

Great Leadership Starts With Leading an Organization of One

BY GLENN GUTEK



All leadership begins with “self-leadership.” Before any leader can aspire to lead a thriving enterprise, he or she must first master leading an organization of one.

Tom and Susan are partners in the same firm and produce at a very high level. Over the past five years, Susan has not only outpaced Tom, but many of her senior partners as well. What is most surprising about Susan’s performance is that her ascent to

excellence was slow in coming, and during her initial years in the firm, Tom was very reluctant to open the doors of partnership to Susan after her lackluster performance.

Tom took a closer look at the root causes of Susan’s consistent growth. What Tom observed was that Susan had an incredible ability to do what needed to be done when it needed to be done. She seemed to respond appropriately to the right opportunities and dismiss the less relevant distractions. Tom concluded that his ascent in leadership was made possible by a hyper-reaction to random stimuli, and it had reached a level of unsustainability. Tom shared with his partners that Susan leads herself with discipline and precision.

To accomplish what needs to be done when it needs to be done, a leader engages in certain practices or disciplines to produce that result when required. Self-leadership employs intentional action in advance to ensure the right action happens when necessary.

Although some people are more naturally disciplined than others, if you struggle with self-discipline, you can create the structures that promote greater “professional will.” To help you get started, consider the following five disciplines of self-leadership. These practices will accelerate your productivity and prepare you to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.

1. Control Time

The most basic expression of self-discipline is controlling your time in such a way that you are focused on your “highest and best” use. There is a wealth of material available to assist with time management, so there is no need to reinvent the wheel. However, there are some practices you can intentionally engage in that will promote greater ability to do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done.

- **Time Blocking:** Allocate blocks of time for your most important activities;
- **Landing the Plane:** Do not allow meetings and conversations to extend beyond the appropriate time limit;
- **Time Cop:** Give your assistant or colleague some authority to assist you in executing your calendar; and
- **Power Sprints:** Protect one-hour blocks of uninterrupted time to execute your most complicated tasks requiring your complete focus.

2. Fuel Energy

Leadership is an energy-intensive endeavor. One of the primary reasons for allowing unsolved problems to be swept under the carpet is the leader’s lack of energy. It is imperative to sustain the appropriate levels of energy to intercept entropy at its earliest stages.

The disciplines most commonly associated with fueling your energy often involve diet, exercise, and sleep habits. Beyond these practices, build into your schedule opportunities to engage in things that put wind in your sails. What are the activities that energize you and ignite your curiosity and passion? Here are examples of practices that you may want to be sure your calendar allows time to proactively pursue:

- **Reading:** helps you think bigger thoughts;
- **Travel:** helps you see a bigger world; and

- **Networking:** helps you learn from other leaders and businesses.

3. Temper Emotions

So much business literature mentions the all-important aspect of passion. There is no argument that passion is essential to effective leadership. Passion is the natural reservoir of energy that propels a leader forward in the face of adversity. However, at times it is critical to practice the discipline of being dispassionate.

Being dispassionate allows a leader to protect the environment from becoming toxic and engaging in the wrong battles. Leaders should fuel their energy by investing in their passions, but keep things from running off the rails by not pouring gas on a volatile

situation. Here are a few techniques that you can practice in advance to promote appropriate dispassion:

- Ask questions,
- Define the problem,
- Spend more time on solutions, and
- Take deep breaths and consider your words carefully before speaking.

4. Focus Words

Every teenager wanting a driver’s license has most likely read a copy of the book, *The Rules of the Road*. Unfortunately, once we graduate from grade school, there are no qualifying tests to ensure we have a license



to speak. The most commonly used tool in the arsenal of leaders is their words. Far too often we lack the right words at the right time. Why wouldn't the wise leader make time to practice the discipline of focusing his or her words for the greatest amount of impact?

The discipline of crafting or outlining scripts for crucial situations will assist in making sure the words that flow from your mouth articulate precisely what you want to convey. The following are various types of scripts that a leader might encounter. Rehearsing your words in advance is a wonderful exercise in self-leadership.

- A brief rundown (or "elevator pitch") of the mission of your organization and your vision for its future,
- A series of statements that defuse hostility and allows people to work through a problem, or
- An outline that identifies an employee's problem behavior and steps for improvement.

5. Use Power

The fifth important discipline that must be an ongoing practice for leaders is *disciplining your power*, particularly as it relates to knowing where your source of authority comes from. Are you building your power base from the positional role in the organization or your credibility with the people you lead?

As the industrial revolution comes to a close and we give birth to the "personal age," it is becoming clear that the authority of a leader rests in the relationships they form with the people they lead. The risk most often encountered when influencing people where there is a personal relationship is not maintaining the authority to exercise your power. One practice that can assist in maintaining your authority is identifying those with whom you need to come out from behind the desk, and those with whom you must stay behind the desk.



- **Out from behind the desk:** Individuals with whom a personal relationship comes easily because they possess the maturity to understand your authority.
- **Stay behind the desk:** Individuals that need you to maintain your position of authority when relating to them and who may confuse the boundaries of a personal relationship.

All leadership begins with self-leadership. Practice the disciplines in each of the five areas of self-leadership and you will find you possess an uncanny ability to do what needs to be done, when it needs to be done.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GLENN GUTEK is a speaker and CEO of Awake Consulting & Coaching, a firm that helps small businesses and organizations improve their leadership and business development through training, development, and coaching. He is also the author of *Wide-Awake Leadership*, which teaches leaders how to overcome mediocrity through effective leadership. For more information on speaking and consulting, visit www.awakeconsulting.com or contact Glenn at glenn@awakeconsulting.com or 407-901-4357.
