

Self-Management - The Control Leaders Need

“Only those with a deeply ingrained capacity for continuous learning and self-reflection stand a chance of surfing the waves of change successfully.”ⁱ

Chris Lowney

Self-management is our ability to nurture and harness one’s own passion, abilities, emotions, and leadership capacity in decision-making. Daniel Coleman describes it as self-regulation, “the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods; the propensity to suspend judgment – to think before acting.”ⁱⁱ

Self-leadership involves self-awareness, knowing who you are and what you can do. But it is not enough to know oneself, the next aspect of self-leadership is self-management. What do we self-manage? Here is a suggested list.

- 1. Managing our over-stress level – This will keep us from burning-out.**
Leaders have different over-stress levels.
It is not enough to recognize the signs of over-stress or negative stress, (e.g. forgetfulness, chronic fatigue, napping intermittently at meetings, tension headaches, withdrawal from relationships or increased mood swings), you have to manage the stress. Failure to manage our stress level will result in our inability to last the long haul, resulting in burnt-out and depression. Effective self-care is part of self-leadership.
- 2. Managing our “hot buttons” – This will keep us from over-reacting.**
Every leader has “hot buttons”, issues that irritate them irascibly. One of my hot buttons is the remark I get from my colleagues when I fail to manage a conflict well: “Call yourself a conflict expert!” That would make me hot under the collar. We need to know what makes us mad. Understanding and managing these “hot buttons” prepare us from over-reacting.
- 3. Managing our addictions – This will keep us from derailment.**
Richard Leider, an international speaker, writes, “We must recognize our addictions to discover if we are being true to our essence or living in a self-imposed prison, driven by others’ or our organization’s expectations. Leaders who feel like victims are often perfectionists, idealists, or workaholics who can never truly please themselves.”ⁱⁱⁱ How true!
Unmanaged addictions (be it work, sex or alcohol) can eventually derail a leader’s career.
- 4. Managing our talents and competencies – This will keep us effective.**
Leaders take time to reinvent themselves. We need to take stock and inventory of our talents and competencies to see if we are the leaders we ought to be. We make time for learning by constantly debriefing our successes, failures and crises.
A good question is to ask ourselves is, “How much time do I spent doing what I naturally love?” Sometimes, we need to reinvent ourselves by challenging ourselves to take risks, experiment with new challenges and get out of our comfort zone.

5. **Managing our learning – This will keep us growing.**
One of the best learning experiences for me is to get involved in community work. It has a way of reminding me of life's cruel realities and people who are disenfranchised. It helps me to reexamine my values, what's important, what I often take for granted, and what it means to be human. Finally, it makes me more compassionate and generous as a leader.
6. **Managing our leadership community – This will keep us accountable.**
We must make ourselves accountable to a personal board of leaders. It is very easy to get side tracked, become disillusioned, yield to tempting unethical offers, unless we have a solid support system that will carry us through the vagaries of change. Do find a group of people whose wisdom and personal counsel you value to help you through your personal life, work and leadership. And consult them regularly.
7. **Managing our commitments – This will keep us focused.**
One of the biggest challenges I face as a leader is over-commitment. Learning to say "no" is often difficult, especially in our Asian culture. We feel obligated, we want to 'give face' to people. But great leaders choose what they do carefully, and have the courage and humility to say, 'no' graciously. Someone once said, "Beware of a full diary, but an empty soul."
8. **Managing our intentions and motives – This will keep us honest.**
Why do we do what we do? It is often unclear. We do have mixed motives. But usually, there is a dominant intention. We have to be honest with ourselves as we examine our intentions. As Richard Leider writes, "We must live with clear intention and make consistent contact with a higher power greater than ourselves."^{iv} Remember, motives and intentions are hidden and can be deceiving. This cuts deep into our integrity – it means doing the right thing for the right reason. Leadership integrity is being built or destroyed by those little day-to-day decisions and actions. How and why we do them reveals who we are.
9. **Managing our weaknesses – This will keep us humble.**

An over-utilized strength will become a weakness. Chris Lowney writes poignantly, "Executives with careers stalled by poor self-confidence can resume an upward trajectory only by identifying and attacking their weaknesses...(Their careers are often derailed) because they never understand and therefore can never address their weaknesses."^v Morgan McCall calls this the darker side of strength. Check this out and see if you agree with him.

The Darker Side of Strength

Track Record^{vi}

Can be misleading. Other people or events may have more to do with the success. Success may have been achieved through destructive ways, or leaders may have moved too fast for the consequences to catch up.

Brilliance

Can be intimidating to others; dismiss people who are less brilliant than themselves or devalue other people's ideas and contributions.

Commitment

May lead to defining their whole life in terms of work and expecting others to do the same; being willing to do almost anything, including unethical behaviors to accomplish own goals or using people as means to our end.

Charm

Can be used selectively to manipulate others.

Ambition

Darkens when people do whatever is necessary to ensure personal success, even at others' or organization's expense.

10. Managing our future – This will help us leave a legacy of greatness.

Not only do we need to figure what we do, we must figure out first what we want to be. Leider writes again, “Working from a clear sense of personal purpose creates success with fulfillment.”^{vii}

Another important question to constantly ask ourselves, “What do we want my family, my employees, my friends to remember me by?” This will help us figure out what we do now. My partner, Peter Chao, describes legacy in this way: “Legacy is the consequence of a pattern of behavior, of a series of decisions, of the outworking of a consistent worldview, of abiding priorities and imbibed values, of a quality of life, and an inspiring vision.”

John Ng, *Ph.D*

President

Meta

Tel: (65) 6419 5255

Fax: (65) 6227 7170

Email: john@meta.com.sg

Copyright © Meta Pte Ltd

For past articles on MetaTrends, please log in www.meta.com.sg

Knowing yourself is an important aspect of self-leadership. Learn about what you need to know

about yourself in ***Self-Awareness - The First Step in Self-Leadership***

Understanding self-leadership. Read all about it in ***Self Leadership – An Enigma Unfolds***

Meta Leadership Model: Centeredness, Calling, Competence and Character. Find out ***On Being A Great Leader – A New Model of Leadership***

ⁱ Lowney, C. 2003. *Heroic Leadership*. Loyola Press, Chicago, Illinois, USA.

ⁱⁱ Goleman, D. 1998. *What makes a leader?* Harvard Business Review, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

ⁱⁱⁱ Leider, R. *The Ultimate Leadership Task: Self-Leadership* in Hesselbein, F., Goldsmith, M., Beckhard, R. 1996. *Leader of The Future*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California. USA.

^{iv} Leider, R. *The Ultimate Leadership Task: Self-Leadership* in Hesselbein, F., Goldsmith, M., Beckhard, R. 1996. *Leader of The Future*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California. USA.

^v Lowney, C. 2003. *Heroic Leadership*. Loyola Press, Chicago, Illinois, USA.

^{vi} McCall Jr., W. M. 1998. *High Flyers*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Massachusetts, USA. (This is an abridge version)

^{vii} Leider, R. *The Ultimate Leadership Task: Self-Leadership* in Hesselbein, F., Goldsmith, M., Beckhard, R. 1996. *Leader of The Future*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, California. USA.