# *Progress vs. Perfection*
## The Importance of Being Humanistic & Maintaining Perspective

If you had to put a percentage on the number of things that are working well in your professional and personal life combined, what would it be?  Over the years, we've asked hundreds of executives this question.  Thankfully, the overwhelming majority of them have responded with an answer that has been at least 80%—in fact, many have said that 90-95% of the things in their lives were working well!

The next question we ask is this: "So, given your answer to the first question, where do you focus most of your personal attention and energy at work?"  Without fail, the majority of executives/leaders who are new to LeadQuest's **10 Principles of Personal Leadership** respond by saying that they devote almost all of their attention and energy (mental, emotional and physical) to the 20%, or less, that could be working better—typically, at the exclusion of the 80%, or more, that is working well!  When these leaders are asked, "In the workplace, what impact does this 'narrow leadership perspective' have on creating an organizational culture where people ***want to*** take risks, volunteer discretionary effort, have courageous conversations, behave accountably, etc.", they often pause.

Typically, before long, a 'challenging and defensive tone' can be detected in the voices of some leaders in the audience as they point out that they are 'driven to succeed, to obtain perfection' in all that they do—that they have been 'conditioned' to focus only on the 20% (i.e., what's wrong) and that that's why they get paid the big bucks!  They chide us that 'the pursuit of excellence' through continuous improvement is what it's all about!

Let's be clear—we're all for continuous improvement and progress; in fact, that's why we put **'Remember, it's about progress, not perfection'** at the bottom of our **10 Principles** card.  In any improvement process, we believe in encouraging people to 'try out' new behaviors that will produce better results, and to continuously learn from feedback and from making mistakes—yes, we assume that people will make mistakes as they develop and grow!

Leaders who focus all of their attention and energy on the 20% of things that are broken—some might call this a 'perfectionist' model—often stifle the shaping of a culture that values 'continuous learning and improvement.'  At LeadQuest, we want leaders to focus on 'celebrating and leveraging' the 80% of things that are working well (at the individual, team and organizational levels) as they address the 20% that could be improved!  In other words, we want leaders to ***be humanistic*** and to ***maintain perspective*** (i.e., be focused on the 'big picture'—the 100%, not just the 20% or the 80%) as they lead their organizations and the people in them!  At the end of the day, we want leaders to shape desired behaviors and results (i.e., high performance) by encouraging personal growth and development, and by using positive reinforcement in the process.  Remember the 4:1 Rule—over time, to stay motivated, the average employee needs to hear four times as many pieces of appreciative feedback as constructive feedback!  In an organization run by perfectionists, this ratio is often 1:10 or worse!

In this article, we've created a different kind of '80/20' model—i.e., celebrate and leverage the 80% 'that's working well' as you address the 20% 'that could be working even better.'  This is vitally important for personal, team and organizational health/success.  In an organization where leaders focus exclusively on the 20% (i.e., what's wrong), we often encounter what we call a 'fear-based culture'—one in which people are used to only hearing about failures and only hearing criticism.  The resulting impact is that employees fear making mistakes, they avoid making decisions and taking risks, they come to resent and not trust leadership, and they refuse to volunteer discretionary effort.  Obviously, these cultural traits act as barriers, not enablers, to continuous improvement, excellence, and sustainable growth.  If your culture is like this, we invite you to 'look in the mirror' and ask yourself two highly accountable questions: 1. How have *I* contributed to this dynamic?, and 2. What will *I* do to change it?

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