



The Zen of Management Maintenance: Leadership Starts with Self-Discovery

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Are you successful or a "success fool"? According to HBS alum and leadership expert **Jagdish Parikh**, the most effective leaders realize they must first learn the skill of leading themselves.

by Jagdish Parikh

Editor's note: Jagdish Parikh (HBS MBA '54), was a recent guest of the HBS Leadership and Values Committee in the Distinguished Speakers Series. We asked him to write about the subject of his talk, "Leading Your Self," based on his book Managing Your Self.

How can the concept of leadership be so rich in knowledge yet so poor in performance? Hundreds of books and "models" purport to suggest the best way to become a leader. Yet many people, asked to name a leader they would consider a role model, struggle to identify even a few individuals.

The gap between what we learn about leadership and what we actually implement exposes a fundamental flaw in most of the leadership models today. These models focus mainly on competencies required for leading an organization, but do not explain how to cultivate those core competencies. Therefore we face, in a sense, a crisis of leadership.

Actually, this is more a crisis of courage than of leadership, because what is lacking today is not knowledge about leadership, but the courage to convert such knowledge into actual performance. But courage does not come just by wishing—it only happens as a consequence of one's level of consciousness, one's inner experience, one's self identity. In this sense, what we are witnessing today is actually a crisis of consciousness. To cope with this, one needs an understanding and experience of a deeper level of consciousness and a higher level of self identity, as a precondition for cultivating the competences for leading others.

This is what Leading Your Self is all about.

Unless one knows how to lead one's self, it would be presumptuous for anyone to be able to lead others effectively. And, if you don't lead your self, someone else will! Leading one's self implies cultivating the skills and processes to experience a higher level of self identity beyond one's ordinary, reactive ego level. This facilitates the journey from reactive constraints to proactive courage leading to creative consciousness—a synthesis of intellectual, intuitive, and emotional intelligence. This enables one to effectively manage relationships with people, events, and ideas, which is the essence of leadership.

In these days of accelerating change and complexity, every manager needs to keep their physical, mental, and emotional dimensions in the fittest condition. This can be done through simple processes for minimizing stress, cultivating creativity, rebalancing emotions, and shared vision building, including Yogic exercises and meditation. "Leading Your Self" is the program that offers these with a unique synthesis of western and eastern, modern and ancient, concepts and processes.

Is stress good for you?

Does stress bring out the best in us? Many executives seem conditioned into believing that stress is beautiful—it pushes us into higher performance, they believe. Surprisingly, they even declare you should never be satisfied with your performance because satisfaction will dampen the drive to do more and better.

Leadership is not just a personality trait, strategy, or tactic

I, too, took on this mindset as an MBA student at HBS. I went to Bombay and became successful as a businessman practicing these tenets but began to suffer negative physiological and psychological symptoms of stress after

just a few years.

At this stage, I seriously began to wonder if there was another way to be successful while also remaining satisfied and happy at the same time. After deep reflection and a PhD, I discovered that the missing link between success and happiness was lack of awareness of one's "inner dynamics."

It is essential to understand and learn to manage and lead one's own inner dynamics, one's own self, in order to achieve sustainable peak performance and a continuing experience of inner fulfillment. Often many people do perform at a peak level, but this is largely through a fear of losing—losing what one has accomplished now and what could be accomplished in the future. Fear creates peak performance by generating adrenaline, which is very energizing and addictive. But adrenaline is also self-consuming and not sustainable.

To achieve sustainable peak performance, learn to transform your motivation from fear of losing to joy of doing, which is a different chemistry—that of endorphins. I believe there are three fundamental laws of High Performance Dynamics:

1. One never does anything unless one feels like doing it, either through negative motivation, fear of losing or positive motivation, the joy of doing.
2. Unless you feel good within your own self, you can never bring about good results on a sustainable basis.
3. Feeling good is a skill: cultivating a deeper awareness of one's self. It can be learned like any other skill.

This becomes most relevant when understanding that the essence of leadership is recognizing, discovering, and identifying with one's true self. The issue is that leadership implies functioning with proactive and creative attitudes. The fact is that mostly we function with reactivity. Why is this so? Because we normally identify ourselves with our body, mind, and emotions, which is a very narrow identity, described as the Ego identity. By its very nature Ego identity is bound to be self-centered and reactive.

How do we alter or expand our self identity? This can be experienced through a three-minute exercise called Performance Enhancing Process. PEP enables one to experience a sense of distancing, detaching from one's body, mind, and emotions and positioning one's awareness and experience deeper in one's "Inner Space," the "Inner Self," or the "Centered Self," which is also the "Proactive and the Creative Self."

The exercise is not only relaxing but also brings a positive, joyous feeling. In this way, one can function from that deeper, joyous, and proactive self through the ego, and not with the reactive Ego Self.

Each person, in a sense, is the owner/manager and observer/experiencer of his or her body, mind, and emotions. The simple metaphor of a chair, taken as representing one's body, mind, and emotion dynamics, can explain this clearly:

As long as I am sitting in the chair, (identifying with body, mind, and emotion), I cannot observe the whole chair nor "manage" the chair. In fact, the chair manages me! To observe the chair, I must get out of it. For this, I must first accept that I'm not the chair. The moment I can accept that, I can get out of it, and then I can manage, move, and lead the chair the way I want to. I become a master, a leader, of the chair.

This enables one to focus on developing the functionary dimensions of the self, namely, keeping the body healthy and energized, making the mind more open and creative, and preventing negative emotions.

That is why effective leadership is not just a personality trait, strategy, or tactic—not just a package of competencies. It is a transformative way of thinking, feeling, and functioning, a way of life, a way of being.

You can't lead something you yourself identify with. The paradox is that detachment (not withdrawal, escape, or indifference) coupled with involvement (not addiction)—in other words, detached involvement—enables mastery. Leadership then "happens" to you! WK