

# ARTICLE

## PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

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### **Overview**

Leadership is at the very center of Performance Improvement. It is crucial that leaders develop and harness the skills necessary to communicate effectively, manage professionally, and lead securely. These attributes ultimately determine the success or failure of the people you are leading. If you are going to positively leverage your strengths and vision, you must be able to work with and through others. Personal leadership sets the foundation for every successful team and must emerge from all levels of the organization if you want to maximize performance.

### **The Eight Cornerstones**

*We have identified eight cornerstones of personal and transformational leadership:*

1. Self-Assessment
2. Toughen Up
3. Be Trustworthy
4. Put Others First
5. Prioritize Importance, Minimize Urgency
6. Set Deadlines
7. Accentuate the Positive
8. Commitment to Excellence

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### **Cornerstone One: Self-Assessment**

#### *Looking In*

Self-assessment is the first cornerstone of leadership. It involves deep personal honesty. It prompts us to start where we are – no illusion, no excuse. It forces asking and answering difficult questions:

- Where am I trying to go in my personal and professional life?
- Do I really want to do it?
- Am I willing to pay the price?
- Do I have the strength to do it?
- Am I willing to sacrifice for success?
- Do I have the willpower to do it?
- Am I striving for excellence or settling for mediocrity?
- Am I blaming others for my inability to set and achieve goals?

Self-assessment gives substance and meaning to WHO WE ARE, where we want to go and how to get there. Looking inside affects the decisions we make, the way we view the world, how we spend our time and the way we interact with others.

True leadership dictates proactive self-assessment. Most of us don't confront critical issues unless there is a wake-up call. These wake-up calls seem to occur at the worst possible time and when they do it's usually too late to make a successful adjustment. The goal is to "Get OUT IN FRONT" with our lives and prepare for challenges that are sure to come when overwhelming pressure isn't staring us in the face.

#### *Looking Out*

Team organizational assessment allows you to uncover the critical business issues and related performance issues.

We call this process gap analysis (reviewing existing strategies, programs and procedures to determine what is working, what is not working and what needs to change for the organization to meet your goals.)

We all struggle with gap analysis because it creates visibility of the gaps between the vision of "WHAT we can be" and current reality.

This VISION focuses on what is possible knowing it cannot be reached unless we elevate the organization's culture, behavior and results.

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### **Cornerstone Two: Toughen Up**

#### *Looking In*

Leaders need to understand that in general, people can be categorized as followers or leaders.

Followers believe that tension and stress should be reduced or eliminated if they are to be happy. They program themselves to be content with mediocrity. They don't like change and will fight it every step of the way.

On the other hand, leaders understand that tension and stress are absolutely essential in living a productive and full life. They understand that to achieve higher goals, behaviors must be elevated. This means the organization and people who make it up must change.

We can guarantee that proactive leadership will experience resistance.

Emotionally tough does not mean emotionally hard or insensitive; it simply means being in control as opposed to being controlled. It means you are in control of your emotions rather than the other way around. Being a leader guarantees additional stress, it's not easy. Plan to be uncomfortable and understand it's a necessary part of success.

#### *Looking Out*

Setting a clear vision is the cornerstone to maximizing organizational performance. It's the responsibility of a transformational leader.

When you commit to Performance Improvement you create concern and uneasiness. Money will fight the change.

Expect this reaction – it's normal. Lock into this vision; elevate the expectations and "STAY THE COURSE."

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### **Cornerstone Three: Be Trustworthy**

#### *Looking In*

People are smart. They generally know where they stand in the minds of others. One of the strange things in life is that others can usually see our strengths, weaknesses, honesty and fairness, and yet it's difficult for us to comprehend our transparency.

We can work side by side forty hours a week for years and think that our co-workers won't pick up on manipulation, brown-nosing, put-downs and the myriad of self-serving activities.

The only way to earn trust is by being TRUSTWORTHY. TRUST is not inherited – it's earned every day through strength of character. The way you truly feel about yourself translates to everyone around you. It sets the foundation for true relationships.

If you are confident in who you are and what you stand for, your positive energy will uplift everyone you work with and allow others to build a real trust-based relationship with you.

#### *Looking Out*

TRUSTWORTHINESS lays the foundation for true leadership. We all have the ability to be both honest and empathetic to others. The conflict can be different but all meaningful relationships contain both elements.

Setting clear goals, strategy and defined measurements are cornerstones in helping others elevate their performance.

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### **Cornerstone Four: Put Others First**

#### *Looking In*

Why is it so hard to get beyond ourselves? The correlation between being highly motivated and being self-centered is very high. Most assertive people hesitate involving others in planning and decisions for fear of confusing the issue, contaminating their own thinking or having to compromise their position. Leaders need to understand that putting others first does not compromise their vision, it adds to it. Being a selfless leader means respecting other people, their ideas and contributions. Putting others first means putting your ego in-check, understanding and respecting the perspective of others and thinking WIN/WIN.

Personal leadership dictates that we progress with our relationships and life. We've all been hurt and in some cases buried personally or professionally. Don't let problems from the past hold you back. It's a rare person who can set the course, back it up with effort and resolve, and put others first. A person with these attributes is recognized as a leader.

#### *Looking Out*

Being a selfless leader sets the foundation for maximizing commitment and performance of all members on the team. It takes tremendous character to give credit to others for success and to take responsibility for poor results. If you give to people, they will be more willing to give back to you and others. People will feel more inclined to communicate with you if as a leader you value their judgments and ideas.

Putting others first sets the foundation for maximizing the commitment and performance of all members of the team.

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### **Cornerstone Five: Prioritize Importance, Minimize Urgency**

#### *Looking In*

You're not leading if you're more concerned with what's urgent rather than what is important.

Some of us become addicted to the adrenaline rush of handling crisis situations and become dependent on the sense of excitement and energy that it creates. We've termed this the urgency addiction.

How does it feel?

On the negative side it feels stressful, pressured, tense, and exhausting.

On the positive side it feels exhilarating. We feel useful, successful, validated. It brings instant results and instant gratification. We get a temporary high from solving urgent and important crisis situations. Then when the important part of the crisis isn't present, the urgency fix is so powerful we are drawn to do anything urgent, just to stay in motion.

Busyness is where we get our security. It's a good excuse for not leading with the first and most important things in our work and professional lives.

Realize that urgency itself is not the problem. The problem is created when urgency becomes the dominant factor and importance is not.

We are so caught up in doing; we don't stop to ask if what we're doing really needs to be done.

Understand that most of the IMPORTANT things (VISION and LONG TERM STRATEGY) don't tend to press us with urgency.

Even though they are the most IMPORTANT, they are not prioritized because THEY ARE NOT URGENT.

#### *Looking Out*

This most important thing for a leader is to keep the most important thing the most important thing.

Evaluate your goals, maximize the important, and minimize the urgent.

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### **Cornerstone Six: Set Deadlines**

#### *Looking In*

One of the benefits of getting older is a better understanding of the limitation of time. We're all terminal.

Understanding our mortality should be a positive force rather than a depressing fact. We're running out of time, now is the time to put urgency into those things that are most important in work and life.

There are only twenty four hours each day. We won't be given extra hours. We have a limited time to accomplish our goals and dreams. Each of us lives in a finite world for a finite period of time with an infinite imagination. We're not going to have time for all of our dreams. To be successful we need to direct our energy toward our purpose and goals. We need to remove the fillers. If you're serious about achievement, lock in the deadlines and measure the results.

#### *Looking Out*

The same is true with organizational leadership. Once the plan is in place, and priorities are established, deadlines must be set.

One of the primary inhibitors to the action plan is the "perfection syndrome." It's irrational but it is how many organizations operate. There is a fear of committing to a new strategy, stretching comfort zones and maximizing performance because of the extreme concern of doing things perfectly the first time. Unfortunately, the only way to do things perfectly is through experience and experience is the name we give to making mistakes.

Set the vision, develop the strategy, set deadlines and "DO IT!"

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### **Cornerstone Seven: Accentuate the Positive**

#### *Looking In*

Do you focus on the positive or negative? Apparently most people are clueless that they affect everyone they meet.

Know it or not, others will view you as uplifting, a non-connect, or, a “downer.”

People are attracted and uplifted by POSITIVE encounters. They want to have their contributions and commitment validated.

In reverse fashion, negativity curtails open communication, engagement, and a passion for WIN/WIN relationships. In our experience, we have never met anyone who would rather be criticized or ignored than praised or recognized.

The conclusion – work daily to accentuate the positive.

#### *Looking Out*

It’s impossible to maximize organizational performance without positive personal leadership. It is the cornerstone of every long term successful endeavor.

“Looking inside” affects how we “look outside.” Positive personal leadership influences those around you and transforms the organizational environment.



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### **Cornerstone Eight: Self-Assessment**

#### *Looking In*

It's easy to be ordinary or mediocre. It takes character and courage to strive for excellence. Not many people are willing to focus and commit to being the best.

The fact is we can all strive to be better. Most of us have far more talent than we give ourselves credit for.

What's your VISION? (Average, Good, Excellent.) Setting a clear vision is the cornerstone to maximizing personal or organizational behavior.

Rest assured that your result will not exceed your vision. Don't sell yourself short. Clear VISION stimulates clear thinking. Others will serve your commitment and want to help (they know their efforts will not be wasted.)

True leadership means elevating your vision and striving for EXCELLENCE.

#### *Looking Out*

A commitment to excellence is the foundation for organizational improvement. Leaders must constantly be challenging themselves and their team to focus on their VISION of excellence. The goal should be to have leaders at all levels of the organization committed to excellence in all aspects of their work and relationships.