



*They can be much better as a team than they can independently and I don't like them to do well.*  
*I know this sounds naive, but I really and truly trust each other and have many tests in our past.*  
*For the next six months...*  
*...because the only way you can't...*  
*...with the right plan, believe...*  
*...of you and your...*

# BUILDING LEADERSHIP FITNESS

*Growth in the Midst of Challenge*

**ANYONE WHO HAS EVER HEARD THE WORDS: “JUST ONE MORE! YOU CAN DO IT! YOU’RE ALMOST THERE!” KNOWS THE COMBINATION OF EXHAUSTION AND EXHILARATION FELT WHEN BEING PUSHED TO EXCEL WITH A PERSONAL TRAINER OR EXERCISE PARTNER.**

In the midst of the final gut-wrenching last rep or push to the finish line, you may ask why you’ve put yourself in the position to experience the pain associated with the benefits you seek. The reality though, is that the answer lies within us all. With any worthwhile endeavor, there is challenge to overcome -- in this example, a better toned physique, greater stamina or faster time.

Because we all know this to be true, why then when faced with difficult or challenging life circumstances, do we tend to want to find a solution, to “get through it” when upon reflection, we know the difficulties are what change and transform us? Our experience has shown that to be where real growth occurs. Why don’t we more often apply the principles we pursue with physical fitness in pursuit of how we can grow in our perspective and maturity as a leader in the face of challenging circumstances? In essence, push ourselves to become stronger leaders through the adversity.

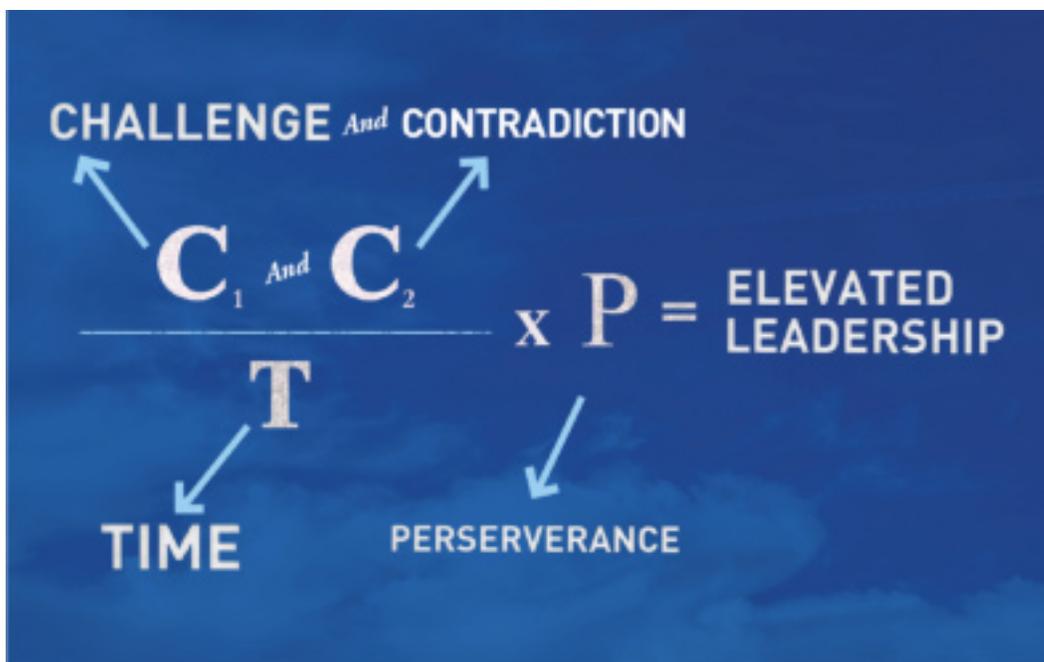
Given the current reality of challenge being faced worldwide at the end of the first decade of the 21st century, a few important questions: How will our leaders respond to these challenges? How will we all respond to these challenges? How can you leverage this period to grow stronger in leadership maturity? Instead of “getting through it,” there is a way to thrive and not to simply survive during these current times.

To clarify, thriving doesn’t mean that the challenge subsides, or that the situation eases more quickly to get things “back to normal.” To thrive, one must recognize the opportunity for personal growth and development that exists just as much as the growth coming from a strenuous workout. Put another way, while it hurts at the time, you know that you won’t see the results after you step out of the shower following the workout. You plan on seeing results eventually, or you wouldn’t put in the time and effort. What you do, is take a perspective that is longer term with the results you seek.

Likewise, what is required during a time of difficulty, is the ability to “take a perspective” within the current set of circumstances. Said another way: instead of simply having an experience, it is “evaluated experience” that leads to change. While not commonly referred to in this way, this ability most often comes with age; the wisdom developed over the course of our lives.

In addition to age and life experience, the ability to take a mature perspective can also be accelerated. An extremely difficult period at a young age in those who focus on positive outcomes or greater purpose of the experience can result in advanced maturity. Often times a strong sense of self, an intense faith, or personal spirituality are key factors which influence this type of perspective being developed during a younger stage of life.

So in adults, what can be done to accelerate the ability to gain perspective and to leverage experiences that result in greater maturity across all of the roles we have as leaders? Within The Leaders Lyceum curriculum a central premise which serves as the catalyst, when harnessed for change can be expressed as the following formula:



Opportunity for change begins by recognizing that Challenge and Contradiction - the combination of a difficult circumstance which contradicts one’s current way of understanding that circumstance - when Over Time is Persevered through, leads to Elevated Leadership. This principle is a truth that plays itself out for everyone who taps the benefits associated with “character building” events of life.

**Making the most of times of tumult means not avoiding instances where our understanding can be challenged. Asking one’s self how the circumstance could change a perspective previously taken - turning the focus inward regarding your role in the solution or issue.**

Not looking outward for the change, but looking inward for how your point-of-view can be stretched. Continued growth comes with never feeling like “you’re there” and by not getting comfortable with “your way” of dealing with life’s challenges.

An important distinction must be made here. The challenge referred to regarding perspective, must not be confused with challenge to one's core values. If the foundational values are based on a solid footing, the assessment of perspective refers to the way of making sense of the world, not on a shifting one's core values. Great leaders have unshakeable values, but are willing to reflect on the way they view themselves and their role in the context of their circumstances.

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## **LIKELIKE, LEADERS WHO STRIVE TO REACH INCREASING DEGREES OF MATURITY, ALWAYS EVALUATE THEIR ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT "THEIR WAY" AS IT RELATES TO DEALING WITH CHALLENGE.**

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Likewise, leaders who strive to reach increasing degrees of maturity, always evaluate their assumptions about "their way" as it relates to dealing with challenge. They most often view themselves as ever-changing, ever-willing to question their point-of-view and make themselves open to the scrutiny of life. This attitude of growth and constant assessment, most often is described as humility within a leader. The journey of their own personal development is more important than the destination that most of us seek to reach.

Practically speaking, to hold fast to one's values while at the same time being self-aware and open to life-long change, results from focused intentionality over time. Being not only open to, but willing to seek challenging circumstances that result in the ability to be pushed in one's thinking, must start with an assessment of one's core values as place to "lead from." With a firm foundation established, only then should a leader be willing to subject themselves to demands of self assessment with other aspects of life. Unfortunately, too often leaders haven't taken the time to do the important work of pointing to the underlying values upon which rest all other decisions.

That is why, when the "real difficulties" of life come along: death of a loved one, relational challenges, health issues, etc., many are unprepared for the decisions ahead. These life-changing events only serve to highlight fundamental and underlying structural weakness; not unlike the way an earthquake impacts buildings. Recalling the opening analogy, if you have prepared well for a physical challenge through training, the impact during and after have much less traumatic affects. It is only through sustained and intentional focus over time that one minimizes the physical damage caused by the event -- training for a full week, 8 hours a day before running a marathon will not achieve the desired results.

What then will lead to the "leadership fitness" for those who desire the pursuit of continued growth? By making a diligent effort to simultaneously remain grounded in a set of solid values based on universally recognized attributes of honesty, integrity, courage, compassion, etc., while also being vulnerable for their own personal growth is a tall order. For mature leaders, this type of thinking takes one out of their comfort zone in many aspects of life, but is worth the effort!

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**A key first step is to seek out opportunities for deeper self-reflection and ways to begin to identify the most closely held values.**

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Also important is examining where you have “fixed” your viewpoints that may need to be challenged, to seek out ways to test assumptions about how “your way” may need to be stretched and validated. A great method of continuing to be pushed in both of these areas is through the active investment in others, both in and outside of close personal relationships.

Great leaders never stop investing in those around them. As a leader matures, the ability to be the direct beneficiary of the insight and counsel of others becomes increasingly more difficult. The act of being “poured into” by others that impacted the leader over time, is now directed toward the “pouring out” of themselves into the lives of others. Steady devotion to this principle yields growth in the leader who gives of one’s self, as much as for the recipient of the leader’s time. In the same way that an active personal trainer who puts in the time along with the student, both then benefit and strengthen their relationship of growth along the way.

When training for any strenuous journey, great leaders likewise are constantly in a state of preparation for the stresses of the race. With an intentional approach and an eye toward the gain associated, taking a perspective on the strains of life will yield an environment in which survive is transformed into thrive!

Get training, the journey is here and now.