WHAT IS LEADERSHIP CAPACITY AND HOW DO I GET MORE OF IT?

by Glenn Williams

What's your leadership capacity like right now? Are you operating from a position of healthy margins, or is your tank running low? Many are talking about capacity in business, but what is leadership capacity, and how can you get more of it?

You've probably already learned the hard way, that adding more to your schedule and working longer hours is far from sustainable. Neither does it send a great message to others in your organization. And while no business is immune to the effects, the bigger the organization, the more critical it is for CEOs to consider.

In 2018, Harvard Business Review released the results of a decade-long research project into how CEOs use their time, where they are, who they are with and what they focus on. While the findings aren't surprising, the extent to which a CEO's allocation of time works its way through an entire organization should give us pause for thought.

"The way CEOs allocate their time and their presence—where they choose to personally participate—is crucial, not only to their own effectiveness but also to the performance of their companies. Where and how CEOs are involved determines what gets done and signals priorities for others. It also affects their legitimacy. A CEO who doesn't spend enough time with colleagues will seem insular and out of touch, whereas one who spends too much time in direct decision-making will risk being seen as a micromanager and erode employees' initiative. A CEO's schedule (indeed, any leader's schedule), then, is a manifestation of *how* the leader leads and sends powerful messages to the rest of the organization."[1]

How you manage your time and, consequently, your leadership capacity directly affects the health of your organization and its people.

What is leadership capacity?

This brings us back to the question: *What is leadership capacity, and how can I develop more of it? Capacity* is the amount something can produce or contain.[2] It might not be something we like to hear, but our capacity is finite. There's a limit on how much we can do with the time and energy we have before we reach the point of exhaustion and burnout.

As I've worked with leaders worldwide, I've watched many miss out on achieving their goals, not because of incompetence or inexperience, but because they've expended all their energy. They have nothing left in the tank. As you may imagine, the detrimental effects nearly always extend to their health and closest relationships.

When leaders are lost

When a leader hits the wall, it's not only those outside work who suffer. The research is clear: What happens at the top sends a message to every level of a company. If the CEO is burnt out, many of their staff are likely in the same predicament. Organizations comprise people with finite capacity. No one has an infinite supply of energy, even though the HBR study concluded that the job of the CEO is all-consuming, with enough work "to consume every hour of their lives."[2]

Leaders are human. If they fail to understand and accommodate their needs, they will not only burn out but also risk becoming "lost," and the flow-on effect will be far-reaching. I explored this dynamic in my book *When Leaders Are Lost: Moving Beyond Disappointment, Failure, and Hurt to Redefine Success*,

"I went from one success to another, one leadership position to the next, with more goals, challenges, bigger budgets, more direct reports, more travel and greater responsibility, each role requiring that bit more of me. Truthfully, I loved it! But, at the same time, I felt torn between success as a leader and wanting to be a good husband and father while sensing I was constantly falling short.

But do these roles have to be mutually exclusive? The pressure is often amplified if you work in the not-for-profit sector, where you expect to give more of yourself for a worthy cause. With no awareness of where I was heading and a lack of healthy boundaries, I soon experienced a significant decline in energy.

My emotional and intellectual bandwidth waned, leaving little to invest in my closest relationships and friendships. My busyness blinded me to the signs that my capacity was finite and fragile. If I'd been honest with myself then, I might have acknowledged that being busy validated my significance, reinforcing that my identity as a leader was a driving force in my life and that success was important to me.
"[3]

How to release greater leadership capacity

So, if capacity is finite, how can we even think about increasing when struggling to keep up with our current schedule?

I and many others have discovered that greater capacity isn't something we add to our toolbelt or skillset. Instead, it gets released as a natural result of alignment.

Consider the example of biomechanics in optimizing sports performance. A golfer analyzing their swing breaks it down into critical movements. They focus on aligning the movements, not applying more force to their swing so they hit the ball harder. Improved performance is the natural outcome of greater and

deliberate alignment.

And the same goes for leadership. How much capacity a leader has is determined by their level of alignment, which, in turn, determines their effectiveness in their role.

We at LCP Global are immensely passionate about capacity. More specifically, we are dedicated to helping you increase your capacity to lead yourself, others, and your business—better.

We've broken capacity into five key elements critical to a leader's performance. When embraced, The 5 Leadership Anchors™ will help you find a greater capacity to succeed in leadership and life.

1. The quality of your relationships

For many leaders, an increase in responsibility leads to a decline in the quality of their relationships, inside and outside of work. However, developing key relationships in a leader's life gives the energy vital to achieving personal and organizational goals.

2. A clear definition of success and an understanding of your motivational drivers

What does success look like for you? Is it the title on your business card, the letters after your name or your remuneration package? How you define success is the root of what motivates you and determines your ability to sustain performance.

3. Commitment to character development that builds confidence and resilience

Every leader has a value code: intrinsic values influencing their behaviour and decision-making. Clarifying your values helps to create confidence, focus and resilience, which are foundational to success.

4. Transforming your personal script so you can make better decisions

A leader's decision-making process is influenced by their personal script. Your personal script comprises the thought processes and behaviors learned as a child that remain with you into adulthood. These scripts either help or hinder your leadership capacity.

5. Creating a new success trajectory personally, professionally, and corporately

If you're dealing with conflicting or unclear goals in your relationships inside and outside of work, your capacity to sustain your leadership goals will be compromised, at the very least.

Clarifying your purpose and vision enables you to set goals with the power to transform the outcomes. Rather than pursue short-term fixes, focusing your time and energy on transformational goals will bring a far greater return.

What's the bottom line?

Growing your leadership capacity is more about alignment than anything else. And the biggest roadblock to it is the limit you impose through misalignment. Take some time to sit with The 5 Leadership Anchors™. Focus your efforts on creating greater alignment. You might surprise yourself and discover

that extra capacity you are looking for.

References

[1] How CEOs Manage Time: Time is the scarcest resource leaders have. Where they allocate it matters—a lot. by Michael E. Porter and Nitin Nohria, July-August 2018,

https://hbr.org/2018/07/how-ceos-manage-time#:~:text=Our%20research%20finds%20that%20they, work%20won't%20get%20done.

[2] How CEOs Manage Time: Time is the scarcest resource leaders have. Where they allocate it matters—a lot. by Michael E. Porter and Nitin Nohria, July-August 2018

[3] Dr Glenn Williams, When Leaders Are Lost, p23