



LEADERSHIP insights

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TO DO: MY BEST

We have our SMART goals, online leadership plans, outlook calendars, mobile phone buzzers, random scraps of paper...however we organize our "to-do" lists, it's no small pile. In the face of beeping reminders and competing deadlines, we can overwhelm ourselves at times with all there is to do.

In Don Miguel Ruiz's book, *The Four Agreements*, he outlines a simple and accessible philosophy of living that is actually pretty helpful and applicable in managing our work and life. The four agreements he advises us to make with ourselves are:

1. Do your best
2. Don't take things personally
3. Be impeccable with your word
4. Don't make assumptions

In this newsletter, I will focus on the first one: do your best. Some days are better than others because we have more strength, insight, and resources of whatever kind, and fewer barriers. Often we struggle though, either beating ourselves up when things don't turn out as planned, or blaming others for putting up road blocks. The challenge is to balance continually *striving to do great things* while *forgiving ourselves or others* when our actual performance is not what we hoped for. *The following ideas may help you achieve that balance.*

> **Just say it.** It *can* be this simple. Say this phrase to yourself frequently: "Do Your Best." Put it up on your refrigerator at home, on your calendar, or anywhere you can see it regularly. In the middle of an overwhelmed moment, remind yourself to *just do your best*. It won't shorten your to-do list, but it will free up energy going to unhealthy stress from the other less helpful comments you are making in your head. (*Yes, we all talk to ourselves. Might as well say something useful*).

> **Make use of your mistakes.** Lately I've been aware that my workshops have more impact when I make a mistake in front of everyone. It's ironic because 20 years ago, these same "mistakes" would have embarrassed and convinced me that I wasn't cut out for this work. Often the very thing we worry most about can turn out to be a gift. People want to see that a leader is human. *What mistakes have turned out to be gifts for you? Are there ways that when you miss the mark it helps others learn? What "stories" do you have that are all the richer because your best effort turned out differently than you planned?*

> **Work with your type** to build confidence and increase motivation. Make the most of your natural personality traits and talents you have, where your "best" will shine. For example, one introvert finds that writing and research projects are a great match for his personality. *Where does your work fit your personality, and are you making the most of that?*

> **Work against your type** to expand your awareness and stretch. The same introvert pushes himself to participate in customer service initiatives to get out with people and interact in ways that leaders are expected to be skilled at. He'll admit it doesn't always feel like his "best" but it's an opportunity to broaden his skills. *It's YOUR best, not the BEST EVER FROM ANYONE that we are talking about.*

> **Relate vs. compare.** I heard this interesting phrase recently quoted from a Quint Studor piece. When we compare ourselves with others we will always either fall short or feel superior, neither of which helps much when striving for balance and self acceptance (and it doesn't do much for team building either). Instead of comparing, ask, *"How can I relate to this person?"* It encourages empathy, and when we put ourselves in others shoes, we are less hard on them and ourselves.

> **Give up the invulnerability myth.** If you are hanging on to the idea that you must look like you have it all together at all times, tune in to this [Brene Brown TED Talk](#). Her research explores wholehearted living which requires:

- **Courage** – to be imperfect
- **Compassion** – to be kind to ourselves first and then to others
- **Connection** – which results from letting go of who we think we "should" be
- **Vulnerability** – willingness to try even if you don't know how something will turn out

> **Rest well.** The book *The Power of Full Engagement* by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz shares valuable research that reveals that it is as important to rest as it is to give 100% when you are working. In truth, we are less effective when we don't build in rest time. Doing our best includes putting resting well on our to-do list.