LeadQuest

The Choice is Yours
Ten Principles of Personal Leadership
A Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Introduction

As a leader, you are powerful! Every day you come in contact with many people:
coworkers, customers/patients, members of your community, your own family and
friends. All of these people are in your **sphere of influence**. Because you are closer to
some of them (e.g., direct reports and family members), you impact them to a greater
extent.

Whenever you are with people in your sphere of influence, you make **choices**,
consciously or unconsciously, about how you interact with them. These choices
determine the impression you make, the impact you have, the confidence you engender,
and the **emotional wake** you create.

Every day you make deposits in and withdrawals from the **relationship bank account**
you have with each person in your sphere of influence. When withdrawals exceed
deposits, a relationship becomes bankrupt. You are powerful because you control the
deposits and withdrawals you make. You are in the driver's seat, in control of the only
person you can change—yourself. You can influence others, but you can't change them.
As a leader, you heavily influence organizational culture and performance results through
your choices, your behaviors and your relationships—you are powerful indeed! The
choice of how you behave is yours.

Remember that employee satisfaction and, thus, customer/patient satisfaction are
influenced in large measure by the quality of the relationship each employee has with
his/her team leader or boss. As a leader, people look up to you as a **role model**; they
learn how to behave by observing how you behave. For that reason, **Job 1** for you is to
role model desired behaviors, such as those associated with your organization's values
and the ten principles of personal leadership, and to build healthy relationships with those
in your sphere of influence. When everyone in your organization chooses to do this, just
imagine the impact it will have on your culture and performance results—it will be **huge!**

The **Ten Principles of Personal Leadership** discussed in this document were developed
to help you on your journey to becoming an even more effective leader who builds
healthy, productive relationships. Personal growth and improvement require devoting
time to self-awareness, self-reflection and choice. This means becoming even more
aware of your behavior and its impact and **reflecting** on why you do what you do; that is,

the thought habits or beliefs you hold that drive your behavior. Finally, it comes down to **choice.** The key is to **choose** behaviors that will serve you and your organization well.

All **Ten Principles of Personal Leadership** are interrelated, so don't be surprised when you notice some overlap among them. Also, as you read about these principles, you will benefit from conducting an informal self-assessment. Ask yourself these questions:

- What am I doing well?
- What can I do even better?
- When I live or don't live these principles, how do I impact myself and others in my sphere of influence?

At the end of the day, remember that **it's about progress, not perfection**. It's about continuous personal improvement!

1. Be in the Moment

Being in the moment means that you are fully engaged, mentally and physically, in what you are doing, whether listening to a coworker or performing a task such as writing an e-mail message or letter. Safety, quality, customer/patient satisfaction, employee satisfaction, decision making and other performance components, depending on your role, are greatly impacted by your ability to focus completely on what you are doing when you are doing it.

Have you ever had the experience of speaking with someone who was not paying full attention—not **present for you**? Perhaps the person was looking at a computer screen checking e-mail, scrolling through telephone messages or looking at someone or something else. If you're like most people, you probably felt ignored and disrespected during the interaction. If so, that individual made a withdrawal from your relationship bank account. You want to avoid having this type of negative impact when you interact with others.

Do you **multitask**? Multitasking is the practice of performing more than one task at the same time, such as speaking with a coworker while reading e-mail messages. Some regard multitasking as an appropriate work behavior, believing that it increases personal productivity. The key problem with multitasking is that it is virtually impossible to perform two or more tasks simultaneously as effectively and efficiently as performing one task at a time. Quality suffers—rework may be necessary. This includes having to repeat conversations that were not skillfully conducted initially because active listening did not occur. When people multitask, they are not in the moment for any of the individual tasks they are performing because each task is a distraction from the others. Also, multitasking at the expense of another person often has a negative impact on that individual and leads to a withdrawal from the relationship bank account. When your attention is divided between two or more activities at the same time, you cannot give 100% to any task. This is likely to

negatively affect the outcome of all activities that are not receiving your undivided attention.

When you find yourself becoming mentally distracted, choose to pause and refocus, or take a break. Over time, as you increase your personal awareness of being in the moment, your ability to **choose** this way of being and leading will improve, and you will find yourself making even greater deposits in relationship bank accounts and being even more effective as a leader. For each activity in which you are engaged, you can choose to be in the moment or not. **The choice is yours**.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- How much of my time with others am I **in the moment** for each interaction?
- What can I do to increase the amount of time I am **in the moment** for each interaction?
- What is the impact on my desired outcome(s) and on others when I am **in the moment**? What is the impact when I am NOT **in the moment***?*

2. Be Authentic and Humanistic

Being an authentic leader means being **real** and **genuine** with all people in all situations. When you are authentic, you say what you mean—what you believe and think—and mean what you say, inside and outside of meetings. You are known as being honest and consistent. Being authentic and telling your truth need not mean that receivers of your messages feel uncomfortable or diminished in any way. Even constructive feedback can be given from a **humanistic** perspective, helping the receiver feel whole and appreciated.

Being humanistic is the opposite of being egocentric—believing that "It's all about me!" **Humanistic** leaders value human dignity and are concerned about the interests and welfare of others. They work and interact from a center of kindness and compassion for colleagues. When you behave as a humanistic leader, you see yourself as being part of something bigger than yourself—the organization. You believe that the organization's success depends on how well you and your coworkers serve, cooperate and collaborate with each other. You believe that the organization is stronger when the thoughts and ideas of all employees are solicited and valued and when external (not internal) competition is encouraged and reinforced. As a humanistic leader, you work hard to shape an organizational culture that wins the hearts and minds of employees so they routinely volunteer **discretionary effort**— "want-to" rather than "have-to" behavior. In each interaction you have an opportunity to be authentic and humanistic or not. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- What percentage of my time with others am I **authentic and humanistic**?
- What changes can I make to increase my **authentic and humanistic** behavior during interactions?
- What is the impact of my behavior when I am **authentic and humanistic**? What is the impact of my behavior when I am NOT **authentic and humanistic**?

3. Volunteer Discretionary Effort Constantly

When employees move from compliance to commitment and willingly volunteer behavior over and above the minimum necessary to do their jobs, they are giving **discretionary effort**. According to research conducted by the Gallup Organization in early 2001, fewer than 30% of American workers are fully engaged at work. In large organizations, the cost of a disengaged workforce runs into millions of dollars annually. The key question is: "What percentage of your employees is fully engaged at work, volunteering discretionary effort daily?"

Your job is to create an organizational culture in which employees are motivated to volunteer their best at all times. The first step in this process is for you to be a role model—to constantly volunteer discretionary effort. One way of doing this is by routinely asking the question, "What more can I do to support you?" This question can be posed to your boss, direct reports and other coworkers. Another way of creating an environment conducive to increasing discretionary effort is to demonstrate behavior consistent with the attitude that "my work is done when my team's work is done."

As a leader, you can create an environment that encourages and supports discretionary effort or not. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- What percentage of my direct reports volunteer **discretionary effort** each and every day?
- How much **discretionary effort** do I volunteer every day?
- What can I do to increase the amount of **discretionary effort** that my staff AND I provide on a daily basis?
- If my staff increased their **discretionary effort**, how would it impact outcomes in my area of responsibility?

4. Model High Performance—Desired Behaviors that Drive Desired Results

High Performance = Desired Results + Desired Behaviors. As a leader, your job is to get the "right" results in the "right" way. Since results are produced by behaviors (what people do and say), you must "hard wire" the two when seeking to achieve higher levels of performance. This means you must clearly define the desired behaviors that will generate the desired results. You must model these behaviors for those around you, especially those who report to you.

Often, leaders focus exclusively on results, with no attention to behavior. Consequently, they fall short of what they are capable of achieving in their organization. Remember that patterns of organizational behavior define the culture of an organization. Poor cultural behaviors sabotage desired outcomes. Therefore, as a leader, you must shape the culture you want by choosing desired behaviors—those that will produce the desired results. Then, you must model those behaviors consistently and provide positive reinforcement to those who do the same.

As a leader, you can create an environment that defines and links desired behaviors to desired results to obtain high performance or not. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- Have I defined **desired results** AND the **desired behaviors** for my organization?
- What percentage of my staff is demonstrating **desired behaviors**?
- Am I role modeling **desired behaviors** consistently?
- What can I do to be more consistent in role modeling **desired behaviors** that will produce **desired results**?
- What is the impact when I role model **desired behaviors**? What is the impact when I don't role model **desired behaviors**?

5. Respect and Leverage Separate Realities

Each of us sees life through a unique set of lenses; that is, every individual lives a **separate reality**. Your separate reality is based on your experiences, your values, your beliefs, your biases, the parenting you received growing up and everything else that has been or is part of your life.

Because you are living your own separate reality, you have **blind spots** unique to you. The special lenses through which you look at the world both focus your attention on certain familiar things and limit your ability to see the rest. For example, have you ever purchased a new car? Suddenly you start seeing more and more of that make and model—and more vehicles of the same color.

The fact that large organizations are comprised of thousands of individuals, each operating with a separate reality, can make leading such organizations challenging as well as stimulating and rewarding. As a leader, you work to establish a common vision and values along with common operating systems such as planning, goal setting, communications and performance management that provide organizational focus and alignment. In the process, you strive to create a **shared reality** among the people who work in your organization. When you bring people together to work as a team, you are increasing the probability of enhanced creativity as individuals are able to contribute their unique perspectives and to see beyond each others' blind spots. When they can see beyond blind spots, teams are better able to identify more possible solutions to a problem.

People often believe that their view of the world is **the** correct view, so it may be necessary to help them understand that, because each individual has a unique perception of reality, others may be able to provide information that might have been missed by any given person. The result often is a better solution than might have been found by one individual acting alone. Remember the old saying, "Two heads are better than one."

Also, your job as a leader is to create an organizational culture that respects, values and leverages the diversity of thought in your workforce. Creativity, innovation and discretionary effort are the prizes of creating such a culture. This begins with your own leadership behavior and whether you choose to approach new and perhaps different ideas and points of view from a place of curiosity or judgment.

As a leader, you can create an environment which recognizes and wisely uses the unique and separate views and experiences each employee brings to the workplace or not. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- How well do I recognize and value the **separate reality** that each of my coworkers and I bring to the workplace?
- What more can I do to honor and wisely utilize each individual's **separate reality?**
- When I value the **separate realities** of others, what is the impact? What is the impact when I do NOT?

6. Be Curious rather than Judgmental

A leader who is egocentric and not humanistic believes that his/her separate reality is the correct and only reality. When such leaders encounter people whose ideas or points of view differ from their own, they immediately become judgmental and find fault with or tear down others' ideas. In the process, they often negatively judge not

only the idea, but also the individual. This type of leadership behavior creates a fear-based culture, kills discretionary effort and stifles creativity and innovation. The result is sub-par business performance.

In contrast, humanistic leaders approach people from a position of curiosity, not judgment. When you behave as a humanistic leader, you respect and leverage separate realities for the good of the organization; you don't let your ego get in the way of doing what is right. As a humanistic leader, when you encounter someone who sees an issue, problem or solution differently than you do, you say in a sincere and non-threatening manner, "Tell me more." As a humanistic leader, you understand that you have your own unique blind spots, and you are truly curious to learn how others see an issue. When you operate as a humanistic leader, you shape a culture where employees feel valued, listened to and appreciated; consequently, people around you routinely volunteer discretionary effort. This enables you to achieve outstanding business results.

As a leader you can choose to be curious or judgmental. **The choice is yours.** You also have the opportunity to encourage others to be curious or to allow them to be judgmental. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- How often am I **curious** with others rather than **judgmental**?
- What changes can I make to be **curious** and not **judgmental** during interactions?
- What is the impact of my behavior when I am **curious** in interactions? What is the impact of my behavior when I am **judgmental**?

7. Look in the Mirror First—Be Accountable

You have a choice. When things go wrong or do not meet your expectations, you can either look for someone or something to blame, or you can **first** look in the mirror and ask, "How did I contribute to what occurred?" A great follow-up question is, "What more can I do next time to prevent what occurred from happening again?" Better still, at the **beginning** of an assignment or a project, ask others, "What can I do to help you succeed?"

When you choose to ask yourself such questions, you move away from being a victim—someone who blames others—to being an **accountable** participant. The bottom line is that you choose to take **ownership** of what you create, and, in addition, you own your role in what others create. When you behave accountably, you act as a powerful role model for those around you and help shape a more accountable culture.

When you stop and think about it, the culture issue is **huge.** What kind of stories do you hear more often during the course of the average workday—victim stories or

accountability stories? If your organization is like many others, the answer is "victim stories." The key question is: "What kind of stories do **you** tell more of on a daily basis?" Remember, you are a powerful role model!

Having a culture that operates with a victim mindset can be deadly. It negatively impacts employee and customer/patient satisfaction, curbs discretionary effort and hurts the bottom line. As a leader, you can consistently role model looking first in the mirror and owning your part of issues or not. **The choice is yours**. You can also role model personal accountability for your actions or not. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- How well do I demonstrate personal **accountability**? How well do I look in the mirror when the results I expect are not achieved?
- What more can I do to demonstrate personal **accountability**?
- What is the impact of being personally **accountable** for my actions? What is the impact of NOT being personally **accountable**?

8. Have Courageous Conversations

In your organization, how often does the **real and honest conversation** take place outside the meeting—in the hallway or in the rest room during a break—instead at the table **during** the meeting? How often does it seem that performance feedback is shared with everyone except the person who could benefit from hearing it? How often is poor performance tolerated and not addressed? These are not healthy organizational dynamics. They destroy trust, morale and performance. What may surprise you is that a **fear-based culture** may be driving these behaviors. Since the shaping of organizational culture starts with the behavior of those at the top, you as a leader must look in the mirror and ask yourself the accountability question: "How have I contributed to these dynamics with my own behavior?"

If you are not having honest and courageous conversations yourself or encouraging others in your sphere of influence to have them, why not? What thoughts or beliefs do you have that inhibit you from having courageous conversations? Are you afraid to be honest in meetings or with specific individuals? These are important questions to answer because the impact of avoiding courageous conversations is significant in terms of business performance. As a leader, you are accountable for the overall success of your organization. Your job is to help create a culture that encourages and values dissenting points of view; also, your job is to provide honest performance feedback. Remember the principle of separate realities—we all have blind spots. When we are truly open and honest with ourselves and one another, all things are possible.

As a leader you can seize the opportunity to have courageous conversations or not. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- How often do I engage in **courageous conversations**?
- What must I do to enable myself to have **courageous conversations** whenever they are needed?
- What is the impact on others and on our organization when I initiate and participate in **courageous conversations**? What is the impact when I do NOT initiate and participate in **courageous conversations**?

9. Provide Timely, Clear and Specific Performance Expectations and Feedback

It is estimated that up to half of all performance issues are caused by leaders who fail to provide timely, clear and specific performance expectations and feedback or who fail to confirm a common understanding of communicated expectations and feedback. This process begins with the delivery of performance expectations.

Most leaders pride themselves on being skilled communicators. They assume that individuals understand performance expectations the first time they hear them. They further assume that if people are unclear about expectations, they will ask clarifying questions. Is it prudent to make these assumptions?

Remember the principle of separate realities—that it is virtually impossible for two people, from the same organization or not, to see things or to interpret verbal messages in exactly the same way. E-mail and other forms of one-way electronic messaging compound the complexity of communication. The person on the receiving end may incorrectly assume that s/he has accurately interpreted performance expectations or other messages. Some staff members may not ask clarifying questions out of fear that they may be perceived as weak or incompetent.

What can you do to **prevent** misinterpretations of expectations and messages which lead to mistakes and the need to redo work? The solution to this problem requires time, effective communication and patience. In this vein, please consider the following steps. First, when you provide performance expectations, be in the moment and create a relaxed atmosphere. Avoid delivering messages and communicating expectations when you are in a hurry or distracted—for instance, running to a meeting or driving your car. Whenever possible, it is best to discuss performance expectations face to face. Second, ask the person on the receiving end to take notes. Third, in a timely fashion, provide specifics about what you want or expect, when you want it and how you want it. Provide examples if you can. Don't leave details to the other person's imagination unless that is part of your communicated expectations. Fourth, after you've communicated performance expectations, ask the receiver to restate what s/he just heard you say. Fifth, don't end the conversation until you are confident that

the other person understands and agrees with the performance expectations. If necessary, repeat Steps 3 and 4 multiple times.

What about delivering feedback? The good news is that everything already written in this section also applies to providing feedback. In fact, throughout the preceding paragraph, the word "feedback" can be substituted for the term "performance expectations." In addition, it is important to understand that consequences drive human behavior, and **immediate consequences** such as prompt feedback have the greatest impact on increasing desired behavior and decreasing undesirable behavior. Your job as a leader—once you have provided timely, clear and specific performance expectations—is to catch people doing the right things, based on your expectations, and to provide appreciative feedback in a timely manner, preferably in that moment. The same is true when you catch people exhibiting undesirable behavior; your job is to attempt to correct that behavior by providing constructive feedback in that moment.

Performance expectations and feedback are integral parts of effective leadership and organizational performance. Your job is to master the delivery of both!

As a leader you can provide timely, clear and specific performance expectations and feedback or not. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- How often do I provide **performance expectations** that are clear and explicit, and take the time to have the listener repeat back to me his/her understanding of those expectations?
- How often do I give timely, specific **feedback** that is appreciative?
- How often do I give timely, specific **feedback** that is constructive?
- What do I need to do to improve the frequency and quality of my communication of **performance expectations** and **feedback**?
- What is the impact on my staff and the organization when I provide clear **performance feedback**? What is the impact when I do NOT provide clear **performance feedback**?

10. Teach, Coach and Mentor—Spend at Least Half of Your Time Developing Others

In the life of a leader, time is extremely precious. Therefore, if you are a leader, you have to be very selective regarding how you spend your time and what you expect others to achieve with theirs. The bottom line is that your job is to **get things done with and through others** in the most time-efficient and most cost-effective way possible.

To successfully accomplish this, you must do more than simply delegate the work—you must ensure that others have the direction, knowledge, skills, resources and ongoing feedback necessary to complete their work in a humanistic, accurate and timely fashion. The CEOs of major corporations such as Microsoft, Boeing and Coca Cola advocate that leaders spend at least half of their time devoted to assisting and developing others through activities such as teaching, coaching and mentoring.

CAUTION: This *does not mean* that you have to add more things to your already overloaded calendar. What it does mean is that you must look at every personal interaction or meeting as an opportunity to develop others by doing simple things that don't necessarily add more time, but do add tremendous long-term value such as delivering personal or team feedback, or sharing best practices.

At LeadQuest, we like to think of these opportunities as leadership 'moments of truth.' For example, when was the last time you were with someone or some group of people where the 10 Principles described in this article were not applied? Perhaps the speaker at a meeting you were attending was 'attacked' by the audience for sharing a point of view that was different from theirs. (In this case, Principles 5 and 6 were violated.) In that moment, what did you choose to do about it? **If your answer is "nothing," think again, because 'doing nothing *is* doing something.' In other words, whether you intended to do it or not, you reinforced the undesired behaviors associated with 'attacking the speaker.'** At the end of the day, is that the kind of role model you want to be?

As a leader, you can seize the opportunity to teach, coach and mentor those with whom you come in contact. **The choice is yours.**

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION WITH YOUR COACHING PARTNER:

- What percentage of my time do I engage in **teaching, coaching and mentoring** others?
- What do I need to do to better **teach, coach and mentor** those with whom I come in contact?
- What is the impact on my staff and the organization when I spend sufficient time **teaching, coaching and mentoring**? What is the impact when I do NOT spend sufficient **time teaching, coaching and mentoring**?