

Lesson Three: Several Habits of Effective Leaders

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A. Key Learning Points

1. Leaders take personal responsibility and facilitate collaborative responsibility.
2. Effective leaders are proactive.
3. Effective leaders begin with the end in mind.
4. Effective leaders put first things first.
5. Effective leaders think win-win.
6. Effective leaders help common people achieve uncommon things (synergy).
7. Effective leaders learn something new each and every day.

B. Real World Examples and Considerations for Practitioners

1. Leaders take personal responsibility and facilitate collaborative responsibility.

A leader takes responsibility for better or for worse results regardless of adverse circumstances or external factors that others might use to rationalize poor performance. Amidst the many variables they can not influence or control, effective leaders know they can always count on their own choices and actions. This self-confident, personal commitment to positive action increases a leader's prospects for success and minimizes probability of negative results.

When leaders take personal responsibility for performance results, it is more likely that their associates and employees (and family members) will take individual and collaborative responsibility. Without personal and collaborative responsibility, success (and failure) seems circumstantial – a result primarily of good luck or timing. We know, however, that conscious, responsible action is a better predictor of success than fate, fortune, or circumstance.

The famous golfer, Ben Hogan, once said, “the harder I work, the luckier I get.” Like all high achievers, Ben Hogan took responsibility for his success through his disciplined daily practice and personal development that defied the physical injuries and limitations caused by a severe mid-career automobile accident.

2. Effective leaders are proactive.

In a match or duel, the initial advantage typically goes to the aggressor. In an automobile collision, the vehicle that causes the impact typically experiences the last damage.

As the celebrated 16th century political scientist, Niccolo Machiavelli once wrote, “Fortune favors the bold.” As the celebrated 20th century business strategist, Peter Drucker recommends, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.”

Although those who are proactive might at times experience more failures than those who are more content to observe from the sidelines, proactive people also tend to experience more frequent, substantial, and satisfying successes.

Free will and personal agency is an extraordinary leadership tool when used with knowledge, principles, and self-confidence. In an age when too many complain about victimization and systemic oppression, it is crucial to emphasize the individual and civic opportunities available for those who are willing to take responsibility and to take action.

3. Effective leaders begin with the end in mind.

Although taking responsibility and taking action are commendable leadership characteristics, it is equally important for leaders to direct their energy and actions toward meaningful, clearly articulated goals and objectives.

Those leaders who have a clear picture of what they seek to accomplish, have a distinct competitive advantage over those whose vision is muddled, conflicted, or inconstant. Without, clear, understandable, consistent goals, it is impossible to direct resources and effort effectively.

The clearer and more urgent the goal; the more likely the probability of success.

4. Effective leaders put first things first.

Sooner or later, every leader experiences difficulty managing their time and resources. For creative leaders, opportunities and expectations will always exceed current capabilities. In this context, effective leaders:

- a. prioritize specific activities that are most significant to their individual and organizational goals
- b. organize themselves to work effectively on their priorities
- c. discipline themselves to stick conscientiously to their priorities and organizational system

In our years of consulting, we've worked with clients who have struggled with each and all of the above elements of effective resource management. If you are struggling with time management, perhaps:

- a. you do not have clear, commonly understood priorities
- b. you are not designing job responsibilities, personal schedules, meeting agenda and budgets that support your priorities
- c. you are not executing your planned priorities and/or managing your organization to achieve your desired goals

5. Effective leaders think win-win.

Although we are conditioned from birth to compete, it is quite apparent that competition is over-rated – it costs too often outweigh its rewards.

When OPEC oil producers compete and production exceeds demand, prices fall and so do profits. When children in a family compete, one child may win, but their sibling(s) must lose (and who wants to raise children who are “losers”?)

In fact, in most competitive situations, the losers, by definition, must significantly outnumber the winners. This fact is neither good for individuals nor for organizations.

When a company rewards one staff member as an employee of the month, what impact does that have on the rest of the work force?

Who wants to “win” an argument with one's spouse or partner?

Today, businesses are beginning to appreciate the potential value and profitability of win-win partnerships. Rather than challenging suppliers to compete based solely on price, many quality companies are emphasizing sole source solutions from suppliers whose competencies offer distinctive value.

In some industries, individual businesses are sharing technology with competitors to create or preserve an agreed-upon product standard that consumers demand (cf. VCRS, CDs. Modem configuration standards) Likewise, some industries and associations are building individual business through cooperative brand based advertising (Got Milk? Beef – it's what's for dinner Pork – the other white meat) Similarly, when consumers' confidence in the quality of California wines increases, the sales volume of most California wines will increase.

While traditional business strategies focus on winning market share from one's competitors, in many current and future markets, the greatest opportunities are for leaders who maintain a significant share of a growing market.

6. Effective leaders help common people achieve uncommon things.

Great leaders have great confidence in common peoples' ability to achieve uncommon things. Because of this confidence in people's ability, great leaders challenge and help people achieve things they might not otherwise have achieved on their own.

Parents understand this aspect of leadership as they raise an infant from the uncertain but infinite possibilities at birth to the knowledge, skills, self-confidence, and achievements of adulthood.

Business leaders understand this when they challenge organizations to achieve robust performance goals that few believe are possible.

Civic leaders understand this when they elevate individual and community spirits, values, and standards.

Great leaders also understand that individuals achieve great things through association and collaboration with other people who share their vision, beliefs, and goals. They consequently strive to cultivate and strengthen communication, understanding, and collaboration among people.

7. Effective leaders learn something new each and every day.

Leaders know future problems and opportunities will not be solved or leveraged with current knowledge and skills. Since leaders, by definition, are responsible for positive change, they are likewise obliged to recognize and develop the knowledge and skills needed for future success.

This emphasis on learning and growth is especially important in our fast-changing, increasingly complex, technology-driven, global society. Likewise, effective leaders know it is crucial to encourage and reward learning among those who depend on them for direction. Such learning is especially important at times of failure. Great leaders, not surprisingly, also often have experience and learned from great failings.

C. Recommended Reading Assignment & Highlights – All selections are from Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*. (Fireside)

Habit 3: Put First Things First, Habit 4: Think Win/Win

Question 1: What one thing could you do (you aren't doing now) that if you did on a regular basis, would make a tremendous positive difference in your personal life?

Question 2: What one thing in your business or professional life would bring similar results?

Rather than focusing on things and time ,, focus on preserving and enhancing relationships and on accomplishing results.

Effective people are not problem-minded; they're opportunity-minded. They feed opportunities and starve problems. They think preventively.

The essence of effective time and life management is to organize and execute around balanced priorities ... if you were to fault yourself in one of three areas, which would it be: (1) the inability to prioritize; (2) the inability to organize around those priorities; or (3) the lack of discipline to execute around them, to stay with your priorities and organization.

You can't talk your way out of problems you behave yourself into.

Win/Win is not a technique; it's a total philosophy of human interaction. In fact, it is one of six paradigms of interaction. The alternative paradigms are Win/Lose, Lose/Win, Lose/Lose, Win, and Win/Win or No Deal

Win/Win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions. Win/Win means that agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial, mutually satisfying. With a Win/Win solution, all parties feel good about the decision and feel committed to the action plan. Win/Win sees life as a cooperative, not competitive arena ... Win/Win is based on the paradigm that there is plenty for everybody, that one person's success is not achieved at the expense or exclusion of the success of others.

D. Additional Resources and Links to Others Sources

Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, *The One Minute Manager*. (Berkeley)

Ken Blanchard, Patricia Zigarmia, Drea Zigarmi, *Leadership and the One Minute Manager*. (Morrow)

Stephen R. Covey, *Principle Centered Leadership*. (Summit)

Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First*. (Fireside)

E. Question(s) for Reflection and Discussion

1. What would your organization and/or community be like if you had never worked there? Why – be specific.