



LEADING  
— *with* —  
EASE

*Creating a solid foundation for  
your leadership role*



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## **Root One: Know Yourself**

When I ask people why they stepped into a leadership role, I often hear “It was the next logical step.” I usually follow up with “Is it what you expected?” and the answer is always “No!” The reasons vary, but I’ve rarely heard anyone say, “It was exactly what I expected.” The answer to “If you could go back, would you do it again?” varies. Most say, “Yes,” but I think that has more to do with the fact that they are attending some form of leadership talk from me. If they were going to say no to that question, they probably would have already stepped out of the role.

To be an effective leader, we must know ourselves well. Leading a team means making tough decisions and supporting a group of people to get the work done. At times this can be overwhelming, and if we don’t know ourselves well, it’s going to be hard to make those tough choices. Not to mention keep ourselves in a good space in order to make those decisions.

If I asked you the question “Who are you?” you’d probably start your answer with your name. Depending on the context of the conversation, you might follow up with your family name or define yourself by someone I might know in your family; i.e., “I’m Jane Smith’s daughter.” If it’s more of a work context, the follow up to your name is more likely to be your role or maybe your department.

If you want to really see people squirm, say, “Tell me about yourself” and provide zero context. Most people struggle with this because we rarely take the time to get to know ourselves, and we are very complex beings.

When we step into a leadership role, knowing ourselves becomes more important. The moment you become a leader your sphere of influence increases, as well as your responsibility. You are no longer taking care of a

set of tasks; you are now responsible for the sets of tasks multiple people are responsible for. More responsibility and far less control. Getting a task done no longer requires knowledge of the task itself. Now you need to understand the inner working of the team member, what's going on in their lives, what their personality needs to get things done, what's happening with other team members that might be getting in the way of getting the task done, and so much more. I like the phrase "Being on the balcony" because you have to step back and take a view of the bigger picture, and you have to be aware of the whole picture. Sometimes it's exhausting watching how everything is fitting together (or worse, figuring out why it's not fitting).

In this section we will talk about getting to know ourselves in order to:

- Protect our energy
- Understand our own needs
- Understand our frustration and emotions
- Communicate our needs

Getting to know yourself is not a one and done. As we learn, grow, and age, our lives change and what we need to keep our personal energy up changes as well. Sometimes it's something happening in our lives, a major change, like moving, changing jobs, having a family, or losing members of our family. During those times, how we practice self-care and what we need to show up as our best selves changes. Sometimes those things are short-lived and other times they are things that happen in our lives that change things for a much longer period.

Then we will talk about understanding others, especially those that aren't like us, in order to:

- Understand their frustration and emotions
- Hear their needs
- Use our differences to come to the best solutions

Same can be said here, people need space to learn and grow. If we aren't a one and done, neither are they, so give them grace and see when they have improved in some area.

Last but not least, I'll share my favorite framework for understanding ourselves and others.

As a leader, your time is no longer spent “doing” the work; you are now ensuring that the work is done through others. In order to do this, you need a good understanding of yourself so you can also understand your team.

# Chapter 1

## Who Am I?

Ask a person this question “Who are you?” and watch how they struggle to answer. Such a short sentence, but it leaves people somewhat stuck. There are just too many ways to answer the question. Usually, they will ask for context first, and if you don’t offer any, they will often start to give their job title, if they have children, who they are in relation to what they do or their surrounding relationships.

Try it for yourself. Who are you?

While this is an incredibly difficult question to answer, it’s important that you understand yourself.

- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What are your preferred methods of communication?
- How do you want people to communicate with you?
- How do you like to communicate with others?
- What are your triggers (those things that just frustrate you to no end)?
- Where are you hard on yourself?

When you step into a leadership role, you suddenly become responsible for yourself as well as the decisions of your entire team. That’s a lot of responsibility. When I work with leaders, I often say, “Yes, that is your responsibility,” or “You need to deal with that behavior immediately.” The consequences of not dealing with issues are longer and more far-reaching than most leaders realize. In order to be aware of what’s happening and be able to deal with it, you need to show up every day with the best energy you



can muster. This means getting to know yourself so you know what you need in any given moment.

We all have four parts to our being:

- Physical – to move
- Mental – to think
- Spiritual – to connect
- Emotional – to feel

We need to understand these parts of ourselves and know how to deal with them when we are struggling with any of them. They are all connected, so struggling in one part will cause problems for the others. Most of us have a “go to” when we are struggling. I used to use the physical. When faced with any stress, I would exercise and get all the excess energy out. Others are more emotional, and when they experience stress, they might take a moment and yell or cry to move that energy.

The physical is usually the easy one for people to understand. It’s about how we take care of our physical body, what we eat, when and how much we move, etc. Taking care of your physical body is not about a new workout trend or having the perfect physique, because that will cause problems in other areas if it’s not your thing. You do need to move though, so do it in a way that you enjoy. Eat the foods that make you feel good.

Our mental energy is something that we don’t think as much about, but just like our physical body we need to be aware of what we are “feeding” our minds. This has become more important with social media and algorithms. Social media shares with us the things it thinks we want to know about. When there is a controversy in our world, we are bombarded with it on social media, and it can start feeling overwhelming. Our minds also need more downtime than we give them. This is why I like baking so much. Mostly I only like baking things that I have done often so I don’t have to focus too hard on it. It gives my brain some rest.

Spiritual energy is different for everyone. It’s our ability to connect. For some that comes in the form of a religious belief system that requires they do things like pray to connect to a deity of their choice. For others it’s a meditation and so on. Still there are those that don’t connect with the idea of a deity or other spiritual being; each of them has their own way of connecting. I have a friend who doesn’t believe in any of the spiritual stuff,

but when I walk in the forest with her, I see more animals than I ever do alone. She will talk to them and take pictures. She connects with Nature. We all need a way to connect to something.

Emotional energy is the hardest for me. It's something I work on constantly. I am not a person who is highly aware of her emotions. My emotions control me more often than I wish they did. The same as all the others, though, we need to be aware of what we feed our emotions. Sometimes it's people in our lives who say hurtful things, but sometimes it's the thoughts in our own heads wreaking havoc. Either way, we need to be aware and decide what we let into our lives. The ability to name and control our emotions is the hardest for many people, because we weren't taught. It's worse for men in Western society, because they have been taught that it's only OK to show anger, but not too much that they lose control.

## **Protect Your Energy**

Getting to know ourselves allows us to protect our own personal energy. We all have things that we enjoy doing, and then there are those parts of our lives and jobs that we do not enjoy but are necessary evils. If we are doing too many of those necessary evils, we will find our energy drained. If we ignore all those things, we will find ourselves in some form of difficulty because those parts **NEED** to be taken care of as well. Here are three suggestions:

1. *Sandwich tasks you don't enjoy with tasks you do enjoy.* Do them in smaller bits so that you aren't spending hours doing the pieces that you really don't enjoy. This will help you to maintain your energy throughout the day.

An example for me is any task that requires me to sit still for long periods of time. Like writing this book! I usually write early in the morning or just before lunch so that my next activity is something that gives me energy. If it's early in the morning, my next activity is a walk with the dog. The dog is ecstatic to go, so it's always an enjoyable outing and it gets me moving. If I write just before lunch, I get to leave the office for an hour or so after, and I usually find a

game or a funny show to watch over lunch, and the obvious, eating, again something I enjoy doing.

2. *Be kind to yourself (which always turns into more kindness for others).* Think of that task or thing that you struggle with. How often do you chastise yourself in your own mind for not staying on that task or for not doing a better job at it? Mine is staying organized. I'm great at taking a day to organize myself. I create beautiful spreadsheets, make binders, and create files (sometimes even color-coded), but then life gets busy, and I forget my whole system! The files are there, but the papers are everywhere. Then I have another day where I clean it all up and I realize I had a system, but I forgot about it. I now just laugh about it, but previously I had some choice words for myself in these situations. I promise you they were not kind words.

My suggestion here is to be kind to yourself on these things and maybe get someone to help you with the areas that you struggle with. When I was in a management role with ten people reporting to me, we would have a ton of projects going on at once. As the leader, I could not keep all of it in my mind, so I used a spreadsheet. I was terrible at keeping the spreadsheet, so I had my assistant keep it updated for me. While not normally part of her role, she had a strength in organizing these types of things and was happy to take it on. Is there someone on your team that could take on some of the tasks that aren't your strengths?

3. *Be prepared.* I am fully aware that doing month-end financials is not my favorite thing, but it is necessary. I've gone back and forth on whether I should have someone take it over for me (I didn't have that option when I was in an HR managers position). The reality for me is that it's less than an hour a week, so I'd be hiring someone for ten minutes (because you know they would be so much faster than I am at it), plus I would still have to upload receipts etc. For now, the better business choice for me was to continue doing this work myself.

I can prepare myself for it, though, and use some of the tools I mentioned earlier like sandwiching. For me it looks like taking thirty minutes every Friday morning to put all the receipts in my system for the week. I update my spreadsheets and then end my week with something I enjoy. I am aware every week that this is what I'll be doing Friday morning, so I'm prepared for it, I know it's coming, and I do my best to keep things as organized through the week so that I'm not searching for things on Friday morning.

## **Know Your Values**

Another important aspect of what you need to be aware of is your values. I shared in the introduction that I worked at a company that rocked my confidence. In reflecting on my time there, I realized that we had a very different set of values, and that values mismatch is what caused a lot of the issues.

My values are Strength, Drive, Integrity, Care for Others, and Vision. This company did not show care for others, the integrity was lacking, and there was no vision for our future. It was a long-standing company that felt like it wasn't going anywhere or trying anything new. Just the same old, same old. This did not match me at all. I was constantly battling with my boss and my management team and repeatedly told I was wrong and to "assimilate" to their way of doing things.

It was a difficult place to be. At every other company I'd worked at my work had been celebrated. To suddenly go from all that praise to being constantly told I was wrong didn't compute in my mind. I was in a constant state of stress and doing everything I could to deal with the stress. For me that looked like extreme workouts, which should have had me in great shape, but I constantly had illnesses that, when reviewed, medically were nothing. This is when the doctor told me to take a vacation or he'd put me on sick leave.

Contrast this to the company I mentioned in the opening. Their values were so close to mine that when I was in university and had to create a company's benefits package, mine was very close to theirs. This was a learning company; when they learned something new, they implemented it, they cared for their employees, and they were very clear on their vision and made it known to all of us. Working there, I had stress—not everything

went right—but my team came together and worked out a solution. The vision and values for the company were so clear that we had great guidelines with which to make the decisions, and we knew if we met them, our decisions would be backed up. I still did extreme sports at the time, but it was just for fun; it wasn't required, and my health was so much better—no bizarre illnesses with no explanation.

If you are at a company that does not meet your values, move on as soon as you can. Nothing good will come of it. If you are in management and you have a team member that has a set of values that don't meet your company values, let them go. It will better serve them to find a place more suited to them, and it will be more beneficial to your team.

I mentioned in the intro to this section that getting to know yourself is not a one and done. Sometimes we have a stressor in our life that changes our behavior, sometimes they are short term, and sometimes they are longer term. I had an extreme version of this the year I started running this business full time; I had half my thyroid removed *by mistake*. I won't go much further into that part here, but I will share that this changed me forever. It's been over eight years, and I'm still not back to who I used to be.

Before the surgery, when things got too stressful, I'd work out. I loved extreme sports and did some pretty heavy workouts. Things like CrossFit and P90X, mountain biking on single-track trails, running half marathons (not my favorite, but I can say I did it once!), snowboarding, kayaking, scuba diving. Anything to get that rush of adrenaline and release all the stress from my job. After the surgery, I did not have the energy for the workouts. It's not that I couldn't do them; I could, but I'd burn out and have to spend the next two days on the couch.

I went from P90X and CrossFit to walking my dog (a fourteen-pound dog who only needs a fifteen-minute walk) and doing at the most ten minutes of exercise. I hate to admit that it took me way longer than it should have for me to figure out that this was going to be my life going forward. I tried for years to build myself back up to twenty or thirty minutes, but every time I did, I'd burn out again and it would take me a few days (or sometimes weeks) to recover. I no longer had exercise as a way to deal with my stress; even something seemingly easy, like yoga, I can still only do ten minutes. I had to learn new ways.

Western medicine felt that there was nothing wrong with me. My numbers were normal, but I was always exhausted. Thankfully I got help from naturopaths and a medical intuitive. I learned a new way to eat and accepted that ten minutes of exercise was going to have to be enough.

I have learned breathing techniques, meditation, mantras, and other techniques to use the other parts of my being to deal with the stress.

I also had to do some review of my values. Specifically, “Drive” . . . For me that always meant driving to a better physical version of me, and I did that through exercise and pushing my body to the limits. I could no longer do that anymore, so what did “Drive” even mean? I’m still driven, that hasn’t changed, but now it’s less in physical pursuits. I’m still always driving to be a better me, but now it looks like a better speaker, writer, and coach (also stepmom, girlfriend, daughter, sister, etc.).

To show up as the best version of ourselves, we have to know ourselves. That is a never-ending opportunity for learning. The more we grow and live, the more things will change. What we need this week is not necessarily what we need next week. Be patient with yourself. The more patience and understanding you have for yourself, the more you will have for others.

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