

In order to lead others successfully it
is important to have a clear personal
purpose, vision, and values.


Find Your Strength by Leading Yourself First



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Lleading quality within an organization can be difficult. Elevating the voice of quality amidst the hustle of external and internal demands requires focus and leadership strength. Introducing advanced quality concepts and methodologies is challenging, and helping others leverage the pervasive nature of quality throughout an organization in all functions calls for relationship-building skills. This is tough work! Understanding that the charge of leading quality reaches beyond those with the title of quality leader to include many others in the organization is essential. What competencies are needed to succeed under these conditions?

When looking to equip leaders to excel in such work, technical expertise is an obvious necessity. Having working knowledge of an array of quality tools and methodologies is expected, as well as knowing when to apply them. Ready to aid in the acquisition of technical skills are several sources including institutional education (higher education and technical colleges), certification courses, online seminars, and conferences. Also, belonging to a



community of quality practitioners affords tremendous insights into best application methods. All in all, the science of quality is well-founded and readily available from numerous sources that have been gifted by many quality pioneers.

Additionally, the critical role of interpersonal competence has been realized. This learning flowed from quality initiatives and culture transformations—an insight from successes and failures in achieving true quality performance. Proficiency in building teams, influencing others, and effectively championing quality initiatives are all essential skills. In large part, leaders of quality grasp the importance of emotional intelligence and strive to build capability. Again, the quality community has stepped up to provide skill-building opportunities. The fast-growing training segment of university-based, nondegree leadership training has firmly established the emotional intelligence pillar. Educators, practitioners, and consultants are ready and willing to share their knowledge in the human behavior and social psychology sciences.

On the other hand, when developing robust and profound leadership, intellectual and relational skills alone fall short. Missing is the fundamental block of individual strength built through effective leading of one's self before seeking to lead others. Leading one's self encompasses unearthing individual purpose, moving toward a comprehensive vision, and remaining awake to life.

Leaders of quality may well adhere to an organizational mission statement, vision, and values. As leaders of others, they probably can articulate these important organizational elements even without a wallet card. Shouldn't the leaders of others first become intentional leaders of themselves? Knowing why the organization exists, but not being able to articulate their individual purposes appears to be a little zombie-like, doesn't it? Many leaders of others fail to formulate a personal life plan, a written document outlining their purposes, visions, values, operating principles, and goals. Given the ever-increasing pace of life and its multifaceted complexities, leaders without a concrete sense of who they are, where they are heading, and their

values are having a rough time. Overwhelmed with work demands, leaders without a strong internal guidance system get lost, burned out, or they even step over ethical and legal lines. Having profound knowledge of their individual purposes, visions, and values provides the basis for resilient and determined leadership. With more than a vague idea of their life-plan components, strong self-leaders have a written plan. (See more about this topic in the sidebar, "Developing a Life Plan.")

The leader of self uncovers his/her reason for being (life purpose), moves toward a vibrant vision, and operates within chosen principles flowing from well-defined values. With these life-plan components in place, the leader of self remains awake despite pressures to fall asleep in a hectic world. A self-leader has his/her eyes wide open to countless available opportunities that foster a purposeful life, instead of just hoping for the best. Optimizing life under current conditions, responding to world stimuli, avoiding pain, and seeking pleasure are poor alternatives. Coping is not the same as creating a life of meaning. The charge to leaders of quality is to lead themselves first in order to gain strength and build resiliency. It is important to appreciate that leading one's self is really a prerequisite to leading others effectively.

Natural Progression

Consider the evolutionary state of the workplace. For many years, dictatorial, parental workplaces were common, but then the late 20th century ushered in participatory work systems. These are the work systems considered current best practice by many people, and they are frequently in place or on the path to fulfillment in most organizations. Under the banner of high-performance work systems, these participatory systems often encourage collaboration and utilize self-directed teams. Performance is enhanced because the mental and creative strengths of the broad workforce are employed, which is wonderful. Workplaces have improved through time. In today's age, it would be nearly unthinkable to work in an organization that was solely directed from the top down, the "do as you are told" workplace of old. Substantial progress has been achieved.

In participatory work systems, the collective is the center of attention and rightly so. The individual is engaged within the context of the organization's mission and direction. Applicable skills and mindfulness (consciousness) are developed and targeted to move the organization forward. The individual is asked to declare his/her contribution to the whole by establishing work goals and targets. The power of alignment is experienced and greater performance is attained within the organizational framework.

The individual may be largely unconscious regarding his/her purpose and direction, however. This peculiar state can be seen when performance coaches inquire about a leader's life purpose. Too often the reply is, "Do you mean at work or outside of work?" Furthermore, if this dual-purpose supposition is followed up by requesting the purpose statement at work and the one in life outside of work, usually the work purpose is cast as a position description, and nothing with clarity is offered related to the individual's purpose outside of work. Whereas the collective consciousness and direction are well established, individual organizational consciousness and defined direction are weak. The organization has done its job, but the individual has not.

Furthermore, thinking that work is somehow detached from life speaks to a lack of connectedness and authenticity. The mental construct of life divided into two or more discrete fragments is rather recent. Farmers, tradesmen, artisans, hunters, shopkeepers, and soldiers from the past viewed work as an integral part of life. The idea of having a work life, family life, social life (including a virtual social life), and romantic life would have seemed ridiculous; it was all just life. This change that divides people's orientation into different aspects of life is the current approach. That reality is not being challenged here, but it is important to recognize that the definition of "I am" now differs depending on the situation and context, rather than being holistic.

The compartmentalization of life is not good for mental health. Life is life. Work is connected to life; it's an essential aspect of life. If work is not life, then what is it? L.P. Jacks captures the integrated life in these words, "A master in the art of living draws no sharp distinction between his work and his play; his

labor and his leisure; his mind and his body; his education and his recreation. He hardly knows which is which. He simply pursues his vision of excellence through whatever he is doing and leaves others to determine whether he is working or playing. To himself, he always appears to be doing both."¹

Lead Self First

Leading self entails seeing the whole of life and having a plan to create a life of meaning. It involves more than having work goals and measures. A holistic, individual plan must be unfolded. Like a comprehensive enterprise plan, a leader of self uncovers individual purpose, vision (including goals in different life aspects), and values. It would be odd to not have these elements in place for an organization because they give overarching direction. If the building blocks of an organization are individuals, however, weak individuals would result in a weak foundation. How can an individual be most effective and make appropriate decisions outside the context of a personal purpose, vision, and set of values?

On the other hand, many leaders of others fail to formulate a life plan, failing to embark on profound self-knowledge and personal transformation that comes from a deep self-understanding. Deming saw the foolishness in leading (transforming) an organization without first addressing the individual. In his book, *The New Economics for Industry, Government, Education*,² he stressed that transformation starts with the individual and his/her understanding of profound knowledge. Shouldn't the individual have a profound understanding of self prior to leading others, therefore?

Deterrent Forces

Excuses abound for neglecting to have a written document outlining personal purpose, vision, values, and operating principles. Deterrent forces often stand in the way of developing these critical documents, which are difficult and challenging to prepare. It's easy to postpone such planning for another day because creating a life plan calls for deep self-examination, and some leaders simply avoid the task. Too often when asked to share the top lines of their purposes, visions, and values, either

no response is given or a weak excuse is offered. It is worthwhile to debunk some of the common excuses.

- *Limited time is available for such work.* For the quality leader who wishes to avoid the deep self-inspection required, lack of time usually is a reasonable excuse. Does the leader's behavior indicate that he/she has time to wander but no time to plan? That doesn't sound like the advice a quality leader would offer to others. These excuses seem to be hollow when the leader fails to plan for self before trying to lead others. Is this activity not viewed as a priority? Some popular quotes come to mind when this excuse is given, such as "Have the end in mind," according to Stephen Covey.³ "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail," wrote Benjamin Franklin,⁴ and "If you don't know where you are going, you'll end up someplace else," said Yogi Berra.⁵

Being too busy to plan results in disappointment. A deathbed exploration of one's life purpose comes too late. Surprisingly, some

leaders have delayed this introspection until they had time to reflect while in prison, jail, a gulag or while under house arrest. St. Paul, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Adolf Hitler, Nelson Mandela, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Miguel de Cervantes, and Malcom X all composed reflective writings while incarcerated. These are not recommendations on how to uncover one's life purpose and vision, but they do indicate that in times of crisis people have a tendency to think more deeply about their direction. The cry, "What was it all about?" when under stress should be replaced by immediately asking the probing question, "What is my life all about?"

The opportunity to construct a life plan and determine one's life purpose, does exist—even for a very busy person. Ample time can be made available for the critical priority of planning for self.

- *Success at work can be a force masking the need to think deeper.* Success can drive a leader to substitute "I am somebody" for "This is who I am." In other words, it can encourage the leader to focus on work success rather than considering his/her whole life. I think Leo Tolstoy captured this thought, "It seems that it is impossible to live without discovering the purpose of your life. And the first thing a person should do is to understand the meaning of life. But the majority of people who consider themselves to be educated are proud that they have reached such great height that they cease to care about the meaning of existence."⁶

Success at work can disguise success in life. Many successful leaders have a crisis of life when formal work comes to an end. Having defined the whole of life by one of its aspects, when work disappears or is abruptly disrupted, listlessness and confusion may occur. A leader of self plans to have a totally meaningful life, not just meaning in some disconnected pieces of life.

- *The drugs of activity, urgency, and demanding schedules can give the illusion of purposefulness.* Being consumed with activity does not necessarily imply purposefulness. Consider all actions either on-purpose or off-purpose. Without a conscious purpose, the leader is little more than a zombie, no matter in what level of bustle and commotion he/she engages. Reflection and deep contemplation about life itself should not be viewed as an optional chore to accomplish when all is quiet. The big questions about life should be thrust into the forefront. The answers about the whole of life, however incomplete,

Developing a Life Plan

Investing a few minutes to capture the answers to the questions shown below is the first and most important step in documenting a life plan. Keep in mind that the four components of the plan don't need to be perfect, and that these questions can help differentiate each of the component's intended content. The life plan can be improved as its contents are tested in real life. Some plan is far better than aimlessness.

- *Purpose statement:* Why am I here on earth? What is my unique reason for being?

- *Vision statement:* Where am I going? What is my comprehensive vision for three to five years from now? What will I have created in the various aspects of my life (vocational, family, physical, community, financial, intellectual, and spiritual) during that time? How do these aspects of my life build on each other?

- *Values:* What are the few (one to three) values I cherish? How do I operationalize them in daily life?

- *Goals:* What spirit-filled goals will advance my vision in the years to come? What steps must I take to move toward my vision? What measurement system will I use to track my progress?





determine direction. A self-leader starts each day envisioning the actions that will move life forward in this chosen direction. At the end of the day, he/she reflects upon his/her on-purpose performance. This requires discipline, but so does brushing one's teeth.

With accelerated change and increased complexity, the work world continues to be more and more challenging. Ethical missteps, exhaustion, loss of passion, and conflicts are plentiful in high-pressure, high-pace environments. Quality leaders are exposed regularly to conflicting interests, the need for speed, and financial stress. Daily distractions abound, like squirrels to a dog. Where once existing without an ever-present consciousness of purpose and direction was feasible, organizational survival now demands a higher level of self-awareness. Quality leaders need to have a rudder in the waters of change.

- *Organizational life can create the illusion of individual purpose.* Because strong organizations have missions, visions, and values, a leader can substitute them mistakenly for his or her own individual purpose, vision, and values. It is easy to get swept up in the group charge, but by subordinating personal identity to that of the organization, disappointment is bound to occur. When circumstance causes a separation from the organization, it will leave the leader searching for self-identity. Better that the leader knows who he/she is, where he/she is going, and his/her values from the start. In contrast, adopting organizational elements automatically not only will result in disappointment, but also blind allegiance. It is not the role of the organization to dictate personal identity or to supply a leader's life meaning.
- *Creativity is a cherished facet of the human experience.* A completed life plan aids in exploration. Instead of wandering aimlessly through this earthly period of existence, a purposeful path is taken, and learnings are gathered that influence the future course. The life plan is a living document; it changes throughout time. Learnings

gathered during the journey provide wisdom and self-truths. The deepened discoveries of self can then be rolled into an updated version of the life plan. Dwight D. Eisenhower, U.S. President and World War II General, exclaimed, "In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable."⁷ He knew the power of adopting a vision built upon a platform of purpose.

Leaders can't stand still, awaiting the string of circumstances to make an impact, and proceeding in a direction without prior thought is little better. Many false roads exist and can be taken, but having a malleable plan allows for an adventure supported by a mindful purpose. A 25-year-old leader views the world differently than a leader who is 50 years of age. Of course, these differing perspectives shape life plans in dissimilar ways.

When the concept of creativity is brought to mind, a mental picture of art or artists often appears. Even when creating art, however, a medium must be chosen. Creating art begins with a vision. This vision forms the basis for a unique expression. Without a vision there is no art. In the act of creation, deviations from the original idea occur during the journey. Why would the creative life not be similarly informed and experienced? A meaningful life starts with consciousness of purpose and a vision, which generates excitement and joy. When obstacles are encountered and visions do not immediately materialize, learning becomes the focus rather than blame, and perseverance replaces hopelessness.

- *Seeking alignment with others is wise.* Belonging to multiple entities is commonplace, where a leader adopts the mission, vision, and values of each group or organization. Leaders give their energies to these entities, conscious of not only the work at hand, but also each entity's purpose. Unfortunately, it is far less common for leaders to have that same degree of consciousness of their own purposes, visions, and values.

Summary

Quality is not only a discipline itself but is also applied to all aspects of an organization. Both the philosophy and methodologies of quality need to be integrated throughout the organization. A leader of quality begins with the firm foundation of knowing who he/she is (purpose), where he/she is going (vision), what his/her principles are (values) before leading others. When things become hectic and demands on them increase, as undoubtedly will occur, resiliency is their hallmark.

The self-leader understands both the obligation and privilege of creating his/her life. Obligation, like life itself, is a gift and to be purposeless wastes that gift. This privilege is found in free will, which offers the option to make choices. The self-leader seeks causality through his/her life force. Far from being a victim of circumstances, this leader moves to create a life of meaning.

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