



Beyond the Mat

ACHIEVE FOCUS, PRESENCE,
and ENLIGHTENED LEADERSHIP
through the Principles and Practice of Yoga

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Laying the Foundation for Success

“Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one.”

—Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Very few of us arise in the morning excited about the workday ahead. There may even be days when we just can't bear to get out of bed to go to work. Many of us hate our jobs, our long hours, and, especially, our boss. We lack autonomy, and we don't feel in control.

If this sounds familiar, know that it's not just you. Burnout is a growing problem in businesses everywhere. Workplace burnout is more than just fatigue, and it goes beyond having a bad day, a bad week, or even a bad month. The term burnout was coined by psychologist Herbert Freudenberger in 1974, referring to “the extinction of motivation or incentive, especially where one's devotion to a cause or relationship fails to produce the desired results.” Burnout is characterized by a chronic state of emotional and physical exhaustion as well as strong

feelings of frustration and powerlessness. Those suffering from workplace burnout tend to withdraw emotionally from their work, lose motivation, and become less productive.

Feelings of burnout go well beyond the workplace and may impact our everyday lives. Have you ever felt like you've had the life sucked out of you, like you seem to have lost your ability to care about anything and everything, to make an effort, and to find positive motivation? Most of us have been there—and that's burnout.

Furthermore, we work too much. The need to be on call 24/7 and to work six or even seven days per week is no longer restricted to high-level professionals such as physicians, lawyers, and business executives. In our modern, global corporate environment, to meet our company's cross-cultural needs, employees in many functional areas are expected to have such availability.

This is what management worries about: employee satisfaction and retention. Costly churn can be devastating for corporations. Satisfied employees feel a connection to the organization's mission, purpose, and leadership. How can we get there?

Believe it or not, yoga is a solution to improved employee satisfaction, workplace happiness, stress reduction, and productivity. Studying and adopting the philosophical underpinnings of yoga allow for a greater sense of overall stability despite external distractions, and incorporating yogic breathing and postures to unify and relax the mind and body provides an ongoing framework in which to manage workplace stress and uncertainty.

Using these techniques provides a way to quietly and unobtrusively cope with the crises that occur during the day. Practicing yoga has been found to reduce pain, relieve tension, decrease risks of injury, improve posture and communication, increase energy and attention span, and bring about feelings of overall well-being.

Too many people talk about a company's leadership, referring to the senior-most executives in the organization. Leadership has nothing to do with titles, whether you have a corner office, or where you sit at the conference table. Inherently, defining leadership means understanding yourself from an inward perspective as well as translating your own tendencies, strengths, and approaches into the way you interact, communicate, and influence others. To me, leadership is the collective action of everyone I influence. My behavior—both actions and words—determines how I influence. My job as a leader is to use my personal power to encourage, inspire, and energize others to action.

Successful leadership isn't about what you know; it's about who you are and how you show up. Behavior can change, and leaders who work to improve their skills generally get results.

So how can you more clearly define the foundations of what it will take for you to become a successful leader? Can an understanding of yoga help you better comprehend what makes certain leaders more effective than others, and if so, how you can implement those skills yourself?

Buddhism swept across the United States starting in the late 1960s and has dominated the conversation around non-Western spirituality ever since. Yoga is just as broad a philosophy/belief system as Buddhism but is still narrowly viewed by many in the United States as a physical fitness practice. And there are many different offerings—variants of yoga such as rock-and-roll yoga, hip-hop yoga, yoga fusion, naked yoga, aerial yoga, acroyoga, and more. Although the physical practice of each of these varies greatly, they all stem from a millennia-old tradition of action, self-knowledge, and wisdom.

Yoga has significant philosophical roots, many of which intersect on a secular level with Buddhism. (One intersection of yoga and Buddhism is that both promote a sense of mindfulness—the ability to be fully present in the moment, to be aware of bodily sensations and breath, to suspend judgment and to simply be aware of passing thoughts and emotions. Mindfulness practice helps us to detach our minds from pursuing desires or avoiding displeasures.)

The first of the eight limbs of yoga are the *yamas*, universal moral and ethical commandments for “right living.” They are guidelines for how we can best show up for our lives, and they apply broadly to our actions, words, and thoughts. I have come to see the *yamas* as an essential foundation for success in life, personally and professionally—and the basis of effective leadership, no matter what your job description entails.

The *yamas* are broken down into five “wise characteristics.” On the surface these five wise characteristics may sound familiar to those of us in the West: don’t commit violence (*ahimsa*), tell the truth (*satya*), don’t steal what others have (*asteya*), practice self-restraint (*brahmacharya*), and take only what is necessary (*aparigraha*). But unlike our more commonly understood set of rules, the Ten Commandments, the *yamas* go deeper as rules of morality for society and individuals. Rather than a list of dos and don’ts, the *yamas* aim to help practitioners develop a powerful set of interpersonal skills, from patience to fearlessness.

Ahimsa

Ahimsa literally means not to injure or show cruelty to any living being. However, as adopted in yoga practice and in life beyond the mat, *ahimsa* is much more than the literal interpretation of nonviolence; it

The Yamas

Ahimsa—nonviolence/compassion

Satya—truth

Asteya—nonstealing

Brahmacharya—control of the senses

Aparigraha—to take only what is necessary

implies that in every situation we should adopt a kind, thoughtful, and considerate attitude and that we should also exercise compassion.

In the early years of our careers we are measured primarily for our individual contributions. Thus, it is often difficult for emerging leaders to recognize that leadership is not solely about them and their ability to attract and direct followers; it is about serving others to bring out the best in the collective group. How else can leaders unleash the power of their organizations unless they motivate people to reach their full potential? If our supporters are merely following our lead, then their efforts are limited to our vision and our directions. Only when leaders stop focusing on their personal ego needs are they able to develop others. This is how ahimsa—compassion and kindness—makes a leader truly effective and is a first step on the path to enlightened leadership.

I was guilty of the “I syndrome” earlier in my career. Although my intent was pure—I wanted to be a vital force in advancing global health and wellness—I was too focused on my own success. I too often compared myself to others, and rather than support and promote them, I wanted to surpass them to more rapidly advance toward my goals.

I also was never satisfied with my present circumstance or the “status quo” and wanted more in terms of opportunity—which I thought could be accomplished by rapidly advancing my rank.

I was wrong. In essence, such behavior served to hold me back by alienating the people I needed to support my desire to more expansive leadership. With the help of a good coach I learned. My coach gave me a proverbial “slap in the face,” which helped me to shift my thinking and behaviors so I became less focused on myself and more engaged with my team. I now understand that it’s critical to cultivate, maintain, and nurture business relationships, and although I’m still focused on my own success, making sure members of my team are also supported and positioned to realize their own potential is even more critical to me. I realize that in addition to offering my expertise and guidance, my team members want to feel that I respect them, care about them, and that I’ll do whatever it takes to help them. I do and I will.

Look in the mirror. Who are you? Why are you here? What is your life purpose?

Have you thought about these things? Be honest. Once you have a true understanding of yourself, you can gain a better understanding of others and create more effective relationships. The Tibetan scholar ThuptenJinpa, longtime English translator for the Dalai Lama, defines compassion as having three components: (1) a cognitive component: “I understand you”; (2) an affective component: “I feel for you”; and (3) a motivational component: “I want to help you.” The practice of compassion is about going from self to others. To become a highly effective leader you must go through an important transformation from focusing on yourself to focusing on others. Bill George, in *Discover Your True North*, puts it most succinctly: This shift is the transformation from “I” to “We.”

Compassion Matters

A new colleague, Leslie, joined my team and seemed somewhat slow to grasp concepts and ideas at a time when the team was extremely burdened by deliverables with tight deadlines. I spent several hours trying to orient her to the program, but my efforts seemed to no avail. She remained inept in my view, and we needed a highly functional team member *now*. We were at a critical crossroads in our program.

I spoke to her manager regarding her initial poor performance and then moved on to focus on key deliverables. But in that time period I failed to exercise ahimsa; I was so frustrated that I “delegated” the situation to her manager and, in the ensuing days, proceeded ahead with other business that I deemed to be more important than fostering a relationship with Leslie.

Despite my initial mistake I reflected on my behavior. Reflection is critical to enhance self-awareness and often the first key to change. I realized that my task as a leader was to exercise compassion and let go of this overt frustration. I quickly reassessed the situation and enlisted broader support for Leslie, including my own. She was new to the role, the team, and the program—perhaps I had expected too much of her in the initial weeks. Once I let go of my quick judgments and offered more compassionate, constructive guidance, things turned around quickly both for Leslie and our team. Gradually Leslie became more comfortable and effective in her role, and the team became more cohesive.

The most compelling professional benefits of compassion are that it engages employees by building an inspired workforce, and it creates highly effective leaders. The core of compassion is suspending judgment in order to have an appreciation of others' perspectives when they are different from your own. Compassionate individuals are genuinely concerned about other people and their needs. When others are suffering, they take action to help relieve it. Compassionate leaders strive to create emotionally healthy and positively energized workplaces that support good morale and enhanced employee engagement and productivity. They have a people-centered approach, with a focus on connection and collaboration. Compassionate leaders genuinely care for the well-being of others and are attentive to their needs, which they put before their own.

Managers often mistakenly think that putting high pressure on employees will improve their performance. But what it actually does is increase stress and anxiety. Compassion in the workplace is effective for building trust, which leads to loyalty and employee retention. Feelings of warmth and positive relationships at work also enhance employee productivity and efficiency.

Organizations that foster compassion typically measure overall success in terms of team or collective success rather than individual success. A culture of compassion has been positively correlated with employee wellness, job satisfaction, commitment to the company, and accountability for performance. All of these things can translate into lower levels of turnover and an improved financial bottom line.

Stop to ask yourself: Am I satisfied with my job? Job satisfaction is a big component of employee engagement. There are a variety of characteristics that influence job satisfaction, such as (1) job responsibilities (the more varied tasks are, the higher the satisfaction), (2) leadership (leaders who give recognition and praise and who

Try This in Two Minutes

Think about your job and ponder these questions. Is your management concerned about the emotional culture at work? How does your boss treat you when she sees you? How do you greet your colleagues and subordinates? How does your typical day at the office begin? Do you run into your office to a barrage of work-related emails from impatient colleagues and clients who want them answered *now*? Or do you exchange a series of greetings with coworkers or perhaps grab a quick cup of coffee before the daily work deluge begins? How do you feel at the start of your day? Do these early feelings correlate with how you experience the remainder of your day? What can you do to either sustain positive feelings or to ensure that your day begins on a more positive note?

consider the opinions of employees generate higher levels of satisfaction), (3) pay and opportunity for advancement (both directly associated with satisfaction), and (4) respect from bosses and coworkers (a community in which managers and coworkers respect each other supports good morale).

Although much has been written about this topic, I would like to focus on one of the key components of job satisfaction: autonomy. Autonomy in the workplace refers to how much freedom and opportunity for self-direction employees have in their work environment. For most of us it's important to believe that we have choices, that we are the source of our own actions and decision making, and that we want to take ownership for our work. Studies have shown that autonomy is associated with greater job satisfaction and increased productivity.

Autonomy is particularly critical when it comes to creating and maintaining our sense of intrinsic motivation—doing something for the pure enjoyment or fun of it rather than for a reward. As a leader I have seen many people, including myself, feel disempowered at work. We are constantly fielding requests and taking orders, struggling to meet the demands and expectations of our superiors who then pass judgment on our work.

Jim Goodnight, cofounder and CEO of SAS, the world's leading business analytics software vendor, is an example of a compassionate leader who supports employee autonomy. The forty-year old software company has not just survived the tumultuous changes in the technology industry but has thrived, posting steady growth year after year. Goodnight, who has led the company since its inception in 1976, holds employees in high esteem and has often said that the secret to the success of SAS is taking care of employees—helping them grow and giving them high levels of autonomy.

When leaders care about employees and are committed to supporting their professional growth and development, they are more likely to offer them high levels of autonomy. Such leaders are also more likely to acknowledge out-of-the-box ideas that come from their team, and they don't take the credit themselves. An environment that promotes creative thinking and a constant exchange of ideas along with individual autonomy and group collaboration supports innovation.

Earlier I mentioned that it's important for leaders to move from an "I" to a "we" focus. But compassion for others is just one side of the coin. Cultivating compassion for yourself is one of the toughest tasks for a leader, both professionally and personally. You might not need to look far to find an example of self-critical talk or a lack of compassion for yourself. For instance, I am a mom who thinks that motherhood is

Since its founding Google has been committed to active philanthropy and addressing the global challenges of climate change, education, and alleviating poverty. Chade-Meng Tan, an early Google employee, personal growth pioneer, and best-selling author, has described Google as a company born out of idealism, at which compassion is organic and widespread throughout the company. Googlers from around the world are encouraged to donate their skills and labor to support service projects in their local communities. The compassionate environment at Google has led to a culture of passionate concern for the greater good, high levels of autonomy, and a corporate focus on personal growth and development.

one of the toughest gigs going. As mothers, we are socialized to ignore our own needs. Taking care of ourselves is considered selfish—we do for others first. But while we do for others, we also compare ourselves to other moms. You know the feeling—someone I know, let's call her Suzy, cooks a three-course dinner at home every night. Each meal is made from fresh, farm-to-table ingredients picked up daily at the local organic market. I, however, eat dinner out at least three times a week due to my long work hours, leaving my son to fend for himself (again). If I think about the disparity between Suzy and me, I begin to feel bad about myself because I am neither home to cook dinner nor can I keep up with Suzy's high standards when I am at home. Now, my inner competitiveness and drive begin to surface, and I have the urge to outdo Suzy with the next meal I cook.

Sound familiar?

There are many ways you can practice compassion and positively impact another person's day (and improve your own) using skills like consideration for others, kindness, empathy and understanding. Here are four examples:

Have considerate perspective. Don't get too caught up in your own world—take the time to anticipate and meet the needs of others. When speaking with someone, listen fully without judgment, and give them your full attention (no texting, no phone calls, no vacant staring!). Use direct eye contact. My father taught me to treat a custodian the same way as I would treat a CEO. I think about this most days, so I don't forget to thank the cleaning woman at the gym for her service or to leave a tip for the housekeeper at my hotel, who worked to ensure that I had a clean room. Not only do I believe that my efforts improve their day, but they definitely enhance mine.

Practice acts of kindness. Go out of your way to be kind to others. Help friends or family by offering to help with housework, run errands, cook a meal, etc. Let a coworker know you appreciate her. And, don't forget to say, "thank you" to your boss for his help—you'll both feel better. I frequent my local Starbucks near daily. Once or twice a month, I tell the Barista that I want to pay for the drink of the person behind me in line. I started doing this to see how I felt practicing random acts of kindness. Well, I found that this small offering liberated me (at least briefly) from any sense of myself as selfish, and helped to surface my more open and loving nature by giving to another without expectation. I felt very powerful with these acts of generosity, since they were

unconditional and unattached. So, my “coffee offerings” have now become a welcome habit that I plan to sustain.

Show empathy. Compassion arises through empathy. Empathy is showing that you understand another’s feelings or emotions, that you identify with the situation and care enough to place yourself in their shoes. I have found that validating another person’s perspective and acknowledging them by not interrupting and by simply stating, “I understand” or “I can see” are great ways to communicate empathy.

Express yourself by sending a meaningful message. Send your compassionate feelings via a simple text message, email, or, better, handwritten letter or card to someone you care about. Just tell them you were thinking of them and that you love them. It is a simple way to show that they matter to you. I do this regularly with my son, who lives about twelve hundred miles away from me. It helps to keep us closely connected.

Here’s reality. My own attitude and competitive nature were doing me in. I was negatively influenced by a set of arbitrary standards I set for myself. Who really cares whether I cook as well as Suzy except me? So I stopped comparing myself to Suzy. I started looking at myself rather than others, began charting a pathway to live just a little bit better each day by taking care of myself and putting my own needs first so I can better serve others. And let’s face it: my son would rather eat frozen pizza than dover sole meunière—one of my favorites!

It's important to note that compassion isn't the same practice everywhere. An Eastern (or Buddhist) view is that we are all essentially compassionate by nature. The Dalai Lama sums it up succinctly: "Every human being has the same potential for compassion; the only question is whether we really take any care of that potential, and develop and implement it in our daily life." Buddhist compassion is directed toward all sentient beings and arises from the knowledge and wisdom of common suffering. The Western view of compassion is that it is a spontaneous feeling, directed toward an individual and arising from concern for another individual's suffering

While Eastern and Western societies interpret compassion differently, there are important commonalities we can use in our leadership practice, such as respect and caring, empathy, giving selflessly and unconditionally, committed action, and offering a benefit to others without thought of gain.

Satya

On August 5, 2016, as the opening ceremony for the thirty-first Olympic Games kicked off in Rio de Janeiro, 207 nations joined to celebrate this pinnacle of sportsmanship, dedication, and talent. More than ten thousand athletes gathered to bring their unique stories of personal trial and overcoming odds to live their passion.

On August 15, 2016, US Olympic Swimmer and silver medalist Ryan Lochte said that he and James Feigen, Jack Conger, and Gunnar Bentz were robbed at a gas station in the early morning hours as they returned from a party.

The incident, however, was captured on closed-circuit television. Brazilian authorities said the American swimmers actually vandalized a gas station and then got into an altercation with security guards there.

After taking a public pounding for reporting a robbery story that police said was fabricated, Lochte apologized for “not being more careful and candid” in his description. He indicated that it was his fault that a fabricated story about a robbery caused an international Olympics scandal. Lochte said that he did not ask his teammates to corroborate his story and apologized “110 percent” to “the gas station owner, to Brazilian police, to the people of Rio and Brazil, everyone that came together to put on these wonderful games.”

Lochte’s shifting account of the incident and the resulting fallout stole the spotlight away, at least briefly, from an Olympic Games that the International Olympic Committee president declared “iconic.” His four commercial sponsors dropped the twelve-time Olympic medal winner in response to the incident.

Athletic training and sports have played a big role in my personal development and my development as a leader. I recognize that business leaders and athletes share similar qualities. They must know when to lead, know when to follow, know when to pass to their teammates, and know when to ask for help. In addition, both business leaders and athletes must build a culture of truth telling by creating an environment in which it’s preferable to tell the truth, no matter what others may think.

But the concept of truth telling goes far beyond business leaders and athletes. So how important is it?

Satya is the Sanskrit word for truth. This principle is based on the understanding that honest communication and action form the foundation of healthy relationships and societies. To develop an engaging culture, we must consider what we say, how we say it, and in what way it could impact others.

Workers often think their leaders don’t want to hear the truth. When leaders encourage speaking the truth, it helps to create an atmosphere that encourages truth telling. People are more apt to speak up

How to Practice Truth Telling at Work

Drop the three “Fs”—facts, fear, and force—and focus on being empathetic to and considering employees’ perspectives.

Validate another person’s point of view. Validation is recognizing and acknowledging another person’s point of view. Once you understand why another person believes what he believes, it’s important to acknowledge it. Remember that acknowledgment does not necessarily mean agreement.

Encourage conversations that matter. People want to contribute but often can’t see how. They experience most meetings as a waste of time. Give people permission to offer ideas and to express doubts.

Having conversations that matter at work can improve employee morale and increase employee loyalty. High-quality conversations lead to high-quality decisions and actions, which can translate into high-quality results.

Listen to what’s really being said. Listening is a crucial skill for boosting another person’s self-esteem. Listen to the entire message the other person is trying to communicate. Ask yourself: What is being said? What tone is being used? What is she doing with her body while speaking? What is she feeling?

Don’t make bad news sound like good news—it’s not. Get to the point, and make sure your message is clear and understood. Preparing a person or team for the information to come by saying, “I have something difficult that I need to tell you” is a good way to soften the blow.

about what's not working and to take the accountability and responsibility to do something about it when they do not fear attack or retribution.

Strategy consultant Brook Manville addressed the question head on in his *Forbes* article, "Is it OK for Leaders to Lie?" His conclusion was that we are trending toward a world in which we demand more honesty and transparency than we've come to expect from our leaders in both politics and business.

Operating in this kind of world calls for a higher standard of transparency, and greater comfort with openness than earlier generations of leaders have known. In the new community context of networks, movements, and ecosystems, the ethical question now becomes a strategic competency of leaders: how can I tell the truth as often as humanly possible? But make no mistake. Most leaders will have to break new ground to find the more moral way.

The Edelman Trust Barometer for 2016, an online survey of over thirty-three thousand participants in twenty-eight countries, showed that peers and employees are more trusted than CEOs. While CEOs and senior leaders typically discuss the operational and financial aspects of a company when communicating, hearing information about personal values, experiences, and shared struggles that leaders have faced is more important to eight of ten employees. One out of every three employees does not trust his own company. So even "white lies"—lies meant to smooth discourse or deflect minor conflict—can lead to awkward situations and mistrust. For example, if a leader says, "I'm busy right now, but I'll call you later" to an employee—when he has no intention of calling her—such a brief and seemingly inconsequential

statement can strain their relationship. Leaders must earn their constituents' trust and loyalty.

There are circumstances in which leaders often try to shield employees from the truth; this is a common occurrence when a company undergoes a merger or acquisition. Have you ever been through this type of situation? Your manager may say, "Not much will change, and your job is safe." Then, a few months later, radical changes and massive layoffs take everyone by surprise. Of course, this is not always the case, but you get the idea.

Truth telling matters. Truth leads to trust. It's not okay for leaders to lie.

Asteya

If the Sanskrit word *steya* means to steal, then *asteya* is the opposite—take nothing that does not belong to us. *Asteya* also means that if we are in a situation where someone entrusts something to us or confides in us, we do not take advantage of him or her. Nonstealing includes not only not taking what belongs to another without permission but also not using something for a different purpose other than for what it is intended or beyond the time permitted by its owner. The practice of *asteya* implies not taking *anything* that has not been freely given, including fostering a consciousness of how we ask for others' time. Demanding another's attention when not freely given is, in effect, stealing.

As leaders, we don't steal, right? How about stealing someone else's idea? Have you ever stolen someone else's idea and claimed it as yours? How about "fudging the numbers" to make your performance look better? *Asteya* means we should be mindful of accepting praise or credit we haven't earned. When we accept compliments for something that wasn't truly our doing, we are basically stealing from the person responsible.

Practicing the Yamas

It's easy to get caught up in the frenetic pace of the workday and the need to provide solutions *fast*—regardless of their efficacy. Here is a simple exercise you can perform in ten seconds or less to help you implement the lessons of the yamas in order to deliver a more mindful, compassionate, truthful, and powerful response. I started employing this exercise, The Pause, after my first visit to Japan.

Prior to speaking take a breath, *pause*, and ask yourself:

- ≥ Is it true?
- ≥ Is it necessary?
- ≥ Is it timely?
- ≥ Is it helpful?
- ≥ Can it be said with compassion?

I love the Japanese culture, which is based upon mutual respect and trust. The Japanese believe it is essential to show interest in your conversation while you are speaking, and thus they use intentional pauses with associated body language that generally includes a slight bow to indicate their respect. (I personally don't bow unless I am with a Japanese colleague.) In addition to showing respect, building trust through conversations is very important in Japanese society. Taking even just a few seconds to pause and think before you speak is a critical moment in building a stronger, more effective style of leadership.

It can be difficult to think of changing behaviors when the focus is on what *not* to do. How, then, can we cultivate nonstealing? One way is to frequently ask ourselves: Am I being mindful of what I am taking in this situation, both literally and metaphorically? Am I paying equal attention to what I am contributing and to the needs of those around me?

Saint Rocco Catholic Elementary School in Johnston, Rhode Island, has students keep a daily Good Deeds Journal. The school stresses the need for children to feel confident and have a positive self-image. At the start of each day students write in their journal a good deed they performed the day before in school, at home, or in the community. Students learn that a good deed can be anything that contributes to another person's happiness. In this way the journal helps to prevent peer cruelty and serves as a reminder of what the students are contributing rather than what they are taking in everyday life. Could we experience a societal transformation if everyone kept a daily Good Deeds Journal?

Thou Shalt Not Steal

Character is the combination of personality traits, values, and virtues. Character is a central, key element of leadership.

- ⇒ Leaders own their choices and actions.
- ⇒ Leaders don't blame others for their decisions.
- ⇒ Leaders recognize that their decisions impact others.
- ⇒ Leaders don't take credit for other people's work.
- ⇒ Wise leaders create shared contexts for employees to learn from one another.

Brahmacharya

In our culture success is often associated with money and power. Wielding power is an important yet highly delicate aspect of leadership. In the worst cases power can be abused or avoided, and in the best cases it can be used judiciously and for worthy goals.

In the Western world the word *brahmacharya* has often been interpreted literally as celibacy, but it actually means “living in divine consciousness.” *Brahma* literally means the “divine consciousness” and *charya*, in this context, means “living” or “one who is established in.” That may sound lofty and perhaps unattainable, but it simply means control of the senses or living in moderation. Brahmacharya means having control over our impulses of excess. As a society we continually strive for *more* in our lives. Our Western culture is materialistic and consumerist. When I practice brahmacharya I do so from a perception of moderation and control over my impulses of excess, whether that’s in shopping, dining out, travel—really anything. I limit my indulgences. Well, most of the time.

We’re constantly waiting for our lives to be complete with *more* and striving for a day that will never come. Because we are in a state of deferred living—what we have now is not enough—we miss living in the moment.

A few years ago I wanted to take a bike trip to Ireland. I looked through lots of outdoors journals and trips guides and saw that the countryside was beautiful and the landscape serene. I was excited to see green hills and quaint villages and to immerse myself in the Irish culture for a week. After discussion with my partner, however, we decided that the trip was too costly that year and that we would go instead on a bicycle trip through southern Vermont. Well, we had been to Vermont several times, and I found myself lacking enthusiasm prior to and

during the trip. Here's the problem: I failed to fully appreciate the Vermont countryside—Vermont also has green hills, quaint villages, and a unique culture. By wishing I was in Ireland, I missed the full experience of Southern Vermont.

In the work world we often seek power or position. Leaders must understand the power they hold—the positive effects of using it properly and the ill effects when used negatively. Those who use their power appropriately can motivate staff, inspire loyalty and commitment, and push employees to aspire to greater achievement. In contrast, those who abuse their power bring down morale, create turnover, incur grievances, and cost the company money in lost productivity. A third dynamic—leaders who avoid the use of the power they are entrusted with—can create confusion, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness in staff

Leaders are most effective when they understand they are in positions of authority—and they influence, inspire, and mentor their way to success. In a broader sense leaders may balance this power dynamic by fostering wide-ranging organizational impact that extends to the community and connects to social causes. Some businesses are offering a percentage of their profits or matching purchases. Blake Mycoskie created Toms Shoes after witnessing the hardships faced by children growing up without shoes. Toms Shoes donates a pair of shoes to a child in need for every pair they sell. With their “One for One” campaign, Tom's has given away more than 60 million pairs of shoes and has now expanded into bags, eyewear, and coffee

The “Buy One Give One” model is attractive to consumers and is consequently a potentially powerful method to bolster social change. There is power of the “one,” as consumers understand that their purchase will benefit “a child in need”—a premise that encourages consumers to use the power of their dollars for the greater good. As

seen in their bottom lines, these companies have taken advantage of the nature of people to exert great effort to rescue “the one” whose needy plight comes to their attention. Although critics have pointed out that sporadic influxes of goods will not address the issues underlying poverty or limited access to education and healthcare in developing nations, such efforts focus consumer awareness on the need for social change and a better balance of power and authority across all lines.

Toms’ corporate culture is bound to its social mission. For example, once a month the company holds a “Happy Helping Hour” in which members of a charitable organization visit Toms to engage with employees in an activity, such as preparing care packages for women in domestic abuse shelters. Toms chooses employees who care about the company’s social mission and will work hard to integrate sustainable and responsible practices into all they do.

Aparigraha

I often find myself holding on to the notion of a right or wrong way of doing things—clearly the right way is the one I’m choosing! Despite my best efforts to maintain a yogic mindset, I continually fight against my type A tendencies, which include a sense of time and urgency for any given task, a need to “do it right the first time,” and a quest for “the best” outcome.

Aparigraha means to take only what is necessary and not to take advantage of a situation or act greedy. Aparigraha also implies nonpossessiveness, or letting go of our attachments to things as well as our need to control people or our surroundings. Nonaccumulating simply means confidence in our existence and abilities and knowledge of ourselves.

Preventing Burnout

There are things you can do whenever you're stressed to keep yourself mentally and physically healthy and to avoid reaching the point of burnout.

Slow down and take a break.

Take regular time out for yourself each day to relax and unwind.

Set aside at least one hour each day to "switch off" from technology.

Establish boundaries so you reduce how often you overextend yourself.

Reevaluate your goals and priorities so you include activities in your daily routine that support your happiness.

Ask for help—we all need it.

Reach out to supportive people in your life to talk and to receive support.

Don't compare. Theodore Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of Joy." It's simple and true.

Be grateful. Gratitude is an affirmation of goodness. It leads to forgiveness and paying it forward. Practicing gratitude is a reliable means to increase happiness.

Aparigraha is one of the central teachings in the ancient yogic text *The Bhagavad Gita*, which consists of seven hundred verses and is mainly a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna taking place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra just prior to the start of a climactic war. Krishna, a major Hindu deity, counsels Arjuna, a fine archer and peerless warrior. Krishna begins with the tenet that the soul is both eternal and immortal. Any “death” on the battlefield would involve only the shedding of the body, but the soul is permanent. Krishna goes on to expound on the yogic paths of devotion, action, meditation, and knowledge. He states, “Let your concern be with action alone, and never with the fruits of action. Do not let the results of action be your motive, and do not be attached to inaction.” Krishna is essentially saying that we should never concern ourselves with the outcome of a situation; we should only concern ourselves with what we’re actually doing right now.

Fear of not being enough often drives our desire for possession or attachment. How often do we worry so much about what might come of the effort we put into a project at work that we never really enjoy the work itself? Can we stop being concerned with what *could* happen and instead enjoy what *is* happening? So often we worry whether we’ll be successful enough or good enough that we forget why we started a project in the first place. When we know we are enough, just as we are, we can let go of that which doesn’t serve us. Aparigraha offers us freedom—the freedom to work and do what we love without worrying about the outcome, to rely less on material possessions to bring us happiness, and to experience all that life has to offer

Understanding Aparigraha

Our lives, our heads, and our schedules are filled with “stuff.” Generally too much stuff. The concept of aparigraha refers to

nonpossessiveness—not being possessive of material items, ideas, people, or places. Practicing aparigraha does not require that we get rid of all our things but rather that we get rid of our *attachments* to those things. By releasing attachments and letting go of what is no longer useful, we experience more freedom and become open to new ideas, relationships, and ways of being. Ask yourself: What am I holding on to or clinging to in my life? Does this serve me? Should I let it go?

Tips for Practicing Aparigraha

Get rid of what you don't need. Possessions take up space and energy, so getting rid of unneeded items can be a liberating experience that creates both physical and mental space. There are three hundred thousand items in the average American home. So consider giving things away that you think you “might use” but in reality have not used in years. When you let go of things from the past, you become able to live more fully in the present.

Forgive others and yourself. Free, nurture, and heal yourself by offering forgiveness to those who have hurt you as well as to yourself. Letting go of painful memories from the past is a key step toward leading a fulfilling and empowered life. Who wants to live with anger and resentment?

Be generous. We live in a culture often characterized by fear. Generosity is the opposite of fear. Giving without expecting anything in return is an act of generosity. So share your time, your energy, and your expertise generously with others.

Reach out to family and friends randomly to let them know you are thinking of them and are sending them love. How do *you* feel?

Have a positive attitude. Clinging to negative thoughts and emotions can become a vicious cycle. Negative thoughts reinforce negative emotions, which in turn lead to negative actions. By replacing negative thoughts with positive thinking, we develop a more optimistic attitude that leads to new opportunities for joy and harmony in our lives.

As leaders we must become nimble at working with fluctuating priorities, high expectations, and in complex environments with ongoing conflict and ambiguity. We must focus on the future, toward innovation, development, and sustainable corporate growth. The present is often viewed as nothing more than a platform for the envisioning of and positioning for the future.

The five yamas, like yoga, are all encompassing and welcoming to everyone. As we develop these “wise characteristics” we build a foundation for our own health and happiness. So I challenge you to stay in the present long enough to commit to a process of sustainable personal growth. The practices and exercises I’ve outlined in these pages will help you understand and implement the yamas and other yogic principles, even if you never attempt a yoga pose. In fact, my goal is not to convert you into a yoga-pants-wearing devotee (unless you really enjoy it—and I hope that you will, as yoga is one of the few physical practices that is adaptable to nearly everybody).

I’ve made a strong commitment to my own corporate career and believe the answer to better leadership is not to opt out and choose an alternative path but rather to allow these transformative yogic principles to inspire and enable me to grow and achieve more than I ever thought I could in my chosen profession. And yoga has helped me achieve better work-life balance so I don’t sacrifice the people and things important to me beyond work. How? Yoga is about balance—mental, physical, and spiritual. Through my practice I am more

Practical Application of the Yamas: Observation

Most everything is relational. How are you doing with your relationships?

Observe your relationship to the five yamas of:

Nonviolence

Truthfulness

Nonstealing

Nonexcess

Nonpossessiveness

Does restraining yourself come easily? Probably not.

By observing our behavior we strengthen our powers of awareness, will, and discernment. We fortify our character and improve our relationships.

self-aware, discerning, and honest with myself. I am more available to others. And I am better able to appreciate the moment and live in the present (most of the time).

What about you? Practicing the yamas will help you to develop a secure foundation upon which you can achieve more confidence strength, resilience, and balance. Sound good? Let's proceed.



Self-Reflection

1. What are your core values? How do you manifest them in your life?
2. Do your thoughts, words, and actions come from a place of love and compassion?
3. Do you speak your truth, or are you scared and worried that you might hurt others' feelings? How can you balance your truths and your fears to practice satya (truth) and ahimsa (compassion)?
4. Do you want and crave what others have, or are you happy as you are?
5. Is your life in balance? Do you live with moderation?
6. Is your life cluttered? Are you holding on to lots of extra things, or do you live with simplicity?
7. Do you practice forgiveness? For yourself? For others?