

MIT LEADERSHIP CENTER

Sloan Alumni Reunion

May 29, 2025



RAISING YOUR GAME

Leading from the inside out

MIT SLOAN SCHOOL
OF MANAGEMENT





What is a well-developed leadership muscle that has served you well?

Is that muscle getting tired or not working as well anymore?





When did you first become a firefighter in life?

Why did it serve you so well?





Childhood? What does that have to do with your leadership today?

EVERYTHING

Our pasts are still
present in our leadership
today

- We unconsciously reenact old scripts and responses from our early life experiences
- Some of those are no longer productive, thoughtful or rational habits in our present roles
- Growth occurs when we become aware of the pattern and do something about it
- This is hard work. You must dig deep, be honest with yourself and take seriously the feedback you've likely received



“Without realizing that the past is constantly determining their present actions, adults avoid learning about their history. They continue to live in their repressed childhood situation, ignoring the fact that it no longer exists, continuing to fear and ignore dangers that, although once real, have not been real for a long time.”

- Alice Miller, *psychologist*



WE ARE THE TOTALITY OF EVERY MOMENT UP TO NOW



- The family we grew up in and everything we experienced and learned there
- Generational messages that were transmitted
- Important people and experiences along the way
- Cultural messages that defined norms and expectations
- Sub-culture affiliations that support our identity formation
- Significant turning points that alter our sense of self or path forward



THE CHALLENGE BEFORE YOU

To turn inward to
figure out where this
habit started

Our task as adults is to grow beyond this habit

- Get clear about when it started and why
- Separate our childhood helplessness from our adult control
- And then replace that habit with something that works better



A CHAIN REACTION



Something Happens in the Present

- Emotions are activated
- Something feels very familiar, even if we can't name it
- Fight or flight takes over, our reactive brain is in charge
- Our rational brain is offline
- We are not fully in adult mode

Decisions Get Made About What Action to Take

- Choices are reactive and usually binary (go, no-go)
- We use old coping strategies that worked in childhood that can be inappropriate in the present
- Executive function of the brain is not in charge
- We defend our actions to the max

Clean Up on Aisle Three

- Once the moment passes, we are left to deal with the consequences
- At this point, the whole brain is activated
- A combination of feeling badly about ourselves and problem solving ensues
- We make a promise to ourselves never to do that again (LOL)

THE IMPACT ON OTHERS

They will be managing you

- Figure out ways to avoid your reactions
- Try to get what they need from you without hitting the tripwire
- Get tense, anxious, uneasy around you
- Find workarounds or allies to avoid you in general
- Seek mentoring and development elsewhere



THE ANTIDOTE FORMULA



SELF-REFLECTION
HABITS



CURIOSITY ABOUT
YOURSELF AND
OTHERS



COMPASSION AND
ACCEPTANCE



**"If you don't deal with your own shit,
others will be forced to."**

The Nicki Roth Theorem



QUESTIONS?



**“Act your age, not
your shoe size.”**

