

A *Management Forum Series* presentation

# **The Three Paradoxes of Leadership**

**Karlin Sloan**

## **Smarter, Faster, Better . . .**

### **Strategies for Effective, Enduring, and Fulfilled Leadership**

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**Synopsis by Rod Cox**

*“Traditional business thinking holds that being **smarter** means gathering knowledge, learning more and more, and becoming a certified expert. It used to be that being a smart leader meant that you simply knew more than anyone else. But now, thanks in large part to the Internet, information is accessible by all. The idea that the leader is the authority on all things no longer holds.”*

*“We have also altered our definition of **faster**. In most business leadership today, stopwatch time management logic no longer works. We now rely on innovation, intelligence, and a big-picture perspective. These things all depend on stopping the tyranny of time; i.e., on allowing your brain to go to Alpha or Theta states in order to achieve great things. (This is not easily done) in a culture in which we are expected to be constantly available and constantly ‘on.’”*

*“But how can we slow down when others are moving at laser speed? To be **better**, we need to stop focusing on our competitive advantage, and instead focus on others and on giving back to our company, our community and our world. The argument is not with the word ‘better’; it’s with the word ‘than’. In other words, to be better with others rather than to being better than others.”*

In this Executive Forum presentation, Karlin Sloan focuses on the paradoxes:

- To be **smarter**, we need to stop being the expert and start asking more questions.
- To be **faster**, we need to slow down.
- To be **better**, we need to stop focusing on our personal gain and start focusing on giving back.

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Executive Forum recommends Karlin Sloan’s solutions-focused book *Smarter, Faster, Better: Strategies for Effective, Enduring, and Fulfilled Leadership*. (ISBN-13:978-0-7879-8268-3) *“This book is the best thing next to having customized executive coaching sessions with Karlin Sloan. She’s truly the master coach.”* (Sidney Chapon, Leo Burnett Worldwide, Inc.) Sloan’s Portland, Oregon Management Forum Series presentation is based on her book, as are the quotes in this synopsis.

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ur world has always needed leaders. At one time, this might have meant a stopwatch approach with a focus on efficiency and output. But in today's world, that approach doesn't work. What has shifted?

*“We are facing big changes in global and multicultural business environments; in quickly changing economic, social, and political landscapes; in ethics and values issues; and in depletion of natural resources. In addition, the younger generation – increasingly the core of employees -- doesn't want to be told. It wants to be asked, and will disengage if not, taking its leadership cues from peer relationships.”*

**“The leader of the past was a person who told; the leader of the future will be a person who asks.”**

Peter Drucker

As leaders, the way we change the world and our organizations is through taking responsibility for something larger than ourselves. This requires us to ask ourselves a new set of questions:

- What strengths can I use?
  - What strengths am I overusing? Is my adaptability and flexibility helping or hurting my company?
  - Who can I tap for their smarts when I need other skills or perspectives?
- What opportunities do we have in the marketplace? What makes our organization special: i.e., what is our positive core?
  - What impact am I making? Is it the impact I want to make?

## The Smarter Paradox:

*“What exactly can you do to become a smarter leader in today's business environment which is full of change, populated by diverse people from diverse cultures, and affected by market forces that can change direction on a dime?”*

Smarter refers to looking at things with an appreciative eye. *“It is no secret that every leader is different. This is why we do not need to become experts on great leadership as much as we each need to become expert at knowing what makes us each great leaders in our own way.”*

The goal is to become a master of strengths, rather than a master of problems:

- Cultivating an appreciative personal attitude and mind-set by using Appreciative Inquiry and by looking at situations from a positive perspective.
- Looking at your leadership in the context of your organization or system.
- Applying your leadership knowledge to others and developing smarter people around you.
- Focusing on what's working, what's going right and can be amplified, knowing that what you focus on becomes your reality.
- Studying how people are engaged at work, and looking for opportunities for improvements, not challenges.

## The Appreciative Eye

*“What if each day you were assured that you would experience satisfaction, discover a new opportunity, and leave your workplace feeling inspired? It is 100 percent possible. This is the gift of using the appreciative eye as a daily practice.”*

The appreciative eye is activated by tapping into those times when you have been inspired, excited and amazed by your work; i.e., in love with what you do. What did it look like? How did it make you feel mentally and physically? How did this affect you and the people around you?

Sloan asked participants to write as many strengths about themselves as they could in two minutes. After discussing them, she followed up with, *“What are the strengths that people who know you might add?”* Surprisingly, for many people the second list was more powerful than the first. She points out that many of us are trained to look at our weaknesses rather than our strengths, and asks *“How is this likely to affect your ability to lead?”*

When a leader builds his approach around an appreciative eye, it can be inspiring as well as strategically advantageous *“by engaging people at every level, by increasing the speed of innovation, and by creating a magnetic setting for the attraction and retention of exceptional talent.”*

This may be as simple as exchanging “How can I survive this day?” with “What can I gain from today?” Holding a positive “now” vision is as important as holding a positive “future” vision.

- What does my company need right now?
- What is the biggest value we can create for our customers?
- What steps can I take today toward efficiency, effectiveness and fulfillment?
- What are our opportunities to face tough issues that, if resolved, would change our business for the better?
- How can I be physically and personally connected to my customers, my suppliers, and my employees?

While leaders in forward-thinking open-system organizations are likely to find Appreciative Inquiry to be a natural fit, other organizations and leaders may struggle with this approach.

- In a closed-system organization, the focus is on stability and traditions. This requires a dominant hierarchical leader, who can “stay the course,” and who is trained to focus on problem identification, not strength development.
- Random-based organizations are intuitive and creative – think of start-ups – but may not have the history or norms needed to produce great work and sustainability.
- The core purpose of open-system organizations is adaptation and consensus based on collaboration and mutual benefit. In an open system, *“expertise doesn’t matter when you’re leading because at any place in the organization people have more or equal access to information.”*

***“Open systems are the enlightened management format needed to succeed and sustain in today’s world.”***

***“Appreciative Inquiry is the use of solution-focused questioning to create dialogue and learning in individuals and groups. It is a way of looking at an individual, a team, or an organization as a strong capable ‘whole’ with capacities that you do not yet know. In a traditional organization, you look for problems and then solve them. In Appreciative Inquiry, you look for strengths, for opportunities to grow, and for the creation of what’s next. By focusing on what works, you propel yourself and your organization toward a more positive future state.”***

## Ten Questions for Leading in an Open-system Organization

1. **What impact am I having?** Is it the impact I want to have? As a leader, your every decision has an impact, a ripple effect. Does your mood engender enthusiasm and commitment? Does your strategy align with trends in the market? Does your team respond in the way you want them to?
2. **How can I use my entire brain?** Does my approach include holistic left-brain thinking (rational, analytic, linear, factual, data-focused) as well as right-brain (nonlinear, conceptual, metaphoric, emotional, people-focused)?
3. **What motivates my people?** What do they need? What do they want? Are their self-esteem needs being met?
4. **Whose viewpoints have I discounted?** What additional viewpoints can I adopt? Do I truly try to “walk in the other person’s shoes?” Do I pay attention to how I disagree when I must disagree?
5. **How am I and others inspired by where we are going and what we will achieve?** What “turns us on?”
6. **What does my intuition – my look within – advise?** *“The more you get used to intuition and practicing it, the more in tune you can be.”*
7. **What is my mood?** Is this the best mood for what I want to accomplish? *“People mimic the mood of their leader. If you’re an upbeat, inspirational leader, you cultivate positive employees who embrace and surmount even the toughest challenges. An emotionally intelligent leader can monitor his or her moods through self-awareness, change them for the better through self-management, understand their impact through empathy, and act in ways that boost others’ moods through relationship management.”* (Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*)
8. **How am I attuned to synchronicity;** i.e., *“a meaningful coincidence of two or more events where something other than the probability of chance is involved”?* (Carl Jung) Luck is where opportunity meets preparation.
9. **How am I using visual images in my planning and decision making?** Am I open to random thinking and graphic visualization? *“Leaders also need to be attuned to the aesthetics in their offices. Aesthetics have an impact on productivity. They help people, both inside and outside the organization, connect to the brand.”*
10. **How am I living and working from my values?** Am I ethical? Do my ethics include compassion, self-awareness and self-control as well as decisions based on the greater good? *“Values are our primary motivators, and they help us make decisions. Knowing our values is basic to self-knowledge, and therefore basic to empathy, understanding, communication and influence – our emotional intelligence.”*

At this point, you may be thinking, “that’s all well and good, but how do I secure buy-in for my positive future vision?” Most resistance to organizational change is based on fear and/or logic: fear of consequences, by-products, outcomes, or the unknown; and not understanding the positives in the course of action you propose.

Sloan proposes a five-phase change process:

1. Share the positive future vision in a way that people can relate to it, speaking to both the analytical and emotional sides of the issue.
2. Listen (gather information) and see what people think.
3. Feed back (acknowledge) what you’ve heard.
4. Listen for resistance and for buy-in rather than ownership. Don’t let dissent fester.
5. Connect individuals to the vision. Link them to the “why.” What’s in it for them?

## The Faster Paradox:

Festina Lente is a Roman proverb meaning “Make haste slowly.” Akin to the fabled tortoise and hare, the proverb encourages us to consider the desired outcome, and then achieve it over the long haul. In other words, **productivity + efficiency + endurance = success and sustainability.**

This is in direct contradiction to the habits of the many companies and managers who focus their efforts on short-term wins, overemphasizing activity and speed rather than productivity, believing that this is how to gain a competitive advantage. They engage in:

- too much instant communication and email
- too much non-vacation, missed lunches, and lack of time out
- multitasking at the expense of quality, focus and true efficiency
- consistent long work weeks in spite of studies that show that the maximum productive work week is approximately 40 hours. (Consider the negative payback for overtime work where productivity drops significantly and yet the overtime pay rate is typically one-and-a-half to two times higher.)

*“If you are able to slow yourself down, reflect, and think effectively, the slowing down will have a profound impact on both processes and people. When you are rushing too fast, not thinking, just fighting fires, those around you match your pace. Mistakes happen, long-term thinking goes out the window, and no one has the time to ask ‘Are we having the impact we want to have as an organization?’*

*Going slower can actually help you and your organization to become faster – in the best leadership-related definition – to maximize the return on your time and energy.”*

***“Work shouldn’t feel hard. When we are doing our absolute best work, it feels easy, enjoyable, and right. It’s not painful or paralyzing. We may work diligently and for many hours in total, but your best, most effective, enduring and fulfilling work flows out easily, without struggle, with grace and simplicity. It takes place at just the right speed – as fast as it needs to be.”***

***We need to slow down our brains to make our thinking faster – to engage our best creative intelligence. When the brain is in the Theta state, we are functioning at optimum creativity which leads to the new ideas that fuel innovation.”***

## Cultivating the Theta State

Have you every wondered why your most brilliant new ideas come about when you are in the shower, or daydreaming, or perhaps about to fall asleep? That’s because your brain is in the Theta state, a place in-between sleeping and waking. *“Theta brainwaves represent a state of deep relaxation and meditation, enhanced creativity, stress relief, light sleep, and dreaming. The Theta state holds the key to the ‘faster’ paradox.”*

And yet many – perhaps most – business leaders push back at the very idea of entering a Theta state because it sounds so much like meditation, and meditation doesn’t sound much like work. But really smart leaders and companies schedule “think time” into their schedules.

Steven Covey (Seven Habits of Highly Effective People) puts it this way: put first things first with primary focus on “non-urgent but important” issues. This includes slowing down and reflecting even when things are going well. Absent the “urgent yet non-important” milieu that many leaders immerse themselves in, thoughts can flow and positive momentum can be maintained.

Sloan suggests building think time into your day as much as 40 minutes per day, as a means of increasing productivity; but if that isn’t possible, mini Theta states can be as short as two minutes. Think of them as a slowing down of your autonomic nervous system or as a very short mini-vacation. Or, using a sports metaphor, as bench time.

*“In no professional sport can an athlete compete on the field 100 percent of the time without experiencing exhaustion or injury. Even if it’s just for a minute, everyone needs to sit on the bench for a breather in order to win in the end.”* (By the way, did you know that the Japanese have a word, *karoshi*, for death related to overwork?)

Other keys to slowing down to achieve success are:

- effectively prioritizing, allowing time for good ideas to become great.
- being sure that your actions are in line with your values and vision.
- stopping multitasking so that you can maintain your undiluted focus and brainpower, and retain information in your long-term memory.
- calming your fears: *“Anxiety drives up the pressure, not the performance.”*
- savoring the moment and being more fully absorbed in what you are doing at that moment.
- if you are a perfectionist, learning when to use it as a strength and when to let it go, recognizing that once you become the leader and not the doer, perfectionism is harmful.
- recognizing the difference between ‘can’ do something and ‘should’ do something.
- focusing on energy management rather than time management.

*“By slowing down, doing less, and focusing on what’s in front of you in this moment, you can achieve infinitely more.”* So it’s not incorrect to say that you can change the amount of time you have by:

- practicing present-moment time by focusing on this exact second of time right now.
- focusing on the person you’re speaking with and to.
- keeping a touchstone or physical reminder to center your mind and focus on the present.
- paying attention to your heart and emotions, and not just your head.
- taking a big-picture snapshot of this moment.

## **Leadership Presence**

Leadership presence is a phrase often employed to describe leaders “who look like leaders.” It has to do with their physicality – how they hold themselves – as well as their air of being in control, energetic, unstressed, in charge, and in power. How do they do it? Is this an innate skill? Perhaps for some, it is, but nearly any leader can increase his/her leadership presence.

It helps to know the psychology and physiology behind leadership presence. When you strike a leadership pose, your brain resets itself to a more powerful “you.” Knowing this, you can actually induce a more powerful you before stepping into a difficult situation. This might include a moment’s meditation and energized reflection; several deep, slow breaths; setting aside your need to be perfectly in control; stretching to lengthen your spine and help your body relax, and so forth. (See the list above.)

## **Energy management – drains and replenishers**

Everyone’s life is full of energy drainers and energy replenishers. Energy replenishers – for yourself as well as for your team – might include:

- Reorienting toward purpose and values. What is your collective purpose as a team? As a company?
- Doing and being what you want to see.
- Being clear about what you want.
- Looking for opportunities to include people in adding value. Asking for their contribution.

- Creating a play ethic, committed to making work more fun. Productivity doesn't mean drudgery.
- Acknowledging the need for physical replenishment.

*“Going faster means slowing down enough to find the most efficient and effective use of one's time and energy. Getting things done right the first time. Making sure the processes used to deliver work product are smooth. Helping your organization to move faster through effective pacing and energy management.”* Note these contrasts:

<b>Energy Drains</b>	<b>vs.</b>	<b>Energy Replenishers</b>
Compete in existing market space	vs.	Create uncontested market space
Beat the competition	vs.	Make the competition irrelevant
Exploit existing demand	vs.	Create and capture new demand
Make the value / cost trade-off	vs.	Break the value / cost trade-off
Align the whole system of a company's activities with its strategic choice of differentiation or low cost	vs.	Align the whole system of a company's activities in pursuit of differentiation and low cost

*“To create an energetic company culture, cultivate energy through good physical, mental, and emotional practices; the goal is health on all levels. Choose a flow state instead of a hyperkinetic state. Be the dominant oscillator, the one who sets the pace by which others around you move. Invest your time developing people or small groups on whom you can always rely.”*

Since time is finite (and time management is now dead) the new focus is energy, a replenishable resource. It makes sense to assess where you are out of whack and what you need to do to replenish. As a first step, Sloan suggests making a list of energy enhancers and energy drains (physical, mental and emotional) as well as energy cycles (the times of the day when your energy is typically high or low), asking yourself:

- What is draining my energy (people, activities, deadlines, refreshers, etc.)? *“When mentally drained, don't answer any questions. When emotionally drained, don't make decisions. When physically drained, stop.”*
- What is replenishing my energy? *“Invest time in people and projects that add to your energy. Watch your energy patterns throughout the day and week, and notice what is giving you energy.”*
- What is in balance and what is out of balance? When am I the most energetic? The least energetic?
- In what aspect do I need more support?
- Who are the people who energize me, or de-energize me? *“If, after having been exposed to someone's presence, you feel like you've lost a quart of plasma, avoid that person.”* (William S. Burroughs)
- What are the most important patterns for me to remember? What can I do more of? What will sustain me over time?
- How does my work energy affect my away-from-work energy? (A Gallup poll shows that more people bring what is stressful at work home, than bring what is non-stressful at home to work.)

***“What you are looking for is maximum ROE: Return on Energy.”***

## The Better Paradox:

*“To be better, we need to stop focusing on our personal gain and start focusing on giving back to our organization, to our community, and to the world as a whole. Leaders who are too focused on beating everyone else often don’t have the impact they want because everyone is a potential threat, and because they are expending valuable energy and time on trying to assuage their competitive fears. When you focus too much on your competitors, your stress levels rise and your capacity for great strategic thinking disappears.”*

Sounds simple enough, and yet many leaders don’t understand that “to be better, we need to move away from trying to be better **than** others – our competitors, our colleagues, our predecessors – and instead, to engage **with** others, collaborate **with** others, and ultimately better ourselves **with** others. Leadership success depends on being smarter, faster, and better **with** the group you lead.”

Attributes of “Better Than” Thinking	Attributes of “Better With” Thinking
Dominance	Empowerment
Greed and hoarding	Abundance and sharing
Fear	Confidence
Closed systems	Open systems
Competition	Collaboration and cooperation
Defeating the other	Having a positive impact
Short-term wins	Sustainability
Me focus	We focus

## Hubris

*“You may be familiar with the ancient Greek concept of hubris, literally translated as ‘exaggerated pride.’ In Greek tragedy, hubris is the fatal flaw in all of human nature. I like to think of it as the basic desire to be ‘better than’ others.”* In modern language, we think of hubris as “pride” or “ego.” It can prevent us from being smarter leaders when:

- We take credit for the intelligent ideas of others.
- We profess to know more than anyone else about a given topic.
- We gain political power from knowledge (or secrets) gained at the expense of team success.

Hubris can prevent us from being faster leaders when:

- We sacrifice balance and don’t take care of our emotional, mental, and physical health.
- We do too many things at the same time and lose our ability to retain information and think clearly.

**“When better than takes precedence over better with, honor goes out the window.”**

Hubris can prevent us from being better leaders when:

- We sacrifice the best interests of our employees or other stakeholders for our own gain.
- We believe we are above the law or above compliance with ethical guidelines.
- We don't model the behaviors we wish to see.
- We damage our shared external environment for short-term gain.

How important is hubris to you? What legacy will you leave? When history looks back at your leadership, what would you like the books to say? Consider drafting a legacy statement for yourself. *“You need to know what end result you want to achieve in order to move forward. What are the things you need to do to make it happen?”*

## Maslow and Leadership

During the 1940s, Abraham Maslow formulated a Hierarchy of Needs that, when published in the 1960's, became a much-referred-to model for human development. No doubt you've seen it: five levels of human needs in the shape of a pyramid, each level advancing from the level below it.

Later, Maslow added an additional step to the top of the pyramid: self-transcendence, the point at which human beings are able to disconnect from the self and put others first. *“This is the place of giving back to the community, to others and transcending the world of ego-driven decisions. This is the top level of ‘better with.’”*

The grid on the following page illustrates our personal relationship to power as related to the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs.

Stage	Consciousness	Incentive	Maslow Stage	Life-View	Emotion	Shadow	Leadership Style
Power Over	Dominance or submission	Emotion	Survival	Struggle	Anger	Victimhood	Force
Power from outside	Prestige	External validation	Comfort	Demanding	Desire	Gluttony, endless want, never satiated	Charisma
Power from inside	Mastery	Internal validation	Love	Hopeful	Satisfaction	Depression when disbelieving in the self	Trust
Power by meaning	Purpose	Impact	Self-actualization	Connection	Harmony	Perceived as innocent and naive	Inspiration and empowerment
Power with	All-are-one	Witnessing	Self-transcendence	Presence	Reverence	Perceived as disengaged	Shared Power, Transformation

(Note: The shadow for each level of power is the negative and often overlooked aspect associated with it.)

## Final Thoughts:

*“As consumers and shareholders begin to vote with their dollars, more companies are becoming aware that their bottom line depends on their focus on other types of corporate and leadership responsibility, including social responsibility. ‘Better with’ thinking is also infiltrating universities and business schools. We are teaching tomorrow’s leaders to be appreciative, inspirational, and legacy-driven. Leaders who are not aware of this movement and do not get on board will be left behind, just*

***“We must be the change we wish to see in the world.”*** Mahatma Gandhi

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*like those leaders who ignored the rise of technology and the personal computer only a few decades ago.”*

*“I know there is a reason that you chose the path of leadership. No one gets here by mistake. It’s not easy. It involves commitment and faith in the stewardship of an idea that is larger than ourselves. It’s a process of continually becoming smarter, faster, and better, and of realizing that, in many ways, you’re already moving toward all of your goals, simply by taking on the challenge of being a leader. But every day is a new opportunity to improve, achieve, contribute, and enjoy yourself a little more than the day before. Enjoy the journey!”*