



Insights from Leadership Fellows

# **Rebalancing our lives as leaders**

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**Society of Leadership Fellows**

St George's House, Windsor Castle

# 21 Introduction

We regularly talk to Leadership Fellows about how we can best develop this series of Leadership Insights, so that you can gain as much as possible from the reports of Conversations that you have not been able to join.

The responses we have had are that in general you want reports that highlight key themes in as few words as possible.

Sometimes a topic – such as integrity in leadership – might require more words to open up some complex issues. In general, though, the message has been that the shorter the word count, the better!

This report is inspired by our 21st Leadership Conversation on July 19-20 on “You as a leader – in July 2021”.

It was actually one of our most inspirational Conversations yet and so this gives us an added incentive to share the key insights in as few words as possible so that as many Fellows as possible have time to scan them.

Because of our increased zeal for brevity, we’re taking the risk of leaving the “big idea” until page 9 onwards.

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# “What would a better version of me look like?”

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We asked ourselves what sorts of leaders we want to be in three years time.

As we explored this question in small groups, a number of us quickly came to the view that we can't answer this question just in relation to our lives at work.

We need to answer it in relation to the whole of our lives.

This is when it got difficult and we had to confront some hard truths.

We might have been able to wriggle off this hook and avoid some moments of reckoning.

But one Leadership Fellow made this impossible for us, when he answered the question that we had set ourselves with another one:

- *“What would a better version of me look like in three years time?”*

Aargh! Now we had to talk about the whole of our lives.

## **A truth we didn't want to face**

As we broadened our discussions in this way, one truth quickly presented itself.

It was a truth that some of us didn't want to face.

But once we had engaged with it we couldn't look away.

# We over-invest in our working lives as leaders

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When we talk about our lives as leaders, our minds nearly always go straight to our lives at work.

We know that in our relationships at home, in our family and among our friends and in the community, we exercise all sorts of different leadership roles.

Yet when we think of leadership we first think of the role of ours that enables us to “put food on the table”.



## **Little left to give**

In this role, we drive ourselves so hard to achieve what we want that we often have little left to give by the time we get home.

We have poured whatever we have to give, and sometimes more besides, into trying to be the leader that we want to be at work.

## **More passive**

At home we become more passive, and more of a recipient.

*“What’s on television, darling?”* With iPhone and iPad lined up alongside us, ready for occasional texting and short emails when we feel we can get away with it, we go through the motions of being “present”.

We are, physically, and that's often just about it.

## **Not emotionally present**

There are so many times when we are not emotionally present and our partner and family know it.

Maybe we have a few brief bursts of engagement with the people we love in our non-work life.

But in truth we know that these bursts of energy come out of what is left over, after we have given as much as we can to our life at work.

# Three resolves to rebalance our lives as leaders

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## 1 **Don't "boil the ocean"**

Get real about priorities and the 80/20 rule.

Instead of taking on 80% or more ourselves, focus on the critical 20% and apply ourselves – as leaders – to building and empowering those around us to take on the 80%.

If we tell ourselves that we are indispensable, we're on a hiding to nothing.

## 2 **Stop being "the sludge in the frying pan"**

That's how one Leadership Fellow described himself by the time he gets home in the evenings, with virtually nothing left to give.

It doesn't just demean us, it demeans our partner and family.

We can change this. After all, we are leaders!

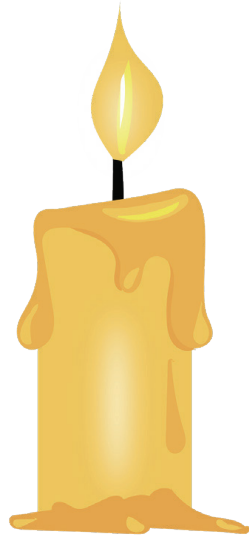
## 3 **Be emotionally present**

We talk about how we fail to be emotionally present when we're at home.

If we can change this, we might be in a better position to change how we are at work, too.

After all, if we were more emotionally present at work we would be more aware when we reach those moments of overload.

We would hear the voices within us warning of the dangers of burn-out.



Leaders who think they can boil the ocean...  
**can't hold a candle to those who succeed  
through leveraging the talents of others**

# Three steps to help change our mindset

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## 1 **Remind ourselves that leadership is a privilege**

Some leaders can seem so burdened down by the pressures of leadership. We can almost see their shoulders slouched forward, over-burdened with the pressures of office.

Once we tell ourselves that we are privileged, doesn't it feel different.

We feel blessed to be able to drive change and impact on others in the ways that we do.

We walk tall in so many different ways.

## 2 **Value the journey and not just the outcomes**

This is one of the things that changes once we see ourselves as privileged.

The burdened leader is weighed down by the pressure of wanting to achieve so many outcomes.

The privileged leader values the journey, as well as being driven by outcomes, too.

It does matter **how** we achieve what we want, and how much members of the team feel that they are essential to this success.

## 3 **Aim to succeed through others**

The privileged leader who appreciates their route as well as the destination gets their kicks out of succeeding through the actions of others.

We see ourselves as discoverers and promoters of talent, and delight in watching others shine.

Our role is to “know the moments that matter the most” and make sure we are present then, in every sense.



*Imagine a drum roll... and it's getting louder!*

# The greatest ideas are the *simplest*

**William Golding** *Lord of the Flies*

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# Achieving a new work-life balance as leaders: how about **colour coding** ALL of our lives?

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Quite a number of leaders have colour codes that help you - and your PA - in organising your life at work.

A number haven't yet reached the stage of having any sort of colour devoted to your personal time at work that you might use for thinking and preparation before meetings. But you're moving in the right direction!

A small number of leaders have taken this concept on to the next stage and developed a colour coding system for the whole of your lives.

## **Five colours in this holistic system**

In Windsor, we were attracted by the image of using a “box of crayons” to draw our life. We envisaged ourselves using five different colours for this holistic system, covering:



WORK

FAMILY

ME TIME

FRIENDS

VOLUNTEERING

If you like this idea, you might want to start by asking what the ideal should be.

First, however, we need to embrace the **real challenge** of asking how much of our energies we currently invest in our working life and how much we have left for the rest of our life.

# How do you allocate your time and energy at the moment?

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Can we think in terms of each of us having a relatively finite amount of energy that we share with others across our life?

On this basis, can we start with two killer questions:

- 1 ***What proportion of your energy do you pour into your life as a leader at work?***
- 2 ***How much does this leave you for family/friends/volunteering and YOU?***

Please be brutally honest with yourself in this moment.

## **Starting with your time as a leader, at work**

We know that some of us have spent years trying to avoid question one.

How much of your energy do you commit to your life at work?

60%? 70%? More?

- Being really, really honest, are you sure that if you say “maybe around 70%” you’re not deceiving yourself?

Suppose we settle on 80%!

It might sound incredibly high to some – and for others, it might feel as if you have got off rather lightly!

This 80% figure might well be on the low side if you’re one of those who “*feel guilty when you’re not working*”, even when you’re in designated family time.

# Looking at the residue, and how you use this time

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Whether you are left with 20% of your overall energy, or slightly less or more, you now need to ask how you share this out at the moment.

- How much of you do you share with your **partner and family**?
- How much do you hold back for “**you time**”
  - whether that’s pursuing a hobby or a sport or just curled up on the settee with a book?
- How much time do you give to **voluntary work**
  - whether that’s being an unpaid Non-Exec Director on a Board, or just occasionally helping with a Saturday night soup run for those sleeping rough, or whatever it might be?
- And how much of yourself do you give to your time with **close friends**?

## No time to spare for this luxury

When we discussed this in Windsor, some Fellows said that they haven’t had close out-of-work friends for years.

It’s as if they told themselves some years ago that they no longer had time to spare for this luxury.

As a result, they were anxious about how they would go about changing this.

## Knowing the baseline that you are starting from

Now you know the baseline that you’re starting from.

Even though you might not want to shout about the figures that you’ve come up with, at least you have confronted the truth of how you allocate your time and energy at the moment.

Now let’s ask what you would like the position to be in twelve months time.

# Setting your 12 month target for yourself at work

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Once again, let's start with the key question:

- ***In twelve months time, how much of your total personal energy system would you like to be investing in your leadership at work?***

Could you keep that to 50% or does that feel unrealistically low?

Some successful leaders manage to split their time on the basis of:

- 1/3 for work
- 1/3 for family and friends
- 1/3 for “me time” and volunteering.

## **Offered up without condition**

We know that however you divide your energy “cake”, so much of the cake has been offered up to your leadership at work without condition up to now.

This is the key factor that needs to change.

## **You need a realistic target**

Whatever percentage figure you set for the proportion of your overall energy that you give to work, the key is that you are setting some sort of limit.

You are **taking back control**.

When you are setting your 12 month target, please remember that it's better to have a 60% target and aim to beat it than to have a third/ a third/ a third target and dismiss that as a silliness in a few months time.

You need a realistic target that you have some faith in.

This will then enable you to move on to the next stage and ask how you want to divvy up that which is left among the other strands of your life.

## The other **four** colour codes

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Out of what is left, please now think of yourself in twelve months time and ask how you would like to be dividing your energy and time between

- your partner/family
- yourself
- your voluntary commitments and
- your friends.

### **Valuing each colour in its own right**

As you answer this question, it will be important to think through how you want to value and protect the energy that you invest in these parts of your life in a way that you have maybe never quite done before.

In this situation, the real challenge is to leave behind the old habit of defining each colour in terms of that which is **left over** once we've given all that we need to give to work.

Now you are creating new limits and boundaries, so that each colour here exists on its own terms and in its own right.

### **Sharing your promise with those you are close to**

Once you are clear what you're aiming for, it is important to challenge yourself on whether this actually is a **promise** that you are making to yourself.

If it is, it could be really good to share this with those you are close to, because it is a promise that you are making to them, too.



## Agreeing practical steps for moving forward

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For those who are promising to increase your emotional commitment to your partner and family, it can help a lot if you share with them a small number of practical steps that you have in mind to help you in making this transition.

The key here is to get specific - and **put it out there!**

You will have to let go of some well-established habits, and you know that they became established in the first place through you putting yourself in a frame of mind that involved a fairly high degree of denial.

### **Four specific steps you could take straight away**

For severe workaholics (and there are a few of us around!) it could be a really significant step forward to say:

- i You won't take your iPhone/iPad or laptop into the bedroom again. You will close the lid on your laptop whenever you are in a family situation, unless you agree that there is a **compelling reason** for why you need to keep half an eye on your Inbox (you know you need to make it difficult for yourself here, or nothing will change!)
- ii For at least one day at the weekend you will not look at your Inbox at all, and you'll expect to stand by this undertaking as a point of honour
- iii For key work colleagues who occasionally need to communicate with you on weekday evenings or at weekends, you will agree a certain out-of-work time zone when you can receive urgent telephone calls, on the basis that any calls at other times will go straight to your answerphone
- iv You will also agree that beyond a certain time in the evening you will not respond to any texts or emails from work colleagues, unless you can describe the situation as an emergency whilst keeping a straight face!

# An ongoing process of negotiation

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We need our partners and families and friends to help us navigate quite a tricky transition here.

We first need to **want** to make this transition, and to be clear in our minds that the better version of ourselves that we want to be in the future requires us to change the balance between our working lives and the rest of our lives.

Changing this balance and then maintaining the new balance once we have achieved it will require an ongoing process of negotiation and adjustment, accompanied – hopefully! – by lots of affirmation of all the good things that are being made possible as we move forward.

Once we are no longer “boiling the ocean” and wouldn’t even joke about being the “sludge at the bottom of the frying pan”, won’t that be brilliant!

## Having honest discussions at home

The great appeal of the colour coding idea is that it forces us to be honest with ourselves.

Once we have achieved this, it will be so much easier to have the discussions that we need to have at home about how we want to reform ourselves.

Whilst this might initially be greeted by an element of scepticism, we know that there will be a huge amount of goodwill towards us from all who really want the best for us.

What an act of leadership!

And doesn’t it show the importance of **self-leadership** for the fully rounded leader.

**You are**

**taking back**

**control**

**as a leader**

# No more denial!



Okay, the phrase “fully rounded leader” might feel a little ambitious at the moment!

The fact is, though, that if you pick up this idea of colour coding to try and move towards the better version of yourself that you want to become across your entire life, that will be a really big deal.

You will be able to say to your partner,

*“I buried my head in the sand for so long! And now it feels like a lifetime ago since we were together in the same room and I wasn’t even emotionally present....”*

