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## Leading With Clarity

By Kerry W. Elam

Leading with a clear intention sets the positive, motivating tone of a successful organization. Inherently, we are more able to align with leaders that articulate the why of the organizational path. This article explores how great leaders consistently communicate clarity by setting intentions, taking time for self-reflection, and tapping into intuition.

### Create clarity

The most powerful leaders seek clarity through taking time for themselves. When we take time to nourish ourselves, we have greater capacity to see the big picture, allowing us to make wiser decisions and plan more effectively. With a culture that thrives on multi-tasking, our world is a busy place. There are more prescription drugs than ever being utilized to deal with anxiety, stress, and depression. “When the well’s dry, we know the worth of water,” said a wise Benjamin Franklin. If we are scurrying from task to task and appointment to appointment, our minds will be cluttered, leaving little space for clear leadership. As a leader of Actualize Consulting, I am often asked how I have such a high capacity and still maintain

clarity. Here are some tips for leaders (and team members!):

- Indulge in natural Vitamin D by doing a physical activity outdoors.
- Take time regularly for quiet meditation or mindfulness practices. “Meditation is not a way of making your mind quiet. It’s a way of entering into the quiet that’s already there—buried under the 50,000 thoughts the average person thinks every day.” (Deepak Chopra).
- Schedule a play date with family or friends. Encourage your team to do the same.
- Breathe deeply when feeling stress or confusion.
- Smile.
- Stretch to release the tension we hold in our muscles.
- Listen to music daily.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Get enough rest. Skimping on sleep and “down time” is not a badge of honor.
- Delegate and empower your team.

### Set intentions

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines intention as “the thing that you plan to do or

achieve: an aim or purpose.” In any facet of life, intentions are relevant to keep us focused. In business, intention setting not only facilitates communication among teams, but also aids us in clarifying the why behind our strategy. When we take time to analyze the intention, we can hone in on a clearer vision enabling us to explain to others and obtain organizational buy-in and support. Thomas Jefferson said, “Nothing was or is farther from my intentions, than to enlist myself as the champion of a fixed opinion, where I have only expressed doubt.”

Some guidance regarding intentions is listed below:

- Seek to understand the various facets of intentions, by first defining the intention, and then implementing it fully through your thoughts and actions.
- Determine how others view your intentions. Do they want to work with you, ask you for advice? If yes, you can conclude others value your guidance. However, if you are leading with little interaction, you may want to re-evaluate how you are actually impacting others.
- Lead intentionally and your teams, organizations, and businesses will prosper in ways unimagined.

In his book, *The Seat of the Soul*, Gary Zukav stated, “The more aware of your intentions and your experiences you become, the more you will be able to connect the two, and the more you will be able to create the experiences of your life consciously. This is the development of mastery. It is the creation of authentic power.”

### Practice self-reflection

Another key ritual of a great leader is taking time for self-reflection. As Sigmund Freud said, “Being extremely honest with oneself is a good exercise.” If we take time to honestly look at ourselves and our triggers, we can continue to grow. Life is a learning process and we strengthen our development by looking at how we show up.

Defensiveness is a powerful clue to our areas of needed growth. The next time you find yourself reacting, take a moment to analyze the why. Most often there is a truth to uncover. For instance, your staff says you are a micromanager and every time you

are made aware, you feel your temperature rising and your inner voice says, “I am not a micro-manager!” The more-seasoned leaders see this as an opportunity to improve, and take the necessary steps to enhance their behavior to empower their team.

An important best practice is to incorporate self-reflection across the organization. At my firm, we recently added self-reflection questions to our bi-annual review process. We used the questions from the book, *HR Transformation*:

1. What are some of the common challenges I run into when trying to accomplish my work?
2. How do people generally respond to me?
3. What work do I find easy, energizing and enjoyable?
4. What work do I get excited about doing? What work do I avoid by procrastinating, avoiding or postponing?
5. What do I need to do less of and what do I need to do more of to add greater value to my internal and external customers?
6. Who are the people I trust the most? Am I willing to ask them for suggestions for how I can improve?
7. How do I respond when I receive feedback? Am I able to process the information without becoming defensive?

### Follow intuition

Lastly, listen to your intuition. What is your gut telling you? Yes, this is an effective strategy even in the business world! Bill Gates attributed much of his success with Microsoft to intuition, saying that to win big, “Often you have to rely on intuition.” Albert Einstein said, “The only real valuable thing is intuition,” and came up with his Theory of Relativity via an intuitive dream. Remember though, that in order to tap into our intuition, we have to clear the static, intentionally tuning into our inner guidance.

With clarity, intention setting, self-reflection, and following our inner voice, we can effectively lead with the strong and stable support of our organizations.

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