



# The Complete Lawyer

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Stephanie West Allen practiced law in the San Francisco Bay Area where she held several offices in the local bar association, wrote for the California Continuing Education of the Bar, and founded a child advocacy project. While in New Mexico, she created a stress reduction program for lawyers and mediated multi-party disputes. For several years Stephanie was manager of professional development for a large Denver law firm. She has taught at the University of CO-Denver, Regis University, and Hastings College of the Law. She has written for such publications as *National Law Journal*, *Lawyer Hiring and Training Report*, *Of Counsel*, and *ABA Law Practice*. Stephanie consults with lawyers around the country, and she has created a mediation model based on neuroscience. Contact: [Stephanie](#) or visit her [blog](#) for lawyers.



Dr. Jeffrey M. Schwartz is a research psychiatrist at the School of Medicine at the University of California at Los Angeles and one of the world's leading experts in neuroplasticity. Decades ago he began to study the philosophy of conscious awareness, the idea that the actions of the mind have an effect on the workings of the brain. Jeff's breakthrough work in obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) provided the hard evidence that the mind can control the brain's chemistry. He has lectured extensively to both professional and lay audiences in the US, Europe, and Asia. Jeff's books include *The Mind and the Brain* and the bestseller *Brain Lock*, the seminal book on OCD. He is the co-organizer of the upcoming international conference on neuroleadership. Contact: [Jeff Schwartz](#)

## Lead Your Brain Instead Of Letting It Lead You

*By drawing on five principles of neuroscience, you can become a better leader of yourself and others*

***By Stephanie West Allen and Jeffrey M. Schwartz***

Some people are pawns on the game board of life, moved about in this or that direction. Others rise above the board altogether and direct the game. As the rest of us look up to them, they show us what is possible. They are our leaders. To become one of those effective and inspiring leaders, an elemental requirement is self-leadership.

A person who has not learned self-leadership will not be a convincing leader. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "What you do speaks so loudly that I cannot hear what

you say." We can see that lack of self-leadership in a potential leader no matter what that person says. Why would we follow a person unable to command him- or herself?

Today self-leadership is more easily definable and more easily achievable, due in part to the remarkable advances in neuroscience. In this article, we present some of the most current research in brain science to help anyone create a blueprint for self-leadership.

## **Distinguish Leadership From Management**

What is self-leadership? To answer, of course we need to define leadership.

Hundreds, probably thousands, of books have been written about leadership. Most of the experts do not agree on its definition. And, unfortunately, many confuse leadership with management. Since we are writing this article guided by neuroscience, our definition of leadership, both what it is and what it is not, will be consistent with how the brain works.

Leadership is strategic; management is tactical. A manager implements a leader's strategy and vision. A leader sees the current situation, assesses what needs to change, inspires thought and action in others, and makes vividly clear the direction and destination. Management directs action—within the boundaries of the direction set by leadership—by staying on the path, and orchestrating people and resources.

Sometimes the same person is both a manager and a leader. In self-leadership, a person *must* be both leader and manager. As a self-leader, your tactician, the manager you hire on to direct action, is yourself.

Self-leadership requires both management and leadership because leading ourselves entails having a clear picture of the destination *and* the ability to stay on course. In this article we present five strategies and tactics of self-leadership that have proven effective by neuroscientists.

## **Strategy #1: Harness Your Will**

When we change ourselves—and such change is usually required in self-leadership—the adjustment is often difficult, largely because we must quite literally make physical changes in our brain. Learning a new behavior or forging a new habit is impossible unless we make brand new connections between our brain cells. On the one hand, we are fortunate that the brain is malleable so we can hone new skills and modify old behaviors. On the other hand, the brain likes to conserve energy by resisting those new neuronal connections and maintaining the status quo.

In order to meet that resistance, especially when it would be so much easier to

follow the old paths, we need to call in our will. And we animate our will by forming a clear purpose.

Let's look at an example. Perhaps you have decided to get up early so you can take a brisk walk to be alert and energized for the workday ahead. When the sun rises on the first day after you made the resolution, the alarm rings, the bed is cozy, rising early seems strange and foreign. Now is when you need some will power. The best fuel for the will is strong, clear-cut purpose. It is imperative that the answer to "why am I doing this" causes you to get out of bed.

How do we clarify the will-igniting purpose? We might start by asking ourselves questions such as these that look at the disadvantages of not changing.

What will happen if I don't make this change?

What opportunities might I lose if I remain as I am?

What consequences have I experienced because I have not changed?

Then we ask ourselves questions about the advantages of changing.

What benefits will come to me with this change?

What will it be like once this change becomes a way of life, a habit?

What advantages will I realize when I become extremely skillful at operating in this changed way?

Like any good leader, you have assessed the situation and seen what changes are needed. And you have formed a clear purpose to inspire yourself when the old ways beckon. You now know how to fire up your will. Harnessing the will's power is an important first step in self-leadership.

## **Strategy #2: Instead Of Resisting The Old Way, Substitute A New One**

When you resist an old habit or way of doing something, you are giving it attention. Attention strengthens the brain paths and neuronal connections. Jeff is one of the leading experts in the treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and he uses this phenomenon of attention to help people with OCD change their brains.

When a person has OCD, he or she will engage in repetitive actions such as checking to see if the stove is off many times before leaving the house or washing her hands over and over to ensure that they are germ-free. That's because when a person has OCD, part of the brain is stuck in one gear, which grinds over and over. People with OCD try to resist the stuck-ness and cannot. The condition can be time-consuming and debilitating.

Jeff has created a method for the people with whom he works: he first helps them to

consciously and deliberately recognize that the repetitive behavior is a function of their OCD and then they substitute another behavior—perhaps going for a stroll, even if for a short time. After a few weeks of this substitution, brain scans show that their brains have changed. They have learned to self-direct their neuroplasticity (brain pliability) and have rewired their brains.

Although most of us do not have OCD, we still experience that stuck-ness in old ways of acting. To change the unwanted behavior, don't resist it but instead substitute a new one. Each time you substitute instead of resist, you make the new way easier by beginning to create new brain pathways. Understanding and mastering self-directed neuroplasticity is a cardinal component of self-leadership. You need to lead your brain instead of it leading you.

### **Strategy #3: Rehearse The New Behavior In Your Mind**

Another exciting development from the world of neuroscience has been known by athletes for many years. If you mentally rehearse a desired behavior, your brain is changed and your skill level improves. Tiger Woods, Nancy Kerrigan, Michael Jordan and Jack Nicklaus are just a few on the long list of top performers with the ability to use mental rehearsal to fuel extreme competence.

Neuroscientists have studied the brain changes caused by mental rehearsal. A typical study compared one group physically engaging in a new behavior, another group mentally rehearsing a new behavior, and a control group doing nothing. The brain changes consistent with skill improvement in the first two groups were almost equal.

Of course, doing nothing resulted in no change. The research is proving what great performers have practiced for decades. Mental rehearsal is another effective key to self-leadership.

### **Strategy #4: Act As If You Have Already Mastered The New Skill**

Jeff coached Leonardo DiCaprio in his role in *The Aviator*. DiCaprio played Howard Hughes who suffered from severe OCD. DiCaprio took on the role so well that he began to experience OCD.

Acting as if you have a trait causes both brain changes and chemical changes throughout the body. Therefore "acting as if" with attention to what you are doing is a very powerful technique for altering and mastering behavior.

Before neuroscience had proven that brain changes are created by behavior accompanied by full attention, the great acting teacher Konstantin Stanislavski knew this intuitively. Stanislavski worked with his students to help them convincingly act their roles. He believed that a person cannot experience a feeling on command but

the actor *can* evoke the feeling by willfully experiencing what he called "antecedents" to that feeling. Antecedents are actions.

For example, suppose a person wants to feel confident consistently and by doing so begins to develop "confidence neural pathways" in the brain thus making it easier for him to feel confident. That person should concentrate on and enact such antecedents of the feeling as:

How does a confident person sound when speaking, laughing, asking questions?

How does a confident person listen?

How does a confident person walk, sit, gesture?

What does a confident person think about?

By answering these questions and letting the responses guide behavior, the person grows in confidence.

The person skilled at self-leadership has a strategy of who she is or she wants to be and can use "acting as if" as one tactic to become that person. The self-leader is fully aware of his or her actions, knowing that those actions create the brain connections and habits that facilitate future behavior. The person who is not aware of his or her action and its consequences is not a self-leader.

### **Strategy #5: Make Mental Notes To Increase Focus And Concentration**

Sometimes we become distracted from the direction in which we want to be going. Our purpose may become clouded by anger, annoyance, confusion, jealousy, fear, or other feelings that knock us off balance and take us off the path. Brain research has provided a handy way to deal with the distraction.

We label the feeling, saying in our mind or, if appropriate, aloud, statements such as "I am angry" or "I am nervous." When we make statements like this, that part of the brain feeling the distracting emotion is calmed. We can then return to clarity and purpose. The neuroscience literature calls this "labeling the affect."

Sometimes in the heat of the moment this labeling is not easy to do. One way to make it easier is to practice it throughout the day when you are not feeling distracted. You can practice by labeling behaviors as well as feelings. Here's how.

During the day make mental notes such as "I am eating," or "I am pleased," or "I am thinking about the deposition." If you practice daily, your skill in mental note taking will grow and you will be able to engage in it, no matter what is happening.

By labeling the affect, by taking mental notes, a self-leader can become calm in the middle of a storm.

Neuroscience is proving what many leaders, athletes, actors, and other exceptional performers have always known instinctively, or have been able to learn through trial and error. Because we now know much about how the brain works, we all have access to these tactics and strategies. Today, each and every one of us can excel at self-leadership, that first, all-important step in becoming a great leader.

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