

A WORK IN PROGRESS

... THE POWER OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE

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Accomplished artists will often make numerous rough sketches of their final composition before putting brush to canvas. When we look at these sketches, we know they are simply preludes to the final masterpiece. We don't judge the sketch negatively because it is incomplete. We know that it is a work in progress. The same applies to us, as leaders.

No one assumes the mantle of leadership fully equipped for this often-demanding role. Even the greatest leaders are a painting in progress. Self-acceptance means understanding this fundamental principle of being a leader and being a human. And this principle needs to be woven through all leadership education and development programs.

Leaders continuously change and evolve and coming to grips with this fact can be a source of great strength. Think of the converse. When we are consumed by thoughts of our limitations, it is very unlikely that we will approach our work with high levels of energy, confidence, and passion—all critical factors in leadership effectiveness. Leaders are at their best when they accept their imperfections as inevitable and most importantly, as opportunities for development rather than as permanent deficits.

It is important to note that I am not advocating blind self-acceptance. Instead, I am encouraging true self-awareness and self-determination. I am encouraging those who lead to be deliberate about who they want to be, today and tomorrow. Be purposeful about the creation of your leadership masterpiece.

One of the most important lessons that I have learned from the very successful men and women whom I have had the honor of coaching is this: they decide on who they will be as leaders not leaving this important task to their inner critics. They know that a lack of strength in one area does not override strengths in another area. They know well their limitations and take steps to minimize their impact but don't dwell on them. They understand that the potential of failure always accompanies leadership.

Great leaders don't rate themselves on their success and failures but, instead, on their intention, courage, and commitment to help others do extraordinary things. As Albert Ellis said: "Our essence is determined by millions of acts, deeds, and traits during our lifetime. It is, therefore, impossible to base self-acceptance on a notion that we can accurately sum up who we are."

Great leaders pursue accomplishments not to prove their worth to others but to have the joy of being part of something significant. Their self-acceptance is not tied to what others think of them. They are freed from this tyranny choosing instead to focus on what they want to accomplish without the weight of others' validation. Self-accepting leaders live and function well in the moment. They are not immobilized by mistakes and setbacks.

Self-acceptance is about recognizing both your humanity and your giftedness. It's about using all your talents and strengths to the maximum, without reticence or apology, embracing your full calling as a leader. Our lives are shaped by our minds; we become what we think. What kind of a leader do you believe yourself to be?



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