

# ON THE BALL: AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE FOR DEVELOPING AWARENESS ABOUT SELF-LEADERSHIP

Céleste M. Grimard  
Université du Québec à Montréal  
grimard-brotheridge.celeste@uqam.ca

## ABSTRACT

*A fundamental prerequisite for becoming an effective leader is being able to lead oneself. This paper presents an experiential exercise that helps individuals become aware of fundamental elements of self-leadership such as managing one's emotions and attitudes; dealing with time constraints, priorities and stress; effective delegation; and working in a team context. In addition, students develop insights regarding their personal orientation towards self-leadership based on their performance during a brief interactive ball tossing activity. At first glance, this exercise appears to be deceptively simple in nature. However, students quickly realize that, as the workload increases exponentially, they must find a way to work together, manage their feelings of stress and anxiety, and establish boundaries in relation to accepting work that doesn't belong to them or that represents an overload of work.*

## INTRODUCTION

"The first and best victory is to conquer self." – Plato

"Leaders who can stay optimistic and upbeat, even under intense pressure, radiate the positive feelings that create resonance. By staying in control of their feelings and impulses, they craft an environment of trust, comforts and fairness. And that self-management has a trickle-down effect from the leader." - Daniel Goleman, *Primal Leadership*

In his classic *Harvard Business Review* article entitled "Managing Oneself," Peter Drucker (2005) argued that effective management or leadership could not occur in the absence of appropriate self-management. Drucker argued that self-management, particularly self-awareness, was crucial to managers being able to contribute in a productive manner to their organizations. Research by Manz and Sims (1980) support this perspective. In particular, they found that self-management and, later, self-leadership were the key to becoming fully functioning members of an organization. In this article, we describe an interactive ball tossing experiential exercise that helps individuals learn about the importance of self-leadership and gain insight into their own self-leadership propensities. If, as it has been said, you can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation, then this exercise is particularly fruitful. It is a simple exercise that offers some potentially profound lessons for students.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### THE CONCEPT OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

An extensive theoretical and empirical literature exists

regarding the notion of leadership. At the core of this literature is the idea that an individual, acting as a leader, influences others to perform in a desired manner through the provision of structure, encouragement and support. This approach is grounded in the perspective that leadership comes not from within a person but rather from external sources and that people depend on others (leaders) to be motivated, controlled, and goal oriented. A much smaller literature proposes that individuals have the capacity to manage or lead themselves. This literature, stemming from Manz and Sims' (1980) ground breaking work, considers self-management to be a type of substitute for (external) leadership (Kerr & Jermier, 1978). The construct of self-management has evolved into self-leadership, which Neck and Houghton (2006, p. 270) define as "a self-influence process through which people achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to perform ... consist(ing) of specific behavioral and cognitive strategies designed to positively influence personal effectiveness." Self-leadership theory is grounded in self-regulation theory (Carver & Scheier, 1981), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), self-control (Neck & Houghton, 2006), and intrinsic motivation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1980).

Over the past decades, Manz and his colleagues have refined and elaborated the construct of self-leadership (Manz, 1986; Manz & Neck, 2004; Manz & Sims, 1991; Neck & Manz, 2010; Sims & Manz, 1996). Self-leadership consists of cognitive and behavioral techniques as well as natural reward strategies that positively influence personal effectiveness (Andressen, Konradt, & Neck, 2011). More precisely, self-leadership includes:

- Cognitive-focused strategies aimed at developing constructive, optimistic thought patterns through self-talk, mental imagery, and the elimination of habitual dysfunctional thought patterns;
- Behavior-focused strategies such as: (a) self-observation and assessment of behaviors that require modification, (b) self-goal setting to direct one's future efforts, (c) self-reward ("creating reward contingencies linked to the self-set goals in order to energize and direct the effort necessary for goal attainment;" Houghton, Wu, Godwin, Neck, & Manz, 2012, p. 224), and (d) self-correcting feedback that refocuses unproductive behavior into more positive directions; Manz & Sims, 1987); and
- Natural rewards strategies whose focus is identifying the inherently enjoyable aspects of tasks.

As suggested by Houghton et al. (2012), although distinct, some overlap may exist between the constructs of self-leadership and emotional intelligence. According to Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2000), individuals who are high in emotional intelligence are able to perceive, understand, and manage their own and others' emotions. Thus, whereas self-

leadership emphasizes the self-regulation of cognitions and behaviors, emotional intelligence focuses on regulating one's emotions. However, the ability to effectively regulate one's emotions is likely to improve self-leadership and its outcomes, and vice versa (Houghton et al., 2012).

**WHY SELF-LEADERSHIP IS IMPORTANT**

"Being responsible for ourselves ... is where formal leadership begins; it is the first step in being able to effectively lead others" (Schaetti, Ramsey & Watanabe, 2008, p. 4). In other words, external leadership begins with self-leadership (Ross, 2014). Without a well-developed ability to lead oneself, one lacks the insight, self-control, ability to work autonomously, and sense of responsibility and initiative needed to, in turn, effectively influence and direct others. As suggested by Phillips, Kern, Tiwari, Jones, and Carden (2012), individuals who lack self-management will not likely be effective employees or followers. Individuals who are engaged in self-leadership serve as models and sources of encouragement to observers (Houghton & Neck, 2002). In addition to serving as models of self-leadership, an important role of leaders is to help employees learn to lead themselves. "That is, the primary function of the leader becomes that of encouraging and reinforcing processes such as goal setting and self-reinforcement rather than directly reinforcing subordinate performance," (Houghton & Neck, 2002, p. 365). Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between self-leadership and performance, whether or individually or as a team member (Frayne & Geringer, 2000; Hauschildt & Konradt, 2012; Konradt et al., 2009; Prussia, Anderson, & Manz, 1998).

In addition to being a prerequisite for leading others (Phillips et al., 2012) and being associated with improved employee performance and career progression (Houghton & Neck, 2002), self-leadership is associated with a wide range of positive outcomes (Stewart, Courtright & Manz, 2011). For example, Houghton et al. (2012) have shown that increased self-leadership predicts increased levels of intrinsic motivation and builds feelings of self-determination, competence and self-control. In like manner, in their daily diary study, Breevaart, Bakker, and Demerouti (2014) found a positive association between the use of self-management strategies and feelings of engagement and resourcefulness at work. Self-leadership is also predictive of higher job attendance (Latham & Frayne, 1989), improved positive affect (Neck & Houghton, 2006; Neck & Manz, 1996), subjective well-being, and job satisfaction (Houghton & Jinkerson, 2007).

**DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF SELF-LEADERSHIP**

The foregoing paragraphs discussed some fundamental

skills required to engage in effective self-leadership and the importance of being able to do so. A number of approaches are available for helping individuals become familiar with the elements of self-leadership and the extent to which they engage in such practices. For example, instructors could propose an exercise centered on Houghton and Neck's (2002) revised self-leadership questionnaire, an exercise in which students assess their behaviors and create a plan for developing their self-leadership skills. Alternatively, instructors could lecture students on the nature of these skills and then invite students to apply them in situations in which they face self-leadership challenges. Houghton, Wu, Godwin, Neck, and Manz (2012) provide two examples of these application assignments. In one exercise, they asked students to reflect on a time when they experienced a significant negative emotion and what they said to themselves during this experience. Students were then asked to rephrase their self-talk into more positive, empowering statements. In a second exercise, they asked students to record answers to the following questions in a personal journal: "(1) How would you describe the stressful situation? (2) What were your thoughts? What did you tell yourself? (3) What feelings did you have regarding this situation? (4) What did you do in response to this situation? (5) What might have you done differently?" (Houghton et al., 2012, p. 229).

As described below, the On the Ball experiential exercise uses a two-step approach. In step one, similar to Houghton et al. (2012), students complete a personal reflection exercise, which provides them with a basic understanding of how to apply the skills of self-leadership. However, we go one step further by involving the students in a simulation that requires them to apply these skills in 'real time' in step 2. We consider the self-leadership skills to be fundamental in nature (level 1 skills) in that they underpin or serve as prerequisites to broader skills such as managing one's emotions and attitudes; dealing with time constraints, priorities and stress; effective delegation; and working in a team context (level 2 skills). The more *intangible* level 1 skills are needed to be able to successfully develop these practical level 2 skills. Whereas the personal reflection helps students practice level 1 skills, the simulation directly addresses level 2 skills. These level 2 skills are typically considered to be the skills possessed by self-managing, self-starting, self-mastering employees in the practitioner literature. For example, Linman (2011) proposes that self-management consists of a number of skills including the ability to resist and manage stressful situations, effectively solve problems as they arise, communicate clearly with others, and make effective use of one's time. Similarly, Taylor (2016) suggests that self-managing or self-directed employees take initiative, manage their time well, have a strong work ethic, and are able to work with minimal supervision (without 'babysitting' as she suggests).

**TABLE 1  
ON THE BALL STEPS AND LEVELS**

Step 1	Step 2
Personal reflection exercise Level 1 skills addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive-focused strategies (self-talk, mental imagery, eliminating dysfunctional thought patterns)</li> <li>• Behavior-focused strategies (self-observation, self-goal setting, self-reward, self-correcting feedback)</li> <li>• Natural rewards strategies</li> </ul>	Experiential ball tossing exercise Level 2 skills addressed: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing one's emotional reactions, attitudes, and behaviors</li> <li>• Motivating oneself (finding pleasure and humour)</li> <li>• Dealing with time constraints, priorities and stress</li> <li>• Managing work load (effective delegation, working with others)</li> </ul>

## ON THE BALL EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this two-step exercise are to help students become aware of the importance of self-leadership in the process of becoming leaders and to discover their personal self-leadership tendencies. As indicated previously, the first step introduces students to the skills of self-leadership and invites them to undertake an individual reflection in this regard. The second step challenges students to apply their self-leadership skills in an experiential exercise.

### PARTICIPANTS AND TIME REQUIREMENTS

This exercise has been used with both managers and university students in groups ranging in size from 15 to 60. The experiential exercise itself takes approximately 10 minutes to carry out, but may take up to an hour to fully debrief.

### STUDENT PREPARATION

Prior to the class in which the exercise is undertaken, students are invited to complete the reflection exercise presented in Table 2 (Are you a self-leader?). This written, individual reflection serves as type of primer on the topic of self-leadership. Although the experiential component of *On the Ball* has been undertaken successfully without this requirement,

the reflection exercise provides students with a useful preview of the skills that they will need to employ in the experiential exercise.

### REQUIRED MATERIALS

We use the following materials in carrying out this exercise:

1. About 30 splash balls (balls that soak up water when wet). These balls are ideal for this exercise because they are very light, are easy to throw, and unlikely to injure anyone. It is helpful to have three or four different colors of splash balls, so that groups can be assigned a unique ball color and, thus, develop a sense of *possessiveness* towards 'their' balls. It is important to note that these balls are not submerged in water for the purposes of this exercise.
2. Two large beach balls with a diameter of 24" or greater. One will suffice in a pinch, but two beach balls allow more than one group to wrestle with an incoming, imposing task. These beach balls should be inflated prior to the start of the class and kept behind the instructor's desk or lectern.
3. An electric air pump for inflating the beach balls.
4. Five or six small plush monkeys [Optional]. The monkeys can be used to illustrate the concept of 'reverse delegation' (Oncken & Wass, 1999).

### TABLE 2 REFLECTION EXERCISE: ARE YOU A SELF-LEADER?

"He that would govern others, first should be the master of himself." - Philip Massinger

The first step in being able to lead others is to lead yourself. People who have a well-developed ability to lead themselves tend to have self-awareness, self-control, self-motivation, an ability to work autonomously without constant guidance, and a sense of responsibility and initiative. All of these skills are needed to be effective employees, and they're definitely a prerequisite for being a leader. If you can't motivate yourself, how will you motivate others? The idea of self-management and self-leadership started with the ground breaking work of Manz and Sims in the 1980s. They considered it to be a type of substitute for (external) leadership: if employees are able to manage themselves, then there isn't a great need for someone to motivate, prod, or control them. More specifically, self-leadership includes three types of strategies:

1. Thinking strategies aimed at developing constructive, optimistic thoughts by replacing dysfunctional thought patterns with positive self-talk and mental imagery;
2. Behavioral strategies such as: (a) self-awareness and self-evaluation, which involves observing yourself and identifying behaviors that need to be modified; (b) setting goals that help you direct your future efforts, (c) developing rewards that motivate you to meet your goals; and (d) self-correcting feedback that refocuses any unproductive behavior in more positive directions; and
3. Natural rewards strategies that involve looking for the intrinsically enjoyable aspects of tasks.

How do you think you stack up? Is self-leadership something that you actively pursue, or do you find yourself being more passive, waiting for direction, inspiration, and motivation from someone else? When you're unmotivated, how do you deal with it? What do you do, if anything, to transform that sense of disinterest and indifference into enthusiasm and engagement?

Here's a simple exercise to help you get started on the self-leadership journey:

1. Describe a time when you experienced a significant stressful or negative experience in your life.
2. What did you say to yourself during this experience? In other words, what were your thoughts about the situation, yourself, and others who may have been involved?
3. How did you feel in the situation? Describe specific emotions that you were experiencing.
4. What did you do to deal with the experience? Describe your actions and reactions.
5. Now, were you to re-live this stressful experience:
  - a. What could you say to yourself that would be more empowering and constructive?
  - b. How would you prefer to feel in the experience? What could you do or what thoughts might help you transform negative emotions in positive or neutral emotions?
  - c. What can you do differently that would help you to be more personally effective in dealing with the situation?

## INSTRUCTOR PREPARATION

Prior to the class in which the exercise is being undertaken, we prepare all the materials, ensuring that the two beach balls are fully inflated, and that all materials are accessible. Since students tend to be curious about and potentially distracted by the materials, we begin the exercise as close to the start of class as possible. We also prepare a PowerPoint slide depicting The Ball Company's organizational structure, or we draw the organizational chart on a white board (see Figure 1). Finally, we decide which groups of students will represent a particular division in The Ball Company (for example, a group of six students at the front of the class to the right can serve as the Production division).

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR CARRYING OUT THE EXERCISE

**Introducing the exercise** - We introduce the exercise briefly, explaining that we will be doing an experiential exercise on the topic of self-leadership. If they are not already organized in groups, we ask students to form six groups of approximately equal size. We advise students to put away coffee cups or anything that might spill or even break throughout the duration of the exercise. [Optional: At this point, on occasion, we have sought volunteers to serve as observers. The advantage of this is that observers may be able to witness group dynamics while our attention is drawn elsewhere. However, student observers may feel excluded from the learning process.]

**Assigning groups to divisions** - We invite students to imagine that they are working for The Ball Company. We show and describe the organizational chart to them, and we indicate that we are the President of the organization. We then point to two groups of students and indicate that they form part of the Production division. We do the same for the remaining two divisions of The Ball Company. The groups that are assigned to the same division do not need to be located next to each other in the room. They are more likely to work together if they are located next each other, but this is not necessarily the case. Indeed, students' tendency to adhere to established structures (i.e., working only with the students in their original group prior to being assigned to a division) is a potential source of learning for students.

**Providing divisions with work instructions** – We then assign colors to each of the divisions so that they know the color of balls for which they will be responsible. For example,

we assign the color blue to Production, white to Administration, and red to Marketing. We tell the students that we will give them balls that match the colors of their divisions and then we announce: “Your task is simply to work. You work when you keep your balls in the air. You are responsible for the execution of your tasks. I'll give you 10 seconds so that you can practice keeping your balls in the air. Then, I'll give you five minutes to perform your tasks.” [Optional additional instructions: “Do not leave your division, and ensure that the work of another division doesn't get mingled with yours.”]

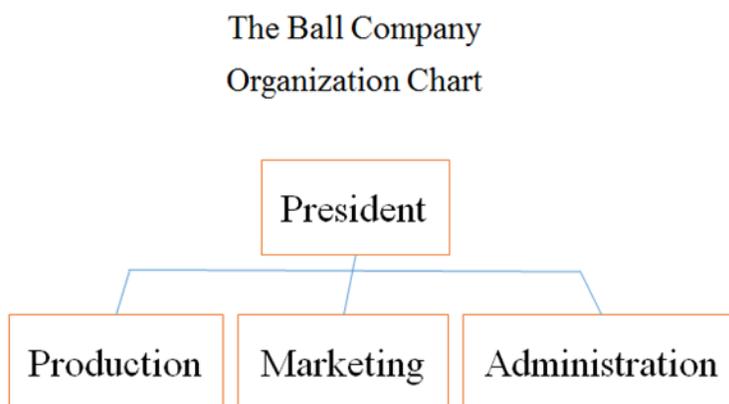
**Demonstrating how work is done** – We ask the students to stand so that they are facing the other members of their division. Then, we indicate that we will demonstrate how work is accomplished. We throw a ball to a student, ask the student to throw it back to us, and then we throw it back to the student.

**Carrying out the exercise** – First, we announce that there will be a practice learning period: we give each group one ball of the appropriate color, and we ask them to practice doing their work. When they appear to have mastered this step (in 10 seconds or so), we provide each group with one more ball, and then, after 10 seconds or so, another ball. Generally, by this time, the groups have determined how to do their work in an orderly manner. Next, we announce that the divisions may now start their work. For the next 30 seconds or so, we throw two more balls of an appropriate color to each group, and we allow them some time to reorganize themselves. Then, we start throwing the remaining balls to the groups, not paying attention to the color of the ball (for example, the Production division will receive white and red balls). We then throw the plush monkeys, one to each group, if available. Finally, we throw the beach balls to the two groups that are closest to us. Once the beach balls have been “in play” for one or two minutes, we tell the students that their work day is over. We ask the students to return the balls and monkeys to their storage bin and return to their seats.

## BEHAVIORS TYPICALLY OBSERVED DURING THE EXERCISE

Initially, group members are passing around one or two balls, and they appear to be bored since there is not enough work for them to do. When a couple more balls are directed at them, they seem more involved in the task, and they establish a steady work rhythm. Some groups spend some time planning their work, and they toss the balls to each other (once the receiver is facing them) in an orderly fashion. In other groups,

**FIGURE 1  
ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**



members are tossing the balls willy-nilly in any direction just to rid themselves of the balls. They do not pay attention to whether or not the person is ready to receive the balls. Some students may collect armfuls of balls and appear to be confused about what to do next. There seems to be an optimal number of balls, which, if surpassed, results in a frenzied atmosphere, particularly for groups that have not taken the time to plan their work. In most cases, the two groups that constitute a single division will not have fused and begun working together. If they do work together, the process of fusing (and changing their work process) is likely to be awkward till they determine how to do so. Usually, one group imposes their work process on the other group.

When groups receive balls belonging to another group, they will begin tossing those balls to other groups *indiscriminately*. However, some groups will simply ‘drop the ball’ and allow balls – regardless of their color - to accumulate at their feet. In part, this is their way of protesting against the heavy workload. Very few groups will throw balls back at the President or question the President about the workload, although they may comment to each other about the workload.

Although most students are laughing and seem to enjoy themselves, some may abstain from participating by standing apart from their group. If we have previously arranged for a student to pout and express other negative emotions, typically, this student’s group encourages him/her to enjoy and participate in the experience.

Once the monkeys are tossed to the groups, more often than not, students simply toss them to other groups. It is possible that the monkeys are not retained because they do not bear the group’s colors. Finally, when the beach balls are tossed, groups normally pass them on to other groups or they push them aside and carry on ‘doing their work’ with their appropriately-colored small splash balls. The introduction of the beach balls is usually accompanied by screams, laughter, and students yelling, “Let’s get rid of it!” as they pass the beach balls on to other groups. As with the monkeys, there is no sense of ownership toward the beach balls. The objective seems to get rid of them as quickly as possible. At the end of the exercise, the room is full of energy.

**DEBRIEFING THE EXERCISE**

Generally, debriefing entails posing questions that enable students to progress around the learning cycle (what happened, what did you do or see others do, what lessons have you learned, what are the broader implications of these lessons). In particular, after the EXPERIENCE, students are asked to REFLECT on their experience and then draw LESSONS and conclusions from the experience. Finally, students are

encouraged to consider relevant ACTIONS for improving self-leadership, given the foregoing. Below, we present some questions for debriefing this exercise. Given time constraints, instructors may wish to focus on a smaller subset of questions.

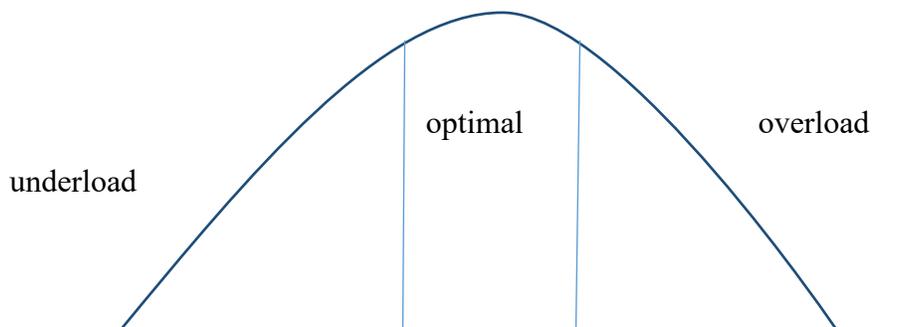
Q1 Managing Stress:

- (a) What was your experience of this exercise in terms of stress? Was it easier in the beginning? Did group members become stressed when there was a lot of work? (At the beginning of the exercise, we experienced an underload of work, we were bored, and we were left wondering how long we would be doing this exercise. Then, when more work in the form of balls came our way, we became challenged and interested in seeing how well we could complete the task. Finally, we were given too much work to do, an overload, and it became stressful. However, the exercise was easier when we all worked together to share the workload.)
- (b) What lessons can we draw from the experience in relation to stress management? (In part, this exercise illustrates the Forbes continuum (see Figure 2) that suggests that there is an optimal level of work that allows us to feel energetic rather than bored (in conditions of underload) or frenetic (in conditions of overload). It is at this middle *zone* where optimal levels of productivity exist. It is important that individuals be aware of where the boundaries of this middle zone start and finish so that they can determine what adjustments need to be made so that they manage their stress levels appropriately. This is especially the case for leaders who serve as role models for others. Since stressed supervisors tend to have stressed employees, it is important that leaders set a good example to their employees by being aware of their stress levels and being able to manage them accordingly. Finally, in part, this exercise illustrates the importance of managing one’s disposition; that one’s mood and attitude towards tasks can be a choice rather than a reaction.)

Q2 Managing priorities:

- (a) What might the small and large balls represent? How were the large balls handled? (The small balls might represent small day-to-day tasks, and the large balls might represent priority tasks. We were so comfortable with and preoccupied by the small balls that, when the large balls arrived, we all but ignored them. We threw the large balls to other groups and considered them to be a nuisance. In doing so, we lost our sense of what was most important.)

**FIGURE 2  
STRESS CONTINUUM**



- (b) What lessons can we draw from the experience in relation to priorities? (Because leaders are generally able to manage a heavy workload, they are often assigned a great deal of work. They need to be able to manage priorities and focus on important/urgent tasks, rather than unimportant tasks. This requires that they recognize priorities when they come their way and take some time to consider their best course of action.)

#### Q3 Delegation:

- (a) What was your experience of this exercise in terms of delegation? Was it hard for you and your group members to focus on your work when so many tasks were coming in your direction? Why did you accept all the work assigned to your group? (By sharing the workload within our group, we were able to effectively delegate work to each other. But, the President delegated too much work to us, and we accepted the work without hesitating or asking the President which tasks were of higher priority. We simply assumed that all assigned work was legitimate, but we should have given it more thought. In effect, by requiring us to assign work to other divisions, the President was delegating his/her responsibilities to us. We ended up with *monkeys on our backs*, so to speak.)
- (b) What lessons can we draw from the experience in relation to delegation? (Leaders shouldn't overload their employees with work. Prior to delegating work, they should ensure they are delegating to qualified employees and that employees are able to manage the delegated tasks appropriately. Moreover, leaders should follow up their delegation to ensure that employees are adequately managing the assigned tasks. At the same time, employees should exercise sufficient agency to be able to (politely) challenge the additional workload that is being delegated. The plush monkeys represent a type of reverse delegation (see Oncken & Wass, 1999), where individuals delegate elements of their own work to others. It is important that individuals understand the scope of their work so that they can effectively refuse the *monkey* that others want to put on their backs. However, leaders should be careful to not accept reverse delegation on the part of their employees.)

#### Q4 Coping with change:

- (a) What were your personal reactions when balls of various colors were introduced (initial reactions; the reactions afterwards)? (It was hectic at first, and, until we stopped to consider what to do, the workload continued to be overwhelming. We didn't know what to do, and we were just reacting. We felt ambushed. So, we generally, threw the balls to any other group just to get them out of our way. Sometimes, we just let the balls fall since they weren't our responsibility.)
- (b) How might this situation occur at the workplace? (In the workplace, if change is introduced too quickly, it can easily become overwhelming. Employees may simply give up or even react negatively and not take the time to understand what it means or how best to respond to it.)
- (c) If your group decided to merge with the other group in your division, how did this change process work? (We tended to pay attention to our immediate tasks without realizing that there was another group that formed part of our division. When we merged, it was chaos until one group proposed a

way of working that we could all agree upon.)

#### Q5 Ownership and responsibility:

- (a) Did any members of your group try to collect and take care of many balls at the same time (over-responsibility), or did everyone only take care of one ball (just tossing it up and catching it)? What happens in organizations if there is 'too much' personal ownership of work or not enough ownership? How can we develop ownership in a team setting?
- (b) Taking responsibility - What happened when the balls fell to the floor? Did members feel responsible for picking up the balls? Who was responsible for the management of your work? What happens when nobody takes responsibility? How might this happen in the workplace?
- (c) Taking initiative - Did you feel that there were too many constraints in the exercise? How do you feel when it was necessary to go out of your group's work zone to recuperate errant balls? Did you consider asking the President questions or suggesting changes in procedures? Did you consider speaking with members of other divisions? How does this sort of situation occur in the workplace?
- (d) Choosing and managing emotions and attitudes – What did you feel during this exercise? Were you motivated? Why/why not? What could you have done to feel more motivated? If you felt negative emotions, did you consider swapping them with other emotions that might be more functional and positive? Typically, it's our reactions to people and events in our environment that generate our emotions, rather than the people and the events themselves. This means that we can choose and, thus, control what we feel and think. Did you try to have fun? Is it important to have fun while working? What things can we could do to introduce more fun in the workplace?
- (e) What links can be made between this exercise and the reflection exercise assigned prior to the class? (While completing the reflection exercise, we had lots of time to consider appropriate alternative thoughts, feelings, and actions. The experiential exercise required that we manage our thoughts, feelings, and actions *on-the-spot*. The latter was more difficult to accomplish, but it reflects what we need to do in day-to-day life. We needed to be conscious of what we were thinking and feeling and how that was translating into our actions.)
- (f) What additional conclusions or lessons can we draw from this exercise in relation to self-leadership? (We can create better experiences for ourselves by:
- Managing our emotions and attitudes (being positive, putting things in perspective, seeing humor in potentially stressful situations, dealing with frustration, focusing what is important, adapting to changing situational needs, and disciplining or rewarding oneself as needed).
  - Motivating ourselves by creating challenges and finding pleasure in the task.
  - Being proactive rather than reactive or complacent (organizing ourselves and others to make best use of our energy and reduce stress; changing what we're doing if it's not working, engaging in problem solving; offering feedback, making suggestions).

- Taking responsibility and ownership (taking work seriously, being reliable, not letting things fall by the wayside, but not taking too much work on for ourselves).
- Considering the impact of our actions on others (seeing the wider picture; communicating rather than just thinking of our own needs and imposing wishes on others; setting boundaries with others).
- Developing self-awareness is extremely important. Peter Drucker (2005) proposed that managers engage in feedback analysis as a means of knowing themselves better. This process involves comparing expectations about how a situation may turn out with the results of our actions and decisions. He also argued that leaders should get to know themselves so well that they only put themselves in situations where they are using their strengths, rather than trying to work out of an area of weakness. Moreover, according to Drucker, leaders should have enough self-knowledge to be able to tell their superiors: “Here are my strengths, my

values, and the method by which I work. Here are the results you can expect from me.”

## CONCLUSION

The On the Ball experiential exercise has been used over a period of 10 years in undergraduate leadership classes. When reflecting on what they have learned throughout the semester in their learning journals, students often point to this exercise as an important source of learning. In particular, they discuss the need to stop and consider ‘in the moment’ how they are dealing with situations in which they find themselves. They describe how an automatism seems to have set in – regarding their reactions to situations and events, their engaging in activities and ‘working’ without taking the time to consider how they might best accomplish the tasks or even if it is within their responsibilities to accomplish it. In sum, this exercise reminds students that leadership begins with self-leadership.

## REFERENCES

- Andressen, P., Konradt, U., & Neck, C. P. (2011). The relation between self-leadership and transformational leadership: Competing models and the moderating role of virtuality. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 19(1) 68-82.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Breevaart, K., Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2014). Daily self-management and employee work engagement. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 84(1), 31-38.
- Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1981). The self-attention-induced feedback loop and social facilitation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 17(6), 545-568.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1980). The empirical exploration of intrinsic motivational processes. *Advances in experimental social psychology*, 13, 39-80.
- Drucker, P. F. (2005). Managing oneself. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(1), 100-109. [Reprint]
- Frayne, C. A., & Geringer, J. M. (2000). Self-management training for improving job performance: A field study among salespeople. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(3), 361-372.
- Hauschildt, K., & Konradt, U. (2012). The effect of self-leadership on work role performance in teams. *Leadership*, 8(2), 145-168.
- Houghton, J. D., & Jinkerson, D. L. (2007). Constructive thought strategies and job satisfaction: A preliminary examination. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 22(1), 45-53.
- Houghton, J. D., & Neck, C. P. (2002). The revised self-leadership questionnaire: Testing a hierarchical factor structure for self-leadership. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 17(8), 672-691.
- Houghton, J. D., Wu, J., Godwin, J. L., Neck, C. P., & Manz, C. C. (2012). Effective stress management: A model of emotional intelligence, self-leadership, and student stress coping. *Journal of Management Education*, 36(2), 220-238.
- Kerr, S., & Jermier, J. M. (1978). Substitutes for leadership: Their meaning and measurement. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 22(3), 375-403.
- Konradt, U., Andressen, P., & Ellwart, T. (2009). Self-leadership in organizational teams: A multilevel analysis of moderators and mediators. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 18, 322-346.
- Latham, G. P., & Frayne, C. A. (1989). Self-management training for increasing job attendance: A follow-up and replication. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 7, 411-416.
- Linman, D. (2011). Self-management skills for employees, or how to be a productive employee. Retrieved on December 20, 2016 from: <http://www.mymanagementguide.com/self-management-skills-for-employees-or-how-to-be-a-productive-employee/>
- Manz, C. C. (1986). Self-leadership: Toward an expanded theory of self-influence processes in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 11(3), 585-600.
- Manz, C.C., & Neck, C.P. (2004). *Mastering self-leadership: Empowering yourself for personal excellence* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Manz, C. C., & Sims, H. P. (1980). Self-management as a substitute for leadership: A social learning theory perspective. *Academy of Management Review*, 5(3), 361-367.
- Manz, C. C., and Sims, H. P. Jr. (1987): Leading workers to lead themselves. The external leadership of self-managing work teams, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 32, 106-129.
- Manz, C. C., & Sims, H. P. (1991). Superleadership: Beyond the myth of heroic leadership. *Organizational Dynamics*, 19(4), 18-35.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., Caruso, D. (2000). Emotional intelligence. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of intelligence* (2nd ed., pp. 396-421). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Neck, C., & Houghton, J. (2006). Two decades of self-leadership theory and research: Past developments, present trends, and future possibilities. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 21(4), 270-95.

- Neck, C. P., & Manz, C. C. (2010). *Mastering self-leadership: Empowering yourself for personal excellence* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice.
- Oncken Jr, W., & Wass, D. L. (1999). Management time: Who's got the monkey? *Harvard Business Review*, 77(6), 178-186. [Reprint]
- Phillips, J., Kern, D., Tiwari, J., Jones, K., & Carden, N. (2012). Self-leadership change project: An ongoing experiential program. *Advances in Business Research*, 3(1), 120-129.
- Prussia, G. E., Anderson, J. S., & Manz, C. C. (1998). Self-leadership and performance outcomes: The mediating influence of self-efficacy. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 19, 523-538
- Ross, S. (2014). A conceptual model for understanding the process of self-leadership development and action-steps to promote personal leadership development. *Journal of Management Development*, 33(4), 299-323.
- Schaetti, B., Ramsey, S., & Watanabe, G. (2008). *Making a world of difference: Personal leadership*. Seattle, WA: FlyingKite.
- Sims, H. P., & Manz, C. C. (1996). *Company of heroes: Unleashing the power of self-leadership*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Stewart, G. L., Courtright, S. H., & Manz, C. C. (2011). Self-leadership: A multilevel review. *Journal of Management*, 37, 185-222.
- Taylor, Nicole F. (2016). For business success, hire self-managing employees. Retrieved on December 20, 2016 from: <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/9233-self-managing-employees.html>