9. Personal goals for self-directed leaders: traditional and new perspectives

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All my life I've always wanted to be somebody. But I see now that I should have been more specific.

(Fictional character who never quite got her act together, played by Lily Tomlin, from Searching for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe, Wagner, 1985)

And you may ask yourself . . . same as it ever was?

(With apologies to David Byrne)

If you care enough about a result, you will almost certainly attain it.

(William James)

Self-management is of course exceedingly complex, but at its core are personal goals and feedback (Latham and Locke, 1991). Other chapters in this volume focus on feedback, and offer many useful perspectives on this vital construct. This chapter focuses on the other core construct: personal goals.

Your motivation can come from many sources, but the most powerful driver is your personal goals. Goals motivate us in all important aspects of our lives, and leadership development is no exception. This chapter offers a variety of personal goals that are potentially helpful toward developing into a better leader.

Goals direct people's attention, energize and change behavior, and inspire accomplishment and higher performance (Locke and Latham, 1990). Specific goals are more effective at these things than vague goals. 'I want to be an awesome person' and 'I want to be a successful businessperson' are worthy aspirations, but they are pretty vague. 'I want to become a better leader' is arguably a bit more specific, especially when used as a stepping stone toward personal greatness and business success. Goals concerning what to change about your leadership can be more specific yet.

For example, having clear intentions to become a better leader by
improving one's strategic thinking and developing stronger people skills are more specific goals than 'becoming a better leader'. Developing a viable vision within the next month and motivating people by using new and more powerful approaches are more specific yet. This chapter is intended to provide you with a set of potentially-useful options from which to choose.

The specific goals you choose to pursue are completely up to you, of course, but it is better to choose valid, high-leverage goals than goals that won't make much difference. Thankfully, at least a half century of management research and theorizing have made clear the aspects of leadership that really do have an impact on a leader's performance and effectiveness. This chapter will identify a variety of useful goals that have appeared in mainstream leadership theories, and will also offer some new perspectives. From this array of options, the self-directed leader can pick and choose goals that are most personally relevant and useful.

The self-directed leader (SDL) is one who makes valid, useful decisions and takes appropriate action in the pursuit of personal development in the domain of leadership. Self-directed leadership requires making choices mindfully rather than mindlessly. It also requires taking high-leverage actions, rather than acting in the ways that are simply the easiest and most natural. Self-directed leadership begins with selecting personal goals and making conscious choices about what dimensions of leadership to learn and what strategies and tactics to implement. This description of the self-directed leader contrasts with the too-common mindless approach to one's own leadership, and with merely hoping for improvement, which are easy but tend to result in no development at all. The point is, whatever goals you decide to pursue, wishing and hoping to achieve them won't make it happen; making a decision to take specific action is the key to moving from the worthy ideas that can be found in this volume to an actual result.

I will use the term self-sabotage to refer to undermining one's own self-development efforts or leadership effectiveness by failing to act on things under one's control, or by acting in suboptimal ways. Dubrin (1992) defined self-sabotage as doing things against your best interests, even though you probably could do otherwise. Thus, knowing that one needs to improve one's leadership effectiveness by improving 'people skills', but failing to take decisive action in that regard, is self-sabotage. So is choosing a self-development goal that is not as important as one that goes ignored; so is choosing an important goal but not pursuing it or progressing as far as one could. I will sometimes use self-command to suggest appropriate goal selection and the application of appropriate strategies and tactics that counteract the tendency to self-sabotage and enable progress toward greater leadership effectiveness.
GOAL CHOICE

Before you attain your leadership development goals, you must first engage in the tasks of appropriately choosing and then effectively pursuing them. Traditional leadership theories that have been validated with evidence, as well as recent perspectives that have potential impact on leader effectiveness, can identify the most important goals for personal leadership development. Specifics about how to implement these ideas are readily found in training sessions, manuals, and some of the cited references; therefore the chapter is more strategic than tactical.

How people choose their goals has been the subject of surprisingly little study. But criteria that you can apply in making goal choices include the potential value of the goals in question, their importance compared with other options, your confidence regarding your ability to pursue and achieve them (or at least make progress), and what your thoughts and emotions seem to indicate that you should pursue (Klein et al., 2008). Thoughts and emotions have potential diagnostic value in indicating the potential value you place on achieving the goal. Then, once you’ve chosen your goals, it becomes time to commit to the chosen goal(s), and enter the volitional control phase of self-regulation, which consists of focusing attention on the chosen goal, executing strategies to attain it, and monitoring performance (Zimmerman, 2000).

For academics, this entire domain of goal choice and pursuit is a wide-open field for research inquiry, particularly in the domain of leadership. For practitioners, unless and until you have feedback or other data that indicate which goals you most need to pursue, you can use the criteria listed above on an intuitive basis. Most of this chapter is dedicated to providing a wide-ranging set of goal options from which to choose, and it includes relevant references for diving deeper into topics of particular interest.

GOAL PURSUIT

People often hold certain beliefs, or feel that they know what they should do, but don’t act in ways that are consistent with what they think. Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) described the ‘knowing–doing gap’: the often-large discrepancy between what people know they should do, and what they in fact do. Argyris (1993) described the difference between espoused theories and theories-in-use: people say the right things, but don’t act commensurately. To illustrate this point, pick a well-known and useful concept such as ‘world-class customer service’ or ‘employee empowerment’. We all ‘know’
these things, but do we use them to their full potential? To think about how we fall short of realizing the full impact of important ideas, consider this metaphorical ladder:

The first level of (pseudo-) knowledge is characterized by mere awareness. We sometimes erroneously assume that we are applying concepts simply because we are familiar with them, and perhaps because they seem commonsensical or like old news. Imagine sitting in a classroom, hearing the instructor bring up a popular management term, dismissively thinking ‘sure, I’ve heard of that. There’s nothing new here’, and failing to hear the rest of the message which may include new perspective, depth, nuance, or creative application.

At the second level, you progress from recognizing a shallow buzzword to actually knowing what it means. Take ‘empowerment’, for example: can you articulate what it means psychologically, what it means in fact, the common misperceptions surrounding it (including what it is not), and what is required for its effective implementation? The same questions pertain to all important leadership concepts.

At the next level, you move beyond the intellectual understanding of a concept to also appreciating its potential importance and impact. At this level, you embrace the concept, and agree that (done properly) it is potentially worth implementing.

The levels of knowledge just described increase progressively in terms of depth of understanding and commitment to execution. But all are cognitive, not behavioral, and all still sit on the cognitive side of the knowing–doing gap. All, even at the top level of complexity and commitment, remain espoused theories rather than theories-in-use. Therefore, the self-directed leader needs to move to higher, more behaviorally-oriented rungs of the ladder. At these levels of use, climbing the ladder becomes potentially more impactful, although, of course, the ladder must be leaning against the right wall; some goals are not as helpful as others. The aspiring leader who starts pursuing an important goal behaviorally rather than merely in her head can:

- Try it once, but perhaps without adequate persistence, and perhaps never again.
- Do it sometimes, when it is easily remembered or attempted.
- Live it, consistently and over time, as appropriate.

It is, of course, this final rung that represents true development in a leadership competency. As an aside to researchers: espoused vs. enacted theories, and what psychologists call implicit theories (in this context, of leadership effectiveness) have not been adequately studied in managerial
populations, and offer valuable opportunity for future theorizing and empiricism.

PERSONAL GOALS AND MAINSTREAM LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Choosing goals represents the ‘what’ to focus on in self-management and leadership development. Other chapters focus on the how, such as how to be resilient in the wake of failure and how to cope with stress. Leadership theories and research, not to mention readers’ intuitions, make clear the why. It is up to the reader, perhaps with reference to sources that describe the theories in full detail, to identify and act upon the where and when.

The theories and new concepts summarized below identify many important dimensions of leadership that are most likely to have a positive impact and enhance leader effectiveness. They offer many possible destinations for the self-directed leader, all of which are potentially valid and useful. The choice of destinations, though, is up to the reader, and should be based on what s/he deems most personally important (and perhaps most urgent).

Attending to People and to Task Performance

Pioneering studies done more than half a century ago investigated two fundamental types of leader behavior: consideration or relations-oriented behavior, and initiating structure or task-oriented behavior (Yukl, 2006). The former concerns supportive, helpful behavior toward people, in particular subordinates, and the latter concerns task accomplishment by subordinates, including setting performance goals, planning and scheduling, and providing resources.

These are broad, important, and enduring categories of leader behavior (Judge et al., 2004). Some leaders are effective on both dimensions. Many, it seems, focus on one to the neglect of the other. Some seem ineffectual at both.

Because acquiring and attending to feedback, as discussed in other chapters, is a fundamental component of effective self-management and personal development, the straightforward implication of these leader behaviors is to collect feedback on effectiveness at dealing with people and with making sure their work gets done properly. Assuming room for improvement in one or both of these two leadership capacities, and substantial upside such that a concerted effort is worthwhile, the self-directed
leader mindfully sets goals to practice and further develop the relevant competencies.

A common form of self-sabotage is to engage in actions that are easiest or most enjoyable. Some manager/leaders prefer to deal with task issues and wish the human element of work would just go away. Some enjoy working with people and don’t want to deal with performance problems. Leader self-command derives from applying a different criterion in choosing what dimensions to tackle: those most important to one’s personal leadership development and effectiveness.

**Participative Leadership**

In addition to attending properly to both people and to task performance, a third fundamental dimension of leadership is the extent to which leaders involve others in decision making (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1958). Leaders can make decisions autocratically, engage the group in decision making, consult others and then decide, or delegate decisions altogether. Of course, a leader may make use of all of these approaches, depending on the task at hand, as well as on other considerations, such as followers’ interests and expertise. Often, however, leaders have personal preferences and tendencies that over time constitute a single personal style.

Common self-sabotage tendencies are to be overly autocratic and not engage others in decision making; to routinely engage others in decision making even when it is unnecessary and time-consuming; and, associated with each of these tendencies, to employ a single approach inflexibly rather than applying a contingency analysis to determine when it is most and least appropriate to involve the group. As with all aspects of leadership, self-appraisal and feedback can inform leaders as to their personal tendencies. As a consequence of such feedback, leaders can choose goals in the form of (a) more extensive use of underutilized styles; and (b) practicing and developing the requisite skills, including situational analysis, that inform when (and when not) to use each style. Thus the leader who learns that he is too autocratic can set goals both to make more joint decisions with the group and to practice the skills that enhance group decision-making effectiveness. He also can set a goal to learn to diagnose the features of situations that are best for making the decision as a group – for example, the members are able to contribute and need to be committed to executing the decision – as well as retaining his habitual autocratic style when the decision must be made immediately or group members have nothing to contribute and don’t care to be involved.

One solution is to consult the Vroom and Jago (1988) model to learn
how situational features – including characteristics of the team, the problem and circumstances – affect the need for team-based decision making. Another is to apply the tactic of consensus with qualification (Eisenhardt, 1989): when appropriate, work with the team to achieve consensus, but when time runs short and/or consensus appears impossible, conclude the effort and make the decision autocratically.

**Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership is based on the leader’s authority to tell direct reports what to do and on the use of rewards (and punishments) to get them to comply (Bass, 1985). This approach to leadership can be effective because people are more likely to do things that result in rewards, and less likely to do things that result in punishment (at minimum, they may repeat the punishable offense but do it in a way that makes them less likely to get caught). Rewards – including not just money but also intangibles such as compliments – do motivate people. The challenge is to allocate rewards properly.

The leader interested in improving her transactional leadership skills could make a point of carefully contemplating or seeking feedback about how pay is distributed, about whether she plays favorites in terms of job assignments and giving praise, and how thoughtfully and fairly she applies disciplinary action. Upon finding indications of doing a poor job in any of these regards, or of doing an adequate job but not realizing the full potential of reward systems as motivators, she could set a goal for herself to motivate people more effectively via rewards. This could include subgoals of making sure that rewards are based on performance and desirable behaviors, and that rewards are allocated fairly and/or transparently.

A common trap for leaders was described in an important article titled ‘On the folly of rewarding A while hoping for B’ (Kerr, 1975). For example, business leaders sometimes want colleagues to cooperate but create competitive reward structures, cut budgets for those who keep spending down and increase funding for those who go over budget, and ask for long-term thinking and action, but reward and punish on the basis of short-term results.

A second common trap is to unwittingly deliver rewards and administer punishments unfairly. Employees often think that they are unfairly treated compared to someone else, sometimes due to perceived favoritism and bias. Leaders can set a goal for themselves of achieving fairness in the workplace. Subgoals could include making sure the top performers receive significantly higher rewards than lower performers, creating greater
transparency so that people know what criteria are being used, or becoming better at appraising performance and giving appropriate feedback, in part so that people can improve their performance and earn higher rewards in the future.

A more specific self-sabotage trap is being more likely to give compliments than criticism, or vice versa, sometimes for reasons that aren’t valid. It is not uncommon to be off the mark in these regards. For example, the well-known Myers–Briggs Type Inventory includes the dimension Thinking vs. Feeling. Thinking types are more likely to criticize than to compliment; feeling types are more likely to compliment than to criticize. A leader who wants to do better in giving valid positive and negative feedback can set personal goals – regardless of ‘type’ – to give both praise and constructive criticism rather than over-rely on one or the other, and to give such feedback only when it’s truly deserved.

**Charismatic Leadership**

Many leaders and aspiring leaders wish they had charisma. The good news is that theory and research have identified concrete actions that leaders can take to make it more likely that others will view them as charismatic. Charisma is thus not something that only a select few are born with and that others missed out on. In fact, people can ‘work on’ their charisma and noticeably enhance it.

Charisma (e.g., Conger and Kanungo, 1998; House and Shamir, 1993; cf. Miner, 2005) is defined in part by its impact on followers, including its appeal to their emotions and values in ways that inspire intrinsic motivation. Charismatic leadership is defined also by the leaders’ actions, which impress followers and enhance perceptions of charisma. These perspectives suggest to the self-directed leader the possible need to display emotion as appropriate (at least, passion for the cause); to consider followers’ ethics and values in communications, decisions and actions; and to appeal to intrinsic sources of motivation. Compared with the extrinsic motivators highlighted in transactional leadership, intrinsic motivation derives from the work itself, as the individual engages in it and performs. Charisma-conferring behaviors include communicating a compelling vision for the future, showing self-confidence, expressing confidence in others, and sacrificing on behalf of the team. The self-directed leader who wants to increase his personal charisma would assess his behavior on those dimensions and set personal goals to display them more often and clearly.

Two common traps are thinking that charisma is the single key to effective leadership, and misunderstanding the meaning of charisma.
Related to both of these is thinking that charisma is mostly about style and personality. Perhaps this is true in the colloquial sense, but this is not the way that leadership scholars or self-directed leaders think about charisma. Avoid these traps by understanding what charisma really means, as described above. Work on those specific behaviors, such as communicating the vision and showing confidence in followers, rather than on your 'personality' or image. Also make sure that you supplement charismatic behaviors with the substance and sheer competence that will impress people, deliver results, and sustain your leadership over the long run. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Thus the leader can set goals of increasing her displays of passion for the mission, creating a culture that is based more strongly on values and ethics, or reducing an over-reliance on extrinsic rewards and increasing the intrinsic rewards of people's work. The latter can be done by, for instance, enhancing and conveying the importance and significance of their work to customers both outside and inside the organization, and providing direct feedback to people about the impact and importance of their work.

Transformational Leadership

There is much overlap and potential synergy between charisma and transformational leadership. Yukl (2006) offers a thorough discussion of the similarities, differences and sources of conceptual confusion. Transformational leadership is that which inspires followers to perform beyond expectations and transcend their own self-interest for the good of the team or organization (Bass, 1985). Transformational leadership activates people's higher-order needs such as self-actualization, and includes the values-based, charismatic behaviors described above. It further includes giving personalized attention to individuals, stimulating team members intellectually, and conveying expectations of superior performance beyond the norm. For example, the self-directed leader interested in developing and strengthening her skills as a transformational leader will make a concerted effort to develop and communicate in inspiring fashion not only a compelling vision of the future but also followers' roles in helping to attain that future. She also will provide more individualized attention through personal coaching and mentoring, assigning tasks and goals that challenge people and develop their skills, and allowing people to express their personal interests and strengths.

Leadership effectiveness can be defined by leaders' achievement of their own goals, but a more useful definition considers the achievement of team
and organizational goals. A common trap and source of self-sabotage in
the domain of charismatic and transformational leadership is to develop
and pursue a vision that is personally appealing to the leader but to others
is unethical, inappropriate, or strategically mistaken. The leader who is
effective at transforming people and organizations can as easily transform
them for the worse as for the better. One important antidote to this trap is
to involve others in formulating and evaluating the vision – and an im-
portant tactic is to inject intellectual stimulation into the process by inviting
others’ ideas and constructive dissent. A second antidote is to revisit the
vision periodically, again with team involvement and intellectual stimula-
tion. Some elements of the vision, particularly those involving high ethical
standards, should remain permanent features. Other aspects, particularly
at the tactical and sometimes strategic levels, may need to change as
circumstances change.

NEW DIRECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR
SELF-DIRECTED LEADERS

The discussion above used prominent leadership theories to identify
an array of important goals that self-directed leaders can choose to
pursue. Next, I draw from a variety of (mostly) recent ideas from the
academic literature that leaders may also find interesting and
useful as sources of additional developmental opportunities. Some
are not new topics in and of themselves, but have not been fully inte-
grated into the leadership literature or become standard topics in
leadership development. Others are very new to the literature, in some
cases not explicitly linked to leadership but still opening potentially
important avenues toward further theorizing, empiricism and leader
development.

Ethics

You don’t have to be an outstanding leader, or attend leadership work-
shops, to understand that the things done by Ken Lay, Bernie Madoff
and some of the culprits behind the economic meltdown were unethical.
Most people can’t imagine themselves doing the heinous things that make
the news. But most people are not as ethical as they think they are, in part
because they make so many decisions on the basis of unconscious biases
(Banaji et al., 2003). Making ethical decisions takes moral awareness
(recognizing that the issue has ethical implications), moral judgment (dis-
cerning which actions are morally defensible), and moral character – the
courage and persistence to act in accordance with your ethics, despite the challenges (Trevino and Brown, 2004).

Moreover, there is a difference between being an ethical person and being an ethical leader (Trevino and Brown, 2004). Whereas ethical people make decisions and behave ethically, they often do so invisibly or silently or on their own. An ethical leader is a role model, visibly setting the standard, communicating openly to others, and creating and strengthening a culture of ethical behavior. A self-directed leader can set a goal of being not just an ethical person but also an ethical leader.

A common self-sabotaging trap is to simply not realize that biases often drive decisions; another is to recognize the factors driving a decision but not realize that they constitute biases. Different people take contrary but principled stands: people are responsible for their own fates vs. people are victims of circumstances; war is bad vs. war is sometimes necessary; government is the solution vs. government is the problem; the markets work vs. the markets need some regulating. Whatever side leaders take on these and other philosophical debates, traps can occur when decisions are driven by an ideology or belief system based in preconceived bias that one party considers ethical and another, unethical.

One potential solution to these quandaries is to apply the ethics system of consequentialism. In contrast to making decisions intuitively, or unknowingly applying personal biases, consequentialism means deciding and acting on the basis not of the leader’s predilections, but of the best consequences for pertinent stakeholders (Baron, 1998). This requires a thorough forecasting of consequences, considering for all relevant stakeholders the tangible outcomes, short- and long-term impact, and so on. Applying this ethical system helps to ensure that leaders are vigilant in the pursuit of rational problem-solving and thus take fewer actions that ignore the consequences for some important constituencies.

**Leadership Self-Efficacy**

One of the most powerful psychological predictors of behavior and performance is self-efficacy: believing in your ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to attain goals (Bandura, 1997). More specifically, leadership self-efficacy (LSE) is confidence in one’s knowledge, skills and ability to lead others effectively (Hannah et al., 2008). Leadership self-efficacy has been shown to predict others’ ratings of leaders’ effectiveness, although cause and effect are not well established (Anderson et al., 2008).

Self-sabotage can result from a type of ‘underconfidence’, in which
people’s lack of faith in their own leadership capabilities can deter them from taking on leadership roles or undermine their effectiveness within those roles. Conversely, leaders can self-sabotage because of self-efficacy that is unrealistically high: overconfidence in their decision-making abilities, for instance, such that inappropriate intuitions or instincts interfere with valid and useful analysis, or the mistaken belief that past successes or having skills relevant to one leadership context, such as in a turnaround/cost-cutting situation, necessarily generalize to other situations that require different strategies and tactics.

One solution to inappropriate levels of leadership self-efficacy is realistic optimism, a combination of confidence that things can be made to work out, along with recognizing the current facts and challenges (Schneider, 2001). For those with leadership self-efficacy beliefs that are simply too low, several general approaches to increase self-efficacy have been well-validated in other domains. These include learning through observing role models, hearing persuasive arguments about what can be accomplished, and practice (Bandura, 1997).

Also crucial is to recognize that leadership involves many skills, in many domains and contexts, and that the skills that apply to one may be less relevant to the next. High self-efficacy can be general ("Thankfully, I really am a good leader"), but really should be domain-specific ("Honestly, I have some relevant skills, but have never faced this type of challenge before and may need some coaching."). Self-directed leaders should strive to develop appropriate levels of self-efficacy for each of the leader competencies he or she is striving to develop, be it the behaviors described above in the context of traditional leadership theories, those described next, or those discussed in other chapters of this volume.

Positive Psychology

Martin Seligman, then-president of the American Psychological Association, observed a decade ago that the field historically had fixated on fixing people’s problems (trying to bring them to ‘normalcy’) but had neglected the huge upside potential of moving people from average to extraordinary. The field of psychology made an important turn. Since then, psychologists have attempted to identify important human virtues and personal strengths, and management scholars have similarly offered new perspectives on organizational behavior – with the common theme of identifying opportunities, strategies and tactics for pursuing and achieving excellence.

Paralleling the positive psychology perspective, much of management
traditionally has concerned itself with solving problems: dealing with difficult subordinates, responding to performance shortfalls, coping with crises, and managing by exception (dedicating time and resources to the salient exception, as defined by falling below expectation or standard, or taking action only when mistakes have occurred). Managing by exception is concerned primarily with deviations and shortfalls, and intervening when something goes wrong (Bass, 1990).

This distinction—management by exception vs. pursuing excellence—pertains to leaders throughout organizations, from supervisory levels to the strategic apex inhabited by top management teams. At strategic levels, but potentially pertinent at all levels, Das (2004) suggests reorienting strategy so it is more opportunity-focused, not merely problem-focused.

A common self-sabotage default option is problem-focused thinking. A solution is to adopt an opportunity lens. Every MBA student knows the classroom mantra of turning problem into opportunity, and many managers would benefit from applying this principle. Executives are typically unlikely to see opportunity in crisis, but Brockner and James (2008) suggest some strategies for perceiving opportunity: applying a learning orientation, having high self-efficacy in dealing with difficult challenges, considering long-term change rather than just short-term damage control, attempting to treat causes rather than merely symptoms, and inviting creative solutions.

The self-directed leader can assess not just weaknesses but also her own strengths as well as the strengths of her people. Whereas so much leader training concentrates on fixing shortcomings (say, the low scores from multi-rater feedback), a positive psychology perspective would focus on how to leverage a leader’s strengths to full advantage. Further, it suggests creating the conditions necessary for people to leverage their strengths in ways that benefit (satisfy, develop, strengthen) both them and the organization. This is a far cry from management or leadership by exception. One place to start is by conducting personal strengths assessments (for example, at www.authenticity.org). The real starting point, though, is to set a personal goal and make a conscious decision to play from strength, not just to correct weakness.

**Proactive and Transcendent Behavior**

Leadership is about more than occupying a role that includes having authority over other people. Leading, as distinguished from managing, includes the activity of creating change (e.g., Kotter, 1999). In contrast to behavior that is determined by circumstance, in which people are passive respondents to environmental demands (including rewards and
punishments), proactive behavior is that which creates constructive change in environments, in others, or in oneself (Bateman and Crant, 1993). As a special category, transcendent behavior creates major and positive change with major impact (Bateman and Porath, 2003). Thus, whereas people so often merely meet expectations, put up with constraints, allow problems to persist, and watch windows of opportunity slam shut, those exhibiting proactive and transcendent behaviors exceed expectations, overcome constraints, fix problems, and seize or create opportunities.

These behaviors have obvious potential utility for leadership. Proactive behavior has been widely studied (Crant, 2000; Grant and Ashford, 2008), not much with respect to leadership but enough to indicate that managers who exhibit more proactive behavior are rated as more charismatic leaders by their bosses (Crant and Bateman, 2000). They have not been studied in conjunction with mainstream leadership theories or with objective leader effectiveness, although predictions and relationships should be straightforward because effective leadership is distinguished in part by acts of change. Short of extreme levels or attempts that violate laws, ethics or important norms, proactive and transcendent behaviors by leaders potentially will increase leaders' impact. The self-directed leader can make a point of self-assessing or seeking feedback from others ('am I more passive and reactive, or proactive in making things happen around here? 'am I a true leader of change, or a maintenance manager/bureaucrat?') and take action as desired.

One self-sabotaging trap is to engage in proactive behaviors that are inappropriate; another is to not engage in them much at all. A helpful metaphor provides a solution. Imagine your job as an inverse donut: a center made of cake, surrounded by air space, which in turn is surrounded by a solid. The cake at the center is the core of your job: the crucial activities and performance that you are expected to deliver. This is not the small stuff of the job; it is the crucial performance that you must deliver at a high level. The airspace around the essential core is where you have autonomy, or the freedom to innovate, experiment, change things, and expand your responsibilities. The surrounding solid is the out-of-bounds, where you dare not tread: illegalities, unethical actions, and actions that violate corporate strategy or the culture in ways that will not be tolerated.

For the self-directed leader, this metaphor provides a framework for personal assessment, guidance for decisions, and even a vision for both your leadership and your work unit (team, division, organization). Specifically, you should be able to identify your core responsibilities, separating the top priorities that require excellence from the many other
routine responsibilities that are less important. You could check with
your boss to learn whether you are in agreement, and negotiate to mutual
understanding. Do the same with the out-of-bounds – articulate the list,
and confirm or negotiate with your boss. What’s left over, the things yet
undiscussed, comprise the air space, representing possible opportunities
for new leadership initiatives and change.

Be clear about priorities and out-of-bounds, and get on the same page
as your boss. For more proactive, transcendent, impactful leadership,
work the air space – create plenty of room to operate. Identify problems to
tackle, scan for opportunities to pursue, and consider how to create new
opportunities that serve your organization well. And by the way, you can
engage in similar exercises with your direct reports, making sure that they
are on the same donut-page with you.

Enacted Problem-Solving

When appraising leaders, people sometimes distinguish between style and
substance. As noted in the discussion of charisma, it may be that style gets
the most attention, even in academic research. But substance, of course,
matters most, in the long run.

Where does substance, in the eye of followers and other leader beholders,
come from? Expertise and competence provide substance; adding
trustworthiness to the equation creates a formula for leader credibility
(Kim et al., 2009). Actual performance in the form of results delivered by
and attributed to the leader will enhance these perceptions. Self-directed
leadership does not let a focus on style drive out the required focus on
delivering results.

How to deliver results? One perspective focuses on enacted problem-
solving (Bateman, 2010), which consists of the cognitive and behavioral
activities of problem solving in the service of performance. An example
is the classic phase model of problem solving that so many managers
know but don’t mindfully implement: defining the problem, establishing
goals, generating and evaluating an array of alternative solutions,
choosing or combining solutions, planning implementation, implement-
ing, and following up by assessing progress and adapting as needed.
Effective leadership also includes motivating enacted problem solving
by followers, thus distributing leadership and generating better results
throughout the group, unit or organization for which the leader is
responsible.

One related form of self-sabotage, already noted, is to care more about
style than results. Another is to care solely about results to the neglect
of people; this includes the taskmaster style that creates pushback and
burnout, or a focus on short-term results at the expense of the longer term. Another is to define performance inappropriately, such as by sheer quantity of output to the neglect of quality, productivity to the neglect of creativity, and managing by exception rather than also seeking, creating and seizing new opportunities. Yet another is to try to do everything yourself, rather than distributing to others some responsibilities for problem solving and opportunity-pursuit.

The solutions are to supplement these single-minded goals with additional needed goals: establish the dual goals of attending to both people and to results, to the long term as well as the short run, quality as well as quantity, the core of the donut as well as the air space, opportunities as well as problems. These dual goals can be established and pursued by followers as well via distributed leadership throughout the system. See Collins and Porras (1996) for descriptions of how companies, and by extension leaders, can pursue the genius of the ‘and’ (dual goals pursued strategically and successfully) rather than limit themselves via the tyranny of the ‘or’ – same dual goals, but viewed as dueling or mutually exclusive rather than complementary.

Strategic Leadership and Cognitive/Behavioral Complexity

Strategic leadership refers to the leadership ‘of’ organizations rather than ‘in’ organizations (Hunt, 1991). Strategic leadership is exercised by the people in the upper echelon (Hambrick and Mason, 1984) or top management team (TMT) with overall responsibility for the organization. Boal and Hooijberg (2000) integrate several literatures into a view of strategic leadership that has important implications for the capabilities that strategic leaders need to develop in their organizations and in themselves. Their model is potentially relevant as well to self-directed leaders without top-level strategic responsibilities.

In the Boal and Hooijberg (2000) integrative model – for our purposes here, viewed as not limited to strategic leadership but rather as a strategic perspective for SDLs of all levels – leaders must create and maintain (1) the ability to learn (absorptive capacity; Cohen and Levinthal, 1990), (2) the ability to change (adaptive capacity), and (3) managerial wisdom. All three of these leadership cornerstones derive (partly in conjunction with charisma and transformational leadership) from three leader competencies: cognitive complexity, behavioral complexity and social intelligence.

As summarized by Boal and Hooijberg (2000), cognitive complexity refers to how a person thinks, and includes the ability, when processing information, to distinguish more rather than fewer categories and to see
both differences and commonalities among them. Behavioral complexity means having both a large repertoire of behaviors and the ability to perceive and select the most appropriate behaviors to use in a given situation. Social intelligence is the ability to both understand one’s social environment and to act appropriately on that understanding. The self-directed leader (as always) self-assesses and decides his or her developmental needs, with the key options here lying with these three competencies as pathways to developing the ability to learn, to change, and to act with wisdom.

An obvious trap but perhaps the most pervasive form of self-sabotage is simply rigidity. Leaders sometimes are rigid in their thinking, or rigid in their actions, or both. A broad solution is to increase one’s repertoire of thinking patterns and behaviors, as described by the theory. Then, engage in flexible tenacity (Gollwitzer et al., 2008): steadfast pursuit of the strategic goal, exploring for the most effective tactics, keeping some tactics and abandoning and replacing others as required. As a related example, political scientist Gil Troy (2008) advises US presidents to engage in tactical fluidity, to be principled plus accommodating, and to be flexible plus anchored.

Components of the Boal and Hooijberg (2000) model have been studied empirically, although not with a focus on self-development as it might apply to leaders at different levels or in different contexts. The model offers a strategic perspective on leadership that the self-directed leader can use to great advantage by considering which aspects are most relevant to self and situation. It also offers high potential and good opportunity for future empirical work on self-directed leader development.

Critical Thinking and Wisdom

School textbooks bombard students with ‘critical thinking’ exercises and questions for discussion. How much and how often do you truly engage in critical thinking, in life broadly or with respect to leadership in particular? Reminder: this chapter is choosing goals and pursuing them – moving into action in your personal development as a leader. Here, the goal is to become a better thinker, or to engage in more critical thinking on important issues.

Many perspectives on wisdom have been offered over the millennia. Recently, Sternberg (1998) offered a theory describing wisdom as a process of attaining the common good through balancing the interests of multiple entities – oneself, others and surroundings – over short- and long-term time horizons. In the business context, at least five balancing acts characterize wisdom: (1) knowing all/ knowing little, in which executives
must have extensive knowledge but also acknowledge the limits of their knowledge; (2) diving deep/flying high, in which executives interact closely with relevant stakeholders, but also stand apart and develop transcendent solutions; (3) now/not now, characterized by a decisive action orientation but also patience or inaction when appropriate; (4) complexify/simplify, seeing interdependencies and complexities but also thinking and communicating in clear, simple and thematic ways; and (5) only me/no me, taking on the responsibility but suppressing the ego (Mick et al., 2009).

As always, a pervasive self-sabotage trap is mindlessness, including making leadership-related decisions – strategic, interpersonal and other kinds – unreflectively, on a mindless or default basis. Of course, time sometimes is scarce, and/or intuition serves us well. Often, though, leaders mindlessly engage in business as usual, or apply their default options, when they should be stepping back and thinking things through before deciding and acting.

Greater self-command comes from consciously injecting mindfulness into your leadership processes, creating time and space to think, by executing the strategies and tactics of critical thinking and problem solving, inviting others to participate in and provide feedback on your decision-making processes and the effectiveness thereof, and reflecting on past decisions and performances to draw lessons pertinent to future decisions and leadership challenges. Evidence-based management is a disciplined approach to making decisions based on the best available scientific evidence rather than on personal preference and unsystematic experience (Rousseau, 2006), and offers an effective antidote for mindlessness that can elevate the quality of leaders' critical thinking, wisdom and effectiveness.

Some self-sabotaging traps are to equate wisdom with intelligence, to consider it something that only a few possess and the rest of us never will, and to assume that it will develop naturally but only over time. Self-directed leaders can identify wisdom as a personal development goal, and consider wisdom not an attribute, but a process of how to think. Consider also that it doesn't come naturally with time, but is a function of both leadership-related experiences and reflection on those experiences. Wise leaders develop a more expansive set of perspectives than others via their thinking habits, including reflecting more deeply than the rest on their experiences and on events. 'Leadership is made in large part based on what you take the time to go back and learn, and then apply forward' (Avolio, 2005, p. 110).

**Long-Termism**

One important aspect of wisdom is thinking and behaving with an eye toward the long term. Whether doing academic research on leadership
or leading in the real world, we tend to focus on short-term rather than long-term results. In conducting research, performance data tend to be collected contemporaneously with data gathered about the leader, or with only a short time lag. Business leaders are (with only occasional exception) rewarded and punished based on the results they generate quarterly and annually, rather than on the results that they might generate a few years down the road. It's a short-term world, when it comes to performance evaluation, but a long-term world when it comes to careers, organizational survival, and ultimate impact on society and the planet.

The tragedy of the commons – the scenario in which herders benefit as their animals graze a tract of communal land until overuse leads to its destruction (Hardin, 1968) – is perhaps the best-known example across scientific disciplines of how short-term thinking and behavior sabotage long-term outcomes. The book title *Short-term America* (Jacobs, 1991) captures the United States' obsession with immediate results, as contrasted with Asia's 'psychology of long-termism' (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 2001). But even among Westerners, researchers have documented individual differences in future orientation (Zimbardo and Boyd, 1999) and temporal depth (Bluedorn, 2002).

The importance of learning how to think long-term (and of acting on that basis) seems self-evident, although long-term thinking has gone virtually unexamined by management scholars. It may be possible to train people to become long-term thinkers. El Sawy (1983) increased business managers' future time horizons by asking them first to think about history. Furthermore, an interview study of people pursuing extraordinarily long-term goals – goals that might not be achieved in their own lifetimes – identified the psychological factors that maintained their long-term goal focus and persistence (Bateman and Barry, 2010). The various factors included envisioned possible futures and possible selves; an appreciation of history, future what-ifs, and sustainability goals; work characterized by fun, surprises, puzzle-solving and interesting challenges and tools; various forms of learning and progress; and other factors. Long-term goal pursuit appears to entail both hot and cold (emotional and cognitive) processes sustained by a combination of short-term gratifications and anticipated long-term impact.

**Goal Hierarchies**

People have many goals, and their goals can be arranged in a hierarchy, from long-term and abstract goals residing at the top, to lower-level, short-term and more concrete goals that serve as stepping stones to the
higher goals. Wadsworth and Ford (1983) helped people identify their goals in a number of life domains (work, family, social life, leisure and so on) at four goal levels: short-term (specific), medium-term (broad), medium-long-term (more broad), and long-term (very broad). The long-term goals were more general than the short-term goals, and the short-term goals served as means to long-term ends. People in this study said that the process of verbalizing these various types of goals heightened their consciousness, clarified direction, and raised their motivation levels.

In the business world, the goals of top executives can be arranged into a hierarchy from highest-level personal and sometimes societal goals (which the business can serve) downward through goals for the enterprise, strategic goals that are means to achieving enterprise goals, and project and process goals that serve strategic and higher-level goals (Bateman et al., 2002). High-level goals for the enterprise can include such things as organizational performance (growth, revenues, survival and other success indicators) or other accomplishments (cashing out profitably, going public, avoiding bankruptcy, avoiding a hostile takeover). Strategic goals help achieve enterprise goals, and are defined as the bases for allocating resources, differentiating the firm, and achieving strategic objectives; they often take the form of deliverables to the customer. Project goals are discrete and time-bound objectives, and process goals are more continuous, ongoing, and tactical ways of operating. Examples of project goals are opening a new plant, hiring a new executive, and introducing a new product; process goals include thinking strategically, listening to customers, and communicating with employees.

In terms of content, the executives’ goals resided in nine primary categories: personal, financial, customer, market, operations, product, organizational, people, competitive, and strategy-making goals. Determining goal hierarchies can be used to determine content areas on which they focus too much or too little, reveal tendencies toward too many abstract high-level goals to the neglect of concrete lower-level goals (and vice versa), and identify goals that are most instrumental toward multiple higher-level goals, thereby offering the highest leverage and deserving or requiring the most attention.

The interested self-directed leader can create such a goal hierarchy with a focus on leadership development, perhaps fitting together the most personally important ideas in this chapter and in this book. Benefits could come from sharing your goal hierarchy with your boss, direct reports and peers. Build feedback around it. Use it as a roadmap to reaching your loftiest goals, and as a vision of your future self.
Possible Selves

Everyone now seems to know that leaders are supposed to develop and communicate a compelling vision of what they want to accomplish, or what they want their team or organization to 'look like'. The vision can be strategic (as in identifying the businesses we want to compete in or the ways in which we will rewrite the rules of the industry), or they can be cultural (as in the values we strive to uphold and the kind of place we want to work in). A vision is a goal to strive for, a source of motivation for followers, and a guideline for making decisions when it otherwise would not be clear what to do.

For the self-directed leader, this obviously indicates the need to create a compelling vision, learn how to communicate it effectively, and make it a point to convey it often, to all stakeholders. But another type of vision is potentially of great importance here: one's vision for oneself as a leader. Psychologists introduced 'possible selves' as an imagined future self-image (Markus and Nurius, 1986). A compelling possible self can motivate people to make decisions and take action in ways that further their own development toward their desired self-image. In domains other than that of leadership, possible selves are known to provide direction and impetus for decisions and actions, provide standards for evaluating oneself and one's progress, and motivate change (Higgins and Pittman, 2008).

To my knowledge, possible selves have not been studied in the leadership literature as a source of motivation, although Killeen et al. (2006) studied gender effects of envisioned leadership. But as a concluding point to this chapter, I highlight the potential not only of setting personal goals with respect to the specific theories and concepts described herein – chosen based on self-assessment and potential impact – but also of building a richly-textured goal describing a personal vision of the ideal leader you want to become.

It is not uncommon for workshop facilitators to ask audiences to write their own obituaries, and for instructors to require students to write papers describing the leader they want to be. These are useful exercises, probably not used to their full potential either in leadership research or leader development. You can paint a detailed picture of the thinking habits and behaviors of the leader you want to become, or of the goal hierarchy you want to pursue. At a minimum, you can break the constraining self-image of being a non-leader or a maintenance manager, and establish a personal vision of becoming a true leader. And that self-designed leader can and probably should be of a certain well-visualized type: one who actively pursues the right goals.
CONCLUSION: BACK TO GOAL PURSUIT

To help cross the bridge from goals to action, here are some final suggestions. First, and repeating, make sure to consciously choose some personal goals worth pursuing; make a decision to act. Second, specify (at least mentally, but ideally in writing) the circumstances that create opportunities to try your newly-established leadership efforts. This tactic, called implementation intentions (Gollwitzer et al., 2008), significantly increases the likelihood that you will move from goal to action.

Third, set a 'style-goal' of flexible tenacity: persevere in goal pursuit (including after setbacks; see King and Rothstein, Chapter 13 in this volume), but keep learning, and adapt or adopt new tactics in new circumstances or with different people. And fourth, throughout all of your self-development efforts, establish an outlook of realistic optimism (Schneider, 2001). Realism is usually better than naïveté, and optimism is usually better than pessimism — unless it includes self-deception. Realistic optimism means that you do not expect that positive outcomes, such as improved leadership, will come to you with little or no effort. You appreciate the positive aspects of your current situation including your leadership-related strengths and skills, and also understand what you need to develop and want to improve. You are conducting appropriate reality checks and not deceiving yourself — you perform regular progress assessments, fine-tune your tactics, and adjust as necessary. You understand the magnitude of the task, focus on possible opportunities to develop, and frame your goal as an opportunity, not as a problem or an ordeal that you must survive in order to avoid failure. Framing your leadership development goals positively — as high-potential opportunities rather than as chores — encourages mindfulness rather than mindlessness, active goal pursuit, learning from setbacks, perseverance and enjoyment en route.

Moving forward, consider the following quotes:

If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves.

(Thomas Edison)

Jump into the pool.

(Erich Fromm)

The difference between will and might rests with us.

(Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi)
REFERENCES


