

Building a Leadership Identity with Impact



By Amy Franko



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Building a Leadership Identity with Impact

Welcome to AmyFranko.com and this updated edition of one of our most highly downloaded eBooks, *Building a Leadership Identity with Impact*. Every leadership journey is unique. This eBook is comprised of our top blog posts, edited and organized into three themes for your leadership development.

Leading Yourself. Leading ourselves is the start of the journey. This theme delves into the concepts of self-leadership and leadership identity.

Lead and Inspire Others. If you're currently a people leader or aspire to that role, this theme covers topics such as your role as manager and coach, along with strategies to build influence and inspiration.

Creating Your Leadership Legacy. You don't need to be of a certain tenure or have a leadership title to begin elevating your impact. There's no time like the present. This theme offers concrete ways to begin building your leadership legacy today.

To discuss ways to partner on your next leadership program or keynote event, please refer to the back of this eBook for contact information. I look forward having you in our community of sellers and leaders.

Lead Yourself. Lead and Inspire Others. Create Your Legacy.

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Founder & CEO

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Leading Yourself



ARTICLE 1

The Power of Self-Leadership

When you think of leadership development, what comes to mind?

For most, the concept of leadership development involves the process of building leaders of other people—creating a connection between managers and the front line. Topics in a leadership development course might include communication, conflict management and delegation, to name a few.

It's not often though that we stop to look in the mirror. Have you thought about what it means to lead yourself? That's self-leadership, and it's the most important pillar in the leadership development process.

Self-leadership describes how you lead your own life – setting your course, following it, and correcting as you go. Life and business are often intertwined, so it also reflects how you work with clients, colleagues, and the leadership in your organization. Self-leadership is something that needs continual focus at every level of the organization. Even if you don't have a leadership title within your organization, you are still a self-leader.

What does it take to become a self-leader? Below are five core qualities of self-leadership that anyone can hone:

Self-leadership describes how you lead your own life – setting your course, following it, and correcting as you go.



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME A SELF-LEADER?

Below are five core qualities of self-leadership that anyone can hone:



1) Enthusiasm for Learning

Almost all people I've met who are great self-leaders are learning enthusiasts. They keep up with trends in their industry, are well-read, and love to learn and share new information. I've also noticed that they usually surround themselves with others who are also learning enthusiasts.

2) Goals for Life and Business

Because many of us live in a combined world of the personal and professional, setting goals for business and life are critical. Those who exercise self-leadership take that a step further by monitoring those goals and correcting the course when needed. One idea I incorporate in my own life is to create a vision board. It allows me to dream big and visualize what I want my life to be. Secondly, create a goal board – this can be a white board of your yearly goals, broken down into quarterly or monthly goals. As a manager or individual contributor, how are you communicating and monitoring goal progress – outside of formal performance evaluations?

3) Willingness to Let Go

Self-leaders have learned where to direct their time and energy, and where to delegate. This action allows you to better lead in your areas of strength. It also allows you to create collaborative relationships with your colleagues.



4) Flexible Structure

Self-leaders design plans and schedules, and they have the discipline to honor them. For example, discipline may mean time blocks for their more important work, or a scheduled time to check email and return phone calls. It could also mean shutting down at a certain time each evening, or a willingness to say no to non-essential activities. This structure also has flexibility. In today's environments, we're asked to run from meeting to meeting with little time to ideate or think. An example of flexible structure is building in blocks of time for idea generation and thinking.

5) Focus and Discipline

It's a fact that our brains can only truly focus on one thing at a time to do a task well. This is even more critical when the task involves creating thinking or problem solving (rather than a rote task). Self-leaders have developed the skill of selecting what they want to focus on and tuning out the rest for a set amount of time. They do their best work and create better results. 

Self-leaders design plans and schedules, and they have the discipline to honor them.

ARTICLE 2

Build Your Leadership Identity and Leadership Brand

One of the concepts I talk about in my keynote programs is the importance of creating both a leadership identity and a leadership brand.

While I've met many people who innately possess executive presence in spades, I've known many who have also worked to cultivate it and grow into leadership roles. I've also learned that executive presence isn't just for someone aspiring to become an executive leader; it's a set of attributes and skills one can build to make an impact in any aspect of personal and professional life.

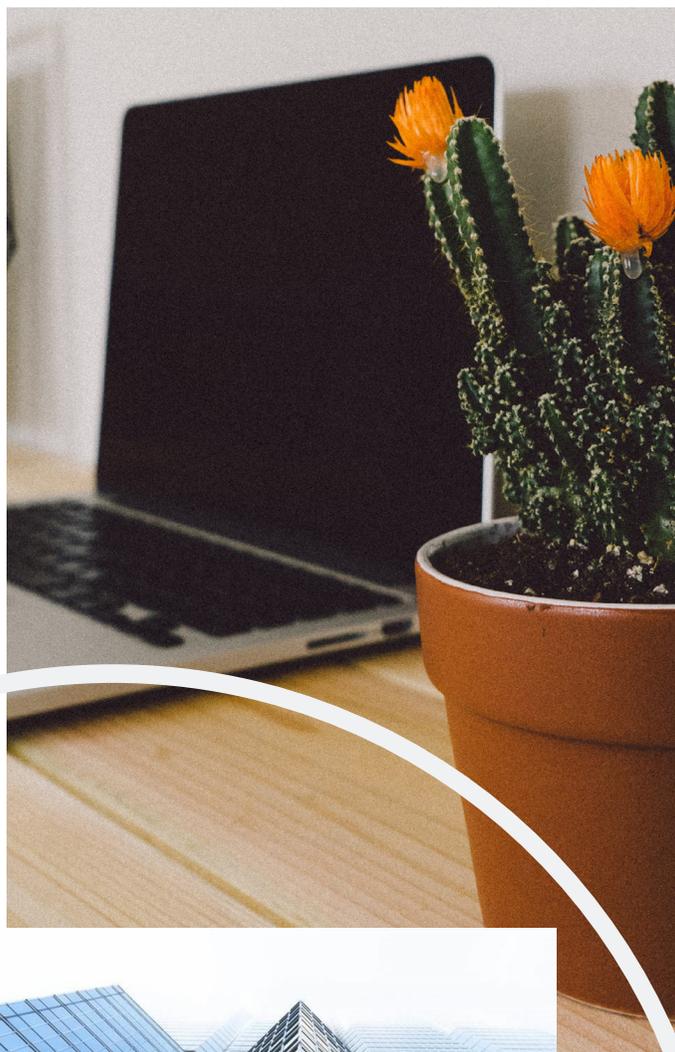
An interactive exercise I take my program participants through involves them visualizing a leader who has impacted them in some way. Then they answer the following questions. What would you say they value? What's an outward behavior that confirms that for you? These two questions get to the heart of leadership identity and leadership brand.

The inward value represents our leadership identity, and the outward behavior represents our leadership brand. It can be challenging to maintain awareness of our leadership identity and leadership brand. Sometimes our outward behaviors fall out of alignment with what we value, or we learn something about what someone values by their behavior.

I had an experience in an executive-level meeting that brought home the importance of congruence between our leadership identity and our leadership brand. The discussion topic was related to non-profit philanthropy and one executive shared her position.

Knowing this person well, I knew the goal of sharing her position was to encourage 100% financial commitment to the mission. But the delivery was tone deaf; it was condescending and accusatory. A complete turn off. What I learned is this person valued commitment from her peers, which in and of itself is a positive leadership identity value. But the message, the leadership brand, didn't get the intended results. If anything, it backfired.

Part of our leadership journey is to up-level our awareness of how our leadership identity and leadership brand are being received by others. If our message or the result doesn't match our intention, we may need to dig into that further and make some changes.



LEADERSHIP IDENTITY

Our leadership identity is what we value, and what we're passionate about. It's the purpose that drives us. Leadership identity and brand are very closely tied, they reflect one another. They also have some differences. Your leadership identity is made of up:

Your values. Those beliefs that are within us. While many of those values are instilled in us from a very young age, I do believe that our values have the capacity to morph.

Your experience. This is your collective experience, both personally and professionally. For those of you who are younger in your career experience, it may feel challenging when those around you may be further along in their career/life. It's an opportunity to learn from those with more experience, continually sharpening your saw with learning. For those who are more tenured in your careers, there's much to learn from younger peers and team members; it's an opportunity for learning to be a two-way street.

Gravitas. I was first introduced to this concept by Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an expert in executive presence. Gravitas is our substance. Do we know our stuff? Do we internalize it? A great example of substance is owning our subject matter expertise. Hewlett has also shared through her research that gravitas is our confidence and our grace under pressure. Gravitas comes from within.

Mindset. Our internal settings will direct our destiny. Dr. Carol Dweck is a Stanford professor who pioneered research on growth mindsets and fixed mindsets. We have both mindsets. If you visualize a continuum, she found that some tend more toward the growth end of the continuum, and some tend more toward the fixed end of the continuum. Those who tend more toward growth see experiences, feedback, and setbacks as learning opportunities. They also believe in their capacity to grow their intellect. In other words, they aren't static; they can grow and expand.

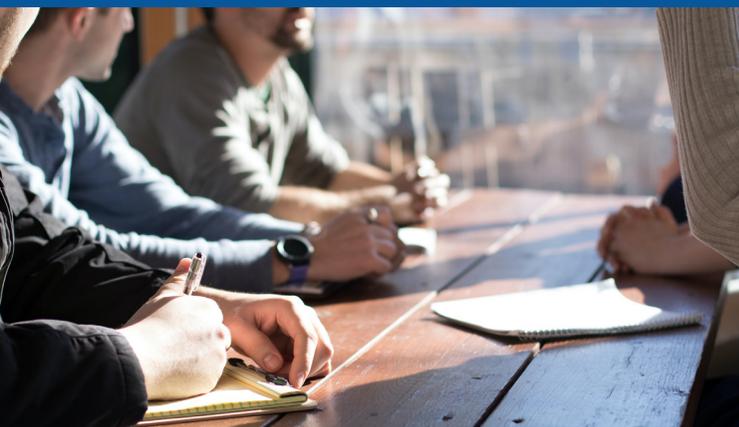


Our leadership identity is
what we value, and what
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the purpose that drives us.



LEADERSHIP BRAND

If your Leadership Identity is the internal, your Leadership Brand is the external display of your leadership identity. It's how you operate in the world. If I could give you an image to keep your mind, it's the image of action.



The elements that make up your Leadership Brand are:

Behaviors. If you have ever seen a leader whose behavior is consistently the opposite of what they say they value, then you've experienced first-hand why consistent and reliable leadership behaviors are so important. Your behaviors either support your leadership identity or they undermine it. For example, let's say one of your leadership values is freedom. But you micro-manage your people or you consistently squash new ideas because they'll never work. Your value and your actions are at odds.

Communication. Are you compelling in all forms of communication? Can you command a room, read a room? What do your body language and posture say about you? In her executive presence (EP) research, Sylvia Ann Hewlett found that the number one element of communication when it comes to EP is the ability to improvise and to speak off the cuff.

Vitality. This is having a level of polish and sophistication. How well do you take care of yourself, physically, mentally, emotionally? Do you come across with vigor, with the energy that says you can take on more advanced assignments, more leadership responsibility?

Persona. Within this element I group activities like thought leadership, strategic relationships, social profiles, community work, and board service. Let me give you a quick example from my own life. One of my passions is elevating girls into leadership; I see them as our leaders of tomorrow. That aligns with my value of creating opportunity. To that end, part of my leadership brand is board service. I'm Chair of the Board of Directors for Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland. You'll see that work in my social profiles, my connections with community leaders and my support of the organization.

Skills. Lastly, skills are an important part of your leadership brand. What are your core skills, and what skills do you need on your leadership path.? Are you clear on which skills you need to build to advance to the next leadership role? 



ARTICLE 3

Lifelong Learning is Your Best Investment

My marketing director Michelle often shares stories about her step-mother-in-law, Connie. Connie is 99 years young. At 95-ish she decided she wanted to learn German. That led her to take a class at a local university, and then an overseas trip to use her new skill. I'm told she planned to travel on her own, until her son and daughter-in-law intervened and went along with her.

I'm blown away that she still works out daily and can do a yoga headstand. I told Michelle that I wanted to be Connie when I grow up. We got to talking about Connie's secrets to this kind of longevity. We were able to boil it down to two big things. She's consistent with self-care, and she's the perfect example of a lifelong learner.

This article dives into the second of those two, what lifelong learning can do for us personally and professionally. You are the best investment you can make.

Waiting doesn't work. It's up to us
to go out and create the life we want.



YOUR DEVELOPMENT IS AN INVESTMENT, NOT AN EXPENSE

I'm always amazed at what we'll spend on things. The coffees. The near-daily Amazon deliveries. But it doesn't it sometimes seem harder to invest in ourselves?

This was a muscle I had to build for myself when I became an entrepreneur. When my employer was paying my way, it was easy to say yes. But when the responsibility landed on me, I had to learn to let go of excuses. I was so focused on what I was "spending" to go to the conference or to hire the coach, that I didn't realize it for what it actually was. It was an investment. Not something that was going to be consumed, and then gone. But something that would build me up, change me, challenge me – and I would always carry that experience with me. It was also an up-leveling – because investing in my own learning consistently gives me the confidence to charge the fees I've earned through my education, experience, and results.

Ideas for Your Development Journey

I'm a big believer that when you make the decision to invest in yourself, that the "how" will begin to show itself. But the "how" needs a little help to make it work. That's where the "doing" comes in.

Money an issue? There are so many low-cost or no-cost options to get you started. [TED Talks](#). [Podcasts](#). [Coursera](#). [LinkedIn Learning](#). Scholarships. Early on in my journey I had no money to invest. I belonged to a local training organization that helped me out by granting me a partial scholarship to a conference. In exchange I shared my key learnings with the other members when I returned. That little piece there – the follow through with what I learned – that's the difference maker. Follow-through and application build your confidence; they reinforce that you made a good investment.

As I grew in my development journey, my company grew. As the company grew I was able to invest more. Today, I have a budget in the business that's solely dedicated to professional and personal development.

Own Your Journey

I come across too many people who are waiting for someone to invest in them. Waiting for their company to write the check to the conference, or to pay for organizational membership.

Waiting doesn't work. It's up to us to go out and create the life we want. The sad thing is that most won't create it.

Fear stops us in our tracks. Fear of looking like an impostor. Fear of not being good enough. Fear of not doing it perfectly. Fear of the responsibility of following through and applying what we learn. Even fear of success. But on the other side of the fear is where all the good stuff is – whatever that might be for you.

I'm reminded of a quote I heard on a podcast. I wish I could remember who said it, but I keep it in my quote journal and refer to it when I need a mental pep talk:

“There is nothing more inspiring, empowering, and invigorating than taking complete responsibility for all aspects of your life.”

A silhouette of a person standing on a rock with their arms raised in a gesture of triumph or achievement. The background is a bright green sky with some clouds. The overall image has a green tint.

Leading Others



ARTICLE 1

Leadership Defined: First, Intentional, Blind

In my line of work, I'm often asked how I define *leadership*. I picture the leaders I've been so fortunate to be surrounded with in life. Sports coaches, parents, teachers, community leaders, mentors, volunteers, friends, fellow board members, fellow entrepreneurs, CEOs, executives. As President & Chair of the Board of Directors for *Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland*, I get to spend time with hundreds of girls and young women practicing leadership every day.

So, let's dive in. How do I define leadership?



LEADERSHIP IS STEPPING UP FIRST OR BEING A FAST FOLLOWER.

I learned the concept of going first from *Simon Sinek* when he keynoted the ATD International Conference. His message was so simple, but it described leaders perfectly. Leaders are willing to go first, even when the *risk* is high, or the stakes are high. There's something they believe in or something that calls them to step up first. I'm thinking of a CEO who has a huge vision for her non-profit. She's pursuing a goal that will put this organization's work on the map. But nothing like it has been done in her community and it will require major fundraising and support. She's going first. She's also going to need fast followers – those who buy into her vision right away and are willing to step up beside her to make this vision happen.



“What is your intention for today?” And while the intention may look a little different each day, what underlies it is a choice to show up in a certain way.

I’m at my best as a leader when I take away the labels from myself or others. I see fewer limitations and way more possibility

LEADERSHIP IS INTENTIONAL.

I keep a daily journal, and one of the questions is, “What is your intention for today?” And while the intention may look a little different each day, what underlies it is a choice to **show up** in a certain way. I try to revisit what I’ve written as I go about the day, checking in with myself to see how I’m doing with that intention. You might set a leadership intention for your day, before a sales call, a big meeting, or a tough conversation. When I choose to set an intention, something clicks into my awareness. I feel more connected. I’m more aware of my words, my tone of voice. I’m better at being empathetic and trying to understand the other person’s perspective. All things that leaders do.

LEADERSHIP IS BLIND.

I’m still always struck by how easily we place labels on who we think leaders are and what leadership should look like. Lots of shoulds. But leadership doesn’t see any of that. It doesn’t see your age, your generation, your socio-economic status, your gender, or your ethnicity. It doesn’t know your outward appearance, your job title, years of experience, or accomplishments. These are all labels that we put on leadership. And these labels are limitations. I’m at my best as a leader when I take away the labels from myself or others. I see fewer limitations and way more possibility. **Possibility** is a big part of what leadership is about! Because leadership is blind, it’s why we need more diversity in all of our leadership conversations – whether that’s physical diversity, thought diversity, or diversity of experience. It all matters if we’re going to move the needle on our most pressing leadership challenges. 

ARTICLE 2

Inspiration is the Spark that Elevates You and Your Team

Have you ever had someone in your life that makes you feel as if there's nothing you can't do? Someone who moved you to be more and do more than you ever thought possible?

That's inspiration . . . it can be hard to describe, but we know it when we feel it, and we know it when we see what an inspired person or group of people can do. When we have leaders who are inspirational, we become connected to them, we see the possibilities of what a team can do together, and we can create amazing results.

A mentor once taught me that it's my job to be a spark of inspiration, to light that fire within the people on my team and those around me. It's one of the most rewarding parts of leadership.

But most of us think of inspiration as something we're born with – we're either inspiring or we're not. It's actually a skill, and if you're committed to becoming a leader, it will be one of the best skills you learn.





In this article I share some of the everyday ways you can build inspiration into your life and leadership path.

Inspiration is about intention, and it takes awareness of the words we use and how we respond to people. A good friend once emailed me about wanting to apply to graduate school and change careers. First of all, I had no idea that she even had an interest in changing careers, which was a lesson for me in making more effort to learn what's important to the important people in my life. Honestly, my first reaction was that it was a crazy idea. That it's going to take years for her to rebuild her career, that she had no idea what she was getting into, and on and on and on. But after I turned it over in my mind a few more times, I realized that this is her dream; our dreams should propel us to take these leaps into the unknown. After all, I left my technology career over a decade ago to pursue my own dream of being an entrepreneur. By being intentional, I was able to see past my own reactions and get to what really mattered – that my role is to be a source of inspiration and support to her.

Choose to spend your time with people who inspire you. The days in my life that are the most productive and fulfilling are the ones where I spend time in person with people who inspire me. When I get that opportunity, I'm still jazzed up even after a 10-hour day. That same day in front of a computer? No way. At least three days a week I plan my days to be around those who inspire me – my team, my customers, other entrepreneurs and leaders.



I'm reminded of Maya Angelou's words that say it all about inspiration:

“I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Build inspiration into the structure of your life and work.

For me, the choice to spend time with people who inspire made me change how I structured my days. I now make it a priority to get out of my office several days a week to be with inspirational people.

Other things I do:

- Each night, I write down three successes or things I was inspired by that day. It's quick, and you'd be surprised at how that adds up over time.
- I capture inspirational stories. I have notepads everywhere! Everyday people and situations inspire me. I share those stories with my team, and I often use them in public speaking or writing.
- I create whitespace in my calendar every week. A completely jammed calendar doesn't inspire me at all. (I can admit though, I'm a work in progress on this one!) For example, I'm writing this article on a day where I have zero appointments scheduled. That gives me the time I need to focus. Or, if I have a particularly busy week, I try to keep weekend activities to a minimum. Openness creates opportunity and inspiration.
- I write lots of personal notes. There is such power in a personal note. The connection from that can't be underestimated – you never know who you'll inspire by reaching out to thank or recognize someone, or to let them know you are thinking about them. 🌀

Inspiration is everywhere around us if we're open to it. As a future leader, you have the opportunity to be that spark for someone else!



Coaching and managing aren't an "either/or" proposition. Today's leaders will need to both manage and coach.

ARTICLE 3

The Blended Leader: Manager and Coach

(Editor's note: This article was written with sales leaders in mind, but it can be applied to any leadership role.)

For as long as I can remember, I've loved participating in sports and fitness. Basketball. Softball. Track. And lately, indoor cycling and barre classes are my favorite way to get a workout. No matter what the activity, having a good coach (or instructor) makes all the difference.

Coaching has made its way from athletic fields to the business arena and is often cited as being superior to the practice of "managing." A great coach inspires you to be your best and reach your true potential. A great coach focuses on skills and guidance versus tasks. That requires striking a balance.

Coaching and managing aren't an "either/or" proposition. There's no getting around the fact that there will always be projects and issues and pipelines to manage. Today's leaders will need to both manage and coach. As a leader, it's difficult to avoid getting sucked into managerial minutia. And then the coaching gets pushed to the back burner. The key is continually rebalancing our priorities.



EFFECT ON THE TEAM

From my experience, one place this happens more than others is within sales organizations. Pressure to produce in sales is always strong, and it's not unusual for top performers to be elevated to leadership positions, without receiving any leadership training.

Take for example one of my acquaintances, who is a sales representative and serves as an individual contributor on his team. For years he had a great boss; a manager who trusted his people. That manager made time for each of the 10 team members individually, plus regular team calls. He was eager to help them grow and looked for development opportunities. The manager struck a beneficial balance between coaching and managing. But then that manager left the company for a different opportunity. Enter the new manager, with no previous leadership experience. All coaching-related activities for the team were pushed to the side. **And yes, productivity has declined, as has team engagement.**

It's a frequent scenario. Individual contributors who are meeting and beating their number are promoted to leadership. There's an automatic assumption that because they know how to sell, they also will be stellar in a leadership role.

But there's a gap. As an individual contributor, a person is responsible only for himself. When promoted, she becomes responsible for eight to 12 others as a frontline leader. She probably doesn't have individual customers—she's now leading the team. It's a mindset shift and a skill shift.

How can that be turned around? Upskilling sales leaders to become coaches and mentors is as important—if not more important—than focusing on individual contributors. Like many frontline leaders, sales leaders are often under-invested in, despite the fact that they have the most direct access to those who generate revenue for the organization.

Make sure you have curriculum and performance resources that specifically address the sales leader and empower them to coach individual contributors.



A MATTER OF TIME

One tactical way to start addressing this issue is for sales managers to know where their time is currently invested and where it's wasted. Track a typical week in the life, and write down everything you're doing—capturing a snapshot of your time. Then analyze.

You will likely be surprised at what you find.

What is your time being dedicated to? Meetings? Individual contributor tasks? Leadership tasks? Next, categorize the tasks so you can understand the balance. For example, do you spend a small percentage of time coaching, but 50 percent of your time in meetings? Look for opportunities to delegate, outsource or delete any non-productive tasks. There are plenty of tech tools out there to track productivity, but I've kept my approach low-tech, with a handwritten tracking sheet.

There's a big difference between busyness and productivity.



HIGH PRIORITY

As someone in leadership role, you must make conscious decision that you want to devote time to coaching your team and make it a priority.



What will you do today to incorporate more coaching into your routine and unlock your team's potential?

Make it meaningful. Look at ways to better prioritize your week to allow meaningful time to coach. It's mindset and skill. Then think about what will happen if your whole team analyzes how much of their time is being invested to move business forward. Help them analyze and reprioritize, too. (That's coaching!)

Build a cohesive team. Sales, especially, is seen as an individual sport. My old boss used to say that salespeople are "coin operated." There's some truth to that statement. They most likely are "Type A" folks, mainly focused on their piece of the pie. But as a leader, you need your contributors to perform individually, as well as a team. Help them understand there's something bigger at stake. That's how you build a more cohesive team.

Mind the gap. Determine where skill gaps exist on your team. It's your job to advocate that they get the training they need to advance and be their best. On the flip side, when you see a team member with a notable strength, give them the opportunity to model for the rest of the team. Not all the coaching has to come directly from you. Peer-to-peer coaching is a beneficial option, too.

Individual empowerment. It's important that the team members can articulate their greatest opportunities, challenges and obstacles. Part of the coaching process is encouraging others to make those realizations themselves, so that you're not saying, "I'm the expert, and I have all the answers." Rather, help them shine the light and let them share their ideas. Ask them how they see themselves making goal and what solutions they recommend for their challenges. By doing that, you have turned the conversation around and empowered your team to be creative problem solvers. As the coach, you can help to refine solutions or remove obstacles.

Let it go. A word of caution: you might think you have the better answers. (And you very well might.) This is the time to embrace your self-awareness and allow your team to develop ideas and implement them. If it doesn't work? They will learn from their mistakes, just like you did. As the coach you have to step back and allow them to try even though they might fail. Risk, after all, is integral to growth and learning. 



Creating Your Leadership Legacy



ARTICLE 1

Your Daily 20

Twenty minutes.

That what I just set the timer for, to keep my daily writing chain going. I got the idea of the writing chain from Dan Pink's book, *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing*. Pink was referring to a strategy that Jerry Seinfeld uses to build the daily habit of writing new material. His goal was to string together as many days in a row as he could, marking each day with an X where he accomplished the goal. Then when the inevitable "I just don't feel like it," or "I'm too busy" voices creep up, there's a visual reminder to keep the habit going.

I tested out Seinfeld's strategy and committed to writing for 20 minutes a day for 30 days. Even on the weekends. I got away from writing blog posts when I was writing *The Modern Seller*, and I realize how much I missed these short-form writing bursts.

Here's what I've learned from the experience

- **This Daily 20 concept can apply to anything you want to build a habit around.** Healthy eating. Reading. Practicing a skill. Business development. Thinking. Rejection. [Check out this TED Talk from Jia Jiang](#) on how he made it a goal to string together 100 days of rejection.
- **Getting to 20 minutes often encourages me to do more.** It's in the getting started where I get stuck. But 20 minutes is both short enough and long enough to get some momentum. There are times when I stop at 20 because it's a packed day. And there are times where I'll continue for an hour or more. Where I was tested was on the weekends, especially if we were traveling. Out of those weekends, I broke the writing chain twice. It was both a letdown and a motivator. I was disappointed in myself for missing those days, but...I was also motivated to get back at it. I learned that I could use the positive momentum of X's I tallied up to keep going.
- **I looked forward to the 20 minutes most days.** When I was writing *The Modern Seller*, it was all I could think about creatively. I felt like every ounce of creativity was being invested in the book. But there's also a business to run! I had to find ways to create creative spaces for client deliverables, a website launch, and the daily grind of being an entrepreneur. Looking back, I didn't fully appreciate all that I was trying to do. With the initial book goal behind me, I see how much my mind freed up to create new ideas.
- **Being time bound keeps me from procrastinating (mostly).** I try to have one day per week where I have nothing on the schedule. I love seeing those days on my calendar. But the shadow side is that I trick myself into thinking I have so much time. Sometimes those open days become wasted, and I didn't get anything significant accomplished. The time-bound nature of the 20 minutes helps me to stay focused. There's a beginning and an end, and my mind snaps into gear. 🌀

This Daily 20 concept can apply to anything you want to build a habit around.



ARTICLE 2

View Your Career as a Jungle Gym, Not a Ladder

A person will average 10.7 jobs in his or her lifetime, according to *Fast Company*.

Let's say your career spans 30 years (and for many of us, careers will be longer). That calculates, on average, a move to a new job every 2.8 years. My own career path reflects this. In **20 years**, I've grown my career with **six companies** and have had **seven unique job descriptions**.

For many of us, our beliefs around how our careers will unfold were hatched by watching our parents work at the same place for their entire career, and perhaps in only a couple of jobs that entire time. To a large extent their careers were planned. And if they were designated as "management material" they were swooped up, placed on the "management track" and away they went.

Our experience is now entirely different. This notion of the "planned career" is as outdated as the phone I bought six months ago.

Today, when you walk in the door of a company there's really no step-by-step formula or well-worn path to follow to your dream career or your leadership aspirations. You design your path; you own it and are responsible for creating opportunities.

Pattie Sellers, former Editor-at-Large of *Fortune Magazine*, captures it perfectly:

“The most successful people I know don't think of their career as a ladder, but rather a jungle gym.”

Remember the playground jungle gym from when you were a kid? We would play for hours, never getting bored of trying new things and seeing just how high we could fly on the monkey bars.

Pattie's comment hits home because it offers an important shift in perspective that leaders should take to heart. The business world is no longer the ladder of "career planning" but rather the jungle gym of "development planning." The speed of business today means absolutely everything is changing and unpredictable. In other words, it's very hard to plan for, and it means you need the agility and forward thinking of development instead of planning.

With all of this in mind, how you do focus more on “development planning” and less on “career planning?” Here are a few suggestions:

- **Think skill first.** Look to develop skills that are transferable across positions and industries. One tip is to pay attention to people that are successful and determine what skills have helped them, regardless of position or company. Examples are business development skills, presentation skills, and language fluency – all skills that are transferable. Become well-versed on the trends of your industry and business trends as a whole. You’ll uncover patterns in skills and knowledge to help your development planning.
- **Develop technology acumen.** The language of business and the language of technology are intertwined. You don’t have to be a technology wiz, but at today’s pace of business your willingness to become versed in technology trends and their effect on business is directly tied to your development. One example is technology-enabled learning. One of our services is sales training, and many companies are looking for ways to deliver effective training in that medium. That requires me to be well-versed in how the technology affects various aspects of learning and development. I also need to make the tie between technology-enabled learning and business outcomes.
- **Look for big picture experiences.** Experiences don’t have to take on the look of a formal “job” or “position.” Look at everything you do as an experience and a way to develop skill. As an example, I took a language immersion trip to Mexico and practiced skills I wouldn’t have otherwise had the opportunity to develop. Skills like communicating in another language, interpersonal skills with a host family, and making my way around a different city are all transferable to my professional and personal development
- **Apply for the position anyway.** I can’t tell you how many times this comes up in conversations, where people hold themselves back from going after a position they want because they don’t think they have “all” of the skills. It’s okay if you don’t – that’s part of what taking a risk means – going after something where you don’t have all of the answers upfront. My advice is to be calculated in your risk taking; honestly assess where your skill gaps are and get advice from a trusted mentor to help you determine if the position is a right fit for your development plan.
- **Continually build relationships.** Your network of relationships is one of your greatest avenues for building your leadership path as well as helping others. Make sure you are connecting with and serving your network. Make sure you’re reaching out to influencers and being visible within your company and industry. This is where you learn about new opportunities for development. Relationship building should be in every leader’s development plan. 🌐

Look for big picture experiences. Experiences don’t have to take on the look of a formal “job” or “position.” Look at everything you do as an experience and a way to develop skill.

Pondering Your Next Big Goal?

I still have the publisher's email from my first book, *The Modern Seller*. It had finally made its way to the last stage.

"The book is uploaded to the printer!!"

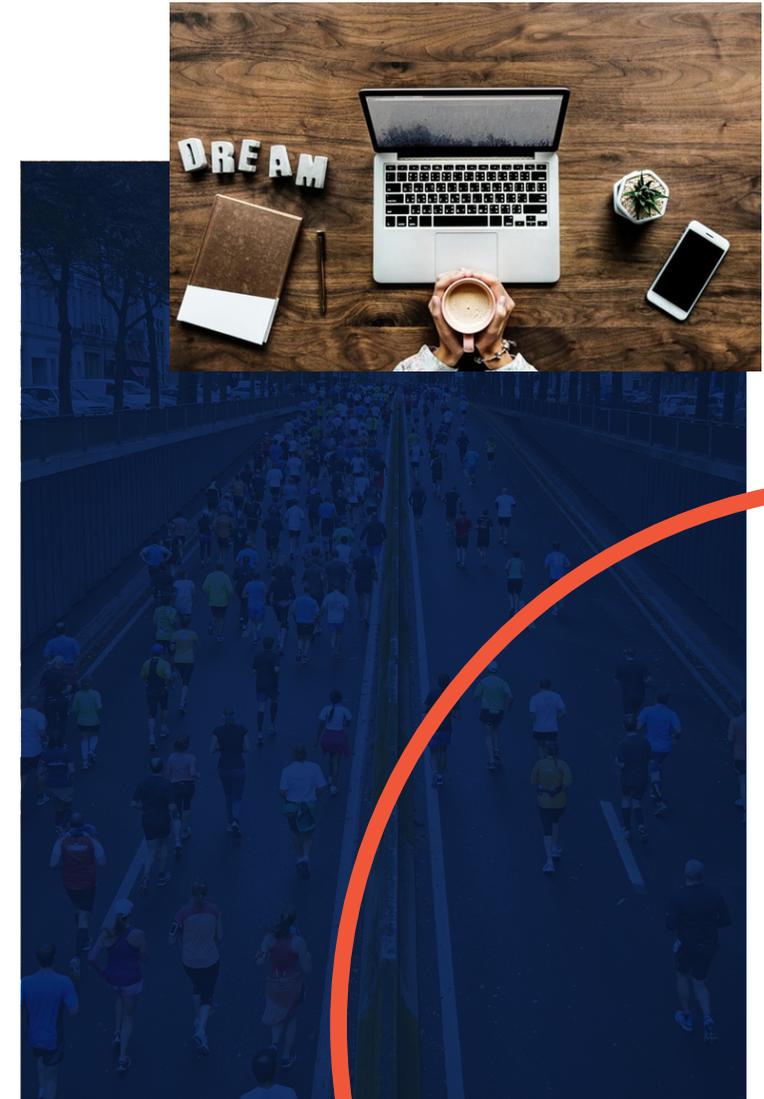
A 20-month project, and a 20-year goal in the making was finally coming true.

If you're pondering that next big dream goal in your life, or if you're in the midst of one, these were a few of the most surprising, unexpected lessons I encountered during the process of writing *The Modern Seller*.

When you're built for sprints, you must train differently for a marathon.

I'm used to moving fast. A 500-word blog post, or even a 5,000-word eBook? No problem. Those are sprints; I can easily see the finish line. Because I have developed the muscle for this type of writing, it is in my comfort zone.

But a 45,000-word book is a marathon, and the finish line is off in a murky distance. For someone who is used to moving fast and pivoting quickly, my mindset and goal-setting strategies needed to change. I had to anticipate and work past frustrations – from changing up the outline, to even scrapping entire sections because they just didn't fit. If I scrapped an entire section, I had to accept that it wasn't a failure, but part of the process. The bigger the goal, the more planning it needs. I chunked down that big goal ("the book") into much smaller milestones: outlines, chapters, or some days, just sentences.





Knowing where your energy comes from is critical to making progress.

I'm an ambivert, so while I get energy from both collaborative and independent activities, I'm definitely more on the extroverted and social end of the spectrum. Writing a book is a very solitary activity. If I logged too many days in a row alone in my home office, I thought I would lose my mind.

To get past that, there were times I just had to put it down. While some authors would tell you to write every single day, I decided to take breaks. There were some stretches where I was doing client work or keynote speaking engagements. I needed those interjections of collaboration and different work to keep me motivated and energized. The one downside was that there were some stretches where the break was too long, and it took more to get back into the writing habit. A weekly check in with my publisher helped me with that accountability to keep me on track.

There will be tradeoffs. Make sure you're good with them. Someone asked me what my biggest tradeoff was to make time for writing the book. Hands down, it was less new business development time. I'd been warned by more than one author to be ready for a sharp drop in revenues because of the time needed to write the book.

That was such valuable advice: I made some adjustments to budget and worked on building business primarily in existing clients or working referrals, versus net new business. So far I've been diversified enough with offerings and clients, plus with a dedicated team to execute on contracts, the drop off hasn't been as significant as I'd anticipated.

A secondary lesson with tradeoffs: With a goal this big, I didn't have room in my life for another goal of this size. I had to choose the book over other big goals, so I could stay focused. With the goal at the finish line, my energy has shifted. I'm much lighter and I have more creative bandwidth.

As you're building your leadership legacy, what are the most impactful goals you want to accomplish? Where can you start today? Reflecting on sprints, energy, tradeoffs, and significance will help you get there and become that leader making an impact on others. 

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About Amy Franko

Amy Franko is a keynote speaker, sales strategist, and author specializing in B2B sales and sales leadership development. She works with professional services and technology organizations to accelerate their growth results.

With over 20 years of client-facing sales experience, Amy began her career with global companies IBM and Lenovo before pivoting into entrepreneurship. Her book of business includes some of the world's most recognizable brands.

Her book *The Modern Seller*, is an Amazon #1 New Release, and was named a 2019 top sales book by Top Sales World. She is recognized by Top Sales World as one of the top 50 sales bloggers in the world. She was recently named by LinkedIn as a 2019 Top Voice in Sales.

Amy is the President and Chair of the Board of Directors for Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland, serving over 18,000 girls in central and southern Ohio. She resides in Columbus, Ohio with her husband Dave and their very energetic black lab, Roxy. She loves all things fitness, enjoys travel, and is usually reading several books at once.

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