

7 Guideposts to Lead Yourself Well

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Why is it that leading ourselves can be more difficult than leading others? It doesn't make sense, but we know it's true. The idea is not unlike a doctor who doesn't take care of herself or himself physically. Or a landscaper with a rundown yard, or an auto mechanic that doesn't change the oil in his car. They know the right thing to do, but don't do it.

"Being a self-leader is to serve as chief, captain, president or CEO of one's own life."

---Peter Drucker

That speaks directly to personal responsibility, and taking responsibility for yourself is at the core of self-leadership. Andy Stanley adds further insight with this quote.

"A person's irresponsibility will always become someone else's responsibility."

-Andy Stanley

It is clear that the surest way to lead others better is to lead yourself better first. Self-awareness is the beginning of self-leadership.

7 Guideposts:

1) Pursue character over success.

The pursuit of success in your business is a normal and healthy desire as long as it never compromises your character. And always remember that the pressures of work can tempt you to behave in ways you wouldn't otherwise behave.

The imperfection of our humanity is not an excuse to dabble in sin.

There are no perfect leaders, and thankfully God's grace is abundant. Yet, the little missteps and seemingly small character slip-ups can open the door to leadership damaging behavior.

We should live in freedom, not paranoid of making a mistake, but the point is that self-leadership of your character is of utmost importance in the life of a Christian leader. The reason self-leadership of your character is so important, is that no one else can do that but you.

2) Establish life boundaries by your personal values.

Your personal values, the things you hold most dear and important, form something like the banks of a river that guide the flow of your life. They inform your decisions and subsequent actions.

When a river overflows its banks it can do considerable damage. In the same way, the lack of boundaries in our daily lives is a recipe for disaster. For example, in current culture one of the most prevalent concerns is – how much is enough? Boundaries help you answer that question.

Your values might be things such as faith, health, family, growth etc. The list should be a short collection of the non-negotiables that constitute the framework of how you think and behave.

- What are the values that guide your life?
- Do they ring true with Scripture?
- Has God affirmed them in your life?

3) Cultivate humble confidence in your leadership

Humble confidence reduced to the most basic elements is the combination of belief that God is with you and belief in yourself. Humility comes from knowing how desperately you need God and belief in yourself is required to lead with confidence. If you don't believe in yourself, no one else will either.

Authentic confidence is seeing yourself the way God sees you, relying on His presence and power combined with an appreciation and development of your gifts and abilities. Our flaws and faults keep us humble, but they also help build our confidence because we know God is with us and gives us grace and favor. Where we are weak, He can make us strong.

Recent, a friend shared his thoughts with me.

- Self-awareness is *knowing* yourself; self-belief is *betting* on yourself.
- Self-belief without self-awareness is *delusion*.
 - Arrogant confidence = I can.
- Self-awareness without self-belief is *disillusion*.
 - Lack of confidence = I can't
- Self-awareness with self-belief is wise *discernment*.
 - Humble confidence = I can't, but God can

4) Develop self-control to prevent being out of control

Self-control is essential for self-leadership and when exercised over your desires, emotions, ambition, and temptations, perhaps ironically results in the greatest soul level freedom in your daily leadership.

Pressure is the crucible that tests our self-control. It's not difficult to behave appropriately when all is calm, but when the heat is on and pressure rises, it's easy to cross lines that we never intended to cross.

One great *principle* to develop self-control is to **choose between two competing desires**. For example, I desire good health and I desire chocolate chip cookies. The questions I must ask are, which one do I want more and am I willing to make the trade?

One great *practice* to develop self-control is to **pre-decide**. Making one big preemptive decision helps spare you from many small in-the-moment decisions. For example, if there are chocolate chip cookies in front of me, there is a strong likelihood I'm going to eat them. Therefore, I pre-decide when entering a grocery store not to buy any.

When you find yourself "in-the-moment," here are two ways to help activate self-control on a consistent basis:

- Quickly and quietly remind yourself of the consequences.
- Quickly and quietly remind yourself of the benefits.

5) Chase personal growth over personal gain

It's surprisingly easy to blur the fine line between personal growth and personal gain and the nuance is found in which one motivates you more. The fundamental question is are you willing to keep growing as a leader even if it doesn't seem to produce the desires you hope for?

If your primary motivation for growth is personal gain, the outcome is typically shallow and lacks fulfillment. And it often happens that you stop growing when you achieve what you wanted.

When personal growth is a natural part of your self-leadership, then if you receive personal gain, it's a blessing not an expectation, and your heart quickly finds a place of gratitude. And gratitude is a healthy perspective for self-leadership.

6) Develop healthy habits that guide your steps.

Good habits are one of the most powerful tools to strengthen healthy self-leadership. Good habits are an extension of life values that you truly practice

It's good to give yourself some grace in the connection of values and habits. For example, you might highly value health but be in a temporary exercise slump. Or faith may be a core value, but you're struggling with your prayer life. That's part of the human condition. However, over time, our daily habits begin to reveal or at least shed light on what our true values are.

Typically values inform your habits, but if your habits and values don't seem to line up, you can reverse the process and work on developing good habits to live your values.

7) Master your emotions so they don't master you

An emotionally unpredictable leader unintentionally prevents people from getting close and slowly erodes trust. We know what it's like to be around a leader that might blow up one day and sulk the next. What is your response? Keep a safe distance? Yup, that how most of us respond.

We all have emotions, ranging from anger to joy, and our humanity is part of the process. Meaning we can handle them well or mishandle them.

- Which emotion seems to get the best of you?
- What are the triggers?
- How do you regain a healthy balance of emotion?

No one wants or expects you to behave like a robot, and seeing your true heart is important, but mastering your emotions before they master you is one of the most important self-leadership practices you can engage.