

## Management Consulting: Helping Leaders Regain Their Edge

By Joelle K. Jay

**M**anagers, supervisors, and other business leaders usually know how to lead their company or department. But not many are good at periodic introspection. Regardless of whether the economy is flourishing or floundering, many business leaders get stuck in the same trap – they don't take time to stop and reflect on what they're doing. Because they have so much responsibility and accountability on their shoulders, they're constantly on the go, striving to deliver results.

Many leaders get so fixated on the success of their team and the results of their efforts that they forget to focus on *their* talents and expertise. And yet, it's *their* ability to sustain a high level of effectiveness that is one of the biggest contributors to a company's success.

Leaders need to take the necessary steps today to reap bigger rewards tomorrow. *Employee assistance professionals can help as part of their management consultation services.*

❖ **Don't ignore the vision.** This means being clear enough about what you want that you can describe it in vivid detail. A vision is necessary not only for the company, but also for your own role as a workplace leader. What strengths do you bring to this role? How can you capitalize on those strengths to meet your goals...and that of the company?

❖ **Don't lose your focus.** Do you try to do everything at your company? Or do you know how to delegate? Finding focus is about choosing where to put your time, energy, and attention. It may even mean eliminating areas in your work life that don't fit. When you know what's most important, you can let other matters drop. Which areas will help you achieve *your* vision?

❖ **Don't be inefficient.** As stated, many business leaders try to do too much. A good example of this is the amount of time spent "putting out fires," as opposed to not spending enough time on the things that matter most. Stop asking, "*How can I do everything I need to do in a day?*" and start asking, "*What are the **most effective** actions I can take?*" By investing even a little time in planning, and then taking targeted action, leaders can attain their goals much more quickly than they can when their workdays aren't efficient. It's true that, "*things come up*" sometimes. However, if you're working on 25 things seemingly at once all the time, something needs to change in how you plan and go about your day.

❖ **Don't keep doing things the hard way.** Leaders can continue to do things the way they've always done them...*or* they can focus on their strengths and perform their tasks based on the ways in which they naturally excel. The key is to identify and use your unique attributes so you can be an effective, higher-achieving leader. In what ways are you especially talented? What do you love to do at work most? What positive traits are you recognized for? When you have the freedom to perform your job the way you want, how do you do it?

❖ **Don't be unpredictable.** The least stressful companies to work for are those in which officially stated goals, values, procedures, job responsibilities, etc., is a fairly accurate description of what usually transpires in a typical workday. What the leaders of these companies have in common is their predictability.

❖ **Don't be disconnected from your employees.** Being holed up in your office all day,

every day, while striving to get your organization ahead doesn't work. Effective leaders are also approachable. They care about what's on their employees' minds, and they aren't afraid of constructive criticism because they know the end result will be a better leader, and a better company. (**Editor's note:** See also this month's handout section.)

While these areas are by no means inclusive of all the pitfalls that leaders need to be wary of, by avoiding them you'll lay the foundation for exceptional leadership results...the kind of leader that others will want to follow.

### What is Your Personal Leadership IQ?

Let's take this issue a step further: just what is personal leadership, and how can managers and supervisors put these ideas into practice to improve themselves and their companies?

Simply put, personal leadership is leadership of the self. When a manager or supervisor practices personal leadership, he or she "*leads from the inside out.*" Basically, the principles of leadership that make businesses a success are applied...but to *yourself*. For example, leading in business involves:

- Having a compelling vision;
- Developing strategies; and
- Inspiring people to use their talents to meet a goal for improved business results.

Leading yourself means applying these same principles of leadership to your role as a manager or supervisor. Managers and supervisors that practice personal leadership use more inspiration, rather than just perspiration; synergy instead of just sacrifice; and wisdom instead of simply "work."

Personal leadership is so important that renowned management expert Peter Drucker called it, "*The only leadership that's going to matter in the 21st century.*"

The key question for managers and supervisors becomes, "*Are you succeeding in leading yourself?*" Have them take the following quiz to find out.

### The Personal Leadership Quiz

Answer each of the following questions with a "yes," "sometimes," or "no" response.

1. *I am clear on what I want and know how to get it – for things big and small.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

2. *I practice a strategic, reflective approach to leadership.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

3. *I know where to focus my attention on a daily basis.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

4. *I am able to maintain peak performance at all times.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

5. *I maintain my sense of stability and equilibrium in times of change.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

6. *I have identified my talents, strengths, skills, and weaknesses.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

7. *I know how to maximize and leverage my unique talents and abilities.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

8. *I am delighted with my quality of life both on and off the job.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

9. *I am not overly stressed or overwhelmed in my life.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

10. *I make a meaningful contribution every day.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

11. *I have enough time for the people, activities, and events that are most important to me.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

12. *I take regular action toward my most important goals – not just what's most pressing.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No



13. *I have a wide network of people who support me, and whom I support in return.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

14. *I am constantly learning and improving myself.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

15. *I intuitively recognize and take advantage of opportunities.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

16. *I am often astounded by the way the opportunities I want and the solutions I need present themselves at just the right moment.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

17. *I achieve a sense of renewal and restoration on a daily basis.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

18. *I am proud of my ability to maintain my values and the essence of who I am, even when life gets hectic and/or as I attain more responsibility.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

19. *I have achieved "success" as I define it.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

20. *I can say with confidence that every day I am at my very best.*

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ Sometimes \_\_\_ No

## Tally Your Score

- For each "yes" response, give yourself **2** points.
- For each "sometimes" response, give yourself **1** point.
- For each "no" response, give yourself **0** points.

## What Your Score Means

### 0-13 points

❖ *If your score is low, you're likely new at personal leadership. You're so focused on your image in the workplace that you're neglecting your personal leadership. Chances are that you're doing what you've always done. As a result, you're not being very strategic about what you're*

doing and why. It's time to take a break from your daily duties, go "backstage," and do the introspective work of who you are as a leader, what you want to achieve, and how you can find the ideal strategy to attain your goals.

### 14-27 points

❖ *If you scored in the middle range, you are spending some time on yourself, but you're not being strategic in terms of achieving the right balance. You may often feel that both business and life are "hit or miss." You're getting some benefits, but not the way you could. Examine where you're excelling. These are your strengths. Find a way to refine those strengths even more so that you can capitalize on them better. Then, look at where you rated yourself low. Those are your weaknesses. Develop those areas to improve your level of personal leadership.*

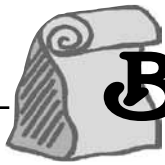
### 28-40 points

❖ *If your score is high, congratulations! You are very thoughtful and strategic about what you're doing and why. You're capitalizing on your talents, and as a result, you're maximizing your business results. However, don't get comfortable and rest on your laurels. Continue developing your skills. Strengthen your competitive edge and become even more strategic. Remember, the stronger you get in personal leadership, the stronger you get in your business.*

## Take Leadership Personally

The bottom line is that as a leader in your workplace, you must learn to lead yourself to remain effective. And just as the way you lead helps shape your life, the life you live will help you lead. In other words, when you become a better leader, you will also lead a better life. Employee assistance professionals can help.

*Joelle K. Jay, Ph.D., is the author of "The Inner Edge: The 10 Practices of Personal Leadership." Additional source: Jeffrey Miller; author of "The Anxious Organization, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: Why Smart Companies Do Dumb Things," Facts on Demand Press.*



## Overcome Fear of Talking to the Boss



**E**ffective business leaders need to be seen as approachable by their employees. However, communication between management and workers needs to be a two-way street. On the one hand, managers and supervisors need to make it clear that their doors are open, and that they welcome their employees' concerns.

Unfortunately, it only takes one highly introverted manager or other unapproachable supervisor, for many workers to feel that any boss's office is off-limits. In other words, their experiences with workplace superiors have told them that their manager is likely to ignore, get angry or become defensive if they bring up their concerns. So, they stay away and problems fester, even if their manager is, in fact, *receptive* to addressing issues in a calm and cool manner.

This is a common problem. According to research, more than 70% of employees fear having a conversation with their boss. What's more, avoiding discussions with the boss is not only scary to many workers it's also destructive. According to

the poll, conducted by the authors of the best-selling book, *Crucial Conversations*, people who aren't confident in their ability to address their superiors about workplace matters are 59% less productive – and an overwhelming 96% more likely to have poor morale.

“The select few who speak up candidly and respectfully – no matter the topic – are viewed as the top performers in their organization,” explains co-author Joseph Grenny. He offers the following tips for conquering jitters and approaching leaders about workplace issues:

❖ **Talk face-to-face and in private.** Don't chicken out by reverting to email or phone.

❖ **Assume the best in others.** Perhaps the boss is not aware of what your colleague is doing. Approach the conversation as a curious person wanting to help, rather than as an angry co-worker.

❖ **Share facts not conclusions.** Reading too much into workplace issues when you may not have all the facts is risky and likely to put people, including the boss, on the defensive. Wrong: “*Jim shows up late every day, and people see him at bars after work. I think he has a drinking problem.*” Right: “*Jim has been late to work a lot, and we'd like to find out why. He's a good worker when he's here, but we've had to pick up some of his workload, and we don't think this is fair.*”

❖ **Ask for your business leader's opinion.** After stating what's on your mind, ask your boss if he/she sees the problem differently. You're now poised to have a healthy conversation about someone's behavior, regardless of who it is, or what it is.

*Additional source: VitalSmarts®, an innovator in corporate training and organizational performance. For more information, visit [www.vitalsmarts.com](http://www.vitalsmarts.com).*