



DOING THE HARD WORK

The hardest work of leadership is often the work within.

Do the Next Important Thing

Leadership gets built by knowing what matters, understanding what holds you back, and taking the next step anyway

There are days when leadership feels strategic. You are thinking about the future, building something new, or solving an interesting problem. And then there are Tuesdays. The proposal needs finished. The employee conversation needs to happen. The customer needs called. The numbers need reviewed. The decision needs made.

A surprising amount of leadership comes down to something less glamorous than vision: **figure out the next important thing, focus on it, do it, learn, and keep moving.** Not perfectly. Not after every possible outcome has been analyzed. Not when you finally feel motivated. But faithfully, consistently, and well enough to make progress.

1 Figure out what actually needs to be done

Being busy is not the same as doing important work. It is easy to spend a day answering email, returning calls, solving other people's problems, researching, organizing, and checking things off a list - while the one thing that really needed your attention remains untouched. Sometimes we do not lack discipline. **We lack clarity.** Ask a simpler question: What actually needs to happen next? The ability to distinguish the important from the merely available, urgent, or comfortable is part of leadership.

ASK YOURSELF: If I could accomplish only one meaningful thing today, what would most improve the situation in front of me?

2 Pay attention to what you are avoiding - and ask why

Sometimes you know exactly what needs to be done and still are not doing it. The difficult conversation moves to next week. You research instead of launching. You do ten small tasks instead of looking at the financial problem. Sometimes procrastination is not really a time-management problem. **It is protection.** You may be avoiding failure, rejection, conflict, embarrassment, disappointing someone, losing money, being wrong, or even succeeding and becoming responsible for something bigger. Acknowledge the fear. Name it. Understand what it is trying to protect you from. Then decide whether it deserves to make the decision.

ASK YOURSELF: What am I avoiding right now - and what am I afraid might happen if I actually do it?

3 Stay with the important thing long enough to move it

A difficult task creates friction. So you check email, think about another project, research one more thing, pick up your phone, or start improving a part of the work that was not actually the problem. Twenty minutes later, you have been busy without really moving. Focus requires repeatedly bringing yourself back to the thing you already decided mattered. You do not have to eliminate every distraction. You have to get better at noticing when you have wandered away - and **returning to the work.**

ASK YOURSELF: Once I know what matters, can I stay with it long enough to create meaningful progress?



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4 Do not let overthinking or perfectionism become avoidance

Thinking, preparation, and quality matter. But sometimes what looks like high standards is actually **fear wearing respectable clothes**. 'I need to think about it more.' 'It is not quite ready.' 'I need a little more information.' Those statements can be legitimate - or they can protect us from being judged, hearing no, making a choice, or discovering what happens when we finally act. Ask what additional information or improvement would actually change the outcome. Good leadership is not careless, but it also does not require certainty before action. **Get it good enough. Make the decision. Take the step. Learn from reality.**

ASK YOURSELF: Is my desire to make this better actually improving the outcome - or helping me postpone the moment when I have to act?

5 Shorten the distance between knowing and doing

Most leaders have a gap between what they know and what they do. You know the conversation needs to happen, which customer needs called, which project needs killed, or which opportunity deserves pursuit. Execution disciplines such as EOS emphasize surfacing issues, deciding, and moving toward action rather than allowing important matters to remain unresolved. The deeper principle is simple: **the shorter the distance between recognizing reality, making a sound decision, and acting on it, the faster you learn and move forward**. Consider the consequence, gather the input that matters, decide, act, learn, and adjust.

ASK YOURSELF: Where in my life or leadership do I already know what needs to happen - but have not yet acted?

The Work Is Often Less Complicated Than We Make It

There is a temptation to believe progress requires a breakthrough: more motivation, a better system, greater confidence, perfect clarity, or the right opportunity. Sometimes it does. But much of meaningful progress is less dramatic.

KNOW	NOTICE	CHOOSE	DO	LEARN	REPEAT
What matters?	What am I avoiding?	Does fear decide?	Take the step	What did reality teach?	Keep moving

Courage is acknowledging what you fear without automatically allowing it to decide what you do next.

Know what matters. Notice what is holding you back. Choose whether that fear deserves authority. Do the work. Get it good enough. Learn what happens. Then return tomorrow and do the next important thing.

THE HARD WORK TEST

CLARITY - What actually matters right now? What is the next meaningful outcome - not simply the easiest available task?

FEAR - What am I avoiding? What am I afraid might happen if I take the step I already know needs taken?

FOCUS - Am I working on it? Or have I found something more comfortable to occupy my attention?

ACTION - What physical action moves this forward? Make the call. Write the first paragraph. Schedule the meeting. Review the numbers. Send the proposal.

STANDARD - How good does this actually need to be? What level of quality is appropriate for the consequence?

DECISION - What am I waiting for? Is there information I genuinely need - or am I delaying a decision I already know enough to make?

Then ask one final question: What is the next important thing I can actually do? Do that. Then ask the question again.

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The hardest work of leadership is often the work within. Leadership requires learning to manage your own attention, avoidance, expectations, decision-making, and willingness to act.

You do not have to feel fearless, completely certain, or perfectly prepared. You need enough clarity to recognize the next important thing, enough honesty to understand what is holding you back, and enough courage to take the next step anyway.

AgStrat works with founders and leaders who are building both stronger organizations and the personal capacity required to lead them. To begin a confidential conversation, contact AgStrat at virgil@agstratsolutions.com.

Clarity | Discipline | Growth | Leadership | Stewardship