

9

Skills for Being Whole

Acting with Integrity

The second Total Leadership principle is to be whole: to act with integrity, striving to produce a feeling of oneness (“integrity” stems from the Latin *integer*, which means whole or complete). Acting with integrity demands respecting that you are a person who plays a number of important roles and practicing the skills that enable you to do so purposefully.

Clarifying what’s most important to you, the first principle, is essential. But that’s only the starting point. You also must embrace, serve, and draw strength from the various people who matter to you so that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. In this chapter I suggest activities you can do to make these skills a part of how you go about navigating the hurly-burly of every day, bringing greater coherence to it all by cultivating allies and giving projects in the different parts of your life the attention they need. At the same time, you must be smart about braiding these fibers as one.

Skill: Clarify Expectations

Any fool can know. The point is to understand.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

Certain practices can help you strengthen your ability to listen well—to understand the interests of others—while advocating what’s important to you. Bruce Springsteen is especially good at clarifying expectations. You can start by identifying who matters most to you, and then consider what you think they need from you. Then talk with them, and take mindful steps to increase the focus you put on them and the conversations you have with them.

Exercise: Stakeholder Expectations

Think of an important person in your life, someone who matters to you and who you believe has a stake in your future. Imagine how he would answer this question from you: “What are the main things you want or need from me?” Then write whatever comes to mind that he might say: attention, emotional support, material resources, information, a point of view about an important topic—anything. Write your responses in as much detail as you can. Repeat the same exercise for other important people at work or in school, in your home or family, and among your community or social circle. This exercise will help you lay the foundation for identifying what your stakeholders need from you, and vice versa.

Then think of a conversation that you would like to have with one of your close friends but that you’ve been avoiding (about his constant lateness), family members (about resolving a conflict on parenting), or work colleagues (about how to manage a client dispute). Before you engage in this conversation, ask another trusted friend to pretend to play that person’s role in a conversation, after

you provide background about your relationship. Run through scenarios of how that person might respond. How did you react in each scenario? What did you learn from the role-play that will help you prepare for the actual conversation and your ability to blend both inquiry (listening well) and advocacy (sharing your point of view)?

Then, once you've had the real conversation, reflect on what transpired and how you might do this differently with other dear friends or colleagues, and repeat the cycle. Most of us don't usually take time to practice expressing ourselves and reflecting on how we react to others. Role-playing can prepare you for meaningful and productive conversations. The result is often clarity and insight about what you can do differently to better meet others' needs, as well as support from them about how they can help you to meet yours.¹

Exercise: A Better Connection

Identify a relationship in which communication could use improvement: in your team at work, between you and your teenage son, or with a neighbor. Think about what you could do to improve the communication by creating connections with a rich, genuine, enlivening, and mutual exchange of ideas and feelings. Research by Jane Dutton and her colleagues at the University of Michigan has shown these simple ways to create better connections.²

- Commit to being present, attentive, and affirming. (Put the smartphone away!)
- Communicate your desire to give your help on what matters to him.
- If you have it, express your trust in his ability to live up to your expectations.

- Create positive images of the future.
- Allow yourself to have fun with him, especially to laugh at yourself.
- Assume positive intent—that he is on your side—until proven otherwise.

Choose one, or a combination, to create a high-quality connection with someone close to you. A firm connection allows both of you to talk about what you need from each other to make the relationship stronger.

Skill: Help Others

*When you concern yourself with others, you
naturally develop a sense of self-confidence.
To help others takes courage and inner strength.*

—THE DALAI LAMA

It's well established that most of us feel good when we help others.³ But it's easy to lose sight of this fundamental aspect of human nature and instead to act selfishly, to forget that relationships are a means for enriching our own lives and the lives of others. Let's learn from the example of Julie Foudy, whose efforts to help others have taken place on a public stage, and look at some concrete actions you can take to help people. To do this you must reflect on the exchange of support in an important relationship and find out how you can assist him. Then you must take action on what you discover. With these activities you can leap into the hearts and minds of others, determine what they need from you, and develop your capacity to provide for those needs.

Exercise: How Can I Help You?

Identify a goal that either directly or indirectly benefits at least one other person, if not lots of other people. It might be to serve as a board

member for the homeowners association in your neck of the woods, because you want both to make your neighborhood a more desirable place to live and to feel well connected to others who live around you. Then identify the potential beneficiaries of your efforts. It might be your neighbors whose lives would be a bit better as a result of something you can do for them, or it might be people whom you don't know very well.

Once you have identified the beneficiaries, have a quick conversation with them. Let your sole focus be finding out how your efforts might help them. Be relentless in your curiosity about what they need and care about. Ask pointed questions such as, "How would your feeling about the block be better if you had this help?" Then, if it's at all feasible, commit to providing that help—in a way that is as easy for you as possible.

The main idea is to keep on the lookout for opportunities to contribute to others, while, at the same time, not being a doormat. Organizational psychologist Adam Grant and others have shown that the most successful people are those who both help others, very efficiently, *and* take the initiative to ask for help in pursuing goals that serve a collective purpose.⁴

Exercise: Spread the Love

Here's an even simpler method for enhancing your reputation as the kind of person whom people turn to for help and in turn want to help. Over the course of the next week, on your own initiative, perform one simple act of kindness each day. It doesn't have to take much out of you; help an elderly person walk across the street, donate blood, write a thank-you letter, visit someone who is sick, apologize for a transgression, or volunteer to carpool—whatever suits you. In some instances, the recipients might not even be aware of what you're doing to benefit them. Keep a daily log, and, at the end of the week, take a few minutes to reflect on how your acts of kindness affected both you

and your beneficiaries. If the recipients were not aware of what you did, then imagine how they would respond if they became aware of it.

This activity provides practice in identifying the needs of others and initiating action to contribute to their well-being—an essential element in building meaningful relationships and generating virtuous cycles of compassion and mutual support.⁵

Skill: Build Supportive Networks

*Walking with a friend in the dark is better
than walking alone in the light.*

—HELEN KELLER

Leading the life you want requires having the encouragement and resources that come from other people: opportunities, materials, ideas, money, and someone to talk to when you're hurt or afraid of what might come next. Leadership does not happen in social isolation: it is a team sport, as Sheryl Sandberg's *Women of Silicon Valley* demonstrates clearly. Yet many of us fundamentally misunderstand how much others are willing to help when asked.⁶ So it's a lifelong enterprise to build your networks, by both asking for and giving help. To practice cultivating support, identify how you can strengthen relationships with those in your inner circle, and—go ahead—ask for help with something you're working on.

Exercise: Who Matters Most

List the names of the three to five people (individuals or groups) who matter most to you in each domain of your life—in your work or career, in your home or family, and in the community or society. Write a sentence about why each one of these people or groups is important to your future and why it's in their interest to aid you.

Then come up with one thing (the simpler and easier, the better) that you can do to provide some kind of help for some or all of these people or groups, something that fits with the vision you're trying to create for yourself. If you can't think of anything, then find out: How can you learn about what they need that you can provide? Now, give that help (again, the less costly for you, the better)—for example, provide a professional introduction for a friend or coworker—and observe the results, both in how you feel about yourself and in how your supportive action fortifies your relationships. Research has shown that experiences that spark an individual's genuine desire to help others can strengthen social bonds.⁷

(While you're at it, you might consider those people or groups whom you help—perhaps too much, in proportion to how much they matter to your future—and brainstorm possibilities for ways you might gracefully reduce what you're giving to them. There is a limit, after all.)

Look at your list of the most important people in your life, and for each one estimate the percentage of all your communication that you engage in using (a) face-to-face, (b) virtual synchronous communication—shifting place, but not time (e.g., phone, video conferencing)—or (c) virtual asynchronous communication, shifting both place and time (e.g., e-mail, letters—you remember those, right?). Think about whether the form of communication you use for each one helps or hinders your ability to gain support for your goals. You might even ask them which media they prefer.

What ideas come to mind for ways you might use different media to bring others closer to you? Keep in mind that “virtual” shrinks physical distances and allows you to reach many people through one message, and that “in-person” is richer and gives you information through tone and body language. You might discover that you would benefit from more in-person contact with some (such as your family or clients) and less with others (such as your boss), or more videoconferencing

and texting with others (the younger people in your network) and less e-mailing with still others (those from the old school).

Exercise: SOS!

Identify a specific area in your life—personal, professional, or both—where you could benefit from help. For instance, are you struggling to get to the gym in the morning? Are you having difficulty meeting a deadline? Are you feeling stuck in a dead-end job with no other options? Do you want to learn how to cook? It could be anything—large or small.

Now think of someone you know who might be able to provide support. Do you have a friend who gets to the gym regularly? Do you know someone who rarely misses deadlines? Do you know someone who is a recruiter or who has used a good recruiter in the past? Do you know someone who loves to cook? Consider this person to be your helper, and plan a time to meet with her, describe your situation, and ask for the help you are seeking. Then be sure to express genuine appreciation for her help and identify how it has made a difference, whether through a personal note, a small gift, or some sort of public acknowledgment. And be sure to take the call when others ask for help. Pay it forward. Even more fun: connect people who you believe might be able to help each other.

Skill: Apply All Your Resources

If food is poetry, is not poetry also food?

—JOYCE CAROL OATES

Eric Greitens used what he discovered about himself and the world to enhance his impact as a military leader and CEO. There are countless ways that people can take what they have gained in one

part of their lives and use it to pursue a goal that matters to them in another part.

The first exercise for this skill is designed to help you become aware of how you can take advantage of what you know from one domain (as, for example, what you learn from being a good father or son) and use it to improve your effectiveness in other parts (being a good mentor at work or in your community). The possibilities, when brought to bear in your everyday life, produce a greater sense of coherence—the elegant unity of form and function that J. J. Abrams admires in *Greitens*. The second is intended to jump-start how you think about new ways of connecting people across all your different networks.

Exercise: Talent Transfer

Think of a skill that you've developed—maybe mentoring colleagues, organizing activities for your family, or running the church bake sale. You might even write a very short résumé for each of your different roles, highlighting such skills. Think of these talents as muscles that can be used to achieve different ends, just as a strong arm can be used to swim, throw, lift crates, or carry a sleeping child. Let's say you successfully planned your wedding—congratulations! Now use what you learned to plan a community gathering for two hundred people or a conference at work. Are you an accountant by day? Turn into a teacher at night, running a budgeting-skills class for your kid's high school. Organizational psychologists call this a "strength development approach": first identify your talents, and then apply them in new areas. This practice actually enhances the initial competency.⁸ By transferring skills from one area of your life to another, you capitalize on them, further honing your strengths in other areas. You become better able to meet goals in all parts of your life.

Another way to do this is to reflect on something that makes you proud: a work accomplishment, a fruitful friendship, or your commitment to salsa dancing. What skills, as opposed to raw talent or experience, helped your success? Persistence? Listening? Practice? Next, identify an area in your life that you feel could use improvement. How might you use the skills that were instrumental in improving the first area, which you are proud of, in the second area, where you want to improve? Create a simple plan that uses those skills in this other part of your life. Suppose you're good at making strong friendships but struggle with anxiety: you might try applying your ability to forge partnerships to enlist one of your trusted friends to help you manage your anxiety.

Exercise: Creative Contacts

A basic concept in social capital theory is that you gain access to resources through your personal and professional networks and that your reputation is strengthened in your networks when you help others. This, in turn, increases the chances that others will share resources with you. Here's a simple exercise that puts these ideas into action, with an emphasis on connecting *across* domains: name three people in your life who are untapped resources. You may know these people through one domain in your life, and yet, by thinking creatively, you may see the potential to draw on their support in other areas of your life, while contributing meaningfully to their lives as well. Read through your contact lists or your church or school directory for ideas. You might, for example, think of the other parents on your child's soccer team as people who might work with you on a neighborhood cleanup or as a focus group for a new health care service your company is planning to launch. Draft a plan for enlisting their help with something that matters to you. Make sure that this plan explains how their assistance will be mutually beneficial—good for them and for you.

Skill: Manage Boundaries Intelligently

*God saw that the light was good, and he
separated the light from the darkness.*

—GENESIS

Michelle Obama's example shows the importance of carefully grappling with the demands of different roles by consciously managing the boundaries among them. As we accelerate into the frenzy of digital contact and the ubiquity of screens streaming information at us, it is harder to focus our attention on what and who matters most. This psychological skill is surely one of the most important to learn if you are to thrive in a networked world. To improve your ability to manage boundaries intelligently, and thereby integrate the various roles you play, to feel more whole, let yourself step out from time to time. Also, see how you can both segment and merge the different domains of life, depending on what you and the people around you need at a particular moment.

Exercise: Unitask and Disconnect

There's a growing body of evidence on the risks associated with so-called multitasking, so it's wise to develop an appreciation for what you can do to counteract its effects.⁹ In the first part of this exercise, pick an activity that you engage in daily, such as exercising, cooking, or responding to e-mails. On two separate days, first do that same activity while multitasking—that is, while doing something else such as watching a movie or talking with a friend. On the second day, do that same activity on its own, with no distractions at all. Then ask yourself, Was the quality of the experience better in one scenario? Was one scenario more fun, more engaging, or more efficient? If others were with you, ask them whether they could tell the difference. This simple experiment will help you identify the costs and benefits associated with multitasking and will give you new ideas for how best to manage your attention.

For the second part, select a one-hour time slot in which you will not use any technology—no internet, no smartphone, no electronic connectivity. Nothing! Select this time window wisely, and consider who or what would benefit from your full and complete attention. Then, after powering down for that one hour, consider the following: Were you craving your technology or fretting about someone not being able to reach you? Why? How did this affect your experience? How did it affect others whom you were with during this time? Then consider trying longer stretches of such glorious concentration.

This exercise will give you ideas about when it is appropriate to set up useful boundaries and to focus on a few people and things. The practice will help you get accustomed to switching among the different spheres of your life. That, in turn, will make you more successful in mastering what I call the “art of interruptability”—the ability to move with grace and efficiency from one thing to another.¹⁰

Exercise: Segment and Merge

Some organizational psychologists have found that people vary in their preferences for either segmenting or merging.¹¹ The activity described here helps you understand what works for you. It also involves two complementary experiments. First, set a time to talk with people you see daily or weekly about how you might try segmenting the different parts of your life. Get them to help you imagine a boundary—for example, reserving a special time or place dedicated to one thing—that allows you to focus in a way that works for you *and* makes things demonstrably better for them.

For this exercise, try to create a separation among different roles. For example, you might try, for the next week or month, dedicating the home office for Mom’s work only, agreeing that she will occupy that space from 9:00 a.m. to noon, and then again from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. (This helps her do what she needs to do to be successful as

a breadwinner for the family.) Or you might agree that smartphones will be off and stored in a kitchen drawer during family dinner time. (This boundary fosters better conversation and helps kids learn to be psychologically present by disconnecting from their wired worlds.) That's the segment part of this exercise.¹²

Then, for the merge part, think about opportunities for you to bring together two or more parts of your life. (Again, focus on time and space.) The goal is not only doubling up but also improving the quality in each sphere. You might take a child to a company-sponsored charity run, or bring a coworker to a block party in your neighborhood. Experiment with ways to measure whether this attempt to blend domains made things better not only for you but also for the people around you. Suppose you organized a park cleanup day that included your partner and some coworkers who live nearby. Did each enjoy being a greater part of your life? Ask them afterward how they felt about being there.

After you've tried a new way of separating and a new way of merging, jot down your insights about what worked and what didn't. The key questions: Did you find yourself more or less distracted? Were you more or less productive? How did other people react to you? Were they put off, or did they seem to feel closer and more trusting of you?

Skill: Weave Disparate Strands

*In the sky, there is no distinction of east and west;
people create distinctions out of their own
minds and then believe them to be true.*

—BUDDHA

Being able to manage boundaries is an important skill, but it's not quite the same as fitting the pieces of your life together into a coherent whole. Explore how people in the different parts of your life see

you, and identify the scripts and goals that are compatible among your essential roles. Think of how well Tom Tierney invested effort to produce the fabric of his life with its interwoven strands.

Exercise: Hidden Identities

Pick a few important stakeholders—people you believe are important to your future—from different areas of your life. Ask them to describe you briefly. Does each person see you similarly? Are some stakeholders unaware of aspects of your life that are important to you? Why? This is what psychologists call a “reflected best-self” exercise. It’s helpful for developing an improved understanding of your unique values and talents.¹³

It’s useful to wonder about the aspects of your identity that are currently hidden from some people. Your spouse might know you are a scholar of European history, but your coworkers might not know anything beyond your vacations to major capitals on the continent. Let people know something about an aspect of your life that is opaque to them. Sharing a personal side of yourself at work can increase trust and strengthen relationships with your colleagues. Explaining a conflict at work can help a child understand the ethics you share. Discovering how people see you helps knit together the threads of your life.

Exercise: Compatible Scripts and Goals

This exercise complements the preceding one by asking you to look from the inside out rather than from the outside in. Let’s start with role scripts (or *schema*, the term used by personality researchers).¹⁴ These are the mental frameworks that inform your knowledge about the appropriate behaviors for a person in a particular role, whether husband, neighbor, lover, boss, or son.

Think about the different roles that you actually play, and briefly write your view of the script for each of these roles. For example, let's say you're a husband. How do you believe a husband should act? Next, think about whether any of your behaviors overlap across domains; for example, does acting with compassion appear under both your husband and your boss role? Identify behaviors in one role that might strengthen your impact in a different area of your life; for example, does acting with compassion in your marriage make you a better neighbor? A better coworker? Thinking through these questions helps you see how you can bring more of yourself to the different spheres of your life.

Strengthen the weave by identifying a goal and writing a short note that explains how each domain of your life—work, home, community, and self—benefits from and contributes to your achievement of that goal. This will help you see connections in your life and understand how they are affected by your pursuit of a goal. This insight, in turn, enables you to think more expansively and creatively about how to bring the domains together in a way that makes sense to you. If your goal is to be remembered as someone who made the world better, for example, jot down how your actions in each part are moving you closer toward that aim. Then note how, in turn, your feelings about how things are going in each domain are enriched by those actions. Now, what ideas pop up about what you can do to tighten the connections?

