

# Whole-Life Leadership: Self, Others, All

By **Garry Priam**

**W**HAT DOES IT MEAN TO LEAD FROM ANY LEVEL? Through our interaction with people, we help to raise people up. We instill a sense of confidence and create leaders who are confident and ready to inspire others.

Whether I am facilitating a workshop, teaching a course or mentoring one-one-one, my opening words always include: “I am here to teach you and I am also here to learn from you because we all learn from each other.”

By making this statement, I am acknowledging that learning is shared by everyone and that even the smallest takeaway can make a difference—and change the outcome of how we do and see things. I am open and willing to learn from others and embrace it.

## Opening Up to Self-Leadership

However, while perpetual learning may be the hallmark of leadership, true, whole-life leadership stems from a willingness to reflect, apply and to return with strategic intent.

I see myself as a whole-life leader in this light because I know that throughout my career some of my decisions were not always right. I have some mistakes. Moreover, I will most likely will make more. That said, I learn from my experiences, which helps me make the difficult choices.

I also share my stories with people about how important it is for me to have down time, exercise daily, eat well and socialize. As a result, I am unafraid and look forward to taking the steps to accomplish what needs to be done when it comes to working with others and giving direction. Through my experiences and mistakes, I have become a more “whole” person and leader.

## The Onus and the Bonus

Given the amount of pressure we face as professionals and the world’s and our own expectations, we need to become whole-life leaders for our own mental, physical and organizational wellbeing—and to share this with others.

It’s important to help ourselves and others. Not everyone wants to go on a 10 kilometre run, but all of us have something that re-energizes and helps us to decompress. It’s up to you to find what works for you.

If we don’t, we suffer as individuals, which in turn affects our co-workers, our companies and our customers like a ripple in a pond—albeit, one that affects everything above and below the surface.

Whole-life leadership includes fulfilling these internal goals, which in turn lead to more success in achieving external goals for people and co-workers. We create neither meaning nor lasting results chasing external successes alone. We create them by committing to inner success which generates the motivation, creativity and resilience to accomplish challenging external goals.

**“I am open and willing to learn from others and I embrace it.”**

## Sharing the Bigger Picture

From that solid core of internal, self-leadership, whole-life leaders similarly distinguish themselves in the totality of their intentions and interactions. They understand what it takes to achieve important goals and are able to guide the work to completion. This stems from the simple fact that whole-life leaders respect the “wholeness” of the people involved and acknowledge their varied contributions by helping them see the impact of their work on everyone’s well-being.

Whole-life leaders have the ability to link the “smallest”



player to the biggest picture in this way. As a result, they design work that challenges versus demands and fuels versus drains. They see the contributive potential of the individuals on their team and their vision for a better future has plenty of room for healthy, energized and engaged people. Most importantly, they create meaning and the sense of belonging—which fuel us all on a foundational level.

### Grasping the Human Dynamic

As per David Whyte, author of *The Three Marriages*, “The current understanding of work-life balance is too simplistic. People find it hard to balance work with family, family with self, because it might not be a question of balance. Some other dynamic is in play, something to do with a very human attempt at happiness that does not quantify different parts of life and then set them against one another. We are collectively exhausted because of our inability to hold competing parts of ourselves together in a more integrated way.”

“This sense of belonging and not belonging is lived out by most people through three principal dynamics: first, through relationship to other people and other living things (particularly and very personally, to one other living, breathing person in relationship or marriage); second, through work; third, through an understanding of what it means to be themselves, discrete individuals alive and seemingly separate from everyone and everything else,” Whyte says.

### Whole-Life Leaders of HR

Many HR professionals are whole-life leaders already, responsible for supporting the same ethos within their organizations as quintessential linchpins in the development of work-life policies and programs. These programs range widely, grow daily and include flexible working arrangements, parental leave policies, on-site childcare, and work redesign initiatives. Most importantly, HR’s efforts in these areas singularly enrich the

experience of the workplace by allowing people to co-manage their work and non-work responsibilities, while enhancing work-family enrichment.

Undeniably, organizational work-family cultures are shaped by the values held by the company’s leaders. However, family-friendly initiatives are ineffective if employees do not perceive their use to be supported by the company. If employees perceive the organization’s work-family culture to be unsupportive, they refrain from utilizing family-friendly policies for fear of negative career repercussions.

As a result, HR professionals and whole-life leaders at the executive level can help to cultivate positive perceptions of a work-family culture by removing these fears, establishing reasonable organizational time demands that are compatible with other life domains, and providing and encouraging managerial support of work-family balance at all levels of leadership.

By developing ourselves as whole-life leaders and recognizing the whole-life potential of the employees in our midsts, there is little that cannot be accomplished. HR professionals, together with the C-suite, supervisors and managers, can proactively communicate and stimulate positive employee work attitudes and instill leadership in others.

Recognizing these efforts through a whole-life lens only lends itself to even greater potential. Whole-life leaders become a vehicle for promoting ever wider change as both role models and change agents—redefining work, family, careers and leadership, then re-applying the learning to find win-win solutions for pictures great and small. **📌**

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