

Self Leadership – An Enigma Unfolds

“Exceptional leaders distinguish themselves because of superior self-leadership.” Daniel Goleman

Great leadership is a cultivated art. It begins with self-leadership. Because at the center of leadership is the person who, more than anything else makes the difference. Leadership success or failure begins with how the leader approaches self-leadership.

Bill Hybels, a noted leader of one of the largest non-profit organizations in the world, points out, “The toughest management challenge is always yourself.” Dee Hock, writing about leadership for over 20 years and a laureate in the Business Hall of Fame, shares this wisdom, “We should invest 50% of our leadership amperage in self-leadership and the remaining 50% should be divided into leading down, leading up and leading laterally.”

Chris Lowney, in his book, *Heroic Leadership* writes, “If you want your team to perform heroically, be a hero yourself.”

What is Self-Leadership?

There are four different aspects to self-leadership.

1. **Self-Awareness:** The ability to acknowledge, understand and be conscious of one’s own values, perspectives, strengths, weaknesses, leadership propensity, and emotional needs.
2. **Self-Management:** The ability to nurture and harness one’s own passion, abilities, emotions, and leadership capacity in decision-making.
3. **Other-Awareness:** The ability to acknowledge and recognize the passion, gifting, strengths, weaknesses, potential and needs of others.
4. **Other-Management:** The ability to grow and motivate other people to develop their potential and/or fulfill the organization’s objectives.

Great leaders begin with self-awareness and move to self-management, then proceed to other-awareness culminating in other-management. It is not a linear but an interactive effect among all four factors.

Some leaders are conscious of themselves, their personalities, idiosyncrasies, motivations, and competencies but they cannot manage themselves, especially their emotions and weaknesses. They lack self-control, lose their cool, become unusually critical, behave inappropriately, want to do everything, and are unable to keep their pride in check.

Why is self-leadership so important?

1. **Appreciating others**

When you truly know yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, you will appreciate others. Chris Lowney points out that because leaders are anchored by an appreciation of their own dignity, they develop appreciation of the aspirations, potential, and dignity of others. This is the way they transform the way they look at others.

2. Preventing derailment

Many hot-shot, rising stars self-destruct, never achieve their early potential because of the lack of self-leadership. Daniel Goleman, in his extensive study on leadership derailment, points out, "When I compared star performers with average ones in senior leadership positions, nearly 90% of the difference in their profiles was attributable to emotional intelligence factors rather than cognitive abilities."

3. Ensuring long term success

Great leaders have a long-term perspective for life and success. They are not here for the short-term but for the long haul. Only leaders who practice consistent self-leadership can ensure long-term success. The temptation to push for quarterly profits at all costs can derail the leader. Unless, leaders have a keen sense of self-leadership, they cannot stay focused on what's important.

4. Leaving a legacy

All leaders leave legacies, good or bad. They leave their imprint on the organization through their beliefs, values and attitudes. Hence effective self-leadership is essentially about leaving a great legacy for the people we are leading.

Let me conclude by making two pertinent observations in self-leadership.

First, self-leadership is an ongoing process of self-reflection. As Chris Lowney writes, "Self awareness is no one time project. No less essential than the initial assessment of one's strengths, weaknesses, values, and worldview is the ongoing, everyday habit of self-reflection, the *examen*. It's an opportunity to measure life – a little bit at a time – against principles and goals."

Second, continual self-leadership is a mark of leadership maturation. Personal leadership is a never-ending work in progress that draws on continually maturing self-understanding. Some people never mature as leaders – they remain insecure, self-defeating, juvenile or worse still, delinquent in their leadership development.

Hence, self-leadership is imperative if we want to be great leaders.

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