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The Leadership Strategy Most Successful CEOs Fail At Practicing

No matter where you are in your career path, you can make it a priority to advance your personal leadership skills.



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We all see the daily headlines: Mark Zuckerberg's network rises by additional millions as Facebook's value increases, Arianna Huffington kickstarts a new "Thrive" venture, Bill Gates' foundation makes a

huge donation to a charity in need. Successful CEO's are American heroes--we follow their path to top and hope to emulate their success in our own lives.

But many executives today--as well as managers, account executives, and many employees across the spectrum of the corporate ladder--often overlook the first, and often most powerful, leadership strategy: Personal leadership. As a result, they only obtain *part* of the equation for success. They earn the income but neglect to take care of themselves. Or they take care of themselves but forget to give to others. The result is a life of overwork streaked with a persistent sense of dissatisfaction and that nagging question, "Where am I going wrong?"

The key to success that includes the whole package--wealth, health, and meaning--is personal leadership.

Personal leadership is the leadership of the self. It involves developing a sense of ownership and responsibility for one's own success--including leading positive change, overcoming challenges, and determining a career path that will be fulfilling on a personal level and impactful for the organization.

So, if these leaders are already successful, why do they need to hone their personal leadership skills? In my years of coaching experience and research for the Leadership Research Institute, I've found that when leaders learn and practice personal leadership, they gain a sense of empowerment. They feel more committed to their work and feel very energized about overachieving their goals and results.

If you're a leader looking to feel fulfilled both professionally and personally, here are two ways to start on your path to refine your personal leadership skills:

Get clear on your vision. It sounds like something most successful C-level executives should already have, but many leaders *don't* have a clear perspective on their vision. This isn't the vision for your company, now--it's the vision *for yourself*. What is the path to both your long-term and short-term goals? How do you answer that question both personally and professionally? Without a clear sense of vision, leaders can lose that sense of meaning, and so they get discouraged. They become stressed, burned out or exhausted. If they can't resolve the situation, they fade out of leadership roles and may even leave the company.

When you *do* have a vision, it's time to put it into words. A vision statement captures your future into one succinct statement. Done well, it gives you the language you need to refresh on the images you envision for your future and keep you on track toward that vision in day-to-day life. Unlike the vision statement for a company, your vision statement need not be pithy or profound. You don't have to hang it on the wall or carve it in marble. What does help is to repeat the statement in your mind once a day to really lock it in.

Get a coach. Developing a vision is only part of the equation. The next part is achieving that vision, and here's where a coach can be most helpful.

Executive coaches teach leaders the practices of personal leadership so they get clarity about their vision and goals, as well as their value to the organization.

- Coaches help leaders become very focused on their priorities, so they can emphasize on the ones that have the greatest impact.
- Coaches help leaders take clear, specific action to get results, with accountability and measurement.
- Coaches help leaders fill in the gaps. Do you need to identify and leverage your strengths? Learn to maximize your time? Build a personal support team? Through coaching, leaders stop spinning their wheels and put into place the skills and strategies that will help them be successful.

As a result of coaching, leaders feel accomplished and supported at the same time--and that translates into a commitment to their goals, their organization, and their own personal success.

No matter where you are in your career path, you can make it a priority to advance your personal leadership skills. When you do, you'll find yourself becoming more and more committed to the future you want, and the present you enjoy. You will develop even more clarity bit by bit about what the vision looks like in daily life. And you will achieve it.

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