2 THE CONTEXT OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

Mapping the Route

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

2.1 Explain how our behavioral choices largely shape the world in which we live and yet are also shaped by the world in terms of factors such as rewards, laws, and rules.

2.2 Understand how behavior takes place at two levels, an observable physical level and an unobservable mental level, and how self-leadership strategies influence behavior at both levels.

2.3 Recognize how we as persons, our behavior, and our world are closely related and have important influences on one another.

2.4 Describe how the practice of self-leadership is affected by our unique tendencies.

2.5 Recognize that we choose our own behavior.

What do Elon Musk, founder of SpaceX and cofounder of PayPal and Tesla Motors, and Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple, have in common? In addition to being groundbreaking entrepreneurs, both have been described as possessing the ability to create a "reality distortion field." Reality distortion field? Yes! Inspired by a *Star Trek* episode in which aliens create a new world by mental force, the term was first used in relation to Steve Jobs in the early 1980s by Apple employee Bud Tribble. "In his presence, reality is malleable," Tribble explained to colleague Andy Hertzfield. "He can convince anyone of practically anything."[1] Apple cofounder Steve Wozniak further described the phenomenon: "[Jobs's] reality distortion is when he has an illogical vision of the future, such as telling me that I could design the Breakout game in just a few days. You realize that it can't be true, but he somehow makes it true."[2] The ability to create a reality distortion field helped Jobs dramatically shape the future of how people use phones and listen to music, despite how implausible that future may have seemed back then. As Sir John Hargrave has explained, "Steve Jobs's 'reality distortion field' was a personal refusal to accept limitations that stood in the way of his ideas, to convince himself that any difficulty was surmountable. This 'field' was so strong that he was able to convince others that they, too, could

achieve the impossible. It was an internal reality so powerful it also became an external reality. Whatever you may say about Jobs, he was a master mind hacker."[3]

Elon Musk seems to have a similar vision of the future and the ability to project a similar reality distortion field.[4] "Elon's version of reality is highly skewed," stated an anonymous Internet user purporting to be a SpaceX engineer. "If you believe that a task should take a year then Elon wants it done in a week."[5] Much like Jobs before him, Musk is revolutionizing how we drive, with his electric car company Tesla, and space technology, with his aerospace manufacturing company SpaceX. As *Wall Street Journal* writer Rolfe Winkler has noted, "Skepticism is the natural response. But each time Mr. Musk delivers a better, less-expensive electric car or launches another rocket successfully, he proves his doubters wrong."[6] More recently, Musk acquired the iconic social media platform Twitter, rebranding it as X. The story of Elon Musk is an interesting but cautionary tale of self-leadership. On one hand, Musk is a striking example of how one person can lead themselves to do world-changing things. On the other hand, it is also a story that warns us that we need to make sure the deeper values that form the foundation for our self-influence (the "Why?" for our self-leadership) are at least as solid as the personalized strategies we apply to lead ourselves. The verdict is still out on Musk's legacy—his controversial actions and behaviors are well documented,[7] but it remains clear that Musk has led himself to do things never done before.

A number of years ago, Charles Manz, a member of our author team, worked as a retail clothing salesperson during a Christmas holiday break from college. He recalled the following incident:

> One particularly hectic day, I observed a woman, amid a mob of customers, looking through piles of casual slacks. She was obviously frustrated and grumbled as she worked her way through the piles. I had been straightening the pants between helping what seemed to be an endless onslaught of customers, and I noted that the woman's method of searching was, much to my dismay, essentially to destroy slacks by throwing them on the floor or stuffing them in other piles as she continued her search. Finally, she turned to a customer nearby and commented, in obvious displeasure, that the slacks were in a totally disorganized mess, and she could not find the size she needed. At this point, being a bit tired and irritable myself and having watched her undo a substantial amount of my work, I turned to her and said, "You know why they're a mess, don't you?" She looked at me, obviously surprised, thought for a few moments, and then said, "I suppose because of impatient, pushy ladies like me."

Many of us practice the same kind of behavior throughout our lives, and unfortunately, it often concerns considerably more important matters. For example, the way we behave toward others largely determines how they behave toward us. We can alienate people and then complain (as the woman did in the clothing store) about the mess our relationships are in. It is important to realize, however, that we do have an impact on our world just as it has an impact on us. We change the world by being alive. We breathe the air, we take up space, we consume limited food resources, and so on.

We may even bring out hostility in others by being alive. Charles Manz recalled quite vividly another experience that he had when he was about 16 years old:

> I was walking down a long hall in my high school, thinking of nothing in particular, when I heard an exasperated sigh behind me. I turned to receive a lethal look from a girl in my class and to hear the words "Would you get out of my way?" snapped at me. It turned out that this young lady wanted to walk faster than I and had tried several times (unsuccessfully, given the crowd of students in the hall) to pass me. By the time I realized that she was competing for my physical space, my existence as a living being had already made her angry.

Most of us probably can offer similar examples of experiences in crowded restaurants or traffic jams.

We have little control over the impact we have on the world in cases such as these. What is of greater importance is the behavior that we freely choose to practice. What we choose to do with our lives and how we go about accomplishing our chosen ends will largely shape the relevant world in which we live. To help you appreciate the importance of this idea, we need to address several issues. We start by examining some of the conceptual foundations of self-leadership before we turn to a discussion of the substantial impact the world has on us.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

As we mentioned at the end of Chapter 1, the concept of self-leadership is based on a well-established foundation of research and theory from the field of psychology, including self-regulation theory, social cognitive theory, self-management, intrinsic motivation theory, and positive psychology. In this section, we provide a brief overview of each of these theories and how they relate to the theoretical context in which self-leadership takes place. We then explain how self-leadership goes beyond these basic underlying theoretical contexts to provide a higher degree of individual self-influence.

Self-regulation theory suggests that people regulate their behavior through a process that is similar to the way a mechanical thermostat works.[8] A thermostat senses temperature differences relative to a temperature setting and then signals the furnace (or air-conditioner) to produce warm (or cool) air to reduce the discrepancy. In much the same way, self-regulation theory suggests people monitor their behavior relative to a set standard or desired state. If there is a deficit between a person's actual level of performance and the standard, then the person will adjust their effort and attempt to change the behavior to improve the performance and eliminate the difference.

Within self-regulation theory, standards are largely taken for granted, and little attention is paid to where such standards originate. For example, in an organization, standards for employee behavior are often determined and assigned by managers based on existing organizational policies, rules, and procedures. On a continuum ranging from complete external to complete internal influence, basic self-regulatory processes tend to fall closer to the external influence end.

Social cognitive theory also proposes a self-regulatory system involving self-monitoring and behavioral reactions.[9] However, in contrast to self-regulation theory, which focuses primarily on processes of discrepancy reduction, social cognitive theory involves a dual-control system of both discrepancy production and discrepancy reduction. This theory assumes that people have greater influence over establishing their own performance objectives. Based on their past behavioral experiences, people set goals in ways that create discrepancies, which then result in behaviors and effort aimed at reducing the discrepancies. After the goals are obtained and the discrepancies are eliminated, people tend to set even higher standards, and the process of discrepancy reduction is repeated.

Social cognitive theory suggests that two important self-influence processes help motivate people to achieve their goals. The first is the *triadic reciprocal model of behavior*, which suggests that human behavior is best explained by external factors relating to the world in which we live, internal personal factors, and the behavior itself. We will discuss these external and personal factors and how they interact to help shape our behaviors in greater detail later in the chapter. The second important self-influence process is *self-efficacy*, which is, in essence, our level of effectiveness in dealing with our world. More specifically, our perceptions of our own ability to deal successfully with and overcome situations and challenges we face in life can have a major impact on our performance. Available evidence indicates that our self-efficacy judgment influences the activities we choose to undertake or avoid, how much effort we expend, and how long we persist in the face of difficult situations. Low self-efficacy judgments (e.g., belief that we lack the ability to deal with a difficult challenge) can lead to mental exaggeration of our own deficiencies and the potential hazards of difficult situations. This, in turn, can lead to anxiety and stress, which can detract from our performance. For example, we can too easily focus on obstacles and potential failure rather than on opportunities and potentially successful alternative courses of action.

Perceptions of self-efficacy can indeed have important influence on our personal effectiveness, but from where do our self-efficacy judgments come? They stem from several sources. One of these is our *observation* of the performance of others and their successes and failures. If we observe others with whom we can reasonably identify as they successfully overcome a particular challenge (e.g., earn a college degree, learn to skydive), our own self-efficacy judgments concerning the type of challenge involved should be enhanced. Another source is verbal *persuasion*. An inspiring speech by an athletic coach or a boss at work sometimes can convince us that we can succeed and move us to execute the action necessary to do so. A third source of self-efficacy judgments is our perception of our *physical reactions* to a situation. If we feel calm and relaxed in the face of a challenge, for example, we are more likely to judge ourselves capable of overcoming the challenge than if we feel anxious and stressful.

All of these sources of self-efficacy perceptions are important, and insight into them provides us with useful knowledge for enhancing our personal effectiveness. If we seek out people with whom we can identify (people we believe are reasonably equal to us in ability), who use their talents well and overcome challenges they face, we provide ourselves with a good source for developing positive judgments of our own self-efficacy. Similarly, purposefully exposing

ourselves to constructive verbal persuasion and gaining control over our physical reactions to difficulties can help us improve our self-perceptions, which in turn should facilitate our performance. The most important source of perceptions of self-efficacy, however, is even more basic. It is simply our own *performance history*. If we experience success in difficult situations, our perceptions of our self-efficacy will improve. If we experience failure, they will be undermined.

Although everyone engages in the self-regulatory processes described by self-regulation and social cognitive theories, not everyone is an effective self-regulator. Goal-setting research pioneers Gary Latham and Ed Locke have noted that "although people are natural self-regulators in that goal-directedness is inherent in the life process, they are not innately effective self-regulators."[10] Some researchers have even used the term *self-regulatory failure* to describe extreme dysfunction or breakdown in self-regulatory processes.[11] In response, the concept of self-management has been proposed to help people be more effective self-regulators. *Self-management* is a process through which people apply a set of behavioral strategies in an effort to manage their behaviors in terms of reducing discrepancies from established standards.[12] Self-management, however, generally does not involve any assessment of the standards themselves. Consequently, although self-management is concerned with *how* discrepancy reduction should be approached, it allows for little self-influence regarding *what* should be done and *why*. On a continuum ranging from complete external to complete internal influence, self-management tends to fall in the middle.
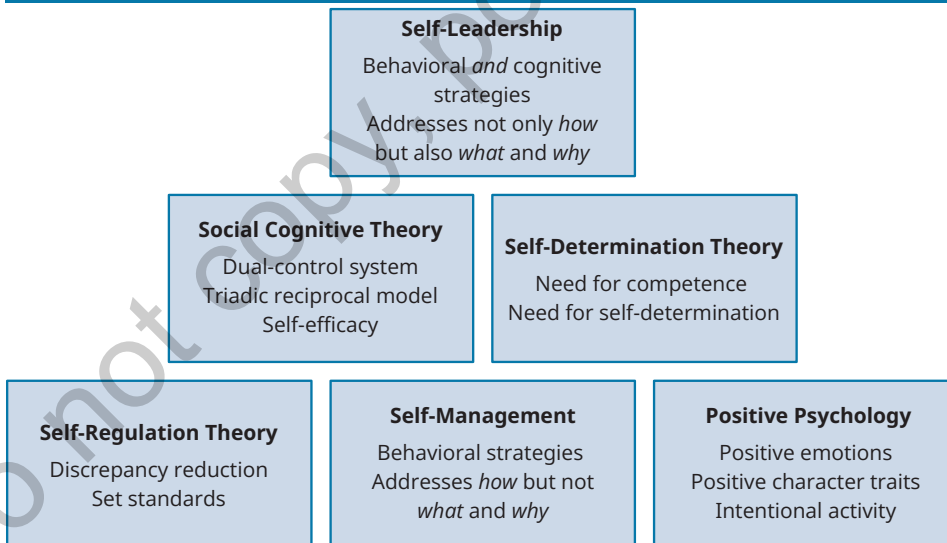
Self-leadership, in contrast, provides a broader and more encompassing approach to self-influence.[13] Self-leadership involves not only behavior-focused strategies (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3) but also cognitive strategies founded on intrinsic motivation theory (addressed in Chapter 4) and constructive thought processes (expanded upon in Chapter 5). Thus, self-leadership encompasses a more comprehensive set of strategies that addresses not only *what* should be done (the standards and objectives) and *why* it should be done (strategic analysis) but also *how* it should be done. On our continuum of self-influence, self-leadership falls more toward the complete internal influence end.

One of the primary ways in which self-leadership extends beyond the basic self-regulatory and self-management perspectives is by incorporating a focus on the natural rewards that result from engaging in a given task or activity. Here self-leadership draws from intrinsic motivation theory and more specifically self-determination theory. *Self-determination theory* suggests that the needs for competence and self-determination are primary mechanisms for enhancing intrinsic or natural motivation derived from a task or activity itself.[14] The need for competence encompasses the need to exercise and extend one's capabilities. The need for self-determination consists of the need to feel freedom from the pressures often created by contingent rewards. In short, self-determination theory suggests that people will seek out and attempt to overcome challenges to increase their feelings of competence and self-determination. We will address the self-leadership concept of natural rewards in more detail in Chapter 4.

Finally, self-leadership is informed by ideas from the growing field of positive psychology. Prior to World War II, the general field of psychology was concerned with three broad

areas: treating mental illness, making people's lives more fulfilling and productive, and nurturing exceptional talent. After the war, the field narrowed its focus almost exclusively to the treatment of mental illness and with impressive results: at least 14 previously misunderstood or poorly treated disorders can now be cured or relieved with contemporary techniques.[15] More recently, however, another perspective has emerged within the field that has refocused attention on improving people's lives and nurturing individual capabilities. *Positive psychology* is a broad term that refers to the study of positive emotions (including happiness, gratitude, and fulfillment) and positive character traits (such as optimism, resilience, and character strengths).[16] One important finding from the field of positive psychology is that a substantial portion (estimates suggest around 40 percent) of an individual's happiness and well-being is determined by intentional activity—over and above the effects of external circumstances (estimates suggest about 10 percent) and each individual's *set point* or predisposition toward happiness (estimates suggest close to 50 percent).[17] By definition, an individual's set point is a constant and therefore unchanging, and external circumstances are largely beyond the individual's control. This suggests that intentional activity, which can include shaping behaviors and changing cognitive attitudes and processes, is critical in determining a person's happiness and well-being. Self-leadership strategies are designed to result in intentional activities that can help people reshape their behavior and cognitive processes to be more positive and productive. See Figure 2.1 for a visual summary of the conceptual foundations of self-leadership.

FIGURE 2.1 ■ Conceptual Foundations: The Building Blocks of Self-Leadership

Self-Leadership
Behavioral *and* cognitive strategies
Addresses not only *how* but also *what* and *why*

Social Cognitive Theory
Dual-control system
Triadic reciprocal model
Self-efficacy

Self-Determination Theory
Need for competence
Need for self-determination

Self-Regulation Theory
Discrepancy reduction
Set standards

Self-Management
Behavioral strategies
Addresses *how* but not *what* and *why*

Positive Psychology
Positive emotions
Positive character traits
Intentional activity

Now that we have examined the theoretical contexts in which self-leadership operates, we turn our attention to a more detailed discussion of the external and personal factors that influence how we choose and shape our own behaviors.

SELF-LEADERSHIP RESEARCH

Is Self-Leadership a Unique Concept?

As discussed in this chapter, self-leadership is rooted in other established theories of motivation and self-influence, including social cognitive theory, self-regulation, and goal-setting theories. This has caused some researchers to question whether self-leadership is a unique concept relative to personality concepts such as conscientiousness and related psychological processes such as self-regulation.[18] However, in a study of 374 professionals with leadership experience, researchers found that self-leadership was distinct from the related classic motivational concepts of need for achievement, self-regulation, and self-efficacy.[19] Furthermore, this study found that self-leadership predicted job performance over and above the effects of these motivational concepts (i.e., incremental validity). More recently, another study with a sample of 408 full-time working adults yielded similar results,[20] showing that self-leadership predicted unique variance across a variety of job performance dimensions and providing additional evidence that self-leadership predicts job performance beyond the influence of personality and self-regulatory traits. Finally, one additional study involving 157 graduate students participating in a self-leadership training intervention as part of a larger professional development program found that self-leadership predicted distinctive variance in educational performance beyond the effects of Big Five personality traits.[21] These findings suggest that self-leadership is a unique and valuable concept with the potential for improving individual effectiveness beyond other foundational concepts of motivation and self-influence.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

The world we live in influences what we do with ourselves on a day-to-day basis and can largely shape our ultimate destiny in life. Considerable evidence gathered from many different organizations has revealed the important impact that being rewarded has on chosen actions.[22] In fact, one author has gone so far as to describe "the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B," suggesting that what we are rewarded for is the type of behavior we are likely to use, even if some other behavior is more desirable.[23] The point is that we respond to what we experience and especially to what we receive for our efforts.

PROFILES IN SELF-LEADERSHIP

Sarah Blakely

Self-leadership is a fundamental aspect of entrepreneurship, which often requires individuals to exhibit a high level of self-awareness, initiative, and resilience. The success story of Sara Blakely, the founder of SPANX, stands as a testament to the power of self-leadership strategies in helping entrepreneurs launch and grow a successful business.

Blakely's journey showcases how her abilities to overcome obstacles persist in the face of setbacks, and visualizing success has enabled her to transform a simple idea into a global empire that revolutionized the hosiery industry through the creation of SPANX.

With a background in sales, Blakely identified a gap in the hosiery market after dealing with the frustration and discomfort of visible panty lines. "I simply wanted to wear white pants to a party and have nothing show underneath it," she explained. She was convinced that she could create a product that would revolutionize the industry and empower women to feel more confident in their clothing. Blakely's first attempt to pitch her SPANX idea to hosiery manufacturers that were primary operated by men was met with rejection after rejection. Rather than giving up, she used these rejections as opportunities to refine her pitch and improve her product. She learned from her father that failure is not something to be feared. "Growing up, he would ask us what we failed at that week. If we didn't have something, he would be disappointed. It changed my mindset at an early age that failure is not the outcome; failure is not trying. Don't be afraid to fail," she once explained in an interview.

Blakely admitted on an episode of the *Oprah Winfrey Show* that she nearly gave up on SPANX after the first year of failures and setbacks, but she asked the universe for a sign that she should keep trying. Later that day, she saw Oprah on television saying that she often cuts off the bottoms of her pantyhose when wearing sandals. After that, Blakely was more determined than ever to make a success of SPANX in spite of the consistent rejections. Later, in a sales meeting with a Neiman Marcus buyer, Blakely, realizing that the woman wasn't grasping the concept of SPANX, stopped the meeting and asked the buyer to follow her into the bathroom. Blakely went into a stall, put on a pair of SPANX, and captured an important sale by demonstrating the difference that SPANX made.

Perhaps most important to Blakely's success was her ability to visualize successful outcomes. As she once described it, "I had a very clear vision of what my life was going to be like. . . . My snap photo was to be self-employed, invent a product that I could sell to lots of people . . . and create a business for myself that would continue to fund itself if I wasn't present." Through visualizations such as these, Blakely created a road map for self-setting goals that would help turn her visions into reality. She truly believed that she could shape her world through the choices she made, that through her efforts she could make her dreams come true. "The difference between people who achieve their dreams and those who don't is simple. It's about action," she explained in an Instagram post. "It's not about having a ton of brains or ton of money or a ton of experience. Two decades ago, I was just a girl with a crappy day job and a crazy idea. I didn't have a ton of money, experience, or knowledge of the industry. But I decided to go for it."

Sources/Additional Readings

Miller, Hannah L., "Sara Blakely: 7 Life Lessons from the Founder of SPANX," Leaders.com, November 18, 2021, https://leaders.com/articles/women-in-business/sara-blakely-spanx/

Locke, Taylor, "Spanx CEO Sara Blakely: People Who 'Achieve Their Dreams' Have This Trait—'It's Not about Having Brains, Money or Experience'," CNBC, November 24, 2020, http s://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/24/spanx-sara-blakely-people-who-achieve-their-dreams-ha ve-this-trait.html#:~:text='%20I%20could%20have%20kept%20dreaming,what%20made% 20all%20the%20difference.%E2%80%9D&text=Why%20Spanx%20founder%20Sara%20Bl akely,and%20family%20for%20a%20year

Wetzel, Charlie, and Stephanie Wetzel, *The Spanx Story: What's Underneath the Incredible Success of Sara Blakely's Billion Dollar Empire* (HarperCollins Leadership: October 27, 2020).

Being rewarded for what we do can influence what we choose to do in the future. This is because rewards provide us with information concerning what leads to positive or negative results and incentive to do what is rewarded. We are more likely to do in the future those things that we anticipate will lead to desirable results and not do those things we expect to lead to negative results. This logic is simple and widely supported by research.[24]

Many influences affect our daily living. Laws place limits on our choices, as do rules that we must follow to function within organizations. If we violate these limits, negative results are likely to follow, such as getting traffic tickets or being dismissed from our jobs. The intention of this book is not to suggest that external influences such as these are not important; rather, it is to emphasize the importance of the role we play in determining the external influences that will be relevant to us as well as the importance of the influences that we place on ourselves directly. The world does have an impact on our lives, but we are in no way helpless pawns.

PERSONAL FACTORS

Each person is unique. We all possess certain qualities, ways of thinking, and so forth that help determine how we see the world and what we do with our lives. To understand fully our own self-leadership practices, we must recognize the importance of what we are and how we think about things. One common way of understanding our unique qualities is in terms of *personality differences*. Frameworks such as the Big Five Model and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) can help people understand their tendencies for thought and actions.[25] For example, some people are more extraverted, which means that they are energized by the external world of people and things. In contrast, introverts are energized by the internal world of ideas and concepts. Both can find ways to capitalize on their unique personality characteristics to help positively shape their behaviors. Another effective way of understanding our uniqueness to shape our behaviors is by acknowledging and applying our *personal strengths*. Two widely used frameworks are Gallup's CliftonStrengths and the VIA Character Strengths, which both suggest that people can be more effective and successful by learning about and applying their top strengths.[26] For example, a person whose top strength is "discipline" benefits from order, routine, and structure, whereas a person whose top strength is "context" enjoys looking at the past to find answers for shaping the present.

This book is particularly concerned with how individual differences such as these affect the actions we choose. For the present, however, rather than going into greater depth about the abstract concepts of personal strengths and personality differences (which we will do in Chapter 8), a more workable approach is simply to deal with individual behaviors. A broad view of the concept of behavior is helpful for an understanding of self-leadership. Behavior takes place at both an observable physical level and an unobservable mental level. In fact, the events that come before behavior and the results of behavior take place at these same physical and mental levels. Thus, complex chains of behavioral influence take place. This idea is represented pictorially in Figure 2.2. For example, imagine a person who thinks about the joys of trout fishing and decides to skip work that day to go fishing but later feels guilty. This example includes a mental event (thinking about fishing) that comes before and influences an actual physical behavior

(skipping work). The physical behavior is followed by a mental result (guilt), which is likely to discourage similar behavior in the future.

FIGURE 2.2 ■ Mental and Physical Levels of Influence
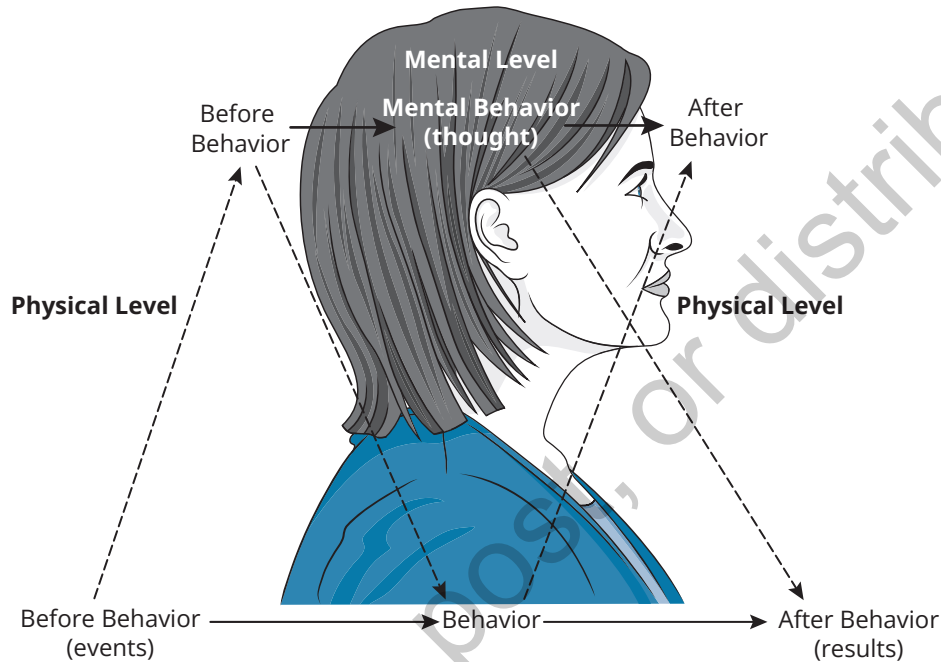
COMBINING THE TWO LEVELS: THE PRACTICE OF SELF-LEADERSHIP

The way we practice self-leadership is affected by our unique strengths, personalities, and tendencies in terms of our resulting thinking patterns and physical action. We can lead ourselves to desired accomplishments by effectively combining these two levels of influence in a proactive way.

An athlete's cereal box endorsement serves to illustrate these ideas. Mikaela Shiffrin is an alpine ski racer and a member of the U.S. Ski Team. She is a two-time Olympic, 15-time World Cup, and seven-time World Championships champion in the slalom, giant slalom, super-G, and combined events. In fact, she became the youngest Olympic slalom champion in history when she captured her first gold medal at the age of 18. Following her victory, Shiffrin's image appeared on the front of a cereal box with the caption "Breakfast of Champions." One might conclude from this statement that Shiffrin's motivation for training centers on winning Olympic gold medals or becoming a world champion women's slalom skier. In actuality, if she had thrown herself into training through force of will, basing her motivation only on the reward of taking gold at the Olympics or winning a world championship, what she would actually have

gotten would have been physical and mental pain, cramps, sore legs, exhaustion, and other consequences that most of us would not view as rewarding at all. Victory in the prestigious Olympic slalom and giant slalom races is a worthy pursuit, but a great deal of self-leadership is needed to carry a person through the sacrifices necessary to reach that final destination.

Physical and mental forces are involved in maintaining such a level of motivation. For example, Shiffrin competed in World Cup and World Championship events, winning awards and recognition on the way to winning her Olympic gold medals. She also probably mentally pictured the moment of victory—arms raised as she crossed the finish line—and perhaps doing cereal endorsements if she chose to do so. By taking actions (mental and physical) such as these, she maintained the necessary level of motivation to complete the difficult training to become an Olympic champion.

This example highlights the importance of achieving the level of motivation needed to make difficult sacrifices. We will discuss this type of self-leadership more fully in the next chapter. Self-leadership also can capitalize on the attractiveness of doing things that we like to do (for Mikaela Shiffrin, it might be the natural enjoyment she gains from alpine skiing). We will address this aspect of self-leadership in Chapter 4. First, however, in the next section we deal with the mutual influence among persons, their behavior, and their world—and especially the importance of the choices we make.

WE DO CHOOSE

As we noted earlier in our discussion of social cognitive theory's triadic reciprocal model, we as persons, our behavior, and the world in which we live are closely related. Each of these factors has important influence on the others. For example, our behavior helps determine what we will be faced with in our world. If our actions generally contribute to the well-being of those with whom we interact, positive forces for a more favorable, relevant world are put into motion. By taking such actions, we can help ensure the personal security and happiness of others and also increase the likelihood of their being supportive of us. In contrast, if our actions are strictly for our own benefit at the cost of others, we might get what we want in the short run, but in doing so we create a hostile world in which we must live in the longer run. Ebenezer Scrooge creates this sort of hostile world for himself in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.

The world's influence on our behavior is also important, as noted earlier in this chapter. Thus, our behavior and our world influence one another. Indeed, Scrooge takes actions that largely create the hostile world he experiences, and this likely brings out more hostility in Scrooge. A vicious cycle of influence is set in motion, and eventually Scrooge's own behavior breaks the cycle only after the appearance of frightening ghosts prompts him to change his behavior.

A final factor that needs to be included to complete the influence picture is ourselves. Because this book is concerned with behavior as a workable focus for improving our own self-leadership, a useful way of viewing ourselves is in terms of behavioral predispositions. That is, the concern is not with elusive ideas like "good attitudes" or "bad attitudes" but instead with our behavioral tendencies (physical and mental). This viewpoint is represented by questions

such as "How do we tend to react to certain types of situations?" and "How do we think about problems?" Such tendencies influence how we behave and how we view the world. The world is more a product of the way we see it than what it is in any concrete sense. As Hamlet observed in Shakespeare's famous play, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Our behavioral tendencies or predispositions are greatly influenced by what we experience, such as praise from our fellow humans for certain types of behaviors. They are also influenced by past behaviors. Most of us, for example, tend to develop habits and patterns in our conduct. In addition, it has been suggested that if we change our behaviors, changes in us as persons (attitudes) will follow.[27]

The mutual influences among these three factors are represented pictorially in Figure 2.3. The illustration suggests that we as persons, our world, and our behavior cannot be fully understood separately. Instead, each factor continually influences and is influenced by the others. We

FIGURE 2.3 ■ The Three Factors of the Influence Picture
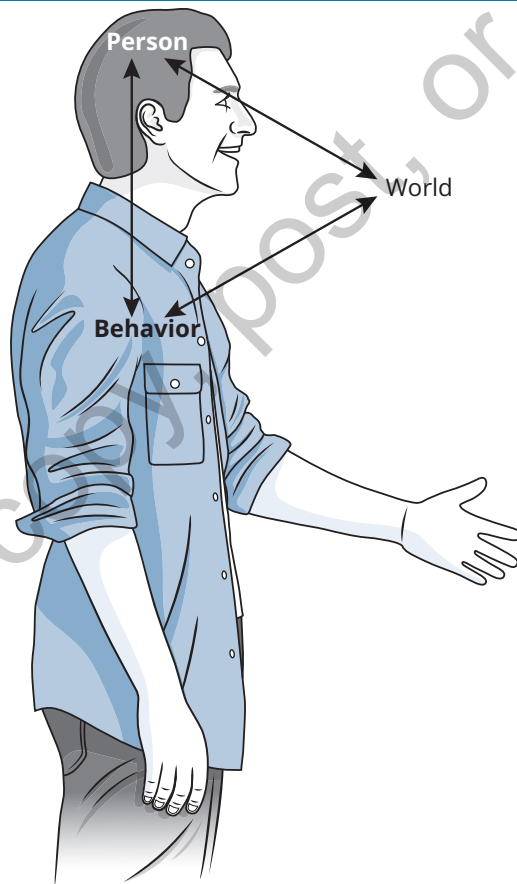
should not expect to have circumstances work out to our optimum liking because we behave in a favorable way. Other factors are involved in addition to the actions we take. At the same time, we do exercise choices that can have major impacts on what we experience and thus increase our chances of achieving more frequent desirable outcomes.

The choices we make concerning all three parts of the total influence picture are important. First, the world includes potential influences that will not affect us unless we allow them to do so. We do not feel the effects of cold weather unless we leave our dwellings and expose ourselves to the cold. Also, you are not affected by this book unless you choose to read it; it is only a potential influence that is dependent on your choice to pick up a copy and make the effort to read the words it contains.

We also choose the actions we take, which in turn influence the world. For us as authors, the ideas we had on self-leadership were only a potential influence for the world until we took the time and put in the effort to write this book. If our choosing to write this book helps others become more effective and contented, then our world is that much improved.

We also have choices in how we think about what we experience. For example, we can decide to take an optimistic view of the world even though many others take a pessimistic one. In doing so, we accomplish two things. First, our world looks more positive to us, and as a result we find it a more enjoyable place to live. Second, as a result of choosing to take an optimistic view of things, we respond more to the opportunities of life rather than to its constraints. Thus, to the extent that we can choose what we are as persons (or at least the way we practice thinking about things), we can influence what the world is to us and how we behave toward it.

The point is that even though we function within a complex system of influence—involving ourselves, our behavior, and our world—we possess a great deal of choice concerning what we experience and what we accomplish with our lives. We are subject to constraints. These include limitations in our situations (e.g., because of Earth's gravity we cannot fly without the aid of equipment of some kind) and the roles in which we find ourselves (such as parents, bosses, citizens). This fact, however, is no reason to feel helpless. Even when faced with the most difficult situations, we lead ourselves by the choices we make. To understand this point, consider the plight of two frogs:

> Two frogs fell into a bucket of cream. The first frog, seeing that there was no way to get any footing in the white fluid, accepted his fate and drowned.
>
> The second frog didn't like that approach. He thrashed around and did whatever he could to stay afloat. Soon his churning turned the cream into butter, and he was able to hop out of the bucket.

Both frogs were faced with a challenging situation, and both led themselves by the choices they made. One led himself to his death because he chose to let his "world" control him. The other frog led himself to safety because he adapted to his world; he controlled what he was able to control—himself—and by working hard and not giving up the fight, he reached safety. Both frogs practiced self-leadership; however, only one did it effectively.

SELF-LEADERSHIP IN THE MOVIES

Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022)

Throughout the movie *Everything, Everywhere, All at Once*, the character Michelle Quan Wang, portrayed by Michelle Yeoh, shows a remarkable ability to influence the reality of her external world through her choices and behavior. Michelle undergoes a profound transformation within herself, representing the internal "person" component of the self-leadership influence picture (see Figure 2.3). Her journey through parallel universes forces her to confront different aspects of her identity and face her fears, ultimately leading to self-discovery. She evolves from a seemingly ordinary housewife into a multidimensional hero through the transformative power of self-observation and self-awareness. Next, her behavior plays a key role in influencing her external world. As she navigates the complex and unpredictable landscapes of parallel universes, she exhibits remarkable adaptability, resilience, and determination. Her ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances and take courageous actions directly affects the outcomes she encounters in these diverse dimensions and shows the significance of behavior as a means of shaping the external world in which she finds herself. Finally, Michelle's choices and actions affect not only her own experiences but also have a ripple effect on the broader world around her. Her journey is marked by moments of selflessness, bravery, and a strong sense of purpose, which influence the reality of those she encounters in her parallel universes, highlighting the interconnectedness of our internal thought processes, our behaviors, and the external world round us.

Discussion Questions

1. Considering the three factors of the influence picture: ourselves, our behavior, and our world (see Figure 2.3), what are some specific ways in which you can influence the reality of your external world?
2. Do we have the power to choose? Can we, like Michelle, alter the world around us through our behavior and our actions?

We can illustrate the importance of choice further with an example that involves a troubling situation. Imagine that you are the head of a group—a department in a company, a community organization, or any other kind of group that might seem relevant to you. In this group, you are faced with a troublesome individual. This person always complains at the smallest hint of being slighted. To stop these annoying occasions, you have found yourself giving in to their wishes much as a parent might to a whining child. This might involve giving them special privileges others do not have or doing things their way even if that way makes things difficult for everyone else. Over time, you have fallen into a pattern without recognizing it until finally the situation becomes nearly intolerable. What can you do?

The solution to the problem is simple—the value of presenting it is in its usefulness for illustrating the issue at hand. You simply choose to stop giving in to the complainer. This might lead to annoying experiences at first, but gradually the situation (your world) is likely to improve. In the present pattern, you are rewarding this person for complaining and thereby encouraging the situation to continue and even worsen. You are also being rewarded yourself when you eliminate

the complaining each time it occurs. Thus, until you make the choice to break the pattern and lead yourself out of the situation, your rewarding behavior is likely to increase, which will make the situation worsen.

To cope with the immediate negative effects of this person's excessive complaining when you stop giving in, you need to motivate yourself to stand firm. You might do this by using methods such as mental support (e.g., having such thoughts as "I'm not giving in this time, buster—I know I can stand firm and things are going to improve around here") or by removing yourself temporarily from the presence of the complainer.

We discuss specific approaches that you can use to lead yourself to do what you set out to do in the following chapters. The lesson at hand is that we do choose. We do not live in a vacuum free from all external forces. Would life be interesting if we did? We are faced with challenges, obstacles, and many difficult situations. All this makes effective self-leadership that much more important and rewarding. We are self-leaders—why not be the best ones we can be? Travel onward and see if you can lead yourself to this end.

Real-World Self-Leadership Case

Darrius Simmons

At the relatively young age of 17, Darrius Simmons of Warren, OH, is already an accomplished musician and composer. Indeed, at the age of 15, Darrius was invited by renowned South Korean pianist and composer Yiruma to join him in playing a piano concert at the legendary Carnegie Hall in New York City. All of this would be impressive enough, but it is even more impressive given the fact that Darrius has only four fingers; three on his right hand, and one on his left. In addition, Darrius had his legs amputated when he was young and uses prosthetics both to walk and operate the pedals on the piano. And yet he is able to skillfully play the piano in a way that astounds his audiences, from those with no musical aptitude to expert pianists like Yiruma. "It's just amazing. How can you do that? All those jumps, you must find it really difficult?" Yiruma observed after watching Simmons play. "It's not that difficult to me," Darrius replied, "honestly."

Darrius has never let the world around him define what he is capable of doing or becoming. Despite his physical limitations, from a young age Darrius has believed in his abilities to meet and overcome challenges. "He'd say, 'I can do it myself. I can do it myself,' and so I just let him go," his mother Tamara explained. At the age of 10, after watching other people play piano, he sat down at a piano at his elementary school, determined to show that he could play too. "They got 10 fingers, but I felt like, I could make four fingers work," Darrius explained, "I like to show people that I can do things that you think that I might not be able to do, and I think that piano was a good way to show that."

Darrius plays both piano and trombone in his high school jazz band, and a video of him performing his original composition "Dreams Are Forever" has gone viral on Facebook, where it has been seen by millions. He hopes to pursue a full-time career in music after high

school. Darrius summed it up by saying, "I'm just glad I inspired people and made some-body's day. That's all I ever really wanted to do, just share my great music with everybody, and just put a smile on their faces."

Questions for Class Discussion

1. Did Darrius Simmons believe that his own actions and choices would have effects on his life's outcomes?
2. What external factors placed limitations on Darrius's abilities to achieve his dreams?
3. To what extent was Darrius able to shape his world through his behaviors? To what extent did the world around him shape his behaviors?
4. What personal factors have caused Darrius to follow his dreams despite his physical limitations?

Sources/Additional Readings

Jenkins, Beverly L., 2018, "Teen Born with Only 4 Fingers Plays Stunning, Original Piano Piece," *Inspire More*, May 22, 2018. https://www.inspiremore.com/darrius-simmons-pianist-4-fingers/

Kim, Michelle, 2016, "Self-taught Teen Pianist Born with 4 Fingers Performs at Carnegie Hall," *NBC New York*, April 28, 2016, https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Teenager-Four-Fingers-Piano-Carnegie-Hall-377367181.html