

Self-Leadership: A Process for Entrepreneurial Success

Original publication by **Robert S. D’Intino, Michael G. Goldsby, Jeffery D. Houghton, and Christopher P. Neck**

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Synopsis by **Benjamin Forster**, Claremont McKenna College, ‘11

The concept of self-leadership, that individuals have the ability to control personal actions and to harness personal strengths, is a key skill in developing today’s entrepreneur. D’Intino et.al. define the process of self-leadership as the “self-direction and self-motivation necessary to perform their tasks and work”. The process of self-leadership follows three main categories including behavior focused strategies, natural reward strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies. Moreover, self-leadership follows a method of self discipline, goal setting, positive thinking and intelligently administered self rewards. The end goal is that through this process of positive thinking and self discipline, entrepreneurs will be able to harness their own innovation and creativity to build their businesses. The process of learning self-leadership, the authors say, is a concept that both new and veteran entrepreneurs are equally capable of applying and mastering in today’s business world.

The first part of the article focuses on the idea of optimism in self-leadership. Perhaps the biggest hurdle for many entrepreneurs is what to do when encountering trying times and difficult circumstances. In this section, the article focuses on the idea of “tragic optimism”, a concept first introduced by former Nazi concentration camp survivor and psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl. Later, Seligman studied “explanatory styles.” This concept is defined as the way in which people explain the occurrences of different events. Optimists view failure as impersonal and not overbearing, a trait inherent in successful entrepreneurs. This outlook of avoiding discouragement by dissociation is applicable in all areas of entrepreneurship, sports and public speaking. Moreover, the practice of visualizing success prior to performance has been shown to increase the likelihood of success drastically.

The next section focuses on the concept of happiness and “flow” in self-leadership. As explained in the article, happiness is an area of the study in which many entrepreneurs differ. Nonetheless, the role of happiness in self-leadership can have profound impacts on one’s work, employees and customers, though according to the article, recent studies have shown that happiness has more to do with reaction to the environment than the environment itself. Incorporating intrinsic motivation, self talk, self observation and reasonable goals into one’s work method is key to entrepreneurial success. The article also delves into the concept of flow, as defined by psychologist Csikszentmihalyi as the total involvement of a person in his or her work. This idea of flow is inherent in highly successful entrepreneurs such as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs.

Also touched on is the effect of personality, defined as the unique traits of a particular person, on self-leadership. Such personality characteristics, the article explains, play a large role in one’s ability to undertake self leadership effectively. Similar to the concept of “explanatory styles” is the idea of “locus of control”, which is the extent to which people believe they retain control

over events in their daily lives. According to the article, those with an internal locus of control have the makings of potential leaders.

Also discussed is the effect of autonomy, the extent to which a person expresses initiative in his or her work, which the article says is important both for entrepreneurs as well as for prospective employees for today's opportunities. The authors also explored the role of emotional intelligence, which consists of four dimensions: self awareness, self management, social awareness and relationship management, all of which are key entrepreneurial skills in handling various business pressures. Also addressed is the role of diversity in self-leadership. According to the authors, youth is the ideal time to start a business as younger entrepreneurs are generally more willing to take risks, and have less personal wealth to lose. The article further explores the social implications as to why many older entrepreneurs are less likely to undertake the process of self-leadership, as well as the role of gender studies in self-leadership. The article discusses the effects of culture in a five dimensional approach including: power distance (the degree of equality between people), individualism, masculinity (prevalence of traditional masculine roles), uncertainty avoidance, and long term orientation (societal devotion to tradition or modern values). Finally discussed is the concept of managing a work-life interface, which focuses on the quality rather than quantity in terms of time devoted to work, and the necessity to balance life and work evenly to maximize entrepreneurial success. The authors pinpoint four causes of entrepreneurial stress: loneliness, immersion in business, people problems, and the need to achieve. In conclusion, the authors state that individual differences can shape leadership strategy, though more research is needed to explore the reciprocal relationship between individual differences and self-leadership strategies.