Introduction

Leadership is frequently thought of in terms of our ability to understand and direct our external environment — people, organizations and events. This course takes the view that to succeed in professional life we need to develop another dimension of leadership — personal leadership. Personal leadership consists of our ability to understand and direct our internal environment — our moods, perceptions, mindsets and motivations.

Some of the most crucial skills in life have to do with how well we can manage this internal environment under ever-changing external circumstances. How quickly can we rebound from setbacks to execute our roles with renewed enthusiasm? Can we stay calm and focused in the face of intense work pressure? How effective are we at eliminating feelings of anger or anxiety that grip us from time to time? How can we cultivate a winner’s mindset that will allow us to perform at our optimum all the time? How can we effectively harness our intuitive and creative faculties to aid us in tackling complex issues?

Very little attention has traditionally been given in management education — or even in earlier stages of school and college education — to building this set of personal competencies. So where can we search for wisdom on this topic? This course will tap three sources of insight and learning in order to help students develop a better understanding of their internal environment and to learn and implement techniques for improving their personal competencies:

a) Psychology (and related scientific disciplines)

In recent decades, psychologists have been accumulating a growing body of evidence about the critical role these skills play in determining one’s success in professional life and in shaping one’s sense of well-being. New fields of research and practice, such as Social Intelligence, Emotional Intelligence, Positive Psychology and Cognitive Therapy, have been spawned, and the following assertions have gained increasing validation even as they have conflicted with conventional wisdom:

- *The brain is plastic.* The brain is capable of eliminating old habits and mindsets and acquiring new ones not just during childhood but even through the course of one’s adult life.
- *Practice makes perfect.* It is not through occasional practice, but through focused, repeated efforts that one can effect a lasting change in one’s thought patterns or behavior. Through such repetitions, the brain gets to re-wire itself as old ways of thinking and behaving are dissolved and new ones are formed.
b) Philosophers and Prophets

Philosophers and prophets from both Western and Eastern cultures have, for centuries, reflected on the human condition and sought to experiment with and develop techniques for gaining mastery over the internal environment as a pathway to success. Several of the modern discoveries about the mind’s role in shaping behavior have antecedents in the teachings of these historical figures.

c) Practitioners

The lives and words of great achievers over the course of history provide additional insight on how personal competencies play a role in shaping success, and how they can be developed. While we are often able to witness only the outer behavior of these individuals, there are many illuminating examples that reveal the inner workings of their feelings and minds as they marched onward toward their goals.

This course will integrate these three sources of insight to provide students with learnings on the following questions:

1) What impact does our internal environment have on our success?
2) What are the areas of personal competency that we need to develop in order to achieve a mastery over the internal environment?
3) What techniques can one use to develop these personal competencies?

Teaching approach

The course will emphasize a practical, hands-on skill-building orientation. Lectures will be richly supplemented by exercises involving introspection, self-analysis/evaluation, and practical applications of techniques. It is the intent of the course to help students begin the journey toward greater self-awareness and mastery over their internal environments.

The course will strike a unique balance between the interest some students may have for maintaining privacy in pursuing their growth goals with the benefits the class can get from engaging in shared learning (across the class):

- A number of the exercises will entail a rich and intimate journey into our internal environments – the mental models that are limiting our growth, the challenges we face in managing our emotions, and the life challenges that we are grappling with. The course will encourage students to reflect on these in very candid ways in their own private context – by engaging in the exercises, and learning from them, on their own. Students will not be required to directly share their personal challenges or issues in the class setting.

- Even as we protect our privacy in this manner, there is a lot of value in sharing and observing others’ approaches, challenges and learnings. To facilitate this community learning, students will occasionally be asked to share their evaluations, analyses and introspections in an anonymous manner with the class. By reviewing these responses across the class, we will be able to gain insights from each other even as no individual is specifically identified in these submissions.
Course Requirements and Grading

Attendance and Engagement (25%)

You are expected to attend all sessions. In particular, please note that attendance in the first session is mandatory.

I expect all of us to be in class on time. We will start our classes promptly because every minute in the service of approaching your full potential is invaluable.

I do not require active participation in class discussion, but I do “cold call” from time to time to add more voices to our discussions.

Please have your video on at all times during the zoom calls. If for any technical or personal reasons your participation through video is problematic on occasion, please let the TA know.

You are expected to be fully engaged and participative, with video turned on, for all pairwise and group breakout discussions.

Pre-Work Assignment (15%)

There is one assignment (~1.5 hours) to complete before the block week starts.

General Assignments (30%)

There are four assignments to complete during the semester. Please refer to Canvas for more information about these assignments.

PL Actions - or - PL Behaviors (Your Term Paper will be based on these Actions or Behaviors you take on)

Option 1 – PL Actions: A key part of the learning process is applying and internalizing the lessons through regular practice. This option invites you to use Mentora Digital’s library of role-plays, missions, teach-backs and multiple-choice questions to learn and practice 8 Actions that you wish to add to your Personal Leadership repertoire – roughly 2 hrs/week over 6-8 weeks.

Option 2 – PL Behaviors: This option invites you to design your own learning path for this semester, by focusing on a few behaviors you wish to implement. You will be given a list of suggested PL Behaviors to choose from, or you can design your own (with pre-approval from me). You will need to commit to 2 Everyday Activities and 2 Episodic Activities. For each Everyday Activity, you are meant to do it for ~15 min per day, for 3 weeks (21 days). For each Episodic Activity, you are meant to do it 3-4 times during the semester. If you wish to pursue a PL Behavior that is not in the suggested list, then you should write to me to get it pre-approved to make sure it is aligned with the learning goals of the class.

Term Paper (30%)

Your capstone project is a term paper in which you will reflect on your learnings from the class and from your PLS Activities/MicroPractice. Please refer to Canvas for more information about the final paper.
Optional Bonus Assignment (extra 10%)

There is an optional assignment that allows you to earn bonus points towards your grade. You will have an opportunity to dive deeper on one of the energies by reading and reflecting on a draft-chapter from my upcoming book (to-be-published). Please refer to Canvas for more information about the optional assignment.