

# LEADING FROM THE INSIDE OUT: WHY BETTER PEOPLE MAKE BETTER LEADERS

*by Glenn Williams*



In his book *Legacy: What the All Blacks Can Teach Us About the Business of Life*, James Kerr examines what makes the All Blacks one of the most successful teams in the history of sport. One of the core beliefs behind their high-performance culture is 'better people make better leaders'.<sup>1</sup> Alongside values of character, responsibility, sacrifice and ritual, Kerr highlights their dedication to personal development as a defining feature of their success.

*“By developing the individual players and giving them the tools, skill, and character that they needed to contribute beyond the rugby field, they would also... contribute more effectively on it... This was a focus on personal development, both as human beings and as professional sportsmen, so that they had the character, composure, and people skills to be leaders, both on and off the field.”<sup>1</sup>*

In his 2010 TED talk, Simon Sinek argues that inspired leaders and organizations work from the inside out.<sup>2</sup> Their success comes from the congruence between who they are and what they do. Customers, staff, and stakeholders connect first and foremost with why they do what they do, more so than what they sell.

## How to lead from the inside out

Ambivalence about your identity, your strengths and weaknesses, what drives you and motivates you to get out of bed each morning will ultimately show up in your performance. Your decision-making will be [reactive to moment-by-moment issues](#), rather than proactive and effective. If these foundational identity questions don't have clear answers, you'll find it difficult to gain momentum.

*“Confident decision-making comes from knowing that your decisions align with who you are, what’s important to you, and the goals you are trying to achieve.”*

Not only do leading sports teams and authors agree, but empirical data demonstrates that self-leadership is imperative to success in leading others. In a 2012 study<sup>3</sup>, researchers wanted to see if the numbers backed up the claim that self-leadership is causally related to better leadership performance. Their hypothesis was proven right. Those who effectively led themselves were the most effective at leading others.

Here are three areas you can focus on to better lead yourself and help you lead others:

## **1. Improve your self-awareness**

We often run into conflict or don’t see the outcome we want because of thinking and behaving in ways that are detrimental to the goal we are trying to achieve. Reflecting on our thoughts and assumptions and becoming aware of our blind spots can give us contextual understanding into why some deals, or relationships, didn’t eventuate<sup>4</sup>. These insights can then be leveraged for greater success in future ventures.

## **2. Understand your strengths and weaknesses**

So much more **energy and capacity** get released when we operate from our strengths rather than work against them in roles that are constricting to who we are. Invest in tools to understand your natural disposition - the way you naturally think, feel, relate, and process information and experiences. Tools like the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment by Gallup can highlight your strengths giving you insight into the roles that are going to be a good fit.

## **3. Find what motivates you**

Beyond earning money, what do you want to contribute to the world and why? Do you know what motivates you and what your **definition of success** is? If you do, are you in a role that aligns with this or is it conflicting with what is really important to you? Whether it be fame, money, reputation,

or making a social impact, what success looks like to you is where your motivation is. Reflecting on these questions can transform the outcome of your efforts.

## What's the bottom line?

“Development of the authentic self is hugely powerful to performance” says Gilbert Enoka, former mental skills coach to the All Blacks<sup>1</sup>. Ask yourself some pivotal questions - What do you value? What are your strengths? Why do you do what you do? This form of self-leadership will lay the foundations to lead successfully both on and off ‘the field’.

---

### References

<sup>1</sup>Kerr, J. (2015). *Legacy: What the All Blacks Can Teach Us About the Business of Life*. Constable: London.

<sup>2</sup> Sinek, S. (2010, May 4). How great leaders inspire action . TED Talks.

[ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action?language=en)

<sup>3</sup> Furtner, M. R., Baldegger, U., & Rauthmann, J. F. (2013). Leading yourself and leading others:

Linking self-leadership to transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 22(4), 436–449.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432x.2012.665605>

<sup>4</sup>Shaw, R. (2014). *Leadership Blindspots: How Successful Leaders Identify and Overcome the Weaknesses that Matter*. Jossey-Bass: CA.