
Practical Buddhism: Leadership and Work

— Nalaka Gooneratne, MD, MSc —

An example

Fill in the blanks below and use this as an example that you can think about as we discuss different strategies:

I would like my team to do _____ but it just isn't happening...



Advice for All

The Buddha's teachings were not only for monks:

With Nandiya — Bhikkhu Sujato



SC 5.2 It's appropriate that gentlemen such as you come to me and ask:

Etaṃ kho, nandiya, tumhākaṃ patirūpaṃ kulaputtānaṃ, yaṃ tumhe tathāgataṃ upasaṅkamtivā puccheyyātha:

SC 5.3 'We spend our life in various ways. Which of these should we practice?'

'tesaṃ no, bhante, nānāvihārehi viharataṃ kenassa vihārena vihātabban'ti?



Virtues of the Buddha: Buddhanusati



Buddhanusati

Meditation (sati) on the virtues of the Buddha and arahants

Typically describes meditation on the Buddha's traits of:

- Perfect, omniscient, good conduct, well spoken, wise, peerless trainer, teacher, enlightened

Reflecting on the Buddha's qualities as a leader embodies some of these elements and can be incorporated into our daily work life and leadership duties

Leadership

Core Buddhist Teachings and Leadership

- Mindfulness
 - Four foundations of mindfulness (previously discussed)
 - Can be summarized as “avoid multi-tasking”
- Brahma-viharas
 - Compassion
 - Kindness
 - Sympathetic Joy
 - Equanimity
- Eightfold Path
 - Right Speech
 - Right Livelihood

How Could this Be Applied to Leadership and Work in Lay Life?

Mindfulness before decision making

Even a brief period of mindfulness before making a decision can be helpful to enhance objectivity:

Research Article



Debiasing the Mind Through Meditation: Mindfulness and the Sunk-Cost Bias

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Metta during meetings

- Workplace environment can be competitive
- Metta as a skillful practice against jealousy/envy/competition
 - Sympathetic joy (mudita)
- Sample mental phrases:
 - “May your happiness and good fortune grow and never leave”
 - <https://www.lionsroar.com/how-to-practice-sympathetic-joy/>
 - “This being is indeed glad. How good, how excellent”
 - Paraphrased from the Visudhimagga in “The Experience of Samadhi”, Richard Shankman

Dealing with Anger

The Abuser — Bhikkhu Sujato

“What do you think, brahmin? Do friends and colleagues, relatives and family members, and guests still come to visit you?”

“Sometimes they do, Master Gotama.”

“Do you then serve them with a variety of foods and savories?”

“Sometimes I do.”

“But if they don’t accept it, brahmin, who does it belong to?”

“In that case it still belongs to me.”

“In the same way, brahmin, when you abuse, harass, and attack us who do not abuse, harass, and attack, we don’t accept it. It still belongs to you, brahmin, it still belongs to you!

Additional Leadership Principles: Sariputta

Dutiyacakkānuvattana Sutta (Wielding Power, AN 5.132)

In this sutta, Buddha describes the traits of a leader

Mentions Sariputta as a leader of the Sangha

SC 4.2 Sāriputta knows what is right, knows principle, knows moderation, knows the right time, and knows the assembly.

Idha, bhikkhave, sāriputto atthaññū, dhammaññū, mattaññū, kālaññū, parisaññū.

SC 4.3 Possessing these five factors Sāriputta rightly keeps rolling the supreme Wheel of Dhamma that was rolled forth by the Realized One.

Imehi kho, bhikkhave, pañcahi dhammehi samannāgato sāriputto tathāgatena anuttaraṃ dhammacakkaṃ pavattitaṃ sammadeva anuppavatteti;

Dutiyacakkānūvattana Sutta Concepts

Atthanu: Vision. Having a clear vision; knowing the means; knowing the goal

Dhammanu: Truth. Having a clear grasp of reality and facts.

Mattanu: Temperate. Understanding the measure or limit, being moderate.

Kalannu: Timing. Knowing the right time for action

Parisannu: Aware. Knowing the thoughts and wishes of the group; knowing the characteristics of its members

Ancient + Modern

We'll review each of these concepts and describe modern analogues/examples

Atthanu (Vision)

Simon Sinek,
“Start with
Why”, 2009

The Golden Circle

WHAT

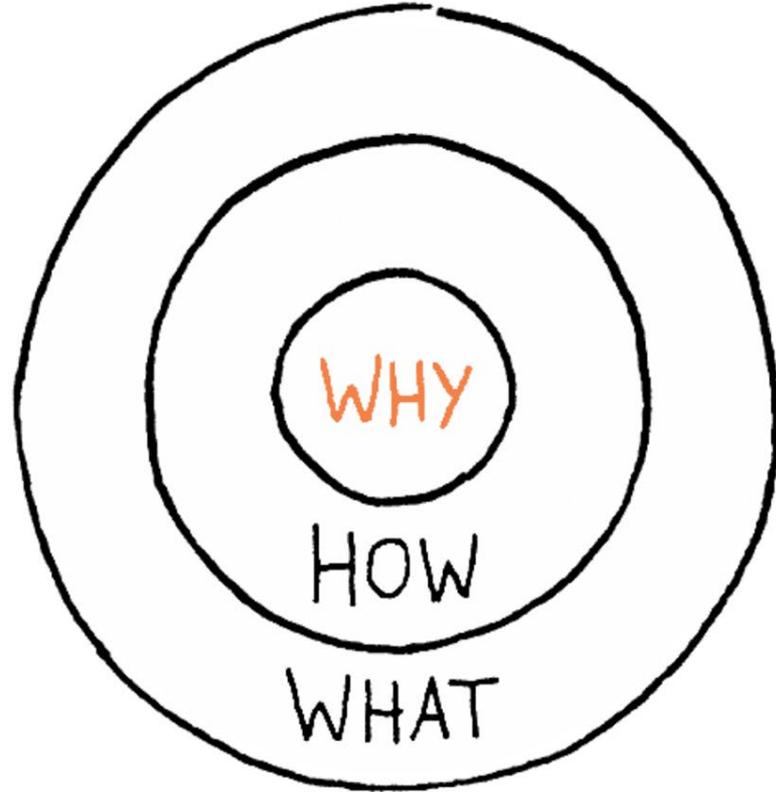
Every organization on the planet knows WHAT they do. These are products they sell or the services

HOW

Some organizations know HOW they do it. These are the things that make them special or set them apart from their competition.

WHY

Very few organizations know WHY they do what they do. WHY is not about making money. That's a result. WHY is a purpose, cause or belief. It's the very reason your organization exists.



Atthanu (Vision): Importance of Focus

“What is the biggest issue with most leaders? They don’t have a compelling vision because they have too many visions. If you look at some of the leaders you may look up to, they may have had many products, but only one vision. A vision is not a product, instead it is where they see all their efforts focused.”

Buddhist Sutta Example:

“Both formerly and now, it is only suffering that I teach, and the cessation of suffering”

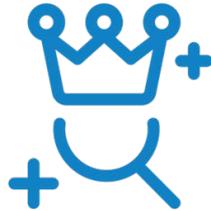
Dhammannu (Truth)

Having a clear grasp of reality and facts.

Vanity Metrics

A principle of “Lean Startup” methodology

Vanity Metrics



Feel good to look at but **lack** guidance for next steps

Actionable Metrics



Can be used to **inform** better business descions.

VS

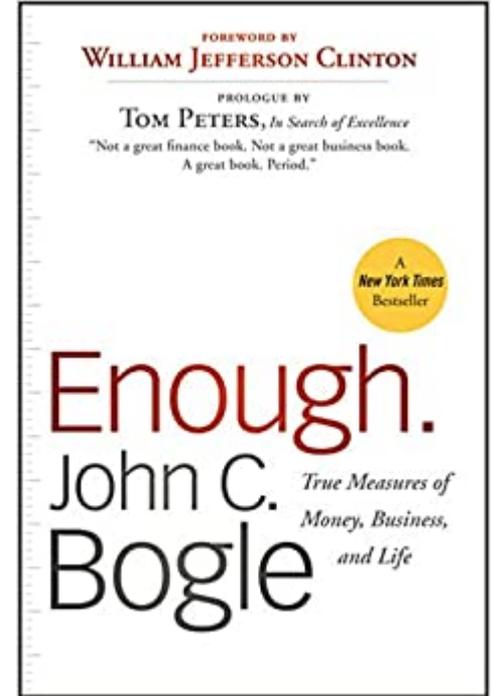


Mattannu (Temperate)

Understanding the measure or limit, being moderate.

Can apply to consequences, such as punishment or income/revenue

Articulated throughout Buddhist teachings as “the middle way”



J Bogle, founder of Vanguard mutual funds

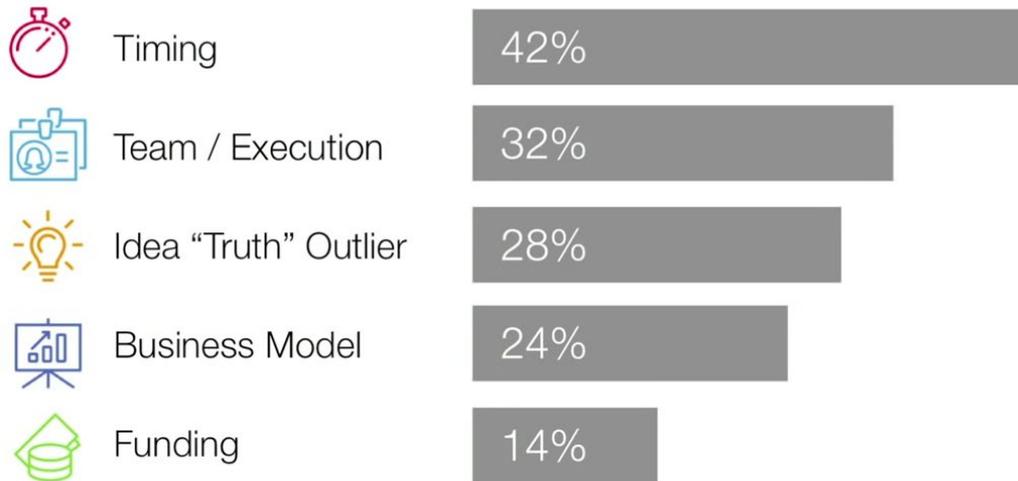


Kalannu (Timing)

Knowing the right time
for action

Bill Gross,
CEO, Idealab

Top 5 Factors in Success Across More Than 200 Companies



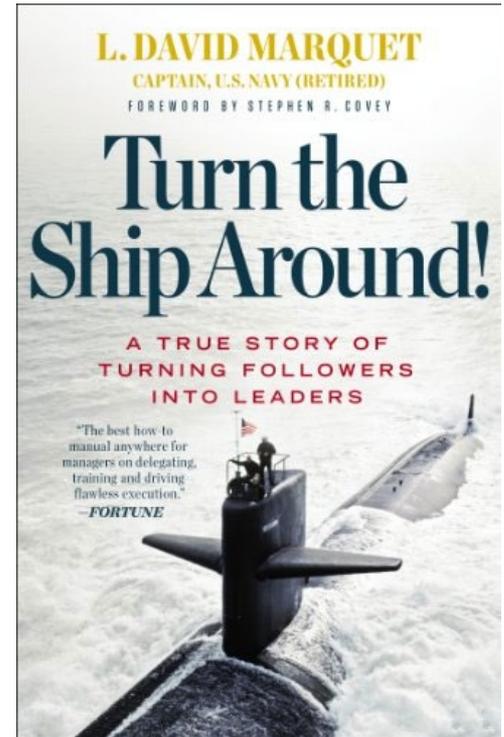


Parisannu (Aware)

Knowing the thoughts and wishes of the group;
knowing the characteristics of its members

Leadership should mean giving control rather
than taking control

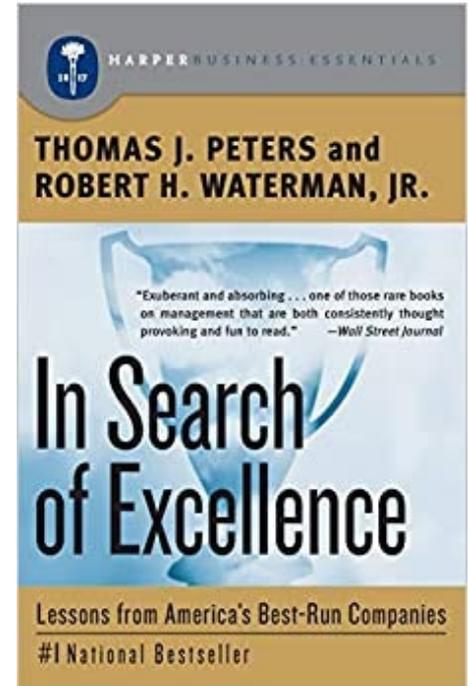
Captain L. David Marquet, developer of Intent-Based Leadership, “Turn the Ship Around!: A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders”. Former captain of the USS Santa Fe, a nuclear-powered submarine.



Parisannu: Management by Wandering Around

First coined by Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman, “In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies”, 1992

Toyota leadership practice: “The gemba walk...is an activity that takes management to the front lines to look for waste and opportunities to practice genba kaizen, or practical shop floor improvement”



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Management_by_wandering_around
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gemba>

Parisannu example: Dhātuvibhaṅgasutta (The Analysis of the Elements, MN 140)

While wandering the Magadhan lands, Buddha asks Bhaggava the potter if he could spend a night in his workshop. Bhaggava agrees, but mentions that another ascetic, Pukkasati, is there also.

When talking to Pukkasati, Buddha learns that Pukkasati is a follower of the Buddha, but Pukkasati does not realize he is talking to the Buddha. Buddha uses this as an opportunity to question him

SC 4.2 He spent most of the night sitting meditation,
Atha kho bhagavā bahudeva rattiṃ nisajjāya vītināmesi.

SC 4.3 and so did Pukkusāti.
Āyasmāpi kho pukkusāti bahudeva rattiṃ nisajjāya vītināmesi.

SC 4.4 Then it occurred to the Buddha,
Atha kho bhagavato etadahosi:

SC 4.5 “This gentleman’s conduct is impressive.
“pāsādikaṃ kho ayaṃ kulaputto iriyati.

SC 4.6 Why don’t I question him?”
Yannūnāhaṃ puccheyyan”ti.

Additional Leadership Principles: From Diverse Suttas/Jatakas



Dasavidha-rājadhamma: Ten Qualities of a Ruler (Jataka)

- Dāna (charity) — being prepared to sacrifice one's own pleasure for the well-being of the public, such as giving away one's belongings or other things to assist others, including giving knowledge and serving public interests.
- Sīla (morality) — moral behavior, both physical and mental; being a good example of others.
- Pariccāga (altruism) — being generous and avoiding selfishness.
- Ājjava (honesty) — being honest and sincere towards others, performing one's duties with loyalty and sincerity, accountability
- Maddava (gentleness) — having a gentle temperament, avoiding arrogance and not defaming others.

Ten Qualities of a Ruler (cont)

- Tapa (self control) — controlling passion and performing duties without indolence.
- Akkodha (non-anger) — being free from hatred and remaining calm in the midst of confusion.
- Avihimsa (non-violence) — exercising non-violence, not being vengeful.
- Khanti (forbearance) — practicing patience.
- Avirodhana (uprightness) — respecting opinions of other persons, avoiding prejudice and promoting order.

Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala (DN 31, The Layperson's Code of Discipline)

“In five ways should a master minister to his servants and employees:

(i) by assigning them work according to their ability,

(ii) by supplying them with food and with wages,

(iii) by tending them in sickness,

(iv) by sharing with them any delicacies,

(v) by granting them leave at times.”

Sigalovada Sutta: The Discourse to Sigala (DN 31, The Layperson's Code of Discipline)

"The servants and employees thus ministered to...by their master show their compassion to him in five ways:

- (i) they rise before him,
- (ii) they go to sleep after him,
- (iii) they take only what is given,
- (iv) they perform their duties well,
- (v) they uphold his good name and fame.



Leadership as a learned skill

“the Wheel-Treasure (leadership) is not an heirloom from your fathers. (...) you must turn yourself into an Ariyan (noble) wheel-turner. And then it may come about that, if you perform the duties of an Ariyan wheel-turning monarch, (...) the sacred Wheel-Treasure will appear to you(...).

Accepting Inquiry

Vīmaṃsaka Sutta (MN 47): Buddha describes how it is appropriate for a subordinate to question and evaluate a teacher or leader

The Inquirer — Bhikkhu Sujato

SC 4.1 “Mendicants, a mendicant who is an inquirer, unable to comprehend another’s mind, should scrutinize the Realized One for two things—things that can be seen and heard:

“Vīmaṃsakena, bhikkhave, bhikkhunā parassa cetopariyāyaṃ ajānantena dvīsu dhammesu tathāgato samannesitabbo cakkhusotaviññeyyesu dhammesu:

SC 4.2 ‘Can anything corrupt be seen or heard in the Realized One or not?’

‘ye saṅkiliṭṭhā cakkhusotaviññeyyā dhammā, saṃvijjanti vā te tathāgatassa no vā’ti?’

<https://suttacentral.net/mn4//en/sujato>
<https://philarchive.org/archive/VOSKAA>

Leading by Example

The suttas are replete with examples of Buddha practising his dhamma

- Ministering to a sick monk
- Austere lifestyle and following the vinaya rules

Mutual Respect and Empowerment

Essential element of
Buddha's teachings
is faith in our
ability to develop

The Appeal of Brahmā — Bhikkhu Sujato



SC 9.3 It's like a pool with blue water lilies, or pink or white lotuses. Some of them sprout and grow in the water without rising above it, thriving underwater. Some of them sprout and grow in the water reaching the water's surface. And some of them sprout and grow in the water but rise up above the water and stand with no water clinging to them.

Seyyathāpi nāma uppaliniyaṃ vā paduminiyaṃ vā puṇḍarīkiniyaṃ vā appekaccāni uppalāni vā padumāni vā puṇḍarīkāni vā udake jātāni udake saṃvaḍḍhāni udakānuggatāni anto nimuggaposīni, appekaccāni uppalāni vā padumāni vā puṇḍarīkāni vā udake jātāni udake saṃvaḍḍhāni samodakaṃ ṭhitāni, appekaccāni uppalāni vā padumāni vā puṇḍarīkāni vā udake jātāni udake saṃvaḍḍhāni udakā accuggamma ṭhitāni anupalittāni udakena;

SC 9.4 In the same way, the Buddha saw sentient beings with little dust in their eyes, and some with much dust in their eyes; with keen faculties and with weak faculties, with good qualities and with bad qualities, easy to teach and hard to teach. And some of them lived seeing the danger in the fault to do with the next world, while others did not.

<https://suttacentral.net/sn6.1/en/sujato>

Ethics of Wealth in Buddhism



Righteous Wealth Righteously Gained

“wealth earned through his efforts & enterprise,
amassed through the strength of his arms and
piled up through the sweat of his brow,
righteous wealth righteously gained”

Public/Community Charitable Acts

“Those who set up a park or a grove, the people who construct a bridge, a place to drink and a well, those who give a residence: for them merit always increases, both by day and by night; those are the people going to heaven, established in Dhamma, endowed with virtue.” (Vanaropa Sutta SN 1.47).