



Book The Inner Edge

The 10 Practices of Personal Leadership

Joelle K. Jay
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Recommendation

Great leaders are take-charge, can-do, action-oriented individuals who work hard to make a difference. However, in today’s busy, nonstop work environment, many leaders, like everyone else, feel overwhelmed, frenzied and frustrated. All the hard work in the world will not alleviate such feelings. Leaders require something more. Executive leadership coach Joelle K. Jay teaches beleaguered executives to focus on their “personal leadership” strengths and capabilities as a way to integrate their personal and professional lives, and come out ahead in both areas. In her insightful book, Jay presents 10 practices leaders can pursue to achieve this vital integration. *BooksInShort* recommends it as a steady, useful read for leaders who want to align their work and their personal lives.

Take-Aways

- To attain your personal and professional leadership goals, follow 10 principles. First, develop absolute clarity about yourself, and envision your future.
- Second, bring consummate focus to your priorities and objectives.
- Third, find a catalyst to drive your actions as you develop your achievements. Avoid tasks that sap your energy.
- Fourth, leverage your unique talents, traits and capabilities.
- Fifth, identify your values. Align your actions with the ideals that matter to you.
- Sixth, make the most of your time.
- Seventh, get a team of supporters to help you develop your unique leadership qualities.
- Eighth, keep learning. Create a systematic, well-organized plan to educate yourself.
- Ninth, relax sometimes to open yourself mentally to new opportunities and creativity.
- Tenth, combine these principles to develop your intuitive leadership and your “inner edge.”

Summary

Have You Lost Your Edge?

As a leader, you have two edges: your “inner edge,” or your internal self – your thoughts, values, plans and strengths – and your “outer edge,” or the external self you present to the world through your actions and activities. Most leaders focus on their outer edge, because people judge executives based on how they act and what they do.

“You don’t become a leader because someone else says you are. You become a leader because you embrace leadership for yourself.”

However, to realize their full potential, leaders also should focus on their personal inner edge. This involves rigorous self-examination, including the answers to some personal questions: “Who are you as a leader?” “Who do you want to be?” “What do you want to achieve, why and how?” Reinforcing your inner edge can make you a better leader.

“To be a better leader and lead a better life, you need to stop worrying about who you’re not, and start benefiting from who you are.”

Today, many managers are stressed out, confused and dissatisfied. They work hard, but concentrating constantly on outer-edge activities has cost them their inner edge. If that sounds like you, the cure is to spend quality time in thoughtful reflection. This will increase your productivity and help you feel more motivated.

“Planning fuels the action.”

Follow these 10 practices to get in closer touch with your inner edge:

1. “Get Clarity: What Do You Want?”

Lucidity makes you more decisive. Use three strategies to boost your perceptions:

1. **“The inner view”** – Explore yourself. Examine your aspirations, worries and desires. Focus on issues you need to clarify. Ask yourself open-ended questions to help you determine your goals. Explore what you want from life and your position as a leader.
2. **“You and improved”** – Look into the future and consider where you want to go. Imagine the future in elaborate detail and colorful images.
3. **“The path”** – See yourself on a path to your future. Make the image as real as possible. Mentally picture, perhaps, a trail up a mountain or through a desert. Visualize yourself traveling away on this path. This process will help you understand better what is in your heart and what matters most to you – that is, it illuminates the important issues.

2. “Find Focus: Where Will You Put Your Attention?”

Concentration can help you determine what to work on and how to prioritize.

“None of the planning tools in the world will help you achieve your vision if all you do is shuffle around the same old tasks.”

Make your vision a workable reality by prioritizing your actions according these five steps:

1. **“Survey the scene”** – Adopt a “panoramic view” of your life. Describe what you see in one sentence. Write it down.
2. **“Choose your focus”** – Establish “three to five priorities” and concentrate on them.
3. **“Study the subject”** – Ask yourself: “Where am I now?” “Where would I like to be?” “How will I know when I get there?”
4. **“Sharpen your focus”** – Now that you have an idea about the way you want to move ahead in the future, think about the specific actions you will need to take to get there.
5. **“Take a snapshot”** – Write down your areas of concentration and the commitments you must make to yourself to achieve what you want to accomplish.

3. “Take Action: What Do You Need to Do?”

Once you analyze yourself and what you want to achieve, plan the actions you need to perform to attain your goals – and then carry them out.

“Just because your time is well organized doesn’t mean it’s well spent.”

Build your action plan according to the “CATA” list:

- **“Catalysts”** – Catalysts speed up chemical reactions. Find the right catalyst to help you reach your vision and drive your other actions. For instance, if you want to lose weight, your catalytic action might be eliminating sugar from your diet.
- **“Achievements”** – Your “daily actions, key relationships, priority projects” and “deadlines” often add up to the achievements of your life. The more time you spend daily working on your achievements, the more productive you will be.
- **“Tasks”** – These activities often consume your day, eating it up with “long meetings, some networking” and “obsessive perfecting of nonessential details.” Focus more on your catalysts and achievements than on your tasks.
- **“Avoidances”** – Some processes expend more of your energy than they should “with little return.” Eliminate as many of them as possible.

4. “Tap into Your Brilliance: What’s Unique About You?”

Pinpoint your primary attributes. Determine how to leverage your distinctive talents to optimize their impact on your life and to become a better leader. If you want other people to contribute to your leadership profile, conduct a 360-degree analysis, polling your peers, staffers and bosses.

“Getting clarity can move you quickly out of overwhelm, distraction and confusion into excitement, confidence and peace.”

Develop your own map of your “leadership DNA.” List your distinctive qualities and how they help you. Be aware that people’s traits sometimes work against them. For example, other people may view a strongly competitive person as being “cutthroat or vengeful.” Once you have your profile on paper, make a plan to “maximize your strengths and manage your weaknesses” by adjusting your approach depending on the circumstances. To illustrate: Perhaps ramp up your “debating and assertiveness” skills when you are involved in corporate negotiations, but soften them when you go off to visit your in-laws.

5. “Feel Fulfillment: What Motivates You and Makes You Happy?”

To make your life more rewarding, get in touch with your personal values – such as honesty, trust, excellence, authenticity, pleasure, generosity and integrity – and base your actions on them.

“Develop an approach to leadership that uses all...your attributes in the most advantageous way.”

To home in on your principal values, use this three-stage process:

1. **“Mining for values”** – To find the values that count most in your life, revisit your “peak experiences.” For example, the serenity and peace you felt during a trip to the mountains may have enhanced the meaning of those values.
2. **“Defining your values”** – Write a sentence describing what each of your 10 primary values means to you.
3. **“Refining your values”** – Narrow your list and prioritize your values. Post your list somewhere prominent where you will always see it.

“To maintain a consistent sense of joy and satisfaction, you need to know what fulfills you and learn to make it a part of every day.”

Now, take bona fide steps to live those values. For example, if family is a primary value, then reorganize your activities to spend more time with the people you love. Bring your values front and center in your life. Tap into them when you make decisions. “Live your values now.”

6. “Maximize Your Time: How Can You Achieve More with Less?”

Achieving personal leadership takes a time commitment. To manage your time more effectively, use modeling: Imagine your perfect schedule. Put it on a calendar to create a time-planning goal.

“Busyness is a choice. Your life will be more in control when you take control. Your time is your own and your time is your life. Relaxed, successful leaders see a different reality.”

To organize your time, define it. Set up “work days,” “meeting days,” “administration days,” and so on. Protect your time by making “appointments with yourself,” from reviewing industry news from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. on Wednesdays to setting aside one day a month for strategic planning.

To guard your time, unplug all the high-tech tools that keep you constantly buzzing. To create a daily schedule, list your appointments on a plain sheet of paper. In between the appointments, show time slots for working on essential priorities. At the bottom of the page, list three to five actions you must accomplish during the day. This is today’s time plan. Work hard to stick to it.

7. “Build Your Team: Who Can Support You?”

To achieve meaningful personal leadership, you need a support team. At work, that’s the cadre of staff members who help you attain your professional goals.

“You should only do what only you can do.” (Dr. Meggin McIntosh)

However, for inner-edge activities, you need support in these categories:

- **“The mastermind”** – Meet with three to five respected peers you can turn to for help in building your leadership skills. Select people who can turn to you for the same purpose.
- **“The dream team”** – Think of leaders you respect and see as role models. Unlike the mastermind group, your dream team does not meet as a collective. Look for dream team members who can work with you one-on-one to help you build your leadership skills.
- **“The imaginary advisory board”** – Imagine how useful it would be to assemble the world’s greatest leaders, past and present, to advise you. You can do it – in your mind. Visualize how the people you most respect – from your grandmother to Sir Winston Churchill, for example – would advise you on personal leadership issues.

8. “Keep Learning: What Do You Most Need to Know?”

Do you learn by chance? For example, when someone recommends a book, do you read it, or when a brochure arrives announcing a new professional development conference, do you sign up? Or do you learn by command, such as when an authority figure demands it?

“There is only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that’s yourself.” (Aldous Huxley)

The best way to learn is by choice: Develop a systematic, well-organized plan to educate yourself. Undertake a course of “independent study” on topics you want to explore; map out your own personal study plan and then begin learning new information. You can also learn by working with a coach or a mentor.

“Be a first rate version of yourself, not a second rate version of someone else.” (Judy Garland)

Enhance your knowledge through serious reflection, that is, careful thought about the people, events, activities and elements in your life, and your aspirations and goals. To learn effectively, take complete ownership of your personal development.

9. “See Possibility: How Can You Invite Success to You?”

Inner-edge leadership practices call for opening yourself mentally to new opportunities. Many leaders adopt an aggressive, action-oriented “making it happen” approach that is not intuitive or “open to possibility.” A different attitude is “letting it happen,” an optimistic, insightful mind-set that lets good things happen by being open to new possibilities.

“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” (Stephen Covey, 'First Things First')

To reorient your thinking along these lines, first try simply to “let it be easy.” To use this philosophy, according to leadership mentor Dr. Heidi McKenna, adopt the attitude, “If things are going your way, go that way. If things aren’t going your way, don’t go that way.” In other words, keep doing things that work, and stop doing things that don’t work.

If your mind is constantly buzzing, you cannot be intuitive and open to new possibilities. Therefore, temporarily shut down your thinking so brilliant new intuitive insights can develop. Get in the occasional habit of “not-doing,” that is, just relax and don’t think about anything or do anything for five minutes or so.

This will help you get in touch with your intuitive side. Give your “secret senses” a chance to develop. Open yourself up to all the amazing possibilities of life.

10. “All at Once: How Do You Move from Excellent to Extraordinary?”

With some careful thought and action, you can use “integrative thinking” to combine these nine practices so that they work in tandem with each other.

To illustrate, consider “tapping into your brilliance” as a companion to “feeling fulfillment.” You will experience confidence and control when you work from a position of personal strength. With this sensation in mind, think of all you can achieve “when the thing you value most is also the thing you do best.”

Join your personal and professional lives so they fully support one another, and then keep your personal and professional goals in alignment to make your life a unified, self-sustaining whole.

In the process, share your knowledge. Help others achieve the personal leadership success you have found with these 10 inner-edge practices. Become an inspiration to the people around you.

About the Author

Joelle K. Jay is an executive leadership coach who holds a PhD in learning and leadership. She also wrote *Quality Teaching: Reflection as the Heart of Practice*.
