Method Leadership's

7 Simple Tools for Personal Growth

Michael Paul Jährling

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For
Personal Growth

About Method Leadership

Method Leadership is a system for getting the most out of yourself and the people you engage with. It comprises a framework built around the four essential traits of effective leadership: Independence, People Skills, Knowledge, and Passion. It is effective both as a personal development framework, and as a leadership development framework.

Our company offers tailored coaching solutions for individuals and organisations looking to rapidly improve their performance.

About the Author

Over the last 25 years I've built and managed multiple corporate teams from 5 to 500 and partnered in several start-ups, living and working in eight countries.

Along the way I've developed some methods and tools for getting the job done well, fast, and efficiently. Now I'd like to help you perform at your absolute best.

Any leadership role, even just leading your own life, requires a solid grounding in self knowledge and self control. Hence this short eBook.

I hope it helps you.
Michael Paul Jährling

How to use this eBook

There are three short sections:

1. Can we really change ourselves?
2. The Basics of Personality
3. The Tools

Read start to finish for a little background on my experience and on personality in general.

OR

For immediate use - skip straight to Section 3

The tools ready to use.

I've purposely kept explanations simple and brief. I think they're clear, but if you should have any questions, feel free to get in touch. Contact details are on the last page.

"Man's main task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is. The most important product of his effort is his own personality."

~ Erich Fromm

Section 1 - Can we really change ourselves?

"I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become."

~ Carl Gustav Jung

Can we really change ourselves?

Yes. Categorically, yes!

At 21, something happened that made me not like myself, at least in that instant and for an hour or two thereafter.

I was tending bar in a cocktail joint. It was a big team, 5 bartenders, several waitstaff, and 4 or 5 cooks.

At around 11pm, the first to finish work would take a seat at the bar. We had a generous boss - everyone got a "knock-off" drink, and after that it was $1 a drink.

By 12:30am most of the team was at the bar, as per usual. A couple waiters were cleaning up the empty restaurant, and it was my turn to finish up in the bar.

The staff were welcome to come get their own drinks, and most did so because the last barman was usually pretty stuffed, and working hard to finish and join the drinkers.

That night someone asked me to get them another drink, rather than come and get it themselves. I was tired, hungry, and keen to finish - it had been a sh*t day.

I snapped - "why don't you get your own drink?" Not especially friendly.

They did. And left a mess.

After knocking off and knocking back a couple bourbons, and sitting for a while, I apologised for my temper and rudeness. It had made me feel like a d*ck. All was forgiven, of course.

Still, when I got home I couldn't help thinking about it. I didn't want to respond that way. It wasn't the first time either. I'd come to realise by then that I had a short temper, and was sensitive to perceived injustice. My anger rarely lasted long, but I did snap now and then.

I wanted to change that, but how?

I had learned cognitively; acknowledged that I wanted to change my habitual responsive behaviour to certain situations, but how to convert this learned lesson into actual changed behaviour?

Over the next few days I watched myself in similar situations, and reaffirmed that I was over-sensitive to perceived injustice. Anger, after all, is the emotion you feel when you think injustice has been done, either to yourself or to someone you care about. The key for me was to realise that small injustices didn't matter, or, more likely, no real injustice was involved. People do silly and thoughtless things without a shred of malicious intent all the time.

For me, little injustices made me angry too much and too quickly.

Being cut-off on the road, someone cutting in a queue, being interrupted. Minor things that at most should elicit a shrug, were "pushing my buttons", and despite having decided that I was not going to react to such petty stimuli, I still did.

Cognitive learning wasn't enough.

I needed reprogramming.

I came up with a simple tool. Every time I felt that silly anger arise, I would give myself a little fist in the thigh. Not too obvious to others, but something physical that would help me associate my new desired behaviour with a physical action.

Every evening before sleep I would remind myself to look out for the "wrong behaviour" - a technique I now call "Bookmarking" - and I stuck with the thigh-tap as my "reinforcer".

It worked. After a few weeks I was routinely ignoring those little irritants that happen to us all, every day, and that used to get me riled up.

I remember feeling almost elated when I realised that I had successfully modified not only my behaviour, but the underlying emotional response that gave rise to that behaviour.

Powerful stuff.

Over the ensuing years I've adopted or developed several more tools that either help eliminate unwanted behaviour or help inculcate new, desired, traits, or both. I've used, and still use, all of them.

New Age types like to say "accept yourself" and "love yourself" just *as you are*. I say to hell with that. Accept and love, absolutely, but...

If I'm habitually behaving stupidly, rudely, unfairly, impatiently, or in any other way such that when I look back I'm not proud, then I don't want to accept that, I want to change it. If I know I have a self-destructive habit that I should kick, then accepting myself "as I am" will not do. If I behave like a jerk, do I deserve self-love?

Now this is not to say that self-rejection and self-hate are good. They're not. Certainly you have to begin with accepting your faults, your dark side, your "shade", as Jung called it. But loving your self means valuing yourself enough to care about getting better, continuously, passionately caring about being the best you can be - taking pride in developing your character, polishing your personality, as it were.

So before I present the tools that have worked for me,, let's talk a little bit about personality.

Having at least a basic understanding of that which you call "you", and how personality is formed and transformed, will help you to understand how and why these tools work.

Section 2 - The Basics of Personality

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."

~ Aristotle

What is personality?

If we take a dictionary definition...

Personality is "the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual's distinctive character."

That doesn't tell us a whole lot, so, without getting too technical, let's look a little deeper.

There are several levels of analysis by which we can try to understand the essentials of that which we call personality: *historical, philosophical, biological, evolutionary, neurophysiological, psychological* and *statistical.*

Something to keep in mind: words denote concepts, which, if defined objectively, reflect the essential characteristics of that about which we're speaking, but not the whole. When I say to you "table", you know what I mean, in essential terms, but very little about any actual table, unless I give you a lengthy and detailed description.

And so it is with the concept of "personality". The dictionary definition above gives us the essential. The following different levels of analysis give us more detail, a look from different angles, as it were.

Think of these levels of analysis as different tools for understanding personality, its nature and its function. These are not strictly defined or mutually exclusive. There is overlap and even contradiction. The point is to realise that personality is complex, and needs to be studied from many angles.

Perspectives on personality

Historical
Since ancient times, myths and legends have given us archetypes as heroes and villains; models to emulate or shun. The prodigal son, the dragon-slayer, the nurturing mother, the virgin process, the tyrannical father, to name a few. Seen from this perspective, elements or shadows of these archetypes can be found in our own personality.

Philosophical
Philosophy studies the nature of reality, how we properly learn about reality, and how we should act.

In that light, a philosopher might see personality as the sum of what we've inherited in our genes (or not), what we've learned, and the choices we've made.

A philosopher is not concerned with how personality works, but rather, what it does.

Biological
From a biological perspective, personality might be seen as the product of the physiological and chemical processes controlled by our autonomic nervous system, which respond to our environment, our diet, and the myriad of external influences with which our bodies must contend with, in order to stay alive.

Evolutionary
From a Darwinian level of analysis, our personality is an evolutionary response to the problem of survival. Inherited personality traits that have succeeded in keeping our ancestors alive long enough to procreate have survived and been passed on to succeeding generations.

Neuro-physiological
Both our emotions and our thoughts - key elements or expressions of personality - rely on electro-chemical processes taking place in our brain and nervous system. These processes are only now being researched and understood, and their role in determining our respective personalities slowly revealed.

Psychological

There are several schools of psychological thought in regard to the nature of personality.

<u>Psycho-analytic</u> (Freudian) - "Self-regulating and independent unconscious processes make up the essence of personality. They operate though mental structures that are in continual conflict."

<u>Neo-psychoanalytic</u> (Jungian) - "Conscious individual, social, and interpersonal factors are powerful forces in shaping personality."

<u>Humanistic</u> (Rogers, Maslow) - "People are basically good and strive toward maximum personal development or self-actualization."

<u>Behavioural</u> (Skinner) - "Personality is the observable result of reinforcement (reward and punishment) from the external environment."

<u>Genetic/Biological</u> - see "Biological" above

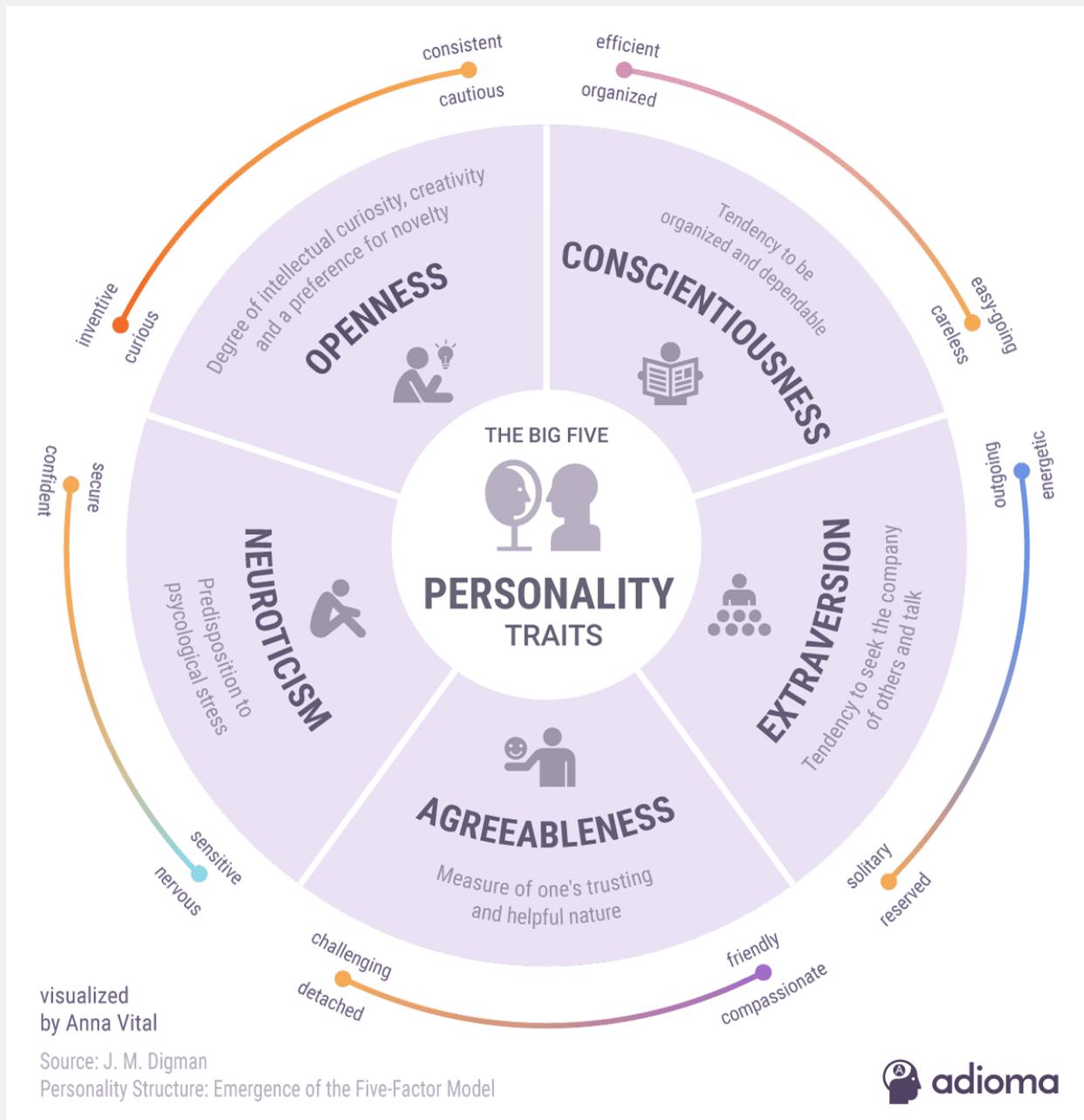<u>Cognitive</u> - "Personality results from the interplay of learned and innate styles of thinking."

<u>Trait</u> - see "Statistical" below

Statistical (Trait)

Statistical analysis reveals that personality can be measured across certain *traits* that we all share, in varying degrees.

The best researched are *The Big 5 Aspect Scale* (sometimes called "Five Factor Inventory") and *Intelligence Quotient (IQ)*.

Here's a representation of The Big 5:

THE BIG FIVE

PERSONALITY TRAITS

OPENNESS
Degree of intellectual curiosity, creativity and a preference for novelty
consistent · cautious · inventive · curious

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS
Tendency to be organized and dependable
efficient · organized · easy-going · careless

EXTRAVERSION
Tendency to seek the company of others and talk
energetic · outgoing · solitary · reserved

AGREEABLENESS
Measure of one's trusting and helpful nature
friendly · compassionate · challenging · detached

NEUROTICISM
Predisposition to psycological stress
confident · secure · sensitive · nervous

visualized by Anna Vital

Source: J. M. Digman
Personality Structure: Emergence of the Five-Factor Model

adioma

I highly recommend understandmyself.com for more on the Big 5 and for a quick and inexpensive self-assessment.

The point of sharing this brief overview with you is to help you better understand the make-up of your own personality, or at least to point you in the right direction if you want to learn more; to reinforce the complex nature of personality; and to give you a foundation for understanding why these mental tools work.

What can we change, and what do we have to accept and work with?

That's a good question.

A good case has been made (by psychologists like Jung and Peterson, by Buddhists and Doaists, and by our own experience), that there's much we must simply accept about ourselves. We have to accept "our nature".

I think this is true.

I think we're born with propensities and proclivities that are "hard-wired". The Big 5 Aspect Scale bears that out, as do my own attempts to change some things about myself, to no avail!

In such cases, the key is to know and control, even leverage these aspects of ourselves that, left unattended, might lead us toward chaos.

All that not-withstanding, I'm convinced there's plenty we CAN change.

We are, I believe, if not masters of our destiny, certainly shapers thereof.

My own experience has been that life ALWAYS throws up curve balls; our destinies are rarely what we have planned, but that if we adjust to our circumstances as they change, we can save ourselves from becoming victims of circumstance.

Shaping our own personality, that is, becoming someone we admire, and, ultimately, creating of our lives something admirable, is the privilege and joy of being human, so have at it.

"I've trained myself to illuminate the things in my personality that are likeable and
to hide and protect the things that are less likeable."

~ Will Smith

Section 3 - The Tools

1. Bookmarking
2. Linking
3. Disintegration
4. Record Setting
5. Channeling
6. Daily review
7. Perfect Day planning

"Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself."

~ George Bernard Shaw

Disclaimer: *This advice is not intended for those trying to beat addiction to narcotics or alcohol. These tools may well help in that endeavour, however such addictions require professional help. If you think you have a problem with drugs or alcohol, please see your doctor.*

Bookmarking

Use this to change behaviour, especially negative emotional, thought, and speech patterns that keep coming back even though you've disavowed them intellectually.

Action to take:

At the end of every day, take a few moments to reinforce intellectually the behaviour or automatic emotional response you're trying to change. Make a mental note that next time it comes up, you'll do X instead. Remind yourself why the old behaviour is wrong or not wanted. This latter bit is important. Re-wiring takes time and repetition.

You'll need to do this for several weeks. Don't bite off too much, and absolutely don't get discouraged if you don't get immediate results. Consistency will pay off.

Why this works:

Evolutionary Psychology tells us that memories are a survival tool. We remember stuff that will help us in the future. That's why we remember significance, and immediately forget the irrelevant.

Neuroscience tells us that memories are "hard-wired". That is, a specific memory is stored as an exact "map" of "activated" neurons. An analogy that might help: think of a vinyl record - memories are like the grooves cut in the surface. They can be re-cut, but it takes more than one pass.

Repeatedly reinforcing desired behaviour can slowly but surely bring about the desired change.

Linking

Use this to inculcate new habits.

Action to take:
One of the best ways to inculcate a new habit is to link it to something you already do.

The best way I can explain this, is with a few examples.

I have an ongoing list of new habits I want to adopt. Here's a few past entries:

- I will do a set of push ups daily, to failure, regardless of whether I go to the gym or not.
- I will follow 120 new Instagram accounts daily.
- Every time I engage with J., I need to give off a "come here and let me kiss it better for you" attitude.

The first I linked to showering. Before every shower, push-ups.

The second I linked to going to the gym. In the 60 seconds between sets, I did my Instagram "housekeeping".

The last, which was needed because this person (a colleague) was a bit defensive and I was feeling like I was "walking on eggshells" every time we met, I simply linked to our mutual greeting. We'd known each other a long while and had a familiar way of saying hi. I simply used that as the link to "switching on" the mindset I need to engage with this person successfully.

Why this works:

One of the reasons new habits don't stick is that we simply forget. Using an already established habit as a trigger eliminates this problem.

Disintegration

Use to dislodge ideas or beliefs you've long held, but have now realised are wrong, but which continue to come up and/or to impact your behaviour. Negative self-talk or limiting beliefs, for example, or philosophical ideas that you've absorbed from friends, family, or society at large that have always been simply accepted as true, but on reflection and logical analyse, aren't.

Action to take:

As hard as this may sound, you must ignore them; push them aside. Simply refuse to think about them, or even to acknowledge them. The best way I've found to do this is by "linking" (see Tool #2) them to something else, that's good to think about. A quick daily review, for example (see point #6).

The key is to not entertain the negative thought, or wrong beliefs, AT ALL. Even for a minute. What usually happens when you do is you get into a lengthy dialogue with yourself, over ground that you've traversed many times before. It's futile, no amount of reason will stop these ideas and beliefs from popping up. So, they need to be "dis-integrated", and the way tis sap then of their power is to ignore them, completely.

Over time, they wither and die.

Why it works:

Long-held ideas are neurologically "hard-wired" in your brain. Re-wiring is not as simple as deciding an idea is no longer true. Every time the subconscious spits them up at you, your consciousness reinforces them, even when your fully-conscious self has disowned them. Refusing to give them space and salience gives your subconscious time to "catch-up" to your conscious self.

Record Setting

Use this to quit a bad habit that you've tried to break but, perhaps repeatedly, failed to stick to. Smoking. Binging. Porn. Whatever.

Action to take:

Quit. Whatever it is. Go Cold Turkey.

Set yourself an achievable target: "If I can go for X time without doing Y, I'll allow myself one Z". Make this first target one you know you can manage.

When you make it, give yourself the promised reward, then set a new, slightly longer target, say 10% longer.

OR

If it was easy, double your target.

REPEAT. As often as you must until, each time going somewhat longer without X. Usually sooner rather than later, you'll realise that you're are in control and the former compulsion no longer has a hold on you.

If at any time you fail to achieve a target, re-commit, with the time you did achieve as your new target.

At no stage should you be too hard on yourself for not making a target. Just get back on the horse. If you sense even a shred of self pity or condemnation, nix it - put it out of your head. Not helpful. Remind yourself often of your "why". Visualisation is key here. Make the "New You" vivid in your imagination.

Why it works:

We are by nature motivated by targets. Setting them gives us something to aim at, and a dopamine hit when we reach them. The key with this tool is to not come down on yourself if you don't make a target. Instead, acknowledge that this won't be easy, and that you now have a new record for how long you can go without X. A new starting point. A new record to break.

Channeling

This is another technique good for breaking bad habits.

Action to take:

Nominate a good action - something that helps you long term, like a course of study, a fitness goal, a creative project anything productive, and especially something that you enjoy, and can quickly "get in to".

Make it something that's doable in chunks of time that are about the same as the time you would otherwise have spent pursuing the bad habit you're trying to break.

Now, whenever the urge comes upon you to pursue the bad habit, go straight to working on your nominated good action. If it's something that needs preparation, have that set-up ahead of time - your running gear ready to go or your language study material open at hand, for example.

No questions, just go to it. Give it everything you've got so that you get into "flow" as quickly as possible.

Repeat as oft as you need to.

Why it works:

Our subconscious is not monolithic. At times multiple "sub-personalities" vie for control of our behaviour. When you're in the grip of hunger, thirst, lust, for example, or if you're cold, or hot, or angry, or under the pall of grief, it can be hard to concentrate on anything else. This is natural. The motivations driving us towards old, destructive, habits, are similar.   Their clamour can be very loud and very persuasive.

Having a strategy to channel your attention immediately into something positive every time they arise is like cutting them off at the pass, so to speak. Once you're focused on the positive endeavour,m the "noise" abates.

Daily Review

Use this for everything. In fact, if there's only one technique you adopt from this list, make it this one. Very powerful.

Action to take:

Every day, without fail, take 5 minutes to review the status of your "Hierarchy of Values".

I do this when I shower, and often also when I first get in the car to go somewhere. Just before sleep works too, if you can stay awake. Some people swear by a journal or diary. What ever works for you. The essential is to review all the things that are most important top you, what their status is, and what you need to think about/work on/change/plan for, etc. in each case.

My hierarchy of values includes:

Family
Primary Business
Start-up Business
Art Projects
Fitness
Study Projects

As I'm already pretty structured in how I approach and maintain these, I don't need a lot of time to run through them in my mind; to assess where my priorities are and any loose ends that I need to deal with.

The secondary benefit of this process is that it heads off worry and puts my mind at ease.   If you're routinely thinking about and planning for the things that are important to you, you're less likely to run into the unexpected.

Why it works:

Entropy is the law of the Universe. Unattended to, everything deteriorates. The Daily Review helps you adopt a proactive approach to the values you're creating and maintaining, and striving to achieve. Do this habitually, and it's less likely things will all of a sudden turn to chaos. It's simply a way of staying one step ahead.

Perfect Day Planning

This is a general productivity tool.

Action to take:

Think about what you could achieve tomorrow if you put your mind to it and stuck it out no matter what.

Plan that day. Write it out, step by step, with start and finish times. From the moment you wake up to the moment you'll sleep.

Don't be too aggressive, but make it so that you'll be busy if you want to get it all done.

Now do it. Set the damn alarm if you're not an early riser. Its only one day and you can rest at the end of it.

REPEAT.

Why it works:
Action without plans is usually pointless. You know that. But most of us have longer term plans, and on a daily basis there's multiple options about what we could spend our day doing.

The "Perfect Day Plan" eliminates the need to make choices on the day. Priorities are set and a schedule made in advance. This works to make it easier to dismiss distractions and stay on task. No mental energy is wasted on decision making and no opportunity for distraction or procrastination given. Just do it, as the ad says.

NB: Use the "15 minute Rule":

The Fifteen Minute Rule

When you start a task, all sorts of distractions enter your head. It's almost inevitable. "Should I grab a coffee first" "I'll just check email". "What's going on with the Corona Virus - I should get on Twitter". You'll find if you can push these distractions aside for the first ten to fifteen minutes, the "mind-chatter" will subside and you'll be able to focus. So, the "Fifteen Minute" rule says - don't succumb to distractions for the first 15 minutes, and your productivity will soar.

A request...

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just copy this link to the download page:

XXXX

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If you've received this eBook and are not yet a subscriber to Method Leadership's newsletter, you might like to sign up, **HERE**.

*"Instead of worshipping who you are now..., worship your ability to transform,
to manifest, over time, your greatest potential."*

~ Jordan B. Peterson

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