I. Background: This course is predicated on two assumptions which we believe to be true. First, given the quality of Stanford GSB students, most—if not all of you—will have opportunities to become leaders—in some cases, of very large organizations. Second, over time, your success as a leader will depend less on your individual skills (despite how skillful you may be) and more on your ability to influence and engage others in pursuit of collective goals. Research has shown that this progression is characterized by a series of transitions—from individual contributor to manager of others, from manager of others to manager of managers, and so on. Research has also demonstrated that career failures are often associated with individual failures to successfully make these transitions. Ironically, because these failures are largely predictable, we can anticipate them and, with some preparation, help leaders understand how to avoid them.

II. The Stanford Young Leaders Project: Over the past year, we have conducted over 60 structured interviews with GSB alumni who graduated three to ten years ago and are currently managing other people. In the interviews, we asked these young managers to tell us about the most significant leadership challenges they struggled with since leaving the GSB. What we discovered was not entirely surprising. The situations that young managers found particularly difficult were those that involved mastering several (often many) new challenges all at once. Consistent with past research, these challenges tended to occur during transitional periods. They also tended to produce considerable learning.

The findings from our interviews suggest that, in general, there are three types of transition that young leaders – specifically graduates of the GSB -- will inevitably confront and, very often, struggle with.
1) **Role transitions** (e.g. moving from individual contributor to first-time manager) Role transitions are challenging because they involve leading at a higher level in the organization, leading in a different function, or leading in a new position with a much broader scope. These transitions require learning new skills and strategies for managing people who have different responsibilities, needs, goals and expectations than the leader has led in the past. In navigating role transitions, leaders grapple with the question “What does it mean to be a leader in this new role?”

2) **Leading Business Transitions** (e.g. managing rapid growth, turnarounds, taking a business to the next level). When leaders find themselves responsible for transitioning an entire team or business, they must reexamine old ways of doing things and determine new methods for accomplishing new goals. When navigating business transitions, leaders begin to ask “How can I get things done to meet the demands of this new environment?”

3) **Personal Transitions** (e.g. managing strategic differences with a boss; dealing with setbacks, stress and disappointment). Though triggered by events in the workplace, these transitions involve changes that take place internally as a young leader learns to deal with situations that put their personal values to the test. What do you do when you have strategic differences with a boss or critical colleague? How do you make sense of professional setbacks that may cause you to question your fit or value? In working through these transitions, young leaders begin to answer the question “How do I stay true to myself?”

Working through the challenges encountered during these various transitions inevitably produced significant, often transformative learning. To help you foresee some of these challenges and learn from the experience of your predecessors, we have created a series of leadership video vignettes. Each vignette consists of a protagonist (a GSB graduate) briefly describing a situation they confronted, the tensions they faced, and the choices they made. We use the videos (rather than written cases) as the basis for most class discussion, examining not only the leader’s actions but also the results of those actions. To ensure you walk away with practical insights, protagonists in each vignette share specific lessons and suggestions based on their experience. In addition, we will integrate lessons from other leaders in the study, as well as relevant research.

**III. Course Purpose and Description:** The objective of this course is to help prepare you to better understand the common challenges and pitfalls that you will face as your career progresses and you become a leader.

Our ultimate goal is to develop this course into a second year elective that students can take as they begin to make the transition from the MBA program into their new careers. Since this is our first attempt at designing the course, we would appreciate your comments on how to improve it. We welcome any suggestions you may have about content, format or delivery.
IV. Course Format: The course is scheduled to meet 1:00 to 4:00 PM Monday through Friday the week of September 14-18. Each class session will consist of two parts. In the first part, we will discuss a set of video vignettes, focusing on problems or difficulties that leaders may experience during specific transitions. Struggling with these problems is to be expected. It is a normal part of any leader’s development. Failing to learn from these problems, however, is a much bigger problem and can ultimately lead to derailment. During the second half of each session we will continue this discussion with a panel of recent graduates (sometimes including the protagonists in the vignettes). On a few days, we introduce a relevant case or exercise. We will try to finish each session by identifying specific things you can do to avoid, manage, or resolve the problems discussed.

VI. Participation/Grading: Pass/Fail.

VII. Class Preparation. Please be sure to read all assigned reading prior to the class. We have kept the readings short, pragmatic, and interesting (we think). Since the class is only one week long, it would help us and the other class members if you could provide us with a short bio (no more than one or two paragraphs) by the beginning of the first class. Not only will this help us to get a sense of your background, it will also be useful for the guest speakers and your classmates. Please email your bios directly to us at the addresses listed at the beginning of the syllabus.
Schedule of Classes

Session 1: Role Transitions: From Individual Contributor to First-time Manager

Session Objective

Moving into a leadership role requires an important change in mindset. It entails a shift in priorities from getting the job done through personal skills and effort to getting work done through others. It often means letting go of the very things that have made us successful in the past and deriving satisfaction from others’ accomplishments. Although easy to understand conceptually, this marks a fundamental shift in our identity—and is often an emotionally difficult time. This session will illustrate how others have sometimes stumbled in making what seems to be a straightforward transition—and the lessons they have learned.

Readings


Vignettes

- Claire Alexander, Vice President Digital Strategy & Operations, Discovery Communications LLC
- Charles Carmel, Vice President Corporate Development, Cisco Systems
- Chris Tilghman, Director, Inside Track
- Brian NeSmith, CEO, BlueCoat Systems

Guest Speakers

- Brian Helmick, President (Co-Founder), Algentis
- Bora Chung, Director, PayPal.com
- Dave Kaval, CEO and Founder, The Golden Baseball League
- Kate Surman, Director, Clinical Inpatient Access and Director, Process Excellence, Stanford Hospitals and Clinics
Session 2—Role Transitions: Taking Responsibility for Team Performance

Session Objective

When your success depends on the performance of others, a number of new skills must be mastered. How do you establish credibility with a new team? How do you assess a new situation and communicate clear expectations? How do you deal with poor performers? Do you know how to motivate others whose values and aspirations may be very different from your own? How does your role change when you begin to manage people who are also managers? This session explores how a set of young leaders grappled with these challenges—and what they learned with the benefit of hindsight.

Readings

- Emily Rex (A)

Assignment

- Emily Rex (A)
  Study Questions
  1. What should Rex do about Jackson? What are the potential consequences that she should consider before acting?
  2. What value does Rex add in her new role?
  3. What would she need to do to get the PMR project back on track? What would this entail?

Vignettes

- Melissa McSherry, Managing Vice President, major bank
- Lisa Dawe, Division Vice President, DaVita
- Bob Holden, General Manager, Rent.com, (eBay, Inc.)

Guest Speakers

- Anne Rubin, Marketing Director, Corventis
- Ted Stinson, Vice President of Sales, Symantec
- Alex Doll, CFO and Vice President, PGP Corporation

Session Objective

We often learn the most through adversity. We learn when we really have to – when pushed to our limits. Sink or swim. Do or die. Learn or fail. This session highlights a few of the most challenging situations described to us by young managers. All involve leading business transitions. Most involve changing contexts: The young manager moves into an entirely new setting or the setting around them changes dramatically. In each case, the leader has to diagnose the business situation, assess the leadership issues, and determine the challenges and opportunities to be addressed – all with little, if any, experience in the new area. Once again, what makes these experiences especially difficult is that they require not only managing change, but being the subject of change. In these cases, leaders must be willing to change themselves if they are to lead the business transition successfully.

Readings


Vignettes

- Mike Folgner, Sr. Director of Social Products, Yahoo!
- Roy Gilbert, Director, Consumer Operations and Policy, Google
- Gerald Risk, President, Asurion

Guest Speakers

- Mike Folgner, Sr. Director of Social Products, Yahoo!
- Roy Gilbert, Director, Consumer Operations and Policy, Google
- Gerald Risk, President, Asurion
Session 4 – Personal Transitions: Building Relationships With Peers and Bosses

Session Objective
Most of us have had to work with someone we don’t particularly like or get along with. These relationships become increasingly important to success as we begin to manage others. In this session we explore the importance of developing relationships with peers and bosses. We’ll take a look at some particularly difficult situations in order to discuss when these relationships are critical and what the potential repercussions are of ignoring them. In the process, we’ll discuss strategies for dealing with difficult peers and managing strategic differences with a boss.

Readings


Vignettes

• Josh Golomb, General Manager, DaVitaRX
• Melissa McSherry, Managing Vice President, a major bank
• David Lyons, Vice President of Engineering, Glacier Bay

Guest Speakers

• Charles Carmel, Vice President Corporate Development, Cisco Systems
• Josh Golomb, General Manager, DaVitaRX
• Barnaby Grist, Senior Managing Director, Strategic Business Development, Charles Schwab & Company
• David Lyons, Vice President of Engineering, Glacier Bay
Session 5 – Personal Transitions: Coping with Hardship, Setbacks and Mistakes; Helping Others Cope with Stress and Hardship

Session Objective

Work can be a stressful place, especially when we think we’ve failed or been treated unfairly. Leaders make mistakes, experience disappointment, and have setbacks like everyone else. Successful leaders, however, face the stress of these situations and do the difficult work of coping effectively. Moreover, they help their direct reports cope with stress so that they too can be more effective. In this session, we take a close look at the skills and attitudes that promote resilience and how leaders can develop resilience in others. Coping through difficult situations may come more naturally to some than others. Fortunately, research demonstrates that coping skills can be learned throughout our lifetime.

We end the course with some insight from the experts. Executive search firms make a living by identifying and developing leadership talent. What do they look for when assessing leadership? What are the derailers that they see most often? What advice can they offer young leaders on the way up to better prepare them for a successful journey? We hope this final panel will give you some useful things to consider, early in your career, while you still have the luxury of time and opportunity.

Readings


Vignettes

• Josh Golomb, General Manager, DaVitaRX
• Charles Carmel, Vice President Corporate Development, Cisco Systems
• Lisa Dawe, Division Vice President, DaVita
• Eric Westendorf, Principal, EL Haynes Public Charter School

Guest Speakers

• Tom Friel, Former CEO, Heidrick & Struggles
• Karena Strella, Egon Zehnder International