Proactive Behaviors for Leading Fitness Improvements

The book suggests ten specific strategies that improvement leaders can implement to level up their system's fitness. Execute these strategies more effectively and easily by making the following proactive *behaviors* habitual. Many of these behaviors will also make you a more effective leader in other contexts.

1. **Lead with purpose.** As tactical matters (process, practices, tools, and the like) come up in conversations, view them through the lens of purpose: how they help solve the right problems or achieve the right goals, and ultimately help the company achieve its mission and objectives.

2. **Articulate assumptions.** Keep on top of the assumptions that guide the system. Make sure they are explicit, shared by all, and kept current. Update the way of working when they change.

3. **Make boundaries clear and real.** If people are aware of their boundaries (and believe they're real), they'll exercise their agency to that extent. Otherwise, they'll operate with less agency than they actually have, and expect management to decide more and drive more. This shrinks the boundaries further, reducing the potential fitness.

4. **Create psychological safety.** Help folks feel safe to act despite fear and risks. Higher levels of fitness require higher standards of safety (inclusion, learner, contributor, challenger).

5. **Build trust.** Unlike safety, which is largely a matter of the system, trust is a personal matter dependent on both competence and character. Help everyone around you recognize areas of low trust, extend trust to others, and adopt trust-building behaviors.

6. **Invite and involve.** As you implement improvements, don't mandate or dictate; instead, invite, involve, and lead with a compelling vision. Have all managers participate in shaping these changes, so they continue to have their needs and objectives met in a healthy way.

7. **Watch the work, not the workers.** Build mechanisms and controls into the system so that the workers can watch more of the work, which frees up management to watch the system. Strive to reduce the watching of the workers because it signals mistrust and encourages behaviors that don't help fitness.

8. **Help people behave congruently with the chosen mindset.** Model the desired behaviors yourself, authentically, all the time. Reinforce the target state patiently and respectfully; be consistent but also pragmatic. For the best results long-term, act as partner, coach, or sounding board.

9. **Be aware of your words.** Explain what you mean by certain terms, because folks may define them differently. Watch out for terms that have unhelpful connotations and implications. Get in the habit of noticing how others interpret your words, and encourage fellow leaders to do the same.

10. **Beware over-simplification.** Notice when people contemplate way-of-working choices that appear too simple for the situation. Help them to understand the pros and cons and to consider more flexible, customized, and nuanced alternatives.

11. **Trade rules for guidelines, agreements, and norms.** Assuming the system adheres to explicit values and principles, minimize your use of rules, and as fitness increases, relax the ones you keep. Do this carefully; the more you "loosen" rules, the more shared understanding and trust the group needs.

12. **Help build cross-functional relationships.** Support people in expanding their circle of engagement beyond those they identify as their team: widen the definition of team, encourage people to form networks across silos, and create opportunities (and reduce barriers) to connect.

13. **Support people differently along the change curve.** With every change, figure out what type of fundamental shift can help each person get out of the Chaos stage. Make it more likely for them to have that Transforming Idea by empathetically providing feedback, opportunities for reflection, and space to try things out safely. Afterwards, make sure they have enough bandwidth and attention for Practice and Integration so the change becomes habitual and unlikely to revert.

14. **Be committed but not attached.** Be committed to a valuable outcome, but not attached to a particular way of achieving it. This stance is closely related to leading with purpose and to autonomy. It facilitates coming up with options that may increase fitness. It also increases people's trust and belief in you, which will make it easier to lead further improvements.