NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

MARATHON LEADERSHIP: PACING YOURSELF TO GET RESULTS

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

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THE GOAL:

Today's pace of change is unrelenting; instead of working "25/8" to keep up, actively control your pace — and that of your team — to get results in what's most important.

NANO TOOL:

Today's work environment can be seen as a never-ending race. You used to be able to work hard on a change initiative (or some other project), knowing that when it was finished you'd get a breather. With the forces of globalization, high connectivity, ever-increasing competition, and the velocity and volume of change, those chances to take a break have all but vanished. In their place we have ongoing stress, fatigue, and burnout — and the inevitable health problems they bring.

You can't control the relentless pace of the environment around you, but you can control how well you and your team navigate it by using the most effective pacing techniques. In other words, you can be in the turbulence without becoming the turbulence.

ACTION STEPS:

1. **Create a "Not to Do" List.** The Not to Do List is easy to understand but often difficult to implement. It involves recognizing your own limits and identifying what you and your team can reasonably accomplish. Instead of blindly agreeing to whatever is asked of them, Marathon Leaders review the tasks at hand and clarify goals they believe they can achieve — and then work to make their senior leaders and teams understand what's possible too. By showing your commitment to achievable goals — and following through by getting results — you win the respect and loyalty of your team, and show senior leaders that you can be counted on to deliver what you promise, giving you the credibility to say no to future projects that will push you and your team over the edge.

2. **Build breaks in the action.** Breaks are not going to occur naturally, so you have to plan and take advantage of them. An analysis of dozens of studies by Sabine Sonnentag of the University of Mannheim showed that taking a break from work, physically and mentally, is essential for maintaining top performance. For some it might mean taking time to reflect, exercise, or meditate. For others, it could be getting out of their office routinely for lunch, or making weekends and vacations work-free. Breaks don't just let you step away; they are also times when solutions and creative ideas come to the surface.

3. **Enforce vacations.** A recent poll taken by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, National Public Radio, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation found that about 50 percent of Americans who work 50-plus hours a week don't take all or most of the vacation they've earned. Research published in the Journal of Organizational Behavior explains the downside: "Organizations should…[implement] regulations that restrict skipping vacation or exchanging days of one's vacation for financial rewards because vacation can serve as a powerful instrument to lessen emotional exhaustion and to foster work engagement." Take a cue from the military: after a solider has seen active duty, he or she gets a furlough or a desk job. Athletes, too, train hard and then take a break from their grueling regimens. Vacation, with limited or no contact with work, allows managers to come back better equipped to handle the turbulence.

4. **Avoid dangerous personalities.** Turbulent environments can provide the wrong kind of encouragement for some people. The first are thrill seekers, people who thrive on chaos. They can achieve extraordinary results before typically crashing and burning, doing significant damage to the people and organization around them. The second are those who push themselves to exhaustion, far beyond the point of optimal or even decent performance. They brag about their 18-hour workdays and eventually start making mistakes — which can be substantial. Both of these types can destroy the culture, productivity, and sustainability of an organization. Make it clear to your team, through your words and your example, that these kinds of behaviors are not appreciated or valued.

5. **Rest.** Whether it's getting the recommended 7-8 hours of sleep each night or taking 15-20 minute power naps during the day, sleep is restorative. Research has proven that getting sufficient sleep leads to better decision-making, higher productivity, more creative thinking and innovation, and better workplace relationships, You can't physically maintain a grueling schedule and tackle a never-ending stream of work demands when you are exhausted (and no, caffeine is not the answer).

HOW LEADERS USE IT:

- **Not To Do List:** As legend has it, a junior executive at General Electric was charged with running a cross-functional project for his boss, who was high in the chain of command. With this authority, the executive called leaders from different functions to participate. They all agreed — with one exception. One manager refused, saying he had more important things to do, and there was nothing in it for him. That manager, according to the story, was Jack Welsh. By saying "no" to non-essential requests, he got the results he needed on his own projects.

- **Breaks in Action:** Founder of investment management firm Bridgewater Associates Ray Dalio has been meditating twice daily for over forty years, crediting it more than any other factor with his success. He will even meditate during market hours if stressed, and says meditation is part of the culture of his firm with many employees practicing it.

- **Time Off:** Underscoring the value of time off, Evernote chief executive Phil Libin offers $1000 to its employees who vacation for at least a week and disconnect from work. He tells them to "come back with a stretched out mind." Similarly, Bart Lorang, CEO of software company FullContact, requires his staff of 75 to take at least three weeks off each year. The company pays up to $7,500 for the vacation as long as the employees don't work while away.

- **Rest:** Embracing powerful research on the benefits of naps, companies such as Nike, Deloitte Consulting, Procter & Gamble, and Zappos encourage the practice during regular work hours. Many provide a napping room or specially designed "pods."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *Your Job Survival Guide: A Manual for Thriving in Change*, Gregory P. Shea and Robert Gunther (FT Press, 2009). Explains the skills needed to thrive in an environment of non-stop change, including pacing yourself; failing gracefully and recovering quickly; and protecting your career.

- *Leading Successful Change: 8 Keys to Making Change Work*, Gregory P. Shea and Cassie A. Solomon (Wharton Digital Press, 2013). Presents a thorough guide to making change work using a tested method developed over 50 years of helping organizations achieve their change initiatives.

- "Sleep Deficit: The Performance Killer," Bronwyn Fryer, *Harvard Business Review*, October 2006.

- "Manage Your Energy, Not Your Time," Tony Schwartz and Catherine McCarthy, *Harvard Business Review*, October 2007.

- Greg Shea teaches in Wharton Executive Education's *High Potential Leaders: Accelerating Your Impact*, *The Leadership Journey: Reimagine Your Leadership*, *Leading and Managing People*, and *Leading Organizational Change*.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director is Professor John Paul MacDuffie, Professor of Management at the Wharton School and Director of the Program on Vehicle and Mobility Innovation (PVMI) at Wharton's Mack Institute for Innovation Management.