

FROM RESEARCH TO POLICY TO EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

IdeasIntoAction

FOR SCHOOL *and* SYSTEM LEADERS

ONTARIO LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

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Ideas Into Action is published by the Ministry of Education to support Ontario's school and system leaders. It is designed to provide research-informed insights and strategies that are aligned with the [Ontario Leadership Framework \(OLF\)](#) and the broader [Ontario Leadership Strategy](#).

This second issue in a three-part series of *Ideas Into Action* is focused on the psychological category of the Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) which includes: optimism, self-efficacy, resilience and proactivity. It builds on *Ideas Into Action – Exploring the “Social” Leadership Resources: Perceiving Emotions, Managing Emotions & Acting in Emotionally Appropriate Ways*.

The forthcoming third and final issue in this series of *Ideas Into Action* will examine the “cognitive” category of the PLRs. It will include a discussion of ways in which the social, psychological and cognitive PLRs are interdependent, each contributing to and influencing the others to enact effective leadership practice focused on achieving the ambitious goals set out in *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*.

Learn more about the Ontario Leadership Framework at <http://live.iel.immix.ca/content/framework>



Exploring the “Psychological” Personal Leadership Resources

Optimism, Self-Efficacy, Resilience & Proactivity

One slogan that Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield (2013) lives by is, “Sweat the small stuff.” For him, “anticipating problems and figuring out how to solve them is actually the opposite of worrying; it’s productive.” He believes that “coming up with a plan of action isn’t a waste of time if it gives you peace of mind. While it’s true that you may wind up being ready for something that never happens, if the stakes are at all high, it’s worth it.”

Hadfield doesn’t advise that we “walk around perpetually braced for disaster, convinced the sky is about to fall on our heads.” That said, he believes in having plans in place for dealing with “unpleasant possibilities.” He refers to this as a “form of mental discipline not just at work but also throughout your life.”

We might conclude from this that Hadfield’s outlook is pessimistic rather than optimistic. He would argue that this is not so. According to Hadfield, his optimism and confidence endure not because

he feels that he is “luckier than other mortals” and, he says emphatically, “they sure don’t come from visualizing victory.” Instead, he explains that they are the “result of a lifetime spent visualizing defeat and figuring out how to prevent it.”

So how does this line up with the view that optimism – commonly believed to be at the exclusion of pessimism – is an essential internal

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reach every student



WHAT'S INSIDE

Part A – The Personal Leadership

Resources (PLRs): Essential Foundations of Effective Leadership – page 2

First Things First: What are the four Psychological PLRs? – page 3

Part B – Digging Deeper: Some Research Perspectives – page 4

Optimism
Self-efficacy
Resilience
Proactivity

Part C – Developing the Psychological Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs): Ten Proven Strategies – page 11

Section One: Strategies that Focus on Each of the Four Psychological PLRs – page 12

1. Regulate Optimism and Pessimism
2. Cultivate Self- and Collective Efficacy
3. Choose Resilience
4. Grow Proactivity

Section Two: Strategies that Apply to all Four of the psychological PLRs – page 23

5. Know Oneself
6. Develop Healthy, Effective Habits
7. Succeed at Self-control
8. Capitalize on Small Wins
9. Embrace the “Happiness Advantage”
10. Build a Culture of Confidence

Part D – Learning More: Resources Recommended by Ontario Leaders – page 39

References – page 41

resource of effective leaders? What role, if any, does pessimism play in enacting successful leadership? What are the connections between these concepts and self-efficacy, resilience and proactivity? What are these psychological traits and why are they important? Finally, how can we develop, refine, and sustain these qualities, which research has shown to be critical to the effective enactment of leadership (Leithwood, 2013a, 2013b)?

These are some of the questions we explore in this *Ideas Into Action paper* with the goal of expanding understandings of the psychological Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs).

Part A – The Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs): Essential Foundations of Effective Leadership

Evidence collected over many years suggests that our effectiveness as leaders is due, at least in part, to the personal traits or characteristics that successful leaders possess. The contribution these internal resources make to the effective enactment of leadership is best understood in the context of the current realities of school and system leaders (Leithwood, 2013a).

In *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact*, leadership expert Michael Fullan (2014) draws renewed attention to the complexity and challenges of education leaders in present-day contexts: “I don’t think there has ever been a time when the circumstances for the role of the principal have been more volatile.” Author and researcher Andy Hargreaves (2014) agrees and adds to Fullan’s perspective, pointing out that education leaders are “in many ways at the centre of a rapidly changing society and the impact it is having on its children and youth.” The demands implicit in these realities are no fewer for system leaders whose role it is to provide the supporting conditions that school leaders need to be successful.

Irrespective of these demands, there is a widely held belief among education leaders that their role is not only indispensable but also meaningful and fulfilling. Recent research on the principal’s work in current times confirms that principals think positively about their role and its rewards – working with students, staff and the community and making a difference in the lives of children, youth and families. This view of the role holds true regardless of its complexity and constantly changing circumstances (Leithwood & Azah, 2014a; 2014b; Pollock, 2014).

The following are the three categories of Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) that leaders draw on to successfully carry out every act of leadership:

Social resources revolve around relationship building, and include our ability not only to be perceptive and empathetic in working with others, but also to be competent in managing our own emotional responses.

Psychological resources help us deal with the ambiguity and risk that is inevitably associated with leadership and include optimism, self-efficacy, resilience and proactivity.

Cognitive resources include both problem-solving expertise and systems thinking, and the role-specific knowledge required to use those capabilities effectively.

Source: [The Ontario Leadership Framework, 2012 – with a Discussion of Research Foundations \(Leithwood, 2013a\)](#)

Not only are these psychological resources foundational to effective leadership, but they are also critical characteristics for children and youth to develop. There are particularly strong connections to development of these traits in Ontario's revised Health and Physical Education curriculum, [Grades 1-8](#) and [Grades 9-12](#) which can lay a strong foundation to the internal resources of optimism, self-efficacy, resilience and proactivity. With this curriculum in mind school and system leaders take into account the parallels between their own learning and development and that of children and youth and their families.

What is it then, about the way that education leaders do their work that allows them to meet the challenges and continuous change with such engagement, commitment and resolve? Both research and practice tell us that it is due in large part to the strength of their internal resources and in particular, their psychological leadership resources. These qualities have never been more essential to the enactment of successful leadership. Effective leaders of transformative and sustainable improvement, and the change that is implicit, must not only possess these internal resources but also are expected to contribute to building and strengthening them in others, including the children and youth in their schools and districts.

First Things First: What are the four Psychological PLRs?

The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) identifies the following four personal leadership resources within the category of psychological PLRs:

Optimism:

- habitually expecting positive results from our efforts
- recognizing where we have, and do not have opportunities for direct influence and control, and
- taking positive risks

Self-efficacy:

- believing in our own ability to perform a task or achieve a goal
- taking responsible risks, expending substantial effort, and persisting in the face of initial failure

Resilience:

- recovering from, or adjusting to change or misfortune
- thriving in challenging circumstances

Proactivity:

- stimulating and effectively managing change under complex circumstances
- showing initiative and perseverance in bringing about meaningful change

Part B – Digging Deeper: Some Research Perspectives

In this section, we bring the four psychological PLRs into greater focus by exploring a sampling of research-informed perspectives. While we consider each of the four psychological PLRs separately, research and professional practice support the claim that they are highly connected, mutually supportive, and work in synergy to contribute to the enactment of effective leadership practice.

Optimism

Our response to the question about whether a glass is half-empty, or half-full, or both speaks volumes about how we view the world and how we think and act. An optimist views the glass as half-full and is thought to be a positive thinker. A pessimist views the glass as half-empty and is typically considered to be a negative thinker. With these views in mind, we consider the wisdom of imposing these rigid values on optimism and pessimism.



“Optimism and hope refer to a belief – perhaps wish would be a better term or even motive – that in future good events and associated positive feelings will outweigh or be more likely than bad events and associated negative feelings.”

Source: *Character Strengths and Virtues* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

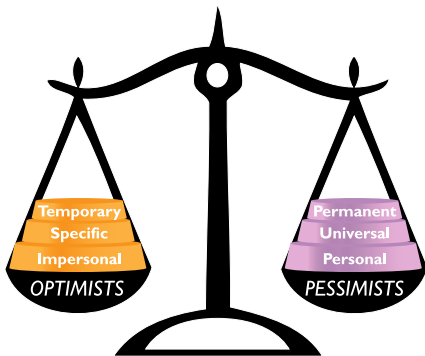
What Is Optimism?

Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman (2004), two pioneers of the positive psychology movement, describe optimism as a “character strength” that is included within a family of related traits along with hope, future-mindedness, and future orientation. These qualities represent a cognitive, emotional, and motivational stance toward the future and change our way of thinking, causing us to:

- expect that desired events and outcomes will happen,
- act in ways believed to make them more likely,
- feel confident that the anticipated outcomes will follow provided appropriate efforts are made to sustain positive outlooks, and
- stimulate our goal-directed actions.

A historical perspective on the identification and application of these qualities helps to explain in part the introduction of these traits into the Judeo-Christian belief system about their value and meaning. Hope, for example, has a long history as one of the chief theological virtues recognized along with faith and charity. In contrast, optimism only came into popular use in the 1700s and pessimism a full century later (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). As these traditions have evolved, the meanings of optimism and pessimism have become both juxtaposed and interwoven.

Explanatory Style



How do you **EXPLAIN** bad events?

"The basis of optimism does not lie in positive phrases or images of victory, but in the way [we] think about causes."

Source: *The Optimistic Child*
(Seligman, 2007)

Explanatory Style: The Hallmark of Optimism or Pessimism

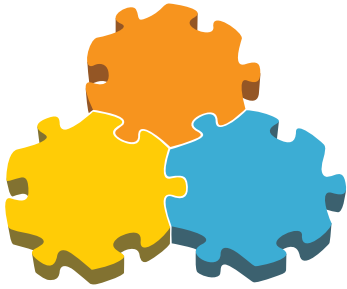
Seligman (1990) and his colleagues conceived the concept of "explanatory style" in an attempt to explain why some people are more vulnerable than others "in learning to become helpless following adversity." In brief, our explanatory style is the habitual way in which we explain the events that happen in our lives, as either positive or negative.

Learned since childhood and under constant development as we age, our explanatory style reflects how we feel about our place in the world and whether we see ourselves as worthy or unworthy. For this reason, explanatory style is considered the hallmark of optimism or pessimism, with permanence, pervasiveness and personalization as three crucial dimensions (Seligman, 1990).

1. **Permanence** is a temporal dimension. People who explain bad events as enduring, with words like "always" and "never," are more likely to give up easily. They are pessimistic. To them causes of bad events are ever present and their effects inescapable. Optimists, on the other hand, use words like "sometimes" and "lately" to explain the temporary nature of the bad events or failures they experience.
2. **Pervasiveness** is a spatial dimension that lends itself to descriptors such as "specific" and "universal." Thinking in these terms influences our ability to compartmentalize bad events. Optimists restrict their helplessness and failures to specific events. "They may become helpless in that one part of their lives yet march stalwartly on in the others." Pessimists, on the other hand, look at failure and bad events through a lens of universality and tend to catastrophize: "When one thread of their lives snaps, the whole fabric unravels."
3. **Personalization** is about internalizing or externalizing blame. Optimists hold others responsible or point the finger at circumstances when bad things happen whereas pessimists blame themselves.

Big and Little Optimism

Anthropologist Lionel Tiger (1979) added another layer of depth to optimism. He distinguishes between "big" and "little" optimism and argues that both are necessary for well-being. Little optimism includes expressions of personal desires and specific expectations about positive outcomes, such as, "I have a crowded schedule today but I'm still going to find time to go for a walk and get some fresh



air.” In contrast, “big” optimism refers to larger and less specific expectations such as, “Our organization is on the verge of moving from great to excellent.” It includes a positive attitude towards progress and the general advancement of humanity.

Optimism and Realism

Strategic optimism and defensive pessimism

That optimism is always the best outlook continues to be a source of debate. For example, psychologists Julie Norem and Nancy Cantor (1986) compared strategic optimists with defensive pessimists and found that strategic optimists envision the best possible outcome and then work to make it happen. On the other hand, they found that defensive pessimists who have been successful in the past continue to believe that the next time could be different. Although the outlook of defensive pessimists may give the impression of a defeatist stance, Norem and Cantor found that many people in fact owe their successes to defensive pessimism. It allows them to “imagine the worst, prepare more, and try harder.” In turn, this becomes an effective strategy for managing anxiety and positively influencing performance.

Barbara Fredrickson (2009), another leader of the positive psychology movement, argues in support of “the right kind of negativity” as “a necessary ingredient in the recipe for a flourishing life... perhaps not all negativity but rather appropriate negativity.” The goal, she says, is to reduce “inappropriate or gratuitous negativity” which is negativity that “comes to dominate the whole emotional texture of life.”

Optimism bias

In yet another dimension of optimism, researchers advise us to guard against our innate optimism bias. On average, it seems that we expect things to end up better than they turn out to be. Neuroscientist Tali Sharot (2012) was researching the vagaries of memory recollection when she “stumbled onto the brain’s innate optimism by accident.”

Sharot was studying memory in people following traumatic events and was struck by the number of errors people made when they recounted events months later. Sharot imaged the brains of people contemplating future events. She found that “once people started imagining the future, even the most banal life events seemed to take a dramatic turn for the better.”

Optimism without realism has its costs. Sharot says being overly optimistic can prevent us from taking precautions to avoid harm or misfortune. By being aware of the optimism bias, we can commit

“The belief that the future will be much better than the past and present is known as the optimism bias. It abides in every race, region and socioeconomic bracket.”

Source: *The Optimism Bias: A Tour of the Irrationally Positive Brain*
(Sharot, 2011)

“The idea that optimism is always good is a caricature. It misses realism; it misses appropriateness; it misses the importance of negative emotion.”

Source: ‘The Uses and Abuses of Optimism and Pessimism’
(Paul, 2011)

“The distinction between perception of competence and actual competence or performance is particularly important when considering teachers’ sense of efficacy. The shorthand term often used is “teacher efficacy.” Using this term, however, can be misleading...assuming that “teacher efficacy” is the same as “teacher effectiveness” or successful teaching. Thus, it is important to avoid the term “teacher efficacy,” talking instead about teachers’ perceptions of efficacy, efficacy judgments, sense of efficacy, perceived efficacy, or efficacy beliefs.”

Source: ‘Collective Efficacy Beliefs: Theoretical Developments, Empirical Evidence, and Future Directions’ (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004)

An example of the collective efficacy of a sports team through the lens of Josh Donaldson, All-Star Toronto Blue Jay: “I’m a pretty intense kind of guy. I want to be in every play. It’s just one of those things where I want to be able to get the job done for my team. Because I know my team expects me to do that and I expect that out of myself...I think, over the course of time what [my team] has seen from watching me play is that I expect the same out of them as they expect out of me. That’s a big part of what helps teams win. It’s when you have [team members] that are accountable for each other and are going to lay it on the line for each other. I think that’s what we have here.”

Source: ‘Walk-off a perfect ending’ (DiManno, 2015)

to actions or guidelines that will help protect ourselves and others. This is not to suggest that we should discard our optimistic mindsets. Rather, what is argued is that “common beliefs about optimism are due for a correction” (Paul, 2011) and that optimism should be “paired with reality testing – conscientious checking on the results of our efforts to make sure that overly positive expectations are not leading us astray (Seligman, cited in Paul, 2011).”

Self-efficacy

What is Self-efficacy?

Psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of self-efficacy perceptions, which he defined as “beliefs in one’s capacities to organize, and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments.” According to Bandura, self-efficacy beliefs are so powerful that they affect how we feel, the choices we make, our level of motivation, function and resilience, and our vulnerabilities to stress. Self-efficacy beliefs change depending on the demands of infancy, childhood, adulthood and old age. That said, our levels of self-efficacy can be strengthened at any age and lead to increased confidence in our capacity to succeed.

Self-efficacy, self-esteem and confidence

Self-efficacy involves more than positive thinking, optimism, having confidence, or pumping up our self-esteem. Efficacy develops as a person or a group, experiences success, success is modelled, and/or encouragement are provided. In fact, Bandura (1997) cautions that “confidence is a nondescript term that refers to strength of belief but does not necessarily specify what the certainty is about.”

According to Bandura (2000a), efficacy is tied to the concept of “agency,” which can be defined as the ability to make things happen, and to action. Highly efficacious teams or individuals will feel optimistic about success because they believe that they have the abilities needed to create that success. This engenders positive thinking, as limitations are seen as challenges rather than roadblocks, and the power of uncontrollable circumstances is weighed against that which can be controlled (Bandura, 2001).

What is Collective Efficacy?

Rooted in self-efficacy, collective efficacy is a group’s beliefs in members’ combined capacity to organize and carry out the courses of action needed to produce desired results. It is an evolving group-level

“Collective efficacy means that people have confidence in each other. Principals trust, value, and depend on their peers. School leaders and district leaders similarly believe in each other’s capacity, individually and jointly, to solve problems and make progress ... Collective capacity is more than the sum total of individual capacities...it is a powerhouse because it compounds individual efficacy into collective capacity and impact.”

Source: *All Systems Go*
(Fullan, 2010)

attribute that reflects a group’s collective capacity to accomplish its goals (Bandura, 1997, 2001). It foretells group performance in a variety of settings, including schools, athletic teams and organizations. Bandura (2000b) adds to this definition the proviso that a “group’s attainments are the product not only of shared knowledge and skills of its different members, but also of the interactive, coordinative, and synergistic dynamics of their transactions.” In other words “perceived collective efficacy is not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individual members.”

Collective Efficacy Beliefs

According to Bandura (2000b), people’s shared beliefs in their collective efficacy have an immense influence on what they can accomplish together including:

- the futures they seek to achieve through combined action,
- how well they use their resources,
- how much effort they put into their group enterprise,
- their staying power when collective efforts either do not produce quick results or meet powerful resistance, and
- their susceptibility to the discouragement that can overcome people taking on tough problems.

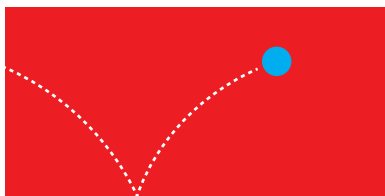
Resilience

What is Resilience?

In science, resilience refers to objects that can maintain their original shape after being manipulated. As it applies to people, the American Psychological Association (2012) defines resilience as “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, and even significant sources of stress.” Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney (2012), resilience experts and authors of *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenges* provide this concise and cogent definition of resilience: “the ability to ‘bounce back’ after encountering difficulty.” To these definitions author Diane Coutu (2002) adds that resilience is “multidimensional and dynamic and bends without breaking.” It is “neither ethically good nor bad. It is merely the skill and the capacity to be robust under conditions of enormous stress and change.”

Seven Ingredients of Resilience

According to psychologist Karen Reivich (2010), “resilience is not all or nothing. It comes in amounts. You can be a little resilient, a



Source: cognitivebehaviortherapycenter.com

“Positive mental health and emotional well-being are closely related to the development of psychological and emotional resilience. Resilience involves being able to recover from difficulties or change – to function as well as before and then move forward. It is often referred to as the ability to ‘bounce back’ from difficulties or challenges. Resilience is enhanced by healthy, active living, but it also depends on many other things. Our lives are affected by a variety of individual characteristics, family circumstances, and community and environmental factors, some of which increase our resilience by protecting us from emotional and psychological harm and some of which reduce it by exposing us to emotional, social, and psychological risks.”

Source: [The Ontario Curriculum, Health and Physical Education, Grades 1-8](#)

Coutu (2002) identifies the ability to make do with whatever is at hand as a building block of resilience. Psychologists, she claims, follow the lead of French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss in calling this skill “bricolage,” a word originally referring to the practice of constructing fine art from whatever materials are at hand. In the modern sense, Coutu redefines bricolage as “a kind of inventiveness, or ability to improvise a solution to a problem without proper or obvious tools or materials” and that “when situations unravel, bricoleurs muddle through, imagining possibilities where others are confounded.”

Source: ‘How Resilience Works’ (Coutu, 2002)

lot resilient, and resilient in some situations but not others. And, no matter how resilient you are today, you can become more resilient tomorrow.” In *The Resilience Factor*, Reivich and co-author Andrew Shatté (2002) identify the following seven ingredients of resilience that we can teach ourselves and others:

1. **Emotion Regulation** is the ability to stay calm under pressure.
2. **Impulse Control** helps us to tolerate ambiguity and make thoughtful decisions.
3. **Optimism** balanced with realism gives us hope for the future and control over the direction of our lives.
4. **Causal Analysis** is our ability to identify the actual causes of our problems and to assess them accurately.
5. **Empathy** represents our ability to read other people’s cues to their psychological and emotional states.
6. **Self-efficacy** signifies our beliefs that we can be successful in solving the problems we experience.
7. **Reaching Out** allows us to take appropriate risks and take on new challenges and opportunities.

These seven ingredients provide the foundation of resilience, built on the recognition that our emotions and behaviors are triggered not by events themselves but by how we interpret those events. Of these seven ingredients, Reivich and Shatté identify optimism as the most important – “it is a motivator – it’s what keeps people going with faith and hope.”

How Resilience Grows

In an attempt to shed light on resilience, what it is and how it grows, Coutu (2002) reviewed empirical research that spanned 40 years and distilled key characteristics that predict resilience; i.e., a sense of humour, forming personal attachments, possessing a protective inner psychological space, a capacity to get others to help you, and athleticism. In addition, her findings show that resilience, like optimism and self-efficacy, can be learned.

Coutu also noted an element of “good common sense” to resilience theories. She found that they overlap in three important ways that capture how we can cultivate resilience:

1. **Face down reality:** Balance optimism with realism.
2. **Search for meaning:** Rather than asking, “Why is this happening to me?” make sense of stress and suffering.
3. **Continue to improvise:** Be resourceful – make do with whatever is available at the time in order to bounce back from less than desirable conditions.

The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People

4. Be Proactive
5. Begin with the End in Mind
6. Put First Things First
7. Think Win-Win
8. Seek First To Understand, Then To Be Understood
9. Synergize
10. Sharpen the Saw

Source: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989)

“Principle-centred living is about being ‘response-able’ and means we are able to choose our own actions. Instead of being controlled by external forces or internal emotions, we can choose how we want to behave and respond to what happens to us.”

Source: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989)

Although each of these three elements brings strength to our resilience, Coutu argues that a synergistic expression of all three is necessary if we are to develop the true resilience we require as individuals and in our organizations.

Proactivity

What is Proactivity?

Being proactive is about making things happen, anticipating and preventing problems, and seizing opportunities. It involves self-initiated efforts to bring about change in the work environment and/or oneself to achieve a different future (Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010). Although this fourth psychological leadership resource is critical for all of us, it is a trait that is essential for system leaders. System leaders in their pivotal position in complex organizations experience countless interactions with the wider environment and must be able to “anticipate future demands that might require significant organizational adaptation (Leithwood, 2013b).”

“Be Proactive:” The First Habit

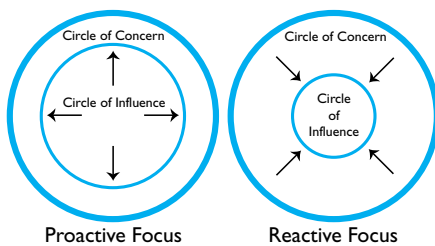
In the now classic *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey (1989) describes “proactivity” as the habit that underpins the other six habits. It begins with the mindset, “I am responsible for me, and I can choose.” He attributes this concept in part to Victor Frankl (1959), the psychiatrist who developed a “self-map” after contemplating the nature of man during his experiences in a prisoner-of-war camp. In the face of horrific circumstances, Frankl used the human endowment of self-awareness to discover a fundamental principle about the nature of humanity – between stimulus and response, we have the freedom to choose, and in so doing build bridges from adversity to a better future. For Covey, the first habit, “be proactive,” is the basis of leadership at home and at work. All other habits, he says, are dependent on being proactive and choosing to master and practice “principle-centred” living.

Proactivity versus reactivity

We learn from Covey that one of the easiest ways to understand the concept of proactivity is to look at its opposite – reactivity. When we are reactive, we are “driven by feelings, by circumstances, by conditions, by our environment.” In contrast, when our behaviour is proactive it is internally motivated and based on choices we make both consciously and unconsciously. Of course being proactive doesn’t mean we are

"We almost always have choices, and the better the choice, the more we will be in control of our lives."

Source: *Take Charge of Your Life: How to Get What You Need with Choice-Theory Psychology* (Glasser, 2011)



Source: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 1989)

never influenced by internal or external stimuli. What it does mean is that they do not control us.

The language we use

An important choice we make that signals our proactivity is the language we use to respond to external forces. Proactive language shows that we are in control; e.g. let's look at alternatives, I can, I choose, I prefer. Reactive language such as there is nothing I can do, or, I can't or, if only, suggests that we have no choice.

Circles: of Concern and ... of Influence

Covey argues that the problems, challenges, and opportunities we face fall into two areas, the "circle of concern" and the "circle of influence." Instead of reacting to or worrying about conditions over which we have little or no control, when we are proactive, we focus our time and energy in the circle of influence – on the areas we can do something about such as our health, our families, and our challenges at work. In contrast, when we are reactive, we focus efforts in the circle of concern – on things over which we have little or no control such as the amount of government debt, the threat of terrorism, and the weather.

Part C – Developing the Psychological Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs): Ten Proven Strategies

In this section, we highlight ten strategies that represent a sampling of approaches found to be effective in building and strengthening our psychological PLRs. The strategies are organized in two sections. The first section includes strategies that focus on each of the four psychological PLRs individually. The second section offers strategies that apply to all four psychological PLRs. There is much more to learn about them than can be provided in this publication. With this in mind, refer to the original sources, which provide both research foundations and details about how to implement the strategies.

As is true of all the PLRs, building and strengthening the psychological category of resources requires commitment, persistence, and more often than not the support of others. Choosing which strategies to try and then realizing their influence will be unique to each of us. It will take time and dedication to bring them to life in the context of our daily lives and in our interactions with others.

Refer to [Ideas Into Action: Exploring the Social Resources](#) to learn about the following ten strategies for developing and strengthening the social PLRs:

11. Cultivate emotional intelligence
12. Strengthen emotional leadership styles
13. Become more mindful
14. Grow and maintain trust
15. Promote positive inner work life
16. Savour positivity
17. Grow your mindset
18. See with "appreciative eyes"
19. Bring emotions out into the open
20. Take care of yourself.

Section One: Strategies that Focus on Each of the Four Psychological PLRs

1. Regulate Optimism and Pessimism

“What we want is ...flexible optimism – optimism with its eyes open. We must use pessimism’s keen sense of reality when we need it, but without having to dwell in its dark shadows.”

Martin Seligman, 1990

The Stockdale Paradox

Retain faith that you will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties...

AND at the same time...

...Confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they may be.

Source: *Good to Great* (Collins, 2001)

“The act of vocalizing feelings and exploring the past jointly with others who faced similar challenges is often characterized by Survivors as a form of healing,”

Source: *‘Aboriginal People, Resilience and the Residential School Legacy’* (Dion-Stout & Kipling, 2003)

“Strategic optimists envision the best possible outcome and then eagerly plan to make it happen. Defensive pessimists believe that this time could be different even though they have been successful in the past.”

Source: *‘Defensive Pessimism: Harnessing Anxiety as Motivation’* (Norem & Cantor, 1986)

Be Aware of Optimism Bias

An optimistic mindset has proven benefits: it can lower stress, ease our minds and improve health, but optimism without realism can have its costs. In *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins (2001) describes the “Stockdale Paradox” as a way of understanding the importance of moderating optimism with realism. The paradox is named after Admiral James Stockdale, who survived a prisoner-of-war camp for seven long years by accepting the reality of his situation – that his life couldn’t be any worse – and at the same time never giving up hope that it would be better in the future.

These seemingly contradictory beliefs prepared Stockdale for his ordeal. As it unfolded, he noticed that his contemporaries who had succumbed were often the most optimistic, and wondered if it was because they failed to “confront the reality of their situation.” Deluding themselves about the probability of release might have worked in the short term, but when they finally faced reality, it was too much for them to bear.

Practice Defensive Pessimism

Julie Norem (2002) author of *The Positive Power of Negative Thinking*, uses an anecdote about public speaking to show how defensive pessimism can be used to our advantage. In thinking about a speech she will make, she envisions disaster: “I’m going to walk onto the stage and trip over the microphone cord. I’m going to knock over the pitcher of water that’s by the podium. The audio-visual stuff isn’t going to work. I’m going to get questions from the audience I’ve never thought of (Norem, cited in Khazan, 2014).”

Rather than giving in to these worries and declining the speaking engagement, Norem chooses to live by the Scout’s motto and “be prepared.” This means taking preventive actions that provide safeguards to address some of her anxieties; i.e., taping down

the microphone cord, wearing flat shoes, emailing a copy of her presentation to the conference coordinator, and bringing it with her on a USB key. In other words, by imagining a worst-case scenario, she motivates herself to prepare more.

Wharton professor Adam Grant (2013) offers more advice to defensive pessimists and to those who are trying to motivate them:

1. **Follow instincts:** Anticipate negative outcomes to ensure success.
2. **Beware of encouragement:** Words of reassurance such as “given how well you have done in the past, you will probably do very well on the upcoming tasks” have no impact.
3. **Allow worry:** Reserve time to generate the anxiety needed to motivate and focus on the task at hand prior to performing it.
4. **Be realistic:** Before performing a task, asking, “Will I?” is more effective than “I will.”

Revamp Explanatory Style

Martin Seligman (1990) argues that people who always believe that bad events are their fault, will last a long time, and will undermine everything they do, can escape this enduring pessimism. This requires learning a new set of cognitive skills to help take charge and resist unhappiness.

Use the A-B-C-D-E approach

Seligman has found success in teaching a form of learned optimism to people with a pessimistic explanatory style, using the following A-B-C-D-E approach.

“A-B-C” addresses our negative reactions to success or adversity:

- **A (Adversity):** Recognize when adversity hits and avoid viewing success as temporary, i.e., “It won’t last.”
- **B (Beliefs):** Be aware of beliefs about the adversity. Are they self-defeating?
- **C (Consequences):** Be conscious of the emotional and other consequences of beliefs about that adversity.

“D-E” refers to how we can rethink a pessimistic reaction into an optimistic one:

- **D (Disputation):** Question whether these beliefs are the only explanation. For example, ask, “What is the evidence for these beliefs? What are other possible explanations for what happened? What are the implications of believing this way, and do they make it worth holding on to these beliefs? How useful are these beliefs? Do others or do I get any benefits from holding on to them, or would we benefit more if we held other beliefs?”

“Habits of thinking need not be forever. One of the most significant findings in psychology in the last twenty years is that individuals can choose the way they think.”

Source: *Learned Optimism*
(Seligman, 1990)

To “tweak” our explanatory style, “the key is to ‘dispute’ and ‘de-catastrophize’ negative explanations. To dispute, confront each explanation the way a sharp lawyer would cross-examine a witness. Poke holes in its story. Question its premises. Identify internal contradictions. To de-catastrophize, ask yourself, ‘what are the overall consequences and why are those consequences not nearly as calamitous as they seem on the surface?’”

Source: *To Sell is Human: The Surprising Truth about Moving Others*
(Pink, 2012)



- **E (Energization):** Be aware of the new consequences – feelings, behaviors, actions – that do or could follow from a different, more optimistic explanation, or set of beliefs.

2. Cultivate Self- and Collective Efficacy

“If I have the belief that I can do it, I shall surely acquire the capacity to do it even if I may not have it at the beginning.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Born of humble beginnings, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi stands as an example of one who grew self-efficacy beliefs over time. He was admittedly shy and unaccomplished in his early years and had difficulty speaking in public. After he left England for South Africa to practice law, he struggled to be a successful lawyer, and had many trials and tribulations. Through his tireless efforts he demonstrated tremendous fortitude to bring India into independence, and was given the name “Mahatma,” meaning “honoured one.”

Ghandi’s narrative lends credence to the claim that self-efficacy can be built. We can extract from his example that a belief in ourselves and in our own ability is paramount in reaching our goals. Researchers (e.g. Bandura, 1997; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010; Goddard et al, 2004; and Eells, 2011) provide insight into strategies we can use to build and maintain both self-efficacy and collective efficacy some of which are described here.

Activate the Four Influencers of Efficacy Beliefs

Albert Bandura (1997) identified four influencers of efficacy beliefs which can be used to shape both self-efficacy and collective efficacy – mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states. These influencers and a sampling of what they can look like in organizations are described in the following:

1. **Provide mastery experiences:** The opportunities we have to learn the skills we need to do what our work entails are the most important source of growing self-efficacy. Personal accomplishments, especially if they involve overcoming challenges, help to raise our sense of competency and strengthen our belief that “if I performed well before, then I’ll perform well again.”

For example, in a school setting, past successes build beliefs in the capability of a staff whereas failures can undermine a sense of collective efficacy. To counter the potential negative impact of failure, leaders offer supports that encourage their staffs to overcome difficulties through persistent effort thereby

Enhance self-efficacy in others by:

- **Slowing down:** Stop and take a moment to construct honest, concrete feedback instead of using global, general praise.
- **Being specific:** Instead of saying “You did great,” identify and name the action or behaviour that was great.
- **Naming an observed strength:** Identify and label a skill that can be used to cope with a future challenging situation.

Source: Adapted from *The Resilience Factor* (Reivich and Shatté, 2002)

$P = p - i$
Performance = potential – interference

Performance (P) in any activity is equal to one's potential (p) after the interference factor (i) has been subtracted from the equation. One's actual performance greatly diminishes with interferences such as self-doubt or fear of failure.

Source: *The Inner Game of Work*
(Gallwey, 2000)

"Schools tend to learn well what they do, and tend to do what they learn well."

Source: 'Collective efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions' (Huber, 1996 cited in Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004)

"Perceptions of collective efficacy directly affect the diligence and resolve with which groups choose to pursue their goals. Hence, perceived collective efficacy is a potent way of characterizing the strong normative and behavioral influence of an organization's culture."

Source: 'Collective efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions' (Goddard et al, 2004)

contributing to the development of a resilient sense of collective efficacy (Goddard et al, 2004).

2. **Structure vicarious experiences:** Exposure to the successes of others enhances efficacy beliefs. These include collaboration with role models who have the skills and expertise we want to develop. "Educators who observe how their colleagues handle challenges are inspired to do the same. These experiences lead people to believe, 'I can do that, too.' (Eells, 2011)." School leaders influence collective efficacy by structuring schools to allow for authentic, collaborative work among staff. They also provide appropriate models of both desired practices and appropriate values; in other words, they walk the talk (Leithwood, Anderson, Mascall, & Strauss, 2010).
3. **Engage in social persuasion:** When we receive a confidence boost from peers we respect, we are spurred on to greater efforts and achievements. Talks, professional learning opportunities and feedback about our achievements can inspire action. Although verbal persuasion alone is not likely to bring about profound organizational change, when coupled with models of success and positive direct experience, it can influence collective efficacy beliefs.
4. **Attend to affective states:** The ways in which we react physically or emotionally to pressure, difficulty and disappointment can have an impact on our efficacy beliefs. An organization with strong beliefs in its group capability can tolerate tension and stress and continue to function without debilitating consequences. In fact, such organizations learn to rise to the challenge when confronted with disruptive forces. In a school context leaders contribute to both individual and collective efficacy by, for example, showing respect for individual members of the staff, demonstrating concern about their personal feelings and needs, maintaining an open door policy, and valuing staff opinions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008).

Rachel Eells (2011) whose research examined the relationship between collective teacher efficacy beliefs and student achievement advises school leaders to monitor the impact of activating these four influencers of self- and collective efficacy. For example, she found that the failure of mastery experiences lowers efficacy and recommends that school leaders respond by bolstering efficacy through social persuasion or vicarious experiences. She also reminds us that "collective efficacy is a group attribute, and groups are made of individuals." This means that "collective efficacy can be threatened

or strengthened by an influential few (Bandura, 2000).” With this in mind, she advises school leaders to note the ways in which a vocal minority on a staff can influence collective beliefs. Low efficacy beliefs are contagious, and can have an impact on willingness to try. Likewise, confidence in collective ability can be contagious – “together, a faculty builds efficacy.”

Stimulate Positive Inner Work Lives

Harvard professors Theresa Amabile and Steven Kramer (2011) and authors of *The Progress Principle* found in their research on inner work lives of knowledge workers that “one of the most basic human drives is toward self-efficacy.” In the workplace context of their study, they define self-efficacy as the belief that we are “individually capable of planning and executing the tasks required to achieve desired goals.”

They also confirmed that the need for self-efficacy continues and even grows throughout our lifespan as we compare our achievements with those of our peers as well as with our own “personal bests.” This strong need for self-efficacy explains “why everyday progress stands out as the key event stimulating positive inner work life and why everyday work setbacks are particularly harmful.”

The following is a sampling of proven strategies they recommend leaders use to stimulate positive inner work lives in others and in turn strengthen self-efficacy beliefs:

- Establish a “positive cycle.” Some ways include offering authentic praise, working collaboratively with people, and making the workplace fun or relaxing.
- Give people the sense that they can make progress in their work. This single most important lever can be as insignificant as solving a minor problem or accomplishing a simple task.
- Support others in getting their work done through:
 - providing direct help,
 - giving adequate resources and time to get the job done,
 - reacting to successes and failures with a learning orientation instead of an evaluative one, and
 - setting clear goals by explaining where the work is heading and why it matters to the individual, the team, the organization, and the organization’s stakeholders.

Facilitate Goal Attainment

Edwin Locke and Gary Latham (2002), distinguished organizational psychologists and experts on goal-setting theory, have shown that effective goal setting is a powerful way to increase motivation and

“Inner work life is the confluence of perceptions, emotions, and motivations that individuals experience as they react to and make sense of the events of their workday.”

Source: *The Progress Principle*
(Amabile & Kramer, 2011)

“When people perform well, they not only feel satisfied with their performance, they generalize this positive affect to the task; they like the task more than they did previously. In short, people see themselves as a success in the workplace to the extent that they are able to grow and meet job challenges by pursuing and attaining goals that are important and meaningful to them.”

Source: ‘Enhancing the Benefits and Overcoming the Pitfalls of Goal Setting’ (Latham & Locke, 2006)

Learn more about goal setting, one of five Core Leadership Capacities (CLCs) derived from the Ontario Leadership Framework, in [Ideas Into Action – Setting Goals: The Power of Purpose](#)

improve performance, thereby increasing self-efficacy beliefs. They argue that if goal setting is to be effective, it must take into account the degree of goal difficulty and specificity in order to influence task performance. They found that specific and difficult – difficult but possible – goals lead to a higher level of performance than a vague goal such as “do your best” or no goal at all. For Latham and Locke (2006), “a goal provides people with a sense of purpose. It increases their mental focus on tasks. The outcome is usually a heightened sense of self-efficacy (personal effectiveness) as well as the pleasure inherent in being purposeful.”

Latham and Locke (2006) recommend five principles of goal setting that should be followed in order to achieve goal commitment and attainment:

1. **Clarity:** Clear goals are measurable and unambiguous. Using the SMART acronym helps us set goals by ensuring the clarity of the goal by making it Specific, Measurable, Attainable/Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound.
2. **Challenge:** Ambitious goals provide a basis for increasing an individual’s personal effectiveness.
3. **Commitment:** Two ways to strengthen commitment are first, the importance of the expected outcomes to the individual and secondly, the belief that the goal can be attained; i.e., self-efficacy.
4. **Feedback:** The combination of goal setting and the provision of ongoing and summary feedback are more effective than the act of goal setting on its own.
5. **Task complexity:** Short-term goals and small wins that provide immediate incentive may result in better performance than long-term goals that are too far removed in time to mobilize efforts.

3. Choose Resilience

“We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed.”

Victor Frankl (1959)

Psychiatrist Victor Frankl’s (1959) memoir has captivated generations with its descriptions of life in Nazi death camps and its lessons for spiritual survival. Based on his own experiences and the stories of his patients, Frankl argues that we cannot avoid anguish but we can choose how to cope with it, find meaning in it, and move forward. Among the lessons of his writings is the message that resilience can be learned.

Some strategies for increasing our resilience are provided in the following:

Practice Seven Skills to Boost Resilience

As discussed previously in this paper, Reivich and Shatté (2002) identified seven ingredients of resilience – emotion regulation, impulse control, optimism, causal analysis, empathy, self-efficacy and reaching out. Their research found that resilience is not an innate ability and can be built and learned using the following proven resilience-building strategies.

Develop “know thyself” skills

The three “Know thyself” skills are designed to analyse our beliefs in order to build awareness of how these beliefs can influence our resilience.

1. **Learn our ABCs (Adversity-Beliefs-Consequences):** ABC equips us with the skill to detect our thoughts when we are in the midst of an adversity and to understand the emotional impact of those beliefs.
2. **Avoid thinking traps:** This skill helps us recognize and address the mistakes we make most often. Thinking traps include jumping to conclusions, tunnel vision, magnifying and minimizing, personalizing, externalizing, overgeneralizing, mind reading, and emotional reasoning.
3. **Detect icebergs:** Mastering the skill of detecting icebergs leads to an increase in emotion regulation, empathy and reaching out and as a result significantly improve our relationships.

Cultivate change skills

These four skills are designed to challenge the way that our thinking can lead us away from resilience.

4. **Challenge beliefs:** Analyse beliefs about the causes of adversity. Find new problem solving/thinking strategies to avoid pursuing the wrong solutions.
5. **Put adversity into perspective:** Determine the future outcomes of adversity. Stop thinking about “what if” and perceiving every failure as a catastrophe.
6. **Calm and focus:** This allows us to find ways to step back from adversity, to create breathing space and to think more assuredly. It has the potential to reduce the impact of the negative emotions.
7. **Practice real-time resilience:** This enables us to challenge beliefs and put things into perspective at the moment that adversity strikes.

Iceberg beliefs are “fixed, frozen beliefs” that “lurk beneath the surface of awareness.” Three general categories of iceberg beliefs are:

6. Achievement; e.g., “Being successful is what matters most.”
7. Acceptance; e.g., “What matters most in life is being loved.”
8. Control; e.g., “Asking for help shows that you’re not in charge.”

Source: *The Resilience Factor*
(Reivich & Shatté, 2002)

REAL: Relationships, Efficacy, Affect and Learning

Strengthening one or more of the following factors can significantly improve individual and team performance:

R = relationships. We are far more resilient when we are engaged, supported, and motivated with and by others.

E = efficacy. Believing that we make a difference, that we have control and that our actions matter, builds resilience.

A = (positive) affect. When we experience positive emotions (such as happiness, joy, optimism, satisfaction, gratitude, peace, and humor), our bodies relax. Our physical stress decreases.

L = learning. When we find lessons – meaning and peace – in our traumas, injuries, and stress, we are better able to move on, understanding that we have grown, matured, and strengthened because of the challenges we have faced.

Source: Adapted from 'Building Resilience: Real Ways to Thrive During Tough Times' (Klein and Bowman, 2013)

Follow the Resilience “Prescription”

In *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges*, psychiatrists and resilience experts Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney (2012) draw on the latest scientific findings to develop a “prescription” for weathering and bouncing back from stress and trauma. Although they agree that resilience can be learned they caution that it requires disciplined practice over time. Their ten-part resilience “prescription” (Charney, 2014) summarized below offers practical suggestions for applying principles of resilience to everyday life. It encourages “doing” what is necessary to enhance resilience as opposed to just “thinking” about it.

1. **Keep a positive attitude:** Optimism is strongly related to resilience and although partly genetic, it can be learned.
2. **Develop cognitive flexibility through cognitive reappraisal:** To benefit from stress and trauma, develop learnable skills to reframe, assimilate, accept and recover.
3. **Solidify a personal moral compass:** Develop a set of core beliefs that very few things can shatter; e.g., faith in conjunction with strong religious and/or spiritual beliefs.
4. **Find and emulate resilient role models:** Imitation is a powerful mode of learning.
5. **Face fears:** Fear is normal and can be used as a guide. Learn and practice skills necessary to move through fear.
6. **Develop active coping skills:** Use active rather than passive coping skills; e.g., minimize appraisal of threat, create positive statements about oneself, seek support from others.
7. **Establish and nurture a supportive social network:** Very few people can “go it alone.” Emotional support accrues from close relationships with people and organizations.
8. **Attend to physical well-being:** Health and fitness have proven positive effects on physical hardiness and mood, and improves self-esteem.
9. **Train regularly and rigorously:** Change requires systematic and disciplined activity. Concentrate on development in multiple areas: emotional intelligence, moral integrity, and physical endurance.
10. **Recognize, utilize and foster “signature strengths.”** Learn to recognize character strengths and engage them to deal with difficult and stressful situations.

As it applies to children and youth, there are numerous opportunities across the curriculum for students to develop self-awareness. In the revised Health and Physical Education curriculum students in every grade are expected to “use self-awareness and self-monitoring skills to help them understand their strengths and needs, take responsibility for their actions, recognize sources of stress, and monitor their own progress.”

In Stuart Shanker’s video, “[What is it?](#)” he describes how being self-aware and regulating responses are skills that we help our youngest learners begin to develop and are important throughout our lives. These same principles apply in considering self-awareness as a school leader.

“A four-second pause – the time it takes to take one breath in, one breath out – can be powerful enough to subvert a poor decision and replace it with a smarter one.”

Source: *Four Seconds: All the Time You Need to Stop Counter-Productive Habits and Get the Results You Want* (Bregman, 2015)

4. Grow Proactivity

“Proactive people focus their efforts on things they can do something about. The nature of their energy is positive, enlarging and magnifying, causing their circle of influence to increase.”

Stephen R. Covey (1989)

Stephen Covey believes that we are all made up of a blend of proactivity and reactivity and that pure examples of the two extremes are rare. He claims that we may find that we are extremely proactive in one area while letting other parts of our lives slip into automaticity. While proactive behaviour is second nature for many, for others it requires effort (Grant, Gino & Hoffman, 2011). With these considerations in mind, the following are strategies that Covey and others recommend to assess and develop our proactivity.

Be Self-Aware

Becoming aware of where we expend our efforts and commitments is a giant step toward becoming more proactive. The key is remembering that between stimulus and response there is a space. This is a space within which we decide how we will react to any given situation, person, thought or event (Covey, 1989). Covey invites us to imagine a pause button between stimulus and response, a button that gives us control by stopping and thinking about what our response will be to a given situation. He provides these suggested steps for practicing this process:

- Notice and observe. Take time to pause, think and decide. Choose the response. Then act.
- Be attentive to and aware of our responses to stimuli.
- Listen to our individual conscience and what it conveys about the wise thing to do. Then act.
- Choose a method to reflect on and keep track of these moments.
- Over time, refer to these reflections to assess the extent to which our awareness of managing both internal and external forces is growing. This will be evident in a pattern of responses.

Pay Attention to the Language We Use

Covey points to our language as an authentic indicator of our reactive and proactive responses. He recommends that we take time – at least a full day – to listen to our own language and the language of people

“...All leaders are leading language communities. Though every person, in any setting, has some opportunity to influence the nature of language, leaders have exponentially greater access and opportunity to shape, alter or ratify existing language use ... leaders have no choice in this matter of being language leaders; it just goes with the territory.”

Source: *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* (Kegan & Lahey, 2001)

“... it makes sense that introverts are uniquely good at leading initiative-takers. Because of their inclination to listen to others and lack of interest in dominating social situations, introverts are more likely to hear and implement suggestions. Having benefited from the talents of their followers, they are then likely to motivate them to be even more proactive. Introverted leaders create a virtuous circle of proactivity.”

Source: *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* (Cain, 2010)

around us with the goal of using language that reflects our proactivity. He advises us to pay attention to the phrases we use; for example:

- How often do we use what Covey refers to as “victim” language typical of reactivity; e.g., “there’s nothing I can do,” “she makes me so angry,” and, “that’s just the way I am?” Do we hear ourselves using phrases such as, “if only,” “I can’t”, or, “I have to?”
- How frequently do we use proactive language such as, “let’s look at the alternatives,” “I control my own feelings,” “I can choose a different approach,” or, “I will choose an appropriate approach?” Do we hear ourselves saying, “I will” or “I can” or “I choose?”

Try Covey’s 30-day Test of Proactivity

Gaining an awareness of the areas in which we expend our energies is a giant step in becoming proactive. Change starts from within, and highly effective people make the decision to improve their lives through the things that they can influence rather than by simply reacting to external forces. Covey suggests that for 30 days we work only in our “circle of influence” by doing the following:

- Make commitments and keep them. Start small by choosing a 10-minute commitment to ourselves that is close to our hearts. Then expand to longer periods.
- Pay attention to our own language. Catch any reactive language and change it to proactive wording. Turn “I can’t” into “I will.”
- “Be a light, not a judge. Be a model, not a critic. Be part of the solution, not the problem.”
- Work on things we have control over. As Covey recommends, “work on you.”
- Look on the shortcomings of others with compassion as opposed to blaming or becoming angry.
- Stop thinking that “the problem is out there.” In fact, that thought is the problem.

Promote Proactivity in the Workplace

Adam Grant and Susan Ashford (2008) are among researchers who have brought increased clarity and deepened understanding about proactive behaviour in the workplace. Their research paints a picture of proactivity in organizations. It identifies the following as key proactive behaviours: seeking feedback, taking initiative in pursuing personal and organizational goals, actively adapting to new environments, making oneself heard, selling one’s ideas, taking charge, acting in advance to influence individuals and

groups, expanding one's roles, revising one's tasks, crafting jobs, implementing ideas and solving problems, and building social networks.

Monitor and Adapt Leadership Style

In addition to identifying proactive behaviours in the workplace, Grant and his colleagues found implications of their findings for leadership style. It seems that proactivity presents a dilemma for leaders when those they lead want to be heard and their contributions to be acknowledged.

So what is a leader to do? Grant et al (2011) argue that leaders must differentiate their approaches and adapt their style depending on who they are leading. Extroverted leadership may prove to be a liability if followers are also extroverts especially if the leaders are unreceptive to suggestions and initiative. It seems that introverted leaders are more likely to listen to, process and implement the ideas of a proactive team.

Daniel Pink (2013) advises leaders to take a more “calibrated approach” and combine the extrovert’s assertiveness with the introvert’s quiet confidence. Grant (2012) refers to people who show this flexibility in leadership style as “ambiverts” – those who fall somewhere in the middle of the introversion-extraversion scale.

Grant et al (2011) offer the following advice for taking into account diverse leader and learner styles:

- When choosing leaders and composing teams, match extroverted leaders with less proactive people and introverted leaders with people who are more proactive.
- Extroverted leaders may be wise to step out of the spotlight and take care to support, encourage, and implement employees’ suggestions when proactivity is needed. This means “dialing back” behaviour by being more reserved, asking more questions, seeking and considering suggestions, and being willing to serve as a facilitator rather than dominating meetings with their own ideas.
- Less extroverted leaders can actively facilitate more proactive behaviours among employees. Some effective approaches include implementing practices that enhance group effectiveness, being receptive to people speaking up, and encouraging them to take charge.
- To develop flexibility among future leaders, coach both introverted and extroverted leaders to take notice of, utilize, recognize, and reward employees’ proactive behaviors.

To find out whether you are an “ambivert” visit <http://www.danpink.com/assessment> where Daniel Pink (2012) has posted an assessment of ambiversion. He created it by replicating the assessment that social scientists use to measure introversion and extraversion.

Simon Breakspear (2015) refers to those who realize the flexibility in leadership style of ambiverts as “agile” leaders. These are leaders who have a mindset focused on “getting better all the time” using the best of the past while designing the future.

Source: ‘[What is an agile leader?](#)’ (Breakspear, 2015)

“It’s not just a matter of acting differently in certain contexts, but not straying too far to either extreme at any one time. The goal is to inspire people while giving them the freedom to do their jobs effectively.

Source: ‘How to Conduct Yourself as a Leader’ (Moore & Victor, 2015)

Section Two: Strategies that Apply to All Four of the Psychological PLRs

5. Know Oneself

“Success in the knowledge economy comes to those who know themselves – their strengths, their values, and how they best perform.”

Peter Drucker, 2005

Knowing oneself as a critical factor in personal and professional development is not a new insight. Centuries ago it was Aristotle who wrote, “Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom,” and it was Socrates who stated that the “unexamined life was not worth living.” Yet the importance of self-knowledge as an enduring message bears repeating. In present times, Covey (1989) launched his discussion of the seven habits of highly effective people by drawing attention to our innate ability to be self-aware. In his view, self-awareness “enables us to stand apart and examine the way we ‘see’ ourselves.” For him, this self-awareness allows us to take a bird’s-eye view of ourselves and reflect on our mental and emotional states. Self-awareness allows us to make conscious decisions about our knowledge and skill, and about our desires and motivations to act.

Likewise, Daniel Goleman (1995) identified self-awareness, which he defined as knowing one’s strengths, weaknesses, drives, values, and impact on others, as one of five components of emotional intelligence along with self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skill. He argues that, “until we take into account how we see ourselves, and

“Self-awareness, then represents an essential focus, one that attunes us to the subtle murmurs within that can help guide our way through life... this inner radar holds the key to managing what we do – and just as important, what we don’t do. This internal control mechanism makes all the difference between a life well-lived and one that falters.”

Source: *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence* (Goleman, 2013)

Knowing yourself is one of the areas of learning in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 education and career/life planning program outlined in the Ministry’s [Creating Pathways to Success](#). In this area of learning students answer the question, “Who am I?” They identify the characteristics that describe who they are such as their interests, strengths, accomplishments, and skills, and factors that have shaped who they are and may shape who they become over time. Refer to this document to learn more about the four-step process as it relates to education and career/life planning.



how we see others, we will be unable to understand how others see and feel about themselves and their world. Unaware, we will project our intentions on their behaviour and call ourselves objective.”

Peter Drucker is another recognized advocate of the importance of self-knowledge especially in our development as leaders. In his classic *Harvard Business Review* article, ‘Managing Oneself,’ Drucker (2005) maintains that it is our responsibility to manage ourselves at work and in life. To do this he says that we “need to cultivate a deep understanding of [ourselves] – not only what [our] strengths and weaknesses are but also how [we] learn, how [we] work with others, what [our] values are, and where [we] can make the greatest contribution.” The following approaches to knowing and developing oneself build on lifelong lessons of Drucker and promote increased self-knowledge that can result in success at work and in one’s personal life.

Use Feedback Analysis

For Drucker, it is only when we “operate from strengths” that we can “achieve true excellence.” He draws from enduring personal experience to recommend the following process as key to learning more about our leadership practice and in particular our strengths:

- **Keep a written record:** Make note of key decisions and actions. Include expected outcomes.
- **Monitor and reflect:** Compare actual results with expected outcomes at 9- or 12-month intervals.
- **Take note of strengths:** Discover strengths that emerge over time – “the most important thing to know.”
- **Work on improving strengths:** Go to work on acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to realize strengths fully.
- **Discover where “intellectual arrogance” may be causing “disabling ignorance” and overcome it:** Remedy any habits that inhibit effectiveness and performance.

Entrepreneur Anthony Tjan (2012, 2015) endorses Drucker’s feedback analysis process as a powerful self-reflection tool. In support of this testimonial, he references Warren Buffet who is known for carefully articulating the reasons he makes an investment at the time he makes it. Buffett’s journal entries serve him as a historical record that help him to assess whether or not future outcomes can be attributable to sound judgment or just plain luck.

In addition to knowing our strengths, Drucker argues that we must reflect on them in the context of:

- Our “work styles:” In what ways do I work best; i.e., am I a reader or a listener, and how do I learn?
- Our “values:” What are my ethics? What are my beliefs and ideals? What do I see as my most important responsibilities for living a worthy, ethical life? Do my organization’s ethics resonate with my own values?

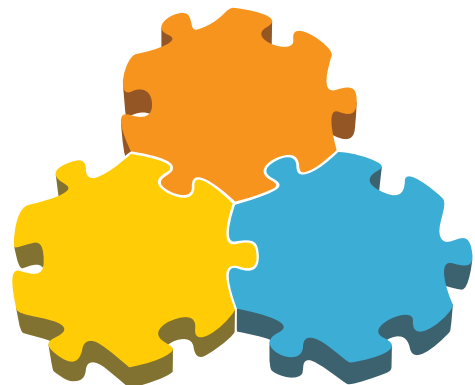
Tjan (2012) argues that the key to the effectiveness of feedback analysis is to:

“(a) codify rationale and motivations and,

(b) reflect and assess outcomes.” Such a practice, he claims, forces us to focus not just on the “what,” but also equally on the “why.” For him, the biggest benefit of codified feedback analysis is “avoiding the attraction of revisionist history when things do not turn out as expected.” In his view, this kind of “backward rationalization is all too easy to fall prey to” and is “the reason why so many do not progress in their self-awareness and personal development.”

Take and Reflect on Results of Evidence-Based Self-Assessment Surveys

A key to learning more about the values, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs we hold about our psychological resources is to complete and reflect on the results of evidence-based self-assessment surveys and questionnaires. Although such tools may not be perfect measures or predictors, they can facilitate the self-reflection that leads to improved self-awareness. The findings may also provide insights about strategies we can use to build on strengths and address any perceived shortcomings. A sampling of evidence-based assessments and surveys that have been developed by experts referenced in this *Ideas Into Action* paper is shown on page 26.



A Sampling of Evidence-Based Self-Assessment Surveys

Name of Survey, Author(s), Focus and Website	Question Format and Sample
<p>The Optimism Test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted from Martin Seligman's (1990) <i>Learned Optimism</i> Focuses on explanatory style Available free to complete and get individual results at https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/ 	<p>32 statements that ask users to select the cause most likely to apply: e.g., The project you are in charge of is a great success.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I kept a close watch over everyone's work. <input type="checkbox"/> Everyone devoted a lot of time and energy to it.
<p>The Defensive Pessimism Questionnaire</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed by Julie Norem (2002), author of <i>The Positive Power of Negative Thinking</i> Begins by defining defensive pessimism and strategic optimism and inviting reflection on situations where the goal is to do one's best Available free to complete and get individual results at http://academics.wellesley.edu/Psychology/Norem/Quiz/quiz.html 	<p>12 statements asking users to rate how true each statement is; e.g.,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I often start out expecting the worst, even though I will probably do OK. <input type="checkbox"/> I carefully consider all the possible outcomes. <input type="checkbox"/> I try to picture how I could fix things if something went wrong.
<p>The "How Resilient Are You?" Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed by distinguished executive coach Manfred Kets de Vries (2014), author of <i>Mindful Leadership Coaching: Journeys into the Interior</i> Focuses on three areas of resilience Kets de Vries has identified; i.e. challenge, control and commitment Available free to complete and get results at https://hbr.org/2015/01/assessment-how-resilient-are-you 	<p>A ten-item test that presents scenarios for users to assess; e.g., You're told that you won't be getting the promotion you sought, because another candidate is more qualified.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Although you are upset, you say nothing. <input type="checkbox"/> You acknowledge that you are disappointed and request a fuller explanation. <input type="checkbox"/> You ask what you need to do to improve your chances for advancement in the future.
<p>The Resilience Test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté (2002), co-authors of <i>The Resilience Factor</i> who believe that assessing resilience is key Helps users gauge current standing on seven abilities: emotion regulation, impulse control, empathy, optimism, causal analysis, self-efficacy, and reaching out Available free to complete and get individual Resilience Quotient or RQ at http://www.frumi.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Resilience-Factor.pdf 	<p>A 56-item test asking users to rate statements such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> When trying to solve a problem, I trust my instinct and go with the first solution that occurs to me. <input type="checkbox"/> Even if I plan ahead for a discussion with my boss, a co-worker, my spouse, or my child, I still find myself acting emotionally. <input type="checkbox"/> I worry about my future health.
<p>The Collective Efficacy (CE) Scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed by Wayne Hoy (2003) to assess collective efficacy of a school Focuses on collective efficacy defined as "the shared perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have positive effects on students." Available free to complete and get results at http://www.waynehoy.com/pdfs/collective-efficacy-short.pdf and at http://www.waynehoy.com/pdfs/collective-efficacy-long.pdf 	<p>12-item and 21-item rating scales that include discussions of validity and reliability, and a scoring key that asks users to rate statements such as the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers in this school are able to get through to the most difficult students. <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students. <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers in this school believe that every child can learn.
<p>Seven Habits Profile</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developed by Stephen Covey (1989), author of <i>The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People</i> Includes a self-scoring tool to assess current level of seven habits of effectiveness including proactivity Available free to complete and get results at http://www.franklincovey.com/tc/mediaengine/public/files/7_habits_profile.pdf 	<p>A 27-item survey that asks users to rate statements such as the following which focus on proactivity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> I am in control of my life. <input type="checkbox"/> I focus my efforts on things I can do something about rather than on things beyond my control. <input type="checkbox"/> I take responsibility for my moods and actions rather than blame others and circumstances.

6. Develop Healthy, Effective Habits

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

Aristotle

“Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character, sow a character, reap a destiny” is an expression familiar to many of us. Central to advancing this maxim is “habit,” the intersection of knowledge, skill and desire. As Chip and Dan Heath (2010) point out in *Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard*, “habits are behavioural autopilot and that’s why they’re such a critical tool for leaders.”

A recurring pattern throughout the strategies provided in the series of *Ideas Into Action* papers that focus on the PLRs is the importance of reflecting on our habits and developing new ones as needed. In keeping with this theme, the following section shines a light on habit formation and change and provides known strategies for cultivating habits that will work for us and in turn strengthen our personal leadership resources.

Start by Understanding Habits

Charles Duhigg’s (2012) *The Power of Habit* draws on a large body of research to show how to put to use the science of habit formation and change. For him understanding the nature of habit is a first step. An at-a-glance summary of key insights from Duhigg’s research is provided here.

What is a Habit and How is a Habit Formed?

A habit represents the choices that we intentionally make at some point, and then stop thinking about but continue doing, often every day. Duhigg depicts the process of habit formation within our brain as a three-step “habit loop” which includes the following:

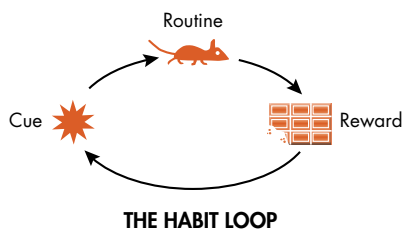
1. **Cue** is the trigger that tells our brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. Cues that trigger a habit sequence fall into five categories: location, time, emotional state, other people, and immediately preceding action.
2. **Routine** is the behaviour itself which can be physical, mental or emotional, and
3. **Reward** is how our brain learns to save the habit and encode it for future use.

“This is the real power of habit: the insight that your habits are what you choose them to be.”

Source: *The Power of Habit*
(Duhigg, 2012)

“Habits are at first cobwebs, at last cables.”

Source: Chinese proverb



Source: *The Power of Habit*
(Duhigg, 2012)

"You can't extinguish a habit; you can only change it, is the 'golden rule' of habit change."

Source: *The Power of Habit*
(Duhigg, 2012)

"The evidence is clear: If you want to change a habit, you must find an alternative routine, and your odds of success go up dramatically when you commit to changing as part of a group. Belief is essential, and it grows out of a communal experience, even if that community is only as large as two people."

Source: *The Power of Habit*
(Duhigg, 2012)

How long does it take to form a habit and can habits be changed?

There is no hard and fast rule to how long it takes to form a habit with one proviso: habits have to "deliver a reward that you actually enjoy." Habits can be changed but only if we keep the same cue and the same reward and insert a new routine.

What are "keystone" habits and why are they so important?

Keystone habits are habits that are essential in our development and in reaching our goals. They matter more to us than other habits because they "give us numerous small senses of victory, serve as the soil from which other habits grow, and give us energy and confidence to do more." Regular physical activity is one example of a keystone habit that triggers widespread change.

What is Duhigg's "framework" for changing habits?

Duhigg's framework is his self-described "attempt to distill," in a very basic way, the tactics that researchers have found for diagnosing and shaping habits within our own lives. He warns that we will all go about changing habits or consciously maintaining healthy habits in our own unique ways and that there are no specific steps or one formula guaranteed to work for every person.

- **Step one – identify the routine:** What's the cue for this routine – hunger, boredom, and so on? What's the reward – a cookie, a change of scenery? The more we know about a routine, the easier it is to change it. To find out we need to do a little experimentation.
- **Step two – experiment with rewards:** There's a reason we follow a less healthy habit and that's why it's important to understand the cravings that drive our behaviours. The goal of this step is to identify the reason we follow a routine – is it from a need to fit in, are we trying to relax, do we get an emotional charge? To figure this out we need to experiment with different rewards and this takes time.
- **Step three – isolate the cue:** All habits have a trigger that tells the brain that we want a specific reward. The key is to identify the cue for every action. To identify a cue, classify habitual cues into one of five categories in order to identify patterns:
 1. Location – where are you?
 2. Time – what time is it?
 3. Emotional state – how are you feeling?
 4. Other people – who else is around?
 5. Immediately preceding action – what preceded the urge?

Record your responses the moment you experience a habit cue over a three-day period.

The “Four Tendencies” provide crucial insight into individual differences. Gretchen Rubin (2015) adds another dimension to knowing ourselves by identifying “distinctions” about fundamental aspects of human nature. She provides the following questions we can ask ourselves to figure out how we’re different from others and how we might tackle habits in a way that suits our particular personal characteristics:

Are you:

- A morning person or a night person?
- A marathoner, a sprinter, or a procrastinator?
- An underbuyer or an overbuyer?
- A simplicity lover or an abundance lover?
- A finisher or an opener?
- A familiarity lover or a novelty lover?
- Promotion-focused or prevention-focused?

“When people exhaust their self-control, what they’re exhausting are the mental muscles needed to think creatively, to focus, to inhibit their impulses, and to persist in the face of frustration and failure. In other words, they are exhausting precisely the mental muscles needed to make a big change.”

Source: *Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard* (Heath and Heath, 2010)

- **Step four – have a plan:** Once our habit loop has been figured out – the reward driving the behavior, the cue triggering it, and the routine itself – we can begin to shift the behavior or consciously maintain it if it is contributing to our overall goal. To develop a plan of action, take all the feedback from the five questions in step three and create a step-by-step blueprint for how to behave when the need to follow a less healthy or less helpful habit surfaces.

Pay Attention to Individual Differences

Like Duhigg, Gretchen Rubin (2015), author of *Better than Before: Mastering the Habits of Our Everyday Lives*, says there is no magic formula for changing and adopting habits. Rubin agrees that what is most important in changing habits is to “know ourselves” and to choose strategies that work for us. As Rubin points out when we try to form a new habit, we’re setting an expectation for ourselves. Therefore, to change our habits, it’s crucial to understand how we respond to both “outer” expectations such as meeting deadlines and “inner” expectations such as getting more sleep.

Know your tendencies

Rubin’s “four tendencies” framework describes how we respond to expectations:

- **Upholders** respond readily to both outer and inner expectations. They wake up in the morning and think, “what’s on the schedule and the ‘to do’ list for today?”
- **Questioners** challenge all expectations, and will meet an expectation only if they think it is justified. They are motivated by reason, logic and fairness. They wake up in the morning and think, “What needs to get done today and why?”
- **Obligers** respond readily to outer expectations, but struggle to meet inner expectations. They are motivated by external accountability. They wake up in the morning and think, “What must I do today?”
- **Rebels** resist both outer and inner expectations. They choose to act from a sense of choice and freedom. They wake up and say, “What do I want to do?”

Note that Rubin has created a quiz that we can complete to help identify our tendencies. It is posted at <https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/1950137/Four-Tendencies-January-2015>.

“Our willpower has made us the most adaptable creatures on this planet, and we’re rediscovering how to help one another use it. We’re learning, once again, that willpower is the virtue that sets our species apart, and that makes each one of us strong.”

Source: *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (Baumeister and Tierney, 2011)

“‘I will’ and ‘I won’t’ power are the two sides of self-control, but they alone don’t constitute willpower. To say no when you need to say no, and yes when you need to say yes, you need a third power: the ability to remember what you really want.”

Source: *The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It* (McGonigal, 2012)

“There is a tendency to think that ‘self-regulation’ is just another way of talking about self-control. We have long seen self-control as a sort of muscle: as having the internal strength to resist an impulse. Self-control is clearly important for children’s ability to deal with the tasks and the temptations that they are confronted with every day (Moffitt et al., 2011; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). But self-regulation represents a very different way of understanding why a child might be having problems with self-control, and more important, what can be done to help that child.”

Source: *Think, Feel, Act – see Calm, Alert and Happy* (Shanker, p. 21, 2013)

The Willpower Factor

Both Duhigg and Rubin identify willpower as an essential factor in any habit change or formation pointing out that we have a limited amount of self-control strength. They point out that as we use our willpower, we deplete it. What this means is that we can’t rely on willpower alone to change or form new habits and underscores the importance of adopting healthy and helpful habits that are ingrained in our brains.

7. Succeed at Self-control

“If we want to improve our lives, willpower is not a bad place to start.”

Kelly McGonigal, 2012

Kelly McGonigal, health psychologist and author of *The Willpower Instinct* agrees with Duhigg and Rubin that willpower is an essential factor in any change we choose to make. In the following section, McGonigal and other experts in the science of willpower provide “need-to-know-and-do” advice about our willpower reserves.

What is Willpower?

Roy Baumeister (see Baumeister and Tierney, 2011), the first psychologist to systematically observe and test the limits of willpower, clarifies that the technical term researchers use for self-control is self-regulation. For a definition of willpower we look to the American Psychological Association (2012) which defines willpower as the “ability to resist short-term temptations in order to meet long-term goals.”

McGonigal (2012) adds to this definition by defining willpower as “the ability to do what matters most, even when it’s difficult or when some part of you doesn’t want to.” This, she says, explains in part why willpower is so difficult. For her, “willpower is the ability to align yourself with the brain system that is thinking about long-term goals – that is thinking about big values rather than short-term needs or desires.”

Willpower as a Muscle

Roy Baumeister’s research, documented in *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011), led to the intriguing theory that “self-control is like a muscle. When used, it gets tired. If we don’t rest the muscle, we can run out of strength entirely, like an athlete who pushes herself to exhaustion.” Subsequent research has supported the idea that willpower is a limited resource. In fact, lack of willpower has been cited as the number one reason

that people struggle to meet their goals (American Psychological Association, 2012).

Conserve and Strengthen Willpower Reserves

The following section draws on a blend of research and practical wisdom from Baumeister, McGonigal and others to provide a sampling of proven strategies which can “train the brain for willpower” (McGonigal, 2012) and increase the strength of our self-control.

Use self-awareness to avoid “willpower failure”

For McGonigal (2012) the first rule of willpower is, “know thyself” because without self-awareness, the self-control system would be useless. No matter what our goals are, we need to keep in mind two basic lessons: our supply of willpower is limited and we use the same resource for many different things. What counts is the exertion whether for tough decisions or for routine tasks and demands. Because there is no obvious “feeling” of willpower depletion, we need to watch for subtle, easily misinterpreted signs such as increased volume of decisions and difficulty in making up our minds about simple things.

Meditate

Neuroscientists have discovered that when we ask the brain to meditate, it gets better not just at meditating but at a wide range of self-control skills. McGonigal suggests starting with this five-minute brain-training meditation exercise:

1. Sit still and stay put.
2. Turn your attention to your breath using the words “inhale” and “exhale” in your mind.
3. When your mind wanders, notice, and bring it back to the breath.

Remember the basics

Start with healthy eating and plenty of sleep. Eating a nutritious and sensible diet can make energy more available to the brain and improve every aspect of willpower. Sleep deprivation – less than six hours a night – causes the prefrontal cortex to lose control over the regions of the brain that create cravings (Konnikova, 2014).

Draw on social support

Change is not often made alone. Find a willpower role model – someone who has accomplished a desired goal. Find a friend, family member, or co-worker who can support any willpower challenges. Even if the goals are not the same, just checking in and encouraging one another can provide a boost of social support to our self-control.

“Meditation is not about getting rid of your thoughts; it’s learning not to get so lost in them that you forget what your goal is. Don’t worry if your focus isn’t perfect with meditation. Just practice coming back to the breath, again and again.”

Source: *The Willpower Instinct*
(McGonigal, 2012)

“Sleep as it turns out, may play a crucial role in our brain’s physiological maintenance. As your body sleeps, your brain is quite actively playing the part of mental janitor: It’s clearing out all the junk that has accumulated as a result of your daily thinking.”

Source: ‘Goodnight. Sleep Clean.’
(Maria Konnikova, 2014)

U.S. President Barack Obama manages decision fatigue by establishing routines. In his view, "You need to remove from your life the day-to-day problems that absorb most people for meaningful parts of their day. You'll see I wear only gray or blue suits. I'm trying to pare down decisions. I don't want to make decisions about what I'm eating or wearing. Because I have too many other decisions to make."

Source: 'Obama's Way'
(Lewis, 2012)

"A small win reduces importance ('this is no big deal'), reduces demand, ('that's all that needs to be done'), and raises perceived skill levels ('I can do at least that'). All three of these factors will tend to make change easier and more self-sustaining."

Source: 'Small Wins: Redefining the Scale of Social Issues'
(Weick, 1984)

Self-monitor

Motivational psychologist Heidi Halvorson (2014) recommends using "if-then" planning to avoid "decision fatigue." She suggests that we decide specific steps needed to complete a task in advance and as important, decide when and where to take them. This will eliminate the need for deliberation when the time comes. Having a plan in place in advance allows us to make decisions in the moment without having to draw on our willpower reserves.

Practice using willpower muscles

Flexing our willpower muscles can strengthen self-control over time. Regularly exercising willpower by pursuing physical fitness has proven to result in stronger willpower in all areas of one's life.

8. Capitalize on Small Wins

"Small wins are a steady application of a small advantage. Once a small win has been accomplished, forces are set in motion that favour another small win."

Karl Weick, 1984

Duhigg's (2012) theory on how to develop and change habits to make them work for us identified small wins as critical because of the power they have to fuel transformative change. Small wins are effective, he argues, because they "leverage tiny advantages into patterns that convince us that bigger achievements are within reach."

What are small wins?

Karl Weick (1984), a prominent organizational psychologist, is credited with coining the term "small win." Weick describes a small win as "a concrete, complete, implemented outcome of moderate importance." By itself, one small win may seem unimportant. However, as he found in his research, "a series of wins at small but significant tasks reveal a pattern that may attract allies, deter opponents, and lower resistance to subsequent proposals. Small wins are controllable opportunities that produce visible results."

Benefits of small wins

Weick draws attention to the benefits of small wins including the following:

- Small wins are like tiny experiments that test implied theories about resistance and opportunity and uncover both resources and barriers that were previously invisible.

“When you have a daunting mountain to climb, it is often best to break it into molehills.”

Source: *The Power of Small Wins*
(Amabile and Kramer, 2011)

- A series of small wins is more structurally sound than a large win because small wins are stable building blocks. Each one requires less coordination to execute. Interruptions such as a change in leadership have limited effects.
- When a solution is put in place with each small win, the next solvable problem often becomes more evident. This occurs because new supporters bring new solutions with them and old opponents change their habits. Additional resources also flow toward winners, which means that slightly larger wins can be attempted.

With these benefits in mind, consider the following ways of capitalizing on small wins.

Identify some meaningful advances on most days

Amabile and Kramer (2011) agree, “Little things can mean a lot for inner work life.” Their research found that over 28 per cent of small events triggered immediate emotional reactions that often had powerful effects on inner work life. Their findings showed that it is critical for teams and for individuals working on complex problems to achieve small wins regularly. Because obstacles are so common in truly important problems, people can become disheartened, unless they can point to some meaningful advance most days. These advances can be minor or even nothing more than extracting insights from the day's failures. This strategy propels long-term goal achievement.

“Chunk it up”

Daniel Coyle (2009) author of *The Talent Code* identifies “chunking” as a strategy that can be used to deepen practice. To illustrate, he points to “kaizen” – which is Japanese for continuous improvement – to show how the strategy of “finding and improving small problems” has helped businesses flourish. The practice involves a focus on tiny incremental changes – improving efficiency on a production line, for example, by shifting a trash bin one foot to the left. As Coyle points out each tiny fix can add up to over a million tiny fixes each year.

Break large problems into smaller ones with concrete achievable goals

“Big, Hairy, Audacious, Goals” (BHAG) – at least those considered to be good BHAGs – have been promoted as providing a “unifying focal point of effort, galvanizing people and creating team spirit as people strive toward a finish line (Collins, 2001).” Research now shows that “big, hairy, audacious, goals” are not only daunting, but they are also too broad to provide useful guidance for day-to-day work (Sutton, 2010).

“Baby steps are the royal road to skill.”

Source: *The Talent Code: Greatness Isn't Born. It's Grown. Here's How.*
(Daniel Coyle, 2009)

“Incremental innovations can pave the way for breakthroughs. Simple ideas can revolutionize industries. Small wins can have big impact. Model projects offer proof of concept to rally support for larger efforts.”

Source: *Small Wins Go a Long Way in Improving U.S. Rail Transportation*
(Kanter, 2015)

Limit “quick hits”

A “quick hit” or “easy victory” creates a clear win but can lead people to draw the wrong lessons about how to sustain change. In contrast, when the approach used by change leaders is the continuous application of a small change advantage there is no need to announce the change or force people to change. The steadily applied advantage pulls rather than pushes people to consider new ways of working (Kanter, 2015).

9. Embrace the “Happiness Advantage”

“Happiness is not the belief that we don’t need to change; it’s the realization that we can.”

Shawn Achor, 2010

Shawn Achor (2010), psychologist and author of *The Happiness Advantage*, is a tireless advocate of happiness as the precursor to success – this, in spite of an apparent “backlash” against happiness (e.g. Beard, 2015; Hutson, 2015; Kahn, 2016). For Achor, people who “cultivate a positive mind-set perform better in the face of challenge.” He calls this the “happiness advantage” and argues that we can “train” our brain to be positive in the same way that we train our bodies at the gym to become healthy and fit.

What is Happiness?

There is widespread agreement among researchers that there is no single meaning to happiness. Happiness is relative to the person experiencing it. This is why scientists often refer to happiness as “subjective well-being because it is based on how we each feel about our own lives (Achor, 2010).” Positivity, positive emotions, human flourishing, can all be used to describe the phenomenon and emotional state of happiness.

Why Pay Attention to Happiness?

In spite of the criticism about happiness as a desirable emotional state, Achor (2012) points to findings in his research in organizations that have shown how happiness and optimism actually fuel performance and achievement, giving companies a competitive edge. He has found that “positivity” – the cultivation of happiness or positive emotions, has a direct causal relationship with the productivity and success of individuals and teams. Positivity includes gratitude and appreciation for others as well as favorable self-regard, and can be fostered both by thoughts and by purposeful activity. Its benefits include increased creativity, higher productivity, fewer fatigue

Learn more about “savouring positivity” and “growing our mindsets” [*in Ideas Into Action – Exploring the “Social” Personal Leadership Resources: Perceiving Emotions, Managing Emotions, and Acting in Emotionally Appropriate Ways.*](#)

Seven Specific, Actionable, and Proven Patterns that Predict Success and Achievement

- 4. The Happiness Advantage:** retrains our brains to capitalize on positivity
- 5. The Fulcrum and the Lever:** teaches us to adjust our mindset (our fulcrum) to give us the power (lever) to succeed
- 6. The Tetris Effect:** teaches our brains to spot patterns of possibility so we can see and seize opportunity
- 7. Falling Up:** refers to finding the mental path to help us deal with and learn from failure
- 8. The Zorro Circle:** teaches us to gain control of our emotions beginning first with small, manageable goals.
- 9. The 20-Second Rule:** shows how, by making small energy adjustments, we can develop positive habits.
- 10. Social Investment:** teaches us how to invest more in one of the greatest predictors of success and excellence – our social network.

Source: *The Happiness Advantage*
(Achor, 2010)

Flow is “deep absorption in an activity that is intrinsically interesting. Individuals in a state of flow see the activity as worthwhile even if no further goal is reached. Flow is believed to occur at the point of balance between the challenge inherent in the task at hand and the skills required to accomplish it.”

Source: *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement in Everyday Life*
(Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

symptoms, improved chances of career advancement and greater engagement.

Misconceptions about Happiness

Many people think that success leads to happiness, but it is actually the other way around. A decade of research in positive psychology and neuroscience has found that happiness is the precursor to success – not the result (Achor (2010)). Another common misunderstanding is that our genetics, our environment, or a combination of the two determines how happy we are. Unquestionably, both factors have an impact but one’s general sense of well-being is surprisingly flexible. The habits we cultivate, the way we interact with coworkers, how we think about stress – all of these, Achor says, can be managed to increase our happiness and our chances of success.

Rewire Our Brains

Achor (2010, 2012, 2014), argues that we can rewire our brains to make ourselves happy by practising simple happiness exercises every day for three weeks. He offers the following as examples.

Develop positive habits

Recent research on neuroplasticity – the ability of the brain to change even in adulthood – reveals that as we develop new habits, we renew our brains. Engaging in one brief positive exercise every day for as little as three weeks can have a lasting impact.

Deepen social connections and offer to help others

The benefits of social support are not just physical – social support is the greatest predictor of happiness during periods of high stress. High levels of social support predict longevity as reliably as regular exercise does, and low social support is as damaging as high blood pressure (Smith, Holt-Lunstad, & Layton, 2010).

Infuse positivity into surroundings

Make our places of work positive spaces. Physical environment can have an enormous impact on our mindset and sense of well-being – personalizing our workspaces can inspire positive feelings and help broaden the amount of possibilities our brains can process, making us more thoughtful, creative, and open to new ideas.

List three gratitudes

Follow the practice used in several top companies by setting aside a specific time each day to keep a “gratitude list.” By taking just five minutes to write or share three things that made you feel grateful

Everyone has a characteristic set of strengths and virtues. Research in the discipline of positive psychology (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) suggests that there are at least 24 strengths and virtues that are recognized in most cultures that can be captured within the following: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

“When faced with an opportunity or challenge, purposefully recruiting your strengths provides energy, focus, and momentum. Keeping a robust list of strengths, as a visual reminder, encourages accessing further potential in conversations, experiences, and planning.”

Source: *MentorCoaching*
(Sharpe & Nishimura, 2016)

“Stress can generally be considered as the experience of anticipating or encountering adversity in one’s goal-related efforts (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010).”

Source: Cited in ‘Rethinking Stress: The Role of Mindsets in Determining the Stress Response’ (Crum, Salovey & Achor, 2013)

over the last 24 hours, we are training our brains to tune into the positives and opportunities.

Keep active to keep fit

Physical activity has been shown in health science as releasing pleasure-inducing chemicals called endorphins. It also improves motivation and feelings of mastery, reduces stress and anxiety, and helps us get into the “flow” – a feeling of total engagement.

Make use of a signature strength

Each time we use a skill we’re good at, we experience a burst of positivity. Even more fulfilling is using a character strength, a trait that is deeply embedded in who we are. Martin Seligman and colleagues catalogued the 24 cross-cultural character strengths that most contribute to human flourishing, and developed a survey to identify an individual’s signature strengths. Take the free survey at www.viasurvey.org.

Think Positively about Stress

As Shawn Achor (2012) points out, “it’s important to remember that stress has an upside.” World expert on resilience, Dennis Charney (2013), along with his colleagues have studied the connections between stress and illnesses and have shown that not everyone succumbs to their trials and tribulations. In fact, a consistent message that emerged from their research is that many people who have traumatic experiences were “emotionally healthy.” In the face of great adversity, these individuals demonstrated reservoirs of resilience because of a phenomenon called “stress inoculation.” That is, they drew on past stressful experiences in their lives to help them cope with and bounce back from the challenges they faced.

Kelly McGonigal (2015) challenges the conventional view that stress is bad. In *The Upside of Stress*, McGonigal argues that stress can “transform fear into courage, isolation into connection, and suffering into meaning.” She argues that we should think of stress as a “signal of meaning,” and not that we are inadequate to the challenges in life.

To substantiate her claim she draws attention to surveys she conducted that show people who say they are stressed out and worry, are also more likely to say their lives are meaningful. She points out that this is a mindset shift. Instead of seeing stress as a sign that something’s wrong, and then choosing a response that’s more destructive – we need to think of one concrete step we can take to reduce the stress. In this way, we can nudge our brains to maintain or return to a positive and productive mindset.

10. Build a Culture of Confidence

“Remember, it’s not enough just to feel confident. You have to do the work.”

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, 2014

In *Confidence*, Harvard Business School professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter (2004) draws on her study of success and failure in organizations across sectors to show that it is confidence that makes the difference between success and failure.

Deliver and Reinforce Organizational Confidence

Kanter provides a prescription for organizations to deliver confidence that consists of the following three ways:

1. **Espouse these high standards in messaging:** This means “grounded optimism” as opposed to delivering “pep talks.” Messaging about positive expectations must be based on specific facts that justify the optimism.
2. **Exemplify these standards in the behaviour and actions:** Leaders serve as role models leading through the power of personal example.
3. **Establish formal mechanisms to provide a structure for acting on those standards:** Leaders must deliver confidence at every level – self-confidence, confidence in one another, confidence in the system, and the confidence of external stakeholders and the public that their support is warranted.

For Kanter leadership is “plural” – leaders supporting leadership. Rather than self-confidence, it is confidence in other people that is the real secret of leadership. Leaders “construct and reinforce the cornerstones of confidence.” This represents three imperatives, one for each stone:

1. **Individual and system accountability:** Foster straight talk; communicate expectations clearly; make information transparent and accessible.
2. **Mutual respect, communication, and collaboration:** Structure collaborative conversations; reinforce respect and inclusion; define joint goals and collective definitions of success.
3. **Initiative, imagination, and innovation:** Open channels for new ideas; treat people as experts in their own work; encourage small wins and grassroots innovations.

Grow Individual Confidence

To develop a more confident “you” – or a more confident organization, community, family, or team – we must know what the challenges are and also what is helpful. To find the confidence to work toward

“Confidence isn't optimism or pessimism, and it's not a character attribute. It's the expectation of a positive outcome. It is an assessment of a situation that sparks motivation. If you have confidence, you're motivated to put in the effort, to invest the time and resources, and to persist in reaching the goal. It's not confidence itself that produces success; it's the investment and the effort.”

Source: 'Overcome the Eight Barriers to Confidence' (Kanter, 2014)

“Leadership is not about the leader; it is about how he or she builds the confidence of everyone else. Leaders are responsible for both the big structures that serve as the cornerstones of confidence, and for the human touches that shape a positive emotional climate to inspire and motivate people.”

Source: *Confidence* (Kanter, 2004)

Confidence is real only when it is grounded in reality. The positive outlook that optimists project does not come from ignoring or denying problems. Optimists simply assume that problems are temporary and can be solved, so optimists naturally want more information about problems, because then they can get to work and do something.

Source: *Confidence* (Kanter, 2004)

personal and professional goals, try the following practices shown to be effective in research (e.g., Grant, 2013; Kanter, 2004, 2014; Reivich and Shatté, 2002):

- **Challenge negative thoughts**
Identify the origin of self-defeating assumptions – you think you can't so you don't – in order to overcome their effects and learn to master the tasks at hand.
- **Set realistic goals that are not too big or distant**
Tackling enormous goals can actually undermine confidence.
- **Notice, analyze and celebrate success**
We must first take note of success and then assess the value of it. Keeping a “success journal” that catalogues skills, talents, and strategies that were used to bring about positive outcomes builds positive self-perception and emotion.
- **Use process praise**
Process praise which focuses on the efforts and the strategies used to bring about a success can lead to greater mastery, persistence, and achievement because it focuses on what people can control; i.e., the work that was done and the approaches that were used.
- **Take advantage of your support system**
“Do-it-yourself-ing” is problematic. Think about building the confidence of others and creating a culture in which everyone is more likely to succeed. In *Give and Take*, Wharton professor Adam Grant (2013) shows that giving can boost happiness and meaning thereby motivating people to work harder. Supporting others makes it easier to ensure that they support you.
- **Lead with your strengths**
Take ownership of any mistakes but avoid being defensive without cause.
- **Take responsibility for your own behaviour**
Avoid the blame game – instead of grumbling about past troubles, move on. “Confidence is the art of moving on.”
- **Anticipate setbacks**
Confidence is not blind optimism or thinking that everything will be fine no matter what. Instead, it grows from knowing that there will be mistakes, problems, and small losses on the way to success.
- **Beware of overconfidence.**
Kanter argues that confidence is a sweet spot between despair and arrogance. Jim Collins and his colleagues (2001, 2009) refer to overconfidence as “hubris born of success.” Typically, when past accomplishments create a sense of invulnerability and a guarantee of future success, hubris has set in.



Part D – Learning More: Resources Recommended by Ontario Leaders

- *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life* by Martin Seligman (1990) shows how to chart a new approach to living with "flexible optimism." Drawing from decades of clinical research, Seligman outlines easy-to-follow strategies such as recognizing "explanatory style" and how it influences your life.
- *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life's Greatest Challenges* by Steven Southwick and Dennis Charney (2012) who weave the latest scientific findings about resilience together with extraordinary stories of people who have overcome seemingly impossible situations. In doing so the authors identify ten "resilience factors" that can help us all learn to become more resilient.
- *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles of Positive Psychology that Fuel Success and Performance at Work* by Shawn Achor (2010) provides seven actionable principles, as taught in Harvard's Happiness course and to companies worldwide, for improving performance and maximizing potential by becoming happier.
- *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* by Charles Duhigg (2012) a *New York Times* journalist, provides fascinating insight into the nuts and bolts of habit formation – and change. The book provides a framework for understanding how habits work and a guide to experimenting with changing them.
- *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work* by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer (2011) shows how workday events can make or break employees' inner work lives. The authors explain how leaders can foster progress, enhance inner work life and boost self-efficacy every day.
- *The Resilience Factor: Essential Skills for Overcoming Life's Inevitable Obstacles* by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté (2003) provides seven proven strategies for dealing with unexpected challenges and conflicts. Using years of research, the authors show that the secret to resilience lies in accurate thinking not positive thinking.
- *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* by Stephen Covey (1989) presents a holistic, integrated, principle-centred approach for solving personal and professional problems. Covey provides a step-by-step pathway for living with fairness, integrity, honesty and human dignity.

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