

A day in the life of a successful leader

If you have been in your career for more than a year or two, you have probably attended at least one leadership development class. I know that in my corporate career I attended many myself, and sent many of my employees to leadership training; and every one of them have been very informative and motivating.

The common challenge is knowing how to incorporate the great tools and techniques into your leadership style. For the majority of people, the moment they get back to their daily routine, the tendency is to go back to old behaviors. What seemed so useful and helpful in that leadership training now becomes a simple memory.

At Next Step Transformation we offer several leadership development courses specifically designed to help you bridge the gap between knowing and doing. As one of our satisfied customers put it:

"I have gone to many leadership development classes throughout my career, but what is different about your workshops is that you make these tools actionable. You don't just teach the technique you show us how to incorporate it in our day-to-day work routine and that made all the difference to me."

My wish for you is that you too will be able to incorporate some of the below tips and tricks into your style of leadership and experience increased success as a leader.

A Day in the Life of a Leader



Write To-Do List



Sharpen the saw



3 things you did well this day



Envision your day



End of Work Day

After work and into end of day

New Work Day



Use your tools throughout the work day

A day in the life of a leader actually begins the night before. The best time to put together your prioritized to-do list is at the end of the workday, because the urgent needs are fresh in your mind. Also, by the time work starts the next day it's too late because you are already being bombarded by "urgent and unscheduled" requests. So, before those requests come in, you need to have something to prioritize them against, and that is where the list you made last night comes in handy.

You have created your prioritized do-list for tomorrow and now your work day is over and you begin the next segment of your day. This is the time to, as Stephen Covey in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* tells us, "sharpen the saw" with activities that nurture your body (exercise), mind (reading/classes/music/etc.), and spirit (quiet time and fun time). Stephen Covey reminds us that if we don't take time to recuperate and regenerate from our work day, then we become less effective – "less sharp".

One mindfulness exercise that I like to use is at the end of each night, right before going to sleep, I remind myself of three things I did well that day. According to my teacher Mark Waldman, "Positive psychology research shows that writing down your daily successes for just one week will gradually raise your self-esteem over the next 3 months, and then keeps it at the new high for 4 months after that!" That is the best ROI in mind exercises that you will find – one week renders 7 months of benefits.

Additional benefits from this exercise is that when you acknowledge those 3 things you did well that day, your brain produces a burst of dopamine which counteracts the stress hormone cortisol. Too much cortisol in your system makes it harder to reach REM sleep. When you do this exercise, you find that you fall asleep faster and actually get more restful restorative sleep. With better sleep, you wake up feeling better and get your day started on a more positive note.

Continuing with a day in the life of a leader, we arrive at the next morning. You have just awakened but have not started your morning yet. At this point you should take the time to do a visioning exercise. This is a short one minute mind movie of how the day will go and what you will accomplish. Dr. Denis Waitley in his book "The Psychology of Winning" calls this exercise Visual Motor Rehearsal, and he tells us that everything happens twice: first it happens in our mind, and then it happens in the external world.

Creating your mind movie has some rules:

- **Focus on what you truly want**, not on what you think you can accomplish.
- **Use positive language** – these are the commands to our control center and they are carried out literally, so make sure what you are envisioning / creating in your mind is good, positive, successful.
- **Describe your vision using all of your senses** – the more senses you incorporate the more real it feels and easier it is to believe it is true.
- **Take your vision for a test drive** – see yourself actually going through your day and having great interactions with people and accomplishing what you really want to do.

I sometimes run through my mind movie a dozen times before I get to the office.

Now you are at work, you have your prioritized to-do list and you are armed and ready to tackle the day. Create the habit of crossing stuff off the list when you get it done – this gives you a burst of dopamine. Dopamine is the accomplishment and motivation brain chemical. If appropriate, you may want to get

your team members to adopt the to-do list, even if it is just to keep them motivated. Dopamine is addictive, so it keeps you wanting to accomplish more and more.

The next behavior to incorporate is that of more effective meetings. You want to make sure that:

- You only have meetings that are really needed
- Every meeting has the right people to provide the information needed to make the decisions; if not then no meeting
- Every meeting has an agenda; no agenda = no meeting
- Document the decisions and solutions discussed so that you don't have to repeat the meeting

As a successful leader it is your responsibility to make sure that the team is working together, everyone's strengths are taken into consideration, and opinions are heard.

Now, as action-packed as this day sounds, you must remember the 52/17 rule: 52 minutes of intense focused work followed by an effective break. If 17 minutes is too long of a break, then do the 6-minute stretch break. These quick breaks keep you in a high performing state throughout the day.

Part of being a great leader is making sure your team has what they need to succeed. One of these things is the right brain chemicals. I suggest reading the article by Simon Sinek, *The 4 "Happy" Chemicals Behind Every Great Leader*. Two very important brain chemicals are Dopamine and Serotonin; these help keep a person motivated and loyal to the team. This is where snacks are your best tool. Certain foods help the body produce Dopamine and Serotonin. In every company I have worked at there is always food available to the teams, so why not make sure the food you have is working to your advantage as a leader? Of course you want to take employee diet restrictions and allergies into consideration, but here are some suggestions of snacks to keep on hand:

- Almonds
- Apples
- Avocado
- Bananas
- Chocolate
- Eggs
- Cheese
- Pineapples
- Nuts and seeds.

Hopefully this Day in the Life of a Leader has connected the dots so you can see that becoming a great leader is not necessarily more effort, but rather a discipline of thinking and behaving in a slightly different way.

If you found this newsletter helpful and are interested in leadership training or coaching, please keep Next Step Transformation Consulting and Academy in mind.

To Your Success,

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