

Some people call it energy, some call it the vigorous activity of leadership. Whatever description used, it is clear that today, you must be ready emotionally and physically to be successful as a leader, says Rudi Plettinx.



Fit for the hard work of business

Recent research from the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) shows that regular exercise and effective leadership go hand-in-hand. CCL's research provides evidence that in addition to physical benefits such as reduced cholesterol, exercisers scored better than non-exercisers in all leadership categories – including organisation, credibility, leading others and authenticity.

management experience, who have leadership responsibility for 500 or more people and/or an executive staff function. Each LAP class typically has a high percentage of Chief Executives and other 'C' titles. The programme focuses exclusively on the demands of an organisation's most senior leaders. It guarantees a comfortable, secure environment in which to evaluate leadership style and effectiveness.

"It was interesting to observe the very different management styles and cultural perspectives represented at Leadership at the Peak in Europe," says Michael Kowal, Senior Vice President and Chief Supply Chain Officer for RadioShack Corporation. "Members of my class came from the US, the United Kingdom, India, Saudi Arabia and Belgium. The environment of the programme is intimate so you get to know people well."

Self-discovery, self-development and fitness activities take place against a backdrop of contemporary business themes. According to Allan Calarco, European Director of CCL Open Enrolment Programmes: "LAP pays attention to the full continuum of behaviours necessary for success, by emphasising the role that fitness and nutrition play as components in the successful leader."

The value of exercise for a leader's well-being has strong anecdotal support, but CCL felt that data-driven executives need more than testimonials to help convince them that exercise time is time well spent.

Dr McDowell-Larsen and her team wondered if they could demonstrate that regular and consistent exercise is related to ratings of leadership performance.

They divided the executives who attended LAP into two groups – those who were regular exercisers and those who were non-exercisers (including sporadic exercisers). They used '360-degree' assessment tools in which the individual executive and his/her bosses, direct reports and peers rate the executive on various leadership attributes.

When the two groups were compared, exercisers rated higher than their non-exercising counterparts on such things as inspiring commitment, credibility, leading others, leading by example, energy, resilience and calmness. The overall effectiveness score for the exercisers was also significantly higher than the score of those who did not exercise. In addition, there were no attributes where the exercisers were rated lower than the non-exercisers.

Another interesting finding was that consistent exercise seems to matter more than weight loss. Ms McDowell-Larsen and her team studied several fitness factors and compared them to leadership effectiveness. Levels of body fat made no difference in how leaders were rated by their bosses, peers and direct reports.

"Our findings don't negate the potential health detriments of excess body fat," says Ms McDowell-Larsen, "but given exercise limitations for busy executives, the focus of a fitness programme should be on regular exercise as opposed to trying to lose weight (or body-sculpt)."

Recent LAP participants in Europe confirm the benefits of fitness for today's business leader.

"The LAP fitness module provided a strong and compelling correlation between fitness and executive performance," says Peter Oosterveer of Fluor. "The LAP

"Executives who exercise are rated significantly higher on their leadership effectiveness than non-exercisers," says study author and former US Olympic Committee researcher Sharon McDowell-Larsen, PhD.

Dr McDowell-Larsen's research is based on interviews with hundreds of top level executives and managers who attend CCL's Leadership at the Peak (LAP) programme, held in a challenging mountain setting in Switzerland and Colorado.

Leadership at the Peak is for executives with 15-plus years of

fitness module offered what is missing in other programmes – unfortunately it is also missing in the life of many busy leaders."

LAP participants take away a 'portable exercise plan' after a one-to-one session with a fitness instructor. This plan typically includes more frequent or regular exercise, or adding new exercises to existing routines. The session also yields a nutritional plan, which for most LAP participants makes changes in their eating habits. Typical changes were eating breakfast, eating more fruits, vegetables and whole grains, eating less red meat and fewer snacks, and generally paying attention to food consumption.

Klaus Ries of BASF, who attended LAP in Davos in March 2006, observes: "The combination of leadership training with a fitness element made me aware of how strong the impact of physical health is not only on stamina and energy for the daily management

educational institution serving as an international resource for increasing the leadership capabilities of individuals and organisations. For more than three decades, CCL has dedicated itself to the understanding and development of effective leaders and leadership practices for the benefit of society worldwide through its research, programmes, and assessment products. CCL's European headquarters is in Brussels.

Fitting in exercise doesn't have to be complicated. You just have to be creative and flexible, and more importantly, make it a priority.

Here's how:

- *Do less, more often:* Shorter but more frequent bouts of exercise are effective and often easier to fit into busy, ever-changing schedules. Often the most successful routine is the one that is the most time efficient.
- *Get moving:* Given the sedentary

club access. If nothing else, pack a set of 'dynabands' (stretch cords for resistance training), a pair of running/walking shoes and a swimsuit (most hotels at least have a pool). It may take a while to make exercise a habit; however, in time it will become routine.

- *Be flexible:* Some executives find it impossible to work out the same time each day or week, but do well when they build in flexibility. Take advantage of an open slot in your calendar whenever it appears. If someone else keeps your calendar, have him or her schedule workouts for you.
- *Multi-task:* Combine exercise time with other activities. Use your daily walk, run or workout to think through your day and strategise about work matters. Listen to audio-books or language lessons if you feel the need to focus your mind as you exercise. Exercise with spouses or children. Finding



Davos, Switzerland

marathon but also on overall leadership success. I now see that physical fitness enhances presence, credibility and trust."


Organisations can reap the benefits of fitter executives. CCL's data suggest that time invested in regular exercise, even if it means spending less time at work, is correlated with higher ratings of leadership effectiveness. Balanced against the costs of inefficiency, stifled creativity, sick days, and exhaustion, these benefits look worth encouraging.

The Center for Creative Leadership is a not-for-profit,

nature of corporate life, creatively finding ways to increase activity throughout the day can help. Try walking while talking on the mobile phone, getting up from your desk to stretch, parking far from the door and taking the stairs rather than the elevator.

- *Keep track:* Set up an easy system to log your workouts. This serves as a reality check on how much or how little exercise you are getting. It can also help you set goals and stay motivated.
- *Take it on the road:* More and more executives are finding hotels with adequate fitness facilities or health

creative ways to combine exercise with other activities helps provide justification for the time spent exercising.

- *Motivate:* Think of your weekday workout routines as a way to stay strong and fit for weekend leisure activities. Staying healthy for skiing, surfing, playing racquet sports and keeping up with children can be big motivators. 

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Special features of Leadership at the Peak

An individual executive coach – Contact begins prior to the programme and continues via a confidential one-to-one feedback session during the programme.

CCL's innovative Peak Selection Simulation – Participants take part in an activity that replicates the leader selection process.

Public Image module – a simulated television interview that allows participants to focus on your public image and improve your communication skills.

Fitness evaluation – LAP focuses on the full continuum of behaviours necessary for leadership success, emphasising the role that fitness and nutrition play. Participants receive a fitness evaluation and tailored recommendations for making 'fitting fitness' into a busy executive schedule.

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