



PERSONAL MASTERY – THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

The first and best victory is to conquer self. ~ Plato

Introduction

In our previous article we covered the competencies required for effective leadership as well as the potential derailing behaviours. It is a relatively simple task to make a list of the ideal characteristics you wish to experience in your boss. A more difficult task is to ask what it is that distinguishes the really great leaders from the rest. Is it their strategic insight, their ability to deliver, championing change in the organization or building enduring relationships? In our experience in working with leaders over many years, the key distinguishing factor is an individual's awareness, application and effectiveness of personal mastery.

To be a really effective leader (of yourself, your family, or in the workplace), you need to be effective as an individual. You need to master the art of self-leadership or personal mastery, and to be able to choose the most appropriate response and behaviour in any situation, to get what you want. The starting point of any leadership development programme typically focuses on the realities associated with the qualities of each individual leader or delegate – “me, myself, I” and what that profile truly represents. This is normally conducted through a number of diagnostic assessments that the leader completes, the results of which provide meaningful and constructive feedback and information that the leader can work through and address. These insights create the gap analysis and the actions and priorities that can then be developed to hone knowledge, skills and attitude for improving leadership effectiveness.



Today, one of the emerging focuses in leadership is the notion of the “authentic leader”, those innate qualities and meta-competencies pertaining to one's natural leadership style - personal value sets, spontaneous behaviours and personal impact that encourages and motivates people, drives exceptional results and inspires followers to go “that extra mile!” The authentic leader or transformational leader has to, by definition, lead by example and can only be a role model if their behaviour, thinking and relational skills are exemplary and consistently applied. There is a mantra in leadership that states that “one needs to lead oneself before one can lead others.”

*“This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”*

Hamlet

What is Personal Mastery

There are many different definitions of personal mastery. The one that resonates with me is the following:

“Personal Mastery is continuously making conscious choices...to get the results you want ... to get from who and where you are to who and where you want to be.”

If we unpack this definition, personal mastery requires:

Continuous awareness

This is the ability to simultaneously observe yourself whilst you are going about your business. This is the part of you that notices your impact on others, your effectiveness, that sees where changes are necessary and that offers different alternatives. This requires sensitivity and emotional intelligence to tap into what is going on inside of you, others and the situation and to pick up on subtle cues and signals. This is also the part of you that is aware of the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of self. It is aware of those thoughts, beliefs, emotions and inner voice that either supports or inhibits you. On a physical level, there is an awareness of and respect for time and for the physical body. You notice subtle messages and stress signals and adapt behaviour for optimal health and well-being. This is the part of you that connects with spiritual guidance and finds meaning and purpose in life.

Conscious choices

This is the ability to come up with a range of possible responses to a situation, to weigh up the pros, cons and potential consequences, and then to make the most appropriate and effective choice. This requires decisiveness, risk taking and action. If you look around you, you will find victims and victors in leadership roles. When things don't go according to plan, “VICTIMS” easily defend, blame and complain, whilst “VICTORS” take responsibility for their actions and impact and learn, adapt and respond instead of react unconsciously. George Bernard Shaw puts it eloquently in his quote below:

“People are always blaming circumstances for what they are. I do not believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, And if they cannot find them, make them.”



Get results you want

This requires someone who is results oriented and knows what it is that is important to them. This requires clear goals, values, purpose and direction. This requires commitment to the end result and courage and resilience to overcome obstacles and disappointments. To be really effective and live a balanced life, it is important to know what you want in all spheres of life. Leaders are usually very surprised when we take them through a wheel of life activity where they rate their satisfaction against 8 different areas: Health, wealth, career/learning, relationship with self, life partner, family/friends, contribution to community and spirituality. Out of balance wheels can cause dissatisfaction, low energy levels and long term health and relationship problems. It is important to set goals against all aspects and to focus on achieving balance.

Who are where you are to who and where you want to be

This requires knowing who you are and who you want to be. Do you know your strengths and weaknesses, your inherent personality traits, your gifts, talents and potential? Are you aware of your values and principles? Do you practice integrity in everything you do? Are you continuously evaluating your behaviour against your principles and building skills and character for the future? Do you encourage feedback from others to see how you could be more effective as a leader – at work and at home? Have you learnt to control your impatience or temper, be more calm in a crisis, recognise others contributions, and be more grateful? Do you know if you come across as cynical or resistant or negative or arrogant? Do you know what kind of a person you want to become as you grow and learn. A wonderful exercise is to visualise your 80th birthday and listen to people making speeches about your life. Do you like what you hear? What would you want to change or different, and start now?

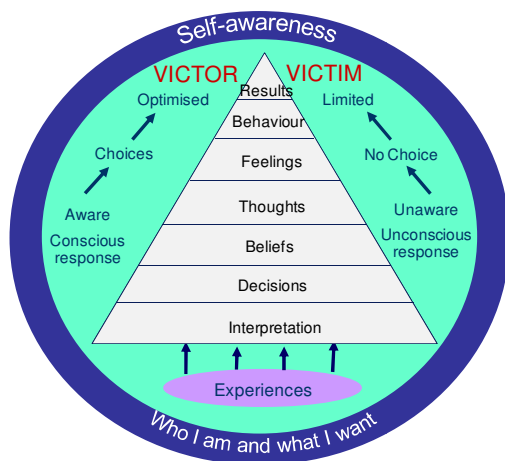
Growth and change

There are many defining moments or turning points in our lives, where we either step up and face our fears, make big decisions or hesitate and miss important opportunities. It is these moments that can shape our future and those around us. Leadership entails continuous learning, feedback, change and growth. The 4 key stages of change and growth are awareness, insight, willingness and action. If any one of these is missing, sustainable change is unlikely to occur.



Much of our behaviour and reactions were programmed when we were very young, as we all learnt from our families, peers and teachers how to survive and get what we want or need. These “programmes” include thinking patterns, beliefs and stereotypes about ourselves and others. They are mostly subconscious, leading to automatic reactions to situations, rather than conscious choices.

Our framework for Personal Mastery reflects that it is our interpretation of experiences that influences our movement up the pyramid of effectiveness to the results we want.



You cannot always choose what happens to you in life, but you can choose how to respond to what happens to you.

Not everyone can be the president, a millionaire, an Olympic athlete or a CEO, but everyone has the potential to learn and grow, and become their best selves. To be the “best you can be”, and to practise personal mastery, leaders need to recognise their multi-dimensional nature, and learn to work with and build awareness, insight, skills, willingness and take action in the aspects of mind, emotions, the physical and spiritual.

Multi-dimensional aspects of self

Power of the mind

Our minds are extraordinarily powerful. Various studies agree that we use only between 1 and 10 per cent of our brains' capacity. In fact, the mind is very much like a computer, which is only as good as its hardware and software. To make it work you need a skilled operator (you) that understands and manipulates the programs inside. How much do you know about the subconscious programmes and beliefs running your relationships, your energy, your health and life?

To optimise the power of your mind, you need to understand the roles of the conscious and subconscious mind.



The conscious mind has the power to think	The subconscious mind has the power to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is like a computer programmer: good at thinking, analysing and calculating information from existing information (past) to make decisions, but it cannot do much without the computer and needs lots of energy and rest to keep going. It operates on beta brainwaves which are fast, active and awake. The guardian to the subconscious, it is where we spend most of our waking hours. It is important to be aware of what thoughts, feelings and habits you are programming on a daily basis or have programmed in the past. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is like a computer programme: it stores all memory, beliefs and habits and carries out the instructions of the conscious mind to the letter. Once the programme is written, it runs automatically until it is changed. It does not need any extra energy or input. It operates on alpha brainwaves which are slower, more passive, relaxed yet alert. It is the doorway to our energy, creativity, intuition and inspiration. The best way of communicating and reprogramming the subconscious mind is through finding quiet time, relaxing into the alpha state or utilising right brain techniques such as pictures, movement, music to activate the subconscious.
<p>When the conscious and sub-conscious mind work together, the outcome becomes a reality.</p>	

Power of the emotions

Emotions are an extraordinarily powerful motivating force in our lives, being responsible for both the greatest wars and deaths, and the noblest acts of securing peace and serving humanity. In your own lives, emotions drive the roller-coaster of cause and effect, action and reaction, with sometimes unexpected results.

E-motion is energy in motion

Emotions give us the energy we need to change or do something about the internal belief or external situation that is causing us pain, or being a threat to our survival. We feel anger if a boundary is crossed and we need to say no and stand up for ourselves. We feel fear if we need to ready ourselves to fight or take flight. We feel bad when we have done something wrong, leading us to adapt our behaviour for better results next time. In other words, emotions exist to help us react, take action and survive. Emotions also enable us to experience the wonders of being alive – falling in love, being inspired though music, appreciating beauty and connecting with other like-minded souls. If we can harness these emotions and use the energy that is naturally generated in an intelligent manner,

to respond instead of reacting, then we are said to have emotional intelligence or a high emotional quotient (EQ). Emotional Intelligence is known to have a significant impact on our performance and success in life.

A simple definition of EQ is the ability to be aware of your own and others' emotions and choices, and therefore to behave appropriately (control emotions and behaviour) to attain the best results for all.

Power of the physical

Your physical body is the vehicle through which much of what you desire in life, is fulfilled. Your body allows you to work, earn an income, experience pleasure through the senses (including enjoying a tasty meal, listening to a piece of music or being intimate with your loved one). Your body allows you to move, eat, take action, defend, run, play with your children, climb a mountain, achieve your goals ... ultimately, to survive. Having a healthy body full of strength, energy and vitality makes all of this possible. Unfortunately, many people suffer from physical discomfort, pain or chronic disease, which limits their ability to do what they really want to. The body is a living, breathing, self-regulating organism which has the ability to adapt, change and heal itself for its own survival. If you learn to



become more aware of your body's subtle signals and messages and work with the body instead of abusing it, you can optimise our physical health, energy and vitality.

The fundamental building blocks of physical health are breathing deeply, sleeping soundly, eating for energy, exercising regularly and finding creative ways to manage stress. The way you think and feel about your body, your energy and your health, however, also affects your physical body. Your metabolism and weight are affected by your beliefs and feelings about yourself and your body. Your ability to manage and reduce stress is affected by your ability to cope with the perceived demands and expectations of others. Your sleeping patterns, breathing and eating are affected by your emotional state, and your 'stuck' emotions can affect your body's response to exercise, heightening pain and injury or safeguarding you from it.

Power of the spirit

Spiritual intelligence has gained popularity in recent years, although it has been something that people have searched for through the ages. Viktor Frankl unravelled some of the mystery of man's yearning for a life of meaning in his book *Man's search for meaning* in 1956, where he describes how the people that survived the concentration camps and coped with the extreme, inhumane conditions, were those that had a sense of purpose and vision for the future.

The originators of the term 'spiritual intelligence', Zohar and Marshall, define the concept as follows:

"The intelligence with which we access our deepest meanings, purposes, and highest motivations. It is the intelligence that makes us whole, that gives us our integrity. It is the soul's intelligence, the intelligence of the deep self. It is the intelligence with which we ask fundamental questions and with which we reframe our answers."

Leadership and Personal Empowerment Programs

In our leadership and personal empowerment programs we take individuals on a journey through all these aspects of self – to raise awareness and interest, to discover more about themselves through

assessments, reflection and feedback opportunities and to challenge and provoke their mindsets, beliefs and attitudes about themselves and the world. We encourage them to strive to be the best they can be, and to find meaning and purpose in life and to make a difference in the lives of others.

Life is not about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.

– George Bernard Shaw