



A life in harmony

Why should creating a work-life balance always come down to making trade-offs? **Stewart D Friedman**, author of *Total Leadership*, tells Phin Foster about becoming a better leader and why life is never a zero-sum game.

It's Tuesday 27 July 2004. Inside Boston's FleetCenter, a young, virtually unknown candidate for the US Senate takes the stage at the Democratic National convention. It is election year and the party is gearing itself up for John Kerry's run against the incumbent George W Bush. Our skilled orator addresses this challenge, and why his party's nominee is the man for the job, but this keynote address transcends the political, taking the audience on an extremely personal journey of discovery.

The senate hopeful speaks of his grandfathers: one a Kenyan who worked as a domestic servant for the British,

the other an oil rig worker who marched across Europe in Patton's army; of a father who grew up herding goats and attending school in a tin-roof shack; and a mother born in Kansas, raised in Hawaii.

'I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story,' he tells the wildly applauding crowd, 'that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me, and that in no country is my story even possible.'

Within four and a half short years that story had become even more outlandish, with Barack Obama becoming the first African-American elected president of the United States.

Throughout his run for president, Obama placed the uniqueness of this narrative at the heart of his candidacy. It is an approach one management professor has been drumming into his students for the best part of two decades.

'Obama's story of growth and transformation through a remarkable personal history, and how that fits in with where he wants to lead us, enabled people to feel that they were listening to a real person whose values were derived from his experiences,' Stewart D Friedman says.

'He clearly takes himself quite seriously as a leader and has done a great deal of introspection, struggling to articulate his story.'

Or perhaps he simply got his hands on an advance copy of Friedman's *Total Leadership: Be a Better Leader, Have a Richer Life*. The three-step blueprint for achieving 'four-way wins' across all dimensions of one's life – work, home, community and self – begins with a frank demand: 'Be real'. This phase encourages participants to understand how crucial events in the past mould their philosophies and aspirations.

'To write about the events that have shaped your values and beliefs is something that everyone can do,' Friedman says. 'A leader needs to be able to frame their narrative and express it in a way that is tangible to other people. The foundation for developing greater leadership capacity is an ability to say to yourself and others, what you stand for, and why.'



STEWART D FRIEDMAN

Stewart D Friedman is an innovator in the leadership development and work-life fields. He has consulted with a wide range of organisations and executives worldwide and conducts workshops globally on leadership and the whole person, creating change, and strategic human resources issues.

'Gaining a greater sense of power through realising that the innovations one is implementing have the best interests of one's stakeholders in mind; that is how you gain support moving towards the vision you care about and that is the very essence of leadership.'

Three steps to total leadership

Being real – acting with authenticity by clarifying what is important: understanding how crucial events in the past have shaped one's values and aspirations; assessing the relative importance of work, home, community, and self; taking stock of how much time and energy is invested in each of these four domains; and diagnosing one's level of satisfaction in each.

Being whole – acting with integrity by respecting the whole person: identifying the most important people in one's life and their performance expectations, determining how different expectations affect one another, assessing how one uses different media for connecting with these 'key stakeholders', and preparing and conducting dialogues with each one to verify assumptions and see things through their eyes.

Being innovative – acting with creativity by experimenting with new solutions: after seeing both what and who are important in a fresh light, designing and implementing small, smart, potent experiments that swiftly produce better results in all four parts of one's life and that transform alienation, exhaustion, and resentment into feelings of purpose, authenticity, connection, and optimism.

Obama may have passed this test with flying colours, but Friedman believes great leaders reside in areas far removed from the echelons of the Oval Office. 'Leadership is not about hierarchical responsibility for the work of others,' he explains, 'it must exist at all levels of an organisation and relate to the creation of sustainable change that's beneficial for all parties. Empowering people with a greater sense of control, confidence and competence for initiating innovation and sustainable change, mobilising people towards goals that are valuable to both you and them: that's leadership and it can be achieved at any stage of one's career development.'

As Friedman discusses the theme of 'four-way wins', one word is noticeable by its absence: balance. The former advisor to both Al Gore and Jack Welch focuses instead on 'integration', a belief in the interconnectivity of each aspect of one's life. 'Balance implies trade-offs; a zero-sum game,' he explains. 'It connotes that performance and satisfaction in one sphere of your life must be compromised for success in another.'

The customised approach of Friedman's programme, and its focus upon interconnectivity, dispels this traditional viewpoint. 'Most people don't really think about how the different spheres affect each other,' he acknowledges. 'They don't look at potential for mutual enrichment, but it's clear that your role as a brother, sister, father or mother will



directly impact upon your performance as employer, coach or colleague. This is about providing a framework for looking at these interactions in a new way, leading to action as well as insight.'

It also demands a genuine desire on the part of participants to instigate lasting change in their lives. Peer support is built into the programme and a step-by-step approach, along with rigorous testing tools, ease this transition.

Friedman continues: 'There are two ways of thinking about work and the rest of your life: a depletion model, where you've only got a limited sum of attention and energy and have to choose where to direct it; or an enrichment model, which asks you to contemplate and pursue those activities

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in ways that engage the mind and enable you to experience positive outcomes in one domain as a direct result of steps taken in another.'

Before one is ready to take that step, however, there comes the second stage in the process: 'Being whole'. Having outlined your values and diagnosed your level of satisfaction within each of the four domains, it is time to identify the most important people in one's life, gauging their performance expectations and assessing how these expectations affect one another. Friedman calls these people 'key stakeholders', and readily admits that this process is not always easy.

'It's the hardest part of the journey for everyone,' he tells me. 'Engaging in direct conversation with those that matter to you the most can be daunting, but it often leads to two important realisations: these people expect less of you than you first thought and they want different things. We make far too many untested assumptions and these assumptions have a direct impact upon how we organise our lives. When you hear the reality being articulated, it enables adjustments to be made and provides a support system that simply wasn't there before.'

These adjustments arrive in the final stage: 'Being innovative'. 'This is the fun part,' Friedman enthuses. 'You start experimenting creatively with ways of gaining mutual wins. Because these innovations are intended to benefit both you and the people around you, the chances of them working are far higher.'

Friedman tends to recommend three experiments to start with – 'one goes great, the other is a moderate success and the third is a total failure' – and they can range from working at home a half-day each week to undertaking community work. He discusses a student's 'jerk-o-meter', where key stakeholders were encouraged to grade his daily behaviour; a New York investment banker with dreams of opening a vegan restaurant in Vermont who began using friends, family and colleagues as guinea pigs for his recipes; and a Washington defence contractor who recruited his father from upstate New York and moved with him to San Diego to start a business.

All these stories are underpinned by a real sense of community, mutual support and enjoyment, Friedman just wishes he could keep track 'of all the whacky things people end up doing'.

'The older I get, the clearer it becomes to me that I spent far too much of my youth being serious,' he continues. 'The innovation process should bring people joy and if it's not fun, why bother?'

Grown-ups need recess too

Our minds, our bodies, and our spirits can only go so far without some care and feeding. So perhaps the more difficult question is this: how do I do it in a way that works and is sustainable?

Here are Stewart D Friedman's tips for those looking for a little rejuvenation:

1. Whatever you do for your recess, try it in small steps for starters. You are much more likely to make it happen if you undertake some activity that does not require a big restructuring of your life.
2. Make a list of the benefits – direct or indirect – that your recess will have on other people in your life. Not only will

you feel less guilty about doing something that at first might have seemed selfish, but you'll actually be more likely to do it when you realise how it will benefit others.

3. Enrol someone you trust to serve as your coach. It could be anyone, so long as they can provide both support and accountability pressure.
4. After a week or two, get feedback from the people who matter to you to see if indeed you're better able to serve their needs and interests as a result of taking your recess.
5. Adjust as you learn what's working from the point of view of the people around you. There are tons of ways it might not work, but these will be fewer if the people around you see your recess as useful for them, too.

Become the complete leader

Incomplete leader

- Fake
- Unfocused
- Rootless

- Fragmented
- Resentful
- Overwhelmed

- Stagnant
- Apathetic
- Pessimistic



The practice of total leadership

Be real

Act with authenticity by clarifying what is important.

Be whole

Act with integrity by respecting the whole person.

Be innovative

Act with creativity by experimenting with how things get done.



Total leader

- Purposeful
- Genuine
- Grounded

- Connected
- Supported
- Resilient

- Curious
- Engaged
- Optimistic

Listen to your stakeholders

While the process certainly seems enjoyable, the wins one achieves can have serious implications. Friedman sees the changes that have a direct influence upon those in most

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need as the ones that stay longest in the memory and cites an example from his time as director of the Leadership Development Centre at Ford as a particular highlight.

‘A manager’s innovation involved creating flexible working schedules for her staff,’ he tells me. ‘One employee had a blind son who attended a special school. The father had never taken his kid to class because he always had to be at work. As a result of the experiment, this was something he could do and when he articulated the difference this had made to his life, and she passed that information on to the group, there wasn’t a dry eye in the house.’

What might raise the suspicions of some business leaders, however, is the idea that many of these innovations do suggest less time spent in the office. Does integration not

still demand a level of trade-off somewhere along the line? ‘Sacrifice is a part of life,’ Friedman conceded, ‘and at 56 I’m old enough to understand that we can’t have everything we want. But my clear sense as a coach, teacher and researcher is that the opportunities for discretion in how one integrates the different domains for mutual gain are massively under explored. These changes are all geared towards improving your performance in the eyes of bosses as well as dependents. Being stuck at your desk for 12 hours a day does not necessarily equate to being more productive.’

Seeing the world through the eyes of your key stakeholders is crucial for getting the balance of one’s experiments right. ‘It allows you to have more discretion in your efforts than you might have thought going in,’ he explains. ‘Gaining a greater sense of power through realising that the innovations one is implementing have the best interests of one’s stakeholders in mind; that is how you gain support moving towards the vision you care about and that is the very essence of leadership.’

The approach has certainly worked for Obama, although letting go of the BlackBerry would not appear to be on his innovations list. But, as *Total Leadership* demonstrates, it is not only presidents who are capable of being enthusiastic about the future and their power to shape it. ■

Human resources

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