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# High Performance Leadership in Organisations: An elusive phenomenon, an ongoing quest

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# Proposition #1

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1. World is becoming more and more challenging

**DURATION  
COMPANIES  
SURVIVED  
ON THE S&P  
500 INDEX:**

61

YEARS IN 1958

25

YEARS IN 1980

18

YEARS IN 2011

# This is taking a toll on executives

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## Corporate suicides highlight stresses at the top ¶

[By Clare Hutchison in London, - Wed Aug 28, 2013 12:02pm EDT ¶](#)

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

[WSJ.com ¶](#)

May 7, 2013, 6:47 p.m. ET ¶

## When the CEO Burns Out ¶

Job Fatigue Catches Up to Some Executives  
Amid Mounting Expectations; No More Forced Smiles ¶

# Proposition #1

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1. World is becoming more and more challenging

⇒ Senior executives must continue to improve just to keep up!

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# Proposition #2

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2. In a world that is changing ever more rapidly, the **best predictor of your future success is your ability to keep learning and developing**

# We have known this for decades

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- “Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other”
- "The illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read or write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn.“





Jeff Immelt,  
Chairman and  
CEO of GE

**KMB:** What do you think made Jack select you for the role of the chairman?

**JI:** You know...**I always think people get a chance like this not because of what they know but more because of how fast people think they can learn.**

I'd have to think that may be Jack and the board thought that ***I was a good learner*** and that I could adjust to the world and drive the right changes at GE.



Jeff Immelt,  
Chairman and  
CEO of GE

**KMB:** So what are **the kind of people that you would fast track in the GE system?** **Other than performance**, what are the qualities you are looking for?

**JI:** If I would pick just one trait, it would be **the ability to learn**, I think... people that have **hunger for improving themselves, curiosity, and knowledge gathering**... that is an absolute critical aspect for what makes people successful in GE.

**And then, it's ... There is a whole series of things to go after that, ...**

**But one common trait of all the successful people in the company is that they are good learners and they have real dedication to self improvement.**



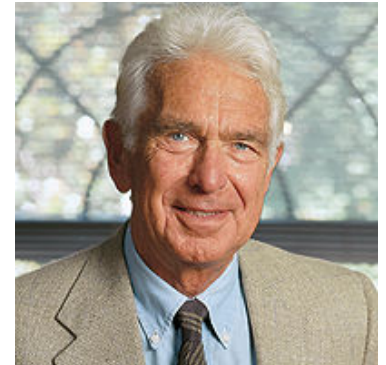
# Good news: It is possible!

“The truth is that **major capacities and competencies** of leadership can be learned, and **we are all educable**, at least if the basic desire to learn is there ....

Furthermore, ... **nurture is far more important than nature** in determining who becomes a successful leader.”

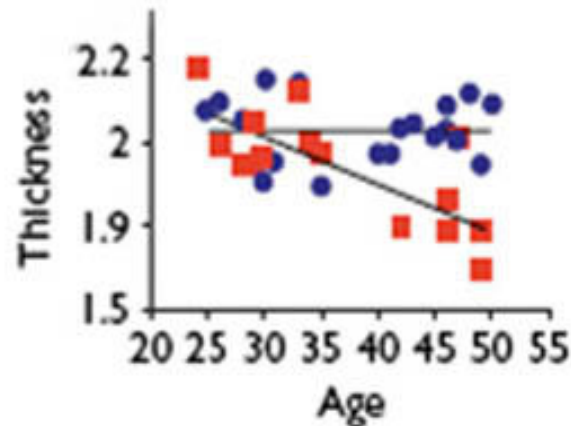
We have seen **evidence that points emphatically** to (this conclusion): Old leaders *can* learn new tricks.

**Leaders can and do make significant**, in some cases life-altering, **changes in their styles** ...



# Recent discoveries (invalidating what many of us were taught earlier in life)

- Neurogenesis

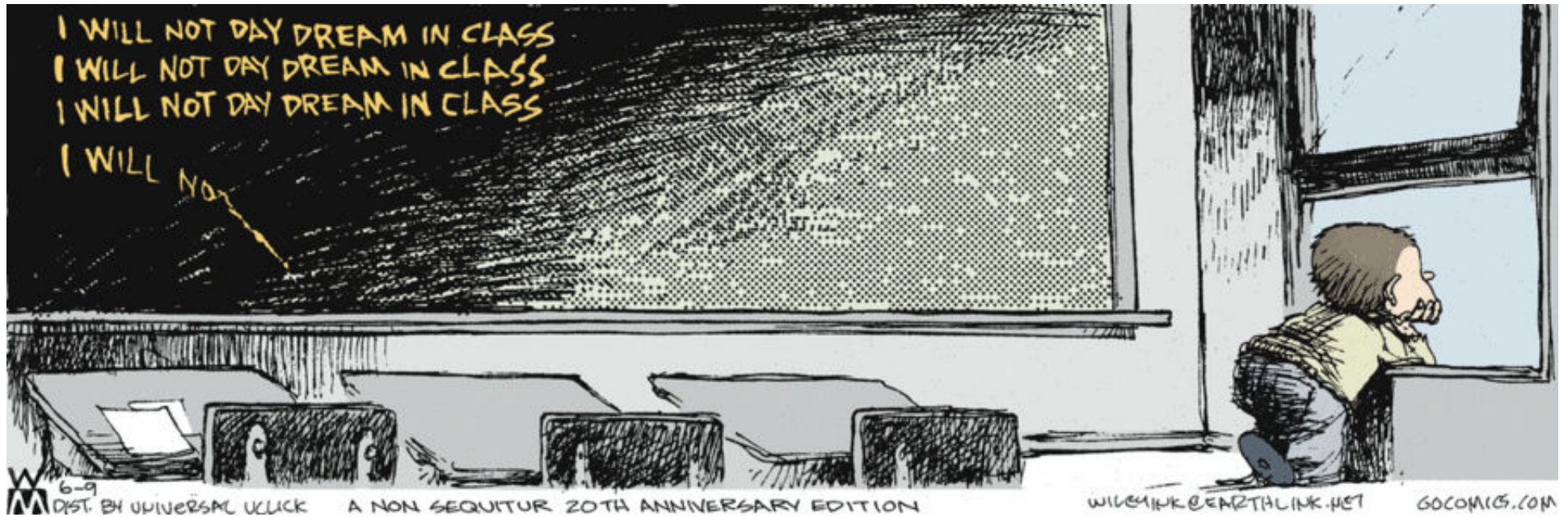


- Brain plasticity

Cab drivers in London: At the end of the drivers' training, the hippocampus of their brain—a part very involved in visual-spatial memory—is *measurably thicker*.

In other words, neurons that fire together wire together, even to the point of being observably thicker.

# Bad news: It's not easy



# Bad news: It's not easy

	Unconscious	Conscious
"Incompetence"		
Competence		

The diagram illustrates a cycle of learning and competence. It consists of a 2x2 grid with 'Unconscious' and 'Conscious' as columns and 'Incompetence' and 'Competence' as rows. Red arrows indicate the following path: 1. From the 'Unconscious' column, 'Incompetence' row to the 'Conscious' column, 'Incompetence' row. 2. From the 'Conscious' column, 'Incompetence' row down to the 'Conscious' column, 'Competence' row. 3. From the 'Conscious' column, 'Competence' row left to the 'Unconscious' column, 'Competence' row. 4. From the 'Unconscious' column, 'Competence' row up to the 'Unconscious' column, 'Incompetence' row.

# Practise!!

# Continued skill development is particularly challenging at the top

	Unconscious	Conscious
“Incompetence”		
Competence		

1. Habits are fairly deeply ingrained by now
2. My current ways are not perfect, but they did get me here
3. Very limited spare time and attention
4. Very limited spare energy/self-control
5. Risk of error – error is costly at the top
6. Failure and vulnerability tend to be disliked

# 1. The Knowing – Doing gap

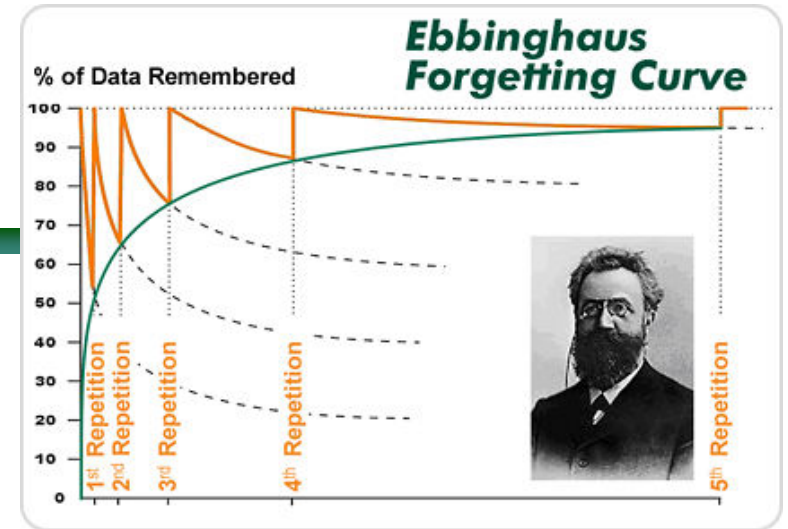
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- Senior executives know a great deal on management and leadership!
- They often *know* what they should do
- ⇒ They over-estimate the extent to which they're doing it!
- Box «ticked», until strong disconfirming feedback \*

## 2. Insufficient knowing

### a. Insufficient effort to acquire knowledge

- o Making notes
- o Repeated re-reading of notes...
- o We used to work much harder at learning!
- o If it's not in your head, it's not usable



## 2. Insufficient knowing

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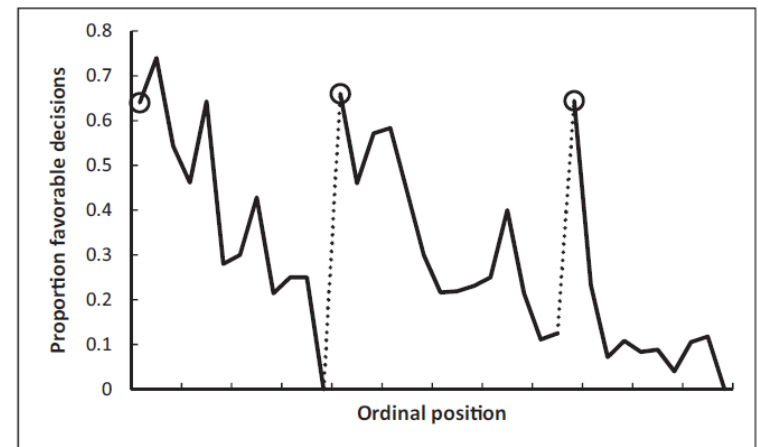
- a. Insufficient effort to acquire knowledge
- b. Under-estimation of implementation challenge
  - o Management knowledge often looks deceptively simple
  - o E.g., Fair process
  - o Identify the gap => fear of failure
  - o Not identify it => failure!



# 3. Limited bandwidth and ego depletion

## Learning a new pattern of response requires self-control/willpower

- Self-control functions a bit like a muscle
  - Long term, regular exercise helps develop the muscle...
  - In the short run, exercising the muscle fatigues it - **ego depletion**
  - Here-and-now vs. past/future/automatic pilot



# 4. Discouragement due to insufficient positive reinforcement

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- Feeling Consciously Incompetent is painful...
- Temptation to make the pain go away
  - Rationalising the gap away
  - Return to Unconscious Incompetence
- Why do we often get less positive reinforcement than we would like?
  - Three hurdles above
    - a. It takes time for people to notice our efforts and reward them

## 4 b) Lack of support from the social system

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- Acceptance

People around you may not welcome the change!

- Support

Are they willing and able to give you the support you need?

## 4 c) Competing commitments

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- Failure to produce «A» does not always signal a lack of commitment to «A»
- It sometimes shows an equally high commitment to produce «B»

## 4 d) Unconscious hurdles

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- The very direct entrepreneur...
- The conflict avoiding executive

# 7 challenges to on-going personal and professional development

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1. Knowing-doing gap
  2. Insufficient knowing
  3. Limited bandwidth / ego depletion
  4. Discouragement due to insufficient >0 reinforcement
    - a. It takes time for others to notice
    - b. Lack of support from the social system
    - c. Competing commitments
    - d. Unconscious hurdles
1. I'm doing it already
  2. I know I'm not doing it, but now I know how I'm going to do it!
  3. I try but I struggle to give it the necessary time and attention
  4. It's not working...  
maybe I am the way the I am...

# Four key enablers

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1. Sufficient intensity and quality of effort
2. Develop your mindfulness
3. Develop your reflectiveness / reflective practice
4. Confidence / persistence

# 1. Intensity and quality of effort

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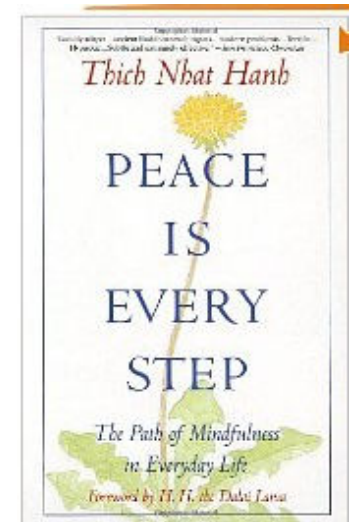
- a. Learn to know yourself (and stop lying to yourself)
- b. Goal selection and formulation
  - o Select something *reaaaally* important!
  - o Phrase the goal positively
  - o Break it down into smaller steps
- c. Give yourself a chance!
  - o Study, memorise, re-read your notes!
  - o Plan breaks into your schedule
  - o Get a coach/a buddy !
  - o Invest time and effort to get the right support around you



## 2. Develop your mindfulness

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- Very few executives spend much time here-and-now!
  - Past
  - Future
  - Everywhere!
- If you're not here-and-now, the habit wins!
- Learn to bring yourself back here-and-now
  - Conscious breathing exercise... (Thich Nhat Hanh)
  - Healthy living
  - Meditation practice



# 3. Develop your reflective practice

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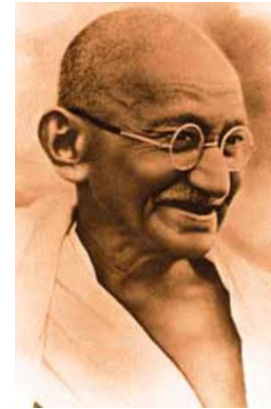
- Think ahead
- Deliberate practise
- Think back
  - On what worked, what didn't
  - Why did you behave this way?
- Solicit feedback – observe others' reactions

# 3. Develop your reflective practice

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- Mahatma Gandhi

His secretary, Pyarelal, reported that well into his seventies, Gandhi daily “held a silent court with himself and called himself to account for the littlest of his little acts. Nothing escaped his scrutiny. He gave himself no quarter”.



- Warren Buffett:

“I insist on a lot of time being spent, almost every day, to **just sit and think. That is very uncommon in American business. I read and think.** So I do more reading and thinking, and make less impulse decisions than most people in business. I do it because I like this kind of life.”



Happiness is when ... what you think,  
what you say and what you do are in  
Harmony

Mahatma Gandhi



If you think A, you will  
eventually say it or act it!

=> If you want your  
words and your deeds to  
be reliably aligned,  
*your thoughts must be  
aligned too.*

=> *You must (learn to  
challenge and) re-shape  
your thoughts over time*

# 4. Confidence / persistence

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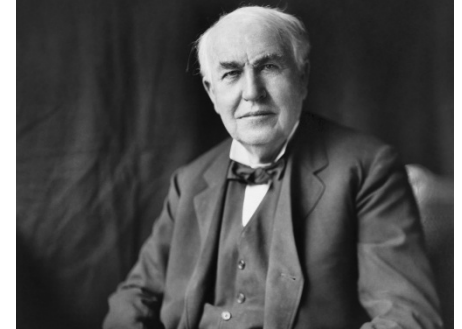
- Learning to produce new behaviours is not a linear process
- Yes it's hard!
- Notice and appreciate successes!
- Breakdowns => 2 questions:
  - When can I get back on track?
  - What can I learn from this breakdown?
- Learn to live more comfortably with “Conscious incompetence”

# You would be in good company

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- *'No, I haven't failed, I have just found another way that doesn't work'*

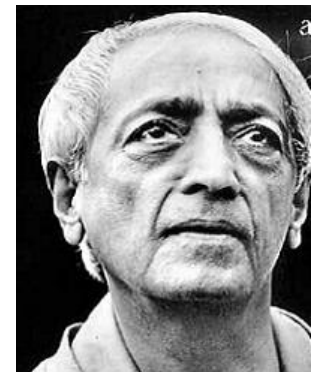
*I am not discouraged, because every wrong attempt discarded is another step forward*



- *Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall*



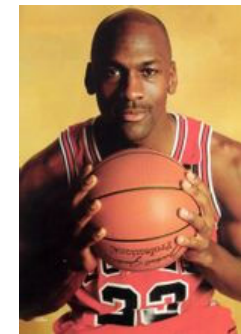
- *There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning*



# You would be in good company

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- *I tried always to do better, saw always a little further. I tried to stretch myself .*
- *I was taught to strive not because there were any guarantees of success but because the act of striving is in itself the only way to keep faith with life*
- *I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.*



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**Thank you for your attention  
and best wishes of success!**

**Any questions, comments or  
other forms of observations?**