

Breakthroughs in Leadership

A presentation given by

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Robert K. Cooper, acclaimed educator and pioneer in the practical application of emotional intelligence, is the author of *The Performance Edge*, *Executive EQ*, *Excelerating*, *Reach's Rules*, *Leadership is Relationships: the Five Keys*, and *The Other 90%: How to Unlock Your Vast Untapped Potential for Leadership and Life*.

Part II: New Strategies for Excelling Under Pressure

The best leadership shows up during hard times. When the world raises its expectations what do you do? Shift gears? Work harder, longer? No, you'll just get more exhausted. The old tools don't work anymore. We must grow or die. Cooper has coined the word *excelerating*, which means speeding through challenges with calm effectiveness.

Cooper offers six steps, each based on science. They can be viewed as tools that change your brain, and they have huge benefits. The steps are as follows:

- 1. Toughen Up**
- 2. Calm Down**
- 3. See Near and Far**
- 4. Improvise**
- 5. Adapt**
- 6. Overcome**

1. Toughen Up Toughness doesn't mean cold-heartedness. It means resilience

and energy in the face of challenge. The amygdala in the brain's limbic system doesn't want us to change. Whenever we are pressured, we tend to do more of the same, only harder and longer. We also assume the worst, especially when we hear vague or mixed messages. To overcome these habits, form an anchor in your brain. Here's how: 1. Create a vivid image in your brain of you performing at your best-see it, feel it, sense it fully. 2. At the height of this image, execute a unique touch, for example your thumb to index finger. This will help anchor the image. 3. At the same time, select a relevant word or phrase to think of. When these three steps are activated at the same time, they create an anchor to place you in your Ideal Performance State. See yourself performing at your best; reinforce the image with a touch and a word. This causes neuro-chain reactions. The word and touch will give you instant recall of how you want to be-at peak performance. The brain cannot dwell on the reverse of an idea, so be sure to focus on exactly what you want, not what you don't want. For example, focus on being on time rather than being late, making sales rather than losing sales, losing weight rather than gaining weight.

Leadership Mechanism #1

Everyday imagine your blessings. Don't just count them Studies show that imagining something in vivid detail activates the same brain cells that are actually used in doing that activity.

A vivid imagination resets your perspective and re-fires the right circuits. Whining stops. Optimism when reality based is a good thing. However, if you aren't naturally positive, be a defensive pessimist, thinking of all the things that could go wrong and how to right them. We have room for both optimists and pessimists. How tough are you physically, emotionally, and mentally? Periodically do a self-check.

Leadership Mechanism #2

Friday Milestone Meeting Ask everyone to respond to two questions: 1. What is the most difficult thing you've done this week at work? 2. What is the most exceptional thing you've done this week at work?

Allow each individual 1 minute to answer in person, by phone, or e-mail. Listen. Take notes. Learn. Link to performance evaluations. If you don't do this, you will miss the unique efforts people are making.

To start right is to be half done.

Leadership Mechanism #3

Quick-start your morning metabolism for more energy and resilience all day.

- 5+ minutes of light activity
- bright light
- light breakfast

People need to pull back to get ahead. Pushing nonstop can cause spontaneous pauses. On average 10% to 15% of the workday is lost to mental space-outs. Rather than thrust your head forward, lift it up and straighten your shoulders. Slumped shoulders decrease vital capacity and cut up to 30% of the oxygen to your brain and senses. Think of your hands as tools. Build the hands of a rock climber or an artist. Gardeners stay younger longer. Exercise your hands and fingers in slow, very focused movement at least 1 minute per day. Increase cardiovascular fitness. Not just formal aerobic exercise. Every step makes a difference. The 10 seconds it takes to stand up can raise energy by up to 30%. Develop a strong abdomen and lower back, the core of the body's energy and toughness. People tend to do the wrong exercises or too many repetitions. Slow down each exercise. Intensity and focus are the keys. Do Transpyramid Breathing by breathing in deeply and then slowly exhaling. When seemingly all air is released, from your stomach push up forcing out more air. Do 10 times a day.

Give and receive feedback with great care. Albert Schweitzer said, "Develop the skin of a rhino and the soul of an angel." Be tough enough to let criticism roll off. "If the shoe fits, wear it. If not, throw it away." Don't let it all in; it will run you. Most of the time we can't tell true feedback from jealousy or humiliation.

Leadership Mechanism #4

Take Essential Breaks: 2 to 5 minute breaks at midmorning, lunch, and mid-afternoon. Breathe. Humor. Light. Sin

2. Calm Down Some dead guy said, "Hard

afternoon · Breathe · Humor · Light · Sip
Ice Water · Loosen Up and Stand Taller ·
Snack for Sustained Energy · Re-
focus Energy up 50%; Productivity up
10%+

work never killed anyone." Strive to be
quick without rushing, to be fast without
tension, to slow down to speed up. Both
rushing and tension increase mistakes at

least 20% to 50%. The harder you push, the worse the results are. Often the
first indication of heart disease is sudden death. Anger is linked to half of
oversights and heart attacks. Everyone has a moment of choice between a
challenge or adversity and their response. They can take the low road or the
high road. Learn the Instant Calming Sequence (ICS) and practice it frequently.
When everyone else is unraveling, this tool is a gem.

Instant Calming Sequence

1. Continue breathing
2. Lighten your eyes (Smile at the corner of your eyes)
3. Uplift your posture (tendency is for a semi-fetal position)
4. Acknowledge reality
5. Mobilize your best

Learn what your hot buttons are and identify your typical response. Replace
your response with ICS. Leadership Mechanism #5 Change the way you walk
through the door. Give yourself a 1-3 minute buffer zone. Half of the most
damaging arguments start or are magnified within 15 minutes of walking in the
door. Leadership Mechanism #6 Eat often-and before serious conversations; cuts
arguing by up to 50% Leadership Mechanism #7 Boost evening energy and get
deeper sleep · 5+ minutes of light activity within 30 minutes following the
evening meal · Sleep in a dark room · Transition to sleep · Get rid of clock light ·
Awaken gradually · Arise at approximately the same time every day Sleeping in on
weekends causes a jet lag effect. Perfect the skill of "liming," doing nothing-or
anything healthy that you love to do-guilt-free. 3. See Near and Far The leader
needs to use the microscope and the telescope to keep regaining perspective.
He or she must be able to see exactly what's immediately in front as well as
what's down the road. Practice extending your senses 360 degrees by noticing
what others miss. Observe people, places, environment, and situations closely.
Focus on your sphere of influence. Life is too short not to want to shape what's
coming. Develop faith in the future at least five years ahead. Without faith that
things will work out, your immune system and resilience are affected negatively.
If you focus too hard on the short-term, you'll become rigid, rule anchored,
unable to change and less successful. By focusing daily on the long-term, you

become more creative, growing, more able to change and more successful. 4. Improvise People need more nerve. They need to challenge their edges by breaking old routines. Improvising has many benefits: · Increases flexibility in approach · Increases attentiveness · Increases courage in facing new challenges · Increases energy · Sustains Ideal Performance State longer and more easily. Sometimes it's best to skip the rules and make up new ones. Identify the path you prefer and sometimes take a different one to build new "fluid intelligence." Sometimes we kill innovation by judging too much. Leadership Mechanism #8 Encourage others to innovate. Give space for new ideas and pre-clarify them. Ask, "In what specific way would this idea be profitable and serve a human need?" "Keep your wit and wits about you." Every day leaders need to add humor concerning life's absurdities and paradoxes to their lives. Ask, "What's the funniest thing that happened today . . . or over the past month?" On average, a child laughs 400 times a day; an adult laughs 15 times per day. 5. Adapt Leaders must learn to adapt in order to prevail. Unforeseen changes will occur. When something stops working, the tendency is to resist. We want to force it to happen. What we should do is to get really curious very fast . . . and adapt to the change. You never know what will be the final result of one simple adaptation. It could lead to a whole new way of doing things. The benefits of adapting include: · Increased creativity · Increased resilience · Increased ingenuity in facing new challenges · Increased energy · Ideal Performance State sustained longer and more easily. You can practice adapting by doing something in an old or new way, creating a sudden need for change, and then adapting and continuing on. Leadership Mechanism #9 Strategies to adapt when there is no direct action to take · Get moving · Write things down · Talk it through · Help someone else in need · Take a new view Shake off old mind set 6. Overcome In reviewing both the greatest successes in one's life and the greatest setbacks, people generally find that they learned the most from the setbacks. People like Hikani Oe, a great music composer; Alexander Graham Bell, inventor; and Charles Schultz, the famous cartoonist, were once thought to be failures. Cooper offers this advice: Keep your setbacks and mistakes in perspective, and conduct your life as though children were watching you. Remember that there has never been another person exactly like you and there never will be again. This is your time.