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THE INGREDIENTS OF LEADERSHIP: FINDING THE PERSONAL POWER FOR MOVING PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS INTO THE FUTURE®

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INTRODUCTION

Each year I have the privilege of working with many, many senior and chief executives across the full spectrum of business activity: the corporate sector, government, military, non-profit organizations, and more. One powerful driving concept comes through in each of these settings – the gut-level desire to transform the organization, or to transform how the organization thinks; or to transform the attitudes of a group of individuals or customer base. Personal, top executive leadership is the transformational force that energizes people and organizations to achieve big goals.

Leadership is a lonely obligation. Every leader, no matter how many followers, is an individual actor, sharing ideas and concepts, mostly verbally, in the hope of producing a result that benefits the operation and the people whose lives those operations affect, and that the goals set are achieved.

The question every leader asks repeatedly is, “How can I effectively move the organization forward in some way everyday?” When loyalty is at a premium and markets and workplaces seem so unstable, what is the force that brings focus and forward momentum?

There are crucial behaviors important people, successful executives, and true leaders use to move processes and people forward. These behaviors are the key ingredients of leadership, to truly be a person of tomorrow. The more of these ingredients leaders take to heart, teach, and expect of others, the more power they will have to achieve their objective.

Leadership is the strategic force that drives individuals, organizations, cultures, and societies forward every day. Leadership is the discipline of being intentionally constructive with a relentlessly positive approach to helping everyone. With these 11 Be-attitudes of Leadership you can live a much more influential, important, happier, and successful life, as will everyone around you.

These 11 behaviors or ingredients, if applied with sincerity, are simple, sensible, constructive, positive, and very doable attitude-driven behaviors. They are the work of leadership.

1. **BE POSITIVE**

- Behave in positive ways.
- Teach others to have fun and celebrate some success every day.
- Use positive declarative language.
- Reduce emotional language.
- Eliminate negative words and phrases.

Example: In normal conversation, when someone says something with which we disagree, we invariably respond by saying something like, “You’re wrong,” or “That’s incorrect,” or “You don’t know what you’re talking about,” or “It’s simply not done that way,” or some similar negative approach. You may then explain what is correct or how you really do things, but your listener is still dealing with the insult of your negative language. This makes it almost impossible for him/her to hear your constructive language. Negative comments almost always put us on the defensive even though we have important, positive, constructive things to say.

“The Bad News Eradicator,” is a little exercise I do with clients in which I present a list of common negative phrases and then ask the clients to turn them into positives. Let’s take the negative phrases below and turn them into positive ones.

Negative

Positive

“We don’t do it that way.”

“Here’s the way we do it . . . ”

“That’s not our style.”

“Here are important elements of our style . . . ”

“The boss won’t buy it.”

“Here’s what the boss has bought in the past; here’s what they may buy in the future . . . ”

“That’s a lie.”

“If you check your facts and assumptions you may come to a different conclusion.”

Or,

“Using the same analysis we came up with a different, more positive result.”

The lesson is this: Your use of negative language controls your relationship with other people. Eradicate or eliminate negative and emotional words and you become far more powerful and in control of almost any situation. Your positive approach blocks or defeats those who are negative.

2. **BE A VERBAL VISIONARY**

The manager’s role in any organization is to meet or exceed expectations, meet or exceed established goals or objectives, and help others to do so within the scope of a plan or operational activity.

Leadership, on the other hand, is predominantly a verbal skill. The function of a leader is to look over the horizon, see what’s there, and figure out where the organization has to go, then to return to tell, show, or verbally illustrate the various elements and destinations of the journey and the priorities for moving the organization forward.

This is the work of a verbal visionary.

3. ***BE CONSTRUCTIVE***

- Insist on constructive behavior.
- Seek to make and solicit positive, constructive suggestions.
- Seek out useful and challenging questions to answer.
- Critique the performance and achievements of others constructively.
- Help others benefit more than you do each time you interact with them.

Example: Recently a friend called. She was in charge of evaluating the performance of the new minister in their church after a year's service. She put together a brief letter to members of the congregation asking that they provide some criticism – I believe she used the words “constructive criticism” – of the minister's performance. She mailed 700. She received more than 500 responses, each of which contained an average of three comments. Some contained even more.

They were devastating. If you added up all of the criticisms there was no way this minister could possibly continue in the job and survive emotionally. Most of the criticisms were negatives; many reflected individual misunderstandings; and virtually none reflected knowledge of the scope of the congregation's mission or the daily activities required of the minister as the congregation's leader. The criticisms boiled down to negative personal commentary.

My friend's problem was, of course, that she had to share this information to the minister. If she didn't have something else worked out, she was sure he would undoubtedly resign. While the congregation really liked this man and wanted him to stay, not even a minister could withstand this level of personal criticism.

I told her about a lesson I learned early in my career from Chester Burger. As a communications consultant he faced similar situations inside corporations. His strategy, which I've followed for years, was to go back to the same people and, rather than asking for criticism, ask them to make one positive constructive suggestion about what the individual might do to achieve the goals of the organization. The application of this technique is incredibly powerful.

Ask anyone to criticize and critique your appearance, preparation, proposal, presentation, personality, anything, and you're guaranteed to get dozens of minor negative comments, most of which you couldn't change even if you wanted to. In fact, most critiques are designed to elicit negative, unhelpful information and are too little, too late.

My friend did go back and use this technique. Out of the 700-member congregation, she received 12 suggestions. Each was implementable and achievable within the next a 30-to-90 day period. My friend went back to the minister, in all honesty, and showed the first assessment from the congregation, but then showed the follow-up work. The minister not only stayed, but also implemented every suggestion in the first 90 days.

The lesson is this: We have the power to structure and control productive discussions and debate. If you want constructive results seek and insist on constructive suggestions. There will be very few, but they will be more useful. If you are constructive and seek positive, constructive suggestions, you automatically control and, therefore, powerfully manage how decisions are made.

Constructive criticism is an oxymoron.

4. BE PROMPT

- Answer it now.
- Ask it now.
- Challenge it now.
- Do it now.
- Fix it now.

Example: Over the years I've learned that whether it's an activist group, angry employees, upset neighbors, or jealous competitors who appear to be outsmarting us, the way to win, the way to move things forward, the way to stay in charge is to act now, do it now – every time.

This often means making smaller decisions and acting on them more quickly.

- Answer it now. If there are questions, get the answers and get them now.
- Ask it now. Rather than waiting for someone else to ask the serious question, ask it first to get the answer.
- Challenge it now.
- If you know it's going to be a problem, act now to eliminate the cause.
- Fix it now. If it's broken, move to repair it; if it's breaking down, move to shore it up.

The lesson is this: Those who act promptly – who do it now – are ahead of the competition, can foil the opposition's most carefully laid plans, defeat almost any critic, and control the situation.

The linear thinkers may criticize you for this, "Move that fast and you'll make mistakes." Since mistakes *will* be made, however, deferring them to some other time only delays success. Make the inevitable mistakes early. Fix them now and move on.

5. BE OUTCOME FOCUSED (This means always focus on the goal.)

- Commit to generating and maintaining forward momentum.
- Focus on today and tomorrow.
- Plan with the end in mind.
- Recognize that the past holds very few important lessons.
- Select an achievable, understandable, time-sensitive, worthwhile goal; then go for it.
- Work in the future tense.

Example: In 1995, I was deeply involved in negotiations between some powerful anti-corporate forces: groups of labor unions, church groups, and non-governmental organizations. The issues were extraordinarily compelling, in the news, divisive, and to some extent in the streets. The challenge was to find a way to sit down face-to-face, put these matters in some perspective, and develop a plan of action.

Fortunately, someone suggested that we meet with a minister in Brooklyn Heights, New York, just across the East River from Manhattan. He was reputed to have the personal presence required to manage such a politically charged confrontation.

We met in his living room in December. This huge, jovial man greeted us warmly, asked us sit down together in front of a roaring fire, listen to some music, and be quiet for a few minutes.

He then laid down just one ground rule for the day's work: the discussion was to be entirely outcome-focused. This meant that whatever happened between us prior to entering his living room no longer existed or mattered (disagreements, arguments, behaviors, truth, fiction, and lies). The past was completely irrelevant to our current discussions. If we couldn't abide by this fundamental ground rule, he promised to end the discussions and bid us a pleasant day.

It's hard to convey just how powerful this concept is. Fundamentally, it recognizes that everyone owns yesterday, everyone owns this morning. There is nothing anyone can do to change that ownership. But no one owns the future – the next 15 minutes, the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year. Therefore, when we choose to be outcome-focused, we choose how we will enter and live through the future, something we can do together.

Now back to Brooklyn Heights. Each time anyone began a discussion supported by something from the past, our host would halt the discussion and refocus it on tomorrow. By 4:30 that afternoon we had negotiated and signed a one-page agreement. That agreement was reached on December 15, 1995. Those who signed it, still live by it today.

The lesson is this: Focus on tomorrow and only take from yesterday positive, useful, constructive elements and ideas that can move the process forward, promptly. Whatever you did with others on various projects, problems, and situations before you read this article no longer matters. Focusing on the future allows you to build tomorrow without all the problems and misunderstandings of the past.

Bonus lesson: Applying this single concept will cut in half the time you spend in any meeting you attend, sponsor, or lead. A good portion of most meetings is spent explaining to those who weren't at the last meeting what went on and what has yet to be done. Then it's necessary to re-explain again because some of those who attended the last meeting have a different perception of what went on than you do. What little time remains is finally used to get something done and move ahead.

Outcome focus saves precious time, reduces mistakes and misunderstandings, and acts as a positive force for moving ahead.

Progress is achieved by looking, acting, and forging ahead. Being outcome focused is one of the most powerful concepts I've ever come across to help move things forward. You see, if you stay in the past, argue the past, try to re-write the past . . . You'll die there; so will your career and your hopes.

You get to the future by starting there.

6. ***BE REFLECTIVE***

- Seek only useful positive lessons from the past, if you go there at all.
- What could you have done more or less often in the past? What could you have done to make something better?
- Could you have conducted yourself differently, more consistently, more positively?

Example: In the course of our Brooklyn Heights discussions, there were a few references to the past. The principle of reflective thinking was applied. In other words you can get to go to the past, but only to seek constructive lessons. What useful bit of information could be extracted that would help implement moving forward to achieve a specific goal? Negative lessons were not permitted; emotional conclusions and negative incidents were eliminated.

The lesson is this: The past is of only limited value. It never repeats itself. No scenario from the past is precisely reproducible in the future. There are mistakes we can correct if we take a cold, hard look. There are a few – very, very few – positive lessons that can be mined from past experience and applied successfully to today’s circumstances.

If you must look backwards, look in the most constructive, positive way possible.

7. **BE PRAGMATIC**

Use what works as a platform for what will be or can be accomplished:

- Search for the truths everyone can recognize and benefit by.
- Make your forecasts achievable.
- Help others achieve their goals and forecasts.
- Prepare everyone for underwhelming results.
- Do the doable.
- Know the knowable.
- Achieve the achievable.
- Get the gettable.

Example: Your credibility rests more on what you are actually able to accomplish than on any series of goals or concepts you may choose to announce but only partially, or never achieve.

One of the more interesting stories about pragmatism appears in Jack Welch’s book, *Straight From the Gut*. He had just finished listening to nuclear engineers decide how they were going to begin selling three nuclear reactors per year in the United States, and how this would save this General Electric division.

After listening for an hour, Welch thoughtfully responded that no matter how good the intentions were, nuclear reactors were not going to be sold again in the United States in their lifetime, and that they needed to focus on something else – perhaps servicing existing nuclear facilities would be a more pragmatic approach. GE is now top in its category of servicing nuclear facilities. Mr. Welch was being a pragmatist.

The lesson is this: A pragmatist matches rhetoric with reality. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes. See the world from their perspective. Help them achieve your goals by achieving a portion of their goals in ways they recognize, and from their own perspective. Dale Carnegie was right, “Help the other guy get what he wants, from his perspective; and he’ll help you get what you want, from your perspective.”

Pragmatism is saying and doing things that “make sense.”

8. **BE A YES PERSON**

Select what can be done and focus on that.

Example: One often-heard management phrase is, “Learn how to say no.” Hopefully, we’ve already learned that the power of the negative is defensiveness, confusion, even more questions, all of which fundamentally hurt people. The role of the leader is to let people know what they can do, what they’re expected to do; their latitude in achieving objectives, and to help set and prioritize useful, positive goals.

What happens when an executive says, “You’ve got to learn how to say no.”? What does “no” mean? Which things should not be done? Is this approach a helpful management style? Why is this executive being so negative when all you have done is work 24/7 to see to it that he/she can be successful? What are the criteria for eliminating functions, practices, or processes? Is leadership about not doing things? What is really meant by learning how to say no? Isn’t it far better to teach people how to say “yes”?

The lesson is this: It is far better for managers to lay out precisely what is expected of employees and how they will be measured: “These are the limits of your authority and function, and here are the three things you should do to meet or exceed my expectations; and other things beyond these three (or four or five) central expectations are less important.” This is helpful; this is being a leader, this is how we move the organization forward, this is how we help individual employees understand what it is the leader is looking for or expects.

9. **BE FOCUSED ON THE CRUCIAL FIVE PERCENT**

We’ve all heard of the equation, better known as the 80-20 rule. Twenty percent of our activities generate 80 percent of our revenue; 20 percent of our customers consume 80 percent of our customer service time. Twenty percent of our time is meaningfully spent, while 80 percent is wasted or otherwise ill used. Twenty percent of our brain is used while 80 percent remains yet to be explored and put into service . . . you get the idea.

Leaders need to distill even further how to they allocate and consume time. What leaders have to do is to focus on the crucial five percent of what is truly essential to move the organization forward. That leaves 95 percent of the brains, smarts, strategic planning, and execution to the rest of the organization.

Years ago when I was just beginning my career in public relations, I did a marketing study for a Minnesota-based *Fortune* 500 company that specialized in high technology switching equipment. The marketing study was extensive, expensive, and one of the most interesting projects I’d worked on at that time in my career. When I made my presentation to the assembled executives and their staffs, the response was clearly enthusiastic. When I asked the CEO about moving forward, he said that the majority of the things I talked about were things the organization needed to do and would be enormously helpful.

When I asked him how many of my of my recommendations we could begin implementing his response astounded me. “Oh” he said, “I think we can manage about four percent of what you recommended.” I was stunned. Virtually everything in my report seemed to be useful, successful, and implementable. Everyone was enthusiastic. So in my naive but brazen way, I asked directly if I had made a mistake and misunderstood what happened just an hour earlier.

The CEO's response was, "No Jim, you didn't make a mistake. But the fact is, this is a 5,000-employee organization. I am only the CEO. The reality is, those who show up to work every day run this company. Some days we do really well. Some days key people don't show, or are here but don't get much done. I'm 57 years old, which means I'll be the CEO of this organization for probably the next six-to-eight years maximum. If I can shift this organization's focus or center of direction four-to-five percent each year I'll be doing extraordinarily well, and that's considering our competitive environment and how our business changes from month-to-month. This means that in the entire term of my tenure as chairman, if I can turn this organization 35-to-40 percent, I'll be doing extremely well, absent a catastrophe like a hostile takeover, which could turn this ship 90 degrees or 125 degrees in an afternoon."

The lessons for me were these: first, the absolute need to focus on what is truly, truly important, that five percent; and second, the limitations of leadership. Even the most dynamic, exciting, and amazing individual is unlikely to make radical changes in organizations over night. Organizational change is incremental.

Here's a place where the inspiration from Jack Welch is useful to factor in. GE was already America's most admired corporation when he took over, and he was Chairman for 20 years. By his own count, he only came up with five major initiatives in the 20-year period of his chairmanship. Those ideas did transform the company from a bureaucratically dominated, old-fashioned American conglomerate to a reasonably agile, well-financed, and market-sensitive leading company in virtually all of its product categories. It took him 20 years, five powerful concepts, and a leadership approach that enabled his own team of managers to move forward.

10. ***BE A FINISHER***

- Start what you can finish.
- Stop what you can't get done.
- Avoid endless and mindless projects.
- Focus on completion.
- Break down the barriers to completion.
- Forecast, and then overcome the institutional resistance to completion.

Studies of management failure and management success show that the ability to finish a few small but core projects can be the difference between success and failure; supremacy and mediocrity; vision and confusion; and reputation gain or catastrophe. *Fortune* magazine cites the failure to complete their own projects and programs as the single most frequent reason CEOs are fired.

Large organizations tend to generate lots of projects, lots of ideas, and lots of "things to do."

Most CEOs will tell you that when they analyze organizational to-do lists, for every 100 projects there are only three-to-five deserving or needing completion. For every 20 development concepts, only two are worth the effort, energy, and expenditure, and half of those will fail.

Start things you can and will finish. Terminate those things that can never be finished. Off load those processes that suck away time, resources, and key attention of your most

valuable people. Beware the sucking sounds: time sucks, resource sucks, brainpower sucks, attitude sucks, and enthusiasm sucks.

The lesson is this: Look at every project, every concept, and every idea that needs to move forward as a marathon. The test of a marathon runner is finishing at the earliest possible time, no matter how long it takes or what level of personal commitment required. Focus, energy, enthusiasm, stamina, sheer guts, and the fortitude to finish are the forces that genuinely move organizations to the head of the line, or to whole new levels of accomplishment and achievement.

If there is no finish line, avoid the starting line.

11. ***BE RELENTLESS IN SEEKING POSITIVE, INCREMENTAL, PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT EVERY DAY***

- Break problems into solvable parts.
- Resolve each increment of the problem promptly.
- Watch for the big break. Capitalize on big things when they happen.
- Prepare to be lucky, but remember that luck is limited.
- The lucky ones are those who are relentlessly incremental in their personal progress every day.
- Crises occur explosively but are resolved incrementally.

Example: Everything we do, know, or create came into being incrementally . . . recognizable increments occur usually in the correct order.

The most credible leaders and managers are those who relentlessly and intentionally:

- Grow and learn every day.
- Help those they serve to achieve some positive incremental progress every single day.
- Identify and talk about those positive increments that they work with, supervise, or lead achieve everyday.
- Assess what they've learned, then teach it to others.

This is among the most profound lessons I can share with you. It is the one I think you'll probably remember most, true success comes to those who relentlessly seek positive, incremental, personal improvement every day.

Well there you are, eleven powerful transformational leadership generating attitudes and behaviors:

1. Be positive.
2. Be a verbal visionary.
3. Be constructive.
4. Be prompt.
5. Be outcome-focused.
6. Be reflective.
7. Be pragmatic.
8. Be a yes person.
9. Be focused on the crucial five percent.

10. Be a finisher.
11. Be relentless in seeking positive, incremental, personal improvement every day.

How will you know when you have achieved success? How will you know when you have achieved success? Here are some indicators: You'll be invited to share your opinions at higher levels within your organization. As a matter of daily routine you'll be able to articulate what is truly important, useful, and helpful to others. You'll notice that, from your perspective, you are doing more important things. This may mean moving to more important work than that which you're currently doing. It may mean evaluating your current environment and determining whether or not you can become a leadership force within the situation in which you currently find yourself.

Leaders automatically ask themselves several questions at the end of each day. This is a discipline that will ensure that even your most frustrating day is rewarding and important:

- What did I learn today?
- How can I apply that learning to something I'm currently working on or something I want to work on?
- What did others learn from me today?
- How many times today did someone tell me they heard me quoted in a meeting they attended and people were inspired to move ahead?
- How or what have I improved in some way for someone else today?

Leadership is the strategic force that drives individuals, organizations, cultures, and societies forward every day. Leadership is the discipline of being intentionally constructive with a relentlessly positive approach to helping everyone. With these 11 Be-attitudes of Leadership you can live a much more influential, important, happier, and successful life, as will everyone around you.



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