

# "Ask the Leadership Consultant" \*

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## Question:

***"I have noticed that the weLEAD site and some noted authors like Stephen Covey often discuss what they call "personal leadership". I am not sure I feel this is important. After all, what one does in their private life should have nothing to do with their work. I believe the two are separate from one another and that many people who are highly successful have personal lives that are a disaster. It doesn't appear to matter and since this is the case, why put so much emphasis on personal leadership?"***

**Answer:** Thanks for your question and comments. First, you are incorrect when you say that personal leadership is separate from one's work or career. Let's begin by defining *personal* leadership to make sure we are all on the same page. Allow me to quote from a few paragraphs I wrote in a past weLEAD article entitled, "[Just What Is Personal Leadership?](#)" Obviously, if you are interested in learning more about this topic I encourage you to read the entire article!

"Personal leadership is the desire of an individual to take charge of his or her own life. Personal leaders realize that leadership is not a position or title, but an outlook on life and their role in the world. The best way I can describe personal leadership is to discuss some of its *desired* traits..."

"Personal leaders have a *game plan* for their life. Call it what you will...personal mission statement, life strategic plan, setting of goals or a personal punch list...it is all about giving your life *direction* or establishing a clear *path* for your life. Unfortunately most people live their lives like a raft floating in the ocean. They bob up and down, left and right, over and under, depending on the tempest of the sea. They become victims of circumstances and allow time to make decisions they are unwilling to make for themselves. Personal leaders are absolutely convinced they have a great degree of control over their own outcomes and circumstances. They are not about to leave their future in the hands of "time and chance".

"Most personal leaders realize and accept the fact that there is a *spiritual element* to life. They may not totally understand it or always sense it but they know it is there. I know the discussion of spirituality is not considered vogue or "politically correct" in some circles. That is too bad and their *personal* loss. Respected author Peter Block reminds us that, "Spirituality is the process of living out a set of deeply held personal values, of honoring forces or a presence greater than ourselves. It expresses our desire to find meaning in, and to treat as an offering what we do". This spiritual element provides a number of positive characteristics that cannot be found or nurtured anywhere else. The personal leader knows the purpose of their existence must go far beyond the pursuit of the "whoever dies with the most toys wins" philosophy of our modern society."

"The last trait I will discuss for a personal leader is that of leaving a legacy. Most people with a strong ambition and degree of success attempt to build monuments to themselves or establish large companies that bear their name. This is a shallow and fleeting hope for immortality. Eventually monuments crumble and it is no great honor to have your family name associated with peanut butter or toilet tissue! The personal leader believes they were given *both* life and opportunity as a gift and for a definite purpose. Yes, they also want to leave a positive legacy, but not in buildings or in the prominence of their name. Instead they know that a *lasting* legacy with real value...is in people. It begins with their families and loved ones. They seek to inspire and motivate their loved

ones to reach their own potential and fulfill their very own dreams. But it doesn't stop there! The personal leader deeply wants to give something back to the world as a *thank you* for the gift of life on a crowded planet. This kind of leader wants to impart what they have learned to *others* to help make their lives *more* productive and fulfilling! It may be in serving the community, mentoring others, visiting the lonely, teaching a class, or any number of ways to leave a personal *endowment of service* to the world. Every personal leader will have their own niche or way of serving, but it is from this that we will often find the greatest satisfaction."

Now, to say that our private life is separate from our work or career is like saying our hands are separate from our feet! Yes, they may have *different* functions but both are connected to the same body and directed from the same mind. Ultimately how we work, and our attitude about others in the workplace is an extension of who and what we are. Any *Human Resource Manager* will tell you that when individuals are having serious problems at home or in their personal lives it affects their work and the attitude they possess. All people have the ability to mask their problems or even convince *themselves* that what happens in their personal life is not hurting their work. But what *really* happens is something different.

Usually, the proverbial "workaholic" spends a great amount of time and effort at the job in an effort to escape from the personal problems they don't want to face at home, or within themselves. Why is this the case? It is because our work and personal life are *interconnected* and stem from the same human mind struggling to find fulfillment. The bottom line is that someone who is balanced, and fulfilled in their personal life tends to bring that attitude and a level of confidence to the workplace. On the other hand, someone who is unbalanced, angry and frustrated about life tends to bring those feelings to the workplace. The only thing that may moderate these feelings is the fear of losing their job if they mistreat others. Yet, many still get away with mistreating and abusing others because they have formal positions of power. The fact that their personal lives are horrendous is reflected by how poorly they treat others on the job.

However, eventually it all catches up with us! Life has a great "time lag" and this is the reason people deceive themselves into thinking *everything* is fine. They believe they have also convinced others by simply pretending that all is well. Yet almost every day we read about the *ticking time bombs* that exploded! A celebrity on drugs overdoses and dies, a CEO is convicted of stock manipulation, an athlete commits a felony with a gun, a teacher has inappropriate sexual relations with a child, or a religious figure commits a gross immoral act. What do all of these people have in common? They lacked personal leadership, and *something* serious going on in one area of their lives eventually affected their entire life.

Finally, I would like to comment on your statement that "many people who are highly successful have personal lives that are a disaster." I believe you and I have *different* definitions of what success truly is! If your definition of success is wealth, prominence, power and fame then it is very different from mine. My values are based on the belief that some successful people do indeed achieve these things. However, real success is living a life that leaves a positive legacy. The obituary for a truly successful person includes words such as dedicated son/daughter, or parent, founder, volunteer, mentor, caregiver, liberator, educator or contributor. These are people who leave a constructive mark on the world and make it better for being here. They are typically *not* acknowledged by Hollywood or the mass media.

Yes, it is possible to achieve a high degree of wealth, power and prominence *without* personal leadership. But history shows us that even many of these individuals eventually *failed* because their excesses or abuses destroyed them or those around them. It is one thing to reach the top and achieve public acclaim... it is another thing to maintain it and stay there. Many people have lives like a meteor, up and bright for a while... followed by a burnout. *Personal leadership* provides a foundation of slow but continual growth and achievement. It also helps one to balance, manage and handle success once it is achieved.

If you have a challenging question you would like our consultant to discuss, please email your question [here](#). We will be happy to keep your question anonymously.

\* The advice and counsel offered by the consultant is based on the limited information provided by the questioner. No two situations are exactly the same, and the consultant makes every effort to provide helpful and educational counsel based on the information supplied.

**About the author:**

**Greg has an extensive thirty-five years experience in public speaking and has spoken to hundreds of audiences worldwide. Greg has a Master of Arts degree in Leadership from Bellevue University, where he also has served as an adjunct professor teaching courses in business management and leadership since 2002. His first book, [52 Leadership Tips \(That Will Change How You Lead Others\)](#) was published in 2006 by WingSpan Press. His second book, [Making Life's Puzzle Pieces Fit](#) was published in March 2009. Both are available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). Greg is also the president of [Leadership Excellence, Ltd](#) and a Managing Partner of the Leadership Management Institute. Leadership Excellence, Ltd. effectively builds individuals and organizations to reach their highest potential through enhanced productivity and personal development using a number of proven programs. He is also the president and founder of [weLEAD Incorporated](#).**

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