

Focus and Balance are Necessary for Leaders

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Leadership is not easy! If it were, we'd have a lot more good leaders and fewer frustrations with bosses and political bureaucracies.

When I work to build the skills of a leader, we start by looking at 67 different attributes. Evaluating all the potential improvements can feel quite overwhelming! Sometimes an individual looks at me and asks, "Are there one or two overarching criteria that supersede all these many characteristics?"

After supporting hundreds of developing leaders, I've concluded that there are two such characteristics. They are "focus" and "balance."

"Focus" is the ability to "zoom in" on a particular activity, give it all your attention, and complete it.

"Balance" is the ability to "zoom out," ensuring that you are giving all the required focus areas the attention they need, at the frequency and to the depth that they need it.

Focus. We all have the freedom and power to choose how we spend our time. Our choices fall into three different areas.

First, we choose what meaning we give to any specific situation. We consider the circumstances important or irrelevant. We delight in the situation or we are offended. We consider the condition worthy of immediate attention, or we delay thinking about it.

Second, we choose what we will do. At least five different options are possible for responding to any given circumstance! The alternative we choose is a function of our values and our evaluation of the probability that we will achieve an outcome we desire.

Finally, we choose what we focus on at any given time. Will we relax and delay this situation until later? Or will we get serious, devoting our concentration to the issue at hand?

Even if we decide to focus deeply on a given situation, we can easily be distracted. The phone rings. Someone walks in and interrupts us. Reading a particular word throws us into a totally different line of thinking. Diversions are incessant!

The best leaders are very deliberate about how and where they spend their time! If you are not currently able to "zoom in" and focus, put some effort against this skill!

Balance. There are so many dimensions of life that demand our attention! We feel a responsibility to "touch" each important aspect at the proper frequency and with sufficient attention. Otherwise, we find ourselves having to do some repair work, perhaps at times inconvenient to us.

Allocate some special "think" time to write down your values and consider all the major focus areas involved in your work life and your home life. If you're not intentional, you'll become so busy that you'll go for long periods without attending to the things you consider important!

People demand many things from you. Their requests can overwhelm you. You lose sleep. You don't eat properly. You become resentful. If this happens, you are of little value to anyone.

Inventorying the significant aspects of your life minimizes your susceptibility to urgency addiction.

Living a perfectly balanced life is not possible. The best leaders are out of balance most of the time. However, they compensate routinely, frequently making adjustments. They establish systems for handling routine demands. And they don't mind apologizing when those occasional botched items occur.

Focus: zoom in and intentionally attend to specifics. Balance: zoom out and survey the territory.

Time is the one resource that we all share in equally limited supply. Use your limited time well!

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