

Your High Performance Zone (Part One)

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As leaders we have a responsibility to keep our mind, body, and heart in good condition. While we can get along without balance for a time, it always catches up with us. The more deliberate you are about that balance, the more likely you are to be effective, to get the results you want, and to be fulfilled as a leader.

It's to be expected that there are going to be times when this dynamic balance is off. Our hearts have their ups and downs with the tough stuff as well as the fun and more feel-good aspects of life. As we age, it takes more effort to keep our bodies in balance. Our minds, along with perceptions, knowledge, skills, ego, blind spots, assessments, judgments and the rest -- can, depending on the situation or issues of the day, help or hinder our own efforts, and those we lead.

But in the bigger picture of your life -- a time scale of years -- being deliberately "in shape" mind, body and heart, will give you a personal and competitive advantage as a leader, and help you sustain effective results from the foundation of what I call your High Performance Zone.

The goal of being fit of body and mind is understandable, but what does it mean to be "fit of heart"? I call the heart the "big compass." It's the pointer that leads to everything of significance you do. Sustainable leadership of others is very much about your ability to inspire them, and inspiration only comes from one place: the heart.

Being in your high performance zone from the perspective of heart means taking the time regularly and often, to reflect, and to be curious with yourself about what is in your heart. Knowing yourself means knowing your heart. Your feelings point to what's working or not working in your life. If you are paying attention to them, they will reveal your standards, expectations, where you are strong, and where you can be stronger. Getting to know what's in your heart is critical, just like exercising and resting your body and mind.

If you take a few moments to rate the various areas, or spokes, of your life, then rate how you feel physically, emotionally and mentally (core) you will see patterns and relationships that give you new insight. I do that with clients – I have them complete a "Wheel of Life" (which is available to anyone on my website, under the Cool Tools tab). I then check in with them, mind, body, and heart, each time we talk. I use the insights that I get from doing that to help guide my coaching work. It helps to do this type of check in and assessment in conversation with someone else, as I have found with my clients and my own coach. There's nothing like having an observer to help with our blind spots.

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I recently worked with a client to complete their Wheel of Life and then used the mind, body, heart check in with her. She is a successful entrepreneur who wants to build her business to the next level, but found herself putting off the actions she needed to take to do it. Looking around the wheel we found that in the areas of professional accomplishment and goals she was rating herself fairly low, even though she had done very well in building a successful business; much lower than one would expect from someone so accomplished. Next, I asked about the core. She mentioned that physically she was often tired and stressed, and it showed up as neck tension and knots in her stomach when she had “down time”. Finally, in the heart department, she was feeling angry with herself for procrastinating on the steps she needed to take to build her business.

Next I asked her to imagine how these things—the lower ratings in her professional and goals areas, the physical signs, and the anger at herself—were connected. After a bit of discussion, what appeared was a new insight, and one very helpful in our coaching work. She said that she had come from a poor family, and had already accomplished more than anyone else she grew up with, including her parents. For herself, she said she had accomplished more than she had any “right to expect”. So while in her mind she knew she was capable of more, and wanted more, she had what authors Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey called in their November 2001 Harvard Business Review article “The Real Reason People Won’t Change” a “Competing Commitment”. Her self-limiting behavior was related to her belief that she had already done too well professionally, which was a commitment that competed with her desire for business growth. Notice the heart acted as the compass to point to the issue, and one that I’m happy to say we addressed in coaching.

The level of effectiveness you operate at is directly related to how well you understand and maintain your core (mind, body, and heart.) Taking the time to listen to what it’s telling you, even given the challenging and demanding world of a leader, is not frivolous or self-indulgent. Paying attention to and addressing issues with mind, body and heart, whether on your own or working with an expert or trusted advisor, is a powerful way for you to lead from a foundation of clarity and confidence; your high performance zone!

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