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Intentions: A Major Source of Outcomes

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SECTION HEAD: INTEGRATIVE LEADERSHIP

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As we engage in mindfulness meditation, or in other inward-looking practices such as self-reflection or contemplative prayer, we gradually become aware of the deeper aspects of ourselves and how those aspects affect the reality in which we live. One of those aspects – our intentions – plays a significant role in our effectiveness as a leader.

The word “intend” means to direct the mind on something. It is determination to act in a certain way in order to bring about a result or effect. When we intend, we are focusing our awareness and our energy on that which we want to usher into being. It seems simple enough, but in reality, one or more intentions may be operating in any given scenario, not all of which will be aligned, not all of which will have equal horsepower, not all of which we may wish to own up to, and not all of which we might be aware of in our everyday, waking consciousness.

Being cognizant of these dynamics and using our mindful practice to identify all the aligned or competing intentions at play, we can choose to keep or discard our intentions, an act that enables us to better energize what we truly want to accomplish and more easily bring it into being.

INTENTIONS VERSUS GOALS

One place to start this unraveling and clarifying of self is to understand the difference between intentions and goals. A goal is a specific result or achievement toward which effort is directed. A goal, by its very nature, is in the future. An intention is when we direct our awareness on a specific course. An intention exists in the present. We *are* it, so to speak.

Thus, you can actually have a goal and yet have no intention of achieving it.

More likely, in pursuit of any goal, your intentions will shape your behavior. Let’s say you are talking with an employee about a project that is behind schedule. The “goal” is to get the project back on schedule. If your intention is to instill fear in that employee, then you might speak harshly or infer punishment of some sort. If your intention is to be perceived as the leader, you might offer immediate advice. And if your intention is to help that employee, you might show compassion and ask questions so you can learn more about the problem at hand.

In *Mindfulness for Dummies*, Shamash Alidina explains that “intention shapes the nature of the whole action itself. Although the action may be the same ... the intention itself strongly influences your moment-by-moment experience and state of mind.”

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