

**Michelle Ray CSP:**  
**Why leadership is an “inside job”™ - Five ways to practise personal leadership**



Leadership begins with leading oneself. A title on a business card or a placard on a desk or door does not automatically make someone a leader. It may give the impression of self-importance and achievement; however, the title alone is not enough. Neither is a job description that notes functions associated with managing people. Rather, it seems to me that there is a pre-requisite for being an effective leader of a team or within any organization.

A leader is someone who recognizes that character is the greatest test of true leadership. Honing this specific talent is far more significant in the grand scheme of things because human beings will progress further in their life paths by mastering the capacity to relate to and communicate with the vast array of personality types, cultures, genders, and demographics that make up the human race. A business title conveying “leader” is no proof of having acquired this gift.

Furthermore, one doesn’t have to be in a workplace to be a leader. A leader is someone who has grasped the ability to consciously take charge of their thoughts, and consequently their actions, in any situation. A leader is someone who is clear about their values and applies them on a regular basis. In other words, having values and living by one’s values are two distinctive propositions.

This has very little to do with moving up the management ladder into a leadership role. During volatile times, individuals and organizations need to be reminded more than ever that we can control our own reality.

The old adage “attitudes are caught not taught” serves us now as a timely message. We can choose a “get a grip” approach when times get tough, which implies a short-term methodology of coping, or we can choose “to manage”, which involves developing a mindset of resiliency for the long haul.

Taking charge of ourselves requires the discipline to take the following actions:

**1. Become aware of your inner dialogue**

Numerous studies in the field of psychology have proven the connection between negative and positive thoughts contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy. In fact, some research has proven the connection between optimism and longevity. It all begins with how we choose to interpret events that occur in our lives. If it is true that we think approximately 60,000 thoughts each day and 80% of these thoughts are negative, we may unknowingly be creating our own demise. By increasing our awareness of destructive thought patterns, we can improve our self-esteem and

sense of well-being, and become more self-directed.

**2. Harness energy and channel it constructively**

It may be surprising to consider that negative emotions have value. Throughout history, there have been many examples of individuals who felt anger and passion regarding injustices in the world and were able to channel their energy positively to achieve extraordinary outcomes. Therefore, the true value of such emotions is determined by how they are expressed. In the words of Dr Michael LeBoeuf: “Adversity is an experience, not a final act.” Think of what is possible when you choose to live in your imagination and begin to channel positive energy, commitment and belief in this direction.

**3. Make work-life balance a priority**

The term “work-life balance” is not an oxymoron! Effective people recognize that taking time out to relax for half an hour to an hour during a busy working day actually rejuvenates the mind and body. Think about where you expend energy as well as the values you live by. Are these two areas congruent? For example, when we say family time or living a healthy lifestyle is a high priority, yet we spend more than 50 hours a week at work, we are compromising our values with paradoxical priorities.

**4. Surround yourself with positive people**

There is no doubt that the company we keep says a lot about who we are. We may not be able to choose our families or who we work with, but we can choose who we socialize with. Negative attitudes are contagious only to the degree that we allow ourselves to “buy in”. Rather than wasting our energy by listening or trying to change others, our job is to model positive behaviour (if we must be around whiney types) or to choose new friends!

**5. Recognize life’s learning opportunities**

Rarely do we acknowledge hurdles or obstacles in life as opportunities, especially when we are in the midst of a personal or professional crisis. These are the moments when we can learn the most, although a heightened state of anxiety will often cloud our judgement. When we remember the wisdom of acknowledging, accepting and then letting go of what we cannot change, we can make headway and move forward. In the words of Oscar Wilde: “The aim of life is self-development. To realize one’s nature perfectly, that is what each of us is here for.”

**About Michelle Ray**

Born in Melbourne, Australia, and now residing in Vancouver, Canada, Michelle Ray is a leadership and workplace motivation expert who demonstrates a deep understanding of team dynamics, interpersonal communication, service excellence, and personal accountability.

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For the past 15 years, Michelle has worked with hundreds of leaders and their teams by helping them create effective business relationships and positive workplaces. As a sought-after international keynote speaker, seminar leader, and author, Michelle has earned the “Certified Speaking Professional Designation”, held by less than 600 people worldwide.

She speaks passionately about individual responsibility, the impact of attitude in the workplace, the importance of outstanding leadership and the value of positive communication and influence. Her core message (and title of her upcoming book): “Leadership – An Inside Job”, resonates with audiences at any level, as she reminds her attendees that leadership is a mindset, not a job title.

Michelle will present a plenary session and two workshop at AAPM 2011. Please visit her website [www.michelleray.com](http://www.michelleray.com) for contact details and additional information.