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REST: A LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

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Rest, one of the most vital elements of leadership success, is too often the most overlooked. In the quest for leadership excellence, leaders today garner a plethora of strategizing techniques, technological skills and marketing methodologies to ensure organizational competitiveness. Yet, in all of the efforts toward success, rest among leaders has become compromised as a casualty of advancement. The average number of daily work hours for Americans has increased by 14.5% over the past eight years, resulting in a 46-hour week. Among America's leaders, that figure has risen an additional 22%, resulting in an average working week of 56 hours, leaving precious little time for needed rest (Thornton, 2007).

Rest can be defined as the cessation of energy requiring activities, including work, for the purpose of allowing for physical and mental relaxation, renewal and revitalization (Harvey, 2000). The purpose of this article is to emphasize the importance of rest as a vital component of optimum functioning and success for organizational leaders. By highlighting the factors that are responsible for and resulting from the decrease of rest among leaders, this article provides a foundation upon which to establish the need for rest as both an expedient and practical facet of leadership application.

Hindrances to Rest and Renewal

Contributing factors to the decrease in rest time for leaders include a shifting work ethic and the technological advances designed to fuel widening and continuous connectivity. Unlike the work ethic of the early 19th century, which allowed for the compartmentalization of work as a mere component of a life centered around family and relationships, work today appears to be the basis upon which individuals define themselves and the means by which leaders measure levels of commitment to their organizations (Wren, 2005). Increasingly, success in leadership characterizes a life comprised of grueling expectations, excessively long hours and instant accessibility both on and away from the job. Moreover, organizational strategy, since the onset of the industrial revolution, has continued to emphasize efficiency as the mantra for status and achievement in all levels of commerce. Endeavors toward efficiency correspondingly inform processes and the sociotechnical systems organizations employ to meet said goals.

Technology integration, for all of its utility in today's marketplace, has added to leaders' surplus of responsibilities, while also diminishing leaders' need for rest. There are a myriad of complex reasons for this phenomenon, including increasing demands for instantaneous borderless communication and immediate solutions for complex problems. With all of the advances in technology, ease of communication and speed of service, it would seem that rest would have become a welcomed recompense for all the hard work that initially went into optimizing efficiency, virtualizing offices and eventually flattening the world (Friedman, 2007). Notwithstanding the sustained energies it takes to maintain and continue to enhance burgeoning capabilities, the overall result of progress in industry and technology appears to regress when it comes to quality of life issues like rest and renewal for leaders.

As demands for low cost are increasing, the need for faster productivity is driving leaders to streamline budget items and demand longer working hours (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Additionally, as leader behavior sets the tone for an organization and becomes institutionalized as both acceptable and expected, the marginalization of rest becomes perpetual (Van Fleet & Griffin, 2006). In organizational environments where gaining profits and market share take priority over all else, leaders who aspire to succeed may feel the need to embrace these values and engage the accompanying behaviors, which, for the sake of productivity, effectively compromise leaders' personal need for rest. Coupled with fatigue, stress, fear of job loss and the unrealistic expectation of stoicism formidably oppose leaders' abilities to aptly rest. The stoic mentality suggests that leaders ought to work incessantly and joyously without acknowledging fatigue or the stress overwork causes (Johne, 2006). In essence, taking time for rest has somehow become associated with slackness, weakness, non-competitiveness or low commitment to organizational goals (Knight Ridder, 2007).

Undoubtedly, organizations and their leaders desire to be high functioning. Including rest as both a personal and professional imperative can ensure that organizational goals are given the attention and focus needed for ultimate achievement. Making a deliberate effort to prioritize rest and renewal as a part of daily living will likely create the wholeness that can only be brought about

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through relaxation and personal reflection. Boyce (2006) asserts that people with balanced schedules, who include periods of rest and renewal, are better able to combat the stress that so often contributes to fatigued induced losses. Indeed, leadership success does not have to be defined by imbalance.

Recommendations

Overall, the commitment to an organization's success must translate to the optimal presentation of the individuals that comprise its members. The following are strategic actions leaders can implement to achieve needed rest and renewal.

- **Redefine leadership success**
  In order to begin the process of prioritizing rest, leaders need to alter their definitions, actions and ideas related to personal and organizational success. Due to the fact that it is the perception of an idea that informs the analogous actions that individuals will take in guaranteeing its manifestation, leaders must learn to perceive rest as valuable and a vital component for both personal and professional enrichment.

- **Employ time management**
  Determine what requires immediate attention and decipher important items from those that are neither urgent nor important.

- **Delegate**
  The art of trusting others to carry out responsibilities is learned over time. However, engaging a leadership development program allows for the training and coaching needed to ensure that organizational goals are handled expediently and competently by those placed in charge.

- **Get needed sleep consistently**
  Research by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF) (2008) suggests that improper rest among individuals significantly contributes to poor organizational performance and cost increases related to tiredness among workers.

- **Keep the Sabbath**
  "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made" (Genesis 2:2). It is here that God established the precedent for rest from labor and renewal of the spirit. Research indicates that people who rest consistently perform much better than those who do not (Harvey, 2000).

- **Plan time for renewal**
  Not only are adequate amounts and quality of sleep important, seven to eight hours nightly according to the NSF (2008), whole periods of rest away from intense work related activities scheduled at regular intervals (quarterly, for example) are expedient for the renewal process.

Conclusion

Leaders must employ conscious efforts to include rest as a life priority. Leaders can only realize maximum performance when periods of rest are scheduled uncompromisingly and as a matter of routine. Notwithstanding meritorious issues on both sides of the current debate surrounding the description of America as "the no-vacation nation," the underlying premise highlighting the need for rest bares worthy consideration.

As long as leaders perceive rest as having little or no importance, organizations' performance will continue to suffer. However, as leaders demonstrably accept and support the need for rest, organizations and families will reap the benefits of having optimized members.

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