

# **LeaderPerfect Newsletter**

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## **The Most Overlooked Leadership Resource**

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Leaders frequently talk about their resources. Indeed, the management side of leadership is largely about optimizing the use of resources and opportunities at our disposal.

So let me begin by asking, what are the most important resources that you manage?

When I put this question to leaders, their most frequent response is give me a list of tangibles such as financial and physical assets. Sometimes (but by no means always) they go on to add people. The list of people may include employees, advisors, clients, suppliers, consultants, and others.

### **State Management**

I would suggest, however, that as leaders there is another invaluable resource that is omitted when we see our resources entirely in terms of tangibles and people. It is the resource that neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) describes at the personal level as "state management."

The first time you see this phrase, you might think it has something to do with the duties of a state's governor. But that's not the kind of state we are discussing.

NLP classifies all personal activity in one of three categories. First is external behavior, which embraces everything someone else can observe in us, from large body movements to the twinkle in our eye.

Second is internal processing, the patterns of thought, reasoning, reflection, and recall that we use to respond to the world. And third is internal state, somewhat akin to what we commonly call a "state of mind."

As their name implies, internal processes are dynamic. They are changing moment to moment. Indeed, we typically describe internal processes with "-ing" words such as thinking, hearing, reflecting, recalling, etc, which convey the idea of action.

By contrast, internal states are relatively "static," which is where they get their name. States include such things as contentment, confidence, joy, preoccupation, fear, anxiety, or nervousness. In the course of an hour we may move from one state to another. But when a particular state is active, it changes very little other than to start and stop. I'm either content or I'm not. I'm either confident or I'm not. True, I may be more content at

certain times, less content at others. Or more confident. Or more fearful. But from minute to minute this level tends to be steady, not changing constantly.

## Resourceful States

There are dozens of states, some more energizing than others, some more productive than others. Organizations, too, have states that they are running. Often you can almost feel that state as you walk through a suite of offices or tour an assembly process. And you often sense it in the quality of customer service at stores where you shop.

One of the primary skills at the heart of NLP is learning to manage your personal internal state ("state management" in NLP parlance) to make it as resourceful as possible. Actually, we would be more precise to speak of managing our internal states, in the plural. That's because we rarely run a single state at a given moment. Instead we are running a combination of states. I may be simultaneously excited about a speech I'm about to give, slightly nervous about stepping on stage, and preoccupied with listening to the introduction.

In the NLP approach to developing personal excellence, the key to peak performance is to run the most resourceful combination of states for the task at hand. NLP recognizes that each of us has a unique combination of internal states that make us more creative, more outgoing, more imaginative, more responsive, more engaging.

## Unleashing Peak Performance

The same is true of businesses and organizations. To perform at their best, they need to be running the most resourceful internal states possible. And it's the leader's duty to create, foster, and nurture these resourceful states.

A key corollary in NLP is that behavior flows primarily from state. Our bodies assume a different posture based on whether we are happy or sad. The small muscles of our face change visibly when we are exhilarated in contrast to when we are afraid. And we all know that a "foul mood" — a most unresourceful state — results in behavior that hardly makes us proud. Our negative state translates into poor behavior.

Thus, the quality of performance in your organization correlates directly to the states that dominate your corporate culture. If fear and uncertainty are widely at play, performance will never match what is possible where people feel empowered, trusted, and energized. The more resourceful the state, the greater the potential for performance.

As a leader, then, perhaps the most vital resource for you to manage is first your own internal state, making it as resourceful as possible. And then the psychological internal state of your organization. Organizations with highly resourceful internal states can rise above the impediments thrust upon them due to limited financial or material resources. History is replete with inspiring stories of people who achieved seemingly impossible tasks with what appeared to be woefully inadequate resources.

How did they do it? If you study each of those stories, you will find what some describe as a "can do spirit." I would call it a highly resourceful state. Somehow, in the worst of

circumstances, some leader or group of leaders found a way to instill such resourceful states in their followers that a "can-do" attitude emerged.

### **Holding Yourself to the Task**

For leaders the regular cycle of financial reports reminds us to pay close attention to managing funds and tangible resources wisely. And a parallel cycle of personnel reports keeps us attuned to our duties toward our people. But there are no built-in corporate mechanisms to remind us to focus on the psychological state of our organization and to make it as resourceful as possible. That's a discipline which leaders must impose on themselves.

I would even go so far as to suggest that one of the key differences between good managers and true leaders is that leadership never leaves the issue of state management up for grabs. We may call the leadership contribution inspiration, motivation, or vision-casting. In the final analysis, however, these elements of leadership are all about fostering resourceful internal states. And if we are not purposefully practicing state management, we are not genuinely functioning as leaders.

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