

IMAGE ALIGNMENT

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Leadership Wired

Looking back, it's easy to see how my self-image—how I viewed myself—had a direct bearing upon my effectiveness—or lack thereof—that day. After that experience, I began to understand that leaders must believe in themselves before they can ever hope to believe in their people. I also realized that, as a leader, if I've not bought in to myself, no one else is going to buy in to me either.

Each one of us has an internal mirror that reflects how we see ourselves. And what we see in this mirror determines how we act as leaders. In other words, our self-image determines our behavior. That's why it's impossible for a person with a poor self image to produce consistently on a high level. It simply can't happen, because we cannot conduct our daily affairs in a way that contradicts how we see ourselves. On the other hand, when a leader believes he can do a good job and views himself as successful, his actions will show it.

Sadly, many leaders don't have an accurate picture of themselves because their internal mirrors are distorted. Because they're unable to see themselves as they really are, they're forever trying to find the right image to present to others. Some project an image that is bigger than they really are; others project an image that is smaller than they really are. Either way, the result is internal confusion.

A key to effectiveness—in life and as a leader—is to project a true image of who you are. The only problem is that we all carry with us four images of ourselves that can cause us to act differently with different people. These four images are:

- 1. The image that others have of us.** This is how the people around us—the ones who observe us at our best and our worst—see us.
- 2. The image that we project to others.** This is how we want others to view us.
- 3. The image we have of ourselves.** This is how we actually view ourselves. Many times, this image does not match what we project to others.
- 4. Our true self.** This includes our character and gifts; it represents who we were created to be.

When these four images don't match, we know it. This awareness might be subconscious, but it's there nonetheless. And it weighs us down.

The solution lies in making sure that these four images are as closely aligned as possible. You see, we can be emotionally healthy only when the image that other people have of us, the image that we project to others, the image that we have of ourselves and our true selves all match. The more distortion there is—among any or all of these images—the less healthy our self-image is, and the less effective our leadership will be. Marcus Aurelius said, "I often marvel how it is that, though each man loves himself beyond all else, he should yet value his own opinion of himself less than that of others." As I learned so many years ago, when it comes to leadership, the first person you must believe in is yourself. The mirror reminds me that I must read myself well before I can ever attempt to read others.