

Conversations with the Experts

Total Leadership



Stewart D. Friedman

Bio: Stewart D. Friedman is the founding director of the Wharton School's Leadership Program and its Work/Life Integration Project, and is the former head of Ford Motor's Leadership Development Center. Stew has worked with thousands of executives, managers, and community leaders to strengthen their leadership skills and enrich their lives. He is the author of *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life*, published by Harvard Business Press.

An Interview with Stewart D. Friedman

By Judi Casey and Karen Corday

Casey: What is Total Leadership?

Friedman: Total means whole, and leadership means creating sustainable change. The purpose of Total Leadership is improving performance in all areas of life by creating mutual value among them, and doing so in a way that works for the most important people in each of the different parts. I call this pursuing a “four-way win”—a benefit for work, home, community, and self. This model is built on my earlier work, which emphasized a non-zero sum approach to the relationship between work and the rest of life.

Casey: When people think about the term “leadership,” do they tend to think about it in only one area, as opposed to taking a more integrated approach?

Friedman: There are a few issues with the terms “leader” or “leadership.” The first is the notion that leadership is a quality that anyone can express; it’s not solely the province of managers, supervisors, or anyone else with a hierarchical responsibility for the work of others. Leadership is about creating sustainable change; it’s about mobilizing people towards a goal that matters. A person can do this at any level and at any career stage. Since the dawn of time, people have wanted to figure out how to lead, particularly in a way that allows harmony among the four domains. These are age-old pursuits; I’ve just brought them together in a way that I hope is useful in these times.

Casey: Why do you think your program resonates with people?

Friedman: It’s a work-life integration program that helps people reduce stress and improve performance in all parts of life and it’s a leadership development program that enhances the capacity to lead. It’s very practical and, as our research shows, it works. The book and program are a marriage of two streams of research and practice to which I’ve devoted my career. There’s a keen interest in both areas, and in the notion of “leading your life,” particularly in a way in which you feel in control and a sense of peace and harmony among all the parts. There’s a lot of anguish over not being able to do that; most of the people I meet have more power and discretion to bring the pieces together in a way that’s mutually beneficial than they currently think they have. That’s one of the benefits of the approach; by taking the systematic steps I describe in the book, people discover more opportunities to creatively integrate the different parts of their lives, now.

Casey: Can you discuss the three principles of Total Leadership?

Friedman: The three main ideas are be real, be whole, and be innovative. To be real is to clarify what’s really

important to you. In the program, there are exercises to that help do this, including writing a page on the legacy you hope to have on the world twenty years from now. Another exercise is telling the story of the three or four critical incidents in your history that have shaped your values and what you believe in and care about. Still another is looking at the four areas and thinking about how important each one is to you, how you focus your time and attention, and how satisfied you are with how things are going in each area.

After you write out your answers, you share them with other people. There's peer coaching built into the program. This can be done either in person or via our Web site, using social media tools. Peer-to-peer coaching is an essential part of the process.

To be whole is to respect all the parts of your life. This is activated by identifying the most important people in each of your domains; I call these people your "key stakeholders." After you identify these people, you clarify the performance expectations they have for you and you have for them. You start to see how your performance in one area affects your performances in the other three—how does being the father that I am influence my roles as a manager, a citizen, a friend, my health and so on? After this is complete, it's time to have conversations with your stakeholders. This is the high-anxiety point in the process, for most people (do I really have to talk to these people about this stuff?), but, in addition to bestowing a kind of honor on these cherished people, it usually leads to two valuable realizations: one is that your stakeholders expect less of you than you thought they did, and the other is that they expect different things from you than you thought they did. This allows you to make adjustments, which leads to the third principle.

To be innovative is to experiment creatively with new ways of getting things done. My April 2008 article in the Harvard Business Review focused on this principle and described the different kinds of experiments identified by my research team and how to perform an experiment. It's a process of trying something new that's intended, consciously and deliberately, to have a demonstrable benefit in each domain. This is the fun part—you do the experiment and then collect the data on what worked and what didn't. Then you reflect on what you learn about your own leadership capacity and creating sustainable change. You are intelligently designing small wins that are not just about what you need, but what the people around you need, so the likelihood of the experiment working is much greater. Your intention is to make other people successful while pursuing your own interest. The experiment is entirely customized to your own situation, which you have now explored in ways you probably haven't before, and you've lowered resistance from other people because it's a small step towards a big idea that's good for them as well as for you.

Common experiments include working at home a half day per week, shutting off your Blackberry during the dinner hour twice per week, exercising regularly, or starting a blog to communicate with friends and family around the world. I recommend three experiments to start—usually one works really well, one goes ok, and one doesn't succeed at all. However, by reflecting on all of the experiments, you learn a lot about how to create change in a way that works for you. The biggest change usually comes in the area of the self. Satisfaction and performance tend to increase in all areas, despite the fact that people end up, on average, spending a bit less time working and more time in the other domains.

Casey: You mention that Total Leadership is not about work-life balance—can you discuss this further?

Friedman: I think the term "balance" can be misdirecting; when people hear the word balance, they usually think "trade-off" or "sacrifice"—that's the model that many people have, and it can misdirect efforts to better integrate the four domains. My mission is to help people to see the possibility of better integration with less sacrifice by thinking a little differently about how the pieces might fit together and experimenting with that. The problem with the term "balance" is the connotation of the necessary trade-off, which I believe is not as necessary as most people think.

Casey: It would be fair to say that these experiments are trade-offs in action. For example, if one experiment is to turn the Blackberry off for dinner for a certain amount of time, the trade-off is that I am less in touch with work, but more in touch with my family.

Friedman: That's a good point. I would say that the goal has to be improved performance at work, as well as the other domains. So, you could say to your boss, "I'm going to be more productive on the performance outcomes that matter to you if I am able to shut off my Blackberry between the hours of six and nine on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Can we try that for a few weeks and see how it goes? If my performance doesn't improve, then we'll go back to the way it was or try something else." The intention from the start and the adjustments that take place are all aimed towards improving performance, from your boss's point of view, as well as from your family's. For some people, this kind of experiment will make them more focused when they are working, less anxious, and better able to deal with the tasks at hand when they are devoting their attention to work.

This is an important aspect of the program from the managerial perspective. It is entirely customized, so everyone will have a different set of issues and everyone's experiments will look a little different. But the goal is the same—better results.

Casey: To continue with the notion that this program is not a balance or trade-off, can you say a little more about the four-way win concept?

Friedman: It's essential to pursue changes that aim to improve all performance in all four areas. The basic assumption is that they are all interconnected—performance in one area affects performance in all three other areas—and that there are opportunities for mutual enrichment that can be found just by looking for them. Total Leadership helps you do so.

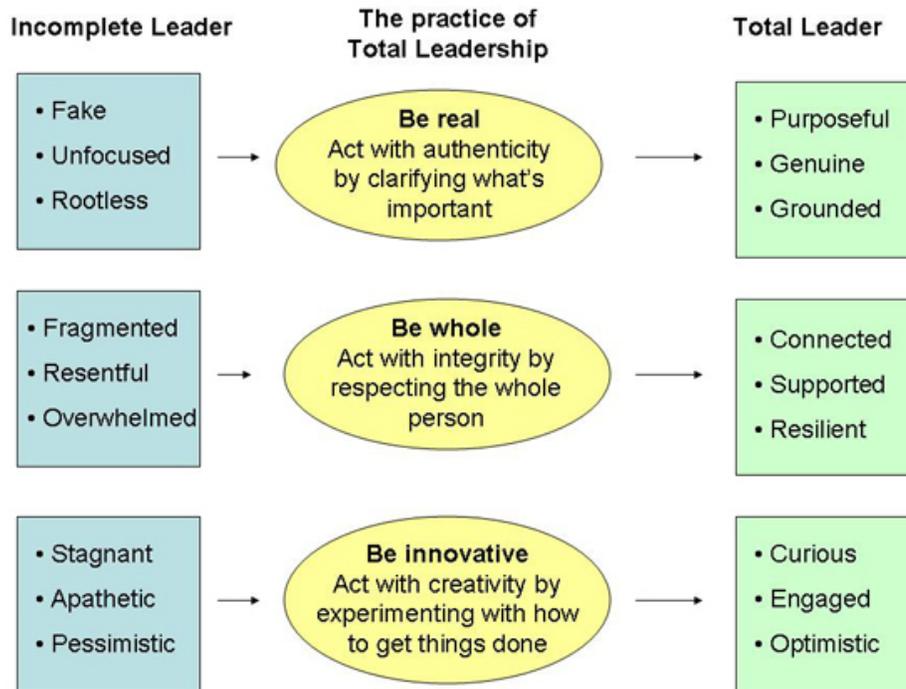
Casey: Is there anything you want to say to our user groups about your model?

Friedman: For the workplace group, what I've discovered is that this is a fruitful approach because it's tailored by the individual; it empowers workers to create change that works for them and for their organizations. It's always about mutual gain; that changes the nature of conversations from antagonism in terms of a sense of entitlement from the employee and a sense of cost from the employer. Using the program means using a new vocabulary, and that to me is very important. The fear factor—which inhibits many people from trying new ways of getting things done—is reduced because of the emphasis on performance and results for all parties.

I come at this as an organizational psychologist; I'm not a labor economist or a sociologist. My primary orientation is the individual in a social context. The Total Leadership program is about leadership development and personal growth. I've been saying that the work-family field needs to learn more about the skills, mindset, and tools that people need to create meaningful change in their worlds. The more we know about the kinds of experiments and initiatives for different people in different sectors of society the better. The other piece to this that I think is increasingly important is how people learn to be more skilled at leading change by coaching other people and by using social media tools online. The method for using virtual communications for this kind of social exchange is a hugely important issue. We're moving away from a reliance on face-to-face communication, and I'd hope to see more research that produces useful knowledge to help people take advantage of digital technology for learning. Evolving the social and psychological technologies to catch up to the new media is a pressing issue.

For more information: <http://www.totalleadership.org>

Becoming a Total Leader



Source: Friedman, S.D. (2008). *Total leadership: Be a better leader, have a richer life*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Additional Resources Related to Leadership

The Center for Creative Leadership: “The Center for Creative Leadership was founded in 1970 with financial support from the Smith Richardson Foundation Inc. Our mission is to advance the understanding, practice and development of leadership for the benefit of society worldwide.” Includes podcasts, white papers and research reports, bibliographies, presentation materials, and several newsletters.

- <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/index.aspx>

Slow Leadership: “Slow Leadership offers ways of returning civilization and humanity to organizations. It is essential that leaders think more clearly and make better choices, free from today’s constant obsession with meeting unrealistic, short-term expectations. The most important characteristics of successful leadership are to be found within the leader, not in college courses or textbooks. This takes time and requires a long-term perspective that is the antithesis of “grab-and-go” management.” This site is written by three business professionals—a retired CEO, a personal and business coach, and a public sector worker/writer.

- <http://www.slowleadership.org/blog/>

LeaderValues: Founded by “globally experienced chief executive Mick Yates” in 1997. The well-stocked research center includes a wide collection of free leadership resources, a Leadership Wiki, a blog, and an extensive links database. Emphasis on multicultural and transnational issues.

- <http://www.leader-values.com/>

LeadershipNow: “At LeadershipNow, we want to change the way you think about leadership. It is not about position. Leadership is everybody’s business. It is for men, women and children. It is for families, business and communities.” Includes a blog, articles, interviews, and book reviews.

- <http://www.leadershipnow.com/>

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