces; I suggested that the developers include more color into the transition pages and menu buttons for the system. I reasoned that the average user coming into the program, particularly of a certain age, would have practically grown up using such interfaces. I posited that this pre-knowledge could be leveraged, along with my suggestions, to make end user training easier to implement and would enhance users' ability to retain training protocols. The leader immediately attempted to nix the idea on the not unreasonable grounds that color can introduce lag into a system due to memory and disk access considerations. I countered that the additional upfront cost associated with these considerations would produce residual ROIs in

excess of the initial upfront costs over the system's lifetime. I further suggested that we perform some industry benchmarks and test them against in house models built to simulate my proposal. After some other discussions around the room from different project members in the room, the decision was made to table all related suggestions until the next project meet.

The next day I was hauled into a meeting with a senior manager and my immediate manager, and basically told I had no standing to challenge this leader's ideas. A week later I was moved from the project and reassigned to a different one on the, in my opinion, dubious grounds of internal talent sharing. In about a year my proposals seemed justified, when one of the most common complaints leveled against the new system was that its interface was bland, and in the words of one trainer, boredom inducing, and universally hated. A second version of the system was subsequently rolled out with many of the ideas I'd initially proposed.

I think this specific leadership assumption is more common than is realized, because inevitably in business circles experience matters. Yet the very certainty that is born of experience, is the very certainty which, in my experiences, can produce some of the darkest blind spots for leadership.