



Practices Self-Development

The Extraordinary Leader

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Practices Self-Development Action Plan

Step 1 – Circle the 2 or 3 companion competencies where improvement would have a positive impact in your organization and you have passion for improvement.

- A. Listens
- B. Open to the Ideas of Others
- C. Respects Others
- D. Honesty and Integrity
- E. Inspires and Motivates Others
- F. Effective Feedback and Development
- G. Takes Initiative
- H. Willing to Take Risks and Challenge the Status Quo

Step 2 – List the companion competencies you will be working to develop below. Create a development goal statement and the in each box list implementation suggestions that provide specific actions you will take to improve.

Companion Behavior 1 _____

Development Goal _____

Specific Actions

Companion Behavior 2 _____

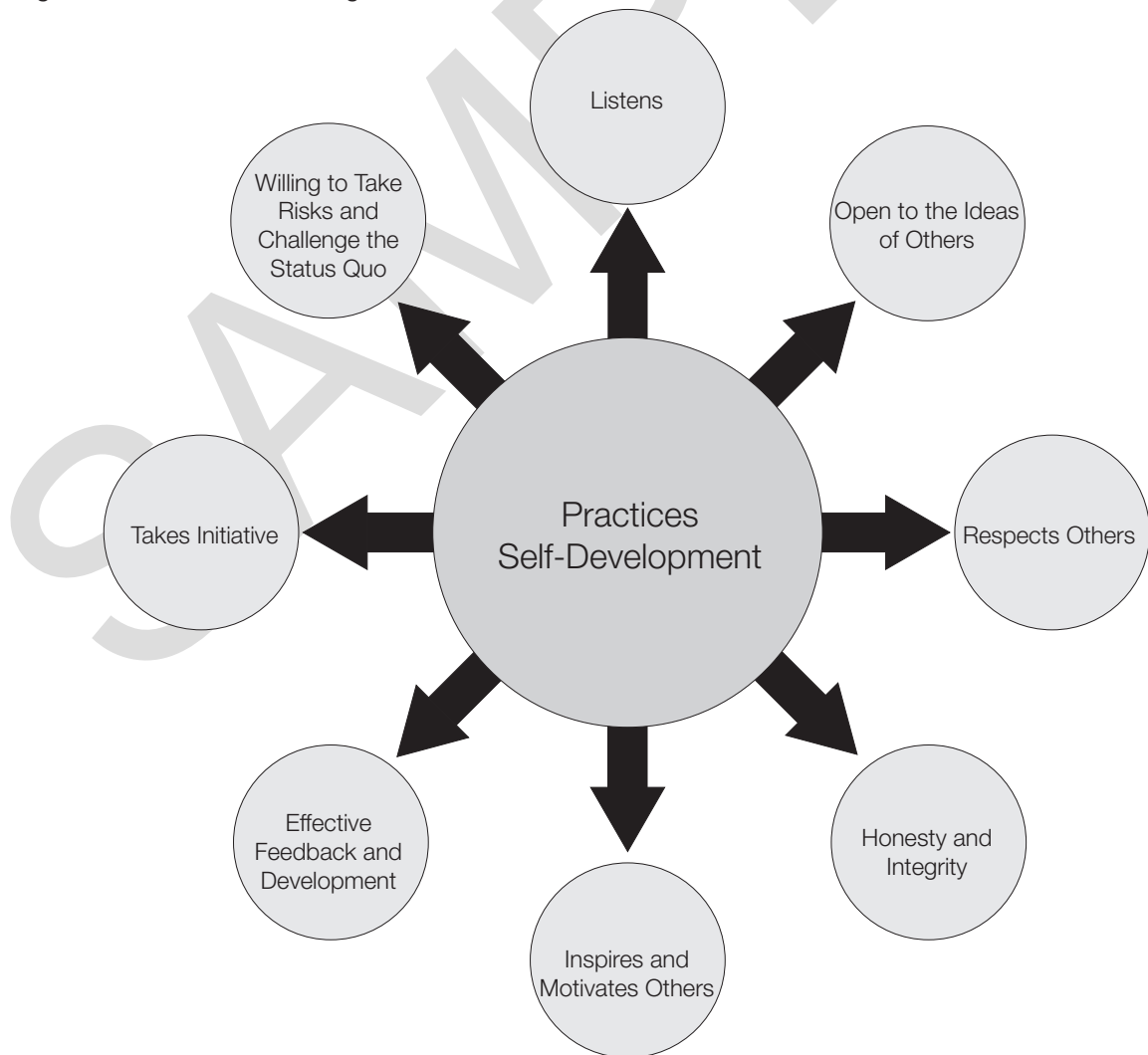
Development Goal _____

Specific Actions

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Practices Self-Development Competency Companions

- A. Listens
- B. Open to the Ideas of Others
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A. Listens

A critical skill for people desiring to develop their personal capabilities is to become an effective listener. Those who are not good listeners end up working on issues that they think are important but which may not be the most critical areas to work on for them. Good listeners also seek information from others and do not merely wait for others to take the initiative to tell them something.

- Behave like a good listener. When someone initiates a conversation with you, begin by removing all distractions—papers, cell phone, open laptops, or screens. By your facial expressions and comments, let the speaker know that you are tracking what he or she is saying. Summarize the key points, along with your sense of how the speaker feels about this topic. Ask him or her to confirm that you heard and understood the message.
 - Model receiving feedback graciously. When listening to another person you will often receive feedback. When others give feedback, avoid becoming defensive and, instead, ask for clarification about the feedback. Thank the speaker for the feedback.
 - Create ample time to listen. Be willing to take the time to understand the needs and concerns of others. It is hard to be an effective listener when you are pressed for time, have a deadline, or have only five minutes before your next appointment. If you don't have enough time for a meaningful conversation, schedule another appointment.
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B. Open to the Ideas of Others

Some people's initial response to any suggestion or new idea is negative. They may believe their own ideas are better, or they may be offended that others would be so presumptuous as to offer feedback. Whatever the origin, reacting negatively to feedback discourages others from offering suggestions or ideas. This severely curtails the self-development process. Feedback from others is the behavioral mirror into which everyone should look. Without such a mirror, the only source of input is internal, which often can be narrow, distorted, or filled with cracks.

- Actively solicit feedback. Be more open to new and different ways to solve problems. If you ask questions sincerely, then others are far more apt to give you helpful answers. These can range from, "Tell me something you think I don't know—and possibly may not want to hear," all the way to, "How would you have handled our issue with Prometheus Corporation?"
- Used varied approaches to inspire. Set a goal to be more inspirational. Most people are very effective at pushing, but the best leaders push and pull. Inspiration comes in many forms, ranging from a leader who is driven for results, one who is clear about the vision, one who is strongly connected to direct reports, and the leader who is extremely principled. Less often inspiration comes from the leader who is a technical expert or who is the cheerleading enthusiast. Whatever you do comfortably now, try adding one more approach.
- Take time to understand others. Allocate the time to understand the needs and concerns of others. When we are in a rush we are rarely open to others' ideas and suggestions.

C. Respects Others

One leading expert on personal change found that if the suggestion for change comes from a respected source, then the change is more likely. If my physician tells me to go on a diet, I give that recommendation more credence than if one of my casual friends tells me I am overweight. Sometimes, good suggestions for change come from people lower in the organization. Not paying attention to such suggestions is nearly always a huge mistake. Our direct reports can see our leadership behavior with greater accuracy than we can. Increasing the credence and respect we give to the opinions and views of others helps the self-development process.

- Actively listen. One of the best ways to show respect is to listen to what other people have to say, even if the views are different from your own. When someone asks you a question, one of the best replies is “What do you think?” Not only does that convey respect, it helps you avert serious mistakes.
 - Act non-defensively. Those who accept feedback without becoming defensive show a great deal of respect for others.
 - Ask others to join you. Look for opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. Too often we feel that we are in competition with others, but asking others to join our team shows great respect.
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D. Honesty and Integrity

Is there a strong link between being honest with others and being honest with yourself? We know of no rigorous studies that answer this question, but we suspect this relationship exists. People who speak honestly and say what they believe seem to be more prone to face facts about themselves. When people are not completely honest with others, they tend to be dishonest with themselves as well.

- Show others the utmost respect. Treat others with consideration and respect. Honesty is something attributed to you by others. It starts with them knowing that you understand their ideas and their situations.
- Take responsibility when things go wrong. Avoid blaming others when things go wrong. Those who blame others will not be perceived as honest and having integrity while those who accept responsibility are perceived as honest.
- Magnify trust. Work to improve the trust that others have in you. Be reliable. Act with consistency. Maintain warm relationships with others. When there is a lack of trust, others will make negative attributions about your integrity or honesty.

E. Inspires and Motivates Others

Leaders who are effective at inspiring and motivating others make more progress on their own self-development. When leaders inspire and motivate others, they put themselves in challenging and difficult situations in which they can grow.

- Set goals as a team. Involve your team in identifying and adopting a difficult stretch goal. When people accomplish an imposing objective they are more motivated and engaged. Nothing unites a team more than pursuing a challenging goal and successfully completing it.
 - Incessantly repeat highest priority goals. Keep the team focused on the highest priority goals and objectives. Remind everyone of the reasons these targets were selected and what payoff they will have. Do not allow your team to become distracted by other issues that keep them from achieving their goal. Enlist their help in keeping high priorities at the top of everyone's mind.
 - Convey your personal passion. Frequently convey your own passion and commitment about the work you are doing. Your emotions are extremely contagious. Your tone of voice and the expression on your face communicate far more than the words you speak. You are the strongest force for creating high levels of engagement and commitment among your people.
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F. Effective Feedback and Development

Development is contagious. When leaders help develop others, some of that development effort is bound to rub off. When leaders engage in self-development activities, it sends a strong signal that they believe in and practice developing other people.

- Welcome feedback. Schedule periodic coaching opportunities with direct reports during which you can offer helpful ideas and suggestions about the way they are performing their jobs. A good part of this time should be spent in providing positive reinforcement for what they are doing well. If you see opportunities for improvement, then offer to provide that to direct reports. With their concurrence, give specific information about what you see them doing and how it might be fine-tuned.
- Link the individual's job to the broader business objectives. Help people understand how their work contributes to broader business objectives. When people see the big picture they understand the impact of their work on the success of the organization.
- Act as the role model for receiving and giving feedback. Seek feedback from your direct reports and colleagues. This sets the stage for feedback being a routine element of every business relationship and not something to be avoided. Model a warm, receptive response to feedback. Be certain it is understood. Do your best to act on it, when appropriate, and let the person know the steps you have taken as a consequence of their feedback to you.

G. Takes Initiative

It is easy to coast along, doing things as you've always done them, and not make waves. Practicing self-development requires self-discipline. Acquiring new knowledge, learning new skills, or changing leadership practices requires initiative. Taking initiative always means extending yourself beyond what is expected of or defined by your role. Taking initiative in your development is key. Taking the initiative—knocking on another door when 50 have been slammed in your face—is what creates extraordinary talent.

- Accelerate your personal effort. Challenge yourself to push a little harder and try a little more, putting in additional time and adding extra effort into your work. What if your team were functioning at a much higher level? What would have to be different? What steps could you take to get it there? Choose one and create the plan for implementing it.
- Go far beyond the expected. Merely doing a job well is not the same as taking initiative. Look for opportunities to go far beyond what is expected of you by seeing something that is falling through the crack between your team and another and fixing the problem. How could you far exceed the quality or quantity of what has been done in the past?
- Start something new. Some managers think their job consists in merely keeping all the plates spinning. Leadership is the ability to identify a new plate that needs to get up and spinning. Jot down the things happening in your area that are solely because of you. What other new processes, new products, or new markets could be developed if you were to take the lead?

H. Willing to Take Risks and Challenge the Status Quo

Some people shy away from challenging assignments, not wanting to run the risk of failure. Others take exactly the opposite stance. They seek challenging assignments, realizing that new challenges will help them to learn and grow. This has been called a “proving” versus an “improving” mentality. People who are the most apt to learn and grow are willing to take on challenging assignments, to stretch themselves, and to go beyond their comfort zones.

- Avoid inaction in favor of the occasional mistake. Review your own feelings about always needing to be right versus recognizing that research has shown that good general managers are right only 65 percent of the time. All highly acclaimed CEOs can point to multiple mistakes they have made in their careers. We all know that the best hitters in baseball have their fair share of strike-outs. Being objective, what percentage of the time do you expect yourself to be right?
- Calculate risks and rewards. As you contemplate an important decision, can you live with the outcome if in this case you happen to be wrong? Are the payoffs from being right sufficient to outweigh the risk of being wrong? Is that risk-reward ratio sufficient to proceed? Most mergers fail. Most new products don't succeed. Not every newly discovered molecule becomes a blockbuster drug. Not every well that is drilled produces oil. But, in each case, the payoffs make the risk worth taking. The key is that taking the risk requires an individual or team to have courage and a willingness to fend off the criticism that may come from others.
- Create contingency plans. Make the effort and take the time to put together a thoughtful plan, one part of which is an analysis of what could go wrong. Do your best to take risks with your eyes wide open. It is more embarrassing when something occurs that had not occurred to anyone. It is far better to embark on a project for which you knew there were technical challenges that could prove to be insurmountable. Having thought through the challenges gives you greater conviction about the wisdom of taking a risk.

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