
Positive Effect Leadership™

Lead Yourself First

**53 (Two-Minute)
Leadership
Challenges**

with

Kathy Stoddard Torrey



53

(Two-Minute)

Leadership Challenges

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Welcome to 53 (Two-Minute) Leadership Challenges!

I am so happy that you decided to join me in improving your leadership skills by spending two minutes each week learning a new concept or skill. We will learn some life-changing skills and have some fun!

Leadership is all about creating positive relationships so you will learn communication techniques that will improve your relationships at work and at home. We will also talk about specific relationship management techniques like conflict resolution, motivation theory, and how to lead change.

Why 53 weeks of 2-minute challenges? It's easier to learn and change in small increments. Over the years, I've learned that sustained behavior change – professional and personal development – happens best

in small, intentional steps over a longer period of time.

This series is for people who believe in personal growth, improvement, success, and going the extra mile. You can transform your life by investing two minutes each week in yourself for one year. We are going one week beyond a year to have an extra week to celebrate our accomplishments!

Each email will end with a challenge which is an opportunity to apply the knowledge you learned in the email. Focused practice of a new skill is essential to incorporating it into your life and seeing real change in yourself.

The emails will arrive on Monday so that you have the week to try out the new perspective or behavior. You can share your experiences with 53 Leadership Challenges on social media by posting with [#53LeadershipChallenge](#). We can all inspire and learn from each other. I look forward to hearing about your adventures!

Warmly,

Kathy



Week 1

Question everything!

We start by questioning everything. It's dangerous for leaders to accept assumptions as fact. Heck! We miss a lot if we don't question things presented as absolute truth.

I realized that even conventional wisdom deserves to be questioned back in 1988 when my first child was born in Germany. American baby books insisted that submerging a baby in water before the umbilical cord came off could cause grave health effects. However, the German nurse dunked my son in a tub of water the day after he was born. I gasped! The German nurse gasped when I told her that Americans use alcohol on the umbilical cord.

Hmmmm. Two countries full of people with normal belly buttons – each insisting that their way was the only right way! Now, when someone tells me that something “has” to be done a

certain way, I cock an eyebrow and say, “Are you sure?”

Great leaders are creative thinkers! They don't get stuck in thinking ruts walked by millions of others. They try to see everything from fresh perspectives. “Because it's always been done this way” is a sure cue that it's time to look around for other ideas and so is “That can't be done.”

CHALLENGE: Look at your life at work and at home through a new lens. What assumptions are you making about people and situations? Get out there and question everything! It's the perspective of great leaders!

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Week 2

The Power of Choice

You know, it's so easy to feel stuck – like we don't have a choice. We walk around saying that we “have” to do things.

It's time to break free of the “have to” perspective because you do have a choice! This life-changing freedom only requires a shift in your thinking.

Think for a minute of all the things that you have to do. Now, take that list that begins with “I have to” and change the beginning to “I choose to.” Does it still make sense? If you said that you have to eat or sleep, you are right! However, most of the things that we believe that we “have” to do are choices.

I don't have to water the plants! I choose to water the plants because I like having them around. I even choose to do taxes because I don't like the risk involved around going to jail. Most of

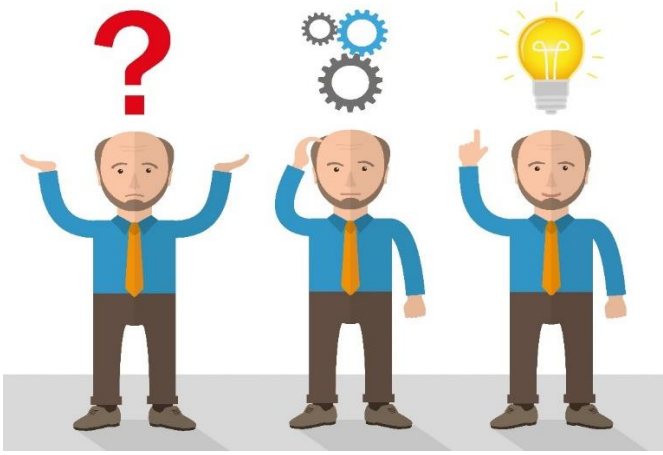
things that we do are choices. So, what's the difference?

We take control of our lives when we realize that we choose our actions. We move from a victim mentality to a more powerful perspective of having control of our lives.

Take charge of your future by choosing actions that move you toward your goals. Leaders aren't victims! Great leaders create their future by their intentional choices in the present.

CHALLENGE: Whenever you think “I have to,” think again about the power of choice. Choose a new action or choose a new attitude, but choose – and move forward intentionally.

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Week 3

Ask more than tell.

Most great leaders have a lot of experience and knowledge. They have figured out the best way to do certain things, and they want to share that information with others because they want to help them. Those are good intentions, but not great leadership.

Our goal is to help other people to become great leaders, too. We don't accomplish that by telling everyone how to do everything. They need to develop problem solving abilities, try out solutions, and learn how to adjust when things don't go as planned. Our job is to make that process as painless as possible.

We help by asking questions. Instead of immediately launching into a lecture about the right way to do a task, we want to ask some questions that will guide the person through some analysis. We can ask things like:

- What do you see as the biggest challenge?
- Have you ever faced anything like this before?
- What would be the ideal outcome?
- What do you think is the best way to proceed?
- What other factors do we need to take into account?

As much as possible, we want to let people do things their way! It creates a sense of ownership and the learning is much greater than if they are just following steps that we outline.

CHALLENGE: Before you send any solutions, ask three questions. You can't make any suggestions or give any examples of success until you have asked three questions. It's good to practice this with personal relationships as well. One client transformed his relationship with his family by using this simple exercise.

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Week 4

Four Stages of Group Development

When leading a group, it's useful to know the four stages of group development: Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing. When a group first comes together, they are in the Forming stage. It's a very polite stage when people are beginning to get comfortable with each other.

Storming is the next stage and it can be a little rough, but it's necessary. When Storming, the group is testing boundaries and figuring out how each person reacts in certain situations. They are also testing your leadership abilities and authority. It's essential to set clear boundaries during this phase and ensure that all conversations, even disagreements, are done in a professional manner. If a group has a terrible experience in the Storming phase, then they will move back to a

super polite Forming stage forever and not be an effective team. It's important for you to create a safe space for conversations and to model respectful behavior for the group.

If the group determines that they can trust one another to be professional and reliable, then they will move to Norming. The group is working together effectively and beginning to put group goals and professionalism above personal considerations in the Norming stage.

Ideally, the group ends up in the Performing stage. At this point, they are a well-oiled machine that accomplishes tasks and goals with ease. The Performing stage is comfortable and fun. The only danger is that if change needs to happen, then the group will resist because they like the way things are!

The group doesn't go through the stages one time. They start over each time there is a change in personnel or procedure. They will usually move quickly back to the stage that they were in before the change.

CHALLENGE: Look at your team or group at work. Which stage do you think your group is in? It's not unusual for a group to go back and forth between two stages. What can you do to help your group move to the Performing stage?

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Week 5

Noticing the Good

Human beings are hardwired to notice and remember the negative things that happen in life. However, we are not doomed to dwell on the less than desirable events of life. We can choose intentionally to change our focus.

As leaders, we want to develop positive relationships. In order to do that, we have to maintain a positivity ratio of at least 5:1. In other words, we must have about five positive interactions with a person for every negative interaction that we have.

In order to maintain a 5:1 ratio, we need to be noticing and commenting on what is going right all the time! It can be a challenge because leaders are trained to look for and comment on problems. However, research on motivation tells us that commenting

positively and showing appreciation for a job well done is very effective.

When I first began my quest to create positive relationships, I noticed that I wasn't regularly saying even one nice thing to my family members in a day. I began to intentionally make one positive comment about something that each family member was doing or a quality they had that I admired.

At first, they were suspicious. They wondered, "What is Mom up to?" I kept doing it, and after a while, they began saying positive things to me and each other. The entire family dynamic improved.

CHALLENGE: Begin to notice what is going right both at work and at home. If you see someone doing something that you would like to see them do again, comment on it positively. Show gratitude for effort and action. You will be astounded at the results.

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Week 6

Listening Fully

The ability to be completely present with another person during a conversation is a powerful skill and a hallmark of great leaders. The goal of an outstanding leader is to create positive relationships with people. One of the ways to build positivity is to meet people's needs to be listened to, understood, and respected.

In coaching, we talk about Listening Levels I, II, and III. At Listening Level I, I'm not really listening to you much at all. I'm thinking about what I want to say as soon as you stop talking and what I need to do after we finish our chat. At Listening Level II, I am listening, but not catching all of the meaning.

However, at Listening Level III I am fully present and listening for understanding. I am paying attention to your words, your tone of voice, your facial expressions and your body

language. I am curious about everything, and I ask a lot of questions. Listening Level III is our goal!

Giving focused attention to someone is a gift. We don't often feel like we are in the spotlight of someone's attention, even though we like being seen and heard.

CHALLENGE: Being fully present and listening for understanding is a skill, and you don't get better unless you practice. Take time to take part in conversations fully. Pay attention to both verbal and nonverbal communications. If you don't have time right then, ask to reschedule the conversation to a time when you can be fully present.

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Week 7

Is that a fact?

There are different kinds of disagreements. We can disagree on values, which often leads to agreeing to disagree.

Sometimes, we disagree about goals. We can come to an agreement, but it can be a lengthy, in-depth process because it often involves a discussion of priorities and strategy.

We can agree on the goal, but not the process to achieve the goal. If we are willing to give up some control, then this type of disagreement can be relatively easy to resolve.

However, the easiest type of conflict to resolve is one based on fact. The challenge is that we often carry on as if what we are discussing is opinion. In any disagreement, a good question to ask is “Is that a fact?”

For example, once I asked my son to take the new registration and put it in his car. He insisted that he had a current registration in his car. Rather

than arguing with him about it, I said, “Ok, let’s go look at it and see.”

It’s important when using this technique to avoid a sarcastic tone of voice. Hear that statement said in a pleasant and neutral tone of voice.

If you are proved correct, it’s best not to make any sort of “I told you so” comment or do a victory dance. As leaders, we are always working to create and maintain positive relationships, and so we want to be right and wrong with some grace.

CHALLENGE: When you find yourself in a disagreement, ask yourself, “Is that a fact?” Can the point of contention be proved in some way? If it can, offer to research the point. Often, the other person loses interest when the argument becomes about fact rather than persuasion.

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Week 8

Cancel that order!

My mom was a worrier. She worried about money, her kindergarten students, and anyone driving. For a long time, I was a worrier, too.

My husband flew helicopters in the Army. In the beginning, I worried about him. “He is going to crash” was a common thought. By the time I finally heard from him after a flight, I was exhausted.

Then I realized a couple of things. First, worrying about what may or may not happen is a huge emotional energy drain. Second, my worrying did not improve anyone’s chances of success or survival.

Worrying and negative self-talk are habits just like any other habit. We can change them with some effort. I designed a mental game to help me change my worrying ways. I pretended

that every thought was a request for something that I wanted. When I thought about something, I was placing an order for it.

When I thought, “He is going to crash,” I was placing an order for that to happen. Immediately, I would think or say out loud, “Cancel that order!” Then, I would replace the “order” with a new one: “He is going to have an uneventful and enjoyable flight.”

The fancy, technical term is cognitive restructuring. We are intentionally changing the way we think. It’s very powerful. Great leaders are in control of their thoughts.

CHALLENGE: Pay attention to your thoughts. Anytime you hear yourself worrying or participating is negative self-talk, cancel that order! If you walk to the closet thinking, “I don’t look good in any of my pants,” cancel that order! Replace it with what you do want. “I look good in anything I put on.” Creating a positive internal dialogue, makes life way less stressful and way more enjoyable.

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Week 9

Three Types of Communication

Back in 1972, Professor Albert Mehrabian said that our message is 7% words, 38% voice, and 54% body language. The only important thing to remember here is that our nonverbal communication has a huge influence on our message.

Nonverbal communication is facial expression, tone of voice, and body language. If I say, “I am so glad to be here,” in a sarcastic tone while rolling my eyes and looking at my watch, you won’t believe my words. That’s so interesting! If the nonverbal and verbal messages are not in alignment, then we go with the nonverbal message! Our words have no meaning when the nonverbal message contradicts it!

As leaders, of course, we need to be careful with the words that we use. However, we also need to pay close attention to our nonverbal message. Crossed arms and stern looks can make us appear judgmental. If we deliver bad news while smiling, we

send a very confusing message. It’s important that we intentionally align our verbal and nonverbal messages.

There is a third type of communication besides verbal and nonverbal; it is symbolic. We do a lot of communicating symbolically with our clothes, jewelry, shoes, hairstyle, car, backpack, water bottle, fingernails, and even our homes. We are telling the world something about ourselves with every symbolic choice that we make.

For leaders, it’s important that our symbolic message is intentional and appropriate. We cannot ignore the fact that we tell people about our commitment to a job with our clothes. If I show up to work in wrinkled clothes and hair that looks like I just tumbled out of bed, then I am sending the message that I’m not professional and don’t take my job seriously. That message might not be entirely true, but it’s still the message that I’m sending.

CHALLENGE: Pay attention to the three types of communication. Be sure that your words and nonverbal cues are in alignment. What do people wear at your workplace? What does your boss wear? Great leaders dress appropriately for the situation. It’s also a good idea to pay attention to how your things (i.e., clothes, jewelry, bags) make you feel. You even send symbolic messages to yourself.

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Week 10

Give it a shot!

Over the years, I've tried a lot of different hobbies. I'm looking for a creative outlet. I started with crocheting in high school. I made a hot pink and purple afghan. Then, I went on to needlepoint. I have some lovely shells hanging in one of the bathrooms that I finished in the 80's. I failed at knitting. The sweater vest that I made wouldn't fit over my head. I had the year of baskets in the 90's. I've tried drawing, but I still haven't found my thing.

However, that doesn't keep me from continuing to try new things. I will never find the thing I love doing if I don't keep experimenting. The battle cry is "Give it a shot!" If you don't like it, it's not a failure. You just don't like it!

A friend called to tell me that a man was showing interest in her. He was recently out of another relationship, and she didn't feel he was over it. She decided to give the relationship a shot, knowing that it might not work out. In

the end, it didn't and she was disappointed, but not regretful over a missed opportunity. When we give something a chance, there is always the possibility that it won't work out, but that's OK. There is always the possibility that it will.

Great leaders are bold, and they often live by the maxim "Give it a shot!" "It" could be a new process or procedure. "It" could be a new job position or entering a new target market. Of course, great leaders do research, but it's hard to know with 100% accuracy what will work. Sometimes, you just have to give it a shot.

The key to trying new things is jumping in whole-heartedly - whether it's knitting, an advertising campaign, or a relationship. It's only a failure if you didn't give it your all. Failure for lack of trying and commitment is failure. Otherwise, it's just a learning experience.

CHALLENGE: What new thing can you try out? Maybe it's a new look or a new way to prepare chicken! Perhaps a more authoritative way to communicate might be worth a try. You might love painting! Look around in your heart for something that sounds interesting or compelling, and give it a shot! It's great practice for the bigger leadership opportunities that are sure to come your way.

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Week 11

Loving Kindness Meditation

This is a series about leadership, so why would I talk about meditation? Research shows that this specific type of meditation, Loving Kindness Meditation, increases positivity – which is an important foundation for the lives of leaders. A positive attitude motivates others and increases workplace morale.

Here are some more benefits of an increase in positivity: increased resiliency, increased satisfaction with life, less inflammation in your body, increased broad-mindedness, increased immunity to viruses, better ability to connect with others, less depression, and better focus. Wow! That's quite a list! What leader doesn't want all that?

Loving Kindness Meditation also increases our empathy for others as well as our feelings of friendliness and compassion. There are no right or wrong ways to do it, but there are guidelines. You can search online and find all types of Loving Kindness Meditations. You create statements to

use in the meditation that have the most power and meaning for you.

Basically, during the Loving Kindness Meditation, you say three or four phrases to yourself first. The most important thing is to create and hold onto feelings of friendliness, joy, compassion, and expansiveness as you say the phrases. Here is an example:

- May I be filled with loving kindness.
- May I be well in body and mind.
- May I be at ease and happy.

Then, you will say the same phrases while thinking of someone with whom you feel close. You would think, “May you be filled with loving kindness.” It's important to hold onto the positive feeling while thinking each phrase. Then, move on to someone you feel neutral about, someone you don't really care for, and finally everyone in the world. Use the same three to four phrases each time.

CHALLENGE: This practice can be a game changer in your life. You can see results if you practice for 10 minutes about five or six times a week. Who wants more resiliency when facing challenges and more satisfaction with life? I do! I do! The challenge is to incorporate Loving Kindness Meditation into your life for eight weeks. By then, you should see results that will motivate you to use the meditation for the rest of your life.

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Week 12

How are you looking through your spyglass?

We all look at life through our own spyglass. It's important to use our spyglass to help us keep a broad perspective on the events going on in our lives. When things are scary or overwhelming, we have a tendency to flip the spyglass around and look into the big end. Try it with a real spyglass sometime! You will see only a small circle of whatever you are looking at in that moment. It seems as though that one small piece of the world is actually the entire world.

Let's say that I didn't get a job or promotion that I wanted. As a result, I focus completely on that one small piece of life. I'm looking into the big end of the spyglass and I'm only seeing that "failure." If I flip my spyglass around and look at the broader picture of my life, I can see that not getting the job or promotion is just one small piece of my current

situation. I'm free now to take on a better job that could be right around the corner. I have the opportunity to evaluate why I wasn't the best fit for the job, and I can set new goals. I can also see all the times that I've been a success in my life! This disappointment isn't a pattern; it's just a learning experience.

We see more possibilities and put things in a better perspective when we look into the small end of our spyglass, and see the big picture. Great leaders are adept at catching themselves when they are only seeing a small piece of a situation, and then broadening their perspective to see the big picture.

CHALLENGE: In which end of your spyglass are you looking? If things feel hopeless and you don't see many options, chances are that you are looking into the big end and only seeing a fraction of what is going on in your life. Flip that spyglass around! Although a current circumstance can feel huge and overwhelming, it isn't a complete picture of your life or who you are.

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Week 13

How do I seem to you?

One of the challenges to becoming an extraordinary leader is getting an accurate picture of how we are perceived by others. We believe that we project a certain image, but people's perceptions of us can be quite different.

For example, I might believe that I am a confident and knowledgeable person. However, most people may perceive me as being an arrogant know-it-all. The difference between my intent and others' perceptions might not be as drastic as this example, but they are rarely the same.

We can discover how we are seen by others, but it takes some courage and an open mind. We must pay attention to the reactions that we get from other people and the things that they say about us.

One time, a friend sent me a video of an artist demonstrating how to make decorative Christmas trees. She said

that the artist reminded her of me. I watched the video and only saw a mild similarity, so I started to dismiss the whole thing from my mind. Then, I decided to get curious. What did she see in the video that I was not seeing?

I wrote back that the artist did seem to talk in the same rambling and chatty way that I do sometimes. My friend came back and said, "Yes, and she's tall like you." I am almost six feet tall, and I forget that my height is a huge part of who I am to the rest of the world.

What I do with that information is up to me. I can play up my height and wear heels to seem more powerful, soften my communication style to compensate, or just be aware that I can seem a little intimidating at first just because of my height.

CHALLENGE: Watch out for clues from other people that will tell you how they perceive you. People tell me all the time in a very sarcastic tone, "Why don't you tell us what you really think?" That lets me know that I'm seen as a person with definite opinions who shares them freely. Is that good or bad? I get to decide! The information you gather about yourself is just more information about you. You totally get to decide whether you want to do anything differently or just be more aware.

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Week 14

Finish strong.

One important life and leadership quality is the ability to see a job through to the end. It's difficult, and it takes some self-discipline. For example, when we finish a project in the house, we want to be done and move on. We don't want to clean up the area and put all the tools away. However, it's important that we develop the self-discipline to see every task or goal to its completion.

Leaders are finishers. In fact, leaders finish strong. One of the key pieces to finishing strong is starting tasks that are worthwhile and in alignment with your short- and long-term goals. One of my goals is to maintain an organized home and work environment which means I focus on putting away files and keeping things in their places. For work, I have a marketing schedule, a weekly blog, coaching clients, and classes. Each area requires a set of tasks, and the tasks must be completed for the actions to have an impact.

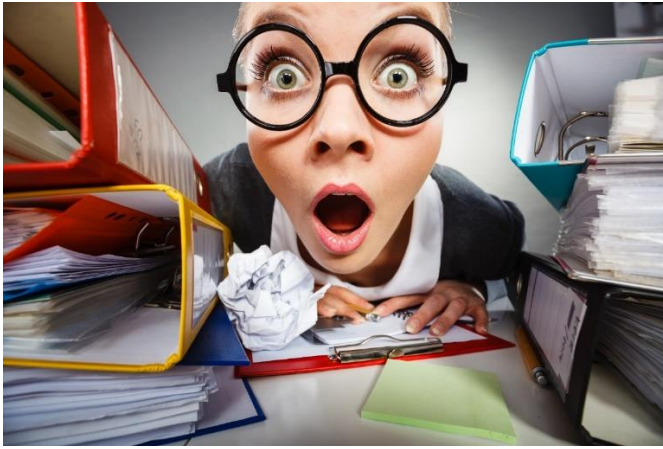
A lot of worthwhile activities are not that much fun. Scheduling social media posts is not my favorite thing to do, but it leads to more clients and more coaching, which I love. I keep the end goal in mind while I'm working.

Self-discipline is like a muscle. The more you use it, the stronger it gets. It's hard in the beginning to see a project through to the very end. However, the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Employers and employees value your ability to finish strong. Family members are also fans of project follow-through. The ability to finish strong can have an enormously positive effect on your life.

CHALLENGE: A good practice for finishing strong is doing the laundry from beginning to end. We all end up with loads of laundry hanging out in the dryer or piled on a flat surface. Make the commitment to move the laundry from washer to the dryer quickly, and then get the clothes out when they are dry. The hard part is folding them and putting them away – right away! By completing the laundry and not spending a lot of emotional energy on resisting the work, we are building our self-discipline and confidence!

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Week 15

Every situation has a fact and a feeling part.

It's important to know that every message has a fact and a feeling part. One must identify both parts in order to deal with a conflict effectively or to communicate clearly. I learned this lesson late in life, and it would have saved me some time and trouble if I'd known about it sooner.

For 20 years, I led volunteers as an Army spouse. In one group that met monthly, there was one young woman who always sat at my right hand and objected to everything that the group proposed. She objected on a factual level – logistics, budget, convenience. She slowed us down every single month.

If I'd been more savvy, I would have figured out that it wasn't the facts that she objected to. I had a vague notion that she was unhappy or resentful, but I had no idea why. There was a feeling

that I wasn't dealing with at that time. If I'd asked and listened, I could have saved us a lot of time arguing over facts for no good reason.

CHALLENGE: Practice identifying the fact and feeling parts of situations. Is your pre-teen refusing to wash dishes? If so, then ask how he or she feels about washing the dishes. If a coworker consistently objects to following a procedure, find out why. Don't accept factual responses. What feelings does he or she have about the procedure? The answers are usually surprising – something that you wouldn't have guessed. The only way to identify the feeling part of a situation is to ask!

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Week 16

Feedback is a gift.

It is common to feel defensive when we get feedback about our performance or decisions. Once when I was listening to a presentation, I pointed out that it was sexist to include a picture of a company founder with a Victoria Secret model when talking about a company's achievements. The person giving the presentation got flustered and defensive. He responded with a comment about wanting to include interesting factoids.

Feedback is a gift. Someone is broadening your perspective and giving you something to think about. It is important to say thank you even if you don't agree with what the person is saying. We want to encourage dialogue!

The presenter could have responded to my observation this way: "Thank you for pointing that out. I can see how it could be viewed as sexist." He didn't

have to agree with me, he could've just acknowledge that my view was valid and thanked me for speaking up. In that way, he would have encouraged others to share their views.

CHALLENGE: Say "Thank you!" in response to every bit of feedback that you receive. Feedback is a gift! People make themselves vulnerable when they give it. It's important to validate their views and show gratitude that they took the time to share a different perspective. Yes, some people are mean when they give feedback – sometimes aggressive. It doesn't matter. It's still a gift. Thanking them for sharing their perspective is a great way to diffuse a tense situation and start a dialogue. So, thank Uncle Seibert for the input on your life choices and move on.

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Week 17

Find the Bright Spots.

“Finding the Bright Spots” is one of my favorite concepts, and it comes from the book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* by Dan and Chip Heath. In one chapter, the authors tell the story of a young man charged with reducing the number of malnourished children in Vietnam. The young man had little money and no power to deal with things like poor sanitation and poverty. Instead, he looked for the Bright Spots; he looked for children who weren’t malnourished.

He found some! Those children’s mothers served the children’s daily allotment of rice in smaller portions. They also added a bit of protein by seining for brine shrimp in the rice paddies. Finally, they included the leaves of sweet potatoes in their children’s diet. These were easy things

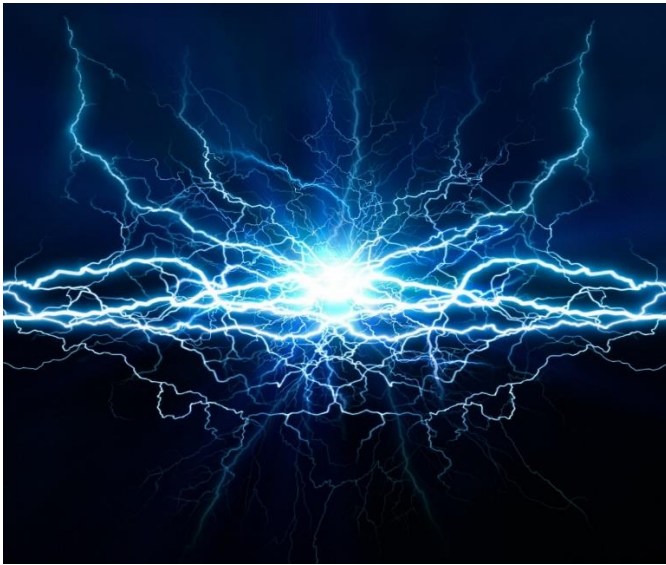
that most parents could do. He then had the moms teach each other these techniques. At the end of six months, 65% of the children were better nourished.

We don’t need to start from scratch very often to solve a problem. Most of the time, someone has already solved it for us. Is one team having a problem keeping up with reporting requirements? Find the team that isn’t struggling, and see how they do it. Are you having trouble motivating your employees? Locate someone who has an enthusiastic team, and find out why.

Bright Spots are proven methods – no experimentation needed. We know that they work and that they can be done.

CHALLENGE: If you are faced with a challenge, look for someone who has already overcome that challenge. If you think about it, hunting for a recipe online is looking for a Bright Spot! Someone else has already figured out how to cook spaghetti squash, and you benefit from his or her experience. Parenting, communication, conflict, and motivating others have all been figured out by someone else. Heck! There are YouTube videos that will show you how to put on tights and trim your beard, although not at the same time. Even if the Bright Spot isn’t exactly what you need, it gives you a good place to start.

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Week 18

You don't have to charge it.

Here is how our thought process works:

Event > Appraisal > Urge to Act > Action

First, we think about an event that is happening or that could happen. Then, we appraise that situation or event by deciding if it's good, bad, exhilarating, scary, or calming. Once we appraise the event and attach an emotion to it, we have an urge to act. If we are angry, we might want to yell. If we are sad, we might want to cry. The emotion and the urge to act are closely tied and happen very quickly. Sometimes, the action follows before we stop to consider the consequences.

The event is just an event. It isn't inherently good or bad. For example, public speaking isn't inherently scary

or fun, but people attach those emotions to it. Isn't it fascinating that one event can be appraised so differently? It's important to remember that public speaking is just talking in front of people and the emotional charge is something we add to it.

We can get rid of a lot of stress if we can neutralize the emotional charge that we attach to things. For example, let's say someone pulls out in front of me on the highway. It's just an event – not good or bad. I get to appraise that event. I can get angry at the person's carelessness or I can accept the fact that we all pull out in front of someone sometimes. It's just a part of driving.

I get to decide whether or not to charge the event by attaching a strong negative emotion to it. Stress isn't caused by an event; stress is caused by our reaction to an event.

CHALLENGE: What situations, events, or people are you charging with a strong negative emotion? Do you need to? Is that emotional charge helping or hurting? Sometimes all it takes to get rid of an emotional charge is to notice that we are feeling a strong negative emotion, name that emotion, observe where we feel it in our bodies, and then take a deep breath. Observing ourselves re-engages our neocortex and gives us a chance to respond intentionally.

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Week 19

Intentional Change Theory

A professor named Richard Boyatzis studies leadership and personal growth. He came up with a model for the best way for us to improve ourselves. It's called the Intentional Change Model, and here are the steps:

1. What does your ideal self look like? What skills does your ideal self have? In what areas is your ideal self an expert?

2. Take a hard look at your real self right now. How are your ideal self and real self similar? Those are your strengths. Gaps are where your real and ideal self are different.

3. Create a learning agenda that builds on your strengths and reduces the gaps.

4. Try new behaviors, thoughts, and feelings in alignment with your learning agenda. If one thing doesn't work, then try another!

The final point that Boyatzis stresses is the importance of having a person to journey with you through your

intentional change. He says that trusting relationships enable us to experience and process each new personal discovery better.

Personal growth is a challenge. It takes analysis and hard work. As Boyatzis says, "People change in desired ways, but not without intentional efforts."

CHALLENGE: Take some time to think about who you want to become. What can your ideal self do? How does your ideal self behave? What thought patterns or perspective does your ideal self have? My ideal self is a little more fit and financially more secure than my real self. Those are my gaps. My ideal self and real self are both confident and motivated. Those are my strengths.

Once we've identified our strengths and gaps, we want to create a plan! My plan would include more exercise and actions that will create more financial security. As part of my plan, I get to try different things to accomplish those goals. You get to experiment, too! It's fun to try new behaviors and thought patterns.

We all want to be sure that we have a trusted friend or coach to help us process the journey and increase our awareness.

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Rationalization:

YOU convincing
YOURSELF to go against
YOUR OWN values.

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Week 20

Rationalization alert!

One of the best quotes that I have ever come up with is “Rationalization is bad judgment’s best friend.”

In workshops, I have participants list the two or three qualities that they want to be known for. Many people say they want to be known as honest and trustworthy. Then I have them share with a partner how they demonstrate those values daily in their lives.

Then, I ask them to share a time that they didn’t live in alignment with those values. We are human, and most of us have a small example of when we haven’t acted exactly in accordance with our values.

What’s interesting is that very few people just tell the story of what happened. Most people feel compelled to explain the circumstances of that particular situation. I hear a lot of “I

had to because...” when I listen in on the conversations. They are explaining their rationale for going against their own values. Wow!

If you find yourself creating reasons and excuses that make a behavior OK, you are using rationalization to make a bad judgment call acceptable.

CHALLENGE: If you hear yourself making up excuses and reasons for doing something, then you are trying to rationalize actions that are in violation of your own values. Any rationalization is warning! Stop and figure out which of your values you are in danger of violating. Is it really a good idea to go against that value? It might be, but it’s important to make a conscious choice.

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Week 21

Conquer busyness.

Most of us are very busy, and yet we don't make progress on important goals. We get caught up in the busyness of life. It's time to take control of our time and use it to accomplish things that have meaning for us!

Let's start by writing down a couple of long- and short-term goals. Maybe you want to learn how to paint or perhaps you want to run a 5K? Do you want to change careers or move? Reading one book related to your career field each month is an excellent professional goal. Sit for a second and dream about an area of your life that you want to change.

Now look at your to do list and think about how you spend your time. Do any of your actions support the goals that you listed? Chances are that your answer is no.

We can change that, but it takes some intentional choices. If you are saying yes to one thing, then you are saying no to everything else you that could do with that time. The first step is to figure out what you can stop doing in order to make room for what you want to do.

Then, block chunks of time on your calendar for actions that will move you toward your goals. Be ruthless in protecting that scheduled time! You can spend as little as 15 minutes a day on your goal. Even small amounts of time add up. In a year, you will be closer to your goal than you would be if you had done nothing.

It feels good to accomplish goals that resonate with your heart. Doing those things gives you more resilience to face day-to-day busyness.

CHALLENGE: Most of us allow daily actions of life to get in the way of achieving our hearts' desires. What is your dream? What action are you going to take every day in order to make that dream come true?

Remember, it can be a very small action that only takes 15 minutes. The key is to make it a priority and do it!

We all deserve to achieve our dreams.

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Week 22

#100HappyDays

We tend to notice, focus on, and remember the negative things in life more than the positive things. Studies show that our brains are hard-wired to give negative events more emphasis.

However, that does not mean that we are doomed to a life of negativity. We can retrain our brains. One way is through a practice called the 100 Happy Day Challenge.

For 100 days, you take a picture of something that represents a positive moment, and you post it on social media with #100HappyDays. It's a great way to begin searching for and noticing the positive moments in your life each day.

I have completed the challenge three times. I try to do it once a year. If you want to officially join the challenge and follow some rules, go to 100HappyDays.com.

The first thing I noticed on the 100 Happy Days website was the requirement for “100 *consecutive* days.” Feel free to ignore the “consecutive” constraint. Don't stop if you miss a day! Keep going! We all have overwhelming days. Sometimes I forget to take a picture! It takes me more than 100 days to complete the 100 Happy Days Challenge. What's important is that we create a new way of looking at the world around us.

The exercise helps us learn to notice, focus on, and remember the positive things in our daily lives. As a result, we become more positive people.

Great leaders are positive, and we want to be around them and follow them because of it.

CHALLENGE: Are you ready for the 100 Happy Day Challenge? You can change your outlook on life for the better by making the effort each day to search for and share one positive moment.

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Week 23

Positional Authority vs. Personal Influence

When in a leadership position, we have a certain amount of authority. It can include hiring, firing, and providing performance feedback. In essence, if someone doesn't do what we say, we can reprimand and fire them. When we lead using positional authority we use negative, fear-based motivation.

It's better to lead with personal influence. We create personal influence by creating positive relationships. We can create positive relationships by:

- maintaining a least a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions
- building trust by being reliable and predictable
- being fair
- listening for understanding
- treating people with respect and kindness

The goal is to have people follow us and do what we ask when we aren't in the room watching over them. We can only get that level of dedication by creating and using personal influence.

Creating and using personal influence does not mean that we don't set standards and hold people accountable. It means we help people create success by firmly, but kindly, ensuring that they are meeting acceptable standards.

P.S. This concept applies to parenting as well! As children grow older and more independent, it's important to develop personal influence by using the actions listed above.

CHALLENGE: The road to creating personal influence is a long one. It requires consistent behavior and a real desire to help others be successful. We've already discussed listening fully, noticing and commenting on positive things, and using Loving Kindness Meditation to increase empathy for others. By putting all those things to use in daily life, you are creating personal influence.

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Week 24

Define your intention.

At the beginning of the year, there is a lot of discussion about using intentions rather than resolutions. I believe that we can use resolutions (i.e., things to do like “exercise three times a week”), goals (e.g., run a 5K), and intentions together to help us move toward success in our lives.

Intentions are powerful because they are the ruler by which we judge what is good or bad for us to do at a certain moment in time. For example, I had become a bit of a hermit at one point in my life. I decided to change that behavior, and my intention for the year was to engage more. I ordered a simple bracelet on Etsy and had it engraved with “Engage!”

Each time an opportunity or challenge arose, I would ask myself, “Is this going to make me more engaged with my community or less engaged?”

Using my intention helped me stay on track and keep my decisions consistent.

This year, my intention is to lead a healthier life, both physically and emotionally. I like short reminders that I can post on sticky notes. So, the short version is “Create abundant health.” The question I ask myself about each new decision is “Will this create more physical and/or emotional health or less?”

Your intention reflects your priorities and goals at a particular moment in time. You can pick an intention for the year or the quarter. An intention is designed to serve you, and you can change it at any time!

CHALLENGE: Think about some of the things that you want to achieve in the next year. Now, create an intention that will help you make decisions that will support your goals. For example, if you want to earn a promotion in the next year or so, then you might make your intention “Be a better boss.” Then each time you are faced with an interaction or decision, ask yourself, “Would this choice or behavior make me a better boss or a worse boss?” A clear intention helps you stay on track to achieve your goals.

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Week 25

Feel into it.

Great leaders have a high level of Emotional Intelligence, which means that they can control their reactions to emotions. In the past, I thought that it also meant that great leaders are masters of their emotions. In fact, it actually means that they are friends with their emotions. Great leaders can recognize the emotion that they are experiencing, embrace that emotion, and understand it.

The first step in incorporating our emotions into our lives is to label them. Many of us have trouble accurately naming the emotion that we are feeling. We tend to go with the big ones like anger, sadness, and happiness. There are, in fact, many nuances of those main categories. Instead of happy, I might be content, satisfied, or giddy.

Next, we want to embrace our emotions. They occur, and we can't

stop them. Instead of spending emotional energy to fight them or stuff them, it's easier to just accept them. We all feel a wide range of emotions.

Lastly, we can gain some good self-knowledge by examining what caused the feeling. What caused us to feel that way? If an action or event creates a light emotion, it's something that we like! Dark emotions are often triggered by things that violate our values or make our egos feel small. It's valuable to know what triggers dark emotions in us.

CHALLENGE: The next time that you feel an emotion, take a moment to examine it. Decide exactly what emotion it is. Sometimes, it's helpful to look at a list. If you search for "list of human emotions" online, you will find several lists to choose from. Next, accept the emotion. Don't label it as "good" or "bad." Accept it as a natural part of being human. Finally, think about what caused the emotion. Did something violate a value? Bruise your ego? Warm your heart? Being aware of the emotions that we are feeling is one part of Self-Awareness which is the foundation for Emotional Intelligence and success in life.

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Week 26

Designed Alliance

People work together in groups better when they establish a clear set of behavior guidelines. In systems coaching, we call the guidelines a Designed Alliance. It's an agreement between all group members about how they want to interact and solve problems. A Designed Alliance can help a group consciously create the culture that they want.

Ground rules created by the leader of the group that are then handed down as mandates are not that effective. The group has not explicitly agreed to abide by the rules. Also, it is then the leader's responsibility to enforce the rules. The group has little buy-in around rules that they didn't have a part in creating.

It's more effective for the group to design an alliance together. The group

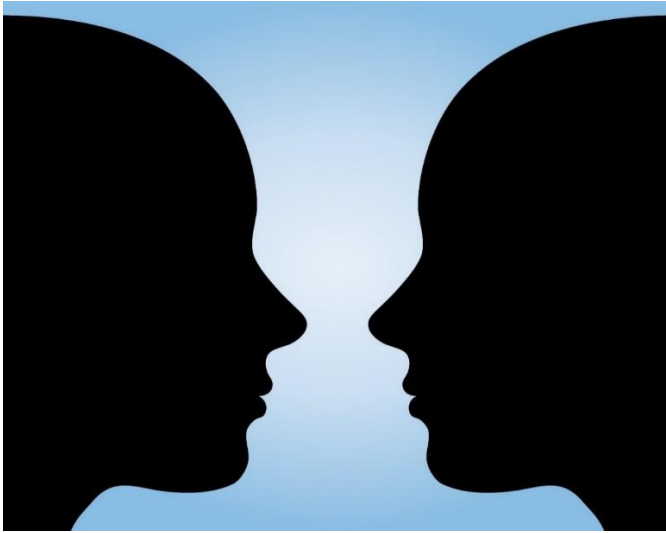
establishes clear guidelines for acceptable behavior and agrees to follow them. The group members also agree to enforce the rules of the Designed Alliance. It's especially important for the group to determine how it wants to deal with conflict.

CHALLENGE: If you have a group or team that meets regularly, a Designed Alliance can save you a lot of time, trouble, and headaches. By having the group create the rules that they want to live by, you are giving them ownership of the agreement. They agree with the rules and abide by them because they helped to create them! Remember that if you use a rule like "Be respectful," you need to clearly define what that means. Ask questions like, "Are we being respectful when we are on time or do we need a separate rule for that?" The Designed Alliance can grow and change over time as challenges come up. It helps the group interact in a positive way that helps them focus on results.

Here are some questions to get the discussion started:

- What atmosphere or culture do we want to create?
- What would help the group flourish?
- How would an ideal team handle conflict?
- What will we commit to for one another?

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Week 27

The Overconfidence Effect

The Overconfidence Effect sends a chill down my spine. It says that the more certain you are of something, the more likely it is that you are wrong.

Is that not one of the scariest things you have ever heard? It means that I, a person who makes swift and confident decisions, could often be wrong!

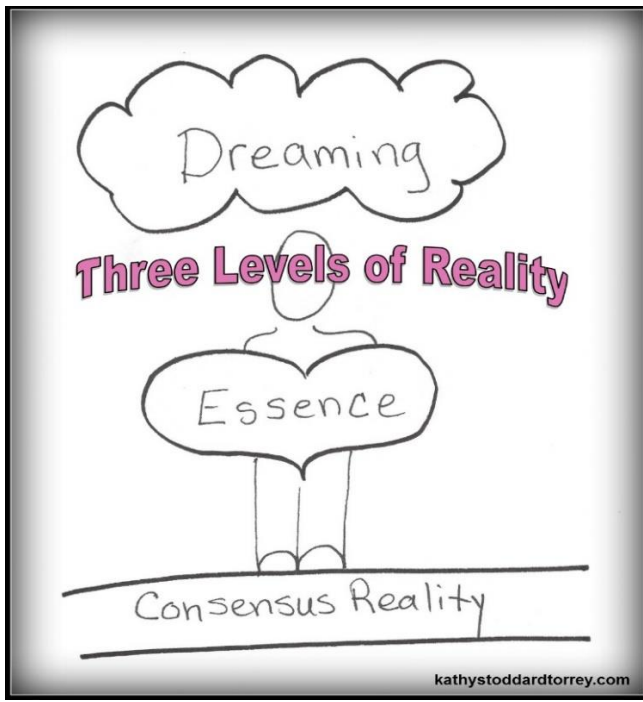
The Overconfidence Effect happens most often when we don't see all the various perspectives of a situation. In other words, we are not seeing the big picture.

The Rubin's vase above is an excellent example. If you said it is a picture of a vase, you would be right. It is a picture of a vase. However, I might say that it is a picture of two faces, and I would also be right. We could stand yelling at each other in defense of our facts, but both of us are correct.

However, neither one of us is seeing the entire picture. Rubin's vase is both a picture of two faces and a picture of a vase. It's a great metaphor for life. If we are very certain of something, we are probably missing the big picture.

CHALLENGE: So, the next time that you feel absolutely certain about something, pause and take a step back. Are you seeing the entire picture? Is there another way of looking at this situation that is equally valid? Keep in mind that anyone who disagrees with you also has a reason. It's a good idea to find out what that reason is so that you can make a decision based on the complete picture.

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Week 28

The Three Levels of Reality

The “Three Levels of Reality” sounds like a great title for a Star Trek episode. However, it is a model that can improve our ability to communicate effectively, handle conflict in a positive way, and motivate others. I learned the concept during my Organization and Relationship System Coaching (ORSC) certification and I discuss it in leadership seminars. The three levels are: Essence, Dreaming, and Consensus Reality.

Essence level is feeling and experience before we put it into words. Once we start to describe a feeling or experience, it becomes less accurate because the description depends on words which cannot adequately capture an experience or feeling.

Once we have named a feeling, experience, or idea, we are in Dream level. We create different possible outcomes and imagine things that we can then make real.

Consensus Reality is where dreams go when we make them a reality. It is what we all

agree is here – chairs, offices, procedures, clothes, etc.

Successful groups navigate through the different levels together. A group that stays in Dreaming level can become frustrated because it never DOES anything. On the other hand, if a group jumps straight to Consensus Reality level, they miss a lot of possibilities that happen in brainstorming in Dream level. Conflict happens when one person is talking about ideas in Dream level and another is talking tangible facts in Consensus Reality.

When leaders create a vision in a way that compels everyone to jump on board, they are operating in Essence level. They find ways to touch the hearts of others and activate visceral feelings of hope, desire, belonging, and shared vision.

As with all powerful tools, creating feelings at the Essence level can also be done with selfish intent. One can whip up feelings of hatred, fear, and a deep need for self-protection. It behooves each of us to recognize when someone is activating a feeling in our hearts.

CHALLENGE: Remember: understanding and using the Three Levels of Reality is the hallmark of a great leader – and a despot. Powerful tools beget powerful results. As you move through your day, define the level of reality in which you are operating. Then, figure out what level other people are in. Conversations across levels usually end in conflict. Skillfully recognizing and steering a group (and yourself) through the different levels improves motivation, creativity, and productivity.

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Week 29

Emotional Pennies

We usually think that time is the limiting resource each day. We never seem to have enough time! However, we can use the time that we have more effectively if we learn to manage another valuable and limited resource – emotional energy. How many times do you fall into the overstuffed chair at the end of the day and spend precious moments watching whatever is on TV because you feel too tired to do anything else?

We only have so much of ourselves to give each day. Think of the emotional energy that you spend each day as Emotional Pennies. Imagine that you start each day with 100 Emotional Pennies. You can't carry any over to the next day, and the goal is to end up with as many Emotional Pennies as possible at the end of each day. The more Pennies you have at the end of the day, the more energy you will have to enjoy your evenings.

Some common things that we spend emotional energy on are work, family, health, other people's problems, friends, and things over which we have no control. Your list may not have all these items, and it probably has quite a few more. Which of these are wise investments, and which are wastes of our Emotional Pennies? As a general rule, we want to avoid any situation that constantly drains our emotional energy with no hope of the situation improving or resolving.

A good test question to ask is "If I face this situation and invest some emotional energy into it, can I resolve it so that I never have to put another Emotional Penny into it again?" It's worth a try if you think you can improve things. If it turns out that you can't, do everything possible to remove yourself from all Emotional Penny-sucking black holes.

CHALLENGE: Count how many Emotional Pennies you spend each day for a week. When I did this exercise for the first time, I was surprised to learn that most days I spent all 100 Emotional Pennies before lunch on my son's school. I spent some extra Emotional Pennies trying to fix the situation, but in the end decided to homeschool him for that year. We want to invest our emotional energy in things we enjoy, people we love, and situations that we can change for the better.

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Week 30

Give it 15 minutes!

My son told me that working on something for short periods of time in order to stay focused is called the Pomodoro Technique. He works from home some days and uses the Pomodoro Technique by setting a timer for 25 minutes at a time. You can read more about the Pomodoro Technique online.

I learned about using a timer from FlyLady more than a decade before my son mentioned the Pomodoro Technique. FlyLady's limit is less rigorous. She says, "Anyone can do anything for only 15 minutes, even if you have to break it down into five-minute segments." She also says, "You are not behind! I don't want you to try to catch up; I just want you to jump in where we are. O.K.?" Her website has gotten too complicated and overwhelming for me, but the basic

principles helped me get my life and surroundings under control.

You can accomplish anything in 10-15 minute increments! On low motivation days, I set the timer on my phone for 10 minutes and take on one task. When it goes off, I take a 10-15 minute break. Then I spend 10 minutes on another task. I rotate through the things I want to get done that day and take longer breaks for lunch and snacks. Granted, I don't get as much done as I would if I worked all day, but I get more done than I would if I sat on the sofa all day!

CHALLENGE: It is amazing how much you can get done in 10 minutes. If you can focus for 25 minutes, the Pomodoro Technique can help you achieve your goals faster than you thought possible. Tackling things in short bursts can help with the daily stuff. More importantly, it can help you with your big goals that can seem overwhelming. Want to write a book? Learn to code? Take on your goal in 15-minute increments, and you can achieve it.

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Week 31

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize feelings in ourselves and others, and to then react accordingly. Emotional intelligence is a better predictor of success than intelligence quotient (IQ). Better still, we can improve our emotional intelligence with some study and practice. Of course, technical skills and experience are important, but those are expected from leaders. It's a high level of emotional intelligence that differentiates good leaders from great ones.

Studies also show a link between emotional intelligence and financial performance. *Harvard Business Review* reported that divisions of one food and beverage company that were led by senior managers with high emotional intelligence exceeded their yearly earnings goals by 20%. Divisions led by individuals with

lower emotional intelligence underperformed.

Here are the four main parts of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. Over time, I've learned that achieving high emotional intelligence is sequential. We must be aware of our feelings and triggers first: this is self-awareness. Then we learn to accept our feelings and master our actions, which is self-management. Next, we turn outward and learn to read social signals that tell us how others are feeling, achieving social awareness. Lastly, we can use leadership tools to manage relationships with others. "Managing" people is impossible without the first three parts of emotional intelligence.

CHALLENGE: Think about your favorite leaders. Are they in touch with their feelings? Do they recognize when they are angry and take those feelings into account when acting? Leaders with high emotional intelligence rarely yell or lose their cool. They also ask how you are feeling and recognize nonverbal cues. We will talk about each of the four categories of emotional intelligence in the future. We've talked already about noticing the fact and feeling parts of situations. Practice noticing feelings in yourself and others. It feels mushy-gushy, but it's one of the most practical ways to create success.

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Week 32

The Three Choices in Every Situation

When faced with a situation, we have three choices:

1. Accept the situation as it is
2. Try and change the situation
3. Flee

The choice that we pick will depend on the circumstances. Let's say that I have a tedious boss who drives me crazy. I could decide to accept the situation. I love what I do, and my coworkers rock. I can accept meddling now and then from a micromanaging boss. Or perhaps I really need this job for now, and I can use mindfulness and positivity to help me manage my emotions.

However, if my boss is overbearing and making my life miserable every day, it might be a challenge to my mental health. The second choice is to try and change the situation. Maybe I could ask for a one-on-one discussion with her. I could use some of my stellar communication skills to find the fact and feeling parts of what is going on. It is probably worth a shot. It is

possible that I could go down in flames during the discussion and change nothing. Then, maybe a trip to HR would be in order. In the end, I might not affect any change, but I can try. However, you don't have to try and change it; it's just one option.

If I can't change the situation, and I can't accept it as it is, it's time to make plans to move on. Perhaps it's time to start my own business. Maybe I could take an early retirement. There are several options when fleeing a job that I can't stand, and fleeing doesn't have to be done rashly.

CHALLENGE: When facing a situation that you don't like, ask yourself these questions:

1. Can I truly accept the situation as it is without harming my physical or mental health?
2. What can I do to change this situation? Do I want to try and change it?
3. How can I get out of this situation if I can't accept or change it?

Remember: your circumstances, goals, and values will help you to make the best decision for you.

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Week 33

Positive Emotional Attractor State

Positive Emotional Attractor (PEA) state happens when we are feeling positive and hopeful. When we are in a PEA state, the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, so we are more relaxed, we breathe deeply, and we are more creative. We are also more open to new information.

When we are in a Negative Emotional Attractor (NEA) state, the sympathetic nervous system is activated, and we feel stressed and fearful. We are not creative or open to new information. As a result, we are not going to make our best decisions in an NEA state. (PEA and NEA were researched and defined by Dr. Richard Boyatzis, and he discusses them in *Resonant Leadership*.)

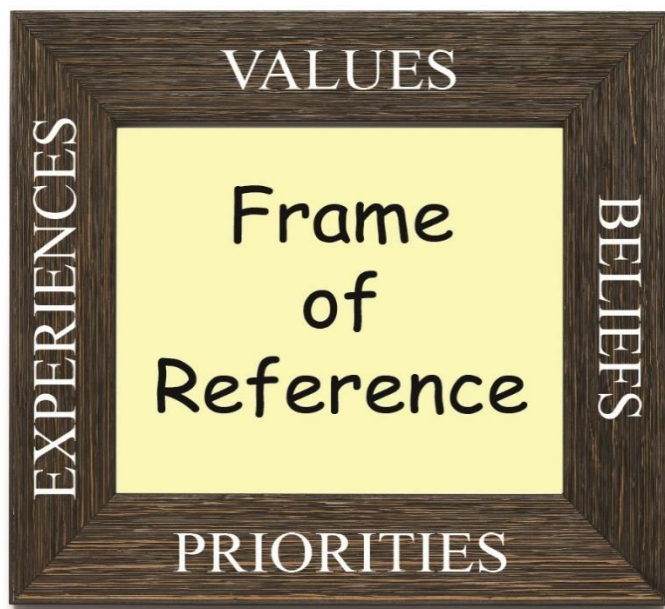
For leaders, this information means that we want to start meetings and conversations with what has gone right rather than jumping in on what has gone wrong. We want to firmly establish everyone in a PEA state in

order to ensure that they are open to new information and are at their creative best. Of course, we must deal with difficult issues, but it's easier to do if we establish some positivity and rapport first.

We also want to create as many PEA state moments as possible to maintain positive relationships. We've talked about our tendency to notice and comment on the negative. This is just a reminder of the power of positivity and creating positive relationships.

CHALLENGE: Intentionally start conversations with something positive whenever possible. When we push someone into an NEA state immediately, they've already stopped listening and absorbing information. It's not hard to create an NEA state. We can do it just by intimidating someone a little bit or making them feel uncomfortable. Great leaders create positive, non-threatening environments.

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Week 34

Your Frame of Reference

The information that we take in and the information that we send out must go through our Frame of Reference, and it's important to know how it affects our view of the world. I picture everyone peering out at the world through their Frames of Reference. Our Frame of Reference is made up of four parts: values, priorities, experiences, and beliefs.

Let's begin with values. Picture your own memorial service in your head. You've led a full and meaningful life with which you are satisfied. What three things are you sure that people will say about you? The list that you come up with is your values. For the most part, our values stay the same throughout our lives.

Priorities are the second part of our Frame of Reference. Priorities are a

snapshot of what is important to us right now. Putting a priority at the bottom of the list doesn't mean that it's not important to you at all; it's just not something you focus on right now. Priorities include things like family, career, faith, and health.

The third part of our Frame of Reference is experience. What we experience in our lives has a profound effect on how we view the world and experience life in the future. Over time, our experiences create our beliefs about ourselves and life in general.

Beliefs are the final part of our Frame of Reference. Many of them are the foundations of our lives - personal rules that we don't realize exist. As adults, we get to examine our beliefs and decide if they are serving us well or not.

CHALLENGE: Our Frames of Reference create the world that we live in. Intentionally examining and creating our Frame of Reference can make all the difference in the life that we experience. Usually, an initial discovery session with a coach will include an examination of your values, priorities, beliefs, and the significant experiences that have influenced you. If you don't have a coach, then ask a good friend to help you examine your Frame of Reference.

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Week 35

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the first piece of emotional intelligence to master, and it means that we have a realistic view of ourselves and our abilities. I know from coaching and training that getting an accurate picture of ourselves is harder than it sounds.

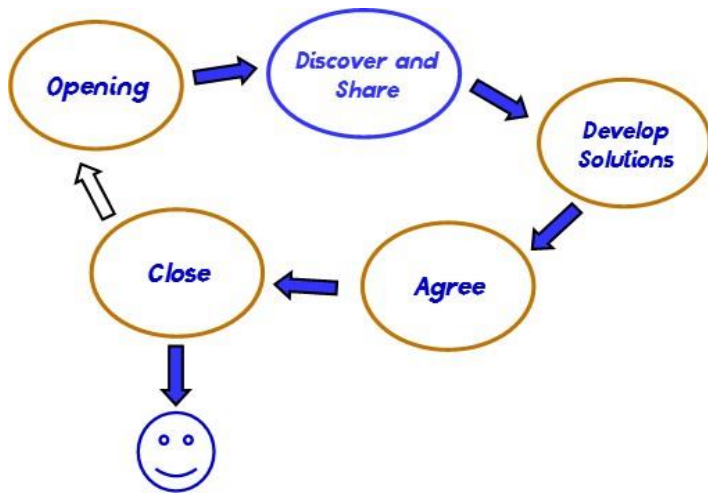
The first step in being self-aware is identifying our strengths and weaknesses. There are several strength-finding books and online assessments. We can use our strengths intentionally to our advantage and to develop our weak points.

The second step to self-awareness is knowing what topics and actions annoy us or make us angry; those are our triggers. Our triggers have more to do with our experiences and values than they do with other people. It's important to ask ourselves why they are triggers.

The third step to self-awareness is figuring out how we are being perceived by others. In week 13, we talked about the difference between the way we are perceived and our intended persona. A great way to get clear feedback is a 360° assessment, but those can be expensive. An alternative is to ask people for clarification when you see clues that they are perceiving you in way other than how you intend.

CHALLENGE: It's important to know your strengths and weaknesses. Take some time to figure out yours. We all have things that upset and annoy us. It's important to know what those triggers are. Lastly, determine the difference between how you are being perceived and your intended persona. All three of these things, as well as identifying your Frame of Reference, will help you master the first piece of emotional intelligence – self-awareness.

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Week 36

Conversation Outline

It took me a while to appreciate the power and beauty of this conversation outline.

Keep in mind that we are having a conversation when we make a decision or resolve a conflict.

Open. We open a conversation simply by stating what we are going to talk about. It helps the conversation stay on track.

Discover and Share. This is the most important step in a conversation. We often skip this step and move straight to positional arguing about the best thing to do. In Discover and Share, we take time to listen fully like we discussed in week 6. Finding out how the other person or people view the situation creates more options and helps to maintain positive relationships. We also share our

perspectives and feelings during this step.

Develop Solutions. Once we have all the facts and feelings on the table, brainstorming begins. I see it as a funnel that begins with a wide variety of options and slowly narrows down to the best choice.

Agree. If we've done a good job at Discover and Share, it's easier to come to an agreement.

Close. We check to make sure everyone is on board and explicitly state the agreement. It's also a good time to check in one last time on how everyone is feeling about the agreement.

CHALLENGE: When having a conversation, focus on the Discover and Share step of the conversation. The other steps happen naturally and don't need as much emphasis. The information needed to resolve conflicts never comes to light if we jump straight to developing solutions without fully listening and understanding each person's perspective and feelings. It's totally worth the time that it takes to be sure each person feels listened to, understood, and respected.

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Week 37

Navigating Change with the Rider, Elephant, and Path

The Rider/Elephant/Path model comes from a book by Dan and Chip Heath called *Switch: How to Change When Change is Hard*. It is one of the simplest and most useful models for successful change.

First, we want to convince the logical Rider that this change makes sense. We want to do research, listen to experts, and ask others how they made this change. Our logical Rider must believe that the way we are heading makes sense.

Second, we must motivate our emotional Elephant. The Elephant is not moved by logic; it follows its heart. Your deepest heartfelt motivation will be the reason that your Elephant agrees to move along the path.

Keep in mind that the small Rider cannot force the Elephant to go a certain direction. We cannot be motivated by logic alone. We must feel in our hearts that the change is worth the effort.

Lastly, we want to create a structure for our Path. We want to clearly mark the Path and maybe put some walls on each side to help our Rider and Elephant stay on it. Accountability partners and coaches are excellent examples of how to create a clear path for the Rider and Elephant to follow.

CHALLENGE: If you want to make a change, make sure that you get the Rider and Elephant on board to follow a clearly defined Path. Do this by ensuring that the change is logical and speaks to your heart. The logical Rider and the emotional Elephant represent your head and heart. Both must believe the change is worth the effort. Lastly, create a structure to keep yourself on track. Write down your goals, and share them. Enroll a friend or a coach as an accountability partner. Set a time for a new behavior. and have others join you. There are lots of ways to create a clear Path to help you stay on track.

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Week 38

Self-Discipline

Self-discipline is the second component of emotional intelligence. We start with self-awareness and learn our strengths, weaknesses, and triggers. We also determine how we are viewed by others. Then we move on to self-discipline.

Self-discipline means controlling our impulses; we pause to think before we act. In general, we want to avoid any behavior that doesn't get us closer to our ideal self. That could mean resisting a cupcake, controlling our tempers, or doing our homework.

Our first impulse might be to yell at someone who has done a poor job or insulted us. However, yelling doesn't create a positive work environment or positive relationships.

Leaders who manage their feelings and actions create an atmosphere of fairness and trust, which reduces

politics and infighting. The result is increased productivity because everyone stays focused on achieving organizational goals.

Self-discipline also helps us avoid unethical and immoral behaviors. Few people plan to be dishonest. Many times, it's just the result of poor impulse control.

CHALLENGE: Think of self-discipline as a muscle. The more you exercise it, the stronger it gets! Each time that you exercise self-control, you make it easier the next time. Make a practice of pausing and taking a breath whenever you feel an undesirable impulse coming on. Think of the consequences, and make a decision that is in alignment with your values and goals.

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Week 39

Intrinsic Motivation

Motivation is often listed as a component of emotional intelligence. Motivated people love to excel and learn.

Until about 1950, scientists believed that there were two types of motivation: biological and reward/punishment. Biological motivation is driven by our biological needs to eat, sleep, etc. Scientists believed that the only other way to motivate someone was to offer a reward or threaten a punishment. Explains a lot about our parents and grandparents, doesn't it?

In 1949, Harry Harlow was doing behavior experiments with rhesus monkeys. He planned to test the effectiveness of rewards and punishments while the monkeys solved a puzzle. Two weeks before the experiments started, he put the puzzles

in with the monkeys so that they would get used to them.

A totally unexpected thing happened. Without rewards or fear of punishment, they solved the puzzles frequently and quickly. Harlow called it intrinsic motivation.

Through coaching and interacting with others, I've concluded that we all crave challenges that we can overcome. Some of us hunt for bargains. Others train for marathons. If you look around, people who are happy are leveraging their intrinsic motivation just like the rhesus monkeys did when they solved the puzzles.

CHALLENGE: What motivates you? Do you have challenges in your life that feel like fun? If not, it's time to create some. You can take on a physical challenge or learn to knit. Helping others in some way is also a satisfying challenge. What can you do to let your intrinsic motivation out to play and create happiness?

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Week 40

Creating Success by Creating Habits

We have a limited amount of willpower to use each day. Anyone who has tried to stick to some sort of diet can attest to the fact that we are weakest at the end of the day.

So how do we incorporate a new behavior into our lives? We apply some willpower for a while and turn those actions into habits.

For example, let's say that I want to exercise three times a week. If I don't have set times to exercise, I battle with myself every day about when and what time. Often, I will end up not exercising at all! However, if I write down set times to exercise in my calendar and stick with them, I will incorporate the times into my schedule

and life. After about a month, exercise is a habit, and I don't have to use any more willpower on it. Then I can move on to another new behavior.

One study done by a researcher at Duke determined that 40% of our daily activities are habits. These can include the time we get up, the way we get ready in the morning, our mid-morning trip to the vending machine, our lunchtime exercise, and our before-bed snack or sit-ups. Some habits help us more than others. Intentionally crafting useful habits can help us achieve our goals.

CHALLENGE: What activity has shown up on your New Year's resolutions list more than once? Let's take that desired activity and make it a habit. If it's reading a book a month, set specific times for reading each week. Write the dates in your calendar, set reminders on your phone, and tell anyone who will listen about your plan. Then stick to it rigorously for a month or two. It generally takes a month to create a habit if it's something you do daily. If you are doing the activity three times a week, it could take a little longer. However, if you make it a priority and stick with it, you can create a habit that helps you achieve your dreams!

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Week 41

If you can't get out of it, get into it!

This phrase has been a battle cry for me for more than a decade. It comes from the book *Whistle While You Work: Heeding Your Life's Calling* by Richard Leider and David Shapiro.

In the introduction, Leider tells the story of an Outward Bound trip to Africa. One day, they planned to hike across the Salei Plains and meet their truck on the other side that evening.

They walked through tall grass called lion grass because lions like to stalk prey in it. Suddenly, one of the group members dropped to the ground. He'd seen a lion and was freaked out. The dangers of their current position hit him, and he refused to go on.

The guide told him that he must go on. There is nowhere to go back to. The truck was ahead of them. Reason did not work, and the man still refused to go on.

The guide leaned down and said, "We have a motto at Outward Bound precisely for this sort of situation: 'If you can't get out of it, get into it!'"

If you can't (or choose not to) quit right now, it doesn't do any good to complain or do a poor job. Every experience in life enriches us and teaches us something about ourselves.

It's better to go all in. Stop resisting, and give it your best shot. Get out when you can, but until then truly get into it. It is less emotionally taxing for everyone involved. We can just be grateful that most of our challenging situations don't involve being stalked by a lion.

CHALLENGE: What current activity are you resisting? If you can get out of something that's using a lot of Emotional Pennies, do it! If you can't get out of the situation, really go all in. Make the best of it, and do the best job that you can. Resistance usually produces a negative attitude, which doesn't help anyone, including you.

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Week 42

Put the big rocks in first.

This is a story about priorities. I have demonstrated this concept in my time management and leadership workshops.

A professor stood before his philosophy class. He filled a large jar with rocks and asked his students if the jar was full. They said that it was.

The professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. The pebbles rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed that it was.

The professor next picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. The sand filled up the spaces between the pebbles. He asked once more if the jar was full. The students responded, "yes."

The professor then produced two cups of coffee and poured the entire contents into the jar. The students laughed.

The rocks are the important things in your life like your family, your health, and activities that bring you joy. The rocks are your priorities, and the rest of life should work around them.

The pebbles are things that matter — like your job and other obligations. The sand represents all the small requirements of life that take up a lot of our time and make us feel busy. If we fill our jars with sand, we don't have room for things that make life meaningful.

What about the coffee? No matter how full your life may seem, there's always room for a cup of coffee with a friend. Having a supportive community is important.

CHALLENGE: We want to be sure that we make time for our priorities. We want to block off time for our rocks; then we work the rest of life around them. Compare your to do list with your priorities. Are your priorities on the list of things to do tomorrow? If not, block off some time on your calendar, and spend some time on things that move you forward and give your life meaning.

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Week 43

People Are People

In my leadership series, I begin with a book called *Leadership and Self-Deception*. The book asserts that all personal and personnel issues are caused by one thing: we don't see other people as people.

Here is an example from the book: Imagine that you are sitting on an airplane next to the window. No one has an assigned seat, and the middle seat is open. Do you put your bag in the middle seat and try to discourage people from sitting there? The flight attendant has announced that the flight is full. Do you judge each person by how much of an inconvenience that they will be? Does one look too chatty? Another have too many bags?

In that moment, are you seeing the other passengers walking down the aisle as people like you who have a need to sit down or as annoying objects who threaten to invade your personal space? How would you feel as a person walking down the aisle?

The book explains the theory in detail, but basically our goal is to see everyone around us, even the obnoxious ones, as people. Of course, that doesn't mean that we must put up with unethical behavior or disrespect. It means that we set boundaries and give feedback in a compassionate way.

The key is to avoid seeing ourselves as above or more important than other people. We want to see every person as someone with needs and dreams equal to your own. We want to see them as equals and treat them the way that we want to be treated.

I continually work on seeing other people as people. When I begin to slip and magnify someone's faults and objectify him or her, I repeat to myself, "This is a person with worries and dreams equal in value to my own."

CHALLENGE: Pay attention to how you view other people. If you find yourself amplifying their faults and your own good qualities, you are probably not seeing the person as a person. It's so easy to objectify people! When we do that, we can rationalize some really awful behaviors. Find an affirmation that works for you, or use mine: "This is a person with worries and dreams equal in value to my own." If you don't believe those words, it's time to take a good look at yourself and think about what kind of person that you want to be.

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Week 44

Social Awareness

Social Awareness is another part of Emotional Intelligence. We must be able to read other people and their interactions before we can manage relationships, which is the last part of Emotional Intelligence.

Social Awareness includes being aware of others' feelings and perspectives, and taking an active interest in their concerns. Another big part of Social Awareness is anticipating, recognizing, and meeting the needs of others. Lastly, it means being savvy about the politics around you, which means noticing and understanding a group's emotional currents and power relationships.

How can we do all that? It comes down to paying attention to the verbal and nonverbal cues of others, especially the nonverbal ones. We talked about the importance of nonverbal communication in week 9. Nonverbal communication includes tone of voice, facial expression, and body language. When we pay attention

to those things, we get a lot of information about what people are thinking and feeling.

Once we have an idea of what's going on, we don't want to run with that first assessment. It's an assumption! It's important to check out our hypothesis by asking some questions. If someone answers that everything is fine, but his or her arms are crossed and the tone of his or her voice is combative, something's up. Don't assume anger or annoyance or gastric distress. Instead ask, "You said that you are fine, but it sounds like something is bothering you. What's up?"

As we notice nonverbal cues and ask questions about what's going on, we hone our skills of Social Awareness. We check to see if our assumptions are correct, and we get an accurate picture of the situation. Once we've mastered Social Awareness, we can move on to Relationship Management.

CHALLENGE: For practice, start paying attention to the nonverbal cues of the people around you. See what you notice about their facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language as you go about your daily routines. Can you make an educated guess about how they are feeling? Remember, this is just practice. In business and personal interactions, be sure to check to see if your guess is right. Always ask!

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Week 45

Chunk it down.

Really big jobs can seem overwhelming. At the beginning of the year, I put “Do taxes” on my to-do list. Then I look at it for a few weeks. There are too many jobs rolled up in that little phrase. I don’t make any forward progress until I break it into smaller chunks.

Once I chunk it down, the list might look like this: 1) Download IRS forms, 2) Collect/find W-2s, and 3) Find receipts.

Doing even one thing a day will move you toward the finish. Once you get started, it’s easier to keep going.

It’s also important to celebrate the chunks. When you finish a task, bask in the glory for a few minutes. Revel in the feeling of accomplishment. I give myself little rewards, like 15 minutes of playing *Plants v. Zombies* when I complete a task.

Don’t be afraid of the unplanned detours. You can create a list of baby steps, but sometimes one task leads you down a rabbit hole to a whole room of more tasks. When I start collecting business deductions, I end up on Amazon sorting out the business books.

Sometimes you get a shortcut. Sometimes you get a longer scenic route. If you’ve ever played Chutes and Ladders, it’s like that. Stay on the path, take on one task at a time, and you will get there.

CHALLENGE: Do you have a big task that stays on your to-do list for weeks on end? It might be a candidate for chunking! What’s the very first thing that you need to do to accomplish that task or goal? Write that on your to-do list. I had “Create online class” on my list of things to do for years. Finally, I chunked it down. The first step was “Find a web designer.” It took me a month of searching and interviews to find one that I liked. Then, I moved on to the next small task. It took a few years to see an online class up and running, but I did it! You can, too!

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Week 46

Embrace change.

I tell a story in leadership workshops about how three fictional people face change. Jane embraces change. When a new opportunity comes along, she is ready to make the most of it.

Sean doesn't mind change if he believes it's worthwhile and going to be successful. He watches the change first, and then jumps in after he's had a chance to see how it is going.

The last person is Al. He hates change. He goes kicking and screaming all the way when forced into a change. Once, when a change of process happened at work, he said, "Things were better when Elaine was in charge." A co-worker answered, "Elaine retired 10 years ago."

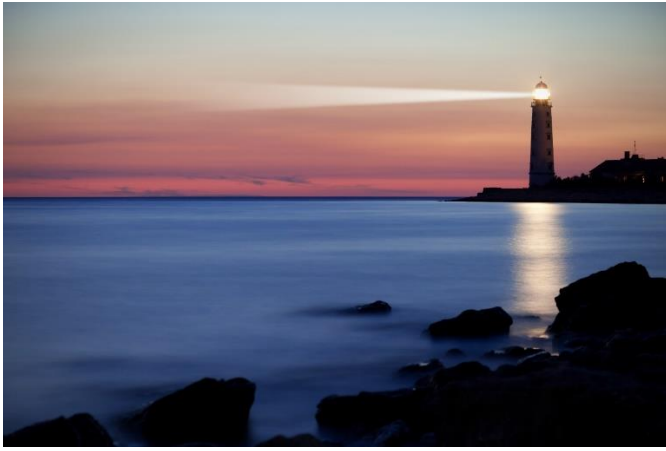
Then I ask the participants to tell me what those three people are doing 10 years from now. They consistently tell me the same stories. Jane is running the company. Sean is one level up in management, maybe. Al has been fired, and is living under a bridge.

I find these responses fascinating. Although many of us resist change, we recognize that the people who embrace change have the best chances at success.

In reality, all three roles have value. Jane is a Leaper; Sean is a Bridge Builder; and Al is a Traditionalist. If everyone leaped, we'd all be in a constant state of flux. Bridge Builders make sure the change makes sense and help find practical ways to make it happen. Traditionalists make sure that foundational values and people are not forgotten.

CHALLENGE: Which type are you? It's important to know your preference. It's also a good idea to try and face change with all the grace and positivity that you can muster. It's fine to remind people of an organization's values, but digging in your heels and refusing to change will not move you forward in your life or your career.

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Week 47

Imagery is the lighthouse of great leadership.

One of the ways to inspire people is to use imagery. Imagery also makes ideas and concepts easier to understand.

We create imagery using analogies, metaphors, and similes. Frankly, I look up the definition of these terms every time I write about them, and I still can't keep them straight. Let's just say that we inspire others when we use imagery to show them how one thing is like another.

Here is some imagery that I use to show the importance of a leader having a clear vision and getting everyone to move toward that vision.

This is a dog sled with the dogs arranged in a gangline team configuration. It's the one with which

we are most

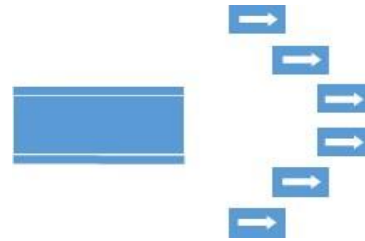


familiar. However, if the terrain is rough and the dogs need to be able to

avoid obstacles and rough ice, the musher will arrange the dogs in a fan hitch, pictured below.

The fan hitch allows the dogs more freedom and flexibility, which is the

same thing that great leaders give their employees. It's an ideal

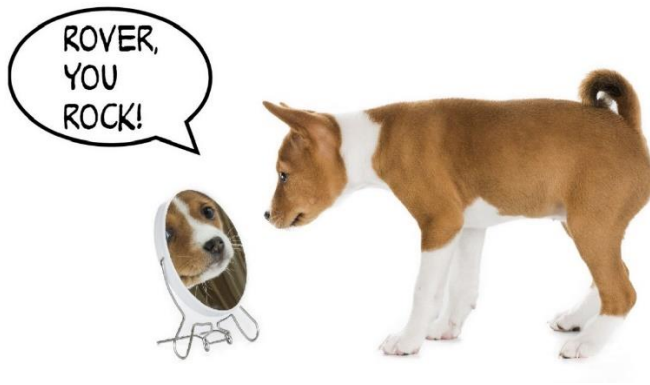


arrangement as long as the musher or leader can keep everyone pulling in the same direction. You can imagine the loss of direction for the entire team if one dog pulls off in a 90-degree angle from the rest of the pack. One troublesome employee can have the same effect.

That imagery helps to show the importance of a leader having a direction, clearly communicating that vision, and ensuring that everyone is working toward that goal. We can clearly see how one employee can derail momentum, efficiency, and success.

CHALLENGE: When trying to make a point or explain an idea, think of what imagery you can use. How is this situation similar to another one? The title of this week's article compared imagery to a lighthouse. What does that mean to you? Does it make sense?

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Week 48

Don't talk to yourself like that!

We all have a little voice in our head, and how it talks to us can make a huge impact on our confidence and self-esteem. Negative self-talk can be a very destructive force. There are some things that we can do to improve the way we talk to ourselves.

Begin by asking yourself if you would talk that way to a friend. Would you say, "You are stupid and incompetent!" to someone you care about? Of course not! If you wouldn't say it to your best friend, don't say it to yourself.

Studies have shown that talking to yourself using "you" or your name as if talking to a friend increases confidence, performance, and anxiety. For example, instead of "I can do this!" I say, "Kathy, you can do this!" It's an easy shift to make. No one knows exactly why this works, but it does, so let's run with it.

Talking to ourselves as we would to a friend and using "you" and our name

helps to put us in an observer role, which is another way to battle negative self-talk. In one study, psychologists had people stand in the mirror and comment on themselves. If a person said, "I am a fat blob with a jiggly belly," the researchers would ask them to state factual information as an observer. The participant could say, "I have a round abdomen." Observing factually leads to action more often than negative self-talk does.

Lastly, we can name our inner voice. In coaching, we call it a Gremlin, and it seems intent on sabotaging our efforts. Many times, our Gremlins are trying to keep us safe. My Gremlin might say, "Don't put in a proposal for that job. You won't get it, anyway." It's trying to save me the pain and disappointment that I would experience if I didn't get it. I can tell my Gremlin, "Thanks! I know you are trying to save me some emotional pain and disappointment, but I've got this! If I don't get it, it will be OK."

CHALLENGE: It's time to pay attention to what you are saying to yourself! First, stop using "I." Talk to yourself as you would a friend, in grammar and in content. Be as kind to yourself as you are to others. Finally, give your Gremlin a name, and reassure it that you can handle whatever disappointments come along.

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Week 49

Relationship Management

Relationship Management is a part of Emotional Intelligence and includes leadership skills that are often taught in workshops. When we talk about Relationship Management, we are talking about things like coaching for improvement, motivating employees, and effective communication techniques. These are tools that leaders use to manage relationships.

The effectiveness of the Relationship Management tools depends on the foundation built by the other parts of Emotional Intelligence: Self-Awareness, Self-Discipline, and Social Awareness. I've learned over the years that great leaders are created by working through the pieces of Emotional Intelligence in the order above, and then finally Relationship Management. We can't "manage" relationships without the first three parts.

Relationship Management is not manipulation. It's about using your

Personal Influence that we talked about in week 23 to create positive relationships with others. We've discussed many ways to influence and communicate with others; those are all parts of Relationship Management. Good Relationship Management results in the development and success of the people we lead. It's using tools like the Conversation Outline in week 36 to resolve conflict in a way that increases the positivity of the relationships of the people involved. The best news is that Relationship Management tools used with care and kindness also help us connect with our family and friends.

CHALLENGE: You have come so far since we began 49 weeks ago! If you've been taking on each challenge, you've improved your Emotional Intelligence, and you see people as people. You realize that your success is dependent on the success of the people around you, and you use the skills you've learned for the improvement of yourself and others. Is there someone who would benefit from learning something that you now know, like the usefulness of Emotional Pennies (week 29), the Four Stages of Group Development (week 4), or how to conquer busyness (week 21)? If so, use some of those tools and your Personal Influence to help them create success – that's Relationship Management.

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Week 50

Resilience

Resilience is the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change. It's our capacity to bounce back when we are hit with adversity and change. Here are things that we can do to make ourselves more resilient:

1. Get rid of unnecessary energy drains in your life. Getting organized can be a huge help. If you started paying attention to how you spend your *Emotional Pennies* in week 29, you are already doing this.
2. Gather a community to support you. This can be family, friends, and your spiritual community. It is crucial to have a support system that can jump in to help and to reassure you during challenging times.
3. Create a positive attitude. You started in week 5 by noticing the good and then continued building positivity and empathy by practicing the loving

kindness meditation we talked about in week 11.

In addition, it's best to have a wide range of coping strategies. Coping mechanisms to focus on during adversity and change include things like exercise, aromatherapy, one-step-at-a-time thinking, journaling, and reaching out to help others.

Keep in mind that even healthy coping mechanisms can be bad if taken too far. For example, if we exercise to the point of injury or constant exhaustion, we aren't taking care of ourselves; we are abusing ourselves.

Each time we overcome a challenge, we become more resilient. As we face adversity, change, and the emotions that come along with them, we build confidence. When the next challenge comes along, we can think to ourselves, "I've done this (or worse) before, and I can do it again."

CHALLENGE: It's important to maintain a life that includes the three things above. In addition, when facing challenging times, look back at week 8 (Cancel that order!), week 12 (How are you looking through your spyglass?), week 32 (The Three Choices in Every Situation), week 41 (If you can't get out of it, get into it!), and week 48 (Don't talk to yourself like that!). They will help you get through tough times.

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Week 51

Leading Change

Over the past 51 weeks, we've talked about change several times. We talked about Intentional Change Theory (week 19); The Three Choices in Every Situation (week 32); Navigating Change with the Elephant, Rider, and Path (week 37); and How to Embrace Change (week 46). Each time we've discussed change, it's been in terms of how to deal with change personally.

Let's shift our perspective to how we can best lead others through a change. Of course, you can use all the concepts above to help others. For example, it's essential to figure out how to talk to someone's Rider and Elephant, and to set up a path with some clear accountability measures.

Here are some other things to do when leading others through a change:

1. Create a clear picture of where you are going and why. People really like

to know what the rationale is behind a change.

2. Ask for input about the change as much as you can. However, don't ask for input if the change is set in stone or if you already have your mind made up; it breaks trust.

3. Maintain a positive attitude about the change, whether you like it or not. Leaders set the tone for organizational change with their own attitudes. We create unnecessary hardship on people when we impose negative feelings about something that is going to happen anyway. We help the people around us when we stay positive.

CHALLENGE: When facing a change, make sure you clearly understand what is going to happen and why so that you can pass that information along to your subordinates. People are uneasy during a change, and knowledge makes them feel more comfortable. Create buy-in by asking for people's opinions and perspectives. It's okay if they express negative feelings; acknowledge them, and keep everyone focused on what they can do. Lastly, stay positive. It's alright to share misgivings, but make it clear that you are going to do what you can to make the change happen as well as possible, and that you expect the same of everyone else.

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Week 52

Establishing a group identity.

Defining a clear team or group identity is one way to create a culture that supports success. One of the best examples of creating a group identity comes from the book *Switch: How to Change When Change Is Hard*. A young man named Paul Butler went to Saint Lucia to save the Saint Lucia parrot. The parrot was on the brink of extinction, and the people of Saint Lucia didn't have strong feelings about the parrot. He had little money and no staff to help him. He created a campaign around the identity of the people of Saint Lucia. Specifically, his message was "We take care of our own."

The campaign was wildly successful. The Saint Lucia parrot now is thriving. Paul Butler went on to work with a conservation organization called Rare, where he replicated the creation of local identity over and over. Creating a specific identity is a hugely powerful tool for any group.

In a business setting, the people in the group get to decide who they want to be as a group. It's important to write down and promote the group's identity. The group can come up with a name, a mascot, and t-shirt designs. One group that I worked with decided that an octopus represented them, and they each had stuffed octopus on their desks as a reminder of who they wanted to be as a group. It's an opportunity for the group to express its uniqueness and create cohesiveness.

CHALLENGE: Call a meeting, and ask your group or team who they want to be. What do they want to be known for? It is kind of fun to create an identity for a family, too. The discussion of who the group wants to be and how they want to be seen by others can be creative and enlightening. It's also a powerful motivator. When someone acts outside the group norm, the team will remind them, "That's not who we are." It's a quick and easy guideline for the group to follow.

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53 (Two-Minute) Leadership Challenges Week 53

Congratulations!

Wow! You did it! I am so impressed and proud of you!

You have used one of the important pieces of Emotional Intelligence, Self-Discipline, to change how you show up in the world. If you've practiced all 52 skills and concepts that we've discussed, you are more positive, more empathetic, better at handling conflict, and a star at relationship management!

You have learned just about all the things that I teach in leadership workshops that cost thousands of

dollars. If my workshop participants' experience is an indicator of your experience, your relationships at work and at home have improved. At graduation ceremonies, family members come up to me and tell me that their family has been transformed. They communicate better and talk about shared concepts like Emotional Pennies.

In the beginning, I said that we are people who believe in personal growth, improvement, success, and going the extra mile. You have proven that to be true.

Challenge: Woohoo! Here is your last challenge. It's time to celebrate! Get yourself a fancy cup of coffee, take a group to lunch, or play a game with your family. Post your accomplishment on social media. And if this series has helped you, I'd appreciate it if you'd tell someone else about it. Together we can increase the positivity, communication, and well-being of everyone around us.

Warmly,

Kathy