

# LEADERSHIP AND FULFILMENT

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Right now how content, fulfilled or happy are you in your job and leadership role?

If you are very happy, what are the circumstances and conditions that are making this possible? If you are not particularly fulfilled, what are the circumstances and conditions that are causing that?

Before you read on, please take a minute to put a list together. You will get much more value from this article if you do this first.

Take a look at your list. How easy was it to come up with that list? If you are like me and lots of other people whom I have met, that list of circumstances and conditions which are contributing to your positive or negative state was very easy to compile.

Now let me remind you of one of the most radical ideas and practices which we explore in our leadership work with senior managers. Maybe circumstances and conditions, as important and influential as they are, do not automatically determine, how content, fulfilled or happy you are in your job and leadership role. They have only a supporting or temporary role to play. Maybe the list is a diversion!

This idea is so radical and counter-intuitive, that possibly many of you are thinking right now that I have gone balmy. Yet, on our leadership programs many of you already have had this very insight and experience, and the responsibility made you feel powerful and liberated. A little anxiety may have occurred and is normal too. The early Greek philosophers, the Existentialists, and Eastern thinkers, have had a lot to say about this phenomenon.

Here are some simple examples. The way many of us tend to think is if we **have** more friends, we will **do** more social things, and as a consequence we will **be** happier. If we get that promotion, then we will have more influence, and therefore we will be more fulfilled. It is an understandable way of thinking about, and relating to, causation. And it is based on a grain of truth. But could we have it back-to-front? Could reality work the opposite way often? For instance, if I am **being** friendlier to people by smiling more, listening more,

being more generous and the like, it may lead to me **doing** lots more social things with them, which may result in me **having** more friends.

Maybe fulfilment itself is a state of being, a way of being which we generate and bring to the present circumstances. Maybe Being precedes Doing precedes Having. Perhaps this way of thinking and being is one of the great gifts which leaders contribute to others.

Remember we are not talking about a mere feeling or emotion here, and we are not trivialising the difficult, or painful, or cruel challenges which we regularly face at work and in life, and the impact that these events definitely do have on us at the time. Some of these impacts can last a lifetime. But I am suggesting that there is power, freedom and fulfilment available, in how leaders choose to relate to circumstances and conditions.

And this is hardly an argument for passivity. It would be a mistake, and a little perverse, for someone who is being responsible for their fulfilment, to be passive and not actively seeking jobs and roles and relationships which they like, and striving to change or avoid ones which they don't like.

This way of thinking and acting can be counter-intuitive, so I invite you to reflect deeply on the possibility and what it really means for your everyday leadership. If you have lost touch with this insight, or lost touch with the freedom, purposefulness and fulfilment which many of you experienced on our leadership programs, here is my suggestion. Right now, or pretty soon, take some time to breathe, to relax, and maybe even to meditate for a while.