

# Nine

## Your Personal Leadership Journey: Focus on Self

*Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.*

*Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.*

—Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

### Introduction

Leaders who want to change an organization must be able to change people. To change others, you have to first change yourself. Therefore, there is only one starting point that makes sense: Learning to lead oneself better is the only way to lead others better.

*You have to be the change you want to see in others.*

(Mahatma Gandhi)

Leaders are often seen as having a separate or extra set of values or characteristics, things that make them different. When you see what is expected or demanded of people we call leaders, you will understand that they are not your average person, at least not during the times when he/she is assuming the role of a leader.

Leaders are generally perceived to have a heightened sense of self-awareness, of their own personal “dream,” “mission,” “capability,” or may even feel to “...have greatness thrust upon

them.”<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, we discuss how you can create your own personal leadership journey. The framework in Chapter Two is designed for leading health programs, but with some modifications it can be used to chart out one’s own personal leadership journey. First, we look at ways to create personal vision, followed by a discussion on finding a path to bridge the gap between vision and reality. Finally, some tips are provided on how you can keep yourself inspired. However, you will need to hone some critical skills in your personal leadership journey (see Chapter 10).

## Becoming a More Effective Leader

Leadership is about the whole of you. Influences from early childhood, education, experiences and learning from failures all count toward molding a leader’s vision, mind-set, and behavior. But also important are the conscious efforts that leaders take to continuously learn and improve themselves, and become more effective leaders.

### *Creating a Personal Vision*

One of the most famous and inspiring vision statements is in a speech by Martin Luther King Jr, delivered at the height of the civil rights movement in the US, in Washington, D.C. in 1963.

Martin Luther King was a great orator and one of the most recognizable leaders in the world. As a leader of the civil rights movement in the US in the 1960s, he was the right leader for the right cause at the right time.

He was a visionary leader who also understood very well how to communicate effectively, and used his oratorical skills to full advantage. He knew how to move people simply with words, by

<sup>1</sup> This is a very popular quote from William Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. The full quote is “Be not afraid of greatness; some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them” (Act II, Scene V).

communicating his vision and his values. To this day, there are still frequent references to his speech “I have a dream” message and this illustrates his power and enduring stature as a leader (see Box 9.1).

**Box 9.1:** Excerpts from Martin Luther King’s “I have a dream”

*I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.*

*I have a dream that one day the nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.*

*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*

*I have a dream that one day the state of Mississippi, a desert state sweltering in the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.*

*I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.*

*I have a dream today .....*

Source: [www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf](http://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf) accessed on March 29, 2014.

**Pause for Reflection**

Analyze the above vision statement in terms of what it embodies.

*The leader finds the dream and then the people. The people find the leader and then the dream. (John Maxwell)*

Thus, the personal leadership journey begins with a vision. A vision is truly an extraordinary thing that can go on to influence and change you.

It is more emotional than analytical. It is something that touches the heart, not just the mind. It should embody what you wish to be and would come to be identified with it.

Your vision may be derived from the vision you have for the community you wish to serve. You may wish to reflect upon your vision of the community you serve or wish to serve. How does health contribute to or is integral to this vision? (See Table 9.1)

**Table 9.1:** Ask Yourself These Questions

<i>What Are You Passionate About?</i>	<i>What Personal Values Have an Impact on You?</i> ↓	<i>Who Inspires You?</i> ↓	<i>What Inspires You?</i> ↓	<i>Who Would Have an Influence on Your Vision?</i> ↓
<u>Example:</u> Empowerment of women and girls	<u>Example:</u> • Persistence • Fair-mindedness	<u>Example:</u> Mother Teresa	<u>Example:</u> Indonesia’s commitment to civil society	<u>Example:</u> • Midwives • Outreach workers

Source: Authors.

You can use the following exercise to develop your personal vision (see Figure 9.1). It takes two “P”s and three “I”s to get you to reflect on yourself as a person, and what drives you.

**Figure 9.1:** Creating a Personal Vision: Some Useful Questions

Questions to ask	
Evocative descriptor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What will I see?</li> <li>What will I hear?</li> </ul>
Core values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do I value?</li> <li>What achievements have meaning for me?</li> </ul>
Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What do I want?</li> <li>How will I recognize when I see it?</li> </ul>

Source: Ciampa and Watkins, 1999.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Ciampa D. and Watkins M. (1999). *Right from the start: Taking charge in a new leadership role*. Boston, USA: Harvard Business School Press.

### The personal vision

- Evokes a clear and positive mental image of a future state
- Creates pride, energy, and a sense of accomplishment
- Is memorable
- Is inspiring
- Is idealistic
- Clarifies purpose and direction, inspires enthusiasm
- Focuses attention
- Moves people to action

**Review your Vision**

How many of the above attributes does it meet?

### *Draw Your Vision*

Represent your vision in a drawing using elements such as rainbow, cartoons, bridges, trees, people, buildings, flowers, and so on. Be creative. Consider: (1) current situation, (2) personal attributes, and (3) future. What is your rationale?

In our program to develop visionary leaders, the personal vision among emerging leaders differed. A few of them expressed it as what they wanted “to be.” For example,

- Be at the forefront of the HIV/AIDS initiatives in the state and region
- Be an advocate and raise awareness to control the scourge of obstetric fistula

Several others expressed their vision as what they wanted “to do.” For example,

- To forge partnership with the private sector to respond to the needs and enhance service delivery

- To keep serving people with a clear focus now and an eye to the future
- To integrate food and health for the poor and marginalized
- To create a new model for integrating livelihood and SRH
- To build an effective new model for government programs in family planning and health
- To help disadvantaged young people
- To improve women's socioeconomic situation
- To influence change in society through appropriate religious tools and messages
- To establish our institute as a recognized national institution for leadership development
- To improve the status of women

A few other emerging leaders expressed their personal vision in terms of "see it happen." For example,

- To see Ethiopian women, children, and young people lead healthy and productive lives
- To see that malnutrition is no more a public health problem
- To see people with HIV/AIDS live a life without stigma
- To see that people at all levels participate in campaign against FGM
- To know that there is widespread consistent and correct use of condoms

**Exercise** **What About You?**

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What do you want... **To be?** .....

.....

What do you want... **To do?** .....

.....

How do you... **See it happen?** .....

.....

### *Assess Vision–Reality Gap*

Leaders have to be practical and realistic. In the context of your vision, you will have to understand the environment you are in and prioritize what needs to be done first. Therefore, an assessment of the vision–reality gap is necessary.

Assessing the reality means taking stock of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as the external environment in which you currently operate or are likely to operate in the future. You will need to know your talents and reflect upon your experiences. You also need to know what the systemic capabilities of the organization are, such as office infrastructure, equipment, technological facilities, supplies, and other resources. The dynamics of the external environment exert an equally important impact on the reality which you as a leader will have to deal with. You will have to be aware of the trends and patterns such as the changing needs of clients, government regulations and policies, competitors' behavior, or the social and political conditions in the community that affect demand or service delivery.

Once an audit is done of the internal and external realities, you will need to seek information and ways to deal with any prospective problems. Having and sharing a vision is an essential first step but knowing and narrowing the vision–reality gap is critical to progress in your leadership journey.

### *Choosing a Path to Realize One's Personal Vision*

An analysis would be needed for identifying these competencies depending upon the vision–reality gap and ways to bridge this gap. Participants of a leadership development program chose a mix of the following to realize their personal visions:

1. Strengthening and utilizing their leadership competencies
2. Strengthening their organizations
3. Inter-organizational partnering

4. Development of community capacities
5. Participation in policy and program activities

#### Strengthening and utilizing their leadership competencies

A variety of skills depending upon the challenges in realizing a personal vision may need to be strengthened and/or utilized. Some of these are discussed in Chapter 10 including listening, negotiation, conflict management, communication, public speaking, and building and leading the top teams. Other skills may include ability to think and act strategically, willingness to use leadership potential, and enhanced persuasive ability.

#### Strengthening their organizations

Often emerging leaders are working in an organization. Depending upon their position, they can contribute to strengthening their organization through developing and sharing a vision, mobilizing support and resources from within, aligning organizational values and systems, strengthening program performance, and initiating new ideas and approaches to implementation for better organizational results.

#### Inter-organizational partnering

For synergy, nothing can beat networks and alliances promoting an idea or getting things done. Leaders recognize the value of people and organizations pooling their talents, experiences, and resources but the challenge is initiating and then sustaining it. Leaders can form networks to address a need or expand the range as well as reach of health services. Government–NGO–private sector alliances in health can not only advocate for causes but can partner to achieve results building upon their distinctive strengths. Finally, leaders can use their competencies to build such competencies in other organizations.



### Development of community capacities

Community values, norms, and practices have significant bearing on health status. Leaders need to recognize them and use them creatively to realize their vision. Sometimes, there may be hostility to new ways of doing things and leaders need to demonstrate their utility and may need to persist despite the opposition. It helps to understand the reasons behind the current practices and address these reasons.

Most leaders desire to bring change through influencing policies and programs

However, the ability to do so effectively may not be easy. The skills and competencies are rather specific (such as negotiation, conflict resolution, communications, consensus building, and so on) and certain traits may take time to acquire (such as politics-smarts, knowledge base, and credibility). Sometimes, the opportunity may present itself such as being a member of the policy drafting committee or technical working group, or a professional association.

### Establish goals and strategies

Every vision effort needs not just a broad vision and an assessment of vision–reality gap, but also specific path, strategies, and realizable goals. Goals represent what you will commit yourself to do, often within a well-defined and short period of time.

### *Inspire Self to Pursue the Personal Vision*

Awareness of “self” is the beginning of being inspired. The elements of self-awareness include perceptions, focus, energy, and clarity, as can be seen from the following comments of some emerging leaders:

- I became aware of my perceptions and skills
- Became reenergized and focused

- Leader with a vision never gets tired
- I became aware of my negative traits

The source of inspiration varies for leaders and may emanate from some experiences, parents, family, world leaders, and high achievers such as athletes, mentors, and program leaders. Even poverty and ill health can be inspiring to some emerging leaders:

- I was touched and traumatized by exposure to the real problems of people in my area.
- It was the pain of seeing young people going through major challenges related to reproductive health and child care.
- Memory of seeing how hungry poor people rushed for food at a mosque spurred me into development work.

Some others saw how weak (or lack of) leadership had affected the lives of people and, thus, realized the importance of good leadership and chose to test their own mettle and become strong leaders.

Early influences, whether from family members or from others, often become a strong source of inspiration. These influences can be instrumental in shaping early perspectives in life and their choice of vocation:

- My mother could extend her love and affection beyond her family boundary, every villager in some way or other got her blessing...that is how I was prompted to think for the poor.
- My grandfather was pioneer in women's education, while my parents taught about sharing responsibilities and working with others.

Some derive their inspiration from world leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.

*The people's capacity to achieve is determined by their leader's ability to empower.* (John Maxwell)

When leaders talk about inspiring people, their prescription is remarkably consistent:

- Communicate continuously
- Listen carefully
- Tolerate failure as a learning experience
- Build on people's desire to make a positive difference
- Maintain a commitment to innovation, creativity, diversity, social responsibility, and continuous development

**Pause for Reflection**

How is a vision in your organization established? Should it move to the next higher stage? Why?

### *Followers May Determine Your Leadership Style*

Traditionally, leaders were viewed by followers as leaders by virtue of their titles or positions. The study of leadership as a discipline has evolved rapidly in the past 50 to 60 years, moving from titles or positions to behavior or personality styles, to action-oriented approach (what followers expected leaders “to do”). Therefore, to be an exemplary or effective leader, the aspirations of your followers should be woven into your behavior and action.

Being a leader is about managing those who “follow” you, either because they are your subordinates (employees/staff), partners, or just people who look up to you, believe in you, or count on you to achieve something. In short, effective leaders need to develop good followership.<sup>3</sup> To foster this, as a leader you need to pay some attention to these four areas:

- *Authenticity*: You have to feel comfortable and real in your role as a leader. Followers need to feel they can trust

<sup>3</sup> O'Brien, P. (2011). Change your leadership style. *New Straits Times*, December 20.

you and that you have a certain pattern of behavior that is authentic and predictable.

- *Bridging*: Leaders create a better future but to get there, they must first lay a clear path that manages this transition that is a bridge between today and tomorrow. Followers look toward a better tomorrow through a leader's vision which is aligned or resonates with their own hopes and aspirations.
- *Communication*: Followers want their leaders to be able to convey their vision and messages clearly, honestly, and sincerely. Communication is a two-way process, so they want their leaders to listen to their views and concerns. Hence, communication can strengthen the leader–follower relationship, in direct and indirect ways.
- *Emotional Engagement*: Ever since Daniel Goleman put forward his “emotional intelligence (EI)” theory,<sup>4</sup> the emotional connection has been hugely influential in the leadership debate in recent years. High IQ does not always mean success or happiness while high EI may determine or generate emotional bonding, loyalty, trust, and admiration from followers. An example of an exceptional successful leader is the former US President Bill Clinton who is renowned for his ability to make an emotional connection with each and every person he speaks with.

*Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.*  
(President John Kennedy)

### *Leadership Development Is a Lifelong Process*

One of the outstanding traits of effective leaders is that they are not only willing to learn from failures but they are constantly learning. It is a lifelong process and commitment. But what does learning mean?

<sup>4</sup> Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence. Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam Books.

Learning has two meanings<sup>5</sup>—acquiring knowledge and acquiring skills. Or, respectively, know-how and know-why. While “know-how” is important, for a leader, the “know-why” is more critical to complement their visionary mission because skills are the building blocks to inspiring and empowering followers.

Here are a variety of ways you can learn (see Table 9.2).

**Table 9.2:** *Akin’s Model of Learning*

Emulation	⇒	In which one emulates either someone one knows or a historical or public figure
Role taking	⇒	In which one has a conception of what one should do and does it
Practical Accomplishment	⇒	In which one sees a problem as an opportunity and learns through the experience of dealing with it
Validation	⇒	In which one tests concepts by applying them and learns after the fact
Anticipation	⇒	In which one develops a concept and then applies it, learning before acting
Personal Growth	⇒	In which one is less concerned with specific skills than with self-understanding and the “transformation of values and attitudes”
Scientific Learning	⇒	In which one observes, conceptualizes on the basis of one’s observations, then experiments to gather new data, with a primary focus on truth

Source: Bennis Warren, 2003.<sup>6</sup>

**Pause for Reflection**  
How do you learn?

<sup>5</sup> Boyett, J., & Boyett, J. (1998). *The guru guide. The best ideas of the top management thinkers*. New York, USA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

<sup>6</sup> Bennis Warren (2003). *On becoming a Leader*. Philadelphia, USA: Perseus Books Group.

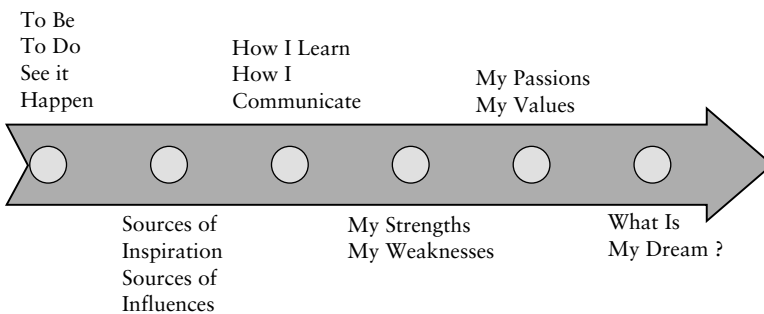
**Exercise**

What or Who Inspires You?	How do You Learn?
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.

*Taking a Journey to Leadership Development*

Becoming an effective leader is a very personal journey (see Figure 9.2). It will lay bare your sense of self, tease your sense of direction, challenge your self-esteem, test your patience, question your decisions, and delve into your resolve and resilience. But mostly, it will be exhilarating and deeply rewarding because, as all travelers well know, it is not the destination that we look forward to but the journey itself.

**Figure 9.2:** *My Personal Journey to Leadership*



Source: Authors.

Remember the famous Chinese proverb:

*Every thousand-mile journey begins with a single step.*