



The LEADS in a Caring Environment Framework: Lead Self

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Graham Dickson and Bill Tholl

*Tzu-kung asked, “What is kingcraft?”
The Master said: “Food enough, troops enough, and a trusting people.”
Tzu-kung said: “Were there no help for it, which could best be spared of the three?”
“Troops,” said the Master.
“And were there no help for it, which could better be spared of the other two?”
“Food,” said the Master. “From of old all men die, but without trust a people cannot stand.” [1]*

Introduction

“Without trust people cannot stand.” But what is trust? A word we often use but spend little time reflecting on. Webster’s Dictionary defines trust as “believing in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of.” But of what? A quick response is, believing in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of another person. But what if the true source of trust is in ourselves?

A colleague once said to one of your authors that “you can only trust others when you trust yourself in their presence.” The author puzzled over this comment for a long time: what does it mean? What does trusting yourself in another’s presence look like? How does trust revolve around how I see myself, rather than how the other person behaves? Six months passed and the enigma remained. And then it was revealed, as the following story demonstrates.

G. Dickson (✉)
Royal Roads University, Victoria, BC, Canada
e-mail: graham.dickson@royalroads.ca

B. Tholl
Canadian Health Leadership Network, Ottawa, ON, Canada
e-mail: btholl@chl.net.ca

While preparing to teach the final day of a week-long university program on diversity in leadership to senior governmental employees, the faculty team—of which this author was a member—were told a small group of participants were going to announce to the class the program was not delivering what they needed, they were disenchanted and going home.

The plan had been to lead a large group session before final group presentations, and the team feared the complaint could derail the program and disrupt the presentations. One faculty member said proceeding as planned would potentially mean the disenchanted could sway some in the larger group to also leave, damaging our program's reputation. Two others called for cancelling the session and switching to small seminar groups so the malcontents would lose their audience and the dissension would not spread.

And then the words of my colleague came back to me—"You can only trust others when you trust yourself in their presence."

I realized we were projecting our fears onto the program participants. The real issue was that we were worried we could not handle the discord. We were afraid we might get angry, or not respond productively, leading other program participants to quit and leaving us looking like fools.

In fact, I realized, we weren't trusting ourselves in the presence of others. At that point I understood the way to deal with the situation was to build trust in myself, or in this case, my team: to believe in the reliability, truth and strength of our ability to respond to whatever happened the next day. We discussed what we would say, how we would handle our emotions and what we would do if people left anyway.

Bolstered by our talk we entered into the fray—and quickly realized only one person was disgruntled. We asked her calmly about her concerns and gave her the opportunity to speak in front of the group. That meant it wasn't us who had to respond: the other participants stepped up to support her in her discomfort and suggest how her concerns could be alleviated. In the end, it was a bonding event, not a divisive one and a great lesson in not projecting one's fears on other people.

The leadership lesson: Deal with your own fears. Prepare for the worst and accept your responsibility to respond to it. And trust—there's that word again—most human beings are motivated to act for the right reasons.

Learning Moment

Take a moment to reflect on the past six months at work.

- Have there been moments where you have not trusted yourself in a challenging situation, or in dealing with another person?
- Reflect on one of those moments. If you had looked internally at the time, to understand yourself and your reactions better, how might the situation or your reaction to it have changed?
- What might you do differently in the future if a similar situation arises?

This anecdote lays the foundation for the Lead Self domain of the LEADS framework.

In a nutshell, the principle underlying the first of five LEADS domains, Lead self, is that we can't lead others without first leading ourselves—we are all CEOs of self.

Recent research provides a strong foundation for our understanding of Lead self. Some of the theories that emphasize the internal focus of leadership variously label it as “authentic,” “servant,” “neo-charismatic,” “spiritual” or “toxic/destructive.” [2] These theories echo Chap. 2’s definition of leadership and suggest elements of character, virtue and service (or the lack of them) are part of a leader’s actions at home and at work. Practicing moral leadership, which is what these theories describe, is directly linked to feelings of well-being among workers and vice-versa—toxic/dark leadership helps create unhealthy workplaces [3].

To develop your own leadership skills, the Lead self domain asks you first to look internally, to discover your sense of duty, consideration and respect for others and then hone it, until you understand the core purpose of leadership is to enhance the health and wellness of people. The next step is to demonstrate that purpose in everything you do (putting the *caring* into the LEADS framework). Good intentions are not enough: you must act, or your capacity to lead will be diminished.

Lead self is the foundation of all the domains. You cannot have productive relationships dedicated to people’s health and wellness (Engage others) without looking inward for your purpose; nor can you ask your organization to deliver caring health services (Achieve results) if the motivation to care does not permeate every decision you make and all activities you direct. You can’t Develop coalitions to improve patient care if the motive for those coalitions is not to improve service. Finally, you will not succeed in Systems transformation if you have not transformed your own ways of thinking and acting.

To help you bring the Lead self domain to life, we outline four capabilities necessary for people to lead themselves. Leaders need to (1) be self-aware; (2) manage themselves; (3) develop themselves; and (4) demonstrate character. We’ll explore each of these capabilities now.

Are-Self-Aware

To know oneself is the first step toward making flow a part of one’s entire life. But just as there is no free lunch in the material economy, nothing comes free in the psychic one. If one is not willing to invest psychic energy in the internal reality of consciousness, and instead squanders it in chasing external rewards, one loses mastery of one’s life, and ends up becoming a puppet of circumstances.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi [4]

What is the self? It’s commonly understood as a person’s essential being. What we believe, what we stand for: our souls. And as Csikszentmihalyi says, we should make an effort to know our internal reality for what it is. But the self is also changeable and self-awareness—knowing how your thoughts, actions and practices reflect the essence of you—requires ongoing work. In the absence of self-awareness, your actions may be more convenient than principled, just a response to the demands of the moment.

Brain research by Baron and colleagues has shown that one of the hallmarks of self-awareness is the ability to reflect on one’s own thoughts, feelings and actions

[5]. Brain imaging studies show when people reflect on their own experiences, they activate the brain circuitry used when empathizing with someone else. As an expression of that research, and to counter the predilection of knee-jerk responses to the demands, Baron and colleagues propose *mindfulness* as the foundation of leadership flexibility.

Mindfulness is a form of self-awareness with two components. The first is to focus attention on one's immediate mental experiences. The second is the willingness to explore those current mental experiences in a non-judgmental manner, through a combination of openness, curiosity, and receptivity. Mindfulness is associated with authentic leadership. Louis Baron's study in 2016 showed action learning in a leadership development program can increase mindfulness, which in turn is associated with improvements in authentic leadership [6].

Ellen Langer is a professor of psychology at Harvard. After four decades of research on mindfulness, she argues mindfulness training makes it easier to pay attention, particularly in a complex environment such as health care. "You remember more of what you've done. You're more creative. You're able to take advantage of opportunities when they present themselves. You avert the danger not yet arisen. You like people better, and people like you better, because you're less evaluative. You're more charismatic." [7] Some studies have found that mindfulness education also increases empathy [8].

Components of Self-Awareness

Psychologist Carl Jung said: "Your visions will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes." [9] The LEADS framework describes the components of self-awareness as your own deep-seated motives, emotions, beliefs and assumptions. Without self-awareness, how can you know if your leadership is caring? Or inclusive? If you aren't aware of your inner biases around, say, mental health or diversity issues, how can you know their impact on your ability to lead? If you can recognize your own biases, you can challenge and alter them, so caring and inclusiveness can become part of your authentic self, and you can act accordingly.

None of this is to say a leader must be perfect. Everyone has flaws, but most can still lead if they admit to them—the issue is whether they are willing to challenge and change them. What most people find impossible to accept in a leader is deception. Leaders who dissemble, who cover up motives or are hypocritical, are clearly not people who care, either about their employees or the people their organizations are supposed to serve. They just want power.

When dishonesty is all about self-aggrandizement, getting power for its own sake, we don't tend to forgive. We don't like fakes and we're even more uncomfortable with people who start to believe the image they've created for themselves.

Learning Moment

Take a moment to reflect on a political leader in your country.

- Do you know who he is—the real person? Is she authentic—true to herself—or pretending to be something she is not?
- When you see authenticity, are you more likely to support someone? Why or why not?
- Why should others follow you? What do you say or do that shows people who you truly are?

Authentic leaders choose appropriate times to admit their vulnerabilities, are aware of who they are and accept it, flaws and all [10].

Self-delusion is the opposite of self-awareness. Whether it's rationalizing decisions, refusing to acknowledge your true nature or being unaware of what you truly believe, self-delusion lets you justify actions that are easy and self-gratifying, rather than doing the difficult thing for the common good [11]. Self-delusion is easy because it allows you to retreat into your own world view, and not attempt to understand the world view of others [12]. Research has shown all humans are prone to self-delusion—it's almost necessary for survival—but it's a matter of degree. Self-awareness lets us expose internal frauds that get in the way of our purpose.

In health care, separate, unchallenged world views can create disconnects between groups. Physicians, for example, may persuade themselves they alone are patient advocates and champions of quality—often to the point of thinking that physicians who move into administration have gone over to the “dark side.” [13, 14] In turn, administrators may think themselves the guardians of value for money while physicians ignore the need to manage finances. These contrary world views can cause rifts between physicians and administrators and undermine the chances of them working together for health reform [15].

To use self-awareness to combat self-delusion, we need to start by acknowledging our potential for self-delusion, then, through self-reflection, expose what our world views, mental models and biases are, before rigorously challenging each of them to root out delusional notions [16]. Self-reflection can be developed in several ways [17]. It can be done through workshops and exercises devoted to building self-awareness, by asking others for feedback, by working with counselors or mentors, by keeping a journal and through psychometric development assessments (a scientific approach to measuring individuals' mental capabilities and behavioural style). On your own you can seek out books and movies that explore power and self-delusion; there is no shortage of examples of this Achilles heel of leadership.

Learning Moment

Take the opportunity to have a conversation with a trusted colleague or friend.

Directions: Part 1

1. One of you is A, the other B. A interviews B, then B interviews A. Each interview is approximately seven minutes.
2. Each interviewer starts by asking “*Why do you want to be a leader in health care?*” and the interviewee answers.
3. Next, the interviewer asks, “*Why is that important?*” following up by asking the interviewee to reflect, introspectively, on the rationale for the original answer, and explain it.
4. The interviewer repeats “*Why is that important?*” three more times, pressing the interviewee to reflect and explain the rationale.
5. Repeat with roles switched.

Directions: Part 2—Consider these questions

1. What do your answers tell you are your true beliefs when it comes to your reasons to lead in health care? Are these beliefs consistent with concept of people-centred care?
2. Reflect on the past six months. Would others in your workplace see you acting in a manner consistent with your beliefs? Why or why not?

This “five whys” exercise is designed to help you uncover your internal stories, test them, and decide whether you want to adjust your world view. But internal adjustment is not enough. You must also consider whether your actions reflect your changed world view and if not, reshape them for the good of the group.

Manage Themselves

The second capability in the Lead self domain is that leaders manage themselves, taking responsibility for their own performance and health.

Self-management is introspection in action, where *manage* means applying mental discipline and rigour to the mindset and behaviour of the *self*. It means internal discipline (the psychic energy mentioned in the *Csikszentmihalyi* quote) is brought to bear on the mental landscape that shapes your practise of leadership, which if not managed, leads to non-productive behaviour. The capability Manage themselves, in its purest form, is action learning, a combination of mindfulness and action needed to respond productively with the agility that modern health workplaces require.

In this section we explore three key elements of self-management, which are:

- demonstrating emotional intelligence;
- building a productive leadership mindset; and
- balancing the demands of personal responsibility and accountability [18].

Demonstrating Emotional Intelligence

Emotions are a source of much energy. According to Swart and colleagues, in their book *Neuroscience for Leadership* [19], there are eight emotions that fuel our desire, commitment and will to do productive work. Five are survival emotions—fear, anger, disgust, shame and sadness; two are attachment spectrums (love/trust and joy/excitement) and the last is surprise. As the eight combine, in response to external stimulus, they construct feelings, which can either help you reach your leadership goal or get in the way of it. Recognizing the existence and power of these emotions—in ourselves and those we lead—is fundamental to managing ourselves and our relationships with others.

Managing one’s emotions for personal satisfaction and efficacy is key to being an effective leader. Modern neuroscience tells us emotions may be innate, but it also tells us the brain has multiple information processing systems that can override emotions and determine how they are expressed. Stephen Pinker says “...minds are packed with combinatorial software that can generate an unlimited set of thoughts and behaviour.” [20] This ability, when directed at managing our emotions, is called emotional intelligence.

In the book *The EQ Edge* by Harold Book and Steven Stein, emotional intelligence is defined as “an array of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies and skills that influence one’s ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures.” [21] Their research shows emotional intelligence can change over time and can be learned and expanded throughout life. Emotional intelligence can be measured through a test called the E-Q-I 2.0. Developed by Reuven Bar-On, the EQ-i has been validated by the American Psychological Association [22]. Based on 15 constructs of emotional intelligence in five realms, the test has demonstrated in many studies that individuals with higher emotional intelligence scores outperform those in similar contexts with lower emotional intelligence. The 15 components of emotional intelligence are shown in Table 5.1:

The aspects of emotional intelligence in the shaded boxes apply to Lead self. They are subject to triggers but can be controlled with effort. The other dimensions are called social intelligence and are more likely to be a function of interpersonal relationships. They are dealt with in Chap. 6: Engage others.

Table 5.1 Elements of emotional intelligence [19]

<i>Self-perception</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-regard • Self-actualization • Emotional self-awareness 	<i>The Interpersonal realm</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Social responsibility • Interpersonal relationships
<i>The stress-management realm</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Stress tolerance • Optimism 	<i>Decision making</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem solving • Reality testing • Impulse control
<i>Self-expression</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional expression • Assertiveness • Independence 	

There are numerous exercises and programs to help you build your emotional intelligence muscle. We use the word muscle, because developing emotional intelligence is not unlike going to the gym to tone up—it must be done consistently and deliberately. We share one of these with you in our learning moment.

Learning Moment

In their book, *Neuroscience and Leadership*, Swart, Chisholm and Brown provide an exercise to make self-management a part of your leadership backpack. They call the exercise an interoception activity: being in touch with the physiological condition of your body. We have adapted it to reflect self-management.

At least once a day for a week or two, make a brief note of how you feel each day—physically and mentally—as you work with your leader. Use language that is as accurate as possible. At the end, ask yourself what you now know about your emotional and physical reactions that you did not know before. This will help you recognize data—coming from you—about the mind-body connection.

This is an activity you can use periodically to remain grounded and to increase your own self-management capacity.

Build a Productive Leadership Mindset

A second dimension of managing self includes consciously adopting a mindset that can balance the complex demands of leadership. Mindset is defined as “a state of psychological preparedness to perceive or respond to an anticipated stimulus or situation.” [23] A leadership mindset is a conscious orientation of thought, based on our best knowledge and continuously enriched by experience and reflection. Unless you pay constant attention to your mindset, you might not recognize situations in which your emotions and actions need to be managed, or why.

A leadership mindset requires you to balance the tension between what might be perceived as competing choices. In the heat of the moment we often rush to choose one idea over another, rather than trying keep them in productive balance. One example is balancing friendship with a professional colleague who deserves corrective feedback and the obligation to provide that feedback. Another example is finding ways to minimize the moral distress a caregiver may feel faced with conflict between the welfare of one patient and a required hospital practice. Managing these opposing situations and doing your best to keep them in productive balance requires a certain mindset. Let’s look at a few different mindsets that reflect a commitment to managing self.

One leadership mindset is “pursuing the 100-year vision in the immediate moment.” A colleague who was proud of his Chinese ancestry told us that to maintain perspective on day-to-day progress, he damped down impatience for short-term success by putting it in a 100-year time frame. This is a kind of mindfulness—the leader has to be in the moment *and* see the moment in the long-term context. Our

colleague understood a 100-year vision meant divorcing his self-esteem from immediate gratification and ongoing frustration and attaching it to a long-term purpose. At the same time, however, he had to be present in the moment: fully conscious and committed to what he was doing to achieve the long-term goal.

A second mindset you are encouraged to develop is *embracing chaos to discover order*, described by Beverly Kaye as leaders being comfortable in ambiguity and chaos [24, 25]. Chaos suggests an underlying flow of ideas or forces, which disrupt expected order and open up opportunities. On a psychological level, this means balancing the need to be in control (reflecting fear and anxiety) with seeing opportunity in chaos (reflecting trust and excitement).

One way to embrace chaos is to shift your focus from looking for stability to appreciating the dynamics of change. Change is triggered by a surge of new values, but stability, through long-standing values, perpetuates the status quo. It's important for leaders to explore surface chaos to determine its underlying values. Knowing the tension between new values and status quo values is the key to understanding why we need to change and the difficulties we—and others—will have with it. Value shifts are difficult places to be in, but we, as leaders, will find ourselves there.

An alternative way of embracing chaos is to see it as an opportunity to be creative, to explore, to generate new goals and directions—in other words to envision a better future. For followers, chaos is uncomfortable; it creates (in the words of the hero's journey) confusion and sometimes resistance or fear of being inadequate. Followers don't know how to move forward in chaos; it is a leader's heroic quest that engages their will to act. But if the followers don't share what the leader is questing after, they won't align their journey with those aspirations. In this case the leader's journey could easily be interpreted as self-gratification. The following story illustrates this.

Joan was an executive coach, working with Jack, a physician, who was vice-president of quality in a large health authority. Jack was describing getting pushback from some nurses and doctors over quality improvement policies he wanted implemented. He had no idea where the resistance was coming from.

"I told them we have to be the best of the best, this is about meeting quality benchmarks, it's a question of proving how well we perform on the most important measures there are. If we're not the best, we can't claim to be excellent providers. For some reason I got a really lukewarm response. What's wrong with them? Why don't they see how important quality is?"

Joan thought for moment, then asked "So Jack: why is being the best so important to you?"

Jack responded immediately. "Ever since I was a child I've strived to be the best at whatever I do. In school, I was always top of my class. It was really important to be the best and it's still a real strength of mine."

"And," Joan said, "Why is that important?"

"Well," Jack responded, "You can't get into medical school if you're not the best of the best. I wouldn't have become VP of quality if I weren't the best."

"Jack," Joan responded. "Why is being the best at quality important? Is there a reason beyond simply being the best?"

"Excellence is a goal in its own right," said Jack. "It's part of being a strong leader, it's who I want to be."

“But is that the message you wanted to give your colleagues?” Joan asked, “Isn’t performing well at quality important because it’s in the best interests of your patients—the goal you all share? Isn’t giving patients the best care possible the ultimate quality goal?”

“That goes without saying,” said Jack. “That’s exactly why I want to be seen to be the best and why it’s important people understand that I will not be satisfied with less.”

“I get that Jack,” Joan said, noting how quickly the conversation veered away from patients to Jack’s need for recognition. “Being the best at something, especially quality—is important. But why is it important? Remember, you asked me why your colleagues were lukewarm. Could it be because the message they were hearing is that improving quality matters because you need to be the best? In other words, more to satisfy your needs than the patients? Is that possible?”

“Maybe,” said Jack. “But I’m not sure what you mean. Isn’t being the best at quality obviously in the patients’ interest?”

“Jack,” responded Joan. “Reflect on the meeting—what you said, your tone of voice, your motivation. If your message was ‘Do this for me because being best is important to me,’ rather than ‘Do this because excellent quality is good for patients,’ you might have a clue why the meeting didn’t go well. Please think about that before our next call, and when you’re in meetings over the next week or so, be mindful of what message you’re trying to deliver, and how best to deliver it so it reflects a shared vision with others, rather than your own needs.”

Jack agreed and used some of the self-directed learning tools (introduced in Chap. 4) to explore why he was preoccupied with excellence. He also worked to ensure he grounded his messages in the shared commitment he and his colleagues had to patients and families.

Jack’s story shows how the “five whys” mentioned above work, and emphasizes two key aspects of self-management: the value of reflection and mindfulness. Joan and Jack used the dissonance between Jack and his colleagues to discover how to bring order to the situation. The solution is consciously reinforcing the vision of higher quality care that is the bond between Jack and his colleagues. As well, urged by Joan, Jack was reminded of the value of reflection and mindfulness as he examined the experience, motives, and feelings of both himself and his team and then used them to understand how his message could unite people in a common cause.

Productively Balance the Demands of Personal Responsibility and Accountability

As leaders, we have responsibilities and accountabilities. Our primary responsibilities come from leadership itself: *the collective capacity of an individual or group to influence people to work together to achieve a common constructive purpose: the health and wellness of the population we serve.* They are:

- Integrating the work of professionals and staff, so they can act collectively as agents of health and wellness;
- Working with all members of the system to improve health and wellness through people-centred care; and
- Achieving results that improve and promote the health and wellness of the population we serve.

Managing your responsibilities and accountabilities is an important dimension of the Manage self capability. To understand their relationship to self-management, consider Steven Covey's definition of responsibility (or as he phrases it, *response-ability*): the ability to respond, productively, to the duties of your role [26]. For a front-line leader, that means responding productively to patients or families. If you're a finance manager your immediate clients are clear but your relationship to patients/families is not. Your responsibility is to understand the impact of your decisions on them and act accordingly. For patients or patient advocates (leaders in your own roles) your responsibility is to balance your personal demands with understanding the personal health and the safety needs of those being advocated for; and to act accordingly. We cannot be *response-able* if we don't thoughtfully understand and accept what is needed by self and others to achieve our collective goal of health and wellness.

As Jack's story shows, the motives behind our actions and how we express them have an impact we need to be aware of. We also need to be able—as Jack initially was not—to accept accountability.

Finally, the challenge of managing self includes an overriding obligation to take responsibility not only for your performance, but for your health. We can't lead effectively if we are mentally or physically unhealthy. Also, there is deep power in modelling health and wellness for others. Not accepting responsibility on this front undermines our authenticity as leaders.

Develop Themselves

Carol Dweck, a psychology professor at Stanford, has done work on mindsets that is fundamental to the Lead self capability of Develop themselves. Her research, based on evidence the brain is capable of lifelong learning and development, shows leaders can move from a fixed mindset (such as a belief your qualities are unchangeable) to a growth mindset: whereby personal qualities can be cultivated through deliberate effort (as we discussed at length in Chap. 4) [27]. You can change who you are if you're self-aware and follow the approaches described throughout this book.

Our analysis of leadership theories and research reinforces the importance of developing oneself. Modern health leaders have to keep growing and developing. Why? Leadership scholar Kets DeVries and his fellow authors say "In a knowledge-driven society, many learned competencies become obsolete at the speed of light... The challenge of unlearning old things and learning new ones is exacerbated by the fact that executives have less and less discretionary time." [28]

To develop self is to keep learning and since the context and work of leading is creating change, learning is continuous. If we as leaders are not open to changing ourselves, how can we ask others, or the organization, to change? Demonstrating how you manage change is modelling for others what you expect of them. As the noted consultant and scholar Peter Senge has said: "There is an old tradition that you see in many parts of the world that if you're going to be in a position of

authority, you should be a *cultivator*. Leaders should be people who are deeply involved in their own realization of becoming a human being.” [29]

Margaret Cromack, a former CEO in Canada’s health system, was trained as a nurse. She has written “The LEADS framework provided a structure to situate my career path and my personal journey toward the position of chief executive officer.” [30] But it’s clear some of the capabilities we describe as part of LEADS came naturally to her, as these examples of developing self and managing self show:

Early in my career, I recognized that the ability to manage myself under any circumstance made a significant difference to the people around me. While rushing to the emergency room, I took the few minutes that we had in the elevator, prior to the run and push with the arrest cart, to collect myself, calm down, breathe deeply, and think about what I needed to do when we arrived. What a difference it made to my being able to contribute to calming the people in the room when we arrived.

Over time, I worked on this skill to manage my reaction to stressful experiences by calming my physiological reaction with deep breathing, listening, and taking time to develop a thoughtful response rather than reacting. It has become a defining character trait of my leadership capability [30].

The article describes challenges and successes on her journey that show the importance of a growth mindset and always developing leadership capacity.

Develop self has three fundamental principles. The first is to know your personality, strengths and limitations—what you do well and what you don’t. The second is to take a systematic approach to learning. Make it part of your daily routine (including getting formal feedback on your development). The third is the commitment to applying what you learn. The LEADS framework helps you put all three principles into practice with guidance on what’s important to know, tools and activities to help you learn and as a guide for continuous learning by defining the qualities of leadership valued in the workplace.

Personal Mastery: A Discipline for Self-Development

A self-directed approach [31] to developing your leadership is sometimes referred to as personal mastery. Peter Senge defines it as “the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of *seeing reality objectively*.” [32] It’s the last aspect that obliges leaders to evaluate their personal performance so they can set directions for growth. In many of the learning moments in this book we use activities designed to help you see your leadership “objectively.” We’re putting quotation marks around objectively because we would rewrite Senge’s definition to seeing reality *subjectively*. Yes, we should gather evidence and feedback on our performance as a leader, but even 360 evidence is based on someone’s subjective interpretation. Objectivity toward leadership—like beauty—is not possible; it can only be approximated.

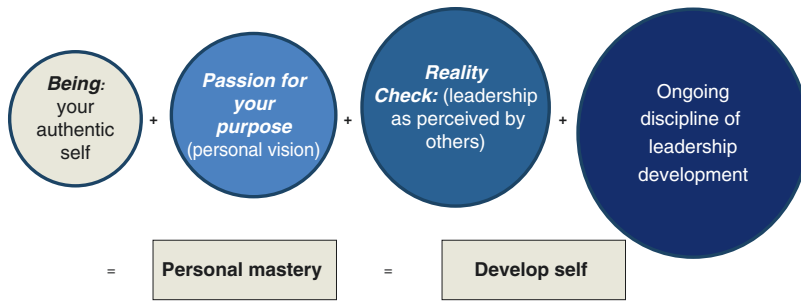


Fig. 5.1 The dynamics of personal Mastery

Astute readers will see that personal mastery is a disciplined approach to their hero's journey, using experience, allies and insight to grow. Personal mastery puts self-management and self-development into practise. Its skills include:

...self-observation, self-goal-setting, self-reward, rehearsal, self-job redesign, and self-management of internal dialogues and mental imagery....These principles require the leader to gather data through self-reflection, using instruments, directed learning tools, and journaling, and to use that data to set goals and monitor progress through a personal learning program [33].

Personal mastery, as Fig. 5.1 illustrates, begins with examining the challenges you face as a leader in the health system and your role in it. Facing those challenges requires you keep your values, personality, emotional reactions and talents always in mind and ensure they are in the forefront of what you do. Then you move to clarifying your vision and infusing it with passion, so you can bring your leadership energy to bear on workplace issues. As you do that you interact with others and, in keeping with your personal mastery regimen, gather feedback on how your actions resonate with followers—what we call seeing reality subjectively. The final step is establishing directions for growth. Personal mastery is the route to becoming a master of your profession by maximizing the instruments of self, as we described in Chap. 4.

Putting LEADS to Work: Operationalizing Personal Mastery

The University of Alberta's Fellowship in Health Systems Improvement, mentioned in Chap. 4, has built a personal mastery component into the program, using self-directed learning. Each participant chooses a goal for self-improvement, designs their learning method and participates in a coaching/mentoring¹ conversation with

¹The facilitators use a combination of coaching and mentoring techniques in working with their coachee/mentee. When acting as a coach, the facilitator will ask questions and probe to draw out answers from the person rather than provide them. When acting as a mentor, they will provide guidance and expertise that is needed by the mentee.

facilitators who are knowledgeable about LEADS and have experience in health care leadership.

Using LEADS as a guide, each participant does a self-assessment, and through self-reflection and a coaching/mentoring dialogue, chooses a leadership learning goal that represents a benefit to themselves—and their sponsor organizations—to focus on as they progress through the program.

To operationalize reflection and mindfulness, self-directed learning tactics are provided. Leaders in the program can choose to use some or all to bring structure to their personal mastery journey.

A Strengths-Based Approach

Developing leadership requires us to know our strengths and how to use them for maximum effectiveness. “Research is showing that the more leaders use their unique strengths, the higher their performance will be in the workplace...and their levels of happiness, fulfillment, authenticity, goal accomplishment, and optimal functioning will increase.” [34]

Focusing on weakness leads to mediocrity, not mastery, but developing strengths leads to exceptional performance.

Proactive leaders work from their strengths, have a clear purpose and vision, have a plan, and understand that they have choices in any given situation. They achieve greater success by focusing on things they have direct control over, such as their own behaviour and reactions, and spend less time on things they have indirect or no sway over, like other people’s behaviour and reactions [17].

Welch and colleagues provide interesting insights from expert coaches on methods to build on your strengths [34]. They suggest you should identify your strengths through the use of validated instruments such as the StrengthFinder [35], reflect on situations and circumstances where your energy is at its highest, and grow your own awareness of how your strengths contributed to that situation. They also recommend spending some time reflecting on how your strengths can be applied in different situations and circumstances and that you engage in dialogue with a trusted peer or coach to explore how to use your strengths more effectively.

However, focusing exclusively on your strengths is not a guarantee of success. In fact, a strength used inappropriately or excessively can be a weakness [36, 37]. For example, your strength may be that you’re results oriented, but if you employ it when compassion is needed, it’ll be a fail. Also, focusing solely on your strengths could lead to complacency and stagnation, leaving you unready to deal with new situations. You can avoid those pitfalls by taking on new assignments, which can help you develop by demanding different skills.

Learning Moment

There is the charming story of the animal school, in which the hare, the tortoise, and the monkey were being scheduled for their next year's program. The school counsellor looked at the hare's transcript and noted that she was extremely good at hopping but had failed climbing. So she took her out of Hopping 2 and enrolled her in a remedial climbing program.

The tortoise had excelled at swimming, but was deplorable at hopping; so he was scheduled into remedial hopping. The monkey was excellent at climbing, but really poor at swimming...and you can guess how this goes.

Reflect on the following questions:

1. How productive do you think the remedial programs would be? Either in terms of personal motivation, or improved results?
2. How does this story relate to Carol Dweck's concept of fixed and growth mindsets? Is leadership a function of physical wiring or a mental muscle that can be developed?
3. If you were to identify one strength and one weakness you bring to the practice of leadership, what would they be?
 - How might working on the strength enhance your leadership capability?
 - Is it worth working on the weakness, or are there better ways to compensate for that?

Demonstrates Character

*“Character is the voice inside which speaks and says, ‘This is the real me.’
Effective leaders, and effective people, know this voice very well.”*

Warren Bennis

This quote from Warren Bennis, founder of the Leadership Institute at the University of Southern California, was echoed in recent research that asked senior leaders from across Canada to identify qualities of leadership. The qualities mentioned most—passion, integrity, focus, resilience, commitment, persistence, courage and credibility—all spoke to character [38]. We noted a similar trend when we were doing the research for LEADS, which led us to this capability, *Demonstrates character*. As one interviewee said about integrity and credibility, “In reality you only have one tool in your toolbox and that is your word. Your word has to mean something.”

Does it pay to demonstrate character? An article in the Harvard Business Review said it does. The researchers found CEOs whose employees gave them high marks

for character had an average return on assets nearly five times as much that of those with low character [39]. Bernard Bass, the father of transformational leadership, says character does matter in leadership. “This is not to deny that evil people can bring about good things or that good people can lead the way to moral ruin. Rather, leadership provides a moral compass and, over the long term, both personal development and the common good are best served by a moral compass that reads true.” [40] In health care, studies have shown transformational leadership has a positive impact on organizational culture, such as employee stress, job satisfaction, and psychological health [41]. Moral character provides followers with a sense of predictability, which may help them cope with uncertainty.

The degree to which one demonstrates character is closely associated with emotional intelligence. For example, when making complex decisions that require moral or ethical considerations, the more primitive emotional centres of your brain (the limbic system) coordinate with the newer part involved in planning and social empathy (the prefrontal cortex). Clinically, people who have underdeveloped character, such as sociopaths, have been shown to have poor connection between those brain centres. So, the ability to act morally, in other words, requires a healthy connection between the feeling and thinking centres of your brain.

Recent research in health care leadership has shown the importance of *resilience*, defined as “the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune.” [42] Resilience comprises many other elements of character including integrity, adaptability, patience and courage. Recent research suggests, similar to emotional intelligence, resilience can be developed like a muscle, in both people and organizations [43]. What can individuals do to increase their resilience? Welcome feedback through LEADS-based 360s such as the LEADS self-assessment at the end of this chapter or through regular bilateral meetings with your coach, mentor, supervisor or board chair. Look for new challenges: opportunities to grow, learn, contribute and feel valued. See adversity as a challenge and willingly take on risks, looking for success but knowing with failure comes an opportunity to learn and “fail forward.” Stretch yourself, test your strengths, and admit vulnerabilities, to learn more about potential weaknesses. Build strong, personal, and professional networks.

Building Character, Building Resilience

Character, like any other attribute we are born with, can be developed. To do that, leaders must be conscious of what constitutes character, and want to develop it. One of the most important ways to develop character is to focus on it. Recognize it in yourself, the challenges to it and reflect how you react to those challenges. Journal your reflections or share them in conversations. Listen carefully to what others did in situations they’ve faced and think how you would want to react in similar circumstances. Gene Klann, in collaboration with the Center for Creative Leadership in the United States, has devised a five-step process called the Five E’s of Character

Development. He says you develop your character by focusing on examples, education, environment, experience and evaluation [44].

According to the Mayo Clinic, the most important exercise for improving your personal resilience is to train your attention and awareness. “Becoming more intentional and purposeful will decrease your negative thoughts and draw your attention to what is most meaningful around you.” [45] As we said earlier in this chapter, being more intentional and mindful can substantially decrease stress and anxiety while enhancing overall quality of life. Resilient leaders stay focused on their “north star” within the overall context of organizational resilience (more on this in Chap. 7: Achieve results).

Summary

As we’ve seen, leadership is an ongoing, lifelong process of development. Those pursuing it:

- Are self aware
- Manage themselves
- Develop themselves
- Demonstrate character

Each of the four capabilities of the Lead self domain is aimed at clarifying and focusing you on building internal strength so you can lead others with confidence, purpose and conviction. Remember: you have to trust yourself before you can be trustworthy in the presence of others. The exercises and stories in this chapter highlight how the Lead self capabilities reinforce each other to build trust in yourself that can be conveyed to others. Circling back to where we began this chapter on the importance of trust, the Rt. Hon. David Johnston, formerly Canada’s governor general, said in his book called *Trust*: “While it is something that most of us take for granted, trust is a vital quality that grows stronger as it is acknowledged and cultivated (like a garden) attentively.” [46]

To help you lead yourself, we’ll end this chapter with a self-assessment exercise. Please evaluate yourself, then based on your results identify one capability you think you should work on to improve your leadership.

Learning Moment

Using the following LEADS self-assessment, assess how well you demonstrate the four Lead self capabilities. Choose the appropriate level (relative to your level of responsibility) to make that assessment.

If there was one capability you would like to improve upon, what is it? Why?

Lead Self Self-Assessment (For on-line access to self assessment tool, please visit www.LEADSGlobal.ca.)

Informal leader (patient, family member, citizen) responsibilities

In order to use my attributes of self to be a better leader, I

1.	Make a conscious effort to continuously surface my assumptions, values, principles, strengths and limitations; understand them as it relates to my own health; and my expectations of care providers or the healthcare system	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
2.	As a respectful consumer of healthcare services or engaged citizen, take responsibility for managing my emotions, mindsets and my personal responsibilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
3.	Systematically seek out opportunities for learning and developing myself in order to influence others effectively	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
4.	Recognize the qualities of character as demanded of me in my advocacy role; and try to exercise them accordingly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N

Front-line leader responsibilities

In order to use my attributes of self to be a better leader, I

1.	Make a conscious effort to surface my assumptions, values, principles, strengths and limitations; and understand them in the context of my supervisory role	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
2.	Take responsibility for managing my emotions, mindset and role expectations as they relate to my role of supervisor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
3.	Systematically seek out opportunities for learning; and be disciplined in developing myself in the context of my supervisory role	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
4.	Recognize the qualities of character demanded of me in my supervisory role, and I am deliberate in demonstrating them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N

Mid-manager leader responsibilities

In order to use my attributes of self to be a better leader, I

1.	Make a conscious effort to surface my assumptions, values, principles, strengths and limitations; and understand them in the context of my mid-management role, connecting senior and supervisory leaders	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
2.	Take responsibility for managing my emotions, mindset and role expectations as they relate to my role of mid-manager	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
3.	Systematically employ personal mastery (either formally through a personal learning plan or informally) in my mid-management role	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
4.	Recognize that qualities of character are often tested in a mid-management role, and I am deliberate in exercising them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N

Senior leader responsibilities

In order to use my attributes of self to be a better leader, I

1.	Make a conscious effort to continuously surface my assumptions, values, principles, strengths and limitations; and understand them in the context of my strategic role to connect mid-managers with organizational priorities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
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2.	Take responsibility for managing my emotions, mindset and role expectations as they relate to interacting with executives and mid-management	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
3.	Systematically employ personal mastery—either formally (through a personal learning plan) or informally, to enhance my interpersonal and strategic capabilities	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
4.	Recognize that qualities of character are regularly tested in bridging strategic and operational responsibilities; and I am deliberate in exercising them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N

Executive leader responsibilities

In order to use my attributes of self to be a better leader, I

1.	Make a conscious effort to surface my assumptions, values, principles, strengths and limitations; and exercise them appropriately in my interactions with the board, media, other executives, professional groups, staff, stakeholders and the community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
2.	Take responsibility for managing my emotions, mindset and role expectations as they relate to interacting with the board, media, other executives, staff, professional groups, stakeholders and the community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
3.	Model personal mastery either formally (through a personal learning plan) or informally, in a process aimed at enhancing my executive capability	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N
4.	Recognize that qualities of character are regularly tested in bridging strategic and operational responsibilities; and I am deliberate in exercising them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	N

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