

# What is Your Leadership Battle?

Are you using the best strategy to overcome it?

Each of us in our leadership role has only a finite amount of time. While we may be tempted to battle through every conflict because we feel we are “right”, battles can take an enormous amount of time and personal energy that would be better spent doing something else. Choosing our battles wisely may actually make us much more effective in winning those that are important to us. Selecting those situations where the consequences really matter to us will allow us to do a better job of preserving our energy, relationships and our peace of mind.

My greatest lessons of leadership have come the hard way, through trial and error, followed by the humility that comes from overcoming those mistakes. Other lessons I learned through observing those I esteemed to be great leaders and whose example I sought to follow. Through it all, I found that leadership grows and develops when one is truly challenged and when one has to muster the courage and creativity to overcome the leadership battles we all face – daily.

## The Battle of the Self

It has been said that all the most important battles in life are fought within the self. This goes beyond 'authenticity' or any of the other recipes commonly offered. Indeed, the worst thing a leader may do is to 'be authentic' if this means acting out of instinct and impulse, without reflection or self-control. The trouble is that the self is slippery, self-deceptive, and easily fooled. It is easy for leaders to stumble into failure, believing all the while that they are on solid ground. These traps can be avoided through intelligence and consistent reflection.

***Strategy to win this Battle: Be real.***

## The Battle for Truth

The battle for truth comprises our perceptions and beliefs about reality. Leaders have to figure out which aspects of the real world are non-negotiable, and which can be shaped to their will. They need to face the possibility that not just they, but their closest associates, are collectively deluded about what is really going on in their world.

***Strategy to win this Battle: De-center (from time to time).***

## The Battle of Listening

It is very easy for leaders to accept the challenges handed to them by their customers and stakeholders, but they should pause and reflect on the motives and interests of these people and the limited purview of their vision. The leader needs to step outside the circle and talk to the people whose voices are more seldom heard

to challenge the perception of the status quo and find new insights. The leader must know when to listen to self and others around her or him.

***Strategy to win this Battle: Build ensembles.***

### The Battle of Legacy

The battle of legacy concerns our ideas and beliefs about who we are. This is the leader's narrative — their story of who they are, their journey to here, and what drives them now — what is their *raison d'être*? This is a value proposition to themselves and to those around them. It may also be an intended legacy proposition. What will they leave behind them of value or impact? When might it be best for the leader to revise his or her view of who they are in the light of experience?

***Strategy to win this Battle: Frame the journey.***

There are many cases, stories and life histories of leaders that illustrate these and other themes, plus a set of actionable disciplines. These can be condensed into following key elements:

1. **Be real:** Show you understand the battlegrounds of the self and that you act with awareness.
2. **De-centre:** Practice the mental art of stepping into the mental perspective of others; read their psychology.
3. **Build ensembles:** Be like a director in musical or theatrical arts - orchestrate your talent.
4. **Frame the journey:** Tell a compelling story that makes sense of what you and your organization are here to do.

One of the most important lessons that I learned as a leader – and on that I continue to share in my leadership development programs and coaching - is that not every battle in my work setting was worth fighting. Leadership is tough. It means taking responsibility and taking charge. People depend on you. The world needs leaders now, more than ever, who can be strategic about seeing, being and doing.

### Corey Atkinson

VP of Learning & Development

corey@mycspn.com

Office: 905-477-5544

Cell: 416-898-6433

Follow Corey on LinkedIn and Twitter. His focus is to deliver cutting-edge ways for organizations to harness team potential and create engaging leaders.