

CHAPTER 1

Leadership

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall...

Game Changer: *Efficiency does not happen of its own accord but is driven into every corner of a business through leaders dedicated to optimizing their operations. The quality of our leadership is mirrored in the health and well-being of our organizations.*

In a large city, two businesses were providing similar products to a similar market that existed in neighboring suburbs. One business was owned by a man who always complained about his staff. They turned up late, stole goods from him and he was always having to hire new people to keep up with the outflow of his *bad employees*. He struggled to make money and his store was anything but tidy. Inefficiency reigned supreme. The other business was incredibly efficient. It was operated by a woman who spoke highly of her people and in turn, they spoke highly of her. There was no staff turnover to speak of, the place was clean and tidy, there were systems in place, and the business was profitable. The outcomes in both these businesses fully reflected their leaders.

If we look at ourselves in a glass mirror, the reflection is precisely what we look like at the time. And business is similar: reflecting in all the various functions and outcomes, its leadership. This reflection tells you who you are as a leader, serving to instruct and guide you. Sometimes we receive great personal encouragement from this reflection, affirming us in the decisions we have made and the actions we have taken. At other times, we see outcomes that are less than desired, indicating changes are required in our own leadership abilities or the need for broader organizational corrections. Whatever the mirror reveals, it points back to leadership.

The Efficient Leader

Four Foundational Leadership Disciplines That Drive Efficiency

While many disciplines could be covered here, I have chosen four of the most common ones that, from my observations, significantly impact organizational efficiencies.

1. Rest

Rest is the fertile soil from which quality work springs from.

Rest is often relegated to that of a secondary activity—that which we have to do in order to work more tomorrow. Many of us have grown up in an environment where the emphasis was placed on working hard and working long, and, if we did this, we stood a better chance of being successful. Productivity was driven from more hours at the office with success attributed to financial gains and security through effort. Work thus became the centrality of focus for one's life with all other aspects taking a distant second, including rest.

Rest provides the context for clear thinking. A cluttered, racing mind outputs fragmented directives and diluted efforts, where multitasking becomes the norm, things are never fully completed, and people feel neglected. Efficiency is no friend to the disorganized mind but for the one where the discipline of rest is seen as an equal partner to their work, clarity of thought with cohesive actions will impact organizational efficiencies, and often, with an ease and flow we are unaware of.

Early in my business career, I thought that working long hours would create success fast. I would often turn up to the office on Wednesday morning having worked 36 hours in the previous two days. While there is no substitute for *focused* effort, relegating sleep to a few hours a night caught up with me. I would walk the edges of burnout every six months or so, losing weeks of momentum as I recovered. It was a case of learning the hard way. I eventually started seeing a naturopath who highlighted the need to stop living on adrenaline and start living out of rest, the foundation of which was a good night's sleep. Instead of viewing sleep as unproductive time, I came to understand it was the perfect partner of productivity. They were two sides of the same coin.

Sleep deficit impacts workplaces in significant ways. A study conducted on four corporations in the United States found that safety, productivity, and performance were significantly worse for those employees who suffered from insomnia and insufficient sleep, concluding that “Sleep disturbances contribute to decreased employee productivity at a high cost to employers.”¹

Dr. Michael A. Grandner, Director of the Sleep and Health Research Program at the University of Arizona, says:

Workplace health initiatives should promote the idea that sleep is not unproductive time. Rather, it is an investment of time that has been shown to produce improved productivity and less productivity loss. The available evidence shows that rather than more productive, individuals who are sleeping less are actually less productive, even with more time. The culture of sleep being only “rest” and therefore a sign of weakness or lack of endurance needs to change. (Grandner 2018; p. 1631)

One major contributing factor to poor sleep is the inability to psychologically detach from our work. Numerous leaders have mentioned how they wake during the night with their minds racing, with many of their partners saying they are physically present but emotionally absent when they are home. One process I have found extremely beneficial to assist the detachment process is what I have called *closing the door on the day*. Fifteen to 30 minutes before leaving the office, review your day’s accomplishments, and then create your plan for the following day, ensuring all your *yet to be done* tasks have been scheduled. Then, intentionally put your computer to sleep and, as you walk out, purposefully close the door.

One of the other issues that contribute to our struggle to detach from work is a racing mind, filled with uncompleted tasks. A highly effective method is simply getting them out of the mind by writing them onto a page, purposefully allocating them to be actioned tomorrow. If and when they reappear in our minds we can tell ourselves that “yes, I have written that down and it will be dealt with tomorrow,” assuring the mind we have it under control. When we have closed the door on the day and have settled our minds, a good night’s rest is made easier.

Rest is also about *deliberately* taking breaks, to calm the mind and relax the body. Rest is an activity that does not demand of us nor does it automatically insert itself in our diaries. We have to be intentional in creating space for it. Asking a business owner what personal goals she would like to achieve in the coming year, she mentioned one was to have a daily nap and the other to have Friday afternoons off. When I asked why they couldn't enact it immediately they said it was guilt driven: if their employees had to work full days then so should they. Leaders often think they have to arrive at work first and depart last so they are seen to be leading by example. But to take time out for daily rest and regular play not only is personally rewarding, but also models the importance of rest to our people. Because busyness is often erroneously equated with productivity, we view downtime as wasted time, thus increasing the feelings of guilt, but as Alex Soojung-Kim Pang, author of the book *Rest*, emphasizes: "Too often busyness is not a means to accomplishment but an obstacle to it. Deliberate rest helps you recognize and avoid the trap of pointless busyness and concentrate instead on what's important."²

2. Reflection

Working from a rested position with a calm mind helps us in the process of reflection. The word reflection, from its Latin origin, means *bent back*³ with one definition being "the return of light or sound waves from a surface."⁴ While we view the *effects* of our leadership being *bent back* through the business mirror, it then becomes important to stop and personally reflect on the *why*. Why has this happened? Why did we gain such success here? Why are customer complaints increasing? Why is the team so happy or late? Pausing from doing the work, long enough to reflect on the impact of our work: deconstructing our successes, thinking through our challenges, and failures, enables greater effectiveness in the present with faster and more precise and efficient movement forward.

Some time ago I saw in the mirror of my business a plummeting conversion ratio from proposals to sales. My immediate reaction was to work harder at increasing my proposal output but instead I paused, reflected on what I was seeing, and as a result gained significant insight into the reason for the decline. I was neglecting to fulfill some of the critical aspects of the proposal/sale process that had proven themselves when my ratios were higher. From my review, reflection, and making the subsequent changes,

my ratios went from 25 percent to 72 percent within the following few months. This wouldn't have happened had I not paused to reflect, seeking to gain distinctive insights to move forward.

One of the advantages of reflection is that we can learn from our *yesterdays* to perform more effectively in our *tomorrows*. Musician Pat Metheny demonstrates this. He has kept a postshow diary for the thousands of performances he has played and among the many insights the diaries provide he says, "It sounds weird, but over time the journal has helped me work out that I shouldn't eat before a show. I play better when I'm hungry."⁵ How would anyone detect that eating affects one's playing if they hadn't exercised the discipline of reflection? And it's often the undetected performance nuances that go unnoticed in the rush of leadership busyness that locks us into *playing as we have always played* instead of increasing the effectiveness of our work.

3. Planning

While I cover this subject in detail in Chapter 3, it is important to mention planning here as it is a fundamental discipline of effective leadership. Planning reduces anxiety and the temptation to be reactive. It enables the leader to take a more considered approach with less energy expended on secondary issues. Planning is central to efficiency and the accomplishment of strategic objectives, enabling us to be methodical in our work and build something of worth. What construction company begins a building project without first drawing up the plans? What war general goes into battle without having first strategically planned the process? What sports coach goes into a game without a plan to beat the competition and win the contest? Yet, for many in leadership, they don't approach their work and their days with a planned approach but rather default to a more reactive style of task and people management. Thorough planning lays the groundwork from which efficient and meaningful activity ensues.

4. Delegation

Speaking with a senior manager recently, he mentioned he performed most of the requests that came his way. Despite having a team of responsible people around him he experienced guilt when he thought of delegating

tasks to others. One business owner I was working with struggled to delegate due to their need to feel important. Being overloaded fuelled their sense of self-worth. Many other leaders I have coached have reverted to doing tasks themselves for the sake of speed and quality: they want it done well, they want it done now, so they perform it solo. And yet other managers fear if they are too proficient in delegation, they may effectively make themselves redundant, thus placing their jobs at risk.

Chapter 3 will cover the practical aspects of how to delegate effectively but for our purposes here, consider the following positive benefits delegation can have.

- It enables leaders to expand their role capacities and work scope.
- When others are entrusted with tasks, it often contributes to their sense of value to the organization.
- It optimizes individual strengths.
- It promotes growth within the individual, especially when it is combined with specific improvement training.
- Focus on high-priority items can be maintained while secondary tasks are being fulfilled by others.
- The concept of team is promoted more effectively.
- It's efficient.

Richard Branson notes: “it’s a fairy tale to think that you can do everything by yourself.” He goes on to say, “It’s vital to the success of your business that you learn to hand off those things that you aren’t able to do well.”⁶ And I think Richard is someone worth emulating in this regard.

Three Habits That Undermine Efficiency

1. Erratic Work Styles

Efficiency is undermined by erratic leadership. If leadership’s management style is largely one of reactivity—an erratic style where leaders display a continuous, almost involuntary, and spontaneous reaction to issues, tasks, and requests with the absence of forethought, planning, and strategic execution—efficiency is effectively stunted.

One of the companies I consulted within the health industry was in a significant growth phase. Their primary challenge was in managing the existing workloads and people while continuing to absorb the current expansion opportunities. The business owner was best described as spontaneous and erratic. They had grown several companies from the ground up, were exceptional at it, and asked me to work with their management team to ensure the business continued to expand without imploding. While they saw the need for managing growth their erratic work style continually undermined any structure and progress we were bringing to the management foundations. I took them aside partway through the project and told them that the biggest cause of the ongoing unrest, unhappiness, and constant chaos in the business was them. From that discussion, they chose not to change, rarely communicated with me, and continued to throw daily grenades into the business. The business mirrored their style perfectly.

One of the traits smart leaders exhibit is the recognition of who they are and who they aren't. Smart leaders have the wisdom to understand those weaknesses that are contributing to inefficiency and lack of organizational performance and seek to shore those weaknesses up through education and coaching. They also employ others with complementary strengths, having the wisdom to let those complementary partners run their race and trusting them in the process.

2. Circle Running

One of the outcomes of the reactive and erratic management style is that of *circle running*. "I feel like I've been running in circles" is the oft-heard statement. Moving at lightning speed, bouncing this way and that, we kick up a lot of dust but don't progress too far. No matter how far along the leadership track we are, most, if not all, certainly experience this from time to time. However, to have this as a lifelong work pattern only gets us running the same circuitous route. I have met business owners in their late 50s and early 60s who have confessed they have operated in this style for many years and with the prospect of retirement on the horizon, they've realized unless they change by creating strategic objectives they can align their daily actions to, the postwork years are likely to be difficult.

Removing ourselves from circle running and learning a new way of operating (especially if it has been our work style for many years) is a courageous act for many. I've seen leaders achieve this shift but it happened with initial insight that there is a better way, educating themselves in time management and delegation along with the integration of leadership coaching and ongoing accountability. And when they revert to previous behaviors (which they always do in the early stages), they realize it is part of the learning process. Circle running limits forward movement and promotes inefficiencies. The straighter the line we can run, the more effective we are as leaders.

3. Lack of Trust

The owners of a nutritional supplements company had placed their trust in one of their divisional managers for many years. He was like a son to them and then the unthinkable happened. They discovered he had been ordering supplies for various customers and was selling a portion of them for his own personal gain. Trust can be destroyed in an instant.

Benjamin Kutsyuruba and Keith D. Walker write:

It is well known that trust is an essential, yet a fragile part of organizational life. Because trust sometimes has to be placed without guarantees, it will inevitably be broken, violated, and damaged when parties involved in trustworthy relationships let others down. When trust-destroying events occur, trust is shattered and its level plummets quickly into the domain of distrust. (Walker and Kutsyuruba 2016)

Trust involves risk but, without taking that risk, leadership quickly becomes the bottleneck through doing too much themselves. This along with the micromanagement of our people tells employees they are there to do what they're told, stifling creativity and initiative. When trust has been broken, instead of setting up checks and balances to mitigate further risk and continue to trust (which the aforementioned business owners did), the prevalent tendency is to regain control, take back the reins, and do more ourselves. This effectively starts a process where we as

leaders become contained within our own worlds, where we don't trust and we fail to listen. Leaders, in taking back the reins, often default to a more authoritarian style and while this approach has its place in certain situations, its effect on broader efficiencies can be detrimental.

Believing in others communicates value and when you combine trust along with an open approach to listening and learning, from the storeman through to senior management, efficiency gains can be rapid.

The Efficient Management Team

Operating on a United Front

Divided management teams create divided organizations: person against person, department against department, fighting over resources with each attempting to get their own way. Divided management teams are reflected in the broader organization with their attitudes and actions cascading down, affecting all those in their wake. And rather than a central strategic agenda running through the core that galvanizes efforts and a team agenda, managers with their own agendas create more havoc than they do good. And this aids in creating greater inefficiencies. Rather than a cohesive flow between people and systems, there becomes a disconnectedness throughout.

When a military squad is assigned a mission, to accomplish its goal each has to focus on the same target while watching and protecting each other's backs. Individually they may have different thoughts of how to achieve the mission but unity is crucial for success. Team sports are similar. The goal is to win every game and while there are strengths and weaknesses within the group, playing *as a team* increases the chances of success. And management teams are no different.

Respect and Connection

At the heart of unity is respect. Managers don't necessarily need to be friends, nor do they have to like everyone on the team but they do need to show respect for each other along with having the capacity to support each other when required. Some of the best management teams I have worked with have been those where individuals enjoyed being with each

other, and this is often a reflection of the senior leader. While the managers might say they'd never do anything personally with the others outside of work, they had connection and demonstrated respect for each other in the workplace. They honored each other's strengths and covered their weaknesses. And while their meetings always involve operational and performance issues, there is often laughter and genuine enjoyment about being in the same room with each other. The senior leader in these cases often promotes out-of-work discussion, demonstrating interest in the personal lives of those they lead. These more personable leaders have a way of connecting their management teams at more a human level, with the interconnectivity increasing the team's engagement thus their corresponding productivity. I have also observed that meetings over food and after-hours social occasions go a long way in promoting this cohesive management front.

Value Systems

Each of your managers has their own value system, and values represent the prioritization of what we prefer in life. And each organization has its own value system, whether this is documented or not. Where this comes unstuck is when different people express different values to that of the corporate values. As an organization, we might value high customer and staff satisfaction where we treat everyone with respect. That works well for most except for, hypothetically, the sales manager who is disrespectful to the customers he deals with. While most of the managers share this corporate value, the sales manager persistently demonstrates a behavior, stemming from his value system that is at odds with the whole. To gain a coordinated front, the senior leader, along with other managers, must address these kinds of behaviors candidly. Sometimes, the proverbial slap in the head along with starting a regular counseling process to help the manager both see and demonstrate a value shift can be the improvement process in and of itself. But sometimes it means either repositioning the person (as in the case of the sales manager repositioned away from customer-interfacing roles) or helping them depart the organization. When these situations are not actively dealt with, the emotional angst of our

personnel increases which in turn affects efficiencies. One of the ways you know this emotional angst temperature is on the rise is by how much time is spent thinking about the issue, talking to others about it, and time spent dealing with the actual person. I have often pointed out to leaders I am coaching that we are spending far too much time talking about the person and that fast, decisive action is required to prevent further negativity infecting the team and the resulting performance loss.

Given each person has a different value system and the organization also has its value system, senior leadership needs to consistently hold the corporate values banner high, always seeking to ensure the team is *aligned in mind* and behaviors.

Weeding

After the first day of consulting with a company, I commented to the business owner it was one of the best teams I had ever observed. “We’ve done lots of weeding,” he responded, and sometimes, there are people on our teams that aren’t quite the right fit. Jim Collins, in his explanation about the findings from research conducted for his book *Good to Great*, writes:

When we began the research project, we expected to find that the first step in taking a company from good to great would be to set a new direction, a new vision and strategy for the company, and then to get people committed and aligned behind that new direction. We found something quite the opposite.

The executive who ignited the transformations from good to great did not first figure out where to drive the bus and then get people to take it there. No, they *first* got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and *then* figured out where to drive it. (Collins 2001; p. 41)

Those we deem to be the wrong people on the bus may be highly skilled, but if they are solo players and disrespectful to others, weeding is often the best option. I have seen companies flourish quickly after the wrong managers were helped to exit.

Strategic Alignment

A compelling vision as part of the strategic directive marshalls the energies of an organization and by its very nature drives efficiencies toward its fulfillment. While I cover the topic of strategy in Chapter 2, it is important to note here that organizations that have strong strategic objectives, that have a collective commitment by management to their overriding mission, and where a *strong reason for being* exists increase their chances significantly of creating a team that is unified in terms of purpose.

When different managers operate from unchecked personal values that drive unchecked individual behaviors and all with different goals, fragmentation, not unity, is the effect. It is important to ensure that senior leadership is regularly revisiting who they are and what they stand for (their values), along with the strategic objectives. When all managers express the same values and are focused on the same goals, efficiency gains velocity. A unified management team is truly a game changer.

Reflection Point

- In reflecting on the subject of leadership, where do you see your personal strengths and weaknesses are?
- Where do you see that your organization could do better in terms of its leadership?
- What are you seeing reflected in the mirror of your organization?

Summary

Changing the efficiency game starts at the top, with leadership. It is important for leaders to:

- Operate from a place of rest and reflect more on their work and the effectiveness of their organization or the department they are responsible for.
- Plan their days and be highly effective in delegation.
- Demonstrate a teachable attitude with a lifelong pursuit of personal development and increasing skill set effectiveness.

- Be personable in their dealings with others.
- Work toward the unity of their colleagues and always have each other's backs.
- Trust others while maintaining effective checks and balances.
- Ensure all team members are contributing to the strategic direction and anyone who is not is helped to get onboard or exit the bus.

Effective leaders are those who when they look out across their organization will see an image reflected back they can increasingly be proud of. The game being played in front of their eyes will show them what they are doing well and what to correct, thus continually driving efficiencies into all aspects of their business.

Endnotes

1. (Rosekind et al. 2010; p. 91).
2. (Pang 2018; p. 242).
3. (Harper 2001–2020).
4. (Merriam-Webster, Incorporated 1828–2020).
5. (Baily 2020).
6. (Clarkson 2015).