

Starting and Sustaining a Complete Quality System

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A Complete Quality System Requires A Complete Leader

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If a Complete Quality System² is to be successfully integrated into an organization, it requires committed and involved leadership at every organizational level. A critical mass of leadership must be trained in the principles of quality, problem solving, teaming, and facilitation. Leadership must be able to lead and facilitate teams so that they can show that they walk the talk and embrace the principles imbedded in a Complete Quality System.

The importance of the organizational leadership's total involvement in designing, implementing, nurturing, and sustaining a complete quality system cannot be emphasized enough. Many leaders have made the mistake of assuming that a complete quality system will take root on its own, and they have maintained a hands-off approach with minimal interest. The leaders are always surprised when it fails. The employees look to the organization's leadership for direction; when they see only a passing interest in the quality program, they do likewise, and the whole effort is lip service until it fails.

We must lead ourselves before we can successfully lead others. Completeness as a leader implies not being fragmented but exhibiting inner and outer congruence. Congruent leaders live and lead in a way that is consistent with their values. Quality must be one of those values. Values are what we believe in, those principles that guide our behavior. Building congruence and conscience is about developing balance and harmony between the inner core and external behavior. No disconnect between core values and actions can be evident. This balance and harmony is completeness. When leaders are complete, they do what they say. A current business term for this concept is "Walking the Talk."

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² Reference the Complete Quality System article

John Zenger and Joseph Folkman identify five fatal flaws related to our sense of wholeness or completeness as a leader, as shown in Figure 1.³

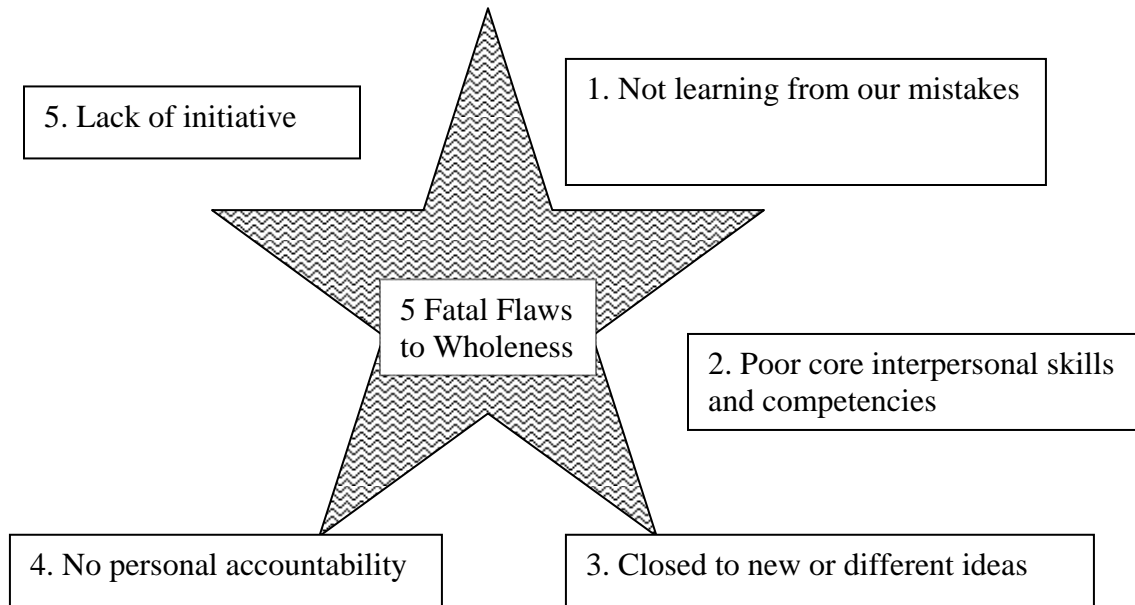


Figure 1. The Five Fatal Flaws to Leader Wholeness

1. Not learning from our mistakes

Incomplete leaders repeat failing actions because the policies or procedures say that we should do an action in a certain way. Times and situations change. We must be aware of the rapid change of the organization and the world around us. It is critical for a leader to have the self-confidence to say openly “This is wrong” and take a different approach. Hiding mistakes rather than admitting them and moving on is a symptom of a leader wishing to save his or her job rather than help the organization move ahead.

2. Poor core interpersonal skills and competencies

“My way or the highway” behavior is inappropriate in today’s team environment. Organizations need different views in order to assess the best options for improvement. Stephen Covey recently revisited his “Seven Habits” and reminds us to “Seek first to

³ Zenger, John H. and Folkman, Joseph; The Leadership Tent, Executive Excellence, February 2003

understand, then to be understood.”⁴ Behaviors such as abrasiveness, browbeating, arrogance, and bullying are common downfalls of rising leaders. No combination of intelligence, administrative skills or hard work can overcome the lack of interpersonal skills.

When you talk to people, look them in the eye. Learn to listen, not just hear what others are saying. Encourage openness in others by being open yourself. It takes a good self-image to accept criticism from others. Most of us find others interesting when the other person is interested in us. We can use this piece of human nature to initiate healthy relationships with others.

3. Closed to new or different ideas

“Not interested here” is a death knell. We must remain willing to learn from others. We should listen to others before we share our own ideas. When we insist on our own position simply because it is ours, we come across as threatened by the creativity and innovation of others. Our employees and peers will quickly lose trust in us if we consistently dismiss the ideas, experience, and creativity of others.

Essential to our success is making it safe for people to talk, involving all people in the solution, and including them in something that they already have a stake in but do not feel part of. It takes extra effort to involve others in new ideas. It is more comfortable for many of us to develop new ideas in private, away from the criticism and suggestions of others. Few of us are pleased when someone calls our idea ugly.

In leadership, our success often hinges on doing things that we are not yet good at. Leaders may not have all of the answers, but we must be adept at finding the answers and then move forward with courage.

4. No personal accountability

⁴ Covey, Stephen; Seven Habits Revisited, Executive Excellence, May 2003

Accountability is defined as the willingness to care personally for the well being of the institution first and of our unit and self second. We accept responsibility for our actions and represent the organization to our employees. We refrain from “blaming up” or acting as a victim of upper management. Success in this arena is acknowledging the way things are and engaging without blame in a full and frank discussion of what is happening. Telling the truth in clear and concise observations is a large part of being complete within ourselves.

There are many opportunities to be accountable in the workplace, including but not limited to:

- Performance measures
- Operational goals
- Communication
- Personal development and growth
- Management of employees
- Required paperwork
- Timeliness
- Subjectivity and effort

5. Lack of initiative

Covey states that most people spend at least 25% of their time and energy in dysfunctional activities – interpersonal conflict, interdepartmental rivalry, finger pointing, blaming, kissing up, political game playing, and other forms of protective and defensive communication.⁵ Part of wholeness is taking action, following through with commitments and responsibilities. Some examples of action over time-wasting dysfunctional activities are:

⁵ Ibid.

- Maintaining our physical abilities, including strength and flexibility. Movement over indecision.
- Enhancing our mind-body connection. Being congruent between internal and external behaviors.
- Exhibiting a strong work ethic. Being willing to work hard.
- Showing a love and passion for what we do. “Just doing it.”
- Staying on the competitive edge. Continuously improving our personal best.
- Ability to deal with pressure, not hiding from competition or conflict.

Initiating decision-making and moving forward in spite of uncertainty requires courage. Many leaders spend so much time fighting their own situation and avoiding their key responsibilities that they never lead.

Figure 2 is a summary of the major competencies that leaders at all levels in an organization need to help make a complete quality system a success. These five areas encompass the ideas of self-worth, skills, communication, and results that are so essential in today’s complex business environment.

Competency	Indicator
Character	Ethical standards, positive self presence, and authenticity
Personal Capability	Intellectual, emotional, and skill makeup. Lifelong learning.
A Focus on Results	The ability to have an impact and get things accomplished.
Interpersonal Skills	Communication approach and its impact on other people
Change Leadership	The ability to produce positive change

Figure 2. Core Competencies for the Whole Leader

Leaders are susceptible to inconsistencies during periods of transition. When our personal and business environments are changing, so are our relationships. Good management is based on good mechanics – like procedures, techniques, models, and

policies. Good leadership requires more creativity, articulating and bringing forth a vision. Leaders add legitimacy to their positions by their acceptance, trust, and belief.

A Complete Quality System requires complete leaders throughout the organization that are focused on the customer, make sure that processes are aligned to customer needs, and measure and monitor to ensure that customer needs are met. Complete leaders also monitor and measure how employees are functioning within a complete quality system. They insist that employees receive appropriate training, good team leadership, help with facilitation when obstacles are encountered, and recognition for jobs well done. A Complete Quality System focuses internally and externally to deliver satisfaction to the employees and the customers.