

Self-Action Leadership (Volume II)

Self-Action Leadership (Volume II):

*An Action Research-Based
Character Development Model*

By

Jordan R. Jensen

Cambridge
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By Jordan R. Jensen

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

This is the second book in a two-volume textbook on Self-Action Leadership. Volume I—*The Self-Action Leadership Theory*—contains prefacing information for both volumes and the first four book sections, which are referred to as “Books.” It is highly recommended that you read and study Volume I before moving on to Volume II.

Volume II—*The Self-Action Leadership Model*—contains the last four book sections and the appendices for both volumes. The Freedom Focused Corporate Declaration of Independence and Constitution are also included and appear at the end of Volume II, following the appendices.

This two-volume textbook is, in part, an abridged revision of my doctoral dissertation and other papers I wrote as a graduate student at *Fielding Graduate University* during the years 2009-2013. To access my full dissertation—including additional narrative detail and scholarly literature reviews of self-leadership, autoethnography, action research, and obsessive-compulsive disorder—visit **www.freedomfocused.com**, where you can download the full text for FREE. It is also available in the ProQuest Library Database, catalogued under UMI number #3592738.

Throughout the book the acronym **SAL** is used to refer to Self-Action Leadership

SAL

Self-Action Leadership.

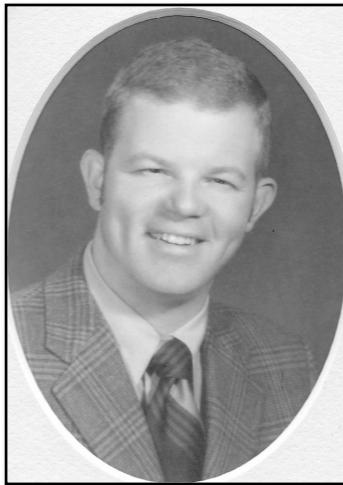
BOOK THE FIFTH



THE SELF-ACTION LEADERSHIP MODEL



DEDICATED TO: MY FATHER—Rex Buckley Jensen—a BUILDER



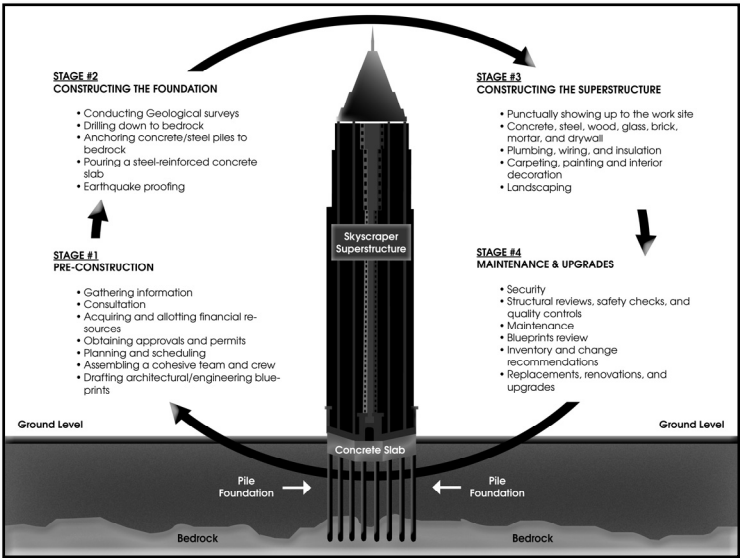
Rex Buckley Jensen
Circa 1979

And to all builders throughout the ages—
yesterday, today, and forever into the future.

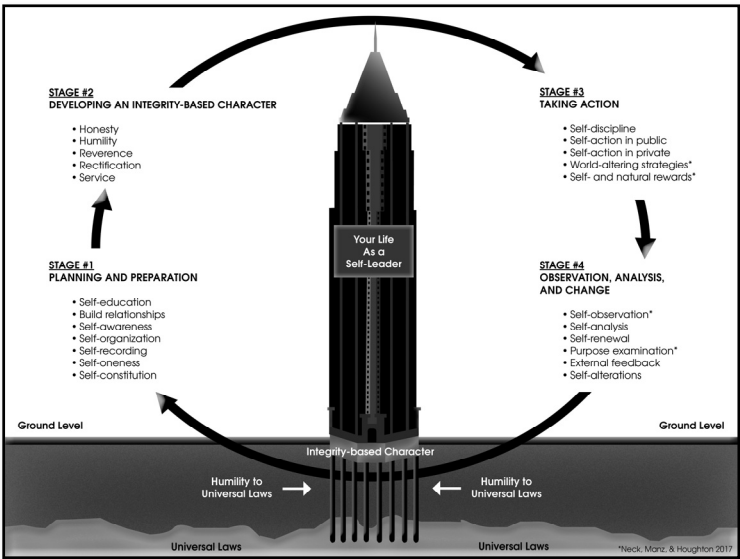




The Bank of America Plaza; Atlanta, Georgia, USA



The Construction Process



The Self-Action Leadership Model

CHAPTER 1

THE BUILDERS

I have always admired builders. My dad was a builder. In conjunction with his two-decade career in education as a classroom teacher, he was also a licensed contractor in the construction industry. One of Dad's and my favorite things to do together was visit a new earthen dam under construction. We'd drive up as close as possible to the site, and then soak in the beautiful sights of massive scrapers, bulldozers, excavators, and dump trucks busy at work. An earthen dam is a gargantuan structure, as beautiful (to us) as it is functional to society. The whole scene was exciting for us to watch.

To this day, one of my hobbies is to visit construction sites and watch experts build homes, buildings, roads, bridges, and skyscrapers. I especially admire master masons. It's awe-inspiring to watch as they mix and manipulate mortar into creative outlays of beautiful brick and elegant stone. To me, one of the most glorious sights in the world is to watch an artist or builder fashion something with one's own hands that is both attractive and useful. Fortunately, I live in the greater Houston, Texas area—one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States—where there is never any shortage of building projects to observe. Such work is marvelous in my eyes, in large part because I lack the knowledge and skills to replicate it on my own—as the crooked brick garden box in my own backyard attests!

BOOK THE FIFTH is dedicated to my Dad—REX BUCKLEY JENSEN. I love and admire my father. He was far from being perfect; yet somehow, he managed to be the perfect dad *for me*. Dad spent most of his career in education, where he taught middle and high school English for 23 years. But, he was *also* a general contractor, among other things. If you were to encapsulate his eclectic career in a single title, he could only be referred to as a rugged, rural, *Renaissance Man*. Over the course of my father's unique career in construction, he built or assembled 76 different homes, 43 apartment units, a cabin, and countless other projects made of wood, brick, sand, soil, or stone. He also started a business building shelves in people's garages. He did this to supplement his modest teacher's salary—raising

seven kids was not cheap! Dad's shelving business, which I worked in as a boy and later a young college student, is carried on by my older brothers and their sons to this day as *JB Shelving* ("JB" stands for *Jensen Brother*).

After retiring from his career in construction and education, Dad did something that was classically *him*. At age 65, he set to work building his dream home with his own two hands and the help of my step-mother and, when necessary, a short-term hired hand or two. Now you must understand; my Dad's dream home was no modest retirement cottage. It was a 47-foot high, 5-story, 8,000 square foot massive mountain abode, complete with four wood-burning fireplaces, built on his own land. This project would have been audaciously ambitious for a 35-year old ace builder in the prime of his life. For Dad—a *retired senior citizen*—it proved to be one of the most painstaking, yet pleasurable undertakings of his life. It took him a decade to complete, and he was still working on it at age 75. At one point, during the early framing process, a strong wind blew down the entire frame on the first two stories. That didn't stop Dad; he simply cleaned up the mess and started over again from scratch—that's just the *kind* of man he *was*.

Infinitely more important than any of his material construction achievements, my father helped my mother build a family of seven children, seven children-in-law, and 31 grandchildren. I greatly admire both of my parents because of the things—and lives—that they have either built or helped to build through their many talents in the world of parenting, construction, and education. For these and many other reasons, I dedicate this book to *Dad*, and more specifically, to my *Parents*, both of whom were impressive builders in their own right.

This book is also dedicated to BUILDERS in general—meaning anyone who has ever built anything sturdy and useful, including homes, buildings, bridges, offices, schools, skyscrapers, woodwork, machines, tools, needful products of all kinds, pedagogical texts and curriculums, good books, honest governments, nations, states, communities, organizations, and most importantly, families, marriages, and individual lives. Anyone can be a critic or a cynic, and sadly, our world is full of both. It doesn't require much creativity, education, talent, or planning to *tear something down*. But it takes an authentic, knowledgeable, and skilled person to *build something up*.

▣ SAL MANTRA ▣

ANYONE CAN TEAR SOMETHING DOWN.
BUT IT TAKES AN AUTHENTIC, KNOWLEDGEABLE,
AND SKILLED PERSON TO BUILD SOMETHING UP.

This book was written in hopes that *you* might become a builder of whatever it is your talents, skills, and education equip you to build. More importantly, it was written to help you in the construction of the most important building project of all—*your own character and life*.

BECOME A BUILDER

The world has too many critics; it needs more creators;

The world has too many theorists; it needs more implementers;

The world has too much deconstruction; it needs more
construction *and* reconstruction;

The world has too many pundits and planners; it needs more
players and producers.

The world is full of good ideas, noble dreams, and worthy visions; it needs more
men and women who make them real.

I therefore salute the builders;

And call upon every man, woman, and child in this world

Who is not yet a builder, to *become one*.

Join me;

And together

We'll make something

Magnificent of *your* life

And in the process,

Imagine,

Create,

And build

Things that will leave the world

A better

Place than

You

Found

It.

Making *YOU* one of the

Honored

and Revered

Persons known simply, but honorably, as...

The BUILDERS.

—JRJ

My Love of Constructive Poetry

As an elementary school student at *Hermosa Vista Elementary* in Mesa, Arizona, I began a love affair with poetry that has continued to deepen throughout my life. It all began in fifth grade when my teacher, Bridgette Owens (who was passionate about poetry herself) introduced my classmates and me to many famous poems, including *Paul Revere's Ride* and *Casey at the Bat*.

In sixth grade, my teacher, Nell Jean, assigned us to compile a poetry anthology with collections of our favorite poems from famous authors as well as a sampling of our own budding attempts at Haiku, Limerick, verse, and free verse. It was a landmark academic adventure for my budding literary intellect. In time, I came to especially appreciate, enjoy, and value poems that were written with a specific, constructive, and positive purpose while still maintaining their literary flourish and prosodic richness.

Later on, I came across a book of poetry in my dad's library. It was a concise anthology entitled *One Hundred and One Famous Poems*, edited by Roy J. Cook. This little volume introduced me to some of the most legendary poems and poets in the history of English literature. From Wordsworth and Whittier to Kipling and Guest; from Emerson, Dickerson, Burroughs, and Wilcox to the Great War poets (i.e. McCrae and Seeger), such timeless works as *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, *Maud Muller*, *If*, *Home, Each and All*, *The Rhodora*, *Not in Vain*, *Solitude*, *Waiting*, *In Flander's Fields*, and *I Have a Rendezvous with Death*—among many others—touched my life deeply and inspired me to become a poet and writer myself.

Above all the rest, I became acquainted with the work of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, whose verse I deeply cherish. His poem, *A Psalm of Life*, was an inspiration to enter the self-help and personal development field, and I'll never forget my Uncle Hyrum quoting it from the pulpit by memory. I, of course, committed this work to memory myself, and later published a collection of my own poetry, which I named *Psalms of Life*. In addition to this masterpiece, and other works in that same anthology (e.g., *The Day is Done* and *The Children's Hour*), I came across another masterpiece of his entitled *The Builders*. Appropriately, the editor had positioned this piece as *the first* poem in his famous anthology, making it extra easy to stumble across. The seeds of the SAL Model were planted in my mind and heart the moment I first came across this magnificent nine-stanza sampling of Longfellow's best verse.

THE BUILDERS

By: *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (1807–1882)

ALL are architects of Fate,
Working in these walls of Time;
Some with massive deeds and great,
Some with ornaments of rhyme.

Nothing useless is, or low;
Each thing in its place is best;
And what seems but idle show
Strengthens and supports the rest.

For the structure that we raise,
Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays
Are the blocks with which we build.

Truly shape and fashion these;
Leave no yawning gaps between;
Think not, because no man sees,
Such things will remain unseen.

In the elder days of Art,
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part;
For the Gods see everywhere.

Let us do our work as well,
Both the unseen and the seen;
Make the house, where Gods may dwell,
Beautiful, entire, and clean.

Else our lives are incomplete,
Standing in these walls of Time,
Broken stairways, where the feet
Stumble as they seek to climb.

Build to-day, then, strong and sure,
With a firm and ample base;
And ascending and secure
Shall to-morrow find its place.

Thus alone can we attain
To those turrets, where the eye
Sees the world as one vast plain,
And one boundless reach of sky.¹

This poem, and others like it, filled me with an appreciation for poetry's capacity to teach moral lessons in beautiful, inspiring, and memorable ways. Such poems filled my heart with pleasure, joy, and gratitude, influencing me to memorize them for recitation at appropriate opportunities. More significantly, they motivated me to work hard and strive diligently to make something grand out of my life—and to help others make something grand out of theirs.



 *In Your Journal* 

- If you were a licensed contractor, what kinds of physical construction projects would you most like to build?
- What *kind* of metaphysical construction projects (e.g. character building and personality refinement) would you like to undertake during your time in this world.
- What “Builders” (e.g. leaders, parents, teachers, coaches, mentors, siblings, friends, etc.) have helped to build, or otherwise positively impact, your life?

CHAPTER 2

THE SEEDS OF SELF-HELP

This chapter tells the story of my experiences learning about self-help and personal development. It chronicles a journey that began when I was just a boy and would eventually lead to the development of the SAL Theory and Model and the creation of this textbook.

I was fourteen years old in 1994 when Warner Books published my Uncle Hyrum's book, *The 10 Natural Laws of Successful Time and Life Management*, which would eventually sell over a million copies. The summer of that year, I worked on Hyrum's desert ranch in southwestern Utah.

A ranch hand's work was low-paying and physically strenuous. Summer days were hot, dry, and dusty, with temperatures often exceeding one hundred degrees Fahrenheit (thirty-eight degrees Celsius). For most of us, our daily commute included a ride in the back of a white Ford pickup truck. One week, we were scheduled to build a fence up in the mountains, many miles away from our bunkhouse where we lived that summer. Facing a long, bumpy commute to work for a week or so, I decided to take along a book to read. The book's title was *The Magic of Thinking Big*, by Dr. David J. Schwartz.

Once I started reading, it was hard to stop, and not just because I enjoyed reading more than digging post holes in the rocky desert soil; but because of the seeds of hope, possibility, and vision the book planted in my mind, heart, and spirit. I enjoyed the book so much that I would sometimes read at lunchtime and after work was over. I kept reading until I had read, marked, and annotated the entire volume. The words of Schwartz's message sunk deep into my mind and heart, spawning rich daydreams about my personal and professional potential. I was motivated by the fact that I didn't *have* to be a ranch hand for the rest of my life. I was further inspired by the idea that I could design my life largely according to my own desires if I was willing pay the price to obtain them. When I read the words, "when you *believe*, your mind finds ways to do,"² I was inspired by the personal power and

capacity I possessed to accomplish difficult and meaningful achievements despite any obstacles that might stand in my way.

This was the point in my life when a nascent conceptualization of SAL began to gradually take shape as I became increasingly exposed to a variety of personal development and self-help oriented books and other media. This material included Tony Robbins' *Unlimited Power* and his world-famous audiocassettes, *Personal Power*.³ There was also Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking for Young People*. And I'll always cherish reading my dad's personal copy of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. He had purchased his copy in the mid-1960s as a young missionary in England, and it had that wonderful "old book" smell. At this time, I was also introduced to material from Zig Ziglar, Brian Tracy, Stephen R. Covey, and of course, my Uncle—Hyrum W. Smith—among others.

When I was in eighth grade, my mom started buying Gary Smalley's relationship videos.⁴ Though it would be years before I would start looking seriously at exclusive dating or marriage, I enjoyed watching these programs with my mom, and I learned a great deal about personality differences, communication skills, and successfully cultivating healthy and successful relationships.

My oldest brother Paul—a successful salesman—shared my passion for personal development material and sent me a videotape of the famous business philosopher, Jim Rohn, which I enjoyed and benefitted from watching. Later, as a direct salesman and network marketer, I was reintroduced to Rohn. While I ultimately found little aptitude or interest in direct sales or network marketing, Rohn's timeless talk on CD, entitled *Building Your Network Marketing Company*, was filled with general truisms about long-term success that enormously influenced my thought processes as I set out to build Freedom Focused, develop the SAL Theory and Model, and write this textbook.

In high school, I attended a couple of Peter Lowe's day-long success seminars, where I had the chance to hear a variety of high-profile speakers—including President Gerald Ford, General Colin Powell, Zig Ziglar, and Karl Malone—speak on personal development topics related to self-improvement, health and wellness, and success. Shortly after graduating from high school, I also read my uncle's book, *The 10 Natural Laws of Successful Time and Life Management*. Through this extended process of association, the nascent seeds of SAL were deeply implanted in my mind, heart, and soul.

**“Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit;
sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.”**

—William James
(1842–1910)

In college, I voraciously consumed Stephen R. Covey’s *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which planted a potent patch of additional SAL seeds in my mind and heart. More than any other personal leadership book I had ever read, *The 7 Habits* left a deep and lasting impression on me. After reading the book, I procured *The 7 Habits* seminar on CD—taught by Covey himself—and listened intently to the entire program. The more familiar I became with the material, the more convinced I became that I didn’t want to just practice what Stephen Covey had taught me; I wanted to *become the* Stephen R. Covey of my generation.

In addition to carefully studying Covey’s work during my college years, I also read books written by Og Mandino. In particular, I diligently practiced and completed Mandino’s forty-five-week challenge outlined in *The Greatest Secret in the World*. This particular self-help exercise was by far the most ambitious and labor intensive I had ever participated in—before or since. Og stated in his book that the probability of *anyone* actually completing his ambition challenge was about one-in-seventy-five.⁵ I was absolutely determined to prove to myself that I could be one of the 1.3 percent of people who would actually finish the entire program. Forty-five weeks after I started, I succeeded in my objective—an accomplishment that provides me with a residual source of personal confidence and inner security *to this day*.

Over a long period of time, I gradually developed and refined my own thoughts on self-leadership—thoughts that would eventually evolve into the SAL Theory and Model. At age twenty-five, I began constructing the SAL Theory and Model. At age twenty-six, I self-published my first book, *I Am Sovereign: The Power of Personal Leadership*. It was a self-leadership guide for teenagers, and contained the first version of the SAL Model, as well as early vestiges of the SAL Theory. Later, as part of my doctoral research, I further honed the SAL Model and introduced the first full version of the SAL Theory. The textbook *you now hold in your hands* is several iterations removed from this original work. It is the end result of 30 years of informal research, 13 years of formal research, writing, editing, revising, and reworking. In all, this project has been literally thousands of hours in the making. It is my *magnum opus* as a writer and thinker. Indeed, I do not foresee, nor do I intend, to write anything more important in my lifetime than *this* single, comprehensive work. Suffice it to say, it has been an

exhilarating journey thus far—a journey that is, in many ways, *just beginning*.

 *In Your Journal* 

- Prior to being introduced to SAL, what self-help media has positively influenced your life, actions, and Existential Growth?
- Which of these tools did you enjoy the most?
- Which of these tools did you find to be the most helpful?
- Which of these tools would you most highly recommend to others?
- Which of these tools most closely resembles the message contained in the SAL Philosophy?
- In recommending resources to others, how high up (or low down) on your list would this 2-volume textbook be, and why?

CHAPTER 3

A CONSTRUCTION METAPHOR

As I mentioned in the first chapter, I've always been fascinated by construction. My dad was, among many other things, a general contractor by profession. From ages three to seven, I eagerly followed my dad around wherever he went, especially if our excursions involved trucks, heavy equipment, power tools, lumber, concrete, or mortar. While I did not choose a career in construction, my interest in construction principles and processes is alive and well to this day.

Something else I've always been deeply enamored with is skyscrapers and city skylines. Growing up in a tiny rural community in the middle of the sparsely inhabited, mountainous deserts of the *Four Corners* area of the United States, skyscrapers were nowhere to be found—unless you consider mammoth rock formations (e.g. *Shiprock*, *Agathla Peak*, *Delicate Arch*, etc.) to be skyscrapers. Perhaps this geographic isolation fueled my fervor to eventually visit these elusive cityscapes—an ambition I have vigorously pursued as an adult.

Over the years, I've had the extraordinary opportunity to visit nearly every major metropolitan area in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. From the matchless dome of St. Paul's Cathedral in London to the cavernous city centers of Lower and Midtown Manhattan; from the unique urban sprawls of Chicago and Toronto to the endless beach towers of Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties; from the spectacular Southern skylines of Atlanta, Dallas, Houston, and Miami, to the wondrous West Coast skylines of L.A., San Francisco, Seattle, and Vancouver, I have been continually entranced with and inspired by these magnificent urban centers.

This lifelong interest in construction and skyscrapers led me to design the SAL Model using high-rise construction as a metaphor. Just as there are certain *physical* laws, principles, and practices of engineering and architecture that apply to the sound construction of buildings, there are likewise certain *metaphysical* laws, principles, and practices of Self-Action Leadership that govern Existential Growth and successful long-term living. The Self-Action Leadership Model provides you with the incredible

opportunity to design *and* construct YOUR OWN LIFE. What could be more exciting and engaging than developing and directing your own destiny?

SAR and SAL Projects

The purpose of the SAL Model is to identify disciplines and establish habits that will empower your ability to conduct Self-Action Research, or SAR, in your life and career. What is SAR? Simply stated, Self-Action Research is action research applied to the self. As you may recall from BOOK THE THIRD, action research (AR) refers to: *a four-step cyclical process of identifying and strategically solving problems*. By way of review, action research also involves “four core processes.”⁶

Process 1: PLANNING	Deciding how to deal with a problem
Process 2: ACTING	Implementing your plan
Process 3: OBSERVING	Paying attention and recording what is happening
Process 4: REFLECTING	Analyzing outcomes and revising plans for another cycle of acting ⁷

Self-Action Research is the application of action research to the *self*. It’s directly related to Self-Action Leadership and is defined as *action research applied by, to, and for the self to gain self-awareness, aid self-improvement, and solve personal problems*. The purpose of Self-Action Research is to strategically apply SAL principles in an effort to achieve specific, targeted objectives related to your own character development and personal growth. Self-action leaders can do this by engaging in SAR and SAL projects, which are defined as follows:

SELF-ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

A self-led action research initiative aimed at increasing self-awareness, aiding self-improvement, and solving personal problems.

SELF-ACTION LEADERSHIP PROJECT

Personal projects aimed at achieving targeted objectives that bolster the Existential Growth of self and others.

These definitions are admittedly similar in their substance and desired ends. There are, however, important distinctions between the two. In a recently published academic paper, a couple of my colleagues and I clarified the difference between SAR and SAL Projects.

In a sense, SAR projects are conceptually indistinct from SAL projects because in both cases, the end goal is *always* to do what is right in the pursuit of long-term existential growth for oneself and others. The main differentiating factor between the two involves time frames. For example, SAR projects primarily deal with micro issues and goals that can often be addressed and completed (or solved) in relatively short periods of time (e.g., days, weeks, and months). SAL projects, on the other hand, deal primarily with macro issues that usually take much longer periods of time to address and complete, or solve (e.g., years, decades, or more). As such, SAR projects are more akin to short- and mid-term goals, while SAL projects focus on longer-term goals in support of one's personal and professional statements of vision and mission. SAR projects, therefore, serve as smaller, piecemeal initiatives within a context of much larger SAL endeavors.⁸

Another way of conceptualizing these two terms is to view *your life itself* as one grand SAL Project that can then be filled with a variety of SAR Projects that facilitate your ongoing quest for Existential Growth.⁹ Or, you might view life as being filled with a few (or several) overarching and extremely important SAL Projects, each one of which are broken down into a variety of smaller SAR Projects that collectively serve as the engine driving your long-term progress upwards into the higher levels of the SAL Hierarchy.

The SAL Model incorporates the four core processes of action research into four analogous stages of SAL action. These stages—and their twenty-three sub-stages—of SAL practice are likened to the stages of building a skyscraper. They form a practicum aimed at helping you develop the character and habits that lead to Existential Growth. Thus, the SAL Model is defined as: *A comprehensive academic model of self-leadership and character development rooted in action research theory and construction science and metaphor.*

THE SELF-ACTION LEADERSHIP MODEL

A comprehensive academic model of self-leadership and character development rooted in action research theory and construction science and metaphor.

The figures below illustrate the four stages and twenty-three steps of high-rise construction (Figure 3.1) and their corresponding stages and step-habits in the SAL Model (Figure 3.2).

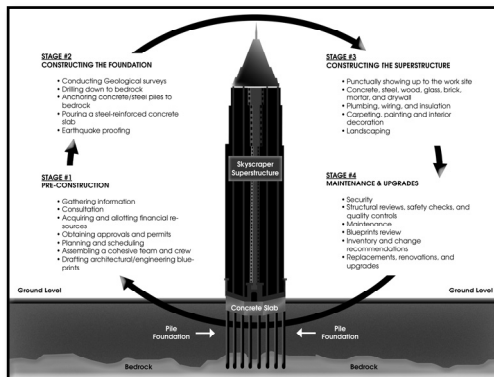


Figure 3.1 The Construction Process

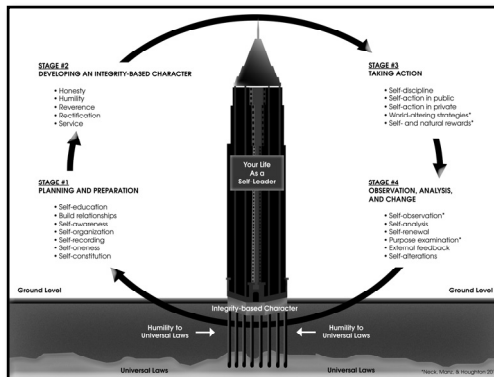


Figure 3.2 The Self-Action Leadership Model

 *In Your Journal* 

- What personal or professional challenges are you presently facing that might make a good *Self-Action Research (SAR)* Project within a larger *Self-Action Leadership (SAL)* Project?

CHAPTER 4

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

SAL Model Stage 1. Preconstruction — Planning and Preparation

When a construction company sets out to build a skyscraper—or any other physical structure—a great deal of planning and preparation must precede any tangible work. Planning and preparation are part of the preconstruction stage, which is done behind the scenes. There are seven different steps in this stage:

- Gathering information
- Consultations
- Acquiring and allotting financial resources
- Obtaining approvals and permits
- Planning and scheduling
- Assembling a cohesive team and crew
- Drafting architectural and engineering blueprints

The SAL Model contains seven corresponding step-habits analogous to the preparation and preconstruction stage:

- Self-education
- Building relationships
- Self-awareness
- Self-organization
- Self-recording
- Self-oneness
- Drafting a Self-Declaration of Independence (Self-DoI) and Self-Constitution

Most people who eventually view a completed skyscraper don't see the time and effort invested in the planning and preparation stages. Similarly, your visible self-improvements and professional advancements are usually preceded by a lot of personal planning and preparation, almost all of which is done in private and without any public attention or applause. This process all begins with Self-Education.

Self-Education

**“Formal education makes you a living;
self-education makes you a legend.”**

—*Habeeb Akande*
(Living)

Just as a building company must have the necessary information, knowledge, and skills to properly build a skyscraper, education is a key component for effective life construction. This process of education is called *self-education*, because *you* are primarily responsible for its attainment. Successful self-action leaders don't wait for the right teacher to come and teach them; they seek out knowledge on their own, sometimes going to great lengths to find it.

The acquisition of knowledge begins with a burning desire to obtain it. One famous (*but possibly apocryphal*) story on this subject involves the famous Greek philosopher, Socrates. As the story goes, a man approached Socrates one day with a desire for knowledge. Socrates took the man down into the ocean and proceeded to shove his head underwater. After a momentary struggle, the man was able to break free of Socrates' grasp. Gasping for air, the man angrily demanded to know why Socrates had attempted to drown him. Socrates replied, “When you desire knowledge as badly as you just desired air, come and see me again and I will show you the pathway to true knowledge.”

One of the best self-educators in history was Abraham Lincoln. “Honest Abe” was born and raised in humble, poor, and unsophisticated circumstances in the dense, rural backwoods of Kentucky and Indiana, USA, in the early nineteenth century. Lincoln wasn't blessed with many chances to obtain formal education, yet he craved knowledge as much as he craved air—so he created his own opportunities, and was willing to sacrifice to realize them. For example, he was known to travel up to twenty miles on foot to borrow a single book to read. Young Abraham devoured all the educational resources he could possibly access. This homespun lawyer-turned-politician

eventually educated himself right up into the highest echelon of public office, where he served as the sixteenth president of the United States from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. Forty-five men have served as President of the United States since George Washington took the first Oath of Office in 1789. Of those 45 men, most of them came from affluent families who ensured their sons were well educated at the nation's best colleges (i.e. Harvard, Yale, etc.). Yet the man who is almost universally lauded as the greatest of them all was Abraham Lincoln—a self-taught, self-made man who never went to college, yet whose extraordinary capacity as a self-action leader and self-educator compensated for whatever formal education, training, and refinement he lacked.

Two other prominent examples of proactive self-educators from the nineteenth century include Sequoyah, a Native American responsible for creating a written alphabet for his people, and Frederick Douglass, who was a leading voice in the American abolitionist movement. I strongly encourage you to study the lives of these three remarkable men. The following books are good places to start:

- *Lincoln the Unknown* by Dale Carnegie
- *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass
- *Sequoyah* by Grant Foreman

Proactive self-action leaders spend a good portion of their time with educational media. They ask questions, carefully observe their surroundings, and seek out information in whatever ways they can. In my case, there's no way to calculate the value of self-education in my life and career, but it's been indispensable and has shaped every one of my major successes. While I have been blessed with a much broader formal education than Abraham Lincoln, I am, like Lincoln, no *Ivy-Leaguer*. Indeed, you will not find any top-tier institutions on my academic transcripts. However, despite the relative obscurity of the schools I attended, I was able to make the most of my opportunities. Just as importantly, I was able to richly supplement my formal education with a broad and ambitious course of personal study.

Because you're responsible for the quality of your own education, *where* you learn is secondary to *what*, *why*, and *how well* you learn. Whether you have opportunities to attend a prestigious university, an obscure college, or your local library, you can still take responsibility for your own learning. With the presence of public libraries, online bookstores, and the Internet,

there's no need to make excuses about your lack of educational opportunities. No matter how hard it is for you to acquire knowledge in your current circumstances, chances are you still have *far* more access to information than Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, or Sequoyah ever dreamed of having. Don't let these magnificent educational opportunities go to waste. Take advantage of them and get studying today!

Learning to Learn

Education goes way beyond just memorizing facts. As such, there are several different components of self-learning that all self-action leaders must focus on. Understanding how you learn best (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic),¹⁰ knowing where to go for information and how to efficiently access it, and the proper calibration of your attitude, perception, and work ethic are all key components of acquiring an outstanding education.

Repetition and Rote-Learning

When I was young, someone taught me the great truism that “repetition is the key to reception.” If you want to commit anything to your long-term memory, you must utilize rote learning. Like it or not, there's a lot of material you must memorize to become a highly skilled, culturally literate critical thinker. For example, you may need to look up certain words in the dictionary several times before you truly own them in your active vocabulary. Moreover, even the presence of high-powered calculators on your phone can't replace the value of knowing the multiplication table and other elementary arithmetic skills. I'm also a big believer that some books are worth reading more than once. I've read one book cover-to-cover twenty-three times in my life, and I'm a smarter, wiser, and better person for having done so. Every time I've read it, I've derived new insights and wisdom from its pages that I hadn't discovered or *discerned* during previous readings.

The purposeful memorization of important facts, quotes, and poems empowers you to draw strength and inspiration from wise teachers. It also strengthens your memory muscles and bolsters your credibility in situations where you must demonstrate your knowledge, or teach it to others. And that is just the beginning of the benefits of memorization. There are *many* others. For example, memorized knowledge is extremely valuable in emergency or other stressful situations, such as knowing how to administer CPR, do the Heimlich maneuver, and recognize signs of stroke, shock, or other medical urgencies. In addition, memorizing frequently-used information is more