

# Being a leader can be a lonely existence - how to cope?

'It's tough at the top' as the old saying goes, and whilst to the world at large achieving the status of 'leader' is seen to be a positive attribute, it can sometimes feel like a challenging and isolating place to be.

Here are our three top tips for surviving life at the top:

## Tip 1. How to be a leader of others

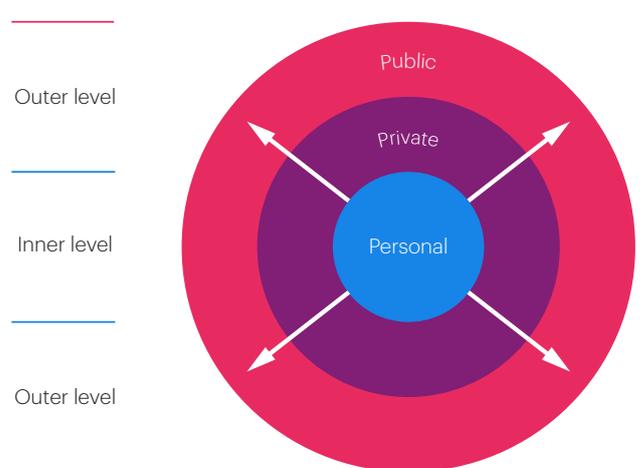
Leading others involves wearing a number of different hats and operating in range of different situations. This can sometimes lead us to question our identify as a leader. Having the self-insight to distinguish the appropriate 'persona' to adopt and then developing these persona will help reinforce a sense of personal integrity.

In 2001, James Scouller described Three Levels of Leadership which is a useful model when thinking about yourselves and your different leadership hats. The three levels are: public, private and personal.

The first two levels – public and private leadership – are “outer” or “behavioural” levels. Scouller distinguished between the behaviours involved in influencing two or more people simultaneously (what he called “public leadership”) from the behaviour needed to select and influence individuals one to one (which he called private leadership). Ask yourself how you present yourself on the public stage as opposed to your interactions with individuals. What aspects of your style would you like to emphasise or down play in these different situations? How do you modify your intrinsic style in response to the other parties involved? What could you do more of, less of or differently in these two situations?

The third level – personal leadership – is an “inner” level and concerns a person's leadership presence, knowhow, skills, beliefs, emotions and unconscious habits. “At its heart are the leader's self-awareness, his progress toward self-mastery and technical competence, and his sense of connection with those around him. It's the inner core, the source, of a leader's outer leadership effectiveness.” How would you define your leadership presence? How might others define it? What aspects of your leadership presence would you like to build upon?

## Three levels of leadership model:

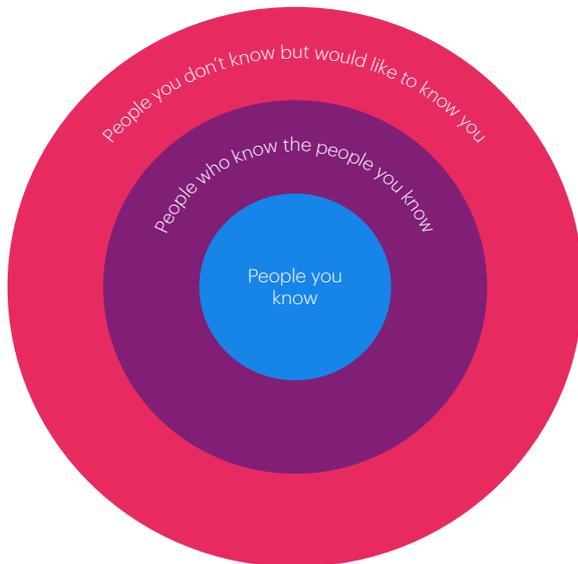


## Tip 2. How to be a leader amongst others

Having friends in high places is always useful but in this context, we mean friends who, by virtue of their sharing the same kind of role and position of accountability, really empathise with the challenges that you face on a daily basis. Similarly, people who have met those challenges and who are prepared to share ideas, best practice and outcomes will help boost your own knowledge bank. Networking is one of the most powerful tools to extend your contacts and find 'friends' with whom you can create a mutual support group.

Professional social media (such as LinkedIn) can be useful in searching people out. However, to make it work effectively you need to post regularly, follow up on contacts and give them a reason to want to talk to you personally. Having a large contact list does not necessarily lead to mutually useful relationships but is a good first step to getting yourself 'out there'

Alternatively, consider joining professional bodies and participating in events that are of interest to you. Get in touch with your peers within your customers', suppliers', agencies' organisations to see how you can learn from each other. Take the conversation with social acquaintances beyond the immediate context and suggest benchmarking visits to each others' places of work, staff exchanges, mutual interest groups.



Building trust does take time but having a friendship group with shared professional interests outside your workplace will reduce any sense of isolation.

### Tip 3. How to be a leader living with others

Getting the work life balance right is a tough call – it's virtually impossible to please all the people all the time. However, viewing your 'other life' as an integral part of your role as a leader can help assuage the feeling that time spent with family and friends somehow feels like an indulgence.

You need time to reflect, recharge the batteries, and keep the sense of why you are putting yourself through the isolation that leading your organisation incurs.

According to a recent survey by employment specialists, there is a close correlation between levels of commitment to personal life, career, job and company. The conclusion is that where commitment to personal life reduces there is corresponding reduction in commitment to work. Keeping things in balance delivers benefits all round.

So, try applying some of the leadership discipline you adopt at work to your personal life:

- Set some personal ambitions that will also have a positive impact on your professional life
- Create realistic boundaries around your private and public life (eg no emails after a specific time) and address incursions

- Prioritise significant family and social events and activities to balance the needs of friends and family members with well as business pressures
- Carry out routine, straightforward tasks just before leaving work so you have started to adjust your pace
- Take time to reflect, assess and improve your 'performance' in your personal life
- Consider alternative ways of working – telecommuting, flexitime, varying core working hours and location

No-one on his death bed ever looked up into the eyes of their family and friends and said, I wish I'd spent more time at the office!



Lesley Fleming  
(Senior Consultant at Bourton Group)  
April 2017

Lesley is a senior Organisation Development and Change Management consultant. She specialises in the people aspect of change, focusing on developing leaders, teams and individuals to enable them to introduce and sustain business improvement methodologies, such as Lean. She helps leaders to understand the operational and behavioural changes required to sustain Lean Thinking against a backdrop of rapidly changing political and economic climates. Lesley has developed a broad range of consultancy skills through leading and delivering major performance improvement programmes for her clients.

Bourton Group has supported many businesses from a wide range of industries to implement Lean improvement techniques via tailored engagement programs.

We work collaboratively to deliver on efficiency objectives and targets, with returns on investment of over 20:1 being reported, along with wider benefits of reducing waste, decreasing time to complete activities and improvements to quality – all of which have been directly attributed to Lean.