

What is Self-leadership?

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In this article I shall try to explain briefly what is the content of self-leadership and how it could be implemented efficiently into practice. I will describe self-leadership with two models; "Self Ltd" and the Total Wellness Model. The key message is that self-leadership consists of very concrete things and its problem is not the missing knowledge but the discipline to implement it into practice. Therefore I have also collected ten principles of self-leadership, which I have myself found useful. When you are following these principles you can find your meaning and implement your contribution.

In a way self-leadership is the foundation for all leadership and management; for if you are not able to lead yourself, how can you lead others? **Self-leadership is an enabling process whereby a person learns to know him/herself better and through this better self-understanding is able to steer his/her life better.** The meaning and importance of self-leadership has become evident during the last ten years. One reason for that is that the rapidly changing business environment requires flexibility, quick responses, creativeness and great learning skills. Management training has increasingly focused on self-leadership during the 1990's. It is not always easy to define, what kind of managers we will need in the future, but we do know that they will have one feature in common: they will need to be good self-leaders. This means that they will need to have high self-esteem and self-knowledge. They will need to be flexible and fast learners, who can cope in totally unexpected situations (Sydänmaanlakka 2002).

I will describe self-leadership with two models which I have myself found useful (Sydänmaanlakka 2000 and 2002). The first one is the **Self Ltd Model**. According to this model, we all are managing directors of our own companies and our organization is called Self Ltd. We should be able to lead this entity well. It is divided into five departments, which are physical, mental, social, spiritual and work department. We should be able to manage the operations of these departments and functions and the interactions between them (see figure 1). Here the leader and follower is the same person (subject and object) or we can say that the leader is our **consciousness** that is leading our body, mind, feelings and values.



Self Leadership: Who Am I?

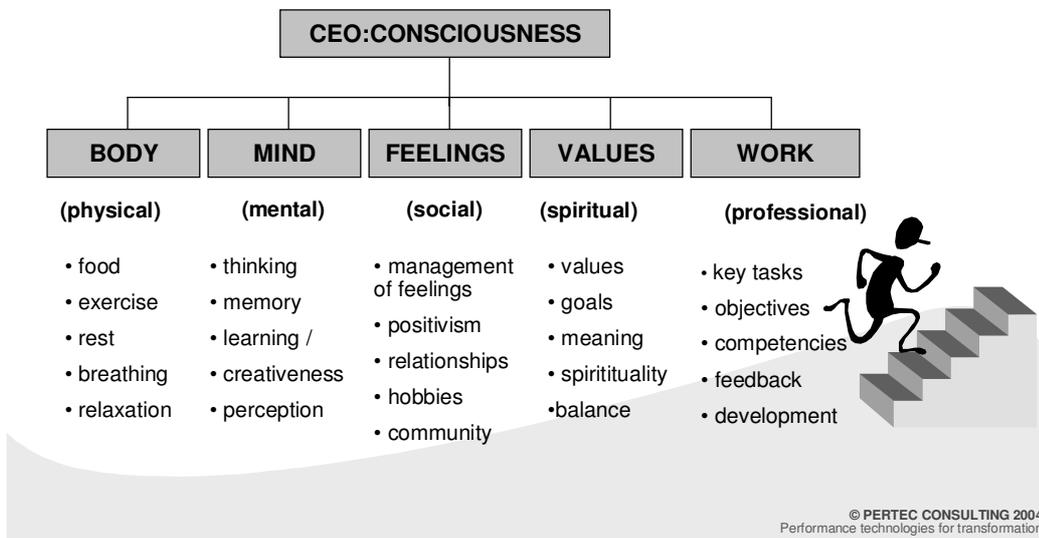


Figure 1. The Self Ltd –model.

Another way to describe self-leadership is to talk about Total Wellness or well-being. Top performance requires people to be in good condition, and maintaining high standards demands total wellness. There are five areas that make up total wellness - professional, physical, mental, social and spiritual condition. When our wellness curve is high in all these areas, we are efficient and feel good.

Self-leadership consists of very concrete things. Professional condition means having clear objectives in work, sufficient competence, feedback about performance and continuous development. By physical condition it means that you have a balanced diet, and that you exercise, sleep and rest adequately. Mental condition means that you are energetic, curious, have the ability to take fast decisions and for learning new things. Social condition means that you can take care of your relationships, with your partner or spouse, your children, your parents, your friends, and that you have time for your hobbies. Spiritual condition means that the purpose, values, vision and actions of your life are in balance. This means that you have clear objectives and spiritual stimuli steering your life. The Total Wellness concept is described in figure 2.



Figure 2. What is total wellness?

Good self-leadership releases energy and gives new internal resources. It is a tool against fatigue, over-specialization and boredom. We all have plenty of unused resources and it is perfectly possible to unlock these internal resources. Often our own restricted views are the biggest obstacles of change, growth and development.

The other obstacle is that we are not very good at implementation. Personal change and renewal process is not easy one. There we need certain principles and a lot of self-discipline in implementation. I have found the following ten principles useful when trying to find my personal vision and especially when implementing it into praxis.

1. Purpose: find the sense of meaning

We all have a meaning why we are here. We have to find what is our **contribution**. We should not ask what life can do for us, but what we can do for life. This way we can contribute and be of service. We have to know ourselves and then we are able to define the purpose of our life: **who am I, what am I doing and where am I living**. This is our Life Plan and Vision, which guides us wherever we are going. It is a direction, not a roadmap. Out of that vision we are able to define our life strategies and objectives, but we have to remember that those have to be updated at regular intervals and that life is always full of surprises!

We have to find a sense of meaning in our personal existence, our relationships, our work and the world as a whole. We have to find **greatness inside us**. We all have a need for meaning and faith. We all need to believe in something; for some people it could be God, for others it could be science or nature. We all have an innate yearning to find purpose to our lives, to connect to something greater than us and to feel that we are a part of the world.

2. Focus: do the right things

Whenever you want to achieve something valuable, you have to focus. When you open yourself up and learn to perceive the outside world with expanded consciousness the more focused you have to be. You have to be grounded to your purpose and values and be action oriented. Otherwise there is a risk of becoming a destitute dreamer. You have to combine your dreams with courage, ethics and action. Courage will enable you to take risks and become the person you have come here to be. It will set you free of your old models of thinking.

Focus also means **simplicity** in everything you do. Learn to lead yourself in a simplified way. Focus is also the only true path to time management; you must be able to prioritize your tasks and invest enough time to important things and leave others. The ability to choose is very difficult to many of us but it is good to remember that **if you want everything you will get nothing**.

Often to be more focused also means living more internally than externally. Usually the emphasis for a lot of us is on focusing externally and trying to be in the fast-track. We are so busy that we do not have time to live! We are living in the Information Age that is full of external stimuli of 24-hour TV, Internet, movies, video games, newspapers etc. There is too much information, but too little understanding. We are having info-illness (“infoähky”) and we cannot cope anymore with that meaningless information and data. We should be able to move to Intuition Age, be able to listen to inner stimulus and be connected and centered; only this way can we live in peace. There is a great need for silence today.

3. Authenticity: live in truth

All great self-leaders share authenticity and lack of guile. They are genuine and do not engage in any role playing. They live in truth. If you are playing roles, it will take all your energy. If you are genuine and living in truth, it will energize yourself. “Being consistent with your truth is also an essential part of your **authentic power**. Once you have discovered who you truly are, what you want from life and what you have come here to contribute, you will not be happy if you settle for anything less than absolute truth in your life. Compromise will become as painful to you as it was once numbing. As you understand your real needs and desires, adapt your lifestyle so you wake up every morning and look forward to the day ahead. Happiness is your most natural state and if you are prepared to listen, your authentic self will guide you to the people, places and situations that brings you most joy.” (Reynolds, 2001, 156.)

Some of the great self-leaders of last century have shown good example for us: The subtitle of Gandhi’s autobiography was “The Story of My Experiments with Truth”.

4. Renewal: learn continuously and be brave

Renewal, learning and change are the key words in the business today. They are also key words in your personal life. You have to be flexible and renew yourself continuously. When you see change as a natural state of life and you are willing to change yourself continuously, you start to understand that change is nothing threatening but a challenge that you are always ready to use.

Flexibility also means that you are **completely present** in each moment and are able to appreciate its newness. You have to maintain your curiosity; be curious about what is happening around you and be spontaneous like children are. This kind of mental curiosity is a great gift. It is also a key to creativity and innovation.

Many times we **fear the unknown** more than the known because we think the unknown is unpredictable and that therefore we cannot control it. This is reason why a crisis is often needed before we can really renew ourselves. Personal change is possible when you are either **terrified or excited**.

Make change your best friend. Change means getting rid of old patterns of thoughts, beliefs, values, fears and habits that no longer serve you. But many times we do not want to change. We prefer to stay our old habits. We must be ready for deep, life-transforming change and accept change a familiar and safe place to be.

5. Trust: trust yourself and have faith in universal intelligence

High self-confidence is necessary for learning. You are able to take risks, go out of your comfort zone and try to learn something truly new skills. Usually we want to develop those competencies where we already are good; we want to be even better. However it is very fruitful every now and then e.g. start a new hobby in which we are really a starter. This way we can experience the pain and glory of learning.

You also should have a faith in something greater than yourself. This kind of faith provides energy. It has nothing to do with traditional religion although for some people religion may provide the faith. For some it can be nature or some kind of universal intelligence. Faith is connected to your personal spirituality. We could think that faith is the spiritual equivalent of physical energy.

6. Patience: be patience and ready

All good things come to those who wait. There is an old saying that says that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. There is also another saying that infinite patience brings immediate rewards. You have to be patient and believe that things will happen when you are ready. But you have to be ready and open for new things, otherwise you are not able to catch them.

7. Assertiveness and discipline: don't give up

You must also learn to develop stamina (Finnish "sisu") and perseverance. Personal change is always difficult and it does not happen at once. It needs time and discipline. Unhappiness can be seen as a bad habit. You have to realize that all your experiences have been a result of choices you have made. If you want to life joyfully you will need the discipline to break the old, often unconscious patterns of behavior that lead you to unhappiness. You set yourself your own limits; you need the discipline of tenacity, commitment and focus to stretch you constantly beyond your own limitations.

Remember that if you want to be good at something, you need to practice it often. This is especially true with self-leadership. The longest journey, as they say, begins with a single step.

8. Sensitivity: learn to read weak signals

To become a good self-leader you have to develop your sensitivity. One paradox of life is that you have to be both hard and sensitive. “To become soft and remain hard, that is challenge enough for one life” is what the Finnish poet Tommy Taberman said. But we should not be afraid of being soft, because the truth is that as you become more sensitive, you also become a lot stronger. This is because you no longer have the disadvantage of trying to hide who you really are and you have also the sensitivity to see through the others in spite of the façade they are having.

This kind of sensitivity is a great competence in your personal life and in your work. You are able to read weak signals from your environment and this way you are always anticipating the coming changes much earlier than others. Sensitivity opens for you new windows to the world. To grow means to be more sensitive, to be more conscious about everything.

9. Love: love is the most powerful source of energy

Love is maybe the most important and the most powerful source of energy in your personal journey. As the old saying goes, love is what makes the world go around. Love is not only passion it is also compassion. It is the manifestation of the universal life force in different ways as kindness, warmth, understanding, generosity, sex and tenderness. Love can energize us in so many different ways. Love is the way to connect one another.

10. Humbleness: be of service

All great leaders, also self-leaders, have the feeling of being in service. They are self-confident enough to perform their duties, but at the same time they are humble enough to understand how small can be their own contribution. They have found their smallness in their greatness.

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