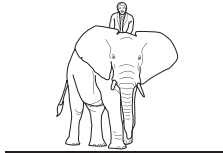




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The Problem of Managing Yourself

*I am dragged along by a strange new force. Desire and reason
are pulling in different directions. I see the right way
and approve it, but follow the wrong.*

—Medea

*He that would govern others should first be the master
of himself.*

—Philip Massinger

BOB WAS HEAD OF A CORPORATE manufacturing division located in East Tennessee. Because his division was relatively small, Bob made all the hiring decisions himself. After receiving feedback from corporate and reading books about the importance of delegation, Bob realized his deficiency and made a pact with himself to engage others in key decisions. Calling in the sales director, Bob asked him to meet with several candidates for the customer service rep position and make the hire. Three weeks later, that director brought his top choice to Bob's office, along with an offer letter for Bob to approve. Dumbstruck, Bob mumbled that he wanted to meet the final three candidates himself. He was unable to go along with the director's choice, as he felt no rapport





with the woman or her thin resume. After meeting the other candidates, Bob hired the man at the bottom of the director's list. No matter how badly he wanted to delegate the decision, Bob could not let go. No matter how much Bob wanted the director to hire his own person, something compelled Bob to make the decision himself. "My mind has a mind of its own," he said. The decision was a disaster both for the now resentful director and for the new customer service rep. It was no surprise when both quit within six months.

Bob was experiencing an internal struggle with himself that he had neither explicitly acknowledged nor ever discussed before. Bob did see that he had failed to lead himself to do what he had promised himself to do. He somehow chose the unwanted controlling behavior over his intended delegation behavior.



Martha was a young sales manager for an advertising agency. She was fairly new at the advertising firm and was promoted to sales manager after her boss abruptly resigned. Martha inherited a difficult employee who was a strong producer but whose competitiveness caused resentment among other team members. The difficult employee's behavior seemed to get worse after inexperienced Martha took over. She said her intention to correct the employee was like "getting in my car to go east and the car insisted on going west, and I couldn't do anything about it." Martha did the right thing by getting her facts together and scheduling a meeting. "As I broached the subject of the prima donna's behavior, his reaction was defensive, and I backed down." That was her car turning toward California. "My sense of empathy or my desire to please others overrode my ability to be assertive and provide strong direction for him." She was clearly disappointed in herself. "I missed my chance. I later tried giving him 'motherly' advice, but he did not change." Martha's vivid image of her car turning in the opposite direction against her wishes illustrates the gap between her intention and action. A part of Martha knew what to do, but the other part would not comply.



An obvious question is, why are these leaders not behaving as they intended? They had the right idea each time, but somehow sidetracked themselves into undesired behavior. It is a puzzle why leaders choose unwise behavior when they are often aware of a smarter choice. That puzzle is the focus of this book.



The Conflict Between Knowing and Doing

Kings, heads of government, and corporate executives have control over thousands of people and endless resources, but often do not have mastery over themselves. From a distance, larger-than-life leaders may look firmly in control of their businesses and their personal behavior. What about up close? Personal mastery is a difficult thing. For example, can you think of any politicians in recent years whose personal behavior was revealed as opposite to their espoused values? Or consider *Fortune* magazine's article a few years ago about why CEOs fail.¹ The records of thirty-eight ineffective CEOs revealed that all were good at cognitive stuff—vision, strategy, ideas, and the like. Things broke down during execution. The CEOs' behavior did not follow through on their thoughts and words. Action did not follow intention. Things as simple as sitting too long on decisions, not confronting underperforming subordinates, or not delivering on commitments ended up harming the company. The CEOs had plausible excuses, but it seemed clear that their actual behavior did not reflect their stated intentions. They seemed to know what to do but were not doing it.

Have you ever had a clear intention and then failed to follow through? Jeff Pfeffer and Bob Sutton wrote a book called *The Knowing-Doing Gap*, in which they described the many ways in which corporate talk substituted for corporate action.² The same gap exists for individuals. I think that all managers and professional employees know what they *should* be doing, *how* to do it, and *why* they should do it. We know or can figure out the correct thing to do. Yet often we do not act accordingly. Our intentions and behaviors often refuse to align. In my consulting and executive teaching, I have come across dozens and dozens of internal conflicts between knowing and doing. One part of a manager wants to do one thing; another part wants to do something else.

I put off writing my monthly report until the last day every time, said the publisher of a food magazine. This procrastination drove him crazy because he could not understand or control it. He finished most other tasks on time, and the last-minute pressure on the report was extremely unpleasant. Each month he tried to start the column earlier, but failed to do so.

I often tell my direct reports I will do something and then I don't follow through. This bank manager did not know why she made casual promises she did not keep. The bad habit extracted a price in annoyed and frustrated direct reports, and they let her know about it. She was genuine in her intention each time she made a promise, but something often got in the way of follow-through.

I am reluctant to recognize and celebrate people's accomplishments. Why make a fuss over people doing what they are supposed to do? Celebrating accomplishments was a blind spot for this plant manager. He did not “get it” about the value of public praise and recognition. From others he had gradually learned that he “should” provide verbal recognition, but was slow doing so.

Listening is my biggest fault. Shortly after someone comes into my office, I tune out and start to think about e-mails. People who visited with this utility manager complained when he worked on e-mails while they talked. He tried to pay attention, but he typically lost the struggle after five minutes or so—a habit he believed made him a less effective manager. Why did he not listen to people when he believed that was the right thing to do?

I am mentally critical of others. I point out their flaws and failures. I am just trying to help people, but they do not appreciate it. Most managers do not realize that their thoughts toward others are disproportionately negative, so give this engineer some credit for seeing his own criticalness. He understood and admitted to his negative bias, but he did not know how to change it. He said he wanted to soften his critical approach, but never did.

Something will tick me off and I react. Often it is something small and then I have a mess. I know it would be better to hear the other side of the story before reacting, but I don't do it. This manager was a weekend Executive MBA (EMBA) student who reacted sharply and negatively to an e-mail I sent to fifty students in the class reminding them about a deadline. He took it personally and sent me an angry e-mail. When I called him, he apologized when we discussed the reason behind his e-mail. As we talked, he told me a story of recently calling a direct report into his office and accusing her after hearing a customer complaint. He was later chagrined to learn that the complaint was not valid. He said he understood there were two sides to every story and that the impact of his reactions on direct reports could be devastating. He wanted to change, but continued to overreact.

What is going on with these managers? Have they no self-discipline or willpower to be better leaders? Are they mentally weak or lazy? Do they lack resolve? I appreciate their stated desire to do right, but their behavior looks stupid because they admit to doing the wrong thing when they know the better choice. They are caught in something within themselves that they do not understand or know how to manage.

The big challenge in leadership is not in figuring out what to do but in actually doing the thing you know will produce great results. The



challenge is learning to lead *yourself* to do what needs doing when it needs doing. Personal mastery aligns your behavior with your intention, and it is far, far harder to achieve than it looks.

The Universal Failure of Willpower

The behavior of these managers does not seem so unusual when you consider the failure of willpower in everyday life. I gave my MBA class an assignment to change something about themselves over a period of three weeks, and several students opted for healthier eating habits. One in particular decided to give up sodas. Ten days into the project, he was invited to a friend's house for pizza. The smell and taste of the pizza made him crave a soda "more than I have ever craved something in my life. There was something in my mind that directly linked the pizza with the soda, and the link was so strong I could not resist it." One part of him lost out to the other part. Personal resolve and willpower lost out to desire. This student was not alone. Most of the MBA students failed in their quest to improve themselves during the three weeks, and the remainder faded shortly after the assignment ended.

I have my own failures. One evening over dinner, I told my wife I was going to use the free evening to grade papers. Getting those papers finished would feel good and be a win-win for me and my students. With grading finished, I would have the next morning free to prepare for class, and I would be able to return the graded papers in class. As I left the dinner table, something pulled me toward the sofa in the living room to rest for a few minutes. Without my realizing it, my right hand reached for the remote and turned on the TV. "But I want to grade papers," a part of me protested. *Dancing with the Stars* was on, so I decided to watch it and then for sure I would grade papers. After thirty minutes, something pulled me out to the kitchen for a snack despite my not being hungry. I did not want that ice cream, but I ate it anyway. When the program finished, I noticed that *American Idol* was on next. The part of me that wanted to watch it was stronger than the part of me that wanted to grade papers. Grading papers would be much more satisfying than watching TV, but I lost the argument. Finally, late at night, I started grading papers, and then I got up early in the morning to finish them. Despite losing sleep, I was unable to finish the papers before I had to prepare for class. The students did not get their papers back in class. My mind had a mind of its own. My "stupid" behavior won out over my good intentions. My inner excellence was not at the level I would have liked.



Perhaps there is comfort in finding esteemed company in the failures of intention. Here is what the Apostle Paul said about himself:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.³

“Everyone has the same amount of self-discipline, almost none,” says Jim Loehr, a sports psychologist who runs a corporate athlete program that is popular with Wall Street executives and others.⁴ People mistakenly think they can change their lives if they just try harder and summon enough willpower. It seldom happens. Just ask Opera Winfrey. She got her weight down to 160 pounds four years ago. Now she is back up to 200 pounds. “I didn’t just fall off the wagon, I let the wagon fall on me,” she wrote in *O* magazine.⁵ Something like two-thirds of weight lost by dieting is regained within a year, 90-plus percent within two years, and over 99 percent in five years.⁶ What is the delusion that makes people persist in buying weight-loss books and believing this time they will lose weight? Of course, their hopes are no more foolish than the 90 percent of owners of health club memberships and exercise machines who do *not* exercise. Their good intentions led to a purchase but not to new behavior.

Personal resolve apparently is not enough to change a bad habit, even with impending death to focus the mind and motivate action. Several studies of patients who underwent coronary bypass surgery and were given doctor’s orders to change their diet and lifestyle to extend their life found that only about one in ten people adopted healthier day-to-day habits, such as proper diet and exercise.⁷ Cardiovascular surgeons give diet and exercise advice expecting that patients will *not* follow it. The patients clearly understand the life-extending value of changing their behavior, and still do not follow through.

These examples show, first, that our mind can be unreliable when it comes to regulating our behavior. When we really want to use our willpower, it is likely to desert us. There seems to be a universal gap between what people think they will do and what they are actually doing. Managers, for example, often know the correct behavior to get results, but find it hard to change their behavior pattern. Second, they show that it takes two parties to have a conflict, and, metaphorically speaking, “both are within me.” An internal division causes people’s frustrations—the part that wants to do the new or better thing and the part that refuses or has something else in mind. This divided self is the key to understanding how to lead yourself to gain mastery over your behavior.



This book will explore the knowing-doing breakdowns that plague and mislead leaders and professional employees, and then describe practices that will strengthen one's higher intentions to assert control over personal behavior. These practices can reduce the gap between the divided self to create a more united and reliable self that chooses the wise behavior. To get started, let's look more closely at the divided self.

The Divided Self: Executive and Elephant

Think again about the list of inner conflicts expressed by managers and others so far in this chapter. The internal struggles revealed a divided self, with one self supposedly guiding and giving instruction to the other, which refused to cooperate. One self seemed stronger than the other, and too often the "wrong" self seemed in charge. A human being seems composed of two selves—one that is habit bound, impulsive, and emotion driven, and the other more thoughtful, circumspect, and rational.

A story from ancient mythology in India illuminates the point. Five stallions are pulling a chariot. The stallions are the five senses, each of which seeks gratification for itself. The driver is the mind. The mind is responsible for keeping the stallions under control and on the correct road; otherwise their strength will overpower the driver and wreck the chariot. When emotions and desires are strong enough to take control in a human being, a wreck is likely to occur. Benjamin Franklin said, "If passion drives, let reason hold the reins."

The idea of two selves has a long tradition in Western culture; they are represented in the battle between reason and emotion, superego and id, angel and devil, the light side and the dark side, good and evil, and the spirit and the flesh. In some religious groups, "The devil made me do it" is a way of describing the self that acts selfishly and without restraint as something different from the "real me." In psychology, these two parts have been called the learner self and the judger self,⁸ the conscious mind and the adaptive unconsciousness,⁹ the higher brain and the lower brain,¹⁰ and the cool (cognitive) and hot (emotional) systems.¹¹ A recovery center for substance abuse labels the intense craving for alcohol or drugs the "beast" within. Each client, to recover, must learn to deal with that powerful beast.¹²

What this adds up to is that everyone has two parts, or two selves, so to speak, that sometimes are in conflict. The bigger part is unconscious and forceful, and manages most of our behavior. The other, smaller part is conscious and makes deliberate choices, and seems to play a subsidiary role, being used only on occasion when needed. Our unconscious processes pretty much run our lives, as revealed in our habit patterns of





thinking and behaving. And they do a good job most of the time. We happily enjoy work and life when our behavior is aligned with the needs of the moment. We don't realize that our unconscious mind is busy running our life on automatic pilot—we feel as though we are in control of our daily behavior—until we try to change something about ourselves. A major problem occurs when the two parts are in conflict, such as when the conscious part wants to listen to the person talking and the unconscious part wants to check e-mails. Or when the conscious part wants to read a book, and an unconscious force wants to watch TV. When there is a direct conflict between the two parts, we discover that the unconscious part seems as strong as an elephant. If you have ever tried, you know that changing a deeply embedded habit seems nearly impossible. You also sense an elephant's strength when you cannot resist a desire or craving despite your conscious wish to do so. You are not in control of yourself after all. Changing something as simple as eating, drinking, TV viewing, or exercise habits can be enormously difficult, requiring a major effort, maybe even an outside intervention of some sort, and the desired change may fail anyway. But there is hope. It does not have to be this way if you adopt and follow some of the practices in this book.

The metaphors I use in this book for our two selves or parts are the *executive* and the *elephant*, which I will often refer to as the inner executive and the inner elephant. The inner executive is our higher consciousness, our own CEO so to speak. Visualize an executive riding on a large elephant, attempting to control it, with legs dangling on either side of the elephant's neck. The inner elephant symbolizes the strength of unconscious systems and habits.¹³ The inner executive plays the role of providing higher-order choice processes that can guide the inner elephant. The intentional mind is small in proportion to the unconscious mind, much as an executive is small in proportion to the elephant on which it is riding. The executive has limited influence over the elephant's mental and behavioral processes. The strength of an elephant can cause a problem for any person. If the elephant wants to turn left or right in search of food, it will do so, regardless of the person's conscious wish to be on a diet. As long as our inner executive is in alignment with our inner elephant, which is most of the time for most people, we feel in control and everything is fine. However, when we want to go in a direction different from our inner elephant, struggle and failure often ensue.

An executive may appear weaker than an elephant, but the executive has some advantages. The executive sees a bigger picture from the top of the elephant, much like a traffic reporter in a helicopter who can see a traffic tie-up miles ahead. The inner elephant can see only the cars directly in front of it. The inner executive is also smarter, wiser; it can plan ahead and is the source of free choice. When faced with a challenging planning





process, such as making travel arrangements for multiple family members from disparate locations to share a common vacation, the inner executive can work through and solve the puzzle. The inner executive can see the different parts of the bigger picture, and organize a unifying solution.

When a leader is unable to follow an intention with action, the reason is that the inner elephant is acting on its own by refusing to accept direction. The inner elephant is asserting its habits and preferences over the inner executive's wishes. For example, at times my inner elephant can overpower my inner executive in both aversion and attraction. My inner elephant has long had an aversion to daily exercise. My inner executive knows that morning exercise makes me feel good all day and that strengthening my quad muscles supports the knee I injured in a skiing accident. My inner elephant habitually directs me away from morning exercise toward the computer to do e-mails or to the kitchen for breakfast, while subtly suggesting that I will exercise later. My inner elephant also has a strong, nearly irresistible attraction to snack foods at social gatherings. Seeing tables loaded with delicious snacks, my elephant will take me to the food soon after arriving. This is not my executive's idea of healthy eating, but it knows better than to get in the way of a hungry elephant.



Learning to Lead from Your Inner Executive



All of us have these two parts within—the wise and intentional inner executive and the unconscious inner elephant, which does a good job for us most of the time. The friction between inner executive and inner elephant occurs when they have different ideas about desired behavior. The inner elephant is concerned about its own needs and comforts, and is often stronger than the inner executive. The inner executive can see the bigger picture even if it has not learned how to guide and control the elephant.

For a leader, the ideal situation is for the inner elephant to work as servant, the inner executive to work as master. Of course everyone faces situations where the inner elephant's urges seem far stronger than the inner executive's good intentions. This is like the inmates having more influence than the warden. Managers who do not have a well-developed inner executive will not lead themselves consciously and intentionally, just as a company without a CEO and executive team will not have an intended strategy or the capability to coordinate disparate departments for strategy execution.

When in its proper role, the inner elephant thrives as a follower, not a leader. Ideally, leaders will understand their own elephant, and will be conscious of its habits and needs. When a person is "unconscious," however, he or she tends to live at the mercy of the inner elephant, following its needs and impulses without concern for others or a bigger





picture. When “conscious,” a leader can be intentional about doing the right thing. Mike Hyatt, CEO of Thomas Nelson Publishers, told my MBA class, “Managing me is a full-time job. I manage myself to have the right impact on the company.” Mike understands himself, and intentionally directs his behavior to signal the right cues to the Thomas Nelson culture.

I recall a research manager who refused to “be evaluated by his inferiors.” Killian had an aggressive, unbridled inner elephant accompanied by a weak inner executive. In committee meetings, he revealed his smarts. His arguments overwhelmed any competing idea. His subtle disparagement of ideas other than his own and his shunning people who disagreed with him allowed him to win battles, but eventually created a backlash. His inner elephant was blind to the bigger picture of uniting, integrating, and building a research organization to include everyone. His boss, the vice president, suggested a 360° feedback process wherein Killian would get feedback about how others perceived him. He refused, and threatened to resign before he would accept feedback from his “inferiors.” Although a gifted researcher, Killian never did break free of his unfortunate leader habits. He could not get into an executive mind-set that could see a bigger picture and be concerned with needs beyond his own. His inner executive was not sufficiently developed to understand and restrain his inner elephant. He kept ramming ahead unconsciously with ideas that represented only his personal beliefs and self-interest, and was eventually removed from the management position.

In my experience, professionals like Killian who have an ambitious, single-minded inner elephant that overpowers their inner executive generally are remarkable individual achievers, but often make poor leaders. Killian was a driven and highly published researcher, but the blind devotion to his own viewpoints did not translate into leadership of other people. When a leader does not have a bigger picture (one that includes other people) from which to guide his or her inner elephant, then the leader is more likely to act unconsciously, impulsively, and blindly, driven by personal beliefs, prejudices, and desires. Professionals with a weak inner executive often act like impulsive children, blinded by temptations that fulfill their strong personal needs. When a manager’s inner elephant is so dominant, there are no second thoughts, no inner conflict, and little empathy for other people or ideas. Someone who is all elephant probably needs strong guidance from an outside executive.

To become better leaders, we must learn to manage ourselves by developing our inner executive to direct and guide our inner elephant. The laments and ineffective behaviors described early in this chapter were examples of leaders not doing what they knew they should do. Each case was an example of conflict within the manager, between





the inner executive and the inner elephant. The inner executives within the managers knew all the ideal leader behaviors, such as delegating more, listening attentively, and completing a monthly report on time. Yet even when knowing the correct action, they failed to act on the ideal. I appreciate that most leaders do the correct thing most of the time. But when an internal conflict arises between intention and action, the inner elephant's unconscious response has asserted itself to override the inner executive's wishes, causing the less desirable behavior.

Purpose of This Book

So there you have it. The premise of this book is that managers often know what they should do, and why and how to do it, yet too often they do not. Why? Their inner elephant's unconscious desires and habits are too strong; their inner elephant won't follow directions. Their inner executive is not sufficiently well-developed to take charge. They have not learned to lead themselves. As leaders learn to recognize the two parts within themselves, and the occasional conflict between the parts, they can strengthen their inner executive and learn how to train, calm down, and guide their inner elephant to follow their inner executive's wishes.

In a normal person, the inner executive grows stronger with exercise and practice, which allows the inner elephant's bad habits and self-defeating behaviors to weaken and fall away. As your inner executive gets stronger, you become more conscious of the two selves and points of inner conflict. Achieving this awareness is a big step. Your inner executive typically has a notion of the right behavior, and you can be puzzled and frustrated by your occasional inability to act correctly. With a little practice, you can learn to execute the right action on the occasions of internal conflict rather than let the elephant have its way.

This book is about understanding and clearly recognizing your own inner executive and inner elephant. It is about learning *how* to help your inner executive manage your inner elephant as needed to behave according to your best intentions. Your inner executive already knows a lot about effective leadership. The challenge for you is to learn to guide your inner elephant toward that behavior despite its sometime obstinacy or neediness for the wrong thing. The solution is to learn to follow your inner executive's higher intentions and what it knows to be true. When leaders learn how to increase their self-discipline and self-mastery to manage themselves, they finally can become the leader they want to be, which is a feeling of inner excellence.

The trick is to lead yourself *first* so you can be a first-rate leader of other people. Leading yourself means seeing, understanding, mastering,





and leading your unconscious but powerful inner elephant. You can appreciate that bringing your two selves into alignment and learning to be the master of your own behavior would have a terrific leadership payoff in satisfaction, inner peace, impact, and productivity.

Throughout the book, I present a variety of personal practices to help you gain mastery over your inner elephant—lessons in how to lead yourself. Many people I have taught and coached have found these practices valuable for achieving a higher level of self-discipline, more self-awareness and self-control, greater ability to follow their own higher intentions, less procrastination, weaker impulses, and a more positive viewpoint, including reduced anxiety and fewer negative thoughts toward themselves or others. These practices are derived from a variety of sources, including Western psychology and Eastern spirituality. I have been pleased at how quickly people can adopt these practices and see some change in their thinking and behavior.

I have used nearly all of the practices myself, and over the years, they have led me to experience increased feelings of contentment and peace. The falling away of simple urges, such as food cravings; the enhanced “flow” and immersion in my work brought about by the melting of resistance to doing important projects; the ability to reach out to someone in the moment to resolve a conflict—these feel wonderful and peaceful, like a load off my mind. The absence of inner struggle—one part of me wanting to do one thing, the other part the opposite—is a feeling of freedom. My hope is that you will try practices that appeal to you and experience similar feelings of peace and self-control.

Chapter Two will develop the concepts of the inner executive and inner elephant in more detail, and Chapters Three and Four will closely examine the inner elephant from different perspectives, with special emphasis on the many inner-elephant illusions, guises, mistakes, and problems that can lead well-intentioned leaders astray. Chapters Five through Sixteen describe ideas, personal practices, and exercises that show you how to engage and strengthen your inner executive to take charge of your inner elephant, shifting the balance between your two selves in favor of your inner executive and thus avoiding the problems identified in the early chapters. These practices are presented in an approximate sequence of difficulty; earlier chapters cover simpler ideas that can solve specific problems, and later chapters cover practices that strengthen the inner executive more generally. If you can find even one or two of the many suggested practices that appeal to you, and begin using them regularly, you can start making progress right away. As you learn to master yourself, you can become a master leader of other people.

