

10BrilliantThings™

FREE GUIDE · PERSONAL GROWTH SERIES

Lead Yourself

Before You Lead Others

*The most important leadership you will ever practise
is the leadership you exercise over yourself.*

By Coach Andre Fredericks · 10BrilliantThings.com

Introduction

Leadership is one of the most studied, discussed, and sought-after qualities in professional and organisational life. Thousands of books, programmes, and development frameworks have been created to answer a single fundamental question: what makes an effective leader? And yet, across all of that research and accumulated wisdom, one finding emerges with remarkable consistency — that the most important form of leadership available to any human being is not the leadership exercised over teams, organisations, or communities. It is the leadership exercised over oneself.

Self-leadership — the practice of intentionally guiding and motivating yourself toward chosen goals and values — is both the foundation of effective leadership of others and, more fundamentally, the foundation of a life lived with purpose, integrity, and genuine agency. Research published in the *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* confirms through meta-analysis that self-leadership significantly affects individual outcomes across performance, wellbeing, and career development. A 2025 Springer Handbook of Leadership chapter identifies self-leadership as a prerequisite for authentic and effective leadership of others — the inner capability from which all outer leadership competence flows.

The concept was first formally introduced by Charles C. Manz in the early 1980s, who defined it as a comprehensive self-influence process — the practice of leading oneself toward performance of naturally motivating tasks and managing oneself through work that is less naturally motivating. More recently, positive psychology researchers have extended this definition to include the capacity to identify and apply one's signature strengths to initiate, maintain, and sustain self-influencing behaviours aligned with one's deepest values.

This guide — the tenth and final guide in the 10BrilliantThings™ Personal Growth Series — brings all of the previous guides together into their ultimate expression. Clarity. Goals. Daily structure. Emotional intelligence. Ownership. Communication. Energy. Habits. Relationships. All of these capacities are expressions of self-leadership. And self-leadership, practised consistently and developed deliberately, is the foundation from which genuine leadership of others becomes possible.

"Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." — Jack Welch

The growth begins — and never stops beginning — with you.

Chapter 1 UNDERSTAND WHAT SELF-LEADERSHIP ACTUALLY IS

Self-leadership is not self-discipline. It is not the harsh internal enforcement of rules and standards through willpower and guilt. It is something deeper, more sustainable, and ultimately more powerful: the intentional practice of understanding who you are, identifying what you genuinely want to become, and deliberately guiding your thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and habits toward that vision — not because external circumstances demand it, but because internal clarity compels it.

Charles Manz's foundational definition describes self-leadership as a comprehensive self-influence perspective that spans three domains: behaviour-focused strategies (goal-setting, self-monitoring, self-reinforcement), natural reward strategies (designing work and life to incorporate activities that are intrinsically motivating), and constructive thought strategies (managing the inner dialogue and mental frameworks that shape how you experience and respond to your circumstances).

Positive psychologist Marieta Du Plessis adds a values-aligned dimension to this model: positive self-leadership is the capacity to identify and apply your signature strengths to initiate, maintain, and sustain self-influencing behaviours. This framing is particularly powerful because it grounds self-leadership not in external obligation but in internal authenticity — in the alignment between who you are at your best and how you choose to act each day.

Research published in 2025 in the Springer Handbook of Leadership confirms that self-leadership is not simply a personality trait possessed by some and absent in others. It is a set of learnable, practicable competencies that can be developed through deliberate training and consistent application. The meta-analytic evidence confirms that training in self-leadership competencies improves stress resilience, job performance, satisfaction, and the ability to organise and motivate both oneself and others.

- **Self-leadership is:** The intentional, values-aligned practice of guiding your own thoughts, emotions, and behaviours toward your chosen direction.
- **It is not:** Self-punishment, rigid self-discipline, or the performance of productivity for external validation.
- **It encompasses:** Behavioural self-management, natural reward design, and constructive thought strategies — applied in the service of your deepest values.

◆ **Reflection:** How would you describe your current practice of self-leadership? In which area — behaviour, natural rewards, or constructive thought — is your self-leadership strongest? Where is the greatest opportunity for development?

Chapter 2 KNOW YOURSELF — THE INNER FOUNDATION OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

You cannot lead what you do not know. The foundation of effective self-leadership — and of all genuine leadership — is honest, accurate self-knowledge: a clear and compassionate understanding of your values, your strengths, your patterns, your triggers, and the gap between who you are and who you are choosing to become.

Self-knowledge is not a one-time insight achieved through a single reflective exercise. It is an ongoing practice of honest self-observation — of noticing how you respond under pressure, what consistently energises and depletes you, which environments bring out your best and which activate your worst, and where your stated values and your actual behaviours align or diverge. This kind of honest, granular self-knowledge is the raw material from which effective self-leadership is built.

Research on self-awareness in leadership — a body of evidence now spanning several decades — consistently identifies self-awareness as the most critical predictor of leadership effectiveness. Leaders who understand their own emotional patterns, cognitive biases, strengths, and limitations make better decisions, communicate more authentically, build stronger relationships, and demonstrate greater resilience in the face of challenge. They are also more likely to seek the feedback, development, and support that enables ongoing growth.

Self-knowledge also includes an honest reckoning with your identity: the stories you carry about who you are and what you are capable of. Many of these stories were formed in early experience and have not been examined since. Some are accurate and enabling. Others are limiting fictions that masquerade as permanent truths. Self-leadership requires the courage to examine these stories honestly — and to rewrite the ones that are no longer serving the person you are becoming.

- **Know your values:** What do you genuinely stand for — not what you should stand for, but what actually guides your decisions when no one is watching?
- **Know your strengths:** Where does effort come most naturally? What activities produce a sense of flow, engagement, and authentic capability?
- **Know your patterns:** What are your habitual responses to stress, challenge, conflict, and uncertainty? How do these patterns serve you — and where do they limit you?
- **Know your stories:** What do you believe about your own potential? Are those beliefs grounded in evidence — or in old experiences that no longer define you?

◆ **Reflection:** If you were to write an honest, compassionate assessment of yourself as a self-leader — your strengths, your patterns, your growing edges — what would it say? What would your closest colleague or trusted friend add that you might be missing?

Chapter 3 DEFINE YOUR PERSONAL LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

Every person who leads — whether a team, an organisation, a family, or their own life — operates from a set of implicit assumptions about what leadership means, what it is for, and how it should be practised. These assumptions are a personal leadership philosophy, and they exist whether or not you have ever made them explicit.

The problem with an implicit philosophy is that it cannot be examined, evaluated, or deliberately improved. You operate from it automatically — and when it produces poor results, you cannot identify which assumption is responsible or how to adjust it. Making your personal leadership philosophy explicit is one of the most impactful developmental investments a self-leader can make.

A personal leadership philosophy articulates: your core values and what they mean in practice; your beliefs about what effective leadership of yourself and others looks like; the non-negotiable standards you hold yourself to; the kind of leader — and person — you are committed to becoming; and the relationship between your leadership of yourself and your leadership of those around you. It is not a mission statement or a branding exercise. It is a living document that holds you accountable to your own deepest convictions.

The 10BrilliantThings™ framework provides a clear philosophical foundation for self-leadership: Responsible — taking full ownership of your outcomes and your development; Proactive — creating momentum deliberately rather than waiting for circumstances to dictate your direction; and Purposeful — acting from a clear, values-aligned sense of direction rather than reactive habit or external pressure. These three principles are not just a professional development model. They are a personal leadership philosophy.

- **Articulate your values:** Write your three to five core values in specific, behavioural terms — not 'integrity' but 'I keep my commitments even when it is inconvenient.'
- **Define your standards:** What are the non-negotiable standards you hold yourself to as a self-leader, regardless of context or circumstance?
- **Name your commitment:** In one sentence, complete this statement: 'The leader I am committed to becoming is...'
- **Review and update:** Your leadership philosophy should evolve as you grow. Review it at least annually and update it with the honest learning of the year.

A personal leadership philosophy is not a declaration of arrival. It is a declaration of direction — the conscious choice of the standards, values, and commitments by which you will govern your own life.

◆ **Reflection:** Do you have an explicit personal leadership philosophy — or only an implicit one? Take 20 minutes to write the beginning of yours. What do you stand for? What standards do you hold yourself to? What kind of leader are you choosing to become?

Chapter 4 MASTER YOUR INNER DIALOGUE

The most influential voice in your life is the one inside your head. The running commentary you maintain about yourself, your circumstances, your capabilities, and your future — what psychologists call self-talk — has a direct and measurable impact on your performance, your emotional state, your resilience, and your capacity to lead yourself and others effectively.

Research across sports psychology, clinical psychology, and organisational behaviour consistently confirms that the quality and tone of self-talk is one of the strongest predictors of performance under pressure. Constructive self-talk — encouraging, realistic, forward-focused — supports performance, sustains motivation, and promotes recovery from setbacks. Destructive self-talk — self-critical, catastrophising, and generalising — undermines performance, generates anxiety, and makes setbacks disproportionately damaging.

Charles Manz identified constructive thought strategies as one of the three core domains of self-leadership precisely because the inner dialogue is so powerful and so amenable to intentional redesign. Cognitive behavioural research confirms that habitual thought patterns can be identified, challenged, and replaced — not through forced positivity or denial of real difficulties, but through the disciplined practice of examining the evidence for negative beliefs, generating more accurate and useful alternatives, and rehearsing those alternatives until they become habitual.

Mastering your inner dialogue is not about eliminating self-criticism — some degree of honest self-evaluation is essential for growth. It is about ensuring that your self-talk is serving your development rather than sabotaging it. The inner critic that points out genuine errors and motivates improvement is valuable. The inner judge that condemns your worth and predicts permanent failure is not.

- **Notice the default:** Begin paying deliberate attention to your inner dialogue — especially under pressure, after setbacks, and before high-stakes situations.
- **Challenge the distortions:** When your inner dialogue catastrophises or generalises, ask: 'What is the evidence for this? What is a more accurate and useful perspective?'
- **Practise constructive self-talk:** Develop specific, evidence-based statements for your most common challenging situations. Rehearse them until they become automatic.
- **Distinguish the critic from the judge:** Honest self-evaluation that motivates improvement is valuable. Global self-condemnation that undermines confidence is not. Learn to distinguish the two.

◆ **Reflection:** What does your inner dialogue typically say when you face a significant challenge or make a mistake? Is that narrative accurate and useful — or is it distorted and limiting? What would a more constructive inner dialogue sound like?

Chapter 5 DEVELOP SELF-DISCIPLINE AS A PRACTICE, NOT A TRAIT

Self-discipline is one of the most universally valued — and most commonly misunderstood — qualities in personal development. It is widely imagined as a character trait that some people simply possess: an innate capacity for sustained effort, delayed gratification, and consistent follow-through that makes difficult things easy. This understanding is not just inaccurate — it is actively harmful, because it leads people to conclude that their failures of self-discipline are failures of character rather than failures of design.

The research on self-regulation and self-control tells a different story. Self-discipline is not a fixed trait — it is a set of practices and structural conditions that make consistent, values-aligned behaviour more likely and less effortful. Willpower — the conscious effortful application of self-

control — is a finite and depletable resource. People who appear to have exceptional self-discipline are typically those who have designed their environment, habits, and routines in ways that require minimal willpower to maintain their desired behaviours.

Self-discipline as a practice means designing the conditions under which self-leadership is easy rather than relying on willpower to make it possible. It means removing environmental friction from desired behaviours, establishing routines that execute automatically, building accountability structures that support consistency, and developing the self-compassion to recover quickly from lapses rather than allowing them to compound into abandonment.

It also means understanding the relationship between motivation and action — specifically, that waiting for motivation before taking action is a recipe for chronic inconsistency. Research consistently confirms that motivation follows action at least as often as it precedes it. Beginning the desired behaviour — however small the beginning — generates the momentum and positive emotion that sustain subsequent effort. Self-discipline, in this sense, is the practice of beginning, regardless of how you feel.

- **Design, don't rely:** Design your environment, habits, and routines to make your desired behaviours automatic — not dependent on daily willpower expenditure.
- **Begin regardless:** Motivation follows action. The discipline is in beginning, even without the feeling of readiness or enthusiasm.
- **Recover quickly:** Self-compassion after a lapse — returning to the desired behaviour without guilt or drama — is itself a form of self-discipline.
- **Build accountability:** Structural accountability — to a person, a commitment, or a tracking system — reduces the moment-by-moment willpower required.

◆ **Reflection:** Where in your life is self-discipline most challenged? Is the problem a lack of willpower — or a lack of design? What structural or environmental change would most reduce the willpower required to maintain the behaviour you want?

Chapter 6 REGULATE YOUR EMOTIONS UNDER PRESSURE

The moments that most test self-leadership are not the easy ones. They are the moments of pressure, frustration, disappointment, and conflict — the moments when the gap between your values and your automatic emotional response is most visible, and the cost of closing that gap is most clearly felt. Emotional regulation under pressure is both the most demanding and the most revealing dimension of self-leadership.

Research on self-leadership consistently identifies emotional self-regulation as one of its most critical competencies. The ability to experience a difficult emotion — anger, anxiety,

disappointment, fear — without being governed by it; to pause between stimulus and response; to choose a reaction aligned with your values rather than discharging the emotional energy in whatever direction it points — this is the competency that separates reactive existence from self-directed living.

This does not mean emotional suppression. As established in the emotional intelligence guide in this series, genuine emotional regulation involves acknowledging emotions fully and using them as information, while exercising choice over the response. The leader who suppresses their frustration in a difficult meeting and explodes later in a different context has not demonstrated emotional regulation — they have demonstrated emotional deferral. The leader who acknowledges their frustration, understands what it is telling them, and chooses a considered response has demonstrated genuine self-leadership.

Training in self-leadership and mindfulness — reviewed in a 2024 systematic review published in *Management Review Quarterly* — has been shown to improve stress resilience, emotional regulation, and authentic presence under pressure. The review confirms that these are teachable competencies, not fixed personality traits, and that deliberate practice produces measurable and lasting improvement.

- **Name the emotion:** Before responding to a difficult situation, name the emotion you are experiencing specifically. Naming reduces intensity and creates choice.
- **Create the pause:** Build a deliberate gap between the trigger and your response — three slow breaths, a brief walk, a moment of silence. The pause is where self-leadership lives.
- **Ask the values question:** 'What response here would I be proud of tomorrow?' redirects from reactive to values-led.
- **Practise in low-stakes situations:** Emotional regulation under pressure is built through practice in moderate situations before it is needed in high-stakes ones.

◆ **Reflection:** In which type of situation do you find emotional self-regulation most challenging? What is your typical automatic response — and what would a self-led response look like instead?

Chapter 7 HOLD YOURSELF TO CONSISTENT STANDARDS

One of the most powerful signals of genuine self-leadership is the consistency of your standards — not the standards you hold when circumstances are easy and the watching is visible, but the standards you maintain when circumstances are difficult, the watching is absent, and compromise would cost you nothing in the short term except the quiet erosion of your own integrity.

Consistency of standards is not perfectionism. It is not the demand for flawless execution or the refusal to acknowledge genuine constraints and limitations. It is the commitment to bringing your

genuine best — whatever that looks like under current conditions — to the work and relationships that matter most, because you have decided that the quality of your effort reflects the quality of your character.

Research on psychological ownership and accountability confirms that the experience of personal accountability — feeling genuinely answerable for your outcomes — is positively associated with proactive engagement, creative problem-solving, and sustained high performance. When you hold yourself to consistent standards not because someone is watching but because those standards are an expression of who you are, you activate the full motivational power of identity-based commitment.

Holding yourself to consistent standards also means practising what you preach — aligning your behaviour with the values and expectations you hold for others. The research on leadership contagion, noted in the professional relationships guide, found that team members are significantly more likely to adopt high standards when their leaders visibly practise them. You cannot sustainably lead others to standards you do not hold yourself to. Self-leadership, in this sense, is the most foundational form of leadership credibility.

- **The private standard:** Behave as you would if the person you most respect were watching — because the person most affected by your private standards is you.
- **Alignment check:** Regularly audit the gap between your stated values and your actual behaviour. The gap is not evidence of failure — it is a map of your growth edges.
- **Model what you expect:** In every team, family, and community you are part of, your consistent behaviour sets a standard that others calibrate to, consciously or not.
- **Hold standards with compassion:** High standards applied with harsh self-judgment are not sustainable. High standards held with genuine self-care are the foundation of lasting excellence.

◆ **Reflection:** In which area of your life is there the greatest gap between the standards you hold for others and the standards you consistently hold for yourself? What would it mean to close that gap?

Chapter 8 LEAD YOUR DEVELOPMENT INTENTIONALLY

The most self-led professionals treat their own development not as something that happens to them — through the training programmes their organisations provide, the mentors who find them, or the experiences that arrive by chance — but as something they design, pursue, and own. They take responsibility for identifying what they need to learn, finding the resources to learn it, applying it deliberately, and measuring their progress honestly.

Self-determination theory — the foundational motivational framework developed by Deci and Ryan — identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the three core psychological needs that drive intrinsic motivation. Self-directed development, when aligned with genuine interest and genuine values, satisfies all three: it provides the autonomy of choosing your own growth direction, the competence of mastering new capabilities, and the relatedness of developing skills in service of the people and communities you care about.

Research on self-leadership published in 2024 confirms that self-leading individuals are more likely to set and pursue learning objectives, manage their development time effectively, overcome obstacles in their growth journey, and persist through the inevitable difficulties of genuine skill development. They also demonstrate greater career adaptability — the ability to navigate change, transition, and unexpected disruption — because their development is driven by internal clarity rather than external circumstance.

Leading your development intentionally means investing in it consistently, not only when circumstances make it easy. It means reading, studying, practising, and seeking feedback with the same regularity you bring to your primary professional responsibilities. It means treating your own growth as both an obligation to yourself and a gift to the people you serve through your capability.

- **Own your development plan:** Identify the three capabilities that, if developed over the next 12 months, would most significantly change your effectiveness and impact.
- **Invest consistently:** Fifteen minutes of deliberate development each day — reading, practising, reflecting — compounds into 90+ hours per year. Do not wait for ideal conditions.
- **Apply immediately:** Every learning has a half-life. Apply what you learn within 72 hours of encountering it, or the vast majority of it will be lost.
- **Seek honest feedback:** The most valuable development feedback rarely arrives unsolicited. Ask for it specifically, regularly, and from people who have earned the right to give it.

◆ **Reflection:** Who is designing your professional development — you, or circumstances? What is the single most important capability you need to develop in the next 12 months — and what specific investment will you make this week to begin developing it?

Chapter 9 LEAD OTHERS FROM YOUR OWN WHOLENESS

The transition from self-leadership to the leadership of others is not a departure from what has been developed in the previous eight chapters — it is the natural expression of it. The person who knows themselves honestly, holds themselves to consistent standards, manages their emotions with skill, owns their development with intention, and acts from clear values and genuine purpose

does not need to become a different person to lead others well. They need only to extend the same care, clarity, and commitment outward.

Research consistently confirms that authentic leadership — leadership grounded in genuine self-knowledge, consistent values, and transparent relationships — produces stronger team performance, higher trust, greater psychological safety, and more sustainable engagement than leadership based on role, authority, or the performance of a persona. The leader who does not know themselves, or who leads from a place of unresolved personal anxiety, unexamined bias, or poorly managed emotion, transmits those deficits into the teams and relationships they lead — often without awareness.

Leading from wholeness means bringing your genuine self — including your honest uncertainties, your genuine limitations, and your authentic commitments — into your leadership rather than presenting a polished performance of invulnerability and certainty. Research on psychological safety from the APA confirms that leaders who model vulnerability — who acknowledge what they don't know, who admit and learn from mistakes, and who invite genuine dialogue — create the conditions under which their teams are most creative, most engaged, and most willing to take the risks that produce genuine innovation.

The 10BrilliantThings™ framework's vision of a growth culture built on Empathy, Generosity, and Collaboration finds its most authentic expression in the leader who has done the inner work — who can genuinely understand the experience of others because they understand their own, who can give freely because they do not lead from scarcity, and who can collaborate without ego because their sense of worth does not depend on being the most capable person in the room.

- **Lead authentically:** Authentic leadership — grounded in genuine self-knowledge and consistent values — produces stronger trust and performance than performed authority.
- **Model vulnerability:** The leader who acknowledges uncertainty, admits mistakes, and seeks input creates the psychological safety that enables their team's best work.
- **Extend the same standards inward and outward:** The care, clarity, and standards you apply to yourself are the ones your team will calibrate to.
- **Your leadership is your character in action:** Over time, what people experience as your leadership is simply who you consistently are — under pressure, in private, and when no one is watching.

◆ **Reflection:** How much of your current leadership of others flows from genuine self-knowledge and inner groundedness — and how much from role, habit, or the performance of confidence? What would change in your leadership if you led more fully from your own wholeness?

Chapter 10 COMMIT TO SELF-LEADERSHIP AS A LIFELONG PRACTICE

Self-leadership is not a destination. There is no point at which the work is complete, the development is finished, and the practice can be set aside. The person you are becoming is always ahead of the person you currently are — and the gap between the two is not a deficiency to be corrected but an invitation to engage. The most genuinely self-led people you will ever meet are not those who have mastered themselves once and for all. They are those who have committed, with growing skill and deepening wisdom, to the ongoing practice of honest self-examination, deliberate growth, and values-aligned action.

The research on self-leadership development is unambiguous on this point: self-leadership competencies respond to intentional practice and deteriorate without it. The habits of self-monitoring, constructive self-talk, values alignment, and deliberate development must be actively maintained and regularly renewed. As life circumstances change — as roles evolve, relationships shift, challenges deepen, and new opportunities emerge — the practice of self-leadership must adapt to serve the new terrain.

What does not change is the commitment itself. The commitment to honesty with yourself — even when the truth is uncomfortable. The commitment to your values — even when the cost of living by them is high. The commitment to your own growth — even when progress is slow and the plateau of latent potential feels permanent. And the commitment to those you lead and serve — which begins and ends with the quality of leadership you exercise over yourself.

This is the tenth and final guide in the 10BrilliantThings™ Personal Growth Series. But it is not the end of the journey. It is, in the most genuine sense, the beginning — because everything that has been explored across these ten guides finds its fullest expression not in the knowledge you now hold, but in the practice you choose to build. The life that is available to you — clearer, more purposeful, more connected, more capable, and more genuinely your own — is built one self-led action at a time.

- **Daily practice:** Begin each day with one minute of intentional self-leadership: What do I stand for today? What will I do that reflects it?
- **Weekly review:** Each week, review your alignment between your values and your actions. Where did self-leadership show up? Where did it break down? What will you adjust?
- **Annual recalibration:** Once a year, revisit your personal leadership philosophy, your development commitments, and your long-term direction. Update what has evolved.
- **Never arrive:** The most dangerous moment in self-leadership is the feeling that you have figured it out. Growth requires the humility to remain a student of yourself.

Self-leadership is the most important leadership there is. Not because of what it produces for others — though it does produce extraordinary things for others. But because of what it makes possible for you: a life that is genuinely, unmistakably, irreversibly your own.

◆ **Reflection:** As you complete this guide and this series — what is the single most important commitment you are making to your own self-leadership? Write it down. Share it with someone who will hold you to it. And then begin.

Conclusion

You have reached the end of the tenth guide in the 10BrilliantThings™ Personal Growth Series. But in the most important sense, you have not reached an end at all. You have arrived at the beginning of the practice that everything in this series has been building toward.

Self-leadership — the deliberate, values-aligned, honest practice of guiding your own thinking, emotions, behaviour, and development — is the integrating principle that brings together every capacity explored in these ten guides. Your clarity of direction. Your goals that actually stick. Your daily structure. Your emotional intelligence. Your ownership of outcomes. Your communication. Your energy. Your habits. Your professional relationships. All of these are expressions of self-leadership — and self-leadership is their common source.

The ten chapters in this guide have mapped the full landscape of self-leadership: from understanding what it is and knowing yourself honestly, through defining your philosophy, mastering your inner dialogue, developing discipline as practice, regulating emotion under pressure, holding consistent standards, leading your own development, leading others from wholeness, and committing to self-leadership as a lifelong practice.

None of this is easy. The most important things rarely are. But nothing in this guide — or in the nine that preceded it — is beyond you. Every capacity described here is learnable. Every practice is available. Every commitment is possible. The only question is whether you will choose to begin, and whether you will choose to continue.

"You're not stuck. You're simply under-structured." — Coach Andre Fredericks

The structure — for your self-leadership, your growth, your relationships, and your life — is in your hands. It has been, all along. The question is only what you will build with it.

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