NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

LEADERSHIP IN THE FAST LANE: MASTER SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

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

GOAL

Empower yourself and your team to thrive in a fast-paced environment by strategically managing workloads and priorities.

NANO TOOL

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

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

ACTION STEPS

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

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

3. **Enforce vacations.** A recent poll taken by the Pew Research Center found that 46 percent of Americans who are offered paid time off work don't take it all. Research published in the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* explains the downside: "Organizations should…[implement] regulations that restrict skipping vacation or exchanging days of one's vacation for financial rewards because vacation can serve as a powerful instrument to lessen emotional exhaustion and to foster work engagement." Take a cue from the military: after a solider has seen active duty, he or she gets a furlough or a desk job. Athletes, too, train hard and then take a break from their grueling regimens. Vacation, with limited or no contact with work, allows managers to come back better equipped to handle the turbulence.

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

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

HOW LEADERS USE IT

- **Not To Do List:** Canadian entrepreneur and investor Andrew Wilkinson makes a list of "anti-goals" to avoid activities that detract from his ideal workday. By focusing on what he doesn't want to do, Wilkinson has been able to create a more enjoyable and productive daily routine. Similarly, Warren Buffett uses an "Avoid at All Costs" list to prevent distractions from his most important goals. He advises others to write down their top 25 career goals, then circle the top five and avoid the rest.

- **Breaks in Action:** Founder of investment-management firm Bridgewater Associates Ray Dalio has been meditating twice daily for more than 40 years, crediting it more than any other factor with his success. He will even meditate during market hours if stressed, and says meditation is part of the culture of his firm, with many employees practicing it.

- **Time Off:** Underscoring the value of time off, Adobe's PTO (personal time off) policy states: "There's no specified amount of vacation days or paid time off for full-time Adobe employees, so we encourage you to work directly with your manager to arrange the time off you need when you need it." HubSpot offers a flexible vacation policy, and to ensure employees actually take time off, they have a company-wide mandatory week off in July. Plus, after five years with the company, employees get a four-week paid sabbatical.

- **Rest:** Embracing powerful research on the benefits of naps and meditation, companies such as Nike, Deloitte Consulting, Ben & Jerry's, and Zappos encourage these practices during regular work hours. They even provide specially designed rooms for napping and meditating.

CONTRIBUTOR TO THIS NANO TOOL

Greg Shea, Adjunct Professor of Management; Senior Fellow, Center for Leadership and Change Management, The Wharton School.

ABOUT NANO TOOLS

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, director of Custom Programs at Wharton Executive Education. *Nano Tools for Leaders®* is a collaboration between joint sponsors Wharton Executive Education and Wharton's Center for Leadership and Change Management. This collaboration is led by Professors Michael Useem and John Paul MacDuffie.