



Leadership Sustainability

Seven Disciplines to Achieve the Changes Great Leaders Know They Must Make

Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood
McGraw-Hill © 2013
264 pages
Book: getab.li/22148

Rating

8 9 Applicability
7 Innovation
7 Style

Focus

Leadership & Management

Strategy
Sales & Marketing
Finance
Human Resources
IT, Production & Logistics
Career & Self-Development
Small Business
Economics & Politics
Industries
Global Business
Concepts & Trends

Take-Aways

- Sustaining change takes more effort than initiating change.
- Follow the leadership code: “Shape the future, make things happen, engage today’s talent, build the next generation” and “invest in yourself.”
- To create lasting change, “sustainable leaders” adhere to “seven disciplines”:
- Keep it simple. Translate complicated concepts into clear, compelling language.
- Manage your time. Carefully choose the timing of change. Turn new behaviors into habits with well-timed repetition.
- Be accountable for your actions; hold others answerable for theirs.
- Use your resources wisely. Work with others; don’t go solo. Leverage other people with “coaching,” communicating and aligning your efforts to the firm’s culture.
- Track, measure and analyze your progress. Tie rewards to the factors you measure.
- Seek constant melioration and improvement. Test ideas on a small scale. Then fail, think, revise and repeat until you succeed.
- Lead with your heart to tap into people’s emotions and win their allegiance.

Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) What the five rules of the “leadership code” are, 2) How to make leadership development and change last over the long run, and 3) How you can apply seven actionable disciplines to make change stick.

Review

Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood’s newest, relatively short addition to leadership literature offers something original: You can learn how to prevent new initiatives from becoming yesterday’s news. To that end, they focus on “sustainability” as well as change. The authors’ program for keeping your initiatives fresh and active is clear, simple, manageable and doable. They cite and explain seven “disciplines” every leader of any organization can adopt to generate and sustain meaningful, lasting change. *getAbstract* recommends their plainspoken advice to leaders working to implement agile, well-timed, measurable and sustainable change. Ulrich and Smallwood always deliver value and insight; they can help you change the way you change.

Summary

“Leadership sustainability occurs when leaders accept why they need to improve, recognize what they need to improve and figure out how to make the improvements stick.”

“To build sustainable change, effective leaders start with small and simple changes that show up on their forward-looking calendar.”

Starting Is Easy. Sustaining Is Hard.

People and firms can change, but they rarely stay changed. Yet organizations must innovate and adapt. Lasting change is possible when leaders get the basics right. First, follow the five rules of the “leadership code,” and then apply the seven “START ME” disciplines.”

The Leadership Code

The five rules of the leadership code outline the fundamental leadership skills:

1. **“Shape the future”** – Develop, share and drive your vision of the future.
2. **“Make things happen”** – Execute. Turn talk into action and do it properly.
3. **“Engage today’s talent”** – Develop abilities in others and inspire them to commit to the success of the organization.
4. **“Build the next generation”** – Think about the future: Who will lead and sustain the organization after you leave? Consider and nurture the leaders and the skills leaders will need in the years to come.
5. **“Invest in yourself”** – Commit to growing “intellectually,” “emotionally,” “physically,” “socially” and “spiritually,” by staying engaged, learning, building relationships, and by knowing and following your values.

Mastering these skills will help you become a leader who is able to make timely, correct, visionary and sustainable changes.

The Seven Disciplines

The acronym START ME delineates the seven disciplines for sustainable leadership. These disciplines lay out a blueprint for “the how of leadership.”

1. “Simplicity”

When NASA decided astronauts needed a pen that would write in space, it commissioned research that took years and cost “millions of dollars.” NASA eventually got its pen;

“Today’s biggest unmet challenge of leadership is not learning more about what to do, it is learning how to make sure that what is known is done.”

“Self-reflection helps individuals to sustain change because it replaces avoidance with reality.”

“A compelling purpose increases productivity 5 to 10 percent because people have an emotional commitment...These ‘firms of endearment’ create a share of heart that helps deliver emotional and social value and...helps leaders sustain the changes they desire.”

“The higher the percentage of ownership...you have when you begin your day, a project or your job, the more success you’ll have.”

Russian cosmonauts, meanwhile, simply used pencils. This tale contrasts the potential folly of complexity against the lean, direct power of simplicity.

Leaders must curate complex information, make choices, and identify and understand the core of an issue. Determine what’s important. Win others over by telling stories that tap their interests and emotions. Avoid jargon, and talk about real people who exemplify your message. To boil next year’s 100-page strategic plan down into a powerful message about better customer service, for example, tell a story about an employee or team who served exceptionally well. Help your audience see your vision of a better future in their own minds.

2. “Time”

Take control of your time by questioning your routines. How much time do you allocate to the things you consider most important for reaching your goals? Change your routines with incremental steps so that your time and effort align with your most important objectives.

Consider timing as well as time. Avoid the mistake of former BP CEO Tony Hayward. He visited the Gulf Coast soon after the catastrophic BP platform oil leak. Hayward infuriated an already angry populace by saying “There’s no one who wants this over more than I do. I would like my life back.” Hayward failed to look at change through other people’s eyes. Hayward demonstrated good timing by visiting the area immediately after the disaster, but he botched the gesture by attempting to make himself the victim.

Make change stick by taking repeated action. Use the “four 3s” to give feedback daily:

- **“Three hours”** – Leave your office and recognize one person for something.
- **“Three days”** – Block out time over the next three days to give three people feedback.
- **“Three weeks”** – Visit with many employees regularly for the next three weeks to provide feedback. Keep written records.
- **“Three months”** – Tell employees about your plan to provide regular feedback. Your newfound credibility will ensure they believe you. Make feedback a habit – a part of your new identity and “leadership brand.”

3. “Accountability”

You bear the responsibility to hold yourself and others accountable. Take responsibility for the things that go wrong and share the credit when things work well. Don’t take the position that you’re always right and that good things happen to you because you’re great. Be humble, and appreciate that fortune plays a role in your success. Good fortune is more likely to find you when you share an open, positive outlook with the world.

Announce your plans publicly. That puts you on the spot to follow through. Stay true to your convictions and values, and use them to guide your development of leadership skills. For example, don’t work to build “emotional intelligence” just for the sake of it. Emotional intelligence serves your values and brand. It helps you become better at helping employees find purpose in their work. Demand accountability in others, but help them be accountable by co-developing well-defined goals and metrics they can use to gauge their progress. Set transparent rewards and penalties, communicate your staffers’ progress and coach them along the way.

4. “Resources”

No matter your determination, you can’t do everything alone. To sustain change efforts, leaders must marshal their forces – people and teams – and align them toward a shared goal.

“Sustainability does not occur until the new behavior becomes a natural act (a routine or pattern) in a natural place (the work setting).”

“When leaders and employees have a line of sight between their personal values and the organization’s purpose, they are more likely to sustain their commitment.”

“Any leader who expects sustainable results must ensure personal and organizational accountability.”

“As leaders become clear about strategies and measures, they can certainly craft financial and nonfinancial rewards that change behavior and sustain the resulting patterns.”

Choose and keep top talent, but focus more on crafting great teams. Even Michael Jordan couldn’t lead the Chicago Bulls to a championship until the organization built a good team around him. As in sports, good coaching is essential. Coach others and seek coaching for yourself – it keeps you and your team on the path toward achieving sustainable results.

Align people and processes around the principal changes you seek to sustain. Human resources should work with you, not against you. For example, if greater innovation is the goal, work with HR to design recruiting, learning and advancement programs to hire, develop and reward individuals who exhibit the desired behaviors. Leverage information to sustain change. What you say and the information you share – your behavior and the importance you place on specific activities and initiatives – send powerful signals about what matters most.

Ensure that your ideas and initiatives align with the culture and values of the organization. Stay mindful of the perspective of your stakeholders, both inside and outside the organization. Respect the norms of the organization: Sensitivity to the way your firm conducts business is another key to the sustainability of your ideas and initiatives.

5. “Tracking”

Metrics and measures track your progress. Use metrics to ensure that you reward and recognize the behaviors you want to encourage. Set precise, clear goals that employees understand. As you track their work, measure their progress to gain insight. Measurement should collect data about what happened and should also support “predictive analytics” that provide intelligence about the future consequences of your decisions. For example, Sears accurately predicts future store revenue and profits based on past measurements of employee and customer engagement.

The Oakland A’s, a major league baseball team, predict the future success of potential recruits based on analyzing reams of performance data about all players. The A’s use these insights to sign players other teams might overlook. About a decade ago, the A’s set records for wins. Since then, most other teams have caught on, and now use similar measures and analyses. In business as in sports, analytics that shed light on the future create as much or more value than those that tell you about what happened in the past.

To sustain change, collect data that allow you to see patterns in your analysis. Learn what’s possible. Make better decisions about what initiatives you should invest in and which behaviors you should reward.

6. “Melioration”

Commit yourself and those you lead to constant betterment. Learn and improve from mistakes and failures. Mobility, an upstart Middle Eastern telecom company, suffered a complete outage of cellular phone service after a highly publicized launch. Mobility took immediate responsibility, and the CEO led the firm to a quick resolution of the problem. The CEO did not shift blame to a contractor or supplier, and he refunded customers for lost service. His actions helped cement the organization’s reputation with its existing and new customers. The company’s leaders learned from the problems that caused the outage and upgraded their system’s reliability. Mobility came out a winner – customers rated it much higher for reliability after the incident than before.

Try, fail, think about what went wrong, revise and try again. Learn at each step and stay flexible. Limit the risk of new ventures by running pilot programs. Discover the issues

“You really do get what you inspect and not what you expect...People really do get what they are rewarded for, so it is pointless to hope for one thing while rewarding another.”

“When you are about to blame someone else, turn the blame statement into an I statement. When you are about to take credit for something, use a we statement.”

“Resilient people keep trying until they succeed. That is sustainability.”

inherent in any new project and fix them before expanding the initiative. Remember to step back between trials to consider what went wrong and capture what went well.

Consider the model of jazz bands versus orchestras. Jazz bands try new things and adjust along the way as they absorb feedback from their listeners. Depending on the audience, finding the right notes and flow requires continuous change during each performance and between performances. An orchestra conductor leads differently. Conductors plan and practice every note ahead of time, and aim for strict repetition with no variation during or between performances.

Leadership requires both approaches. Learning and improving in the messy, ever-changing world of business more often resembles a jazz performance. With either dedicated practice or constant adaptation, try to build resilience, another sustainable leadership trait. Resilient leaders improve constantly by innovating, trying new things, failing, thinking, adjusting and repeating until they succeed.

7. “Emotion”

Do you remember where you were during the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001? Such an event imprints on your memory because it evokes and attaches to deep, powerful emotions. As a leader, you might prefer to have your team members make cold, logical business decisions, but they rarely do, and neither do you. You often face choices between rational and emotional courses of action. Effective leaders sometimes make irrational decisions on purpose.

In 1999, Ford Motor Company CEO Bill Ford had to make a decision when his largest factory, which was nearby, exploded. The explosion killed some people and left more at risk. Logic dictated that he should remain in his office, as his staff told him to do, because the disaster scene was very dangerous. Instead, Ford drove to the site and spoke to the media. His words and body language expressed his concern for the workers’ safety. Ford bared his emotions and rallied the company. Leaders create memories, build bonds and inspire through emotion, not logic.

Decide whether you have an emotional urge to lead. Without it, you will find it hard to sustain your interest amid leadership’s challenges and setbacks. An emotional connection to the reasons you lead – that is, aligning your values and goals with the organization’s objectives – is the powerful ingredient that gives you energy and gives your work meaning.

Consider Abraham Lincoln, who led the US during its Civil War. Lincoln leveraged important “emotional strengths,” including a sense of “humor,” “empathy,” forgiveness, fairness, “generosity,” “perspective,” self-discipline and “social conscience.” Lincoln always showed his emotions honestly; he connected to and inspired the American people. If you care about leading, help people care about the change and initiatives that matter to you. Don’t cite just the rational benefits of your change; communicate the emotional reasons, the meaning and the purpose. That will create an atmosphere that can sustain change.

About the Authors

Leading HR expert **Dave Ulrich** is a business professor. **Norm Smallwood** is a prolific writer and strategist. Both consultants, they founded the RBL Group in 2000.