

To lead others, you must lead yourself first

By Repa Patel | 12th April 2021



In August 2020 (post bushfires and during the second COVID lockdown in Melbourne) a [survey](#) of 1000+ Australian workers found that 49.5% of workers were “living well”, despite their significant struggles.

This cohort of almost 50% of respondents were also more likely to experience higher levels of:

- Job satisfaction
- Performance
- Organisational commitment
- Team performance
- Organisational performance

These results show what the ancient eastern traditions have known for centuries: living well has less to do with what’s happening outside and more to do with how you respond (internally) to the external environment.

It is possible to achieve wellbeing during very challenging times. As HR professionals it’s critical we teach leaders how to ride the waves of change as uncertainty is now certain.

Leaders must manage their own mind and emotions, whilst curating a culture that enables their team to thrive. A positive work culture improves performance, motivation, discretionary effort, engagement, creativity and conflict resolution skills. Poor leadership increases the risk of sickness for employees and the [risk of suffering a heart attack](#).

A leader’s thoughts, actions and behaviours create the culture in their team. Many leaders fail to realise this because much of their thinking and behaviours are instinctual and impulsive.

Leading yourself

Leading yourself requires consciously understanding your strengths and what holds you back. This is more than a skills audit. It requires the ability to see your habitual thought and behaviour patterns and choose a different approach in order to change the external circumstances. Your thoughts become your actions, which (over time) become your behaviours and together, they drive your results.

Leading yourself is not just about your own wellbeing; it's the foundation of your personal, professional and business success. Your self leadership underpins the success of your team and business results.

There's a strong link between how engaged employees feel and their performance and wellbeing. This engagement is linked to culture.

Culture is how decisions are made and implemented in an organisation. Engagement is how enthusiastic and connected your employees feel to their work and your organisation. [Gallup's research](#) shows that 70% of your employees' engagement is due to their direct manager. This means that your leaders are in the driving seat when it comes to changing your culture and increasing engagement.

To change your culture and increase employee engagement, the first step is teaching your leaders how to lead themselves so that their thoughts, actions and behaviours have a positive influence in any change process you are implementing. In the process, you will increase leadership bench strength and resilience.

Teaching your leaders to lead themselves

Growing [scientific evidence](#) supports that all decision-making involves thinking (the mind), intuition (the gut) and emotion (the heart). Each of these organs has a significant number of brain cells that connect directly with your brain. The use of these holistic decision-making faculties is subtle, usually unconscious, even for those people who strongly believe intuition and emotion play no part in decision-making.

The first step to self leadership is teaching your leaders how to integrate the mind, gut and heart and showing them how they can use this collective intelligence (rather than just their intellect) to make business and people decisions.

Here's my Mindful Leadership Process which I use when working with leaders in organisations:

1. Conscious - become the architect of your mind

- a) Teach them the tools to manage their mind, controlling and choosing what they focus on, particularly through chaos and disruption. Meditation is the best tool to train awareness and I recommend a meditation app for beginners.
- b) Deep dive into their innate strengths (not skills) and note when they get in the way of personal, team and business success.
- c) Purpose drives performance - connecting them with their motivation to lead. This ignites passion and engagement within each leader, essential to make change leadership sustainable.

2. Courage - the critical component of change, understanding:

- a) The price you pay for the pursuit of perfection and how to avoid it
- b) How to manage the fear of failure
- c) The power of using vulnerability

3. Compassion - converting fear into conviction, the 3 elements are:

- a) The capacity to recognise when you are suffering and how to move forward to alleviate that suffering (self compassion)
- b) How compassion is different from empathy
- c) How to use compassion in difficult situations like performance improvement conversations

Once the individual leader has progressed through her journey, then start working with her leadership team. The focus now is on elevating the leadership team through group work. The results are deep trust, voluntary collaboration and genuine accountability to deliver team results.

The sustainable way to increase leadership bench strength.