



## Personal Leadership: What You Say and Do Matters **10** Behaviors that Block Meaningful Connection

Susan started a weekly meeting for women at her church to fill the need for fellowship and support beyond the annual women's retreat.

William started a family tradition during the winter holidays that endured through the years and is still practices by his grandchildren.

David gently asked the cafeteria manager where he works whether food might be served without unnecessary containers or wrapping, which started an entire "green initiative" at his workplace.

Nobody is likely to write a book about David, Susan or William. But these individuals are creating just as much impact in their community, family and workplace as the industry and political leaders described in the pages of the *New York Times*.

The challenges and opportunities of today require that all of us step forward and step into personal leadership every day, become our own captains and find more of our best to give to the world.

### Make Leadership a Way of Life

Too often, we believe that leadership is the domain of those with recognized authority and titles: CEOs, association presidents, conductors, mayors.

"In a world that is changing as rapidly as this one, we need to think differently about leadership," says Susan Collins, author of *Our Children Are Watching: Ten Skills for Leading the Next Generation to Success*. "Leading is not done by those few in high places, but by parents and teachers and managers and those governing—all working together to create the world that we want."

When you dare to stand up for your beliefs or to follow through on your big dreams and ideas, when you act as though what you say and do in the world matters—and it matters greatly—you are leading.

In other words, leadership is a way of life, an expression of our fullest and

best nature, our unique gifts. And it starts on the inside.

"Everything rises and falls on leadership," writes John C. Maxwell, in his book *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*. "If you can become the leader you ought to be on the inside, you will be able to become the leader you want to be on the outside."

### What Makes an Effective Leader?

Leadership is inextricably connected to who we are deep down, so every leader has a different style. Some lead with their eccentric, charismatic selves on full, charming display. Other leaders bear no banners and sound no trumpets. But the inner qualities that make for effective leadership remain constant among all types of leaders:

**Interest in others.** The best leaders thrive on helping others achieve their personal best; they are motivated by a desire for the highest good for all rather than personal glory.

**Communication.** Sharing knowledge is essential; even more important is listening. As President Woodrow Wilson said, "The ear of the leader must ring with the voices of the people."

**Positive attitude.** Leaders know they can alter their lives by altering their minds. Self-discipline, a sense of security and confidence blossom in the presence of a positive attitude.

**A drive for learning**—from others, from opportunities, from mistakes. Those who stop learning, stop growing.

**Unwavering commitment.** No leader has ever lacked commitment. True commitment requires and inspires courage, passion, focus, initiative and responsibility.

Stepping into your own personal leadership gives you great potential for change in all areas of your life and rippling out to the wider world. \*

*There's a great play on words to remember when people come to you with a problem: "Don't just do something; stand there." It means, first listen so that you actually hear the other person's experience. You'll connect more meaningfully, when you try not to:*

**1. Defend.** When you explain, justify or rationalize, you invalidate the other's experience. You can create a time to offer your experience, but for now, just listen.

**2. Counsel.** Seek not to advise solutions (until asked) but to listen and reflect back the person's experience.

**3. Reassure.** It's healthy to feel our feelings. Consoling ("It's not your fault; you did the best you could."), takes people out of their feelings.

**4. Shut down.** Common phrases are: "It's not that bad" or "Don't worry!"

**5. One-up.** Saying, "Oh, that's nothing! Listen to what happened to me!" gives the message, "Your experience doesn't count."

**6. Pity.** Sympathy and pity ("You poor thing!") don't serve; empathy does.

**7. Commiserate.** Sharing stories of your own similar experiences is not showing empathy; it turns the focus away from the person with the problem.

**8. Correct.** First listen. After the other person feels fully understood, then see about correcting any misunderstandings or inaccurate impressions.

**9. Enlighten.** Don't attempt to educate unless your opinion is asked.

**10. Interrogate.** Too many questions distract from the feelings at hand. \*

## A Letter From Fred Chapin



Books, articles, television shows, movies—all tend to refer to “leaders” as corporate executives, organizational management or political representatives. Hence, when we talk about leadership, that’s who typically shows up in our mind’s eye.

But leadership, and the skills that come with it, are important in all kinds of everyday situations.

This issue’s page 1 feature explores ways to step more fully into your personal leadership so that you can become your own captains and find more of your best self to give your family, your community, your work, and wherever else you could have a greater impact.

The Top 10 gives you some clues about how to avoid common barriers to meaningful conversation so that you can truly hear what a friend in grief or with a problem is saying. The quiz, meanwhile, explores the difference between zestful work toward a cherished goal—and workaholism.

The page 3 provides a sort of “owners manual” for intimate partnership to help in “tuning up” and maintaining your relationship.

Finally, the back page feature article suggests ways to deal with all the little or big things that we tolerate every day, because they deplete the energy we could be using to make desired changes or to simply experience joy in our life.

If you would like to discuss any of these topics, don’t hesitate to call.

## Are You Just Busy—or Addicted to Work?

“Workaholism is an addiction,” Julia Cameron says in her book, *The Artist’s Way*, “and like all addictions, it blocks creative energy.” It’s not enthusiastic, energetic work toward a highly valued goal. Workaholism has a treadmill, joyless quality, not the bouncy, fun energy of a trampoline. While working long hours may help you accomplish a work goal, it likely will leave other areas of your life—family, friendship, creative endeavors, etc.—in shambles. Take the following quiz to help you figure out if you have workaholic habits. Even better, ask a few family members or friends to answer these questions for you. You may be surprised by what you discover.



### True False

- 1. I rarely or never take vacations.
- 2. I take work home with me on weekends.
- 3. I postpone outings until my deadline project is done.
- 4. My family and/or friends complain that I always work.
- 5. I take my laptop with me on vacations.
- 6. I always take calls on my cell phone; it is never off.
- 7. I work beyond normal office hours.
- 8. Work always comes before my creative dreams.
- 9. I seldom allow myself free time between projects.
- 10. It’s a challenge for me to finish tasks.
- 11. I take work with me on vacations.
- 12. I set out to do one job and start on three more at the same time.
- 13. I work in the evenings during family time or time I could be reading for pleasure.
- 14. I allow calls and email to interrupt—and lengthen—my workday.
- 15. I don’t make time for creative work/play a priority in my day.
- 16. Procrastination often keeps me working longer.
- 17. I cancel dates with friends or family members to do more work.
- 18. I rarely allow myself down time to do nothing.
- 19. I often use the word “deadline” to describe and rationalize my workload.
- 20. I often take a notebook or my work numbers with me when I go somewhere, even to dinner.

If you answered more true than false, you may benefit from exploring your attachment to work. For people with workaholic tendencies, work is often synonymous with worth, so the more the better. Work can also be a way to avoid looking at issues in your life—“Who’s got the time?” the workaholic asks. If you would like assistance fighting your workaholic streak, please don’t hesitate to call. \*

# An "Owner's Manual" for Your Relationship

Unlike for cars, there is no "owner's manual" for relationships. No operating instructions, no warranty, no guarantee for the road ahead. Find yourself a partner—and you're on your own.

"Think about it: the requirements for a driver's license are tenfold the requirements for a marriage license," writes Phil McGraw, Ph.D., in his book *Relationship Rescue*. He adds, "The very society that has taught you that it is good and right and natural to share your life with another person... never bothered to teach you how to do that."

Most of us can do without a car if need be, but few of us want to do without love. Within most of us there is a basic human longing for connection and relationships with others. For many, the backdrop of a loving, committed relationship gives us the space to learn about ourselves and grow deeper as we age.

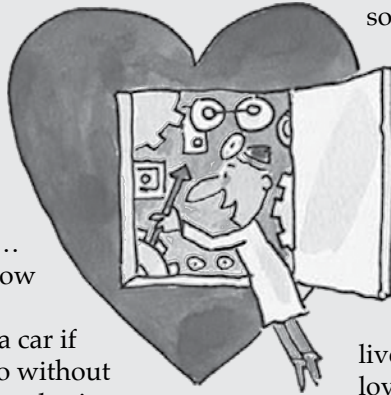
Like cars, relationships need maintaining and regular tune-ups. But because they don't come with operating instructions, the simple maintenance questions below can help you keep your love relationship strong, healthy and on the road for years.

## What Kind of Driver (Partner) Are You?

Recent research has shown several things strengthen a marriage and other long-term partnerships: communication, honesty and spending time together. Just as important is knowing yourself and what you bring to a relationship. When you connect with yourself, and work on those challenging parts of yourself, you create a stronger and better partner for someone else. That isn't just true in the first flush of falling in love, it's true for the many years that follow. "Being intimate with ourselves is the necessary foundation for being intimate with others," writes John Amodeo in *Being Intimate: A Guide to Successful Relationships*.

## Could You Sometimes Be the "Worst Driver?"

Taking responsibility for your feelings and your actions is one of the greatest gifts you can bring to a relationship. You know that "other guy" who's the worst driver on the road? That just might be you. Own up to what's yours, and be clear with your partner about what you're feeling or needing. Try not to make your problems their fault.



## Are You Paying Attention to Warning Lights?

Cars give us little signs that something is wrong—perhaps the wheels are out of alignment or the oil light goes on. Our partners or spouses also send little warning signs that something is not quite right, and it's better to deal with the problems in the early stages, so that everything is in good working order when real crisis hits. After all, when another car pulls out in front of you, that's not the time to wonder if you had the brakes checked.

## Are You a Rude, Irritable Driver?

Are you a road hog? An impatient and irritable driver? Do you refuse to let someone into line during traffic or lean too heavily on your horn? Try a little tenderness. Sometimes we treat people we don't know a lot better than the ones we've lived with for years, and we forget simple courtesies: a loving tone, a touch, a word of appreciation.

## How Are You with the Inevitable Dents and Scratches on Your Car (Relationship)?

Even the "perfect" car turns out to have quirks and challenges. So do our partners—those "perfect" people we fell in love with once upon a time. Before you get angry, decide which issues are worth pursuing, and let the rest go.

## Are You Grateful for Your Car (Your Love)?

How many of us are grateful for this metal conglomeration of thousands of parts that somehow work together to take us to where we want to go? The same goes for our love relationships. Stop, turn off the ignition and take a moment to be grateful for your spouse or partner and the love you both share.

## Will You Get Help Before the Engine Fails?

Like a car, you can fix many of the small problems in a relationship by yourself. But sometimes that ominous clanking under the hood is a signal that something is seriously wrong and a quick fix won't work. That's when it's time to find a "relationship mechanic"—that is, a counselor or therapist—who will help you diagnose what's wrong, and guide you on getting your relationship back on the road.

A relationship with another human being is so much more complex than owning a car. So, too, is the work required to keep a long-term relationship vibrant, passionate and strong. In the end, maintaining something that enriches us is surely worth the investment. \*



# How to Stop "Putting Up" with Things and Choose Joy Instead

What do a cluttered house, a ho-hum relationship and tight shoulders have in common?

Hint: we don't like them, but we put up with them—sometimes without even realizing it.

And here's the bad news: every time we tolerate something, we deplete the energy we could be using to make desired changes or to simply experience joy in our life. It's like living with a low-grade fever or pain that somehow dulls our experience and zaps our full vitality.

He's late again—and stoned. Zap!

I can't find the paperwork I need. Zap!

Overdrawn again. Zap!

At the root of our tolerations are a variety of limiting beliefs that immobilize us. For example: "That's just the way it is." "I'm not worth it." "Don't complain or be too demanding." "I don't have enough time/money/support."

If we are committed to feeling better

about ourselves, to making changes that will bring us greater peace of mind and happiness, it will greatly help to evaluate and eliminate the tolerations standing in our way. Here

are some ideas on how to do that:

**Appraise.** Make an honest appraisal of what you are tolerating in each of the areas of your life: home environment, health, work, money, relationships and so on.

Write down everything that annoys you or that you feel you are putting up with. You may come up with more than 100!

**Evaluate.** Examine each underlying limited belief that has kept you putting up with these things. Again, get support to help you break through them. You may be so close to some of these beliefs that you can't fully recognize them for what they are.

**Appreciate.** Take an honest look at what you are getting out of keeping

things as they are. There is always some kind of payoff for whatever is going on in your life. Who in your life—or what part of you—does not want things to change? Appreciate that person or part, and look for ways for it to be win-win for all concerned.

**Choose.** Based on your values and goals, you get to choose. What will you say "no" to? "Yes?" Make sure the "yeses" really excite you and the no's are clear. Commit to making them real!

**Plan.** With the support of friends, family or your therapist, develop a strategy for eliminating these tolerations or figuring out how to work with them. You don't have to do it alone—in fact, it's useful and helpful to partner up or create a support team.

As you begin to work with these tolerations, you will feel the joy of being at choice, an increase in your vitality and a sense of empowerment. Then YOU will be in the driver's seat of your life...and won't that be a beautiful and worthwhile ride! \*



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