

International Bestseller

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# THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

Sixth Edition

How to Make *Extraordinary* Things  
Happen in Organizations

# Contents

[Cover](#)

[Praise for The Leadership Challenge, Sixth Edition](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Introduction: Making Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations](#)

[What Leaders Do and What Constituents Expect](#)

[Chapter 1: When Leaders Are at Their Best](#)

[The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®](#)

[The Five Practices Make a Difference](#)

[The Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 2: Credibility Is the Foundation of Leadership](#)

[What People Look for and Admire in Their Leaders](#)

[Putting It All Together: Credibility Is the Foundation](#)

[Notes](#)

[Practice 1: Model the Way](#)

[Chapter 3: Clarify Values](#)

[Find Your Voice](#)

[Affirm Shared Values](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 4: Set the Example](#)

[Live the Shared Values](#)

[Teach Others to Model the Values](#)

[Notes](#)

[Practice 2: Inspire a Shared Vision](#)

[Chapter 5: Envision the Future](#)

[Imagine the Possibilities](#)

[Find a Common Purpose](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 6: Enlist Others](#)

[Appeal to Common Ideals](#)

[Animate the Vision](#)

[Notes](#)

[Practice 3: Challenge the Process](#)

[Chapter 7: Search for Opportunities](#)

[Seize the Initiative](#)

[Exercise Oversight](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 8: Experiment and Take Risks](#)

[Generate Small Wins](#)

[Learn from Experience](#)

[Notes](#)

[Practice 4: Enable Others to Act](#)

[Chapter 9: Foster Collaboration](#)

[Create a Climate of Trust](#)

[Facilitate Relationships](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 10: Strengthen Others](#)

[Enhance Self-Determination](#)

[Develop Competence and Confidence](#)

[Notes](#)

[Practice 5: Encourage the Heart](#)

[Chapter 11: Recognize Contributions](#)

[Expect the Best](#)

[Personalize Recognition](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 12: Celebrate the Values and Victories](#)

[Create a Spirit of Community](#)

[Be Personally Involved](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 13: Leadership Is Everyone's Business](#)

[Exemplary Leadership Is Local](#)

[Exemplary Leadership Matters](#)

[Learning Leadership Takes Practice](#)

[Contrasts and Contradictions](#)

[First Lead Yourself](#)

[Leading Is Doing](#)

[Remember the Secret to Success in Life](#)

[Notes](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Authors](#)

[Index](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

# List of Tables

[Table 1.1](#)

[Table 2.1](#)

[Table 2.2](#)

[Table 4.1](#)

[Table 13.1](#)

# List of Illustrations

[Figure 1.1](#)

[Figure 3.1](#)

[Figure 4.1](#)

[Figure 5.1](#)

[Figure 6.1](#)

[Figure 7.1](#)

[Figure 7.2](#)

[Figure 8.1](#)

[Figure 8.2](#)

[Figure 9.1](#)

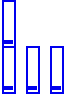
[Figure 10.1](#)

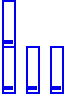
[Figure 10.2](#)

[Figure 11.1](#)

[Figure 12.1](#)

[Figure 13.1](#)







## Praise for *The Leadership Challenge, Sixth Edition*

“Now in its sixth edition, *The Leadership Challenge* has stood the test of time for good reason—it's quite simply one of the best books you'll ever read on leadership. A must read!”

—**Ken Blanchard**, coauthor of *The New One Minute Manager®*  
and *Leading at a Higher Level*

“How can a book celebrate its 30th anniversary and still remain relevant? Easy! It's because the authors never stop growing, learning from all the clients they work with, from all they read in the literature, and from one another. They continue to fill the pages of this book with the best stories, examples, and memorable lessons learned. This is the right resource for anyone just entering the leadership field, or for those who read the book three decades ago!”

—**Beverly Kaye**, founder, Career Systems International,  
coauthor, *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em, Help them Grow or Watch Them Go*

“Whether you are just beginning your leadership journey, or a seasoned CEO, or a professor of leadership, this timeless leadership classic needs to be within constant reach!”

—**Harry Kraemer Jr.**, former chairman and CEO, Baxter International;  
professor of management and strategy, Northwestern University's Kellogg  
School of Management

“*The Leadership Challenge* is a book that not only serves your career but more importantly it is a tool for leading a better life. Jim and Barry have put together one of the greatest of leadership insights. Every leader should take advantage of the gift that is *The Leadership Challenge*.”

—**Howard Behar**, president (retired), Starbucks Coffee

“I love *The Leadership Challenge*! This is the book on leadership that I recommend to all of my clients. The sixth edition provides the best of all worlds: 1. It contains the timeless wisdom that Jim and Barry have accumulated over more than 25 years—it has been and continues to be a

classic in our field. 2. It has been updated to reflect how their timeless leadership concepts can be best applied in today's ever-changing world.”

—**Marshall Goldsmith**, bestselling author of *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, *MOJO*, and *Triggers*

“I've been a fan—and follower—of *The Leadership Challenge* for almost 25 years, and the principles are as relevant today as they have ever been. In this leadership classic, Kouzes and Posner have identified and brought to life invaluable practices that are as insightful as they are practical.”

—**Patrick Lencioni**, president, The Table Group;  
bestselling author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*  
and *The Advantage*

“No book has ever chronicled the practices of true leadership better than *The Leadership Challenge*, and this updated edition deftly outlines how to be a phenomenal leader in the 21st century.”

—**Chip Conley**, New York Times bestselling author of *Emotional Equations*,  
and Airbnb Global Head of Hospitality and Strategy

“*The Leadership Challenge* is a classic, insightful and compelling book. All leadership positions come with its own challenges, but not all leaders know how to navigate through them. If you are looking to excel as a leader, and you need digestible and partial advice: *The Leadership Challenge* by Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner is the book for you. It will not only help you become a great a leader but it will help mobilize your people into getting extraordinary things done. Buy this book, read this book and live this book. Then buy this book for those who truly care about leadership.”

—**Lolly Daskal**, president and founder of Lead From Within,  
author of *The Leadership Gap: What Gets Between You*  
and *Your Greatness*

“If I could recommend only one of the tens of thousands of leadership books ever written, *The Leadership Challenge* would absolutely be my top choice, and by a wide margin. This sixth edition builds markedly on the last but remains characteristically Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner—a complex work in its underlying character, but brilliant in its simplicity and practical

in design. *The Leadership Challenge* is the most useful leadership book ever written; I have each and every edition, and each is better than the last.”

—**Thomas A. Kolditz**, PhD, director, Doerr Institute for New Leaders,  
Rice University

“*The Leadership Challenge* is more relevant now than ever. Jim and Barry continue to provide compelling evidence and examples of leadership that embodies our humanity and capacity to intimately collaborate with others. This book is important in sustaining our faith in the possibilities inherent in institutional life, no matter what chaos surrounds us at the moment. I highly recommend this book.”

—**Peter Block**, author of *Flawless Consulting* and *The Empowered Manager*

“Kouzes and Posner did not invent leadership but sometimes it seems that way. As Alice Waters is to cooking, or Paul McCartney is to music, Kouzes and Posner have developed a discipline and an approach to leadership that sets them apart from all the others. With the sixth edition of *The Leadership Challenge* they not only update their research, they make it once again, come alive. *The Leadership Challenge, 6th Edition*, not only coaches us on how to make extraordinary things happen, the book is extraordinary.”

—**Richard A. Moran**, Ph.D., president, Menlo College and  
author of *The Thing About Work, Showing Up  
and Other Important Matters*

“For over 25 years *The Leadership Challenge* has guided me to know myself and growing as a leader and achieving better results—every time! This new edition improves on an already extraordinary and time tested model by emphasizing the importance and value of engaging your team and those around you. In my business, being a better leader and growing new leaders means improving the health of people and their families. When nurses are more engaged and authentically supported, patients are healthier! *The Leadership Challenge*, with this contemporary update, enables me to improve the health of patients, their families and the communities that we serve. With so many leadership books out there this is truly the ONLY one that you need.”

—**Lori Armstrong**, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, chief nurse executive,  
Kaiser Permanente Santa Clara Medical Center

“What appeals to me most about *The Leadership Challenge, Sixth Edition* is sheer enthusiasm for the art and the practice of leadership. The art of leadership involves bringing people together for common cause. The practice of leadership requires commitment to action for the common good. Both are easy to address, but hard to implement. In this wonderful new edition, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner provide real-world advice—underscored with solid research—that points us in the right direction. Good stuff!”

—**John Baldoni**, president, Baldoni Consulting LLC;  
author, *Lead with Purpose*, *Lead Your Boss*, and *Lead By Example*

“*The Leadership Challenge* is written for leaders who want to transform organizations through some of the most turbulent times in healthcare. These case studies and research on The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Leadership present very practical ways to be visionary, innovative, collaborative, and engaged with your employees. Every nurse is a leader—from the bedside to the boardroom—and all should be competent in the works of *The Leadership Challenge*. I recommend it to ALL!”

—**Susan Herman**, DNP, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, CENP,  
2015 president, Assoc. of CA Nurse Leaders,  
and VP Patient Care Services & CNO,  
San Joaquin Community Hospital/Adventist Health

“If I could recommend only one of the tens of thousands of leadership books ever written, *The Leadership Challenge* would absolutely be my top choice, and by a wide margin. This sixth edition builds markedly on the last but remains characteristically Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner—a complex work in its underlying character, but brilliant in its simplicity and practical in design. *The Leadership Challenge* is the most useful leadership book ever written; I have each and every edition, and each is better than the last.”

—**Thomas A. Kolditz**, PhD, director, Doerr Institute for New Leaders,  
Rice University

“*The Leadership Challenge* isn't theory. It's insight based on rigorous and extensive research. And for me, the most profound insight is a very simple

one: the importance of defining your own personal values and aligning your leadership style around them. As the leader of a large sales organization, I've seen firsthand how powerful that type of authentic leadership can be at all levels.”

—**Mark Madgett**, SVP & Head of Agency, New York Life

# **The Leadership Challenge**

**Sixth Edition**

# **How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations**

**James M. Kouzes**

**Barry Z. Posner**



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## Introduction

# Making Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations

**The Leadership Challenge** is about how leaders mobilize others to want to get extraordinary things done in organizations. It's about the practices leaders use to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards. It's about leadership that makes a positive difference in the workplace and creates the climate in which people turn challenging opportunities into remarkable successes.

The publication of this edition of *The Leadership Challenge* marks thirty years since the book was first published. We've spent nearly four decades together researching, consulting, teaching, and writing about what leaders do when they are at their best and how everyone can learn to become better leaders. We're honored by the reception we've received in the professional and business marketplace and blessed that students, educators, and practitioners continue to find that *The Leadership Challenge* is both conceptually and practically useful.

We persist in asking today the same basic question we asked in 1982 when we started our journey into understanding exemplary leadership: *What did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader?* We've talked to men and women, young and old, representing just about every type of organization there is, at all levels, in all functions, from many different places around the world. Their stories, and the behaviors and actions they've described, have resulted in the creation of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® framework described in this book. When leaders do their best, they Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart.

*The Leadership Challenge* is evidence-based. Analyzing thousands of case studies and millions of survey responses resulted in The Five Practices framework. The hundreds of examples in this book, of real people doing real things, document the practical nature of the model. Each chapter

provides fresh and original data on the impact that the behavior of leaders has on engagement and performance.

With each new edition, we get clearer about the leadership actions that make a difference. We reiterate what's still important, discard what's not, and add what's new. We contemporize the framework and freshen up the language and point of view so that the book is highly relevant to current circumstances and conditions. And, we are more authoritatively prescriptive about the best practices of leaders. The more we research and write about leadership, the more confident we become that leadership is within the grasp of everyone. The opportunities for leadership are boundless and boundaryless.

With each new edition, we also get to address a new audience, and sometimes even a new generation of emerging leaders. That opportunity motivates us to collect new cases, examine new research findings, and talk with people we haven't heard from. It encourages us to perform a litmus test of relevance on our results: Does this model of leadership continue to make sense? If we started all over again, would we find new leadership practices? Would we eliminate any of the practices? In this regard, we are aided by the ongoing empirical data provided by the online version of the *Leadership Practices Inventory*.® This inventory, which assesses The Five Practices, provides more than 400,000 responses annually, and keeps us on guard and on target in identifying the behaviors that make a difference.

We know that all of you face vexing issues that not only make leadership more urgent, but also require you to be more conscious and conscientious about being a leader. Others are looking to you to help them figure out what they should be doing and how they can develop themselves to be leaders. You don't just owe it to yourself to become the best leader you can possibly be. You owe it to your constituents. They are also expecting you to do your best.

# A Field Guide for Leaders

How do you become the kind of leader people want to follow? How do you get other people, by free will and free choice, to move forward together in pursuit of a common vision? How do you mobilize others to want to struggle for shared aspirations? These are only some of the important questions we address in *The Leadership Challenge*. Think of the book as a field guide to take along on your leadership journey. Think of it as a manual you can consult when you want advice and counsel on how to make things happen and move forward.

Chapter One offers two case studies about Personal-Best Leadership Experiences. These stories took place in dissimilar locations and industries, involving different functions, people, and styles, but they both illustrate how The Five Practices apply whenever you accept the challenge of leadership. The chapter continues with an overview of The Five Practices and illustrates empirically that these leadership practices make a difference.

Asking leaders about their personal bests is important, but it's only half the story. Leadership is a relationship between leaders and followers. A more complete picture of leadership develops when you understand what people look for in someone they would *willingly* follow. In Chapter Two, we reveal the characteristics people value most in their leaders and share the voices of people explaining why these are important.

The ten chapters that follow describe the Ten Commitments of Leadership—the essential behaviors that leaders employ to make extraordinary things happen—and explain the conceptual principles that support each of The Five Practices. We offer evidence from our research, and that of others, to support the principles, provide examples of real people who demonstrate each practice in real life, and prescribe specific recommendations on what you can do to make each practice your own. A Take Action section concludes each of these chapters, suggesting what you need to do to make this leadership practice an ongoing and natural part of your behavioral and attitudinal repertoire. Whether the focus is your own learning or the development of your constituents—your direct reports, team, peers, manager, community members, and the like—you can take immediate

action on every one of our recommendations. They don't require a budget or approval from anyone. They just require your personal commitment and discipline.

In Chapter Thirteen, we call on everyone to accept personal responsibility to be a role model for leadership. Through six editions, we continue to champion the view that leadership is everyone's business. The first place to look for leadership is within yourself. Accepting the leadership challenge requires reflection, practice, humility, and taking advantage of every opportunity to make a difference. As we have in every edition, we close with this conclusion: Leadership is not an affair of the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart.

We recommend that you first read Chapters One and Two, but after that there is no sacred order to proceeding through the rest of this book. Go wherever your interests are. We wrote this material to support you in your leadership development. Just remember that each practice and commitment of leadership is essential. Although you might skip around in the book, you can't skip any of the fundamentals of leadership.



The domain of leaders is the future. The work of leaders is change. The most significant contribution leaders make is not to today's bottom line; it is to the long-term development of people and institutions so they can adapt, change, prosper, and grow. Our ongoing aspiration is that this book contributes to the revitalization of organizations, to the creation of new enterprises, to the renewal of healthy communities, and to greater respect and understanding in the world. We also fervently hope that it enriches your life and that of your community and your family.

Leadership is important, not just in your career and within your organization, but in every sector, in every community, and in every country. We need more exemplary leaders, and we need them more than ever. So much extraordinary work needs to be done. We need leaders who can unite us and ignite us.

Meeting the leadership challenge is a personal—and a daily—challenge for everyone. We know that if you have the will and the way to lead, you can. You supply the will. We'll do our best to keep supplying the way.

James M. Kouzes  
*Orinda, California*  
Barry Z. Posner  
*Berkeley, California*  
April 2017

# **What Leaders Do and What Constituents Expect**

## Chapter 1

# When Leaders Are at Their Best

**For Brian Alink**, the digital revolution is as profound as the Industrial Revolution.<sup>1</sup> The way organizations solve problems, drive innovation, and scale those innovations to millions of people so quickly and efficiently is massively changing the workplace, the marketplace, and the community. But as exciting as all this is, something else energizes him even more: the chance to learn how to be an even more effective leader in this new context.<sup>2</sup>

The opportunity to do just that came when Brian was asked to help refine how the credit card business at Capital One Financial Corporation serviced customers across all channels. This challenge was different from others he had spearheaded because it was about “how we change the mind-sets of leaders across the credit card business to use a digital-first approach for servicing. It was about solving real problems that cause customers pain, anxiety, or frustration, and about how we can make it better for them.”

When Brian moved into his current role as managing vice president at Card Digital Channels, he began working with a newly formed team that had just come together. “This put a whole lot of uncertainty into what we were doing,” he acknowledged, and so Brian spent the first few weeks meeting with the executives and other leaders who owned parts of the customer experience, “just listening, learning, getting context, and immersing myself in the situation.” He did the same one-on-one with his immediate team. Guiding him in this initial relationship-building process was a leadership philosophy that had served him well over the years: “At the very beginning of a journey like this,” he said, “it’s about getting to know each other personally.”

It's about knowing who these people are that are working with me, knowing their values, what they love to do, what they care about, and what they stand for. I also love the opportunity to introduce myself—not as a leader or as a strategist or as the analyst or whatever we're trying to do—but just as somebody who is with them as a real human trying to have a greater experience in life and trying to make the world a better place.

Brian pulled his entire leadership team together for a four-hour discussion. He began by explaining how he was attempting to build an environment of trust:

This is the kind of environment where we want to do the greatest work of our lives, where we want to truly make a difference, where we're feeling committed and we want to do something that matters, that has meaning to us personally.

Trust comes from understanding each other's values and understanding our experiences and what we stand for. In order for that to happen, we've got to be vulnerable, and we have to be open. Then we can build on that base of values and trust.

Brian had found that every time he's had this conversation with a new team the experience had been “magical.” Without exception, people opened up and shared their personal challenges with one another. As Brian appreciates, everyone has challenges in their lives, and that it's those hard moments that shape who people are and what they stand for. “What drives all of us,” Brian says, “is that we want to do something meaningful for the people we work with, where it really helps them grow and do something better for the people around us. We want to have that same kind of impact on our customers.”

Through those early meetings, Brian and his team got clear about their shared vision and values. They developed their core strategy and determined how they were going to operate. With this collaborative effort, everyone on the team felt they had created their approach together and developed ownership for it.

Brian and his leadership team then designed and conducted an all-hands meeting that included both his immediate team and extended teams outside



the Card Customer Experience organization. They walked everyone through the process their team had gone through together, then rolled out the new plan and engaged everyone—the developers, the software engineers, the designers, and others—in learning about their mission. This approach helped to dissipate much of the concern and ambiguity, and, Brian observed, “communicated clearly that the leadership team was emotionally committed, had each other's backs, were here to help support our entire team, and to do something big that really mattered.”

But they didn't want this to be only a priority for the customer experience team. They needed to make the idea of helping customers become more digital, and have effortless experiences, a shared vision across all of the credit card business. They wanted everyone—people from product design, credit policy, fraud, collection, credit lines, lost and stolen cards, and other functions—to see themselves in the bigger picture. Brian's team set up meetings with leaders from across the business, shared their aspirations with them, showed them where customers were running into problems, provided them with insightful data, and told them how they could work together to create painless experiences for customers.

As essential as it is to create a vision for and to serve your own vertical team, Brian told us, it's equally important to do the same for your peers and those you don't directly manage:

If we can get leaders who are adjacent to our area to come help us and then be willing to give them the credit for the help they provide, it doesn't take away from my leadership or my team's contribution at all. This is a powerful way to get a lot more intelligence and mind share and support for something bigger that we all need to be working on. In doing so, we create a win for everybody.

Knowing that getting others to collaborate isn't always easy, Brian offered technical resources from his own team in order to help others help him. He operated on a compelling premise: “We are going to win if we help others win. We've got to give in order to get. If we can move the whole organization, what we are going to get is so much bigger than what we could ever have done on our own. . . . Being humble and letting others shine comes back to you many times over.” Brian's team created moments when leaders from other parts of the organization would come together and

showcase their work. These forums elevated others, honored them, and gave them public recognition and credit for the contributions they were making.

While the core of the customer experience approach to leading is elevating others, staying in the background, and giving credit to others, Brian makes sure that those who do the giving are refueled with the energy they need to keep on giving. Each week, he and his leadership team hold standup meetings at which they highlight what everyone is working on and look into problems, successes, lessons learned, and even failures they've had. Those who work in different geographic locations join by video. During these meetings, the leadership team looks for “praise moments” where they can draw attention to exemplary behaviors in front of everyone. When they hear or see something they want to shine a spotlight on, someone will say, “Let's pause for just a moment. That right there was a wonderful example of what we are striving to do.” When people see the successes and hear the positive feedback, it creates momentum.

“When working to transform a company into a customer-focused, digital organization,” Brian told us, “it's immensely helpful to frame the leadership scope as a mission that transcends organizational boundaries. Customers don't know which part of an organization they are dealing with! Limiting the leadership model to the immediate team greatly limits the scope and speed of impact a leader can have on transforming a complex customer journey through an organization.”

This is definitely a leadership philosophy for a new era. It's a 360-degree view of leadership that is more inclusive and more open than what many people have experienced in the past, and it produces results. In less than a year, this collaborative effort at Capital One improved a multitude of customer experiences. For example, customers saved hundreds of thousands of hours of calling time in 2016 as a result of enhanced digital experiences and customer touchpoints. The ratio of customer calls to accounts began a steady downward trajectory to the lowest level since being measured—a major driver of efficiency for the business. At the same time, scores tracking the percentage of people recommending Capital One hit all-time highs.



For Anna Blackburn, “the values match was the biggest driver” in taking her first job with Beaverbrooks the Jewellers, Limited, a family-owned retailer in the United Kingdom. Eighteen years later, these same values drive her as its chief executive officer—their first non-family member, and first female, to hold that position. Honoring values is also at the heart of Anna's Personal-Best Leadership Experience.<sup>3</sup>

Founded in 1919, Beaverbrooks has a long and honored history. Today it operates seventy stores, has a significant online presence, and employs nearly 950 people. It's not only dedicated to offering customers quality jewelry and watches, it's also very proud of its dedication to a mission of “enriching lives.” Beaverbrooks contributes 20 percent of post-tax profits to charitable organizations, and it invests heavily in its colleagues—which has earned the company recognition by *The Sunday Times* (Britain's largest-selling national Sunday newspaper) for thirteen consecutive years as one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For.

Anna's appointment as CEO came at an unsettled time. Her predecessor, a family member, left the company to pursue other ventures. The company had veered away somewhat from its core strategy and culture, and colleagues weren't embracing the new ways. Her fifteen years with the company, however, prepared Anna well for the challenge. Starting on the sales floor, she had served in almost every role and function, worked in locations throughout England and Scotland, and spent five years on the executive team.

None of that meant she could assume she knew what people wanted from her in this new position. One of her first actions was to send out a survey inviting everyone in Beaverbrooks to say what qualities they most wanted to see in the new CEO. At the next annual managers' conference, Anna shared the survey results. People wanted her to be honest, inspiring, competent, forward-looking, caring, ambitious, and supportive, she said, and she pledged to them that she would do everything she could to live up to these expectations.

These actions were an early signal of how Anna intended to be a collaborative and inclusive leader, and her next steps reinforced that aspiration. For example, over the years, Beaverbrooks's operations had become increasingly complicated and formalized, and people had lost a

sense of ownership in the business. Instead of introducing any radical new direction, Anna initiated changes that were “always within the context of building on our strengths,” she said.

It was back to the basics and keeping things simple. Where strategies often go wrong is that you lose connection with the person who's going to be making the biggest difference in your business. They needed to buy in and understand the impact they were having.

A major disconnect that Anna observed was that even though Beaverbrooks made *The Sunday Times* best company list year after year, profits were relatively low. With a firm belief “that being a great workplace and having a great environment should absolutely pay into the bottom line,” Anna set out “to prove that being a great workplace is actually profitable.” However, she wasn't interested in Beaverbrooks being profitable simply for its own sake. She told us that

Beaverbrooks is a business with a conscience. The more successful we are financially, the better we can take care of the people who work for us and the better we can support the wider community. The more successful we are, the more good we can do.

Part of what needed to be done, Anna believed, was to create a greater sense of shared accountability and responsibility: “We needed to have each and every person ready to take their part in making the culture what it needed to be. One person cannot fix, develop, or evolve a culture.” When feedback to the executive level indicated that they worked too much in silos and were disconnected from the stores, Anna introduced new ways to create greater collaboration and synergy. The monthly executive team meetings, for example, became much more focused on strategy, and the quarterly senior manager and corporate office meetings dealt more with operational decisions and with acknowledging the successes experienced in the stores.

Anna also continued the focus group tradition that chairman Mark Adlestone had started: small group meetings of about eight people from similar roles. Annually, she holds fourteen focus groups—six for sales teams, and two each for managers, assistant managers, supervisors, and the office team. The meetings last a half-day, and include discussions of what's working and not working, as well as acknowledgments of individual successes.

Given feedback from the focus groups, Anna devised a new framework for talking about the business, a concept she called The Three Pillars. It is depicted as three pillars standing on a solid base and capped by a header. Written on the base is Beaverbrooks's purpose: "Enriching Lives." On the header is the company name. The first pillar is labeled "Customer Service and Selling"; the second is "Financial Success"; and the third is "Great Workplace." "The key thing," Anna explains, "is that all three pillars are in alignment and the same height. If one pillar were higher than the others, the roof would fall off."

Another of Anna's major initiatives was a refresh of the Beaverbrooks Way, a one-page document, originally published in 1998, that codified the purpose and values of Beaverbrooks. It was not that the values had changed, but that the document was incomplete and unclear. "There was nothing about being a jeweler, and the family values were not referred to," Anna told us. "The values were also open to individual interpretation rather than stating what these values mean in Beaverbrooks." Anna wanted as many people as possible to provide input on a revised Beaverbrooks Way, and she spent twelve months gathering information. She asked questions about it in focus groups, she talked about it with trainee managers, and she sent out feedback forms to all the stores and departments.

She received extensive comments and, with the help of the regional managers, created a supporting document that they introduced at the annual company meeting. In her introduction to this thirty-two-page booklet, Anna wrote:

I received a lot of feedback about what you wanted to see from the Beaverbrooks Way going forward. You asked for clear and simple language, more explanation of our values and behaviors, and more of a working document. This document is a result of your feedback . . . [It] includes "The Beaverbrooks Way" (who we are, what we do, why we exist, and our values) and highlights our behaviors—simply. Our behaviors are defined by examples to help bring our culture to life.

As much as Anna's attention focuses on improving business performance, she also takes to heart her constituents' desire for a caring and supportive leader. For example, she told us, "We find as many excuses as possible to celebrate successes. I think it's important that people feel recognized and

rewarded and valued for the difference they make.” From quarterly business reviews with regional managers to informal office gatherings, Anna takes the time to turn the spotlight on those who do the right things. As they say in the Beaverbrooks Way, “When we recognize what is working well and creating success, we are more likely to repeat the behavior that helped create the success in the first place.” Repeating behaviors that create success is paying off. In the most recent ranking by *The Sunday Times*, Beaverbrooks was the top retailer on the list. Profits were also at an all-time high, proving that you can be both a great workplace and a profitable business.

Given her experiences, what's the most important leadership lesson Anna would pass along to emerging leaders? “Being a role model is absolutely key,” she says. “It's something I've held very close to me throughout my career, whether it's on the selling floor or in the executive office. People who model the behaviors that are crucial to business success inspire others.”

# The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®

In undertaking their leadership challenges, Brian and Anna seized the opportunity to change business as usual. And while their stories are exceptional, they are not unlike countless others. We've been conducting original global research for over thirty years, and we've discovered that such achievements are commonplace. When we ask leaders to tell us about their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences—experiences that they believe are their individual standards of excellence—there are thousands of success stories just like Brian's and Anna's. We've found them in profit-based firms and nonprofits, agriculture and mining, manufacturing and utilities, banking and healthcare, government and education, and the arts and community service. These leaders are employees and volunteers, young and old, women and men. Leadership knows no racial or religious bounds, no ethnic or cultural borders. Leaders reside in every city and every country, in every function and every organization. We find exemplary leadership everywhere we look. We've also found that in excellent organizations, everyone, regardless of title or position, is encouraged to act like a leader. In these places, people don't just believe that everyone can make a difference; they act in ways to develop and grow people's talents, including their leadership. They don't subscribe to the many myths that keep people from developing their leadership capabilities and organizations from creating leadership cultures.<sup>4</sup>

One of the greatest myths about leadership is that some people have “it” and some don't. A corollary myth is that if you don't have “it,” then you can't learn “it.” Neither could be further from the empirical truth. After reflecting on their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences, people come to the same conclusion as Tanvi Lotwala, revenue accountant at Bloom Energy: “All of us are born leaders. We all have leadership qualities ingrained. All that we need is polishing them up and bringing them to the forefront. It is an ongoing process to develop ourselves as a leader, but unless we take on the leadership challenges presented to us on a daily basis, we cannot become better at it.”

We first asked people in the early 1980s to tell us what they did when they were at their “personal best” in leading others, and we continue to ask this

question of people around the world. After analyzing thousands of these leadership experiences, we discovered, and continue to find, that regardless of the times or settings, individuals who guide others along pioneering journeys follow surprisingly similar paths. Although each experience was unique in its individual expression, there were clearly identifiable behaviors and actions that made a difference. When making extraordinary things happen in organizations, leaders engage in what we call The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®:

- ▶ Model the Way
- ▶ Inspire a Shared Vision
- ▶ Challenge the Process
- ▶ Enable Others to Act
- ▶ Encourage the Heart

These practices are not the private purview of the people we studied. Nor do they belong to a few select shining stars. Leadership is not about personality. It's about behavior. The Five Practices are available to anyone who accepts the leadership challenge—the challenge of taking people and organizations to places they have never been before. It is the challenge of moving beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary.

The Five Practices framework is not an accident of a special moment in history. It has passed the test of time. While the *context* of leadership has changed dramatically over the years, the *content* of leadership has not changed much at all. The fundamental behaviors and actions of leaders have remained essentially the same, and they are as relevant today as they were when we began our study of exemplary leadership. The truth of each individual Personal-Best Leadership Experience, multiplied thousands of times, and substantiated empirically by millions of respondents and hundreds of scholars, establishes The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership as an “operating system” for leaders everywhere.

In the remainder of this chapter, we introduce each of The Five Practices and provide brief examples that demonstrate how leaders, just like Brian and Anna, across a variety of circumstances use them to make extraordinary things happen. When you explore The Five Practices in depth in Chapters



Three through Twelve, you'll find scores of illustrations from the real-life experiences of people who have taken the leadership challenge.

## Model the Way

Titles are granted, but it's your behavior that earns you respect. When Terry Callahan asks, "How can I help you?" he means it. One example was while vice president for Miller Valentine Group, a real estate solution provider, they needed to make an important community grand-opening event happen in record time and it required an "all hands on deck" effort. What surprised the team the most was when Terry removed his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and literally got down and dirty as he started mulching the landscape. "Terry taught me that leadership is not about titles and ranks," said one of his direct reports, "but about personal responsibility and setting a positive example."<sup>5</sup>

This sentiment reverberated across all the cases we collected. "At the end of the day," Toni Lejano, human resources manager at Cisco, recalled from her Personal-Best Leadership Experience, "leadership is all about how you behave that makes a difference." Exemplary leaders know that if they want to gain commitment and achieve the highest standards, they must be models of the behavior they expect of others.

To effectively *Model the Way*, you must first be clear about your own guiding principles. You must *clarify values by finding your voice*. When you understand who you are and what your values are, then you can give voice to those values. As Alan Spiegelman, wealth management advisor with Northwestern Mutual, explained: "Before you can be a leader of others, you need to know clearly who you are and what your core values are. Once you know that, then you can give your voice to those values and feel comfortable sharing them with others."

Arpana Tiwari, senior manager with one of the world's largest e-commerce retailers, found that "the more I spoke with others about my values, the clearer they became for me." She realized, however, that her values weren't the only ones that mattered. Everyone on the team has principles that guide their actions and, as a leader, you must *affirm the shared values* of the group. This requires getting everyone involved in creating the values. Doing so, Arpana observed, "makes it relatively easy to model the values

that everyone has agreed to.” Another benefit she realized was that “it is also less difficult to confront people when they make decisions that are not aligned. When a value is violated, leaders have to do or say something or they run the risk of sending a message that this is not important.” Therefore, leaders must *set the example*. Deeds are far more important than words when constituents want to determine how serious leaders really are about what they say. Words and deeds must be consistent.

## Inspire a Shared Vision

People describe their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences as times when they imagined an exciting, highly attractive future for their organizations. They had visions and dreams of what *could* be. They had absolute and total personal faith in their dreams, and they were confident in their abilities to make those extraordinary things happen. Every organization, every social movement, begins with a vision. It is the force that creates the future.

Leaders *envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities*. You need to have an appreciation of the past and a clear image of what the results should look like even before starting any project, much as an architect draws a blueprint or an engineer builds a model. As Ajay Aggrawal, information technology (IT) project manager with Oracle, said, “You have to connect to what's meaningful to others and create the belief that people can achieve something grand. Otherwise, people may fail to see how their work is meaningful and their contributions fit into the big picture.”

You can't command commitment; you have to inspire it. You have to *enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations*. Stephanie Capron, Ritzman Pharmacies vice president of human resources, told us how this family business, with over twenty-five locations, asked people within each location and every department to create a vision board of what they saw the future looking like, and then brought all of these together to create a shared vision (and new brand). “We painted a big picture,” she said, “and got everyone to see that picture so they could understand what great service looked and felt like, and their part in it.”<sup>6</sup> Too many people think that the leader's job is to come up with the vision when the reality is that people, like those at Ritzman Pharmacies, want to be involved in the

process. This grassroots approach is much more effective than preaching one person's perspective.

In these times of rapid change and uncertainty, people want to follow those who can see beyond today's difficulties and imagine a brighter tomorrow. As Oliver Vivell, senior director, corporate development at SAP, points out, "Others have to see themselves as part of that vision and as able to contribute in order to embrace the vision and make it their own." Leaders forge unity of purpose by showing their constituents how the dream is a shared dream and how it fulfills the common good.

When you express your enthusiasm and excitement for the vision, you ignite that same passion in others. As Amy Matson Drohan, ON24's senior customer success manager, reflected on her Personal-Best Leadership Experience, she observed that: "You can't proselytize a vision that you don't full-heartedly believe." Ultimately, she said, "The leader's excitement shines through and convinces the team that the vision is worthy of their time and support."

## **Challenge the Process**

Challenge is the crucible for greatness. Every single personal-best leadership case involved a change from the status quo. Not one person achieved a personal best by keeping things the same. Regardless of the specifics, they all involved overcoming adversity and embracing opportunities to grow, innovate, and improve.

Leaders are pioneers willing to step out into the unknown. However, leaders aren't the only creators or originators of new products, services, or processes. Innovation comes more from listening than from telling, and from constantly looking outside of yourself and your organization for new and innovative products, processes, and services. You need to *search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.*

Leaders don't sit idly by waiting for fate to smile upon them; they venture out. Taking risks was what Srinath Thurthahalli Nagaraj recalled about his personal-best (and first) leadership experience in India with Flextronics. "When things did not work as expected," Srinath explained, "we kept on experimenting and challenging one another's ideas. You have to make room

for failure and more importantly the opportunity to learn from failure.” By making something happen, Srinath was able to move the project forward.

Because innovation and change involve *experimenting and taking risks*, your main contribution will be to create a climate for experimentation, the recognition of good ideas, the support of those ideas, and the willingness to challenge the system. One way of dealing with the potential risks and failures of experimentation is *by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience*. Pierfrancesco Ronzi, as the London-based engagement manager with McKinsey and Company, recalled how successfully turning around the credit process for a banking client in North Africa meant breaking the project down into parts so that they could find a place to start, determine what would work, and see how they could learn in the process of moving forward. “Showing them that we were able to make something happen,” he said, “was a significant boost to their confidence in the project and their willingness to stay involved.”

There's a strong correlation between the process of learning and the approach leaders take to making extraordinary things happen. Leaders are always learning from their errors and failures. Life is the leader's laboratory, and exemplary leaders use it to conduct as many experiments as possible. Kinjal Shah, senior manager at Quisk, told us how his personal best “taught me a lot. I stumbled at places, many times, and got up, dusted myself off, learned from it and tried to do better the next time around. I learned a lot, and the experience definitely made me a better leader.”

## **Enable Others to Act**

Grand dreams don't become significant realities through the actions of a single person. Achieving greatness requires a team effort. It requires solid trust and enduring relationships. It requires group collaboration and individual accountability, which begins, as Sushma Bhope, co-founder of Stealth Technology Startup, appreciated, “by empowering those around you.” She concluded, just as many others had when reviewing their personal-best experiences, that “no one could have this done this alone. It was essential to be open to all ideas and to give everyone a voice in the decision-making process. The one guiding principle on the project was that the team was larger than any individual on the team.”

Leaders *foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships*. You have to engage all those who must make the project work—and in some way, all who must live with the results. General Wendy Masiello, director of the U.S. Defense Contract Management Agency, articulated the importance of being “one team, one voice” to over 600 leaders at their World Wide Training Conference. To make this point, she asked everyone who had contracts with Lockheed Martin to stand. A third of the room stood. She said, “Look around the room at the people you need to team with during this conference. While in sessions sit together, meet together, and share your experiences and expertise.” She then asked those to stand who worked with Boeing, and then with Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and the like. Each time, she spoke the same message and you could hear the sighs as people recognized how they had not been operating as “One Team with One Voice.” As Wendy remarked, “This will only be achieved when we have developed greater relationships with one another.”<sup>7</sup>

Leaders appreciate that constituents don't perform at their best or stick around for very long if they feel weak, dependent, or alienated. When you *strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence*, they are more likely to give it their all and exceed their own expectations. Omar Pualuan, head of engineering at RVision, reflecting on his Personal-Best Leadership Experience, realized that “letting each member of the team contribute to the project plan and make it their own was the most important tool for success.”

Focusing on serving others' needs rather than one's own builds trust in a leader. The more people trust their leaders, and each other, the more they take risks, make changes, and keep moving ahead. Leaders have to create an environment where, as Ana Sardeson, materials program manager at Nest, told us, “individuals are comfortable with voicing their opinions, because then the team feels empowered to take action. This level of comfort with decision making is paramount to creating a space that is conducive to collaboration.” She explained: “When the conversation shifts from a silo to an open and collaborative space, relationships become stronger and more resilient.” When people are trusted and have more information, discretion, and authority, they're much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results.

## Encourage the Heart

The climb to the top is arduous and steep, and people become exhausted, frustrated, and disenchanted, and are often tempted to give up. Genuine acts of caring draw people forward, which is an important lesson Denise Straka, vice president, corporate insurance with Calpine, took away from her Personal-Best Leadership Experience: “People want to know that their managers believe in them and in their abilities to get a job done. They want to feel valued by their employers, and acknowledging an accomplishment is a great way to demonstrate their value.”

Leaders *recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence*. It can be one to one or with many people. It can come from dramatic gestures or simple actions. It can come from informal channels, just as well as through the formal hierarchy. Eakta Malik, senior clinical research associate with a global medical device company, realizing that many people didn't feel sufficiently appreciated, and lacked a sense of team cohesiveness, organized some company-sponsored happy hours and team events, designed “for the team to unwind, get to know each other on a personal level, and to create a spirit of a community.” She publicly acknowledged her teammates' hard work in bi-weekly meetings, which, she explained, “really lightens up the mood. I used to think that having praise on a project looks better when it comes from a director/manager, but I learned that praising someone doesn't have to be connected with having a title for it to be meaningful.”

Being a leader requires showing appreciation for people's contributions and creating a culture of *celebrating the values and victories by creating a spirit of community*. One lesson that Andy Mackenzie, chief operating officer with BioCardia, learned from his Personal-Best Leadership Experience was to “make sure that you and the team are having fun. Every day won't be fun, but if it's all drudgery, then it's hardly worth getting out of bed for.”

Encouragement is, curiously, serious business because it's how you visibly and behaviorally link rewards with performance. Celebrations and rituals, when done in an authentic way and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinarily tough times. As Deanna Lee, director of marketing strategy with MIG, told us: “By bringing a team together after an important

milestone, it reinforces the fact that more can be accomplished together than apart. Engaging one another outside of the work setting also increases personal connection, which builds trust, improves communication, and strengthens the bonds within the team.”

Recognitions and celebrations need to be personal and personalized. As Eddie Tai, project director with Pacific Eagle Holdings, realized, “There's no way to fake it.” In telling us about his experiences, he noted, “Encouraging the Heart might very well be the hardest job of any leader because it requires the most honesty and sincerity.” Yet this leadership practice, he maintained, “can have the most significant and long-lasting impact on those it touches and inspires.”



These five leadership practices—Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart—provide an *operating system* for what people are doing as leaders when at they are at their best, and there's abundant empirical evidence that these leadership practices matter. Hundreds of studies have reported that The Five Practices make a positive difference in the engagement and performance of people and organizations.<sup>8</sup> This is highlighted in the next section, and more of the research supporting this operating system is reported in subsequent chapters.

## The Five Practices Make a Difference

Exemplary leader behavior makes a profoundly positive difference in people's commitment and motivation, their work performance, and the success of their organizations. That's the definitive conclusion from analyzing responses from nearly three million people around the world using the *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI) to assess how often their leaders engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. Those leaders who more frequently use The Five Practices are considerably more effective than their counterparts who use them less frequently.

In these studies, the leader's direct reports complete the LPI indicating how frequently they observe their leader engaging in the specific behaviors associated with The Five Practices. In addition, they respond to ten questions regarding (a) their feelings about their workplace, for example, levels of satisfaction, pride, and commitment, and (b) assessments about their leader on such things as trustworthiness and overall effectiveness. There is an unambiguous relationship between how engaged



**Figure 1.1** The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Impacts the Engagement Level of Direct Reports

people are and how frequently they observe their leaders using The Five Practices, as shown in [Figure 1.1](#). Nearly 96 percent of direct reports who are most highly engaged (i.e., in the top third of the distribution) indicate that their leaders *very frequently* or *almost always* use The Five Practices. In contrast, less than 5 percent of direct reports are highly engaged when



they indicate that their leaders seldom use The Five Practices (at best, only *once in a while*). The differential impact is huge.

In addition, respondents provide information about who they are and their organizational context. Multivariate analyses show that individual characteristics and organizational context *combined* explain less than 1 percent of the distribution connected with the engagement levels of their reports, while The Five Practices account for nearly 40 percent of the variance. How their leaders behave significantly influences engagement, and is independent of who the direct reports are (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, or education), or their circumstance (e.g., position, tenure, discipline, industry, or nationality). How their leader behaves is what makes a difference in explaining why people work hard, their commitment, pride, and productivity.

The more you use The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, the more likely it is that you'll have a positive influence on other people and the organization. That's what all the data adds up to: if you want to have a significant impact on people, on organizations, and on communities, you'd be wise to invest in learning the behaviors that enable you to become the very best leader you can. Moreover, the data clearly shows that how strongly direct reports would “recommend their leader to a colleague” directly links with the extent to which they report their leader using The Five Practices.

Many scholars have documented that leaders who engage in The Five Practices are more effective than those who don't.<sup>9</sup> This is true whether the context is inside or outside the United States, in the public or private sector, or within schools, healthcare organizations, business firms, prisons, churches, and so on. Here are just a few examples of the impact of leaders who use The Five Practices more frequently than their counterparts:

- ▶ Create higher-performing teams
- ▶ Generate increased sales and customer satisfaction levels
- ▶ Foster renewed loyalty and greater organizational commitment
- ▶ Enhance motivation and the willingness to work hard
- ▶ Facilitate high patient-satisfaction scores and more effectively meet family member needs

- ▶ Promote high degrees of student and teacher involvement in schools
- ▶ Enlarge the membership size of their religious congregations
- ▶ Reduce absenteeism, turnover, and dropout rates
- ▶ Positively influence recruitment yields

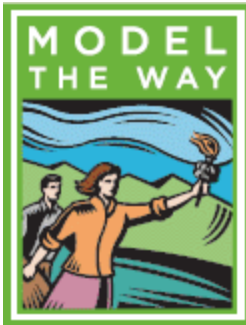
While The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership don't *completely* explain why leaders and their organizations are successful, it's very clear that engaging in them makes quite a difference no matter who you are or where you are located. How you behave as a leader matters, and it matters a lot. Furthermore, evaluations of the effectiveness of the leader by their direct reports, and others, correlate directly with how frequently The Five Practices are used.

Consider these findings at a macro level. Researchers examined the financial performance of organizations over a five-year period and compared those that constituents rated senior leaders as actively using The Five Practices with organizations whose leaders were significantly less engaged in The Five Practices. The bottom line: net income growth was nearly eighteen times higher, and stock price growth was nearly three times greater for those publicly traded organizations whose leadership strongly engaged in The Five Practices than their counterparts. [10](#)

# The Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership

Embedded in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are behaviors that can serve as the basis for becoming an exemplary leader. We call these The Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership ([Table 1.1](#)). They focus on behaviors and actions you need to be comfortable with engaging in. These ten commitments serve as the template for explaining, understanding, appreciating, and learning how leaders get extraordinary things done in organizations, and each of them is discussed in depth in Chapters Three through Twelve. Before we go into depth on each of these commitments, let's next consider leadership from the standpoint of the constituent. Leadership, after all, is a relationship. What do people look for in a leader? What do people want from someone whose direction they'd be *willing* to follow?

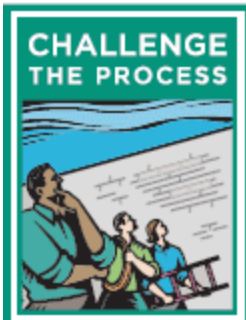
**Table 1.1** The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership



1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.
2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.



3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.



5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
6. Experiment and take risks by consistently generating small wins and learning from experience.



7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.



9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

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## Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from personal interviews, from Personal-Best Leadership Experience case studies, or leadership reflections written by the respondent leaders. The titles and affiliations of the leaders quoted may be different today from what they were at the time of their case study or publication of this edition. In a few instances when leaders have asked us not to use their real names, we have used pseudonyms for ease of discussion. All other details of the example are the respondent's *actual* experience.
2. We are grateful to Steve Coats for providing this example, expanded by further interviews.
3. We are grateful to Natalie Loeb for providing this example, expanded by further interviews.
4. More information about the myths that keep people from fully developing as leaders can be found in J. M. Kouzes and B. Z. Posner, *Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader* (San Francisco: The Leadership Challenge—A Wiley Brand, 2016).
5. We are grateful to Valarie Willis for providing this example.
6. We are grateful to Valarie Willis for providing this example.
7. We are grateful to Joseph Hines for providing this example.
8. More information about the research methodology and findings can be found in B. Z. Posner, “Bringing the Rigor of Research to the Art of Leadership: Evidence Behind The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership and the LPI: Leadership Practices Inventory,” <http://www.leadershipchallenge.com/Research-section-Our-Authors-Research-Detail/bringing-the-rigor-of-research-to-the-art-of-leadership.aspx>.

9. Posner, “Bringing the Rigor,” and J. M. Kouzes and B. Z. Posner, *LPI: Leadership Practices Inventory*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: The Leadership Challenge—A Wiley Brand, 2012), <http://www.leadershipchallenge.com/professionals-section-lpi.aspx>.
10. R. ROI, *Leadership Practices, Corporate Culture, and Company Financial Performance: 2005 Study Results* (Palo Alto, CA: Crawford and Associates International, 2006), <http://www.hr.com/en?s=ldYUsXbBU1qzkTZI&t=/documentManager/sfdoc.file.supply&fileID=1168032065880>. For a list of hundreds of scholarly articles examining how The Five Practices impacts engagement and performance, see Posner, “Bringing the Rigor.”



## Chapter 2

# Credibility Is the Foundation of Leadership

**The inescapable conclusion** from analyzing thousands of Personal-Best Leadership Experiences is that *everyone has a story to tell*. Moreover, these experiences are much *more similar* in terms of actions, behaviors, and processes than they are different, regardless of context. The data clearly challenges the myths that leadership is something that you find only at the highest levels of organizations and society and that it's something reserved for only a handful of charismatic men and women. The notion that there are only a few great people who can lead others to greatness is just plain wrong. Likewise, it is wrong to suggest that leaders come only from large, or small, or already great, or new organizations, or from established economies, or from certain industries, functions, or disciplines. The truth is leadership is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that are available to anyone. It is because there are so many—not so few—leaders that extraordinary things happen on a regular basis in organizations, especially in times of great uncertainty.

Another crucial truth that weaves itself throughout every situation and every leadership action is that Personal-Best Leadership Experiences are never stories about solo performances. Leaders never make extraordinary things happen all by themselves. Leaders mobilize *others* to want to struggle for shared aspirations, and this means that, fundamentally, *leadership is a relationship*. Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. You can't have one without the other. To lead effectively you have to appreciate fully the fundamental dynamics of the leader-constituent relationship. A leader-constituent relationship characterized by fear and distrust will never produce anything of lasting value. A relationship characterized by mutual respect and confidence will overcome the greatest adversities and leave a legacy of significance.

That is precisely what Yamin Durrani told us about his relationship with Bobby Matinpour, marketing manager at National Semiconductor, now part of Texas Instruments, who came aboard just after the company had gone

through a massive reorganization followed by a huge layoff. “Company-wide there was a general lack of motivation, sense of mistrust, insecurity, and everyone was looking after their own interest,” Yamin said. “Our group in particular was suffering from low motivation, as we didn't trust each other. I dreaded going to the office and there was too much internal competition leading to breakdowns in communication.”

Bobby realized that he was going to have to get people to trust one another. His very first initiative was to sit with individual team members to understand their desires, needs, and plans. For the first month, he spent most of the time learning and trying to understand what each person aspired to and enjoyed doing. He held weekly one-on-one meetings with individual team members, asked questions, and listened attentively to what they had to say. “His friendly style and honest, straightforward approach,” said Yamin, “led team members to open up and feel secure. He never acted as if he knew everything and was open to learning new things from the team. Bobby understood that he couldn't gain the respect of the team without respecting them and allowing them the freedom to take ownership of their projects. Bobby opened up lines of communication within the team, especially by encouraging greater face-to-face interactions.”

In management meetings when a question was asked, even though he could have provided the answer himself, Bobby typically referred it to one of his team members, stating, for example, “Yamin is an expert on this topic. I will let him answer this question.” During the annual sales conference, attended by hundreds of company employees, he let the most junior team member make the group presentation, while the whole team stood behind the presenter to answer questions. Yamin observed that:

Being new to the group, Bobby could have easily fallen into the trap of trying to prove himself by individually contributing in projects, or acting as a gatekeeper for information flow; however, he opted to trust his team members on projects and took advice from them as for the approach to take on a particular project. He never forced his ideas. In other words, “my way or the highway” was not his style. He encouraged team members to take initiative and acted as an advisor on projects, and let the ownership remain with the individual team member.

The results of Bobby's leadership were significant. The unit's revenue increased by 25 percent, and the product pipeline overflowed with product ideas. Team spirit soared, people felt engaged, and a general sense of collaboration and teamwork developed. "I personally had not felt more empowered and trusted ever before," Yamin told us. "From this experience I've realized that great leaders grow their followers into leaders themselves."

As Bobby so well demonstrated in the way he focused on others and not on himself, success in leadership, success in work, and success in life are a function of how well people work and play together. Because leadership is a reciprocal process between leaders and their constituents, any discussion of leadership has to appreciate the dynamics of this relationship. Strategies, tactics, skills, and practices are empty without an understanding of the fundamental human aspirations that connect leaders and their constituents.

Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart are the leadership practices that emerge from thousands of personal-best leadership cases. However, they paint only a partial portrait of what's going on because leaders don't make extraordinary things happen all by themselves. The full picture requires an understanding and appreciation of what constituents expect from their leaders. You earn leadership from the people you aspire to lead. People choose, on a daily basis, whether they are going to follow and commit completely their talents, time, and energy. In the end, leaders don't decide who leads, followers do.

Leadership is something you experience in an interaction with another human being. That experience varies from leader to leader, from constituent to constituent, and from day to day. No two leaders are exactly alike, no two constituent groups are exactly alike, and no two days in the life of leaders and constituents are exactly alike. Great leadership potential is discovered, and unlocked, when you seek to understand the desires and expectations of your constituents, and when you act on them in ways that are congruent with their norms and image of what an exemplary leader is and does. What leaders say they do is one thing; what constituents say they want and how well leaders meet these expectations is another. Knowing what people want from their leaders is the only way to complete the picture of how leaders

can build and sustain the kind of relationships that will make extraordinary things happen.

# What People Look for and Admire in Their Leaders

To understand leadership as a relationship, we have investigated the expectations that constituents have of leaders.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, we have asked people to tell us the personal traits, characteristics, and attributes they look for and admire in a person whom they would be *willing* to follow. The responses both affirm and enrich the picture that emerged from studies of personal leadership bests.

Our research on what constituents expect of leaders originally began by surveying thousands of business and government executives. In response to the *open-ended* question about what they looked for in a person they would be *willing* to follow, hundreds of different values, traits, and characteristics were reported.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent content analysis by independent judges, followed by further empirical analyses, reduced these items to a checklist of twenty attributes, which we call the Characteristics of Admired Leaders (CAL).

Using CAL, we ask people to select the seven qualities that they “most look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction they would *willingly* follow.” The key word in the preceding sentence is “willingly.” It's one thing to follow someone because you think you have to “or else,” and it's another when you follow a leader because you *want to*. What do people expect from an individual they would follow, not because they have to, but because they want to? What does it take to be the kind of leader that others want to follow, doing so enthusiastically and voluntarily?

Over 100,000 people around the globe have responded to the CAL checklist. The survey results have been remarkable in their consistency over the years, as the data in [Table 2.1](#) illustrates. There are some essential “character tests” individuals must pass before others are willing to grant them the designation *leader*.

While every characteristic receives votes, meaning that each is important to some people, what is most evident and striking is that for over three decades, there are only four qualities that have always received more than

60 percent of the votes (with the exception of Inspiring in 1987, which was valued by 58 percent at that time). Despite all the dramatic changes in the world, what people most look for in a leader has been amazingly stable.

**Table 2.1** Characteristics of Admired Leaders

Percentage of Respondents Selecting Each Characteristic Over Time Periods*						
Characteristic	1987	1995	2002	2007	2012	2017
Honest	83	88	88	89	89	84
Competent	67	63	66	68	69	66
Inspiring	58	68	65	69	69	66
Forward-Looking	62	75	71	71	71	62
Intelligent	43	40	47	48	45	47
Broad-minded	37	40	40	35	38	40
Dependable	33	32	33	34	35	39
Supportive	32	41	35	35	35	37
Fair-minded	40	49	42	39	37	35
Straightforward	34	33	34	36	32	32
Cooperative	25	28	28	25	27	31
Ambitious	21	13	17	16	21	28
Caring	26	23	20	22	21	23
Determined	17	17	23	25	26	22
Courageous	27	29	20	25	22	22
Loyal	11	11	14	18	19	18
Imaginative	34	28	23	17	16	17
Mature	23	13	21	5	14	17
Self-Controlled	13	5	8	10	11	10
Independent	10	5	6	4	5	5

\* Note: Since we asked people to select seven characteristics, the totals add up to more than 100 percent.

For the majority of people to follow someone willingly, they want a leader who they believe is

- ▶ Honest
- ▶ Competent
- ▶ Inspiring
- ▶ Forward-looking

In addition, these same four characteristics rank consistently at the top *across different countries* as shown by the data in [Table 2.2](#). We also found that the ranking doesn't significantly vary across cultures, ethnicities, organizational functions and hierarchies, genders, levels of education, and age groups (and we'll say a bit more about this shortly).

**Table 2.2** Characteristics of Admired Leaders (CAL) Around the World  
(Rank Order by Country)

Country	Honest	Forward-looking	Inspiring	Competent
United States	1	2	3	4
Australia	1	2	3	4
Brazil	1	2	4	3
Canada	1*	1*	3	4
China	3	2	1	4
Japan	1*	1*	4	3
Korea	1*	1*	4	3
Malaysia	1	2	4	3
Mexico	1	2	3	4
Scandinavia	3	2	1	4
Singapore	4	2*	1	2*
Turkey	3	1	2	4
United Arab Emirates	1	2	3	4

\* Indicates a tie in the rank order.

The examination of admired leader attributes is very consistent with hundreds of interviews we've conducted, asking people to tell us about the most credible leader they have ever experienced. Compare how the characteristics of honest, competent, forward-looking, and inspiring are embedded into what Melinda Jackson, corporate recruiter for a multinational technology company, told us about her most admired leader: "I remember her deep knowledge of the work, clear vision for the future, incredible support and care for those around her, and her stark authenticity. She believed wholeheartedly in what we were doing and led with a fervor that encouraged even my most pessimistic co-workers to follow." Such



stories and the characteristics of admired leaders mirror the actions people describe in their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership and the behaviors of people admired as leaders are complementary perspectives on the same subject. When they're performing at their peak, leaders are doing more than just getting results. They're also responding to the behavioral expectations of their constituents, underscoring the point that the relationship is one of service to a purpose and service to people.

As we weave the themes of being honest, forward-looking, competent, and inspiring into the text of the subsequent chapters on The Five Practices, you'll see in more detail how exemplary leaders respond to the needs of their constituents. For example, being regarded as honest is essential if a leader is to Model the Way. The leadership practice of Inspire a Shared Vision requires being forward-looking and inspiring. When leaders Challenge the Process, they also enhance the perception that they're dynamic. Trustworthiness, often a synonym for honesty, plays a major role in how leaders Enable Others to Act, as does the leader's own competency. Likewise, leaders who recognize and celebrate significant contributions and accomplishments—who Encourage the Heart—increase their constituents' understanding of and commitment to the vision and values. When leaders demonstrate capacity in all of The Five Practices, they show others they have the competence to make extraordinary things happen.

Let's examine why each of these characteristics is essential for creating a sustainable relationship between those who would be willing to follow and those who aspire to lead others. We'll also discover in the process the foundation on which leaders must build that sustainable relationship.

## **Honest**

In every survey we've conducted, honesty is selected more often than any other leadership characteristic. Overall, it emerges as the single most important factor in the leader-constituent relationship. The percentages vary, but the final ranking does not. First and foremost, people want a leader who is honest.

It's clear that if people anywhere are to willingly follow someone—whether it's into battle or the boardroom, in the front office or on the production

floor—they first want to be sure that the individual is worthy of their trust. They want to know that the person is truthful, ethical, and principled. When people talk to us about the qualities they admire in leaders, they often use “integrity” and “authentic” as synonyms for honesty. No matter what the setting, people want to be fully confident in their leaders, and to be fully confident they have to believe that their leaders are individuals of authentic character and solid integrity. That over 80 percent of constituents want their leaders to be honest above all else is a message that every leader must take to heart. “After all,” Jennifer McRae, an engineer with the City of San Jose, explained: “Why would you want to follow someone if you suspected that they were lying or trying to trick you? Honesty is the basis of trust and you have to believe that what the leader speaks or knows is true.”

Of all the qualities that people look for and admire in a leader, honesty is by far the most personal. People want their leaders to be honest because a leader's honesty is also a reflection upon their own honesty. It's the quality that can most enhance or most damage personal reputations. If you follow someone who's universally viewed as having impeccable character and strong integrity, then you're likely to be viewed the same. If you willingly follow someone who's considered dishonest and unethical, your own image is tarnished. In addition, there's perhaps another, subtler, reason why honesty is at the top. When people follow someone they believe to be dishonest, they come to realize that they've compromised their own integrity. Over time, they not only lose respect for the leader, they lose respect for themselves. As Anand Reddy, senior engineering manager at Intel, explained: “A failure of honesty poisons the team, damages the trust between people, and breaks down team cohesion. Besides, nobody wants to follow a leader who is not honest.”

Honesty is strongly tied to values and ethics. Constituents appreciate leaders who take a stand on important principles. People resolutely refuse to follow those who lack confidence in their own beliefs. Confusion over where the leader stands creates stress. Not knowing the leader's beliefs contributes to conflict, indecision, and political rivalry. People simply don't trust leaders who can't or won't disclose or live by a clear set of values, ethics, and standards. You really are only as good as your word in the eyes of those you aspire to lead.

## Competent

To enlist in another's cause, people must believe that the leader is competent to guide them along the path to the future. They must see the leader as capable and effective. "Competence is important," explained Kevin Schultz, assurance associate at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, "because it is difficult to wholeheartedly follow someone who does not know what they are doing." If people doubt the leader's abilities, they're not going readily to enlist in the crusade. Studies point out that when people perceive their leader as incompetent, they reject the individual as well as that person's position.<sup>3</sup>

*Leadership competence* refers to the leader's track record and ability to get things done. This kind of competence inspires confidence—the leader will be able to guide the entire organization, large or small, in the direction in which it needs to go. Another benefit, as Rebecca Sanchez, local government budget analyst, pointed out: "I become a better follower because I have confidence that my leader knows what she is talking about and asking us to do."

However, as Brian Dalton, finance manager with Rocket Fuel, noted: "A leader isn't expected to be an expert in everything, because if they were, then why would they even need followers? Rather, a leader is expected to have a competent understanding of the organization, and be able to recruit and ask instructive and insightful questions to those who are experts in their fields." When people talk about a competent leader, they aren't referring specifically to the leader's abilities in the core technology of the operation. People demand a base level of understanding of and relevant experience in the fundamentals of the industry, market, or professional service environment, but they also know that as leaders move up in the organization's hierarchy they can't be expected to be the most technically competent in an operational specialty. Organizations are too complex and multifunctional for that ever to be the case.

The type of competence demanded also seems to vary with the leader's position and the condition of the organization. For example, expect abilities in strategic planning and policymaking for those who hold officer positions. A leader on the line, or at the point of customer or client contact, typically has to be more product competent compared with someone less engaged in

directly providing services or making products. An effective leader in a high technology company may not need to be a master programmer, but must understand the business implications of electronic data interchange, networking, cloud computing, and the Internet.

For people to have confidence in the competence of their leader, they need to believe that the person knows the business and understands the current operation, culture, and people in the company. They need to know that the leader has had the breadth of experiences that will enable him or her to lead through the challenges that the organization faces at the time. That is why senior leaders tend to have a broader exposure to more functions, markets, countries, and cultures than those in early career stages. The broader the experience, the more likely it is that they can be successful across organizations and industries.

## **Inspiring**

People expect their leaders to be excited, energetic, and positive about the future. A person who is enthusiastic and passionate about future possibilities conveys to others a stronger belief in those possibilities than someone who shows little or no emotion. People are most likely to believe what you are saying because they sense that *you* truly believe it. “The worst kind of ‘leader’ from my experience,” says Amber Willits, marketing specialist at Maxim Integrated, “is one who stands in front of a group of people or an individual and gives zero life and energy into their dream. Hopelessness and negativity follow from those kinds of messages. How can anyone feel motivated to perform their best if their leader does not provide words of encouragement, optimism, and excitement?”

It's not enough, then, for a leader to have a dream. A leader must be able to communicate that vision in ways that encourage others to sign on for the duration. For one nursing supervisor, Ellen Vargas, this took the form of being “contagiously enthusiastic.” “I infected everyone with my passion,” Ellen said, “and because I was so keen about how this new procedure could change lives, everyone else signed up.” People long to find some greater sense of purpose and worth in their day-to-day working lives. Although the enthusiasm, energy, and positive attitude of the leader may not change the content of work, he or she certainly can make the context more fulfilling. Whatever the circumstances, when leaders breathe life into dreams and

aspirations, people are much more willing to enlist in a common cause. Inspiring leadership speaks to people's need to have meaning and purpose in their lives.

Leaders must uplift their constituents' spirits and give them hope if they're voluntarily going to engage in doing things that they have never done before. Enthusiasm and excitement are essential, and they signal the leader's personal commitment to pursuing a dream. If a leader displays no passion for a cause, why should anyone else? Furthermore, being upbeat, positive, and optimistic offers people hope that the future can be brighter.<sup>4</sup> This is crucial at any time, but in times of great uncertainty, leading with positive emotions is absolutely essential to moving people upward and forward.

When people are worried, discouraged, frightened, and uncertain about the present, they often struggle to focus on the possibilities of tomorrow, and the last thing they need is a leader who feeds those negative emotions. Fear does not persuade people to move ahead by being innovative and taking chances, but rather it motivates them to keep their heads down, hold on to the status quo, and stay out of the way. Fear may bring about compliance, but it never generates commitment. Instead, leaders need to communicate in words, demeanor, and actions that they believe obstacles will be overcome and dreams fulfilled. "Working to achieve a shared vision," says Kathryn Trapani, administrative coordinator for a university healthcare organization, "necessitates that leaders get people to feel at the deepest level that by joining in the cause, their lives and those of others can be uplifted." Emotions are infectious, and positive emotions resonate throughout an organization and into relationships with other constituents. To make extraordinary things happen in extraordinary times, leaders must fuel the effort with positive emotions.

## **Forward-Looking**

Sixty-two percent of recent respondents to our Characteristics of Admired Leaders survey, on average, selected the ability to look ahead as one of their most sought-after leadership traits. People expect leaders to have a sense of direction and a concern for the future of the organization. Simply put, says first-year attorney Sarah Holden: "If leaders want to rely on others to follow them, the leader needs to tell them where they are going, and get everyone heading in the same direction." Compared to all the other leadership

qualities constituents expect, this is the one that most distinguishes individuals as leaders because this expectation directly corresponds to the ability to envision the future that people described in their personal-best leadership cases. After all, if the vision is simply same-old status quo, then what is the purpose of that leader, anyway? Leaders are not content with things as they are today; they focus on how things should be better in the future.

Whether you call that future a vision, a dream, a calling, a goal, a mission, or a personal agenda, the message is clear: leaders must know where they're going if they expect others to willingly join them on the journey. They have to have a point of view about the future envisioned for their organizations, and they need to be able to connect that point of view to the hopes and dreams of their constituents. Gloria Leung told us that because her most-admired leader at Hang Seng Bank (Hong Kong) was forward-looking, “this provided us the capacity to walk a path toward the future with great confidence, and fostered shared values because we all knew where we were heading.” You can't get yourself buried in the details and lose sight of the bigger picture. Leaders must have a destination in mind when asking others to join them on a journey into the unknown.

While the other three critical leadership characteristics don't vary much by hierarchical level, it isn't altogether surprising that the importance of being forward-looking does. Our surveys involving the most senior levels in organizations indicate that nearly 95 percent select forward-looking as a requisite leadership quality, while this percentage drops to 60 percent among people in frontline supervisory roles. For college students, this characteristic is typically among their top seven, but not top four. This wide gap indicates an important difference in expectations tied to the breadth, scope, and time horizon of the job. As people move up the organizational hierarchy, their perspective on the future needs to expand.

However, the ability to be forward-looking doesn't mean that people expect their leaders to have the magical power of a prescient visionary. The reality is far more down to earth. People want their leader to have a well-defined orientation toward the future. They want their leader to communicate what the organization will look like, feel like, and be like when they arrive at their destination in six quarters or six years. They want to have it described

in rich detail so that they'll know themselves when they've arrived, and so that they can select the proper route for getting there.

## Consistency over Time and Place

These four prerequisites for leadership—*honest*, *competent*, *inspiring*, and *forward-looking*—have stood the test of time and geography, even though there have been modest changes in emphasis. For example, being honest remains at the top of the list, but it's not quite as high a percentage as in earlier times. This modest decline in *honest* as an admired leadership quality parallels a decline in the levels of trust people have expressed in institutional leaders worldwide.<sup>5</sup> People have become more cynical about what they can actually expect from leaders, but it is important to note that *honest* still remains the number-one quality people look for in a person they would willingly follow.

The biggest change in percentage numbers is in the importance of *forward-looking*, which has declined in the percentage of people selecting it. Even so, it is still among the top four and clearly ahead in relevance compared to the remaining leadership characteristics.

The modest changes in preferences underscore the remarkable consistency of people's expectation of leaders over a wide variety of personal, organizational, and cultural dimensions. These twenty leader characteristics have not changed by more than a few percentage points (plus and minus) since the first round of data collected more than thirty-five years ago. People continue to want their leaders to be truthful, to know what they are doing and talking about, to demonstrate genuine enthusiasm and a positive outlook, and to have a sense of direction.

At the same time, you should appreciate that context matters and the external environment may influence what people look for and admire in a leader at any given moment or in any specific organization or location, and in how you would demonstrate these crucial leadership characteristics. Expectations can vary from organization to organization, function to function, group to group, and level to level.

For example, data collected in healthcare organizations often finds *caring* to be more salient than in other environments. Being *loyal* dramatically increases in importance when sampling people connected with the military,

while *intelligent* receives higher scores in academic circles, and *mature* gets more votes than the norm from senior citizens. Similarly, people in management positions choose *forward-looking* much more often than do those in exempt positions. Human resource professionals select *supportive* more often than other functional groups, while sales people tend to select *inspiring* more frequently than their accounting counterparts do. Furthermore, there are likely to be nuances and possibly subtle differences in how leaders demonstrate these characteristics in various cultures. Appreciating these local differences is important, even while the four qualities remain universal.



# Putting It All Together: Credibility Is the Foundation

*Honest, competent, inspiring, and forward-looking* are the essential characteristics people want in a leader, someone whose direction they would willingly follow. They are the “transportable” part of every leader's repertoire, and you need to carry them with you wherever you go. This finding has remained constant over more than three decades of economic growth and recession, birth of the World Wide Web, globalization of the economy, new technologies, Internet bubbles, explosion of mobile accessibility, rise in terrorism, immigration and refugee crises, and the ever-changing political environment. Whether you believe leaders are true to these values is another matter, but what people would like from their leaders is unchanged.

This list of four qualities is useful in and of itself, but there's a more profound implication revealed by our research. These key characteristics make up what communications experts refer to as “source credibility.” In assessing the believability of sources of information—whether newscasters, sales people, physicians, or priests; whether business executives, military officers, politicians, or civic leaders—researchers typically evaluate them on three criteria: their perceived *trustworthiness*, *expertise*, and *dynamism*. The more highly people are rated on these dimensions, the more credible they are perceived as sources of information.<sup>6</sup>

Notice how remarkably similar these three characteristics are to the essential qualities people want from their leaders—*honest, competent, and inspiring*—three of the top four items selected in our surveys. Link the theory to the data about admired leader qualities, and the striking conclusion is that people want to follow leaders who, more than anything, are credible. *Credibility is the foundation of leadership*. People must be able, above all else, to believe in their leaders. To *willingly* follow them, people must believe that the leaders' word can be trusted, that they are personally passionate and enthusiastic about their work, and that they have the knowledge and skill to lead.

People also must believe that their leaders know where they're headed and have a vision for the future. *Being forward-looking* and *having a vision* is what truly makes leaders unique from other people in an organization. Leaders are expected to have a point of view about the future and to articulate exciting possibilities. People will only willingly follow when they are confident that their leaders know where they're going.

The consistency and pervasiveness of these findings about the characteristics of admired leaders resulted in our development of *The Kouzes-Posner First Law of Leadership*:

If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't believe the message.

Leaders must always be diligent in guarding their credibility. Their capacity to take strong stands, to challenge the status quo, and to point in new directions depends upon being highly credible. Leaders must never take their credibility for granted, regardless of the times or their positions. To believe in the exciting future possibilities leaders present, people must first believe in their leaders. If you are going to ask others to follow you to some uncertain future—a future that may not be realized in their lifetime—and if the journey is going to require sacrifice, then it is imperative that people believe in you. All the programs to develop leaders, all the courses and classes, all the books and CDs, all the blogs and websites offering tips and techniques are meaningless unless the people who are supposed to follow believe in the person who's supposed to lead.

## **Credibility Matters**

At this point you might be saying, “I know people who are in positions of power—and I know people who are enormously wealthy—yet people don't find them credible. Does credibility really matter? Does it make a difference?” These are important questions, and they warrant a response. To answer them, we decided to ask the people whose answers mattered the most—the leader's direct reports—and we found strong empirical support for the First Law of Leadership. Using a behavioral measure of credibility, we asked respondents to think about the extent to which their immediate manager exhibited credibility-enhancing behaviors.<sup>7</sup> We found that when people perceive their *immediate manager* to have high credibility, they're significantly more likely to

- ▶ Be proud to tell others they're part of the organization.
- ▶ Feel a strong sense of team spirit.
- ▶ See their own personal values as consistent with those of the organization.
- ▶ Feel attached and committed to the organization.
- ▶ Have a sense of ownership of the organization.

When people perceive their manager to have low credibility, on the other hand, they're significantly more likely to

- ▶ Produce only if carefully watched.
- ▶ Be motivated primarily by money.
- ▶ Say good things about the organization publicly but criticize it privately.
- ▶ Consider looking for another job if the organization experiences problems.
- ▶ Feel unsupported and unappreciated.

The significant impact of the leader's credibility on employee attitudes and behavior issues a clear mandate to organizational leaders: Credibility makes a difference, and leaders must take it personally. Loyalty, commitment, energy, and productivity depend upon it. And just to underscore that point, consider for a moment what researchers studying soldiers serving in “hot combat” zones discovered about what it takes to influence people to risk injury and even death to achieve the organization's objectives. Soldiers' perceptions of their leader's credibility determined the actual extent of influence that leader can exercise.<sup>8</sup> That's in a traditionally hierarchical, command-and-control environment; just think what that means for your organization. Credibility comes first, and following comes second.

Credibility goes far beyond employee attitudes. It influences customer and investor loyalty, as well as employee loyalty. In an extensive study of the economic value of business loyalty, Frederick Reichheld and his Bain and Company colleagues found that businesses concentrating on customer, employee, and investor loyalty generate superior results compared to those engendering disloyalty. Disloyalty dampened performance by a stunning 25

to 50 percent.<sup>9</sup> Loyalty is clearly responsible for extraordinary value creation. So, what accounts for business loyalty? When the researchers investigated this question, our First Law of Leadership was substantiated in their finding that: “The center of gravity for business loyalty—whether it be the loyalty of customers, employees, investors, suppliers, or dealers—is the personal integrity of the senior leadership team and its ability to put its principles into practice.”<sup>10</sup>

## **What Is Credibility *Behaviorally*?**

The data confirms that credibility is the foundation of leadership. But what is credibility behaviorally? How do you know it when you see it?

We've asked this question of tens of thousands of people around the globe, and the response is essentially the same, regardless of how they phrase it in one company versus another or one country or setting versus another. Here are some of the common phrases people use to describe how they know credibility when they see it:

- ▶ “They practice what they preach.”
- ▶ “They walk the talk.”
- ▶ “Their actions are consistent with their words.”
- ▶ “They put their money where their mouth is.”
- ▶ “They follow through on their promises.”
- ▶ “They do what they say they will do.”

*That last comment is the most frequent response.* When it comes to deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words, then they watch the actions. They listen to the talk, and then they watch the walk. They listen to the promises of resources to support change initiatives, and then they wait to see if the money and materials follow. They hear the promises to deliver on time, and then they look for evidence that the commitments are kept. When words and deeds are congruent, “credible” is the judgment handed down. The judgment when people don't see consistency is that the leader is, at best, unreliable, or, at worst, an outright hypocrite.

When their leaders practice what they preach, people are more willing to entrust them with their livelihood and even their lives. This realization provides a straightforward prescription for leaders on how to establish credibility. *This is the Kouzes-Posner Second Law of Leadership:*

### DWYSYWD: Do What You Say You Will Do

This commonsense definition of credibility corresponds directly to one of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership identified in the personal-best leadership cases. DWYSYWD has two essential elements: *say* and *do*. To be credible in action, leaders must be clear about their beliefs; they must know what they stand for. That's the “say” part. Then they must put what they say into practice: they must act on their beliefs and “do.” The practice of Model the Way links directly to these two dimensions of people's behavioral definition of credibility. This practice includes being clear about a set of values and being an example of those values to others. This consistent living out of values is what it means to be authentic, and is a behavioral way of demonstrating honesty and trustworthiness. People trust and more willingly follow leaders whose deeds and words match.

To gain and sustain the moral authority to lead, it's essential to Model the Way. Because of this important connection between words and actions, we've chosen to start the discussion of The Five Practices with a thorough examination of the principles and behaviors that bring Model the Way to life.

## Notes

1. For a more in-depth discussion about leadership being a relationship, what people look for in their leaders, and the actions leaders need to take to strengthen that relationship, see J. M. Kouzes and B. Z. Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011).
2. For more information about the original studies, see B. Z. Posner and W. H. Schmidt, “Values and the American Manager: An Update,” *California Management Review* 26, no. 3 (1984): 202 –216; and B. Z. Posner and W. H. Schmidt, “Values and Expectations of Federal Service Executives,” *Public Administration Review* 46, no. 5 (1986): 447 –454.
3. H. Wang, K. S. Law, R. D. Hackett, D. Wang, and Z. X. Chan, “Leader-Member Exchange as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Followers' Performance and Organizational Citizenship Behavior,” *Academy of Management Journal* 48 (2005): 420 –432. See also B. Artz, A. H. Goodall, and A. J. Oswald (December 29, 2016), “If Your Boss Could Do Your Job, You're More Likely to Be Happy at Work,” *Harvard Business Review*, Reprint H03DTB, <https://hbr.org/2016/12/if-your-boss-could-do-your-job-youre-more-likely-to-be-happy-at-work>; and B. Artz, A. H. Goodall, and A. J. Oswald, “Boss Competence and Worker Well-being,” *ILR Review*, May 16, 2016, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0019793916650451?ai=1gvoi&mi=3ricys&af=R>.
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# MODEL THE WAY



## **Practice 1** **Model the Way**

- Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.
- Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.





## Chapter 3

### Clarify Values

**“WHO ARE YOU?”** This is the first question your constituents want you to answer for them. Your leadership journey begins when you set out to find the answer and are able to express it. For Sumaya Shakir, IT strategy director at Amtrak, this is where, at a previous company, her Personal-Best Leadership Experience began.

The first time she engaged with her team, Sumaya told us, she found people were hostile and combative. She was taken aback by their lack of respect. It was not the kind of reception that she expected. Instead of being deterred by their reaction, however, she resolved to break the barriers that made the team dysfunctional and transform it into a collaborative star team. She understood that the place to start was not so much with them as it was with her. She told us how she had to determine what was important to her and why:

I had to question myself about what I stood for, what was important to me, what approaches I was going to follow, what I was going to communicate, and what my expectations were. I had to know and believe first within myself. There were so many things that came into my mind all at once, but I had to focus on the core values I wanted to represent.

Sumaya put together a checklist of basic guiding principles and shared her values with each of her teammates. Instead of telling everyone what she wanted out of them, she stated clearly what values she held and what performance criteria she demanded of herself every day. She openly

communicated her values, in her own words, and provided her team with a vivid understanding of what kind of person she was and what they could expect from her. By sharing and explaining her values, people were better prepared to understand the reasoning behind her actions and decisions. Knowing what she stood for, and why, made it possible, Sumaya found, for others to explore their own values and make them transparent to their teammates. As a result, she said, “We were able to build a set of shared values that enabled the team to work together effectively.”

The Personal-Best Leadership Experience cases we've collected are, at their core, the stories of individuals, like Sumaya, who were clear about their personal values and understood how this gave them the courage to navigate difficult situations and make tough choices. People expect their leaders to speak out on matters of values and conscience. To speak out, however, you have to have something to speak about. To stand up for your beliefs, you have to know the beliefs you stand for. To walk the talk, you have to have a talk to walk. To do what you say, you have to know what you want to say.

You have to make a commitment to *Clarify Values*. In beginning your leadership journey, it's essential that you:

- ▶ ***Find your voice***

- ▶ ***Affirm shared values***

Becoming an exemplary leader requires you to fully comprehend the deeply held values—the beliefs, standards, ethics, and ideals—that drive you. You have to freely, and honestly, choose those principles you will use to guide your decisions and actions. You have to express your authentic self, genuinely communicating your beliefs in ways that uniquely represent who you are.

What's more, you have to realize that leaders aren't just speaking for themselves when they talk about the values that guide their actions and decisions. When leaders passionately express a commitment to quality, innovation, service, or some other core value, they aren't just saying, “I believe in this.” They're also making a commitment on behalf of an entire organization. They're saying, “We *all* believe in this.” Therefore, leaders must not only be clear about their personal guiding principles, but they must also make sure that there's agreement on a set of shared values among

everyone they lead. Furthermore, they must hold others accountable to those values and standards.

# Find Your Voice

What would you say if someone were to ask you, “What is your leadership philosophy?” Are you prepared right now to say what your leadership philosophy is? If you aren't, you should be. If you are, you need to reaffirm it on a daily basis.

Before you can become a credible leader—one who connects “what you say” with “what you do”—you first have to find your authentic voice, the most genuine expression of who you are. If you don't find your voice, you'll end up with a vocabulary that belongs to someone else, mouthing words written by some speechwriter or mimicking the language of some other leader who is nothing like you at all. If the words you speak are not your words but someone else's, you will not, in the long term, be able to be consistent in word and deed. You will not have the integrity to lead.

This was the most valuable lesson that Michael Janis, director of strategic marketing at Agilent Technologies, realized from reflecting upon his leadership journey. “After searching, seeking, and copying the behaviors of leaders in the hopes that I would somehow magically acquire their strengths, their talents—finding success and exhaustion in the process,” he explained, “I've found that the real strength and talent in leadership comes from me, who I am.” Identifying personal values will help you, as it did Michael, to define your leadership philosophy.

Perhaps you believe that nobody really cares about your voice. Think again, because this critical comment from one financial analyst is typical of what so many people reported about their supervisors:

When leaders do not understand their own personal leadership philosophy, their communication and actions can be confusing. Furthermore, if their leadership philosophy is not clear, that person's team will not know what values and beliefs should guide their actions when encountering daily challenges. This confusion will lead to low levels of team commitment, as people aren't able to either identify with or support the leader's values.

To find your voice, you have to discover what you care about, what defines you, and what makes you who you are. You have to explore your inner self.

You can only be authentic when you lead according to the principles that matter most to you. Otherwise, you're just putting on an act. Ivar Kroghrud, the chief strategist at QuestBack, has taken this a step further by creating a one-page “user manual” so that people can understand his values. He reports that the reaction has been “100 percent positive.” By opening himself up in this manner, Ivar finds that it just makes others open up as well, getting to know one another right from the start, avoiding typical misunderstandings and conflicts.<sup>1</sup>

When you fail to express your leadership philosophy in word and deed, you weaken your own and your team's engagement and effectiveness. When we ask leaders if they are clear about their leadership philosophy, those who rate themselves among the top 20 percent on this leadership behavior have entirely different work attitudes from their counterparts in the bottom 20 percent. Their scores on variables like pride in their organization, commitment to the organization's success, willingness to work hard, and overall effectiveness are more than 110 percent higher than those who report they are not very clear about their leadership philosophy.

Moreover, the results from their direct reports are equally dramatic. Those who rate their leaders among the top 20 percent on clarity of their leadership philosophy have significantly more favorable feelings about their workplace than those whose leaders were ranked among the bottom 20 percent. For example, their responses on some specific dimensions are:

- ▶ 130 percent higher on “feel a strong sense of team spirit”
- ▶ 122 percent higher on “proud to tell others I work for this organization”
- ▶ 126 percent higher on “clear about what is expected of me”
- ▶ 115 percent higher on “willingness to work harder and for longer hours if the job demanded it”
- ▶ 135 percent higher on “trust management”
- ▶ 122 percent higher in “feeling like I am making a difference”

The evidence is clear: to be the most effective, every leader must learn to find the voice that represents who he or she is. Responses to the question of how strongly direct reports agree or disagree that “overall, my supervisor is

an effective leader” provide undeniable proof that being clear about who you are and what you stand for is essential. Those who rate their leaders in the top 20 percent on being clear about their leadership philosophy evaluate these leaders as nearly 140 percent more effective than those leaders rated by their direct reports in the bottom 20 percent on this critical leadership behavior.

This data underscores what one frontline supervisor told us he desperately wished his manager would do:

By looking within and understanding what values and beliefs are most important to him, my manager would be able to share these with our team using his own words and messaging. Clarifying his leadership philosophy would help our team identify with and support the values and beliefs that comprise my manager's leadership style. Furthermore, by having a leadership style that is truly his own and not someone else's, his actions would align with the beliefs and values he shares. My manager would be able to build consensus around the leadership philosophy.

He needs to elicit feedback from the team on what values and beliefs are collectively most important to us. By doing this, my manager would be building unity in the team rather than forcing his poorly conceived and ill-considered philosophy upon us. Having the entire team support the philosophy would ensure consistency in the team's work and maintain credibility within our organization.

It's for these reasons that the leadership development program at Yum! Brands, the world's largest restaurant company by units (KFC, Pizza Hut, and Taco Bell), is mostly about asking participants to look inside themselves. Their viewpoint is that you are not fit to build and lead a team until you've worked hard on yourself.<sup>2</sup> Ruthy Ladonnikov, commercial compliance analyst at Genentech, told us how true this was for her: “My values and passions are the drivers to my arguments and opinions, and self-awareness of these values is required if I want to influence others.” Knowing her core values, she realized, made her both “more confident in speaking to others and conveyed authenticity.”

Leading others begins with leading yourself and you can't do that until you're able to answer that fundamental question about who you are. When

you have clarified your values and found your voice, you will also find the inner confidence necessary to take charge of your life.

## Let Your Values Guide You

After seven years of rigorous research, a landmark study of the observations from more than 100 CEOs and over 8,000 of their employees found that leaders who were clear about their values delivered as much as five times greater returns for their organizations as did leaders of weak character.<sup>3</sup> This finding, on what management consultant Fred Kiel refers to as “strong character,” resonates with what Courtney Ballagh told us: “You find your voice by letting your values guide you and then sharing them with others.” As a sales supervisor for a Michael Kors fashion accessory store, Courtney told us that when working in retail “it is very common to get employees from different ethnic backgrounds, ages, educational levels, and varying degrees of commitment. But as long as you are honest, open, and willing to listen to their values, you will be able to find common ground.” She described a situation where she was not initially getting along with Tracey, one of her underperforming associates. Having grown comfortable with her voice, Courtney got together with Tracey, talked about her values, and invited Tracey to do the same.

I helped Tracey express what her reasons were for what and why she worked for the store, as well as provided her the opportunity to talk to me about her values. These two steps were paramount in fixing our work relationship and leading to the future success of the team. I've learned that not everyone you encounter in the workplace is going to think like you and approach problems in the same way—therefore, by affirming our shared values and finding each other's voices, we are able to communicate more effectively and build levels of trust that are unparalleled. The outcome of this situation was that my work relationship with Tracey became much stronger, and overall store productivity and morale increased.

A value is an enduring belief, which scholars routinely divide into two categories: means and ends.<sup>4</sup> In the context of our work on leadership, we use the term *values* to refer to here-and-now beliefs about how you should accomplish things—in other words, means values. We will use the term

*vision* in Chapters Five and Six to indicate the long-term ends values that leaders and constituents aspire to attain. Leadership requires both.

Values are your personal bottom line. They influence every aspect of your life: for example, moral judgments, commitments to personal and organizational goals, the way you respond to others. They serve as guides to action and set the parameters for the hundreds of decisions you make every day, consciously and subconsciously. They inform the priorities you set and the decisions you make. They tell you when to say yes and when to say no. They also help you explain the choices you make and why you make them. Being clear about your values helps you perform better in difficult circumstances.<sup>5</sup> You seldom consider or act on options that run counter to your value system. If you do, it's with a sense of compliance rather than commitment.

If you believe, for instance, that diversity enriches innovation and service, then you know what to do if people with differing views keep getting cut off when they offer up fresh ideas. If you value collaboration over individual achievement, then you'll know what to do when your best sales person skips team meetings and refuses to share information with colleagues. If you value independence and initiative over conformity and obedience, you'll be more likely to challenge something your manager says when you believe it's not right.

Without a doubt, in these chaotic times having a set of deeply held values allows leaders to focus and make choices among a plethora of competing theories, demands, and interests. Paul di Bari's operations section within Engineering Services took on the new responsibility for physical security of the Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Healthcare System's 2.2 million –square-foot facility. This meant hiring a new technician to manage the security system and establishing a new contractor relationship. To get the job going, Paul called a meeting with the new technician and contractor to figure out the status of the current access system, any open projects, and any assignments on the horizon. He used this meeting to vocalize his values about how the newly developed team would work, his vision moving forward, and his expectations for all parties. His values around project timelines, preparations, submittals, and execution, for example, would require more detailed attention than in the past. He also hoped that they would create a new sense of accountability. “It was imperative to the long-term success of



this program and this new team that I clearly explained what my values were, my project management style, and expectations,” Paul told us.

Paul had to establish his voice as a leader by clearly stating management objectives and goals as well as his leadership principles. By defining them unambiguously, he was establishing a baseline for future performance and creating a measuring stick on which to base accountability. “It would have been very easy for me,” Paul said, “to sit back and supervise the program from afar, but to earn the trust and respect of all the parties involved, I had to establish a sense of trust through my work ethic.” Because Paul was clear about his values, he found it relatively easy to talk about them and subsequently to use them in setting standards and expectations. The tone Paul set at the beginning provided guidelines for how his constituents would then act and make decisions.

As Paul's experience illustrates, values are guides. They supply you with a compass by which to navigate the course of your daily life. Clarity of values is essential to knowing which way is north, south, east, and west. The clearer you are about your values, the easier it is for you and for everyone else to commit to the chosen path and stay on it. This kind of guidance is especially important in volatile and uncertain times. When there are daily challenges that can throw you off course, it's crucial that you have some methods to tell which way the wind is blowing.

## **Say It in Your Own Words**

People can only speak the truth when speaking in their true voice. If you only mimic what others are saying, no one can make a commitment to you because they don't know who *you* are and what *you* believe in. Raymond Yu found this out the hard way, when he was, in his words, “demoted” from his management position because of a reorganization, which both frustrated him and lowered his self-esteem. “I never found my voice,” he explained.

With the benefit of time and reflection, Raymond realized that he had “walked down the wrong path.” “I had only been managing and not leading,” he told us. Raymond had used his manager as a role model, with unintended consequences: “Rather than finding my own voice, I parroted his and often used his name and authority to move projects along. In hindsight, I gave up my opportunities to lead by simply being a conduit for

him.” Appreciating that he didn't need to be in a management position to lead, Raymond vowed from then on to “find my voice based on my personal values so that I could become an exemplary leader.”

The techniques and tools that fill the pages of management and leadership books—including this one—are not substitutes for knowing what matters to you. Once you have the words you want to say, you must also give voice to those words. You must be able to express your voice so that everyone knows that you are the one who's speaking and not someone else.

You'll find a lot of science and empirical data in this book to support how important each of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership is. However, keep in mind that leadership is also an art, and just as with any other art form—whether it's painting, playing music, dancing, acting, or writing—leadership is a means of personal expression. To become an exemplary leader, you have to learn to express yourself in ways that are uniquely your own.

Andrew Levine found a way to express his individual voice, and in so doing, helped his colleagues to be able to do the same. Andrew was the head mentor at Young Storytellers. Andrew is passionate about providing a classroom atmosphere that pushes the imaginations of the kids they mentor, and he cares deeply for all the volunteers. One of those volunteers, Pranav Sharma, told us that Andrew's personal values fit comfortably with the values articulated within Young Storytellers' mission statement and explained how this congruence influenced him: “Andrew had a unique voice among the mentors. His example led me to exhibit values he shared with the organization. He helped me understand what it meant to the kids to have a unique voice.”

Pranav was paired with a fifth-grader named Rachel and was tasked to guide her to write an original story in a ten-page screenplay format, but he was having trouble getting Rachel to focus on her story. While other mentors were making progress on their kids' stories, Pranav felt that Rachel was not very motivated. The fact that Pranav had been absent a couple of times over the eight-week program because of workplace demands didn't help the situation. Andrew was noticeably frustrated with Pranav and a few other mentors' seeming lack of interest in the program.

Andrew took two steps to remedy the situation. First, he asked them to think about why they had joined Young Storytellers, and he talked about why he was loyal to the program. He asked them to leave the program if they were not making Young Storytellers a priority, which future absences would make apparent. Second, he asked them to look at the program through the perspective of the fifth-grader. What are the kids looking for from their mentors? He suggested they stop worrying whether they were qualified to mentor or whether the kids would like them. All that was required, Andrew explained, was to be present and to talk to them. Pranav said:

Andrew was right. He was asking us to affirm our shared values and find our voice. What Andrew was doing was asking us to reexamine the reasons we joined Young Storytellers. He wanted us to be vested in the organization's values, which included words like loyalty, commitment, passion, and patience. He wanted us to build a relationship with the kids by talking to them. The only way to make a unique difference in a kid's life was to find my own voice. I had to find my voice if I was to make an indelible impression on my mentee.

The lesson here is how Andrew gave Pranav, and all of the other mentors, time to rediscover how their personal values meshed with those of the organization. By telling them his story, and why he was passionate about becoming a Young Storytellers mentor, he helped them to find the words to express their unique reasons for caring about Young Storytellers, its mission, and especially the children they mentored. Andrew didn't tell them what to believe, he told them about his beliefs, asking them to find in their values their reasons for being involved with the organization. Through this reflection, they discovered their voices, finding the words necessary to reach kids like Rachel and help them develop their personal stories.

You cannot lead through someone else's values or someone else's words. You cannot lead out of someone else's experience. You can only lead out of your own. Unless it's your style, your words, it's not you—it's just an act. People don't follow your position or your technique. They follow you. If you're not the genuine article, can you really expect others to want to follow? To be a leader, you've got to awaken to the fact that you don't have to copy someone else, you don't have to read a script written by someone else, and you don't have to wear someone else's style. Instead, you are free

to choose what you want to express and the way you want to express it. In fact, you have a responsibility to your constituents to express yourself in an authentic manner, in a way that they would immediately recognize as yours.

In thinking about expressing values authentically, Kerry Ann Ostrea, controller at Niantic, shared an analogy about making sure that “what you put on” fits with who you are. “What I mean,” she explained, “is that when you go shopping, you can see something that you like, something that looks good, but you really have to try it on to see how it looks on you. Style isn't the only thing that matters; it must also ‘fit’ the wearer.” When you look at yourself in the mirror, you have to ask: Is this me? In becoming an exemplary leader, ask yourself, do the words sound right for me?

## **Find Commitment Through Clarifying Values**

Shandon Lee Fernandes, former senior research officer in the consulate general of the Republic of Korea in Mumbai, told us that the first step toward exemplary leadership was discovering personal values and beliefs. This was critical, she reflected: “Because only when leaders discover and clarify what they expect of themselves can they expect others to follow. The more easily you can explain your actions and the reasoning behind them, allows others to make a connection between the values and the path they need to take in their actions. Intrinsic cohesion results in external alignment.” Shandon's insights are consistent with what Bernie Swain discovered, after interviewing more than a hundred of the eminent people he has represented as chair of the Washington Speakers Bureau: leaders are self-aware. He says that highly successful leaders have an inner voice that they pay attention to. This insight provides them with an understanding of their strengths, their limitations, their biases, and their motivations. This understanding provides them with a deep well of energy and passion that they are constantly drawing upon throughout their lives in their quest to make extraordinary things happen.<sup>6</sup>

The results of our research clearly support these conclusions and further demonstrate how being clear about personal values makes a significant difference in how people behave in the workplace.<sup>7</sup> In a series of studies over time and across a range of organizations, we asked managers about the extent to which they were clear around their personal values as well as the values of their organizations. They also indicated their level of commitment

to the organization—that is, the extent to which they were likely to stick around and work hard. This set up a classic  $2 \times 2$  experimental paradigm, as shown in [Figure 3.1](#). Quadrant 1 would be those who are not very clear about either their personal values or those of their organization, and in quadrant 2 are those who are relatively clear about their organization's values but not very clear about their personal values. Found in quadrant 3 are those fairly clear about both personal and organizational values, and in quadrant 4 are those clear about their personal values but not very clear about the organization's values. The numbers are the average score to which the respondents in each quadrant say they are committed to their organization, on a scale of one (low) to seven (high). Do you see the pattern in the responses? Do you notice who is most committed based on knowing their clarity of personal and organizational values?

People who are clear about their personal values (quadrants 3 and 4) are significantly more committed than either those who've heard the organizational litany but have never listened to their own inner voice (quadrant 2) or the people who are not clear about their personal values nor those of their organization (quadrant 1). What's even more revealing is that there are no statistically significant differences in commitment levels between those in quadrants 3 and 4. In other words, personal values drive commitment and are the means to increasing motivation and productivity. Results for job satisfaction, turnover intention, and organizational pride are similar to those found when asking about commitment levels.<sup>[8](#)</sup>

HIGH ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES CLARITY	2 4.87	3 6.26
	1 4.90	4 6.12
LOW ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES CLARITY		
LOW PERSONAL VALUES CLARITY		HIGH PERSONAL VALUES CLARITY

**Figure 3.1** Average Commitment Levels of Direct Reports Tied More to Personal Values Clarity Than to Clarity About Organizational Values

The most talented people, no matter their age, background, discipline, or function, gravitate to organizations where they can look forward to going to work each day because their values “work” in that organizational setting. The best employees are attracted to companies that align with who they are.<sup>9</sup> Julie Sedlock, senior vice president for Aéropostale, echoes this observation: “I love to come to work here. I can't think of a day in twenty years that I didn't want to wake up and go to work.” She explains that when you share the company's values, you “want to come to work, work hard, and achieve the goals that the organization has set.”

Commitment is strongest when based on alignment with personal values. People who are clearest about their personal values are better prepared to

make choices based on principle—including deciding whether the principles of the organization fit with their own, and whether to join up and stay or leave! In too many organizations, there is a huge gap between what the organization says is valued and the degree that employees believe they can apply those values to their everyday work.[10](#)

## Affirm Shared Values

Leadership is not merely about *your* values. It's also about the values of your constituents. Just as your values drive your level of commitment to the organization, their personal values drive the degree of their commitment. They will be significantly more engaged in a place where they believe they can stay true to their beliefs. While clarifying your values is essential, understanding the values of others and building alignment around values that everyone can share is equally critical.

Shared values are the foundation for building productive and genuine working relationships. Exemplary leaders honor the diversity of their many constituencies, but they also stress common values. They don't try to get everyone to be in accord on everything. That goal is unrealistic, perhaps even impossible. Moreover, to achieve it would negate the very real advantages of diversity. Nevertheless, leaders build on agreement. To take the first step, and then a second, and then a third, people must have some common core of understanding. After all, if there's no agreement about values, then what exactly are the leader and everyone else going to model? If disagreements over fundamental values continue, the result is intense conflict, false expectations, and diminished capacity. Leaders ensure that through the process of affirming shared values everyone is aligned—uncovering, reinforcing, and holding one another accountable to what “we” value.

Hilary Hall told us about how her manager helped people examine their values, which built a foundation of shared values that resulted in a spirit of camaraderie and common purpose. At General Electric, she was part of a multinational internal audit team, which consisted of a German, two Americans, a Belarusian, and an Indian. Before they even began the project assignment, the manager had them complete a questionnaire, which covered topics such as where they grew up, favorite food, hobbies, and so on. There were also questions that dug a little deeper, asking about the type of work they liked and did not like, the role they usually played on teams, and what they respected in managers and teammates. The manager gathered the team together, and they shared their responses. Thinking back on that experience, Hilary realized that he was doing what exemplary leaders do: affirming



shared values. “Our manager was aligning the team around a common set of values—both personal and professional—and showing the team what was important to him, too,” she said.

Team performance suffers when members do not align with common values. Individuals easily lose touch with one another and work according to their personal standards, resulting in uneven motivation and commitment toward common work goals. Research confirms these experiences.

Organizations with strong corporate cultures based on a foundation of shared values outperform other firms by a huge margin. Their revenue and rate of job creation grow faster, and their profit performance and stock price are significantly higher.<sup>[11](#)</sup>

Matt Ryan, Starbucks's chief global strategy officer, substantiates this claim: “We have successfully linked the percent of store partners in a given store who think we're living up to our values to the performance of that store. We're able to see a very distinct market improvement in the store's comp performance [that is, same-store sales], controlling for all other variables, when partners believe we're doing the right thing values-wise.”

These results make a significant difference to their bottom line.<sup>[12](#)</sup> Similar findings apply to public sector organizations. Within the most effective agencies and departments, there are strong agreements and intense feelings among employees and managers about the importance of their values and about how those values are best implemented.<sup>[13](#)</sup>

Shared values make a significant and positive difference in work attitudes and commitment. In our studies, involving hundreds of organizations, we've shown that shared values foster heightened levels of motivation and intense feelings of personal effectiveness. They promote pride, high levels of company loyalty (lower turnover), and teamwork, and reduce levels of job stress and tension.<sup>[14](#)</sup>

Periodically taking the organization's pulse to check for values clarity and consensus is well worthwhile. It renews commitment. It engages the team and organization in discussing, clarifying, revising, and recommitting to values that are most relevant to a changing constituency (such as diversity, accessibility, sustainability, and so on). Richard Sasser, area manager for the Aviation Division of Austin Commercial, keeps a white coffee mug on his desk on which he has written his seven values.<sup>[15](#)</sup> When people ask him

about the words on his coffee cup, Richard always says, “Well, you asked . . .” and then he told us how “this leads to an opportunity to share my personal values and gets the other person to consider what matters most to them. In these conversations, we generally find ourselves in agreement about our shared values and the purpose behind what we are doing together.”

Once people are clear about the leader's values, about their own values, and about shared values, they know what the team's expectations are and feel that they can count on others. Consequently, they can work more productively, be more innovative, manage higher levels of challenge, and better handle often-conflicting work/life balance issues.

## **Give People Reasons to Care**

While it's important that leaders forthrightly articulate the principles for which they stand, the values leaders espouse must be consistent with the aspirations of their constituents. Leaders who advocate values that aren't representative of the collective won't be able to mobilize people to act as one. There has to be a shared understanding of mutual expectations. Leaders must be able to gain consensus on a common cause and a common set of principles.

Harmony among individual, group, and organizational values generates tremendous energy. It intensifies commitment, enthusiasm, and drive. People have reasons to care about their work, and because of that, they are more effective and satisfied, experiencing less stress and tension. As Courtney Ballagh recalled from her experience at Michael Kors with her associate Tracey, “By getting to know each other on a personal level, we identified our shared values and gave each person a reason to care about more than just ourselves. Morale increased significantly and the store functioned better as a whole.” Shared values are the internal compasses that enable people to act both independently and interdependently. Surveys reveal that people feel that organizations, and their leaders, should be spending more time talking about values with one another than they do now.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

Nicole Matouk was working with the student records office at Stanford University's law school when the associate dean asked for feedback about

how things were going, and what they could do to provide students with a more hassle-free experience. Nicole felt that everyone had the opportunity to speak out on the topics they felt strongly about, and all were given equal and ample time to express themselves without any pressure or fear of retribution. What she recalls most vividly is that while the associate dean asked many questions, she “didn't have to struggle to think of the questions she wanted to ask, or how she would connect what we were discussing to our goals because her values were guiding her questions.”

As we talked, I could tell she was leading me in a particular direction, but it didn't seem manipulative. This was so much more powerful to me than reading about the values in the school's handbook. I was generating the answers to her questions, so I felt this is what I believe, not just what I am supposed to agree with. Not only did this meeting help our team individually to generate answers that were in line with our values and the office's values, but it also helped us to affirm our shared values as an office. We came out of that meeting more united and with the knowledge that we were all working to achieve the same thing, instead of pulling against each other for time and attention.

Nicole's experience reaffirms that when people believe that their values and those of the organization align, they are the most loyal. The quality and accuracy of communication and the integrity of the decision-making process increase when people feel part of the same team. Our research, along with the findings of others, clearly reveals that when there's congruence between individual values and organizational values, there's significant payoff for leaders and their organizations.

Conversations and discussions, like those at the law school, remind people of why they care about what they are doing. These exchanges renew commitment and reinforce feelings that everyone is on the same team, which is especially critical in geographically distributed workplaces. The resulting alignment between the leaders' and constituents' values enhances clarity of expectations. This transparency enriches people's ability to make choices, enables them to deal more effectively with difficult and stressful situations, and enhances their understanding and appreciation of the choices made by others.

Conversations about values also enable people to find more meaning in their work. When you converse with your team members about their values, and when you facilitate a values conversation they can have among themselves, you are helping them to see how the work that they do connects with who they are. You are helping them to make a much deeper connection to work than can ever be realized through discussions of tasks and rules. You are also creating a context in which they can connect more deeply with each other.

## **Forge Unity, Don't Force It**

When leaders seek consensus around shared values, constituents are more positive and productive. You cannot mandate unity; instead, you forge it by involving people in the process, making them feel that you are genuinely interested in their perspectives, and that they can speak freely with you. For them to be open to sharing their ideas and aspirations, they have to believe that you'll be caring and constructive in searching for common ground. No surprise that people who report that their managers engage in dialogue regarding values feel a significantly stronger sense of personal effectiveness than individuals who feel that they have to struggle on their own to figure out what the priorities and principles are, and how they're supposed to be behaving.

Erika Long, senior human resources (HR) manager at Procter & Gamble, started with the company as an intern and was immediately impressed with how leaders demonstrated their values and the core principles of the company in decisions they made. She says:

Leaders at P&G are constantly affirming these values. Anytime they are faced with a difficult decision, they will look to the PVP [the company's Purpose, Values, and Principles] to guide their actions. I met with the director of sales for the Hong Kong and Taiwan regions. I asked him, how does he make sure he is always making the right business decisions? He said, simply, "I look to the PVP. It guides the way I do business. If I am put in a position that is in conflict with those guidelines, I simply don't do it."

Erika says, "People who work at P&G are proud to say so, and everyone feels they are part of something special. Their core values align with those

of the organization.” People who are unsure or confused about how they should operate tend to drift, turn off, and eventually depart. The energy that goes into coping with, and possibly fighting about, incompatible values takes its toll on both personal wellbeing and organizational productivity.

“What are our core principles?” and “What do we believe in?” are far from simple questions. One study reported 185 different behavioral expectations about the value of integrity alone.<sup>17</sup> Even with commonly identified values, there may be little agreement on the meaning of values statements. The lesson here is that leaders must engage their constituents in a dialogue about values. A shared understanding of values emerges from a process, not a pronouncement.

This was precisely Charles Law's experience at American Express when assigned to launch a marketing campaign with a team of six colleagues of different ethnicities and business functions. At first, progress was slow, as frequent conflicts drove down team morale. Each team member focused on his or her individual goals, without considering the interests of others. Differences between them led to mistrust and worst yet, according to Charles, because he had the least experience of anyone in the group, team members were skeptical about his leadership competency.

Charles saw that the team needed to agree on a shared set of values in order to function well. He noted that it was not so important what they called or labeled a particular value, but rather that everyone agreed on its importance and meaning. One of his initial actions was to bring people together just for that purpose. They could arrive at common and shared understandings of what their top priorities and values were, and what these meant in action. He sat down and listened to each team member individually, then reported about everyone's opinions at their next group meeting. He encouraged open discussions and worked through any misunderstandings.

The last thing Charles wanted them to feel was that he was imposing his values on them, so each person talked about his or her personal values and the reasoning behind them. In this manner, they were able to identify the values that were important to the group. Charles explained:

With a set of shared values, created with everyone's consent, everyone strived to work together as a team toward success. Shared values created a positive difference in work attitudes and performance. My action made my colleagues work harder, emphasized teamwork and respect for each other, and resulted in better understanding of each other's capabilities to meet appropriately set mutual expectations.

Charles understood that leaders can't impose their values on organizational members. Instead, they must be proactive in involving people in the process of creating shared values. Ownership of values increases exponentially when leaders actively engage a wide range of people in their development. Shared values are the result of listening, appreciating, building consensus, and resolving conflicts. For people to understand the values and come to agree with them, they must participate in the process. Unity is forged, not forced.

Fervently shared values are much more than advertising slogans. They are strongly supported, and broadly endorsed beliefs about what's important to the people who hold them. Constituents must be able to enumerate the values and have common interpretations of how to practice those values. They must know how their values influence how they do their jobs and how they directly contribute to organizational success. Marwa Ahmed, senior program manager/gas operations at PG&E (Pacific Gas & Electric), told us how she clearly communicated her values to her team, and then, she said:

I asked about their values and what they thought about the company values. From these discussions, we came up with the team's shared values. In my weekly meeting, I started a practice of telling a story about a personal situation where I applied my values either in my personal or professional life. After a couple of weeks, my team members started to share theirs, and in time, the alignment of people's personal values with the team values increased.

A unified voice on values results from discovery and dialogue. Leaders must provide a chance for individuals to engage in a discussion of what the values mean and how what the organization stands for influences their personal beliefs and behaviors.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Clarify Values***

The very first step on the journey to exemplary leadership is clarifying your values—discovering those fundamental beliefs that will guide your decisions and actions along the path to success and significance. That journey involves an exploration of the inner territory where your true voice resides. It's essential that you put yourself on this path because it's the only route to authenticity. Moreover, you must choose that path because your personal values drive your commitment to the organization and the purpose it serves. You can't do what you say if you don't know what you believe. Nor can you do what you say if you don't believe in what you're saying.

Although personal values clarity is essential for all leaders, it's not enough by itself. That's because leaders don't just speak for themselves, they speak for their constituents as well. There must be agreement on the values that everyone will commit to upholding. Shared values give people reasons for caring about what they do, making a significant and positive difference in work attitudes and performance. A common understanding of shared values emerges from a process, not a pronouncement; unity comes about through dialogue and debate, followed by understanding and commitment. Leaders must hold themselves and others accountable to the set of values they share.

Model the Way begins with *clarifying values by finding your voice and affirming shared values*. This means you must:

1. Identify the values you use to guide choices and decisions.
2. Find your own authentic way of talking about what is important to you.
3. Help others to articulate why they do what they do, and what they care about.



4. Provide opportunities for people to talk about their values with others on the team.
5. Build consensus around values, principles, and standards.
6. Make sure that people are adhering to agreed-upon values and standards.

## Notes

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## Chapter 4

### Set the Example

**STEVE SKARKE READILY** admits that he was unprepared for the job when tapped to be the plant manager at Kaneka Texas Corporation. After coming to grips with his values, and what he believed the organization should stand for, he started homing in on how he could make a difference through his leadership actions.

For example, over the years, the management team had been discussing a vision of becoming a “World-Class Plant.” They debated the defining characteristics of a world-class plant and agreed that a strong culture of safety and good housekeeping should be at the top of the list. Looking around, Steve could clearly see that the housekeeping conditions at Kaneka did not meet this ideal. In fact, whenever they had a pending customer visit, Steve would have to remind everyone to make an extra effort to clean up. This included sending people out to pick up trash in the plant, in the parking lot, and on the roads. Steve knew there had to be a way to make cleanliness part of their daily routine.

While offsite after lunch one day, Steve stopped at a hardware store, bought a two-gallon plastic bucket, and put the words “World-Class Plant” on its side. When he returned to the plant, he walked through it and started picking up trash. Soon his bucket was overflowing. He carried his bucket of trash through the main control room and, as everyone watched intently, emptied it into a trashcan. Then he walked out the other door, saying nothing. Word spread quickly that the plant manager was in the plant with a bucket, picking up trash.

Each time Steve ventured out with his bucket, he made sure that it would be visible. It didn't take long for more buckets to appear, with other managers going out into the plant to pick up trash each day, setting the example for all to follow. Soon, whenever Steve walked through the control room, operators would ask how much trash he was able to find. When he had a full bucket, he would walk by the supervisor's office and hold it up for inspection. The process that Steve started, by his hard-to-miss example, soon became the norm.

In addition to actual trash removal, Steve's actions started generating lots of discussion and new ideas about how they could make the job of cleaning the plant easier. To make debris collection easier, trashcans previously removed were placed back in central areas. The operation staff agreed to maintain them and came up with even more ideas to better organize their work areas. The maintenance technicians began carrying buckets around to keep parts in along with trash containers to make cleanup quicker and easier. During this time, the plant launched a new program called “My Machine” whereby each operator was assigned a piece of equipment to keep clean and learn about how it functioned to ensure its proper operation.

“By simply deciding to venture out and start picking up trash,” Steve told us, “I was modeling the way by aligning my actions with the shared value of having a clean plant. It also helped me to ‘find my voice’ around this very important issue of housekeeping. I made it personal for everyone. In a short time, many others were setting the same example.”

Steve's story illustrates the second commitment of Model the Way—leaders *Set the Example*. They take every opportunity to show others by their own example that they're deeply committed to the values and aspirations they espouse. No one will believe you're serious until they see you doing what you're asking of others. Either you either lead by example or you don't lead at all. This is how you provide the evidence that you're personally committed. It's how you make your values tangible.

In Chapter Two, we reported that our research has consistently revealed that *credibility is the foundation of leadership*. People want to follow a leader in whom they can believe. But what makes a leader credible? When people defined credibility behaviorally, they told us it meant “do what you say you will do”—or DWYSYWD for short. This chapter on Setting the Example is

all about the *do* part. It's about doing what you say, practicing what you preach, following through on commitments, keeping promises, and walking the talk.

Being an exemplary leader requires you to live the values. You have to put into action what you and others stand for. You have to be the example for others to follow. And, because you're leading a group of people—not just leading yourself—you also have to make sure that the actions of your constituents are consistent with the shared values of the organization. An important part of your job is to educate others on what the organization stands for, why these things matter, and how they can authentically serve the organization. As the leader, you teach, coach, and guide others to align their actions with the shared values because you're held accountable for their actions, too, not just your own.

In order to *Set the Example* you need to:

- ▶ ***Live the shared values***
- ▶ ***Teach others to model the values***

In practicing these essentials, you become an exemplary role model for what the organization stands for, and you create a culture in which everyone commits to aligning themselves with shared values.

# Live the Shared Values

Leaders are their organizations' ambassadors of shared values. Their mission is to represent the values and standards to the rest of the world, and it's their solemn duty to serve the values to the best of their abilities. People watch your every action, and they're determining if you're serious about what you say. You need to be conscious of the choices you make and the actions you take because they signal priorities that others use to conclude whether you're doing what you say.

The power of the leader's personal example can't be stressed enough. Researchers find that leaders who persist in attaining organizational goals, promote the organization to outsiders and insiders, and initiate constructive change in the workplace are much more likely to have direct reports who exhibit the same behaviors than leaders who don't set that kind of example. This effect is strongest when the leader is most visible to direct reports, and considered to be a worthy role model.<sup>1</sup> Research on “behavioral integrity” demonstrates quite clearly that the alignment between a leader's words and deeds has a powerful impact on how much constituents trust the leader and on their subsequent performance levels.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, clarifying the values and performance expectations you have for yourself communicates to constituents what you are likely to expect of them. Setting the example is how leaders embody shared values and has the effect of teaching others to model the values themselves.

Poonam Jadhav's experience illustrates how true this research is. As credit manager with the Central Bank of India, she worked with two different managers, the first of which gave a very inspiring and motivating speech on the day he took charge, making it clear what he expected of everyone. However, the motivation and commitment of the team faded rather quickly because he did not practice what he preached. Branch staff experienced that he just preached values but did not follow them. They slowly stopped believing in him, and then his messages.

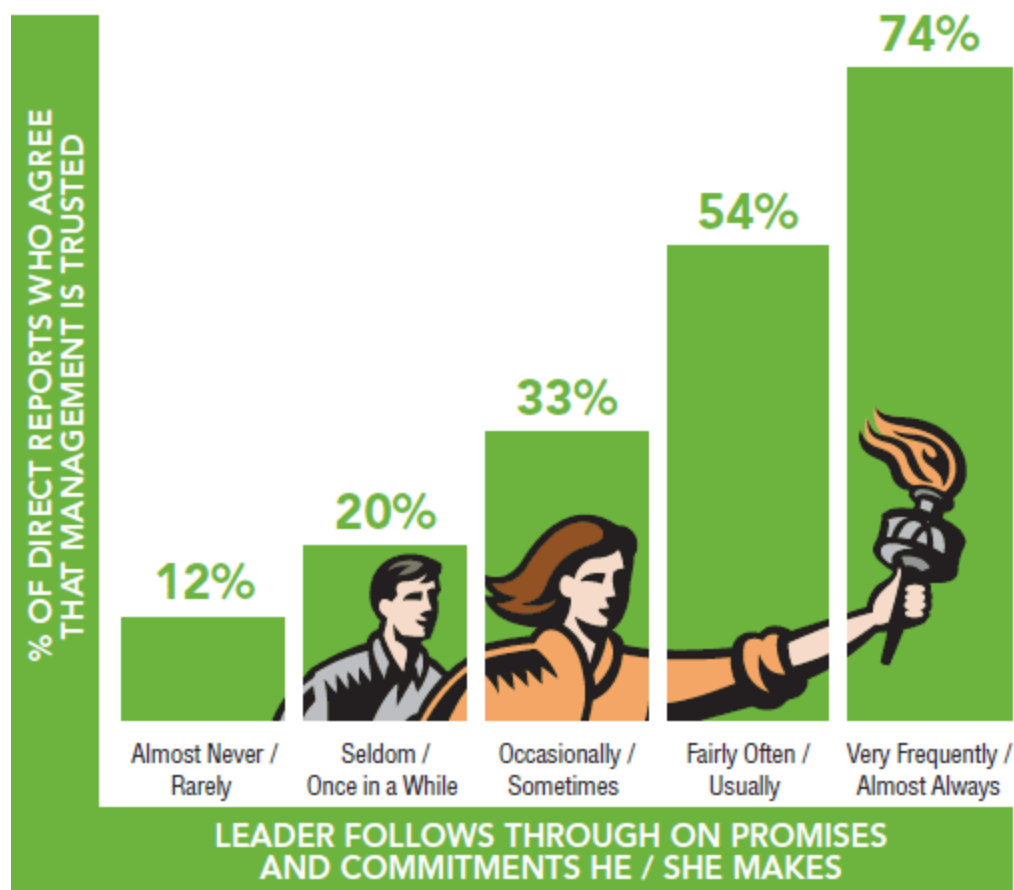
Not surprisingly, that manager didn't last very long. The subsequent bank manager was one who, Poonam explained, practiced exemplary leadership:



He really set the example by being very committed to his values, work, staff, and organization. He was clear about his values, preached them, and followed them. He aimed to provide excellent customer service. If he saw that a customer was waiting for a long time because his staff was busy attending to other customers, he would walk up to the customer himself and ask how he could help them. His way of handling things made us more responsible and accountable for our actions. The same staff, demotivated by the earlier boss, was now more excited and enthusiastic to get the work done swiftly with high quality. Looking at his sincerity, commitment, and dedication, every staff member started giving more than 100 percent to their job.

If you want to get the best results, make sure you practice what you preach. John Michel, author of *The Art of Positive Leadership* and a retired Air Force brigadier general, has said, “Those who serve under an effective general know well that he or she would ask nothing of others that they would not first do themselves.” He points to George Washington, first president of the United States and commander in chief during the American Revolutionary War, as an example. Despite the harsh winter conditions in 1777, and demoralized troops following a string of losses against the British in Philadelphia, the men never gave up. Why, John asks? “It's largely because of the inspiring and unselfish example of their leader. He didn't ask the members of his army to do anything he wouldn't do. If they were cold, he was cold. If they were hungry, he went hungry. If they were uncomfortable, he too chose to experience the same discomfort.”<sup>3</sup>

As shown in [Figure 4.1](#), there's a consistent and dramatic relationship between the extent to which people trust their organization's management and the frequency that they find their leaders following through on promises and commitments. There's a six-fold increase in levels of trust between the bottom and the top of the range in the frequency to which people report their leaders *do what they say they will do*.



**Figure 4.1** Following Through on Promises and Commitments Increases Trust in the Leader

The most significant signal-sending actions you can take to demonstrate that you live the values are: how you spend your time and what you pay attention to, the language (words and phrases) you use, the way you handle critical incidents, and your openness to feedback.<sup>4</sup> These actions make visible and tangible your personal commitment to a shared way of being. Each provides the chance to show where you stand on matters of principle. Simple though they may appear, you should remember that sometimes the greatest distance you have to travel is the distance from your mouth to your feet.

## Spend Your Time and Attention Wisely

How you spend your time is the single clearest indicator of what's important to you. Constituents use this metric to judge whether you measure up to espoused standards. Spending time on what you say is important shows that

you're putting your money where your mouth is. Whatever your values are, they have to show up on your calendar and on meeting agendas if people are to believe they're significant.

If you value service to others, for example, and say that store operators are important, you should be meeting with them in their locations. If you say that you're focused on customers (or clients, patients, students, voters, or parishioners), then you should be spending your time with them. If productivity and improving sales performance are critical, then you need to show up at sales meetings. If innovation is essential, you should be visiting the labs and participating in online open source discussions. Being “there” says more about what you value than any email, tweet, or video ever can.

Abhijit Chitnis told us about his experience at Accenture working with a leader whose actions “truly personified the values that he stood for” and the extraordinary results his team achieved under such leadership. His five-person team, functioning out of Mumbai, along with a global team of eight from Boston and Ireland, ran into some challenges completing a business intelligence system a client needed to issue its annual financial reports. To complete the engagement on time they were going to have to put in extra work, missing New Year's plans with family and friends.

When their senior client engagement delivery manager, who was already on vacation, heard about this, he canceled his plans and returned to work, even though he was not a part of this particular delivery team. He stayed with the team, day and night for two days, sending a powerful message that he was committed to the team, the project, and the client. For Abhijit and his colleagues, their leader's actions substantially increased their personal levels of engagement and boosted the entire team's morale: “We took each of the words from our leader very seriously, because we believed in him and trusted him more, and because he showed us that he truly means every word that he says.” All this happened because a leader put his values into practice, and provided, says Abhijit, “incredibly strong evidence of the importance of the idea of modeling the way.”

Leaders must set the pace in living in accordance with shared values. If they don't live the values themselves, they have no credibility when preaching them. Moreover, without credibility, the values become meaningless, no more than mere words on a page. Tyrone O'Neill, head of customer

marketing at Optus (Australia), took this understanding to heart and demonstrated not only how important it is to lead by example but also how this enables others to live the values themselves.<sup>5</sup>

After years of stellar growth, Optus faced serious challenges as the industry was transforming. Charged with the job of significantly improving customer retention and engagement, Tyrone realized that a fundamental change was needed in the psyche and operating habits of the organization. At the heart of their design to accomplish that change was a clearly articulated and shared value of customer focus. However, because people were already incredibly busy, they weren't paying much attention to this new initiative. Therefore, Tyrone turned his attention to changing people's behaviors, starting with his own. Everyone on the team who was not in a customer-facing role was assigned a list of customers whom they were expected to call to conduct a customer satisfaction survey.

One of his managers told us that everyone hated the phone calls at first, but Tyrone's actions helped change their perspective. Tyrone started calling and surveying customers himself—even after work hours. He would visit the call center and listen in on survey calls. He would discuss survey results with the call agents. He would go “mystery shopping” on the weekends to get a peek into what their frontline staff members were experiencing with customers on the ground. Then he would come back on Monday and share his reports with the team. Simply put, said one of his constituents, “Tyrone led by example.”

He showed us how to put our value of customer focus into action. He got into the trenches with us and did everything he could to get as close to as many customers as possible to know what they were thinking and feeling. He took matters into his own hands to solve the problems that he saw. The effect was that everyone wanted to get involved and mimic his behavior. Initially, we all had excuses for not making the calls or following through on other initiatives of the change program. But his personal crusade changed everything.

Both Abhijit's and Tyrone's experiences underscore the importance of the Golden Rule when it comes to leadership: only ask others to do something you are willing to do yourself. How leaders use their time shows others that they are serious about their dedication to the group, the task, and the values

shared. You can't just talk the talk. You have to walk it, which often means rolling up your sleeves and being part of, not apart from, the action.

## Watch Your Language

Try talking about an organization for a day without using the words *employee, manager, boss, supervisor, subordinate, or hierarchy*. You may find this exercise nearly impossible unless you've been part of organizations that use other terms—terms such as *associates, crew, cast members, team members, partners*, or even *constituents*. The corporate lexicon can easily trap people into a particular way of thinking about roles and relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Exemplary leaders understand and are attentive to language because they appreciate the power of words. Words don't just give voice to one's mind-set and beliefs; they also evoke images of what people hope to create with others and how they expect people to behave. The words people choose to use are metaphors for concepts that define attitudes, behaviors, structures, and systems.<sup>7</sup> Gary Hamel, one of the world's most influential and iconoclastic business thinkers, points out that “the goals of management are usually described in words like ‘efficiency,’ ‘advantage,’ ‘value,’ ‘superiority,’ ‘focus,’ and ‘differentiation.’ Important as these objectives are, they lack the power to rouse human hearts . . . [and leaders] must find ways to infuse mundane business activities with deeper, soul-stirring ideals, such as honor, truth, love, justice, and beauty.”<sup>8</sup>

How to use language consciously to reflect a unique set of values is understood clearly at DaVita. Their special language begins with the company name, an adaptation of an Italian phrase meaning “giving life,” which was selected by the DaVitans (that's what the company's employees call themselves). Every day, in every kidney dialysis clinic, DaVitans work hard to give life to those suffering from renal disease.

At DaVita, memorable catchphrases infuse daily conversations and reinforce the company's values and management practices. The Three Musketeers maxim “One for All, and All for One,” for example, permeates the company's culture and reinforces the idea that everyone at DaVita is in it together, looking out for one another. Employees are all “teammates”—be prepared to put a buck in a glass on the meeting table if you should ever use the “E-word.” They refer to the company as the “Village.” Teammates

become “citizens” of the Village when they are willing to “cross the bridge” and make a public commitment to the community. Every member of the senior leadership team crossed the bridge as part of their symbolic rite of passage into those roles. The company's slogan “GSD” (get stuff done) embodies their long-standing emphasis on execution and operational excellence, and the highest compliment to pay a teammate is to say he or she is “good at GSD.”

Javier Rodriguez, DaVita's chief executive officer, Kidney Care, says that a quick glance at their language can appear to be merely semantics or a play on words. He feels that it's quite the opposite:

The words we use, while simple in nature, are packed with meaning. They create imagery and communicate history, traditions, and beliefs. Since the language is so pervasive in the organization, we get the added benefit of it serving as cultural alignment and an accountability “acid test” for behaviors—as in human medicine, an organ will reject inconsistent words and actions.

Language clearly communicates a message beyond the literal meaning of your words and phrases. In their book *Words Can Change Your Brain*, Andrew Newberg and Mark Waldman show that “a single word has the power to influence the expression of genes that regulate physical and emotional stress.”<sup>9</sup> Positive words strengthen areas in the frontal lobes, promoting the brain's cognitive functioning, and build resiliency. Conversely, hostile language and angry words send alarm signals to the brain, as protection against any threats to survival, and partially shut down the logic-and-reasoning centers in the brain.

The language and words leaders use affect their self-images and people's responses to what's going on around them. They help build the frame around people's views of the world, so it's essential to be mindful of your choice of words. Frames provide the context for thinking and talking about events and ideas and focus the listeners' attention on certain aspects of the subject. Frames influence how people view and interpret what's going on around them. For example, terms such as *boss-subordinate*, *top-down*, and *rank and file* put a hierarchical frame around a discussion about relationships in organizations. The words *colleagues*, *teammates*, and *partners* put a different, more collaborative, frame around the same theme.

“Watch your language” takes on an entirely new meaning from the times your teacher scolded you in school for using an inappropriate word. It's now about setting an example for others of how they need to think and act.

## **Ask Purposeful Questions**

When you ask questions, you send your constituents on mental journeys. Your questions choose the path that people will follow and focus their search for answers. The questions also let people know what is top-of-mind for you. If you were to ask, for example, “What have you done today to partner with a colleague on getting the work done?” you are sending a signal about the importance of collaboration. If, on the other hand, you were to ask, “What have you done today to reduce the costs of doing business?” you are sending a very different message. Both are legitimate questions, but they indicate very different priorities. Questions are one more tangible indicator of how serious you are about your espoused beliefs. Questions direct attention to the values that deserve attention and how much energy should be devoted to them.

Questions develop people. They help people escape the trap of their mental models by broadening their perspectives and enlarging their responses by taking responsibility for their viewpoints. Asking relevant questions also forces you to listen attentively to what your constituents are saying. This action demonstrates your respect for their ideas and opinions. If you are genuinely interested in what other people think, then you need to ask their opinion, especially before giving your own. Asking what others think facilitates participation in whatever decision will ultimately be determined and consequently increases support for that decision.

When Joshua Fradenburg was brought on to turn around a foundering sporting goods store in Northern California, he realized that all employees needed to contribute to coming up with ways to improve sales. Josh openly sought advice, asking, “What do you think the store is doing well? What do you feel we need to work on?” He never criticized an idea, instead choosing to ask follow-up questions that might allow for a more productive thought. Josh encouraged his staff to offer suggestions about merchandising, sales promotions, and inventory. For example, although most of his staff ranged from fifteen to eighteen years of age, he asked each to go to the product wall and select which skis or snowboard they wanted. Then he had them

pick out their bindings and boots. After giving them a few minutes to make their decisions, Josh asked them what they were thinking about when they were deciding. He asked them to close their eyes and envision what it would look like to use the new gear: “Feel the cold. Hear the wind whistle. Smell the fresh mountain air.” His questions got them thinking about how most people made an emotional (rather than a technical) purchase decision. As all exemplary leaders do, Josh used focused questions to reframe the staff's thinking and their approach to sales.

Think about the questions you typically ask in meetings, one- on-ones, telephone calls, and interviews. How do they help to clarify and gain commitment to shared values? What would you like each of your constituents to pay attention to each day? Be intentional and purposeful about the questions that you ask. When you are not around, what questions should others imagine you are going to ask them when you return? What evidence do you want to ask for that shows how people are making decisions consistent with values? What questions should you ask if you want people to focus on integrity, or on trust, or on customer satisfaction, or on quality, innovation, growth, safety, or personal responsibility? In [Table 4.1](#), we've provided a few sample questions that you could purposefully ask every day to demonstrate the importance of a few shared values.

**Table 4.1** Ask Purposeful Questions Daily



<b>TEAMWORK</b>	<i>What did you do today to lend a hand to a colleague?</i>
<b>RESPECT</b>	<i>What did you do today to acknowledge the work of one of your colleagues?</i>
<b>LEARNING</b>	<i>What's one mistake you made in the last week, and what did you learn from it?</i>
<b>CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT</b>	<i>What have you done in the past week to improve so that you're better this week than last?</i>
<b>CUSTOMER FOCUS</b>	<i>What is one change that you made in the last week that came from a customer suggestion?</i>

Whatever your shared values are, come up with a routine set of questions that will get people to reflect on the shared values and what they have done each day to act on them.

## Seek Feedback

How can you know that you're doing what you say (which is the *behavioral* definition of credibility) if you never ask for feedback about your behavior? How can you expect to match your words and your actions if you don't get information about how aligned others see them being? Asking for feedback gives you a perspective about yourself that only others can see. With this insight, you have the opportunity to make improvements.

The feedback process strikes at a tension between two basic human needs: the need to learn and grow versus the need to be accepted just the way you are.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, even what seems like a mild, gentle, or relatively harmless suggestion can leave a person feeling angry, anxious, poorly treated, or profoundly threatened. One major reason that most people, and

especially those in leadership positions, aren't proactive in asking for feedback is their fear of feeling exposed—exposed as not being perfect, as not knowing everything, as not being as good at leadership as they should be, as not being up to the task. There is simply no way to get around the fact that you can't grow as a leader without getting feedback. Researchers have found that people who seek out disconfirming feedback (contrary to their self-perceptions) perform better (in this case, more likely to receive financial bonuses) than those who only listen to people who see their positive qualities. “Being aware of your weaknesses and shortcomings,” they say, “whether you like it or not, is critical to improvement.”<sup>11</sup>

Ed Beattie, general manager at Chorus (New Zealand), is always on the lookout for feedback.<sup>12</sup> “There is no feedback that Ed won't listen to seriously,” one of his direct reports told us. “He doesn't want us to hold anything back, even and especially feedback about his personal performance. He wants to know what's going on—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Everyone has the ability to approach him openly and candidly without fear of him getting angry or defensive.”

Bonnie Barger, vice president, order-to-cash strategy and operations at Oracle, made a personal and public commitment to seek feedback, and to ask other people how her decisions affected them. Their annual credit and collections summit was a credibility moment for her and a turning point with her team, she said.

It was a chance to demonstrate to them that I meant what I said. I kicked off the discussion by going over the new direction of the company's business model, why it was important to go through this transformation. I said that I didn't have all the answers, and I asked them for their help. It turned out to be a very good day, and although exhausting and at times tense, we all felt a great deal of relief to be able to talk openly with one another. Many came up to me afterward and thanked me for setting the tone. By opening up and asking for their feedback, we were able to achieve an understanding among the entire team that would otherwise have been impossible.

Self-reflection, the willingness to seek feedback, and the ability to engage in new behaviors based on this information is predictive of future success in managerial jobs.<sup>13</sup> You can't learn very much if you're unwilling to find out

more about the impact of your behavior on the performance of those around you. It's your responsibility as a leader to keep asking others, "How am I doing?" If you don't ask, they're not likely to tell you. Dr. John C.

Brocklebank, a senior vice president for SAS, found his team's feedback from the *Leadership Practices Inventory* to be incredibly valuable.<sup>[14](#)</sup>

Appreciating that getting feedback can be uncomfortable for some people because it exposes "vulnerabilities" and, at the same time, realizing that a willingness to be vulnerable is what makes a leader authentic, John decided to share both what he learned and what he intended to do to become a better leader. In his blog, he described their feedback as leaving him "humbled and enlightened," and asked them to continue giving him their views on his progress; he specifically thanked his team for this gift.

A side benefit of making it easy for people to give you feedback is that you increase the likelihood that people will accept honest feedback from you. You must be sincere in your desire to improve yourself, and you must demonstrate that you are open to knowing how others see you. However, keep in mind that if you don't do anything with the feedback you receive, people will likely stop giving it to you. They're liable to believe that you are arrogant enough to think that you are smarter than everyone else is or that you just don't care about what anyone else has to say. Either of these outcomes seriously undermines your credibility and effectiveness as a leader.

## Teach Others to Model the Values

You're not the only role model in the organization. Everyone should be setting the example. Align words and deeds at all levels and in all situations. Your role is to make sure that your constituents are keeping the promises that you and they have agreed on. People are watching how you hold others accountable for living the shared values and how you reconcile deviations from the chosen path. They're paying attention to what others say and do, and so should you. It's not just what *you* do that demonstrates consistency between word and deed.

Every team member, partner, and colleague is a sender of signals about what's valued. Therefore, you need to look for opportunities to teach not just by your example, but also by taking on the role of teacher and coach. For example, instead of handing off some customer accounts to a recent hire with very little tactical work instruction, Cheryl Chapman, senior customer operations manager at a global flash memory manufacturer, spent several hours daily with this person providing a comprehensive review of processes, actions, and rationales behind certain decisions. She encouraged the new employee to always be honest with the customer, even in difficult situations. When a quality issue led to product delivery issues that affected the customer's quarter-end financial targets, Cheryl guided the employee in having a candid conversation with the customer regarding root cause, corrective action, and next steps. Cheryl made sure that this new employee, along with others on the team, lived the same standards and values, especially in interactions with customers.

For direct reports there's a very strong correlation between how they rate their leaders' overall effectiveness and the frequency they report them “spending time and energy making certain that the people he or she works with adhere to the principles and standards we have agreed upon.” The top 25 percent of leaders described by their direct reports as affirming shared values have favorable ratings on workplace attitudes like commitment, motivation, pride, and productivity that are on average 115 percent higher than those leaders seen by their direct reports as least frequently engaged (bottom 25 percent) in this leadership behavior.

Exemplary leaders know that people learn lessons from how people handle the unplanned as well as planned events on the schedule. They know that people learn from the stories that circulate in the hallways, in the break room, in the cafeteria, on the retail floor, and on social media. Exemplary leaders know that what gets measured and reinforced is what gets done. If you're going to create a high-performance culture, you need to pay attention to bringing on board people who share the values held dear. To show others what you expect and ensure that they hold themselves accountable, you need to confront critical incidents, tell stories, and make sure that organizational systems reinforce the behaviors you want them to repeat.

## **Confront Critical Incidents**

You can't plan everything about your day. Even the most disciplined leaders can't stop the intrusion of the unexpected. Stuff happens. Critical incidents—chance occurrences, particularly at a time of stress and challenge—are a natural part of the life of every leader. They offer, however, significant moments of learning for leaders and constituents. Critical incidents present opportunities for leaders to teach important lessons about appropriate norms of behavior.

Sharada Ramakrishnan returned from a short vacation to take over as the team lead for a new project at Capgemini to find that one of the team members was planning to go on vacation during a critical week of the project. Her immediate reaction, she said, was to refuse the request point blank. Then she realized as a leader, she needed to think not only about the project but also to think about her team members: “I knew that all of them were entitled to a vacation, especially when I had just taken one.” However, a resource crunch meant that one less developer that week would impact their deliverables and timelines. Sharada decided to grant the request, even though she knew that it would require her to do additional developmental work that week. She understood that by doing this, she was setting an example of how the team could reach out and help each other during any crisis, and this incident completely changed the team's outlook about her. To illustrate the impact, she offered the following example.

The individual going on vacation worked extra hours and transitioned to me the details before going on vacation. He also ensured that he was available to be on call for any clarifications I might have while handling his codes. The attitude of all the other team members started changing toward me as they realized I was doing what I said I would do. I stayed back with my team even when I was not needed around, took initiative, demonstrated my willingness to address their issues and help them achieve their goals.

There are critical moments such as the one Sharada faced when leaders must clearly communicate what's crucial and what requires everyone's attention. This is precisely what Emily Singh experienced when working through the merger of two business teams at a consumer goods manufacturer.<sup>15</sup> The teams were somewhat competitive and Emily wasn't initially completely trusted. To turn this situation around, she started by setting a tone of continuous communication with everyone involved. She held frequent meetings, encouraging open discussions and making it safe for everyone to express their feelings about their work and the new team configuration. In building trust, she shared information and her own client experiences, soliciting feedback about others' experiences, both seeking and incorporating their advice about how to handle client allocations. As one of her direct reports explained, "It would have been easy for her to play favorites, but she chose to do the right thing—her words and actions were consistent—and eventually that trickled down and made everyone believe that we were in it together."

Critical incidents are those events in leaders' lives that offer the chance to improvise while still staying true to the script. Although they can't be explicitly planned, it's useful to keep in mind, as Sharada and Emily did, that the way you handle these incidents—how you link actions and decisions to shared values—speaks volumes about what's important.

## **Tell Stories**

Stories are a powerful tool for teaching people about what's important and what's not, what works and what doesn't, what is and what could be.<sup>16</sup> Through stories, leaders pass on lessons about shared values, define culture, and get others to work together. Paul Smith, former director of consumer

and communications research at Procter & Gamble, and author of *Lead with a Story*, explains why telling stories is so important for leaders:

Because you can't just order people to “be more creative” or to “get motivated” or to “start loving your job.” The human brain doesn't work that way. But you can lead them there with a good story. You can't even successfully order people to “follow the rules” because nobody reads the rulebook. But people will read a good story about a guy who broke the rules and got fired, or a woman who followed the rules and got a raise. And that would be more effective than reading the rulebook anyway.<sup>17</sup>

Management author Steve Denning learned firsthand how stories could change the course of an organization when he was the program director of knowledge management for the World Bank. After trying all the traditional ways of getting people to change their behavior, Steve found that simple stories were the most convincing way to communicate the essential messages within the organization. “Nothing else worked,” Steve said. “Charts left listeners bemused. Prose remained unread. Dialogue was just too laborious and slow. Time after time, when faced with the task of persuading a group of managers or front-line staff in a large organization to get enthusiastic about a major change, I found that storytelling was the only thing that worked.”<sup>18</sup> In a business climate obsessed with PowerPoint presentations, complex graphs and charts, and lengthy reports, storytelling may seem to some to like a soft way of getting the hard stuff done. It's anything but that. The data supports Paul's and Steve's experience with storytelling. Research shows that when leaders want to communicate standards, stories are a much more powerful means of communication.<sup>19</sup> People more quickly and accurately remember stories—more than they recall corporate policy statements, data about performance, and even a story plus the data.

Storytelling has been a part of Phillip Kane's life since he was a kid, and he carried over the family tradition into his business life. Early in his career, needing to find a way to connect personally with employees while at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, he started writing to his team every Friday. The letter, simply titled “The Week,” began as a recap of highlights from the prior week's work. But it soon transformed “into a communication that was less about what we do than how we do it—which, to me, is as, or

more, important,” Phillip explained. Now, as chief commercial officer, key markets, at Pirelli Industrial SpA, Phillip uses stories to help bridge cultural and language divides by using common human experiences to bring people together. Storytelling, Phillip believes, offers a framework for relating the message—something that people encounter in their lives that can be a bridge to the main point—and it offers him the chance to lead through an example rather than to come across simply as preaching.

Telling stories, as Phillip knows, has another lasting benefit. It forces you to pay close attention to what is going on around you. When you can write or tell a story about someone with whom your listeners can identify, they are much more likely to see themselves doing the same thing. People seldom tire of hearing stories about themselves and the people they know. These stories get repeated, and the lessons of the stories spread far and wide.

## **Reinforce Through Systems and Processes**

Bert Wong, CEO of Japanese-American joint venture Fuji Xerox Singapore, realized that his team and company were too heavily reliant on him. “I was leading an orchestra of people who would merely follow my lead,” Bert told us. “When I was physically present, the business would see growth, but when I was absent, business would correspondingly suffer. Initiatives would be followed through with excellent execution, but the starting point and the driving force would always stem from me.” Bert began a multiyear process of creating a sustainable organization in which everyone shared in and operated by a common set of values. While many initially challenged his approach, Bert's persistence led to the creation of Fuji Xerox Singapore's four Core Values: *Fighting Spirit*, *Innovation and Learning*, *Collaborate to Compete*, and *Care and Concern*.

Bert appreciated, however, that understanding these values and agreeing on them were only the first steps. The next challenge was making them a way of life, ensuring that the core values played a pivotal role in guiding the everyday decisions and actions of organization members. He knew that all the organizational processes and systems had to reinforce the values. For example, whenever they won a contract, Bert made sure he attributed the success to living the core values. He began talking about the values at every meeting. The company established an Inspirational Player of the Year Award, voted by peers, to give recognition to people who exemplified the



FX Singapore Core Values. To reinforce the value of Collaborate to Compete, for example, different departments began to share similar key performance indicators (KPIs). Where previously the finance and sales departments would often clash, they unified the KPIs of both departments, reinforcing the value of collaboration and giving the finance department a stake in winning a contract.

Fuji Xerox Singapore gradually began to see changes within the organization. With the Core Values reinforced in their daily work activities, people began to internalize the values in everything they did. What began as Bert's personal leadership journey eventually led to the institutionalization of a set of principles that guided everyone's decisions and actions.

Lou Gerstner, credited with saving IBM after resuscitating, then reinvigorating, the nearly bankrupt company when he took over as chairman and CEO in 1993, was recently asked, “How important are values in sustaining companies?”<sup>20</sup> Lou replied, “I think values are really, really important, but I also think that too many values are just words.” If you looked at the annual reports of ten major companies, what's striking, he explained, is that “almost all the values are the same. But when you go inside those companies, you often see that the words don't translate into practices.” For example, a company may say teamwork is critical, but then individual performance drives pay levels, or service quality is said to be vital but it is measured only annually. Lou explained, “If the practices and processes inside a company don't drive the execution of values, then people don't get it. The question is, do you create a culture of behavior and action that really demonstrates those values and a reward system for those who adhere to them?”

All exemplary leaders understand that you have to reinforce the fundamental values that are essential to building and sustaining the kind of culture you want.<sup>21</sup> Key performance measures and reward systems are among the many methods available to you. Recruitment, selection, onboarding, training, information, retention, and promotion systems are other meaningful ways to teach people how to enact values and how to align decisions with them. The norms and practices of your team and organization send signals about what is valued and what isn't, so they must be consistent with the shared values and standards that you're trying to teach.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Set the Example***

One of the toughest parts of being a leader is that you're always on stage. People are always watching you, always talking about you, and always testing your credibility. That's why setting the *right* example is so important, and why it's essential to make use of all the tools you have available to do it.

Leaders send signals in a variety of ways, and constituents read them as indicators of what's okay and what's not okay to do. How you spend your time is the single best indicator of what's important to you. Time is a precious asset because once passed, it is never recoverable. But if wisely invested, it can pay returns for years. The language you use and the questions you ask are other powerful ways to shape perceptions of what you value. You also need feedback to know if you're doing what you say or sending mixed messages.

Be mindful that it's not only what you do that matters. You are measured also by how consistent your constituents' actions are with the shared values, so you must teach others how to set an example. Critical incidents—those chance occurrences in the lives of all organizations—offer significant teachable moments. They offer you the opportunity to pass along lessons in real time, not just in theory or the classroom. Critical incidents often become stories, and stories are among the most influential teaching tools you have. Remember that what you reinforce will be what receives the most attention. You have to keep score for people to know how they're doing and to improve how they're doing it. You also must reward the appropriate behavior if you expect people to repeat it.

To Model the Way, you must *set the example by aligning actions with shared values*. This means you must:

1. Keep your commitments and follow through on your promises.

2. Make sure your calendar, your meetings, your interviews, your emails, and all the other ways you spend your time reflect what you say is important.
3. Ask purposeful questions that keep people constantly focused on the values and priorities that are the most essential.
4. Broadcast examples of exemplary behavior through vivid and memorable stories that illustrate how people are and should be behaving.
5. Publicly ask for feedback from others about how your actions affect them.
6. Make changes and adjustments based on the feedback you receive; otherwise, people will stop bothering to provide it.

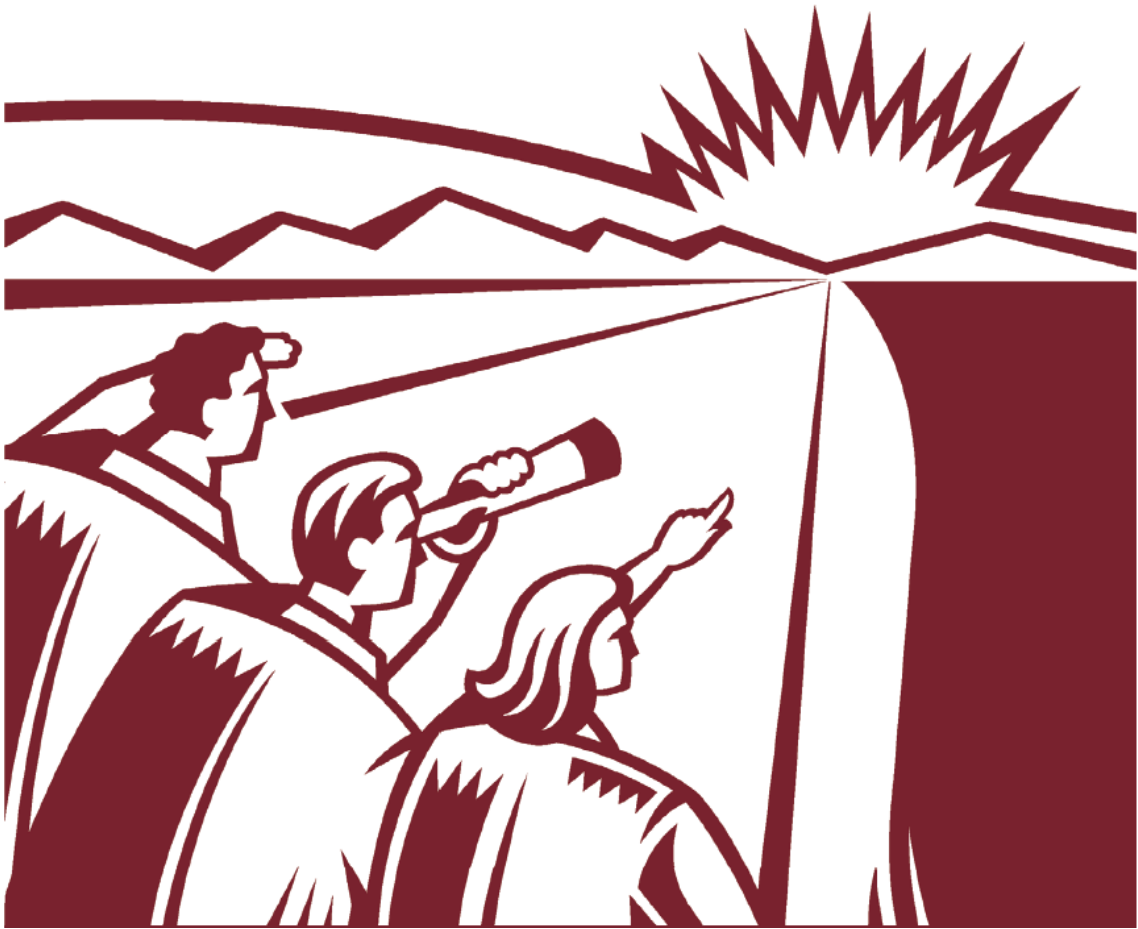
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# INSPIRE A SHARED VISION



## **Practice 2** **Inspire a Shared Vision**

- Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
- Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.





## Chapter 5

# Envision the Future

**At a late-night** meeting of Anh Pham's team, the mood was inspired. Dinner had just arrived, and everyone was cheerful. Team members were smiling and joking around. The energy level was high. It felt “magical,” Anh told us. He'd been envisioning this kind of moment for some time.

This joyful scene is hard to imagine given that only months before they had all been struggling. Anh was an engineering manager at Analog Devices, and the company had gone through a major organizational change. Under the new strategic initiative, several divisions dissolved, top management shuffled, and the satellite office where Anh's team was located suffered major cuts. Headcount was down 30 percent. Morale had taken a nosedive, and Anh found it increasingly difficult to get his team to focus on their job of product development. Productivity suffered as people started worrying more about their jobs and the team's direction than about the work at hand.

Anh knew something needed to happen. He discerned that the team needed direction, but he didn't think that was his job. The new general manager, however, hadn't been very effective, in Anh's opinion, in “addressing the team's low morale or articulating a clear vision for our future.” Determined to correct the situation, Anh gave serious thought about a guiding strategy and vision for the team, and shared this in a meeting with his manager. His passionate plea made an impression, and at their next quarterly review, Anh took the podium to lay out the vision.

Anh began by apologizing for the earlier lack of communication, particularly around layoffs. He explained why it had been necessary to divest certain lines of business, focus on their core competency, and apply

their talents to solving their customers' most challenging problems. Then he shared his passionate message about what he saw for their collective future:

We are a design powerhouse. Each and every one of us is here because we want to build the best converter, the fastest communication system, and the smartest automobile sensor. This is our chance to do just that. Imagine the day when the Apples, Ericssons, or Ciscos of the world would call us every time they dream of their next big thing. They would call us for our latest advanced technology and for our knack of solving their problems efficiently and elegantly. Look on our website today and you will see Analog Devices—Ahead of What's Possible. This will not happen overnight, but it is our commitment, and we need everyone to make our vision a reality. We need your talent, we need your dedication, and above all we need you to reach for your dreams and make them happen.

“My message scored a direct hit,” he told us. “Across the room, relief and excitement replaced the concerned faces. The tensed mood gave way to a relaxed and jovial atmosphere.” Both Anh and the team knew that one speech wasn't going to change things overnight. But his message dealt directly with the current situation and appealed to the team members' competitive spirit and their common purpose of technical excellence. It garnered support from the team and senior management—just what they needed at the time.

Call it what you will—vision, purpose, mission, legacy, dream, aspiration, calling, or personal agenda—the intent is the same. If you are going to be an exemplary leader, you have to be able to imagine a positive future, as Anh's story illustrates. When you envision the future that you want for yourself and others, and when you feel passionate about the legacy you want to leave, you are much more likely to take that first step forward. However, if you don't have the slightest clue about your hopes, dreams, and aspirations, then the chance that you'll take the lead is slim. In fact, you may not even see the opportunity that's right in front of you.

Exemplary leaders are forward-looking—a quality constituents clearly expect of leaders. They envision the future, and gaze across the horizon seeing greater opportunities to come. They imagine that extraordinary feats

are possible and that something noble can emerge from the ordinary. They develop an ideal and unique image of the future for the common good.

But such a vision doesn't belong only to the leader. It has to be a shared vision. Everyone has hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Everyone wants tomorrow to be better than today. Shared visions attract more people, sustain higher levels of motivation, and withstand more challenges than those that are exclusive to only a few. You have to make sure that what you can see is also something that others can see.

Leaders make a commitment to *Envision the Future* by mastering these two essentials:

- ▶ ***Imagine the possibilities***

- ▶ ***Find a common purpose***

You begin with the end in mind by imagining what might be possible. Finding a common purpose inspires people to want to make that vision a reality.

# Imagine the Possibilities

*“The human being is the only animal that thinks about the future”* (italics his), writes Daniel Gilbert, professor of psychology at Harvard University, and known for his research on affective forecasting. “The greatest achievement of the human brain is its ability to imagine objects and episodes that do not exist in the realm of the real, and it is this ability that allows us to think about the future . . . the human brain is an ‘anticipation machine,’ and ‘making future’ is the most important thing it does.”<sup>1</sup>

Leaders are dreamers. Leaders are idealists. Leaders are possibility thinkers. All ventures, big or small, begin with the belief that what today is merely a yearning will one day be reality. It's this belief that also sustains leaders and their constituents through the difficult times. Turning exciting possibilities into an inspiring shared vision ranks near the top of the list of every leader's most important responsibilities.

When we ask people to tell us where their visions come from, they often have great difficulty describing the process. When they do provide an answer, it's typically more about a feeling, a sense, or a gut instinct. There's often no explicit logic to it. They just feel strongly about something, and that intuitive sense must be fully explored.<sup>2</sup> Envisioning and intuiting aren't logical activities, and they're extremely difficult to explain and quantify. Alden M. Hayashi, a former senior editor at *Harvard Business Review* who has studied executive decision making, reports, “In my interviews with top executives known for their shrewd business instincts, none could articulate precisely how they routinely made important decisions that defied any logical analysis. To describe that vague feeling of knowing something without knowing exactly how or why, they used words like *professional judgment*, *intuition*, *gut instinct*, *inner voice*, and *hunch*, but they couldn't describe the process much beyond that.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, the leaders he studied agreed that these hard-to-describe abilities were crucial to effectiveness. They even went so far as to say that it was the “X-Factor” separating the best from the mediocre. In fact, intuition and vision, by definition, connect directly. Intuition has as its root the Latin word meaning, “to look at.”<sup>4</sup>

Visions are projections of one's fundamental beliefs and assumptions about human nature, technology, economics, science, politics, art, ethics, and the like. A vision of the future is much like a literary or musical theme. It's the paramount, persistent, and pervasive message that you want to convey, the frequently recurring melody that you want people to remember; and whenever repeated, it reminds the audience of the entire work. Every leader needs a theme, an orienting principle around which he or she can organize an entire movement. What's your central message? What's your recurring theme? What do you most want people to envision every time they think about the future?

Ask people if their leader “paints the ‘big picture’ of what we aspire to accomplish.” Ask them how frequently their leader “describes a compelling image of what your future could be like.” What you will discover is that those leaders who engage the most in these behaviors have direct reports with the highest positive workplace attitude scores. For example, 73 percent of those who report to leaders in the top 10 percent on these two leadership behaviors “strongly agree” that they would work harder and for longer hours if the job demanded it, compared with only 15 percent of those who report to leaders in the bottom 10 percent. Less than 8 percent of the direct reports of the leaders in the bottom 10 percent strongly agree with the statement “People who are part of this person's work group feel like they are making a difference in the organization.”

Responses to the question of how strongly direct reports agree or disagree that “overall, my supervisor is an effective leader” provide undeniable proof that being clear about the future is essential. Only 6 percent of those who rate their leaders in the bottom 10 percent on providing clarity about the future strongly feel that their leader is effective. However, direct reports who rate their leaders in the top 10 percent on this dimension are more than thirteen times more likely to also rate their leaders as effective. The findings are similar to the question of how frequently does your leader “paint the ‘big picture’ and describe a compelling image of what the future could be.” Direct reports provide effectiveness ratings nearly 1.6 times higher for those leaders in the top 10 percent on this variable compared with their counterparts in the bottom 10 percent. The key message from these findings: every leader must learn to communicate a vision of his or her larger purpose.

Being able to envision the future is decidedly important and has a tremendous impact on people's motivational levels and workplace productivity. For many leaders, however, compelling images of the future don't come easily—at first. Fortunately, there are ways you can heighten your capacity to imagine exciting possibilities and discover the central theme for your life and potentially the lives of others. Breakthroughs come when you *reflect* on your past, *attend* to the present, *prospect* the future, and *express* your passion.

## Reflect on Your Past

As contradictory as it might seem, in aiming for the future, you first need to look back into your past. Looking backward before you stare straight ahead enables you to see further into the future. Understanding the past can help you identify themes, patterns, and beliefs that both underscore why you care about certain ideals and explain why realizing those aspirations is such a high priority for you.<sup>5</sup> This was precisely the lesson realized by Jade Lui, consultant at the time with an Australian recruitment firm, who told us: “In order to look into the future, I first needed to search my past for recurring lifelong themes. This gives me clarity on identifying the big picture but also understanding current trends.” In a similar vein, “read history” is the best advice Bob Rodriguez, managing director and CEO of the \$17 billion value investing firm First Pacific Advisors, says he ever got about the one thing he could do to be the best possible investment professional.<sup>6</sup> “And so I became a good historian,” he says, “reading both economic and financial history as well as general history.”

Your personal history is your traveling partner on every journey you take. It provides valuable guidance and informs the choices you must make. As historians John Seaman and George David Smith, partners at the Winthrop Group, say, “The job of leaders, most would agree, is to inspire collective efforts and devise smart strategies for the future. History can be profitably employed on both fronts.”<sup>7</sup> To lead with a sense of history, they maintain, is not being a slave to the past but to recognize that there are invaluable lessons to be learned by asking “How did we get to the point we are today?” Michael Watkins, vice president of the California Institute of Technology, and noted scholar on accelerating transitions, says that without this perspective, “you risk tearing down fences without knowing why they were

put up. Armed with insight into the history, you may indeed find the fence is not needed and must go. Or you may find there is a good reason to leave it where it is.”<sup>8</sup>

When you gaze first into your past, you realize how full your life has been, and you become more aware of all the possibilities that could lie ahead. Looking back enables you to understand better that the central recurring theme in your life has been there for a long time. Another benefit to looking back before looking ahead is that you gain a greater appreciation for how long it can take to fulfill aspirations.

None of this is to say that the past *is* your future. That would be like driving while looking only in your rearview mirror. It's just that when you look deeply into your entire life's history, you understand things about yourself and your world that you cannot fully comprehend by looking at the future as a blank slate. It's difficult, if not impossible, to imagine going to a place you've never experienced, either actually or vicariously. Taking a journey into your past before exploring your future makes the trip much more meaningful.

## **Attend to the Present**

The daily pressures, the pace of change, the complexity of problems, and the turbulence in global markets can often hold your mind hostage and make you think that you have neither the time nor the energy to be future-oriented. But attending to the future doesn't mean you have to ignore what is going on in the present. It does, however, mean you have to be more mindful about it.

Being mindful of others and your environment is vital, and a growing number of leaders and organizations trust in the power of mindfulness.<sup>9</sup> You have to get off automatic pilot, believing that you know everything you need to know, viewing the world through pre-established categories, and not noticing what's going on around you. To increase your ability to conceive of new and creative solutions to today's problems, you have to be present in the present. You have to *stop*, *look*, and *listen*. As one of IBM's senior development managers, Amit Tolmare says he has learned that “to be able to envision the future, you have to understand the present. You have to

listen to your team and feel their pain. Only when you understand the current challenges, will you be able to imagine a better tomorrow.”

Set aside some time each day to stop doing “stuff.” Create some white space on your calendar. Remind yourself that your electronic devices have an off switch. Stop being in motion. Then start noticing more of what's going on around you right now. In *Leading the Revolution*, Gary Hamel, one of the world's most influential business thinkers, observed that many people don't appreciate and comprehend what's changing around them “because they're down at ground level, lost in the thicket of confusing, conflicting data.” He says, “You have to make time to step back and ask yourself, ‘What's the big story that cuts across all these little facts?’”<sup>10</sup>

Look around your workplace and community. What are people doing they didn't do a few years ago? What are people wearing, using, and discarding? How are people interacting? How do workplaces and communities look, and feel different, now compared to how they once did? What are the current trends popular these days? Why?

Listen to your constituents. What are their hot topics of conversation? What are they saying they need and want? What are they saying that gets in the way of them doing their best? What do they think should be changed? Listen as well to the weak signals, to what's not being said. Listen for things you've never heard before. What does all this tell you about where things are going? What's it telling you about what lies just around the corner?

When promoted to product manager at Labo America, Gautam Aggarwal realized that in order to see into the future he needed to attend to the present. To develop a “clear vision of what kind of group we needed to be and how we would go about achieving our goals,” Gautam explained, “I understood that a leader's vision for the future has to be supported with facts about both the past and present.”

One of the first things he did was to hold an open forum where everyone had “the opportunity of providing feedback on what we had been doing right, and what needed both immediate as well as long-term improvement.” He wanted to learn about how they perceived the product line's presence in the market at the time, and where they saw it three to five years in the future, because, as he acutely surmised, “we would all have to be on the same page about where we were today before we could go to any place in



the future.” These discussions provided Gautam and his colleagues with a realistic assessment of current conditions, strengths, and challenges, while also helping them identify and make choices about which of the many promising paths forward they should pursue.

To be able to envision the future, you have to realize what's already going on. You have to spot the trends and patterns, and appreciate both the whole and the parts. You have to be able to see the forest *and* the trees. Imagine the future as a jigsaw puzzle. You see the pieces, and you begin to figure out how they fit together, one by one, into a whole. Similarly, with your vision, you need to rummage through the bits and bytes of data that accumulate daily, and notice how they fit together into a picture of what's ahead. Envisioning the future is not about gazing into a fortune-teller's crystal ball; it's about paying attention to the little things that are going on all around you and being able to recognize patterns that point to the future.

## **Prospect the Future**

Even as you stop, look, and listen to messages in the present, you also need to raise your head and gaze out toward the horizon. Leaders have to be on the lookout for emerging developments in technology, demographics, economics, politics, arts, popular culture, and all aspects of life inside and outside the organization. They have to anticipate what might be coming just over the hill and around the corner. They have to prospect the future.

Dan Schwab, as training and organizational development director with the Trust for Public Land, encouraged thinking about the future by asking people at new hire orientation, “Where do you want to see this organization five years from now? Ten years from now?” Dan believed that “the greatest gift you can give to other people is thinking bigger than they believe.” He was, as many leaders we interviewed told us, “my organization's futures department.”

Leadership requires you to spend considerable time reading, thinking, and talking about the long-term view, not only for your specific organization but also for the environments in which you're operating. This imperative intensifies with the position's scope and level of responsibility.<sup>[11](#)</sup> For example, when the role is strategic (as it is for a CEO, president, or business development director, for instance), the time orientation is longer term and

more future oriented than it is when the role is more tactical (as for, say, a production supervisor or operations manager). Our data about the perceived importance of *forward-looking* as a key leadership characteristic varies by organizational level, with it being almost always considered vital by senior executives but less so for middle managers; only about half of frontline supervisors consider it necessary. Less than 50 percent of college students include this characteristic on their checklist of top four admired leadership characteristics. Clearly, those with responsibilities for longer-term projects and results see the increasing value of being able to look further out into the future.

You need to consider what you're going to do after the current problem, task, assignment, project, or program is completed. "What's next?" should be a question you frequently ask yourself. If you're not thinking about what's happening after the completion of your longest-term project, then you're thinking only as long term as everyone else is. In other words, you're redundant! The leader's job is to think about the next project, and the one after that, and the one after that. To encourage this perspective, the human resources leadership team at Modern Terminals Limited (Hong Kong) sets time aside each year to consider not simply "what are we doing right?" but more critically the question "what could we do differently to become an even better human resource team?"<sup>12</sup> They encourage everyone to dream big and share their aspirations for the future.

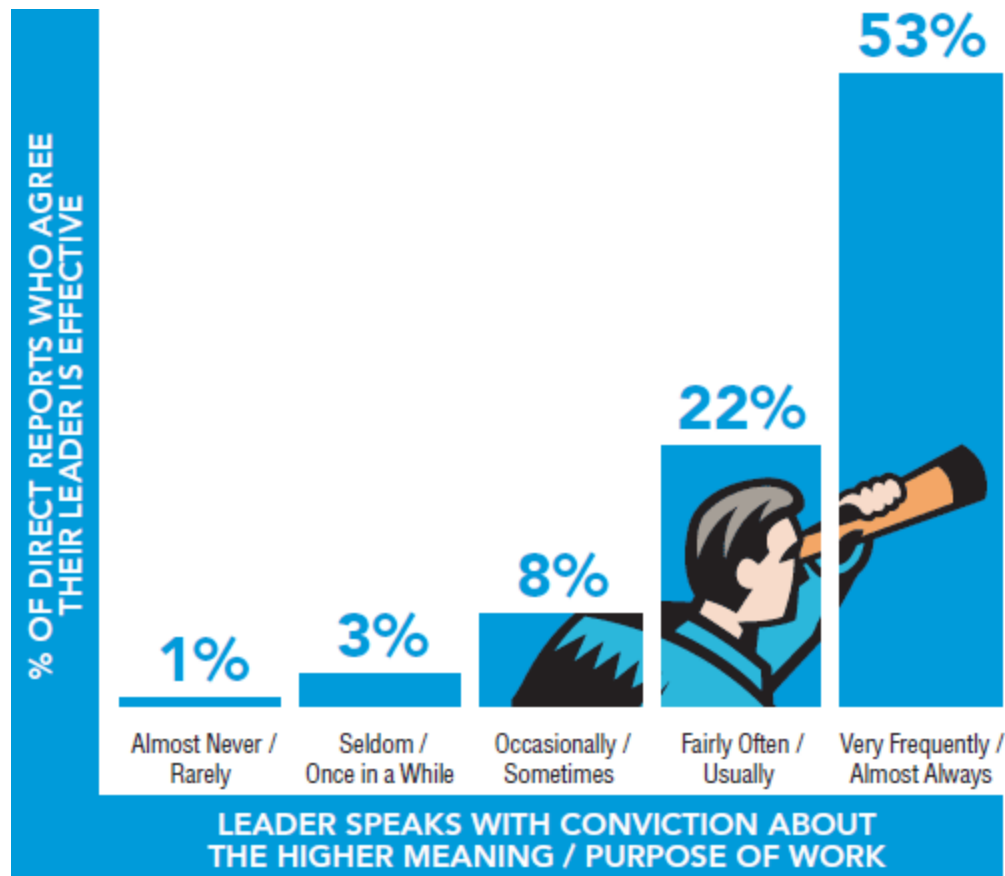
Researchers have shown how leaders who focus on the future attract followers more readily, induce more effort and intrinsic motivation from group members, promote group identification, mobilize collective action, and ultimately achieve better performance on measures of both individual and organizational outcomes.<sup>13</sup> The future is where opportunity lies. You must spend time thinking about the future and become better at projecting ahead in time. Whether it's through reading about trends, talking with futurists, listening to podcasts, or watching documentaries, developing a deep understanding of where things are going is a significant part of any leader's job. Your constituents expect it of you. You have to spend more of today thinking more about tomorrow if your future is going to be an improvement over the present. And throughout the process of reflecting on your past, attending to the present, and prospecting for the future, you also

need to keep in touch with what moves you, what you care about, where your passion is.

## **Express Your Passion**

Anyone would have great difficulty imagining possibilities when they don't feel passionate about what they're doing. Envisioning the future requires you to connect with your deepest feelings. You have to find something that's so important that you're willing to put in the time, suffer the inevitable setbacks, and make the necessary sacrifices. Without an intense desire, a solemn concern, a consuming question, a grave proposition, a fondest hope, or a cherished dream, you can't ignite the spark necessary to energize aspirations and actions. You have to step back and ask yourself, “What is my burning passion? What gets me up in the morning? What's grabbed hold of me and won't let go?”

Leaders want to do something significant, accomplish something that no one else has yet achieved. What that something is—your sense of meaning and purpose—has to come from within. No one can impose a self-motivating vision on you. That's why, just as we said about values, you must first clarify your vision of the future before you can expect to enlist others in a shared vision. As you can see in [Figure 5.1](#), the percentage of direct reports who agree with the statement “Overall, this person is an effective leader” increases dramatically with the frequency they say that their leader “speaks with a genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work.” Responses from these same leaders' colleagues and managers yield similar results. People regard most favorably those leaders who regularly talk about the “why” of work and not just the “what” of work.



**Figure 5.1** Speaking with Conviction About the Higher Meaning/Purpose of Work Raises Leadership Effectiveness Ratings from Direct Reports

Feeling a strong sense of purpose—particularly one that benefits others and not just yourself—has a profound impact on your performance and your health. When organizations convey a strong sense of purpose, there is higher engagement and stronger financial performance than when people feel purpose is lacking. For example, students with a purpose in life rated their coursework as more meaningful than students who didn't have a purpose or had only extrinsic motivations, such as making more money. Furthermore, these students persisted longer when tasks were tedious and, consequently, achieved more in their courses.<sup>14</sup> In the workplace, people who believe their lives and jobs have meaning feel more connected to others, exhibit greater psychological well-being, are more creative and engaged in their work, and perform better in their jobs than those without a sense of meaning and purpose.<sup>15</sup>

Meaning and purpose matter whether you are seeking better grades, persistence in your efforts, greater personal well-being, or improved organizational performance. As a leader, if you want to perform at your best, it's incumbent that you search inside yourself and discover what gives your work and life meaning and purpose. Research by the consulting firm Deloitte confirms that having a strong sense of purpose goes hand in hand with having clear values and beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

This is exactly what Andrew Rzepa discovered during his own Personal-Best Leadership Experience. Andrew had been chair of a committee of trainee solicitors (lawyers) in Manchester, England, for about a month when the national Trainee Solicitors Group arranged a conference for all the trainees in the United Kingdom to take place in his city. It was not his event, but given the close affiliation of their local organization with the national group, Andrew decided that he would do all he could to make the conference a success. With three weeks to go, the enrollment was only at seventy-five, so Andrew declared to his colleagues that he was going to do everything in his power to ensure that there would be at least three hundred attendees.

“I spoke passionately about how good it would feel to be there at a packed event and to look around thinking that we had achieved that,” Andrew told us, and then he asked the committee members whether “they were willing to personally commit themselves to the realization of this goal.” Andrew said that because the conference was not one of the committee's goals nor a reason people had joined the committee, he wouldn't have been surprised if the majority had said no. “To my pure joy,” Andrew exclaimed, “sixteen out of the twenty said yes, they were willing to do all they could to make the event a success.” And the fact that there were some “doubters” actually energized everyone involved. “The committee members were more passionate than I had ever seen them before,” Andrew said. In the end, after all their work, they succeeded in getting 316 attendees to the conference. Andrew's passion not only fueled his own drive but also was contagious in getting others to work as hard as they could to realize a future possibility.

When you feel your passion, as Andrew did, you know you are on to something very important. Your enthusiasm and drive spread to others. Finding something you strongly believe in is the key to articulating a vision in the first place. Once you're in touch with this inner feeling, you can look

and think beyond the constraints of your current position and view the possibilities available in the future.

## Find a Common Purpose

Much too often it is assumed that leaders have the sole responsibility to be the visionaries. After all, if focusing on the future sets leaders apart, it's understandable that there would be this feeling that it's their job to embark alone on a vision quest to discover the future of their organization.

However, constituents actually want to hear more than just the leader's vision. While being forward-looking is an expectation of leaders, they aren't supposed to impose only their view of the future on others. People want to see their own ideals and aspirations, their hopes and dreams, incorporated and appreciated. They want to see themselves in the picture of the future that the leader is painting.<sup>17</sup> The central task for leaders is inspiring a *shared* vision, not selling their personal view of the world. You need to imagine the end result and be able to communicate your vision such that your constituents find a way to achieve their hopes and dreams while achieving that result. What this requires is finding common ground among those people who have to implement the vision.

Amit Tolmare, IBM senior development manager, came to appreciate that “no leader can dream alone.” He realized that achieving his vision could only happen when the team fully owned the dream themselves. People commit themselves fully and deliver their best only if they share the same passion as the leader does, and it's critical that they can picture their own aspirations in the shared vision. Amit learned that people are more likely to commit themselves fully to the greater cause when you listen to them deeply, understand their true calling, and help them achieve their aspirations. People like to be heard, and want to have a meaningful impact in their jobs. As a leader, it is very important to find that common higher purpose and appeal to that inner desire of people to create a difference.

Nobody likes being told what to do or where to go, no matter how right it might be. People want to be a part of the vision development process. They want to walk alongside their leaders. They want to dream with them, invent with them, and be involved in creating their futures. The experience of Omar Pualuan, head of engineering at RVision, gives further testimony to this observation. He recounted how he had created the original business

plan for the project, but “found my teammates presenting solutions to issues and expanding the vision in ways I never conceived of. We took what we learned, iterated, and tested again, many times over. The entire team shared a deep passion and commitment, and our shared vision created a much more spectacular result. My vision was no longer just my own—it had become ours, and the quality of our finished creation reflected this.”

Don't adopt the view that visions come from the top down. You have to start engaging others in a collective dialogue about the future. You can't mobilize people to travel willingly to places they don't want to go. No matter how grand the dream of an individual visionary, if others don't see in it the possibility of realizing their hopes and desires, they won't follow voluntarily or wholeheartedly. You must show others how they, too, will be served by the long-term vision of the future and how their unmet needs will be satisfied. As Theresa Lai, general manager of human resources for Modern Terminals Limited, explained about their process: “We believe that people will have a stronger sense of purpose and achievement by enlisting in a common vision, which is the key reason why we involve all of our team members in the HR visioning process.”

## **Listen Deeply to Others**

By knowing their constituents, listening to them, and taking their advice, leaders give voice to their constituents' feelings. They're able to stand before others and say with assurance, “Here's what I heard you say that you want for yourselves. Here's how enlisting in a common cause will serve your needs and interests.” In a sense, leaders hold up a mirror and reflect back to their constituents what they say they most desire.

You need to strengthen your ability to hear what is important to others. The outlines of any vision do not appear miraculously to leaders in the isolation of the organization's stratosphere. They come from interactions with employees on the manufacturing floor, in the lab, or in the cafeteria. They originate from conversations with customers in the retail stores. They live in the hallways, in meetings, and even in people's homes.

The best leaders are great listeners. They listen carefully to what other people have to say and how they feel. They ask good (and often tough) questions, are open to ideas other than their own, and even lose arguments



in support of the common good. Through intense listening, leaders get a sense of what people want, what they value, and what they dream about. This sensitivity to others is no small skill. It is a truly precious human ability.<sup>18</sup>

When Melinda Jackson, corporate recruiter for a multinational technology company, realized that cohesion on their new team was lacking, she took it upon herself to schedule regular check-ins with her colleagues, which usually began by asking them many questions about how they were doing and then, in her words, “actively listening.” When she learned that not everyone was comfortable with her, she asked for their feedback, tried to be honest about her experience and feelings, apologized, and discussed how to move forward. Melinda said she was “stunned” by how her “being vulnerable, giving feedback, and creating space for everyone to be heard” allowed the team to resolve past issues and strengthen their relationships. These conversations have been opportunities for Melinda to find out what she and her colleagues stand for, value, want, and hope for now and into the future.

Melinda also notes that she learns a great deal about her colleagues' aspirations by asking them about what they plan to do in their evenings and weekends and then remembering what they've said and following up with them after the fact. She intentionally does this when others are around and encourages the conversation to be between the entire group, seeing this as an opportunity to deepen their cohesion as a team. As Melinda observes, “You have to actively listen to their interests, concerns, and the questions that they are wrestling with and determine how to be responsive.”

Extraordinary things can happen when leaders listen—when they involve employees in identifying issues, hear their frustrations and their aspirations, and find ways to respond with initiatives that address those concerns. Generating excitement in a workplace is possible when leaders pay attention to what people want and need.

## **Make It a Cause for Commitment**

When you listen deeply, you find out what gives work its meaning. People stay with an organization, research finds, because they like the work they are doing and find it challenging, meaningful, and purposeful.<sup>19</sup> When you

listen with sensitivity to the aspirations of others, you discover some common themes that bring meaning to work and life.<sup>20</sup> People desire

- ▶ *Integrity*: Pursuing values and goals congruent with their own
- ▶ *Purpose*: Making a significant difference in the lives of others
- ▶ *Challenge*: Doing innovative work
- ▶ *Growth*: Learning and developing professionally and personally
- ▶ *Belonging*: Engaging in close and positive relationships
- ▶ *Autonomy*: Determining the course of their own lives
- ▶ *Significance*: Feeling trusted and validated

While interest in meaning and purpose has grown, as Millennials have become the largest demographic group in the workplace, finding meaning is a universal desire among all generations and has been a topic of research and writing for decades. What people want has not changed very dramatically through the years.<sup>21</sup>

There's more to work than making money. People want to follow a meaningful purpose, not just exchange their work for cash. People have a deep desire to make a difference. They want to know that they have done something on this earth, that there's a purpose to their existence.<sup>22</sup> If you want to lead others, you must put principles and purpose ahead of everything else. The larger mission is what *calls* everyone. The best organizational leaders address this human motivation by communicating the long-term significance of the organization's work. Researchers found that 90 percent of respondents who say that their company has a strong sense of purpose also say it has performed well financially over the last year; and a similar percentage say their company has a history of strong financial performance. That is in sharp contrast to those who say their organization does not have a strong sense of purpose—only two-thirds report that their organization did well financially in the last year or has done well historically.<sup>23</sup> When leaders clearly communicate a shared vision of an organization, they ennoble those who work on its behalf. They elevate the human spirit.

Meaning and purpose are vital to all generations at work.<sup>24</sup> People have never stuck around for very long when what they do is trivial and unimportant. The youngest generation of employees is demanding that this theme get more attention than prior generations have given it. For example, Niki Lustig, senior specialist in learning and organization development at Twitter, says, “One of the things we get challenged with all the time is helping leaders and managers define the purpose of their team's existence. What does that look like in terms of anchoring teams' objectives to the work they're doing, and how does that tie to the broader vision of the company?”<sup>25</sup> To act on this challenge, Niki created The Purpose Statement Workshop—an interactive program that helps teams draft their purpose. The process includes preliminary work around nine questions related to individual purpose, uniqueness of the team, and the relationship between team and organization.

Before attending The Purpose Workshop, team members read each other's responses to the nine questions, and then discuss them in the session. This creates a sense of unity as they learn firsthand why their colleagues joined the company. “Even though we encounter challenges and frustrations,” Niki says, “remembering why we came here and what we set out to do, and hearing it from peers and colleagues, is so inspiring.”

People commit to causes, not to plans. How else do you explain why people volunteer to rebuild communities ravaged by a tsunami, ride a bike from San Francisco to Los Angeles to raise money to fight AIDS, rescue people from the rubble of a collapsed building after an earthquake, or toil 24/7 to create the next big thing when the probability of failure is very high? Steve Coats, managing partner with International Leadership Associates, explains: “True leaders create a culture of great performance and meaningful work. They help people find pride in their work, and make even lousy work (by many peoples' standards) enjoyable. Leaders make others feel important and needed.” He says that you won't find the keys to devoted effort from focusing simply on pay, benefits, or even plush working conditions. Instead, Steve maintains, “you have to give people opportunities to make a difference in something they care about, make it enjoyable for them, and treat them with the respect and honor they deserve. Get better at these and watch the energy, problem solving, fellowship, and production grow.”<sup>26</sup>

When people are part of something that elevates them to higher levels of motivation and morality, they feel energized and more committed; they feel that what they do matters. For example, researchers asked nearly 2,500 workers to analyze medical images for “objects of interest.” One group was told that the work would be discarded, while the other was told that the objects were “cancerous tumor cells.” Workers were paid for each image analyzed. The latter “meaning” group spent more time on each object, subsequently earning 10 percent less, on average, than the “discard” group and the quality of their work was substantially higher. After surveying over 20,000 workers around the world, analyzing fifty major companies, and conducting scores of experiments, Lindsay McGregor and Neel Doshi, in their book *Primed to Perform*, conclude: “Why we work determines how well we work.”<sup>[27](#)</sup>

## **Look Forward in Times of Rapid Change**

People often ask, “How can I have a vision of what's going to happen five or ten years from now, when I don't even know what's going to happen next week?” This question gets right to the heart of the role visions play in people's lives. In this increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world, visions are even more important to human survival and success than when times are calm, predictable, simple, and clear.

Think about it this way. Imagine you're driving along the Pacific Coast Highway heading south from San Francisco on a bright, sunny day. The hills are on your left, the ocean on your right. On some curves, the cliffs plunge several hundred feet to the water. You can see for miles and miles. You're cruising along at the speed limit, one hand on the wheel, sitting back, tunes blaring, and not a care in the world. You come around a bend in the road, and suddenly, without warning, there's a blanket of fog as thick as you've ever seen it. What do you do?

We've asked this question many, many times, and here are some of the things people say:

- ▶ “I slow way down.”
- ▶ “I turn my lights on.”

- ▶ “I tighten my grip on the steering wheel with both hands.”
- ▶ “I tense up.”
- ▶ “I sit up straight or even lean forward.”
- ▶ “I turn the music off.”

Then you go around the next curve in the road; the fog lifts, and it's clear again. What do you do? Sit back and relax, speed up, turn the lights off, put the music back on, and enjoy the scenery.

This analogy illustrates the importance of clarity of vision. Are you able to go faster when it's foggy or when it's clear? How fast can you drive in the fog without risking your own or other people's lives? How comfortable are you riding in a car with someone else who drives fast in the fog? The answers are obvious, aren't they? You're better able to go fast when your vision is clear. You're better able to anticipate the switchbacks and bumps in the road when you can see ahead. There are times in your life, no doubt, when you find yourself driving in the fog, metaphorically speaking. When this happens, you get nervous and unsure of what's ahead. You slow down. However, as you continue forward along the path, the way becomes clearer, and eventually you're able to speed up again.

A very important part of a leader's job is to clear away the fog so that people can see further ahead, anticipate what might be coming in their direction, and watch out for potential hazards along the road. Clear visions are meant to inspire hope—hope that despite the fog and stormy weather, despite the bumps in the road, despite the unexpected detours, and despite the occasional breakdowns, the crew will make it to its ideal and unique destination.<sup>[28](#)</sup>

Kyle Harvey, production and specialty products manager with Caltronics Business Systems, shared an experience while working at a Silicon Valley semiconductor company that perfectly mirrors this driving-in-the-fog analogy. He and a colleague were tasked to create marketing materials about the company's wide range of products. “At the start, it was really confusing,” Kyle said. “My colleague seemed uninterested in the project, and you could have said we were in the densest part of the fog. There was no vision for the project, and we had no direction.”

With little to show after two weeks, Kyle “developed a vision about how to approach the project.” He knew that his colleague was extremely artistic and enjoyed being creative, so he found ways to incorporate her talents and what she liked doing into the project.

This jump-started her and then we really got engaged. After about ten or fifteen minutes of explaining how she would be able to use her creativity, she began explaining how she wanted the video to look. The fog kept lifting and the view ahead was becoming clearer. . . . After a month of work on the project, it finally seemed like we had begun driving faster and left the fog behind.

Each was making significant contributions, became extremely focused, and was driven to reach the goal. Says Kyle:

The fog analogy is especially strong for me in this case. I found that when our vision was unclear, we pulled off to the side of the road and did not continue to drive. However, after finding ways to motivate and inspire her, we were back on the road and moving past the fog.

To become a leader, you must be able to envision the future. The speed of change doesn't alter this fundamental truth. People want to follow only those who can see beyond today's problems and visualize a brighter tomorrow.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Envision the Future***

The most important role of vision in organizational life is to give focus to human energy. To enable everyone to see more clearly what's ahead of them, you must have and convey an exciting, ennobling vision of the future. The path to clarity of vision begins with reflecting on the past, moves to attending to the present, and then goes to prospecting into the future. The guardrails along this path are your passions—what it is that you care about most deeply.

Although you have to be clear about your vision before you can expect others to follow, you can't authentically lead others to places they don't want to go. If the vision is to be attractive to more than an insignificant few, it must appeal to all who have a stake in it. Only *shared* visions have the magnetic power to sustain commitment over time. Listen to the voices of all your constituents; listen to their hopes, dreams, and aspirations. Because a shared vision spans years and keeps everyone focused on the future, it has to be about more than the work at hand, a task, or job. It has to be a cause, something meaningful, and something that makes a difference in people's lives. No matter what the size of your team or organization, a shared vision sets the agenda and gives direction and purpose to the enterprise.

To Inspire a Shared Vision, you must *envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities*. This means you must:

1. Determine what drives you and where your passions lie in order to identify what you care enough about to imagine how it could be better in the future, compelling you forward.
2. Reflect on your experiences, looking for the major themes in your life and understanding what you find worthwhile.
3. Stop, look, and listen to what is going on right now—the important trends, major topics of conversation, and social discontents.

4. Spend a higher percentage of your time focused on the future, imagining the exciting possibilities.
5. Listen deeply to what is important to others in *their* future and to what gives their lives meaning and purpose.
6. Involve others in crafting a shared vision of the future. Don't make it a top-down process.



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## Chapter 6

### Enlist Others

**Jan Pacas, managing director** at Hilti Corporation, wanted to take his team to a place they'd never been before.<sup>1</sup> Jan had worked at various Hilti locations before, but when he arrived at the Australia operation, he found, in his words, a “very average company,” as measured against Hilti International benchmarks and industry peers in Australia. “It was time to create a clear direction,” he told us, “something that would hold the company together, something our people could believe in, and something that gave them the motivation to work together in one direction. We want to be constantly striving for something bigger and better.”

Jan knew that having strategic objectives wasn't enough. “I think very often people fail to translate the business rationale into something tangible and easy to understand for the wider workforce,” he explained. They needed to translate their strategy into something that every person could easily see and describe. “We're Painting Australia Red” is what they came up with. “If you walk on any job site,” he said, “you see an ocean of blue, yellow, green—all representing the colors of our competitors: Bosch, Makita, DeWalt, Hitachi, and so on. We painted the picture that we want to see a much bigger share of Hilti's signature red [color] on every job site.”

“Painting Australia Red” caught on very fast. When they won a huge contract with the second-largest tool hire company in Australia, all employees understood what that phrase meant, in very concrete terms: all 140 of the tool rental stores changed those blue, yellow, and green tools into 200 red ones. Every employee could see that “Painting Australia Red” meant Hilti's brand would be found in houses and garages, trucks, and job sites for all their customers.

Leaders like Jan realize that for visions to be compelling, people at every level must understand what it means for them. Jan believes that unless everyone knows what the vision means to them in concrete, tangible terms, it's worthless. He says:

You have to express it so that every manager and every employee can break it down into specific things that are relevant to them. The vision has to appeal to people's head, heart, and hands. Head, meaning that they understand it logically. Heart, meaning that it's emotionally compelling to them. And hands, meaning that it's actionable, that they know what to do and they're empowered to do it.

"Painting Australia Red" provided a rallying point that would get everyone excited to be part of the company and to play a role in its success. "There are lots of people who have no idea where their company is going," asserts Jan, and consequently "they have no exciting future." By envisioning exciting future possibilities, leaders get people to feel that they're a part of something special. They are energized knowing that their organization is going places, and not just standing around doing what has always been done.

In the personal-best leadership cases we collected, people talked about the need to get everyone on board with a vision and to *Enlist Others* in a dream, just as Jan did. They talked about communicating and building support for a unified direction in which to take the organization. These leaders knew that to make extraordinary things happen, everyone had to both believe fervently in and commit to a common purpose.

Part of enlisting others is building common ground on which everyone can stand. Equally important is the emotion that leaders express for the vision. Our research shows that in addition to expecting leaders to be forward-looking, constituents expect their leaders to be *inspiring*. People need vast reserves of energy and excitement to sustain commitment to a distant dream. Leaders are an important source of that energy. People aren't going to follow someone who's only mildly enthusiastic about something. People actively support those leaders who are *wildly* enthusiastic about it.

Whether you're trying to mobilize thousands of people in the community or one person in the workplace, to *Enlist Others* you must act on these two essentials:

▶ ***Appeal to common ideals***

▶ ***Animate the vision***

Enlisting others is all about igniting passion for a purpose and moving people to persist against great odds. To make extraordinary things happen in organizations, you have to go beyond reason, engaging the hearts as well as the minds of your constituents. Start by understanding their strongest yearnings for something meaningful and significant.

## Appeal to Common Ideals

In every personal-best leadership case, leaders talked about ideals. They expressed a desire to make dramatic changes in the business-as-usual environment. They reached for something grand, something magnificent, something never done before.

Visions are about hopes, dreams, and aspirations. They're about the strong desire to achieve something beyond good, something great and extraordinary. They're ambitious. They're expressions of optimism. Can you imagine a leader enlisting others in a cause by saying, "I'd like you to join me in doing the ordinary, doing what everyone else is doing"? Not likely. Visions stretch people to imagine exciting possibilities, breakthrough technologies, and revolutionary social change.

Ideals reveal higher-order value preferences. They represent the paramount economic, technological, political, social, and aesthetic priorities. The ideals of world peace, freedom, justice, an exciting life, happiness, and self-respect, for example, are among the highest strivings of human existence. They're outcomes of the larger purpose that practical actions will enable people to attain over the long term. By focusing on ideals, people gain a sense of meaning and purpose from what they undertake.

When you communicate your vision of the future to your constituents, you need to talk about how they're going to make a difference in the world, how they're going to have a positive impact on people and events. You need to show them how they can realize their long-term interests by enlisting in a common vision. You need to speak to the higher meaning and purpose of work. You need to describe a compelling image of what the future could be like when people join in a common cause.<sup>2</sup>

## Connect to What's Meaningful to Others

Exemplary leaders don't impose their visions of the future on people; they liberate the vision that's already stirring in their constituents. They awaken dreams, breathe life into them, and arouse the belief that people can achieve something grand. When they communicate a shared vision, they bring these ideals into the conversation. What truly pulls people forward, especially in



more challenging and volatile times, is the exciting possibility that what they are doing can make a profound difference in the lives of their families, friends, colleagues, customers, and communities. They want to know that what they do matters.<sup>3</sup> Studies involving respondents from forty different countries (and sixteen different languages) found that connecting employees with purpose increased their levels of engagement and productivity.<sup>4</sup>

Faced with divisional objectives that were quite daunting, Trustmark Companies vice president for disability and long-term care benefits, Nancy Sullivan, felt that her team could pull through, but to do so, she needed to connect her constituents to more than just the division's plan. She needed to paint a bigger picture of what they could accomplish together and why it made a difference.

Nancy drafted a four-page vision message and posted it where everyone congregated—in the office kitchen. She spoke in team meetings, division meetings, one-on-ones, and chats in the hallway, with genuine conviction about the meaning and purpose of their work and how that would help them see themselves as she saw them—as the best of the best. The message was not only about what they could achieve in business but also the significant role they played in the lives of all their constituents. Here is part of that message:

I dream of a place here in our office, where the sales team maintains respect and confidence in our decisions not just today but tomorrow and always; the constant challenges to our decisions just don't exist. Where our insureds trust our decisions and feel our genuine commitment to serving them well in their greatest time of need. Where our customers have confidence that your decision was contractual, yes, but more importantly ethically correct and sound. Where the only title that you can think of for introducing your co-worker is respected colleague and friend.

I dream of a place where growth and opportunities are massive because of the time and energy you invested with your commitments and therefore our opportunities and potential are endless. A place that no longer manages claims, but manages decisions on disability. A place that is no longer thought of as disability-claim experts, but disability experts. A place where our colleagues and government officials look for disability solutions. A place where Trustmark is the number-one company to serve as the assistance to all disability needs.

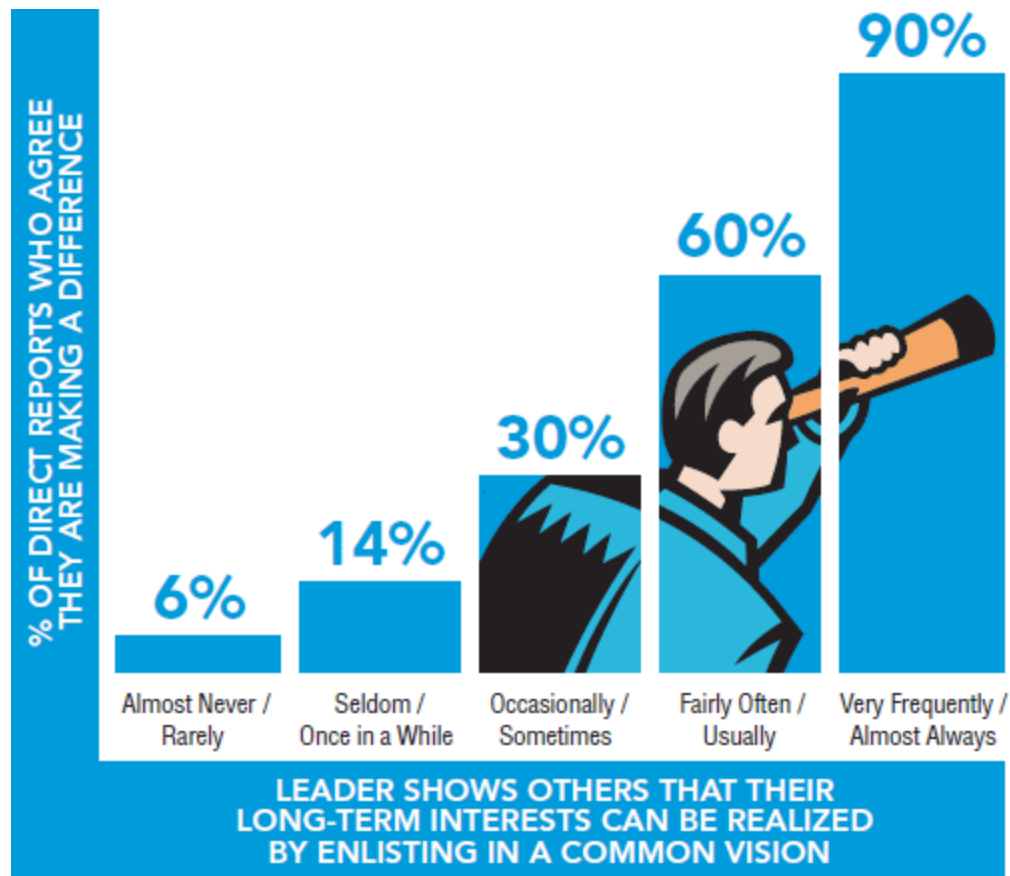
Day in and day out, Nancy stressed the exciting possibilities the future held. Nancy's message had lifted her staff up from the mechanics of disability claims and reminded them of the nobility of what they accomplish. Focusing on the purpose and meaning of the division's work engaged their spirits, and because of this vision, they were able to surpass their annual targets for the tenth year in a row.

The outcomes experienced by Nancy's staff are consistent with research findings on what occurs when people can connect the daily work that they do to a meaningful and transcendent purpose. For example, researchers followed the lives of nearly 400 individuals for one month. Over this time they completed a series of surveys about their activities, about how easy or hard life was, about attitudes toward money, relationships, time, and related variables. Study participants were also asked how meaningful and happy their lives were.<sup>5</sup> What they found was that "when individuals adopt what we call a meaning mind-set—that is, they seek connections, give to others, and orient themselves to a larger purpose—clear benefits can result, including improved psychological well-being, more creativity, and enhanced work performance. Workers who find their jobs meaningful are more engaged and less likely to leave their current positions."<sup>6</sup> When you

can make clear to people that their work is making a difference—that is, they are helping others through their work—you strengthen their intrinsic motivation.

Similarly, our data reveals that leaders who are seen as very frequently or nearly always showing people how enlisting in a common vision can help them achieve their long-term interests are evaluated almost sixteen times more favorably by their direct reports than those leaders who engage in this same leadership behavior rarely, if at all. Researchers have shown that stressing the “why” to people, as in “Why are we doing this and why does this matter?” activates the brain’s reward system and increases not only people’s efforts but how they feel about what they are doing.<sup>7</sup> For example, consider the difference for call center employees who are helping people solve problems versus those who are trying to get people off the phone as quickly as possible. The latter would only try to convince callers that the company was doing everything it could, while the former would eagerly search for ways the company could be of assistance.

Leaders help people see that what they are doing is bigger than they are and bigger, even, than the business. Their work can be something noble. When these people go to bed at night, they can sleep a little easier, knowing that others can live a better life because of what they did that day. As [Figure 6.1](#) shows, the extent to which direct reports feel they are making a difference in their organization systematically increases on the basis that their leaders are showing people how to realize their long-term interests by enlisting in a common vision.



**Figure 6.1** Direct Reports Feel That What They Do Matters as Leaders Show That Long-Term Interests Can be Realized by a Common Vision

## Take Pride in Being Unique

Exemplary leaders, just like Jan and Nancy, also communicate what makes their constituents, work group, organization, product, or service singular and unequalled. Compelling visions differentiate, setting “us” apart from “them” in ways that attract and retain employees, volunteers, customers, clients, donors, and investors. Market researcher Doug Hall has found that “dramatically different” levels of *distinctiveness* in a new product or service increase the probability of success by over 350 percent. The same is true for a vision. The more unique it is, the higher the probability of success in getting people to buy in.<sup>8</sup>

There’s no advantage in working for, buying from, or investing in an organization that does the same thing as the one across the street or down the hall. Saying, “Welcome to our company, and we’re just like everyone else” doesn’t exactly make the spine tingle with excitement. When people

understand how they're truly distinctive and how they stand out in the crowd, they're much more eager to sign up and invest their energies.

Feeling unique fosters a sense of pride.<sup>9</sup> It boosts the self-respect and self-esteem of everyone associated with the organization. When people are proud to work for their organization and serve its purpose, and when they feel that what they are doing is meaningful, they become enthusiastic ambassadors to the outside world. Likewise, when customers and clients are proud to own your products or use your services, they are more loyal and more likely to recruit and recommend their friends to do business with you. When members of the community are proud to have you as a neighbor, they're going to do everything they can to make you feel welcome.

Azmeena Zaveri learned just how important it is for people to take pride in being unique when she led a team of volunteers in handling the sales and finances of a community bookstore in Karachi, Pakistan. The bookstore was an iconic, celebrated, and cherished institution where people loved to gather, to socialize and learn. When Azmeena agreed to take on the financial management role, however, the bookstore was in survival mode. It was no longer providing a high standard of service, there was a lack of conscientiousness in the management of the finances, and there was little motivation for the staff to go the extra mile. The reason for the decline, Azmeena told us, "was not because the team was incompetent or incapable of managing the tasks. A principal cause was the lack of vision and direction for the team. My goal was to inspire the team to bring the bookstore back to being the place where people loved to go, not just because of the great collection of books, but also for the inviting vibe and sense of community."

Azmeena coached the volunteers on ways to improve the bookkeeping process, talked about how to better use the store's scarce resources, and told them how much the patrons relied on the bookstore as an important part of their lives. Throughout the process, she "emphasized how the institution was relying on them to survive and retain its significance to the community, and how they were in an honorable position to not just serve a bookstore, but be a community icon with an esteemed legacy."

Focusing on uniqueness makes it possible for smaller units within large organizations, or individual neighborhoods within big cities, to have their

visions and still serve a larger, collective vision. Although every unit within a corporation, public agency, religious institution, school, or volunteer association must align with the overall organizational vision, each can express its unique purpose within the larger whole and highlight its most distinguishing qualities. Each can be proud of its ideal image of its future as it works toward the collective future of the larger organization.

These days, though, with the latest and greatest available in a nanosecond at the touch of a key or screen, differentiation is increasingly difficult. Everything begins to look and sound alike. It's a sea of sameness out there. People become bored with things more quickly than ever before. Organizations, new and old, must work harder to distinguish themselves (and their products) from others around them. You need to be ever vigilant to ways in which you can be the beacon that cuts through the dense mist and steers people in the right direction.

## **Align Your Dream with the People's Dream**

In learning how to appeal to people's ideals, move their souls, and uplift their spirits—and your own—a classic example is the late Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s “I Have a Dream” speech. Replayed on the national holiday in the United States marking his birthday, it reminds young and old alike of the power of a clear and uplifting vision of the future.<sup>[10](#)</sup>

Imagine that you are there on that hot and humid day—August 28, 1963—when on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., before a throng of 250,000, Martin Luther King, Jr., proclaimed his dream to the world. Imagine that you're listening to Reverend King as thousands around you clap, applaud, and cry out. Pretend you're a reporter trying to understand why this speech is so powerful and how King moves so many people.

We've asked thousands of people over the years to do just that; listen to his remarks and then tell us what they heard, how they felt, and why they thought this speech remains so moving even today.<sup>[11](#)</sup> Following is a sampling of their observations.

- ▶ “He appealed to common interests.”
- ▶ “He talked about traditional values of family, church, and country.”

- ▶ “He used a lot of images and word pictures that the audience could relate to. They were familiar.”
- ▶ “He mentioned things everyone could relate to, like family and children.”
- ▶ “His references were credible. It’s hard to argue against the Constitution or the Bible.”
- ▶ “It was personal. He mentioned his own children, as well as struggling.”
- ▶ “He included everybody: different parts of the country, all ages, both sexes, and major religions.”
- ▶ “He used a lot of repetition: for example, saying ‘I have a dream,’ and ‘Let freedom ring’ several times.”
- ▶ “He talked about the same ideas many times but in different ways.”
- ▶ “He was positive and hopeful.”
- ▶ “Although positive, he didn’t promise it would be easy.”
- ▶ “He shifted his focus from ‘I’ to ‘we’.”
- ▶ “He spoke with emotion and passion. It was something he genuinely felt.”

These reflections reveal the key to success in enlisting others. To get others excited about your dream, you need to speak about meaning and purpose. You have to *show them* how to realize *their* dreams. You have to connect your message to their values, their aspirations, their experiences, and their lives. You have to show them that it’s not about you, or even the organization, but about them and their needs. You have to make the connection between an inspiring vision of the future and the personal aspirations and passions of the people you are addressing.

Andrew Carton, professor at the University of Pennsylvania, underscores the importance of leaders using *image-based words* in communicating their visions.<sup>[12](#)</sup> This is exactly what Martin Luther King, Jr., did in describing people with well-defined attributes (such as children) and observable actions (such as sitting down at the table of brotherhood). As Drew notes:

Image-based words convey sensory information to paint a vivid picture of the future, one that employees can easily imagine witnessing. Along these lines, visions with image-based words are more consistent with the literal meaning of the word *vision*. When leaders include vivid images in their communications, they're transporting employees to the future by telling snippets of a compelling story—a story that captures events that have yet to unfold.

His research has found that image-based words inspire people. For instance, teams were tasked with developing a toy prototype. A vision communicated with image-based words (“Our toys . . . will make wide-eyed kids laugh and proud parents smile”) triggered stronger performance than a vision with similar content but without visual wording (“Our toys . . . will be enjoyed by all of our customers”).<sup>13</sup> You need to frame abstract aspirations in terms of what the result will look, feel, and sound like. With these images, people begin to generate their own passion and conviction about the vision that mirrors their leader's.

Using image-based language and creating a connection between personal aspirations and a shared vision is not only for leaders of social movements or product development teams. It applies equally to teams in workplaces like yours. Kent Christensen found this out when he joined his first company after graduating from college. During his initial few months as part of supply chain operations at Cisco, he felt a bit lost. Managers were coming and going, and teams were rotating in and out very frequently. Kent knew his day-to-day responsibilities as a business analyst, but he didn't see how his job fit into the larger scheme of things.

However, things changed when an internal candidate took over as vice president. He hosted a town hall meeting, introduced himself to everyone, and discussed the importance of the supply chain within the company. The new vice president then put up a slide that would change the way Kent felt about the organization and his role in it. It had four letters on it: V-S-E-M, which stood for Vision, Strategy, Execution, and Metrics. The vice president described how the vision for the supply chain would enable Cisco to optimize customer outcomes, empower everyone in the organization, and provide a blueprint for action. He stressed how everyone had a major role to play and needed to work collaboratively within and across organizations. As a result of this town hall meeting, things changed for Kent:



I had a completely different approach to the way I did my job. This shared vision resonated with me and showed me the light when there was only darkness before. Coming out of the all-hands meeting, the vibe around the office was different. There was a buzz around people as everyone started to feel like they belonged. It was possible that people were just happy that the changes had stopped, but it seemed much more than that. It looked as if everyone had a purpose. Having a vision helped managers and their teams to become inspired and committed to a shared goal.

By showing others how their work connects to a larger purpose, and by aligning individual aspirations with organizational ones, you can get people to see how they belong and inspire them to work together toward a common goal.

## Animate the Vision

Part of motivating others is appealing to their ideals. Another part, as demonstrated by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, is animating the vision and breathing life into it. To enlist others, you need to help them *see* and *feel* how their interests and aspirations align with the vision. You need to paint a compelling picture of the future, one that enables constituents to experience what it would be like to live and work in an exciting and uplifting future. That's the only way they'll become sufficiently motivated internally to commit their individual energies to the vision's realization.

You would not be the first person to think, "But I'm not like Martin Luther King. I can't possibly do what he did. Besides, he was a preacher, and I'm not. His constituents were on a protest march, and mine are here to get a job done." Many people don't see themselves as personally uplifting, and most certainly don't get much encouragement for behaving this way in organizations. Despite the acknowledged potency of clearly communicated and compelling visions, our research finds people more uncomfortable with inspiring a shared vision than with any of the other four leadership practices. Most of their discomfort comes from having to express their emotions. Many people find it hard to convey intense emotions, but don't be too quick to discount your capacity to do it.

People's perception of themselves as uninspiring is in sharp contrast to their performance when they talk about their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences or when they talk about their ideal futures. When relating extraordinary achievements or major successes, people are nearly always emotionally expressive. When talking about intense desires for a better future, expressiveness tends to come naturally. And it doesn't matter what language people are speaking. When they feel passionate about something, they let their emotions show.

Most people attribute something mystical to the process of being inspirational. They seem to see it as supernatural, as a grace or charm bestowed on them—often referred to as charisma. This assumption inhibits people far more than any lack of natural talent for being inspirational. It's

not necessary to be a charismatic person to inspire a shared vision. You have to *believe*, and you have to develop the skills to transmit your belief. Your passion is what brings the vision to life. If you're going to lead, you have to recognize that your enthusiasm and expressiveness are among your strongest allies in your efforts to generate commitment in others. Don't underestimate your talents.

## **Use Symbolic Language**

"This picture represents my vision for employee development," Cheryl Johnson told us. Cheryl is the assistant director for human resources at Santa Clara University, and the picture she showed was a photograph of a produce market teeming with people eagerly shopping for their favorite varieties of fruits and vegetables. She went on to explain:

This market is a vibrant part of the community. The key to the long-term success of this market is being able to meet the needs of the community by offering products that people want, keeping items fresh, and always having a wide variety of items to choose from.

I see Employee Development as a team that offers a variety and selection of ever-changing items and offerings. Some of our customers will be in a hurry and will hardly notice what we offer. Others will linger to enjoy and utilize our offerings. In the longer term, we will create a marketplace that people will seek out for assistance, guidance, resources and learning.

Like any store, we must be ever vigilant of the wants and needs of our customers. We must be willing to be innovative, to try new and different things. We must also be willing to change out our selection of products as new offerings become available or in season. In addition, we must be willing to be constantly culling our outdated and underutilized offerings. Just as a market makes for a healthy community, we will provide nourishment for our campus. Our nourishment will be in the form of creative and fresh ideas for personal and professional growth opportunities that our clients and customers will choose to utilize.

Cheryl's marketplace metaphor is a vivid example of how to bring a vision to life through evocative language. Leaders like Cheryl embrace the power

of symbolic language to communicate a shared identity and give life to visions. They use metaphors and analogies. They give examples, tell stories, and relate anecdotes. They draw word pictures, and they offer quotations and recite slogans. They enable constituents to picture the possibilities—to hear them, to sense them, to recognize them.

James Geary, deputy curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard University, and a leading expert on the use of metaphorical language, reports that people use a metaphor every ten to twenty-five words, or about six metaphors a minute.<sup>14</sup> Metaphors are everywhere—there are art metaphors, game and sports metaphors, war metaphors, science fiction metaphors, machine metaphors, religious metaphors, and spiritual metaphors. They influence both what and how people think, what they imagine and invent, what they eat and drink, what they consume and purchase, and whom they vote for and rally behind. Learning to use these figures of speech greatly enhances your ability to enlist others in a common vision of the future.

Consider, for example, the intriguing impact of language on people in experiments in which researchers told participants they were playing either the Community Game or the Wall Street Game.<sup>15</sup> In both scenarios, people played the same game by the same rules. The *only* difference was that experimenters gave the same game two different names. Of those playing the Community Game, 70 percent started out playing cooperatively and continued to do so throughout. Of those told they were playing the Wall Street Game, just the opposite occurred: 70 percent did *not* cooperate, and the 30 percent who did cooperate, stopped when they saw that others weren't cooperating. Again, remember: the *name*, *not the game* was the only thing that was different!

This experiment powerfully demonstrates why you must pay close attention to the language you use. You can influence people's behavior simply by giving the task or the team a name that evokes the kind of behavior implied by the name. If you want people to act like a community, use language that evokes a feeling of community. If you want them to act like traders in the financial markets, use language that cues those images. The same goes for any other vision you might have for your organization.

## Create Images of the Future

Visions are images in the mind; they are impressions and representations. They become real as leaders express those images in concrete terms to their constituents. Just as architects make drawings and engineers build models, leaders find ways of giving expression to collective hopes for the future.

When talking about the future, people typically use terms such as *foresight*, *focus*, *forecasts*, *future scenarios*, *points of view*, and *perspectives*. What all these expressions have in common is that they are visual references. The word *vision* itself has at its root the verb “to see.” Vision statements, then, are not statements at all. They are pictures—word pictures. They are images of the future. For people to share a vision, they have to be able to see it in the mind’s eye.

In our workshops and classes, we often illustrate the power of images with this simple exercise. We ask people to shout out the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the words *Paris, France*. The replies that pop out—the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe, the Seine, Notre Dame, delicious food, wine, and romance—are all images of real places and real sensations. No one calls out the square kilometers, population, or gross domestic product of Paris. Why? Because most of what we recall about memorable places or events are those things associated with our senses—sights, sounds, tastes, smells, tactile sensations, and feelings.<sup>16</sup>

So what does this mean for leaders? It means that to enlist others and inspire a shared vision, you must be able to draw on that very natural mental process of creating images. When you speak about the future, you need to create pictures with words so that others form a mental image of what things will be like when they are at the end of the journey. When talking about going places you’ve never been, you must be able to imagine what they’ll look like. You have to picture the possibilities.

Debbie Sharp, a manager in Employee Learning and Organizational Development (ELOD) at Houston Community College, paints a very vivid image in the vision statement for her organization.<sup>17</sup>

More than any other institution of higher education the community college is in the business of changing lives. We meet our students where they are and help them define and achieve their goals. As they fulfill their potentials, we help them shine!

In days gone by, the lamplighter dutifully set about lighting the street lamps, as day faded to night. We in ELOD light the lamps of learning, chasing away the darkness of uncertainty and doubt for our customers.

When asked why he is so committed to this repetitive, mundane task, the lamplighter replies, “I do it for the light I leave behind.”

As learning and development professionals, we too are lamplighters, creating conditions that nurture the spark of new ideas and perspectives. Through encouragement, thoughtful questioning, and provision of safe spaces for experimentation, we ignite innovative thinking and self-discovery in our learners.

The light we leave behind illuminates the paths of those we touch, enabling them to spread their light throughout the college.

Getting people to see a common future does not require special powers. Just like Debbie, you possess this ability. You do it every time you take a vacation and share the photos with your friends. If you doubt your ability to paint word pictures, try this exercise: sit down with a few close friends and tell them about one of your favorite vacations. Describe the people you met, the sights and sounds of the places you went, the smells and tastes of the food you ate. Show them the photos or videos if you have them. Observe their reactions—and your own. What do you and they experience? The answer is that people always report feeling energized and passionate. Those hearing about a place for the first time usually say something like, “After listening to you, I’d like to go there someday myself.” Isn’t that what you want your constituents to say when you describe your vision of the future?

## **Practice Positive Communication**

To foster team spirit, breed optimism, promote resilience, and renew faith and confidence, leaders look on the bright side. They keep hope alive. They strengthen their constituents’ belief that life’s struggles will produce a more promising future. Such faith results from an intimate and supportive

relationship, a relationship based on mutual participation in the process of renewal.

Constituents look for leaders who demonstrate an enthusiastic, genuine belief in the capacity of others, who strengthen people's will, who supply the means to achieve, and who express optimism for the future.

Constituents want leaders who remain passionate despite obstacles and setbacks. In today's uncertain times, desperately needed are leaders with a positive, confident, can-do approach to life and business. Naysayers only stop forward progress; they do not start it.

Consider how Ari Ashkenazi, financial analyst at Valin Corporation, had contrasting experiences with two supervisors. The first, he said, always tried to keep spirits up and to look on the bright side, regardless of the situation. Even when a project was unsuccessful, Ari said, she would tell them that future projects would turn out better as long as they kept working hard as well as working smart.

This gave me a lot of faith in her, and helped me to keep from getting frustrated during my work when things didn't always go right. This also had the effect of making it easier for me to try new things as well as report negative news to her since I knew she wouldn't "shoot the messenger" when it came to giving her news.

The second supervisor Ari described would often get easily exasperated, and when she was annoyed or angry, she'd let people know it quite plainly. All she cared about were the numbers and results, and it felt as though she was looking down on you if things didn't go as she planned from the start. The outcome of her negative communications, Ari explained, "was to make me try to avoid her as much as possible and to hold back on giving her negative information that she needed to know, just because I feared the backlash she would give me."

Researchers working with neural networks find that when people feel rebuffed or left out, the brain activates a site for registering physical pain.<sup>18</sup> When leaders threaten and demean people, use scare tactics, and focus exclusively on problems, they activate regions in the brains of their audience that make people want to avoid them. Moreover, people remember downbeat comments far more often, in more detail, and with more intensity than they do encouraging words. When negative remarks become a

preoccupation, an employee's brain loses mental efficiency. In contrast, a positive approach to life broadens people's ideas about future possibilities, and these exciting options build on each other, according to Barbara Fredrickson, professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina. In her research, she finds that being positive opens people up, consequently seeing more options, making them more innovative. Individuals who enjoy more positivity are also better able to cope with adversity and are more resilient during times of high stress.<sup>19</sup>

## Express Your Emotions

In explaining why particular leaders have a magnetic effect, people often describe them as charismatic. However, *charisma* has become such an overused and misused term that it's almost useless as a descriptor of leaders. Being charismatic is neither a magical nor a spiritual quality. Like being "inspirational," it's mostly about how people behave.

Instead of defining charisma as a personality trait, some social scientists have investigated what people are doing when others say they are charismatic.<sup>20</sup> What they've found is that individuals who are perceived to be charismatic are simply more animated than people who are not. They smile more, speak faster, pronounce words more clearly, and move their heads and bodies more often. Being energetic and expressive are key descriptors of what it means to be charismatic. The old saying that enthusiasm is infectious is certainly true for leaders.

Arousing emotion has another benefit for leaders: emotions make things more memorable. By adding emotion to your words and behavior, you can increase the likelihood that people will remember what you say. James McGaugh, research professor of neurobiology at the University of California, Irvine, and a leading expert on the creation of memory, has shown that "emotionally significant events create stronger, longer-lasting memories."<sup>21</sup> No doubt you've experienced this yourself when something emotionally significant has happened to you—a serious trauma, such as an accident, or a joyful surprise, such as winning a contest.

The events don't even have to be real to be memorable. They can simply be stories. For example, in one experiment, James showed subjects a series of twelve slides. Accompanying the slide presentation was a story, one line for



each slide. For one group, the narrative was quite boring; for the other, the narrative was emotionally moving. Participants didn't know at the time they watched the slides that they would be tested, but two weeks later, they returned and took an assessment of how well they remembered the details of each slide. Although the subjects in the two groups didn't differ in their memory of the first few and last few slides, they did differ significantly in the recollection of the slides in the middle. "The subjects who had listened to the emotionally arousing narrative remembered details in those particular slides better" than the group that listened to the neutral story.<sup>22</sup>

Emotional arousal creates stronger memories, and you don't need a complete narrative (or slides); just the words themselves can be equally effective. Researchers asked subjects to learn to associate pairs of words. Some paired-words were chosen because they elicited strong emotional responses (as indicated by changes in galvanic skin response). One week later, people remembered the emotionally arousing words better than they remembered the less arousing words.<sup>23</sup> Whether you hear a story or a word, you're more likely to remember the key messages when attached to something that triggers an emotional response. People are hard-wired to pay more attention to stuff that excites them or scares them.

Furthermore, showing people a concrete example is better than telling them about an abstract principle, which still leaves them on the outside looking in. For example, studies showed that a story about a starving seven-year-old girl from Mali prompted people to donate more than twice as much money as the message that "food shortages in Malawi are affecting more than three million children in Zambia."<sup>24</sup>

Get people to experience what you are trying to explain, and they'll understand in a deeper way. For example, trainers helping volunteers understand how people and their families in hospice care deal with loss will often use an exercise where they hand out packets of index cards, asking volunteers to write on each of their cards something they love and would be devastated to lose. The list often includes the names of family members (spouse, parents, children, siblings, pets), activities (walking, playing music, traveling), or experiences (reading, listening to music, enjoying gourmet dinners, watching sunsets). Then a trainer walks around the room and randomly takes cards from the volunteers. One person loses two of them. Another loses all of them. The person who lost two loses two more.

The effect is dramatic. Volunteers clutch their cards and struggle not to let them go. When they release the cards, they are visibly upset; some even break down and cry.<sup>25</sup>

This poignant exercise speaks volumes about how much more influential leaders can be when they tap into people's emotions rather than only tell them what to do or how to feel. If the trainers had merely shared facts, the volunteers might have been able to understand conceptually the losses that hospice residents were suffering, but not in a way that would have led to genuine empathy. Through this exercise, they could briefly experience the same type of losses in a way that they would never forget.

The dramatic increase in the use of electronic technology also has an impact on the way people deliver messages. More and more people are turning to their digital devices and social media—from podcasts to webcasts, Facebook to YouTube—for information and connection. Because people remember things that have high emotional content, social media has the potential for engaging people more than do emails, memos, and PowerPoint presentations. It's no longer enough to write a good script—you also have to put on a good show.

Keep in mind that the content alone doesn't make the message stick; key is how well you tap into people's emotions. To be willing to change, people have to feel something. Thinking isn't nearly enough to get things moving. Your job is to get them to feel motivated to change, and expressing emotions helps do that.<sup>26</sup>

## **Speak Genuinely**

None of these suggestions about being more expressive will be of any value whatsoever if you don't believe in what you're saying. If the vision is someone else's and you don't own it, you'll have a tough time enlisting others in it. If you have trouble imagining yourself living the future described in the vision, you certainly will not be able to convince others that they ought to enlist in making it a reality. If you're not excited about the possibilities, you can't expect others to be. *The prerequisite to enlisting others in a shared vision is genuineness.*

Cathryn Meyer saw this kind of genuineness modeled when she squeezed into a small conference room with twenty other prospective volunteers for

the mandatory two-hour orientation by the Peninsula Humane Society (PHS) Wildlife Rehabilitation Department. Patrick, the head of the Wildlife Department, and leader of the meeting, was “an unassuming and soft-spoken individual with piercings and tattoos offsetting his official PHS uniform,” Cathryn told us. Here’s how she related the story:

Patrick started by explaining how he had come to work for the organization, and why he felt the work was meaningful. He talked about his history as an animal activist; how he had started his career as a vegan chef before making his way into Wildlife Rehabilitation. He talked about his deep-seated belief that it was possible to coexist with wild animals, even in a world where humans had destroyed much of their natural habitat. He shared that he felt he had a responsibility to give back to these animals that we have taken so much from. He also talked about the criticality of volunteers in the ability to treat and release so many animals back into the wild each year.

Even though Patrick was not overly animated, he spoke genuinely and with a thoughtfulness that conveyed his passion for his work. He painted a positive picture of the future where wildlife can thrive alongside humans, thanks to the work of the wildlife department and the volunteers who work there. He was able to solidify the meaning and impact of the work that each volunteer would be performing.

Cathryn also noted that she learned another very important lesson from her experience with Patrick. It was a lesson about charisma. “Previously I thought that extroversion and unbridled energy were prerequisites (or at least immensely helpful) for successful leadership. I know now that this is not necessarily the case. Quiet confidence works, too. Introverted individuals like Patrick and myself can be effective leaders. All that you need are conviction, sincerity, and passion.”<sup>27</sup>

The most believable people are the ones, like Patrick, with a deep passion. There’s no one more fun to be around than someone who is openly excited about the magic that can happen. There’s no one more determined than someone who believes fervently in an ideal. Are you that someone?



## ***Take Action***

### ***Enlist Others***

Leaders appeal to common ideals. They connect others to what is most meaningful in the shared vision. They lift people to higher levels of motivation and morality, and continuously reinforce that they can make a difference in the world. Exemplary leaders speak to what is unique and singular about the organization, making others feel proud to be a part of something extraordinary. Exemplary leaders understand that it's not their personal view of the future that's important; it's embracing the aspirations of their constituents that matter most.

For visions to be sustainable, they must be compelling and memorable. Leaders must breathe life into visions, animating them so that others can experience what it would be like to live and work in that ideal and unique future. They use a variety of modes of expression to make their abstract visions concrete. Through skillful use of metaphors, symbols, word pictures, positive language, and personal energy, leaders generate enthusiasm and excitement for the common vision. Above all, leaders must be convinced of the value of the shared vision and communicate that genuine belief to others. They must believe in what they are saying. Authenticity is the acid test of conviction, and your constituents will willingly follow only when they believe that you believe.

To Inspire a Shared Vision, you must enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations. This means you must:

1. Talk with your constituents and find out about their hopes, dreams, and aspirations for the future.
2. Make sure your constituents know what makes their products or services unique and special.
3. Show constituents how enlisting in a common vision serves their long-term interests.
4. Be positive, upbeat, and energetic when talking about the future of your organization, and make liberal use of metaphors, symbols, examples, and stories.
5. Acknowledge the emotions of others and validate them as important.
6. Let your passion show in a manner genuinely expressive of who you are.

# Notes

1. We are grateful to Michael Bunting for sharing this example.
2. In a similar way, Simon Sinek talks about how people can be inspired by starting with “why.” See S. Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Portfolio, 2010).
3. R. M. Spence, *It's Not What You Sell, It's What You Stand For: Why Every Extraordinary Business Is Driven by Purpose* (New York: Portfolio, 2010); D. Ulrich and W. Ulrich, *The Why of Work: How Great Leaders Build Abundant Organizations That Win* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010); B. D. Rosso, K. H. Dekas, and A. Wrzesniewski, “On the Meaning of Work: A Theoretical Integration and Review,” *Research in Organizational Behavior* 31 (2011): 91 –127; D. Ariely, *Payoff: The Hidden Logic That Shapes Our Motivations* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016); and A. M. Carton, “ ‘I'm Not Mopping the Floors—I'm Putting a Man on the Moon': How NASA Leaders Enhanced the Meaningfulness of Work by Changing the Meaning of Work,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* (forthcoming).
4. 2016 Workforce Purpose Index, “Purpose at Work: The Largest Global Study on the Role of Purpose in the Workforce,” [https://cdn.imperative.com/media/public/Global\\_Purpose\\_Index\\_2016.pdf](https://cdn.imperative.com/media/public/Global_Purpose_Index_2016.pdf).
5. R. F. Baumeister, K. D. Vohs, J. L. Aaker, and E. N. Garbinsky, “Some Key Differences Between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life,” *Journal of Positive Psychology* 8, no. 6 (2013), 505 –516.
6. E. E. Smith and J. L. Aaker, “Millennial Searchers,” *New York Times*, November 30, 2013, <http://nyti.ms/1dHVKid>; and 2016 Workforce Purpose Index, “Purpose at Work.”
7. J. Newton and J. Davis, “Three Secrets of Organizational Success,” *Strategy+Business*, Issue 76 (Autumn 2014).

8. D. Hall, *Jump Start Your Business Brain: Win More, Lose Less, and Make More Money with Your New Products, Services, Sales and Advertising* (Cincinnati: Clerisy Books, 2005), 126.
9. Pride is one of the five dimensions of a great workplace, and scoring high on this variable qualifies a company as a *Fortune* magazine 100 Best Companies to Work For (M. Burchell and J. Robin, *The Great Workplace: How to Build It, How to Keep It, and Why It Matters* [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011], 127 –154). Pride has also been postulated as a primary intrinsic motivation (e.g., J. Tracy, *Take Pride: Why the Deadliest Sin Holds the Secret to Human Success* [New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016]).
10. “ ‘I Have a Dream’ Leads Top 100 Speeches of the Century,” press release from the University of Wisconsin, December 15, 1999, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/top100speechesall.html>. See also S. E. Lucas and M. J. Medhurst, *Words of a Century: The Top 100 American Speeches, 1900 –1999* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
11. The audio version of the “I Have a Dream” speech can be downloaded from [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/Have-Dream-Americas-Greatest-Speeches/dp/B005BYUSA2/ref=sr_1_3?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1488093384&sr=1-3-mp3-albums-bar-strip-0&keywords=i+have+a+dream): [https://www.amazon.com/Have-Dream-Americas-Greatest-Speeches/dp/B005BYUSA2/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1488093384&sr=1-3-mp3-albums-bar-strip-0&keywords=i+have+a+dream](https://www.amazon.com/Have-Dream-Americas-Greatest-Speeches/dp/B005BYUSA2/ref=sr_1_3?s=dmusic&ie=UTF8&qid=1488093384&sr=1-3-mp3-albums-bar-strip-0&keywords=i+have+a+dream).
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[16.](#) C. Heath and D. Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York: Random House, 2007).

[17.](#) We are grateful to Tom Pearce and Renee Harness for sharing this example.

[18.](#) D. T. Hsu, B. J. Sanford, K. K. Meyers, T. M. Love, K. E. Hazlett, H. Wang, L. Ni, S. J. Walker, B. J. Mickey, S. T. Korycinski, R. A. Koeppe, J. K. Crocker, S. A. Langenecker, and J-K. Zubieta, “Response of the  $\mu$ -Opioid System to Social Rejection and Acceptance,” *Molecular Psychiatry* 18 (2013): 1211 –1217; also see D. Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (New York: Bantam, 2006).

[19.](#) B. L. Fredrickson, *Positivity: Groundbreaking Research Reveals How to Embrace the Hidden Strengths of Positive Emotions, Overcome Negativity, and Thrive* (New York: Crown, 2008).

[20.](#) H. S. Friedman, L. M. Prince, R. E. Riggio, and M. R. DiMatteo, “Understanding and Assessing Nonverbal Expressiveness: The Affective Communication Test,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39, no. 2 (1980): 333 –351; J. Conger, *Winning 'em Over: A New Model for Management in the Age of Persuasion* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998); D. Goleman, R. Boyatzis, and A. McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002); J. Conger, “Charismatic Leadership” in M. G. Rumsey (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Leadership* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 376 –391; and, G. A. Sparks, “Charismatic Leadership: Findings of an Exploratory Investigation of the Techniques of Influence,” *Journal of Behavioral Studies in Business* 7 (2014): 1 –11.

[21.](#) J. L. McGaugh, *Memory and Emotion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 90. See also R. Maxwell and R. Dickman, *The Elements of Persuasion: Use Storytelling to Pitch Better Ideas, Sell Faster, & Win*



*More Business* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), especially “Sticky Stories: Memory, Emotions and Markets,” 122 –150.

22. McGaugh, *Memory and Emotion*, 93.

23. McGaugh, *Memory and Emotion*.

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# CHALLENGE THE PROCESS



**Practice 3**  
**Challenge the Process**

- Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
- Experiment and take risks by consistently generating small wins and learning from experience.



## Chapter 7

# Search for Opportunities

**When Aristotle Verdant** became marketing project manager at a storage networking company, he noticed serious flaws in the company's project management process. Project goals and objectives were only loosely defined, specific outcomes from each project stage were not delivered on time, and capital and human resources allocations were routinely overrun. The result, he said, was that “panic, chaos, overtime, and budget overruns” characterized project execution throughout the company.

In talking with his counterparts in other business units, Aristotle discovered that the issues were not unique to his projects; the same were common to others. “There were occasional murmurs about fixing the process,” he said, “but the apathy had sunk in too deep for anyone to change the status quo and take on the herculean task voluntarily. I decided to meet the challenge with change.” He approached colleagues who were equally frustrated with the process and asked them to join him in identifying the company-wide factors impeding their work. Then they would need ideas on how to fix the broken system. “The problems we were facing could not have been unique to our company,” Aristotle said, “so the best way to get the expertise we needed would be to look outside our organization.”

Aristotle went to his former company to seek advice from an ex-colleague, who shared that they had similar problems in the past and had slowly evolved their processes to adopt appropriate best practices. Their team had gone through specialized training that helped them come together with a new process that the company now followed. Buoyed by that insight, Aristotle went back to his manager, who admitted that the problem with the organization's process was company-wide and agreed to use the

department's employee development funds for special training for the marketing project management team.

“The training was very helpful,” Aristotle said. “Everyone could see that adopting the new process was going to be beneficial and productive, allowing us to better manage the uncertainties that we faced in our projects.” However, before they rolled out the new process they had devised, he told us, more work was needed.

We needed to experiment with its effectiveness in our environment. The experiments would bring in practical learning, allow us to course-correct as necessary, and manage better the change effort. The best way to achieve that in a controlled environment was to do pilot projects that were small in scope. Two of my colleagues willingly volunteered to participate and lead the pilot projects. Through these pilot projects, we monitored the progress as we advanced through different stages, identified the pitfalls, and used the solutions to continuously fine tune the new process and customize it to our environment.

The outcomes were remarkable. “We found that we could considerably reduce the project schedule slippage and costs by 20 percent,” Aristotle told us. “The results raised the morale of everyone involved. All of my colleagues were now eager to adopt the new process.”

Sometimes challenges find leaders, and sometimes leaders find the challenges; most often, it's a little of each, as in Aristotle's situation. What Aristotle did is what all exemplary leaders do. He looked outward, keeping up with changing trends and remaining sensitive to external realities. He persuaded others to take seriously the challenges and opportunities that they faced. He served as a catalyst for change, challenging the way things were done and convincing others that new practices needed to be incorporated to achieve greater levels of success.

Like Aristotle's story, all Personal-Best Leadership Experience cases are about significant departures from the past, about doing things that have never been done before, about going to places not yet discovered. Change is the work of leaders. In today's world, business-as-usual thinking is unacceptable, and exemplary leaders know that they must transform the way things are done. Delivering results beyond expectations can't be

achieved with good intentions. People, processes, systems, and strategies all need to change. In addition, all change requires that leaders actively seek ways to make things better—to grow, innovate, and improve.

Exemplary leaders embrace the commitment to *Search for Opportunities* to ensure that extraordinary things happen. They make sure they engage in these two essentials:

- ▶ ***Seize the initiative***

- ▶ ***Exercise oversight***

Sometimes leaders shake things up. Other times, they just harness the uncertainty that surrounds them. Regardless, leaders make things happen. They actively rely on oversight to seek innovative ideas from beyond the boundaries of familiar experience.

## Seize the Initiative

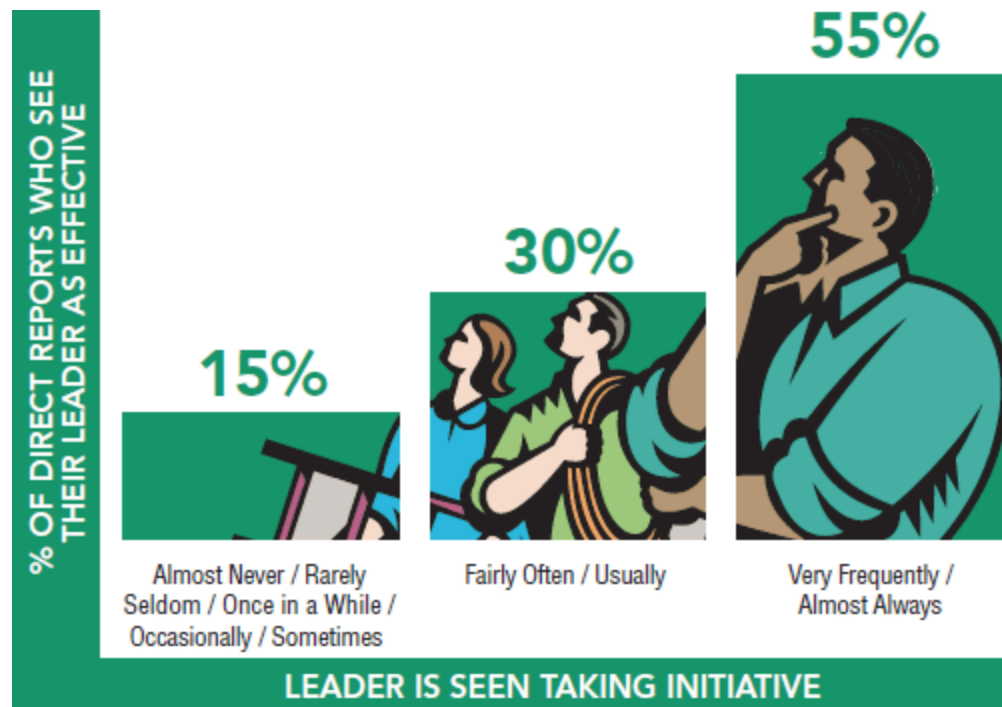
When people recall their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences, they always think about times of challenge, turbulence, and adversity. Why? Because personal and business hardships have a way of making people come face to face with who they are and what they're capable of becoming. They test people. They test their values, desire, aspirations, capabilities, and capacities. They require innovative ways of dealing with novel and difficult situations. They also tend to bring out the best in people.

Meeting new challenges always requires things to be different than they currently are. You can't respond with the same old solutions. You must change the status quo, which is what people did in their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences. They met “challenges with change,” as Aristotle so aptly observed in his experience.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, chair and director of the Harvard University Advanced Leadership Initiative, investigated the human resource practices and organizational designs of innovation-producing organizations, seeking to learn both what fostered and what hindered innovation in corporations. Our studies and hers were done independently of each other, in different regions and periods in time. We were studying leadership, and she was studying innovation. Yet, we reached similar conclusions: *leadership is inextricably connected with the process of innovation*, of bringing new ideas, methods, or solutions into use. As Rosabeth explained, innovation means change, and “change requires leadership . . . a ‘prime mover’ to push for implementation of strategic decisions.”<sup>1</sup> Her cases and ours are evidence of that.

We didn't ask people to tell us about change. They could review any leadership experience. What people chose to discuss were the changes they made in response to the challenges they faced. Their electing to talk about times of change underscores the fact that leadership demands altering the business-as-usual environment. There is a clear connection between challenge and change; and there's a clear connection between challenge and being an effective leader. The more frequently people see their leader “searching outside the formal boundaries of his or her organization for

innovative ways to improve,” the more strongly they agree that their leader is effective. Similarly, as [Figure 7.1](#) illustrates, the effectiveness ratings of leaders increases the more their direct reports observe them actively searching for innovative ways to improve.



**Figure 7.1** Leaders Are Seen by Direct Reports as More Effective When They Take Initiative

The study of leadership is the study of how men and women guide others through adversity, uncertainty, and other significant challenges. It's the study of people who triumph against overwhelming odds, who take initiative when there is inertia, who confront the established order, who mobilize individuals and institutions in the face of stiff resistance. It's also the study of how people, in times of constancy and complacency, actively seek to disturb the status quo and awaken others to new possibilities. Leadership, challenge, and seizing the initiative are linked together. Humdrum situations simply aren't associated with award-winning performances.

That's the attitude that Robin Donahue brought to the quality engineering team at a global healthcare company when tackling numerous nonconformance issues in their products. While the general area to be improved had been defined, the way they were going to reduce



nonconformance rates, with a 20 percent target, was completely up to them. Owning this objective, she and her colleagues felt they could challenge all parts of their existing systems, but they realized that this would be insufficient, and they'd have to, in Robin's words, "think outside the box, not take any existing site practice as set in stone, and experiment with new ideas." They began by brainstorming "what would we change if anything was possible." They followed this up by benchmarking with other sites, both inside and outside their organization, with the aim of gaining new perspectives on such issues. By year's end, they reduced the number of noncompliance reports by nearly triple their initial objective. Robin felt that being proactive, looking for things that could be improved, and being willing to look around (both internally and externally) for ideas "fostered a culture of inquisitiveness, innovation, and learning."

This experience reminded Robin that change is the business of leaders. "Having regulations doesn't mean you can't make changes," she said. "There are always ways to improve the process, and you should take them." The lesson for leaders is that you can't simply go through the motions when it comes to doing your job. Even if you're on the right track, you're likely to be run over if you just sit there. To do your best as a leader, you must seize the initiative to change the way things are.

## **Make Something Happen**

Being high performing necessarily means working beyond your job description and seeing opportunities where others don't. For example, some standard practices, policies, and procedures are critical to productivity and quality assurance. However, many are simply matters of tradition, as Emily Taylor, working in client services for a European global financial services firm, related in her Personal-Best Leadership Experience:

I witnessed how a hardworking and reasonable person like my manager could become so entrenched in a certain way of doing things that he found it difficult to see obvious deficiencies or look ahead. He could not see, or did not want to see, how inefficient the current system was, and how disastrous the manual way of doing things would have been going forward.

This insight helped me appreciate how important it is for leaders to be constantly on the lookout for opportunities for improvement, to identify and challenge systems that are not working well, and foster an environment where everyone is open to sharing new ideas.

As Emily reflected, new jobs and new assignments are ideal opportunities for asking probing questions and challenging the way you do things. They are the times when you're expected to ask, "Why do we do this?" However, don't just ask this when you're new to the job. Make it a routine part of your leadership. Ask questions that test people's assumptions, stimulate different ways of thinking, and open new avenues to explore. Asking questions is how you'll continuously uncover needed improvements, fostering innovation. Studies of business breakthroughs find that they often originated from someone asking questions about why a problem existed and how to tackle it.<sup>2</sup> Be proactive in asking questions that test people's assumptions, stimulate different ways of thinking, and open new avenues to explore.

Research clearly shows that managers rated high in proactivity are assessed by their immediate managers as more effective leaders.<sup>3</sup> Co-workers who evaluate their peers as being high on proactivity also consider them to be better leaders.<sup>4</sup> Similar results about the connection between proactivity and performance have been found among entrepreneurs, administrative staff, and even college students searching for jobs. Proactivity consistently produces better results than reactivity or inactivity.<sup>5</sup> Using cross-cultural samples, we've found that proactive managers score higher than average on the leadership practice of Challenge the Process, and this inclination is independent of both gender and national culture.<sup>6</sup> People perform better when they take charge of change. As is said in basketball, one hundred percent of the shots you *don't* take don't ever go in the hoop.

Leaders want to make something happen, and are often frustrated by the “if it ain't broke, don't fix it” mentality. They earn the respect of the people around them when they question the status quo, come up with innovative ideas, follow through with the changes they suggest, get feedback, understand their mistakes, and learn from failures. The importance of taking initiative was Marina Iatomase's lesson when she took on a very broad assignment upon joining HP's global business services finance group. Her team, she said, “saw me as an advocate who was working to simplify their lives and make their jobs a little easier, while my boss saw my desire to improve the current state of affairs even in the face of adversity. Even as the youngest and the newest addition to my team, I was able to step up as a leader and make a difference.”

Leaders don't wait for permission or specific instructions before jumping in. They make something happen when they notice what isn't working, create a solution for the problem, gain buy-in from constituents, and implement the desired outcome. For example, Starbucks's Frappuccino came to market because one district manager, Dina Campion, was frustrated that her customers were going to competitors' stores for cold blended drinks. Starbucks didn't offer the product, and corporate declined many requests for the drink. Dina, however, saw an opportunity and was eager to experiment with it. She persuaded a colleague in retail operations in Seattle to champion her cause, and he bought her a blender to experiment with formulations of the drink. They didn't ask for permission; they just took the initiative, made the product in one of Dina's stores, and tested it with her customers. As more and more people requested the product, the company ended up being persuaded to invest in the drink, and after several trials, brought it to the larger market. Frappuccino became the most successful new launch in the company's history.<sup>7</sup>

## **Encourage Initiative in Others**

Change requires leadership and every person, down to the most junior member of the organization, can drive innovation and improvements in a team's processes. John Wang, a product manager at Visa, learned the importance of this principle at his first job after college. His manager fostered an atmosphere that supported experimentation and innovation, which allowed John and others to find ways they could improve existing

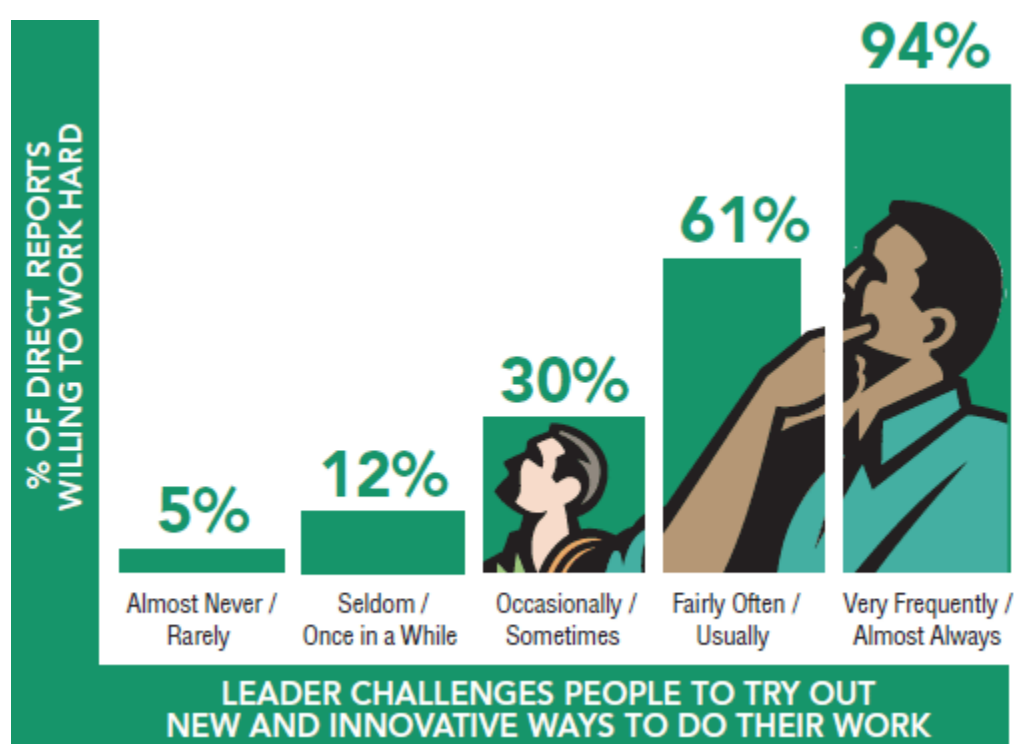
processes and complete their assignments faster and more efficiently. One such area was the weekly backup process for the group's main file server, which was creating backlogs because it was antiquated. John and his colleagues took the initiative to research various alternatives and recommended a quite expensive replacement to their manager.

Their manager was very pleased that they had found a way to improve the backup process and mentioned their discovery to his manager, who also applauded their initiative. “This encouragement,” John recalled, “gave us clear, positive feedback, and the courage to find other suggestions over the next few years to improve our departmental processes. Indeed, this episode gave everyone the clear signal that suggestions were truly welcomed.” The lesson that John took to heart is one that leaders deeply appreciate: giving everyone on the team the opportunity to take initiative can result in unexpected positive changes. John says, “This is a principle that I have tried to implement in my own life: giving people I work with a chance to do things differently than I would.”

Azmeena Zaveri had seen how tradition, along with daily pressures and demands in the corporate workplace, could diminish innovation and responsiveness to new ideas, and admitted how easy it was to fall into this same trap when she worked with a group of volunteers for a local community center in Northern California. She realized that she had become preoccupied with logistical and clerical tasks, “making sure that the increasingly monotonous activities were done correctly and predictably,” and that she had not been sufficiently open to new ways of thinking.

To break out of this pattern, she created a new forum that met after every event to brainstorm on how they could do things better for the next event. In these forums, she invited the team to give their opinions and suggestions for the improvement of their program and encouraged them to share what they might have read about or experienced at other events. She also created a digital diary for the team to pitch new ideas, get into the details of the ones they decided to try out, and generate a log of what they've learned from those experiences. Azmeena and her team understand that not everything will be successful, but, as she says, “trying new things was necessary for the program to improve and stay relevant with ever-changing times.”

Leaders seize the initiative themselves and encourage initiative in others. They want people to speak up, offer suggestions for improvement, and be straightforward about their constructive criticism. The more frequently direct reports indicated their leaders “challenge people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work,” the stronger were their feelings of accomplishment and belief that they were making a difference. Their responses to the question “Would you work harder and for longer hours if the job demanded it?” tied directly to the extent that they felt their leaders provided them with the opportunity to take initiative, as illustrated in [Figure 7.2](#).



**Figure 7.2** Challenging Direct Reports to Try Out New and Innovative Ways to Do Their Work Increases Their “Willingness to Work Hard”

Empirical analyses were similar when direct reports assessed how frequently they observed their leaders doing the same *themselves*—that is, “seeking out challenging opportunities that test his or her own skills and abilities.” The levels of commitment, motivation, and productivity on the part of direct reports increased proportionally to how frequently they indicated their own leaders challenged themselves, as did their evaluations of their leader's effectiveness.

You can create conditions so that your constituents will be ready and willing to seize the initiative in tumultuous as well as tranquil times. First, generate a can-do attitude by providing opportunities for people to gain mastery on a task one step at a time. Training is crucial to building people's ability and their confidence that they can effectively respond to and improve the difficult situations they face. In addition, find ways for people to stretch themselves. Set the bar incrementally higher, but at a level at which people feel they can succeed. Raise it too high, and people will fail; if they fail too often, they'll quit trying. Raise the bar a bit at a time, and as more and more people eventually master the situation and build the self-confidence to continue, move the bar upward.

You can also foster initiative by providing access to role models, especially among peers, who are successful at meeting challenges. Our data shows that the more people observe their leaders as role models for taking initiative, testing skills and abilities, and learning from experience, the more favorably they feel about their workplaces. By observing exemplary behaviors, people can gain insights into the dynamic nature of the skill they are trying to acquire. Positive role models are necessary because it is impossible for anyone to excel based upon a negative. You can only excel to a positive example. You can know one hundred things not to do, but if you don't know even one thing to do, then you can't perform very well at the task. Get people to focus on one or two skills they most want to learn and look for an individual who's good at them to learn from and emulate. Connect people with role models from whom they can start learning, and help them take the next steps of creating a mental picture of performing that same skill themselves and internalizing why it is important to develop that competency.

## **Challenge with Purpose**

Purpose is a tremendously powerful source of motivation, and people cannot persevere for very long without it.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, leaders don't challenge simply for challenge's sake. It's not about shaking things up just to keep people on their toes. Individuals who simply complain about how things are going, grumble about what's not working well, criticize new thoughts and thinking, or point out problems with the ideas of others without offering alternatives are not challenging the process nor leading.

Exemplary leaders challenge for meaning's sake and with a drive to take actions for the better. Leaders challenge, usually with great passion, because they want people to live better lives. They fervently believe that the lives of all their stakeholders will be better when processes, products, services, systems, and relationships are continuously improved. But to be fully engaged in the challenge, people need to know why. Meaningfulness thrives when people understand the purpose of their organization and the work they do.

The strongest motivation to deal with challenge and the uncertainties of life and work comes from inside of people, and not the outside. It doesn't typically come from something that others hold out in front as some kind of carrot or stick.<sup>9</sup> The evidence from our research, and from studies by many others, demonstrates that if people are going to do their best when challenged, they must be internally motivated. Their tasks or projects must be intrinsically engaging. Researchers have challenged the assumption that giving people more money (for example, providing or increasing financial incentives) significantly improves performance. Current thinking is that contingent rewards (for instance, pay for performance) may be a losing proposition.<sup>10</sup> Studies provide convincing evidence that reliance on extrinsic motivators can actually lower performance and create a culture of divisiveness and selfishness, precisely because it diminishes an inner sense of purpose.<sup>11</sup> When it comes to excellence, it's definitely not "What gets rewarded gets done"; it's "What is rewarding gets done."

You can never pay people enough to care to care about their products, services, communities, families, or even the bottom line. After all, why do people push their own limits to get extraordinary things done? And, for that matter, why do people do so many things for nothing? Why do they volunteer to put out fires, raise money for worthy causes, or help children in need? Why do they risk their careers to start a new business or risk their security to change the social condition? Why do they risk their lives to save others or defend liberty? How do people find satisfaction in efforts that don't pay a lot of money, options, perks, or prestige? Extrinsic rewards certainly can't explain these actions. Leaders tap into people's hearts and minds, not merely their hands and wallets.

Arlene Blum knows firsthand the importance of challenging with purpose. Arlene, who earned a doctorate in biophysical chemistry, has spent most of

her adult life climbing mountains. She's completed more than three hundred successful ascents. Her most significant challenge—and the one for which she is best known—was not the highest mountain she'd ever climbed. It was the challenge of leading the first all-woman team up Annapurna I, the tenth-highest mountain in the world. “The question everyone asks mountain climbers is ‘Why?’” Arlene explains,

and when they learn about the lengthy and difficult preparation involved, they ask it even more insistently. For us, the answer was much more than “because it is there.” We all had experienced the exhilaration, the joy, and the warm camaraderie of the heights, and now we were on our way to an ultimate objective for a climber—the world's tenth-highest peak. But as women, we faced a challenge even greater than the mountain. We had to believe in ourselves enough to make the attempt in spite of social convention and two hundred years of climbing history in which women were usually relegated to the sidelines.<sup>[12](#)</sup>

Arlene maintains that passion is the dividing line that separates those who make a successful ascent from those who don't: “As long as you believe what you're doing is meaningful, you can cut through fear and exhaustion and take the next step.”<sup>[13](#)</sup>

Passionate and purposeful leadership is particularly important in times of high uncertainty. When risk and complexity increase, people are in greater need of direction and guidance than when times are safer and simpler. People need a reason to keep on climbing, to keep on striving, to keep on struggling. That reason needs to be more than a short-term reward. It needs to be something more sustaining. When challenging people to grow, innovate, and improve, explain how it will benefit their colleagues, their customers, their families, and their communities. Connect the challenge to the greater good. Give them a reason to care.



## Exercise Outsight

On a visit to the rugged coast of Northern California, we came across important advice for leaders. Printed at the top of a pamphlet describing a stretch of the Pacific Ocean was this warning: “Never turn your back on the ocean.” The reason that you can't turn and look inland, to catch a view of the town, is because a rogue wave may come along when your back is turned and sweep you out to sea, as many an unsuspecting traveler has discovered. This warning holds sound advice for travelers and leaders alike. When you take your eyes off the external realities, turning inward to admire the beauty of your own organization, the swirling waters of change may sweep you away.

So too with innovation: you must always scan the external realities. Innovation requires the use of *outsight*. The sibling of *insight* (the ability to apprehend the inner nature of things), *outsight* (the awareness and understanding of outside forces) comes through openness. That's because researchers find that innovations come from just about anywhere.<sup>14</sup> According to a global study of CEOs, the most significant sources of innovative ideas are discovered outside the organization.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes ideas come from customers, sometimes from lead users, sometimes from suppliers, sometimes from business partners, and sometimes from the R&D labs of other organizations.

Leaders must always be actively looking for the fuzziest signs and intently listening to the weakest signals to anticipate the emergence of something new over the horizon. It's by keeping the doors open to the passage of ideas and information that you become knowledgeable about what is going on around you. Insight without *outsight* is like seeing with blinders on; you just can't get a complete picture.

## Look Outside of Your Experience

Anne Wong, director of digital marketing at Illumio, has always been open and insatiably curious about what's going on around her. She's known for asking lots of questions. One of her direct reports described her as “unrelenting in her questions until she completely understands whatever is

being discussed.”<sup>16</sup> An important rationale for doing so, Anne says, “is always trying to clearly understand situations from other people's perspectives.”

Researchers, in shadowing senior executives, discovered that the most successful ones were not waiting for information to come to them, but were out and about making themselves knowledgeable so that they could understand what to do next.<sup>17</sup> For example, they were checking the morning news, dropping by their colleagues' offices for a quick catch-up, walking the hallways or plant site, going to the cafeteria for coffee or lunch with peers, participating in informal gatherings and celebrations, attending training programs and conferences, and so on. One of their main preoccupations “was staying on top of what was happening within and around [our] organizations.” They were vigilant in making sure they didn't find themselves in the position of asking after the fact: “How could this happen without me knowing?”

Leading by wandering about, and asking questions, not only allows leaders to look outside of their experiences but also promotes external and internal dialogue about finding innovative opportunities. It also strongly influences the pride and loyalty people experience about their organizations, and their willingness to take that extra step to make their projects most successful. For example, our data reveals that the more people observe that their leader “actively searches for innovative ways to improve what we do” the greater the extent they feel they are making a difference in the work they do.

Studies into how the brain processes information suggest that to see things differently and hence creatively, you need to bombard your brain with stuff it has never encountered. This kind of novelty is vital, according to Emory University neuroscientist Gregory Berns, because the brain, evolved for efficiency, routinely takes perceptual shortcuts to save energy. Only by forcing yourself to break free of preexisting views can you get your brain to recategorize information. Moving beyond habitual thinking patterns is the starting point to imagining novel alternatives.<sup>18</sup>

Because the human mind is surprisingly adroit at supporting its deep-seated ways of viewing the world while sifting out evidence to the contrary, McKinsey & Company researchers suggest that direct personal experience is the antidote: “Seeing and experiencing something firsthand can shake

people up in ways that abstract discussions around conference room tables can't. It's therefore extremely beneficial to start creativity-building exercises or idea generation efforts outside the office by engineering personal experiences that directly confront the participants' implicit or explicit assumptions.”<sup>19</sup> It's been said that understanding what's going on around you can't very well be done by simply sitting behind your desk in the office.

Courtney Ballagh came to this realization when she worked as an assistant manager in a retail store where the sales team had fallen into a rut and was not making its numbers. In retailing, as in many organizations, people often stick to one tactic that works for them until forced to change it. The store was performing well, she recounted,

until one day the tactics we were using to sell our product became inefficient. No one could think of ideas to bring to the table to change our style, so I had each associate pick two or three stores in the mall to observe. I wanted to inspire and challenge the team by getting them to pay close attention to how those associates were selling their products and bring back new ideas to share together. They went everywhere from Gap, a mid-level nonaggressive brand focused on customer satisfaction, to Louis Vuitton, a commission-based luxury retailer that is all about making the sale. Once they all came back and shared the information they had gathered, they were able to think outside the box and see that what makes other people successful can work for them, too. These new selling techniques helped our team break out of their rut and get back on track.

As Courtney went on to explain: “If you only speak to those around you and do not go out of your way to see new perspectives, you will never come up with anything new. New things are challenging and exciting, and it takes going out of your comfort zone to see that.”

Leaders understand that innovation requires more listening and greater communication than routine work does. Successful innovations don't spring from the fifty-second floor of the headquarters building or the back offices of City Hall. You need to establish relationships, network, make connections, and be out and about. The need to stay in touch with the world around you was precisely Priya Saudagaran's experience at a nonprofit firm implementing water purification systems for rural areas within India. She

was distressed to learn about a decision by senior management to shut down a particular treatment system, depriving the local villagers of access to clean water. While she appreciated the company's financial decision, Priya felt this wasn't consistent with the company's mission. She went to her supervisor and asked for the chance to talk to the villagers directly to find out why people were not buying the water. She also started looking outside the four walls of her organization, researching how competitors were addressing similar business situations and speaking with other comparable nonprofit organizations.

Priya went out of the office and into the field, wanting to “know what the problem is rather than sticking to the traditional way of shutting down a business if it is not doing well for an extended period of time.” As a result of her findings and analyses, they eventually got more community involvement, tweaked their business model, and within twelve months made it a profitable unit; subsequently this model was copied into various other locales. Her experience provides testimony to the importance of listening to and promoting diverse perspectives.

## **Listen to and Promote Diverse Perspectives**

Demand for change will come from both inside and outside your organization. If everything was working perfectly, then perhaps there might not be any urgency to do things differently. But the truth is that if aspirations are to get or be better, then some things are going to have to change, even before they are broken. Standard operating practices (SOPs) keep things going the way they are but are often not well suited for dealing with turbulence, uncertainty, or mandates for better results.

In the beginning of his career as a financial analyst for Wells Fargo Bank, Luis Zaveleta told us about how they trained him in the standard operating procedures, which he was expected to follow within the department. Some of his duties dealt with daily, weekly, and monthly reports that were suited for the use of SOP, “but the rest of my duties involved more creative thinking.” When the number of challenging assignments increased, however, he found it harder to justify the use of the company SOP.

As I gained experience and developed more managerial skills on the job, I began to question the way the work was being done. I started by asking the more experienced workers and my manager the reason behind the usage of the SOP to solve every problem within the department. I soon learned the reason of the heavy usage of SOPs was none other than the lack of alternatives. Every employee in the last ten years was taught how to do their jobs with the use of the SOP and nobody ever thought to update it or even use a different method solve a problem.

When a new challenge presented itself, Luis had to choose between following the same inefficient SOP or challenging the established departmental processes. While Luis felt “a leader needs to be brave enough to go against the tide in order to improve a process,” he also realized that leaders needed to know the limitations of their knowledge and be open to exploring any ideas that come to them. So Luis interviewed co-workers, managers from different departments, and a few directors to get their input. The best advice, he said, came from an unlikely source, a co-worker who at the time was working as a teller for one of the local branches. “Knowing that ideas can come from anybody allows a leader never to miss an opportunity for innovation,” Luis told us. “In my example, I asked everybody within the company about overcoming my challenge and I was open and receptive to ideas from outside my department.”

The receptivity to new ideas that Luis demonstrated is a necessary skill for leaders to embrace if they are to challenge the process effectively. You need to appreciate that one person may have a valid point of view about a problem, but individuals from different backgrounds can come up with diverse views on the same problem. The extra information and perspectives can help you formulate better answers and improve outdated systems. Successful leaders need to encourage the sharing of information from all stakeholders, to be receptive to different ideas no matter the source, and to use the collective knowledge to come up with an effective solution to any challenge.

Researchers find that unless people actively encourage external communication and seek diverse points of view, they tend to interact with outsiders less and less frequently, and new ideas are cut off. Classic research studies examined the relationships between how long people had

been working together in a specific project area and three types of interpersonal oral communication (intraproject, organizational, and professional communication) at various stages of the groups' existence. They also examined the technical performance of each group as measured by department managers and laboratory directors.<sup>20</sup>

They found that higher-performing groups had significantly more communication with people outside their labs, whether with organizational units, such as marketing and manufacturing, or with outside professional associations. Intriguingly, the groups that had been together for the longest time reported lower levels of communication in all three areas. They “were significantly more isolated from external sources of new ideas and technological advances and from information within other organizational divisions.”<sup>21</sup> The long-lived teams cut themselves off from the kind of information they needed the most to come up with new ideas, and thus reduced their performance over time. They'd been together so long, it appears, that they felt they didn't need to talk to outsiders; they were content to speak just to each other.

One of the reasons that people are often afraid to ask around for advice and input from others is because they perceive that doing so means, or at least implies, that they're incompetent, that they don't know something that they should already know. However, studies have shown that this fear is misplaced. People perceive those who seek advice as more competent than those who do not seek advice and this belief is even stronger when the task is difficult than when it is easy.<sup>22</sup> You can enhance people's opinions about your competence by asking questions and seeking advice from people who know what they are talking about. For one thing, doing so makes that other person feel affirmed. Consequently, when you have a particularly perplexing problem, don't hesitate to talk about it with someone who has dealt with similar situations. There is a good chance they will think more of you afterward.

One way to open yourself up to new information is by taking on multiple perspectives. What can you do to take a more expansive view of your present circumstances? Researchers have suggested three approaches:<sup>23</sup>

- Take the perspective of someone who frustrates or irritates you, and consider what that person might have to teach you.

- ▶ Listen to what other people have to say; that is, listen to learn rather than to necessarily change their perspective.
- ▶ Seek out the opinions of people beyond your comfort zone, folks you don't typically talk with.

Asking questions and seeking the advice of others naturally leads to knowledge sharing across an organization. This inquisitiveness also strengthens interpersonal relationships. It is imperative that you listen to the world outside, and ask good questions. You never know where a great idea will come from, which means that you need to acquire an attitude of treating every job as an adventure.

## **Treat Every Job as an Adventure**

When we asked people to tell us who initiated the projects that they selected in describing their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences, we assumed that the majority would name themselves. That's not what we found. Someone other than the leader—usually the person's immediate manager—initiated more than half the cases. At first, this caught us by surprise, until we realized that much of the work that people do is assigned to them. That's just a fact of organizational life; few get to start anything they do from scratch. Consequently, whether the project is self-initiated or assigned is not the important variable. What makes the difference is how the individuals on the receiving end view the assignment. They could see it as just another job—a task to complete—or they could see it as an adventure—a possibility of making something extraordinary happen. Hands-down, exemplary leaders choose adventure.

Stuff happens in organizations and in people's lives. It's not critical whether you find the challenges, or they find you. What is important are the choices you make. What's important is the purpose you find for challenging the way things are. The question is this: When opportunity knocks, are you prepared? Are you ready to open the door, go outside, and pursue an opportunity? When Clay Alm stepped into a senior operations leadership role with OneRent Inc., a series of mini-crises confronted him. At one point, he got quite frustrated with responses from his counterpart in sales, who kept saying that it wasn't an operations problem. Clay realized that he needed to approach the problem from a different perspective in order to get

the attention of the sales team, and he set about initiating several strategies. Clay told us that he “learned that you will likely get shot down when you bring forth a proposal to change the status quo, and you will likely be denied more than once. However, good leaders do not give up when confronted with adversity; they meet that adversity with alternative solutions, and do not stop putting forth additional solutions until that adversity is overcome.”

Even if you've been in your job for years, treat today as if it were your first day. Ask yourself, “If I were just starting this job, what would I do?” Begin doing those things now. Always stay alert to ways to improve your organization. Identify those projects that you've always wanted to undertake but never have. Ask your team members to do the same.

Be an adventurer, an explorer. Where in your organization have you not been? Where in the communities that you serve have you not been? Make a plan to explore those places. Take a field trip to a factory, a warehouse, a distribution center, or a retail store. Visit with people in a function, department, location, or even client base that intrigues you.

You don't have to be at the top of the organization to learn about what's going on around you. Be on the lookout for new ideas, wherever you are. If you're serious about promoting innovation and getting others to listen to people outside the unit, make gathering new ideas a personal priority. Encourage others to open their eyes and ears to the world outside the boundaries of the organization. Collect ideas through focus groups, advisory boards, suggestion boxes, breakfast meetings, brainstorming sessions, customer evaluation forms, mystery shoppers, mystery guests, visits to competitors, and the like. Online chat rooms are great venues for swapping ideas with those outside your field.

Make idea-gathering part of your daily, weekly, and monthly schedule. Call three customers or clients who haven't used your services in a while or who have made recent purchases, and ask them why. Sure, there's email, but the human voice is better for this sort of thing. Work the counter and ask people what they like and don't like about your organization. Shop at a competitor's store or, better yet, anonymously shop for one of your organization's products and see what the salespeople in the store say about it. Dial your workplace and listen to how people answer telephone calls, and handle



questions. Make sure that you devote at least 25 percent of every weekly staff meeting to listening to outside ideas for improving processes and technologies and developing new products and services. Don't let staff meetings consist merely of status reports on routine, daily, inside stuff. Invite customers, suppliers, folks from other departments, and other outsiders to your meetings to offer their suggestions on how your unit can improve. Keep your antennae up, no matter where you are. You can never tell where or when you might find new ideas.

These methods will keep your eyes and ears open to new ideas. Remain receptive and expose yourself to broader views. Be willing to hear, consider, and accept ideas from sources outside the company. If you never turn your back on what is happening outside the boundaries of your organization, the waves of change that roll in won't catch you by surprise.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Search for Opportunities***

Leaders dedicated to making extraordinary things happen are open to receiving ideas from anyone and anywhere. They are adept at using their oversight to survey the landscape of technology, politics, economics, demographics, art, religion, and society in search of new ideas. They are prepared to search for opportunities to address the constant shifts in their organization's environment. Moreover, because they are proactive, they don't just ride the waves of change: they make the waves that others ride. They are prepared to seize the initiative and address the constant shifts in the organization's environment.

You don't have to change history, but you do have to change business-as-usual thinking. You have to be proactive, continually inviting and creating new initiatives. Be on the lookout for anything that lulls you or your colleagues into a false sense of security. Change, innovation, and leadership are nearly synonymous. This means that your focus is less on the routine operations and much more on the untested and untried. Keep in mind that the most innovative ideas are often not your own nor from your organization. They're elsewhere, and the best leaders look all around them for the places in which breakthrough ideas are hiding. They ask questions and seek advice. Exemplary leadership requires oversight, not just insight.

The quest for change is an adventure. It tests your will and your skill. It's tough, but it's also stimulating. Adversity introduces you to yourself. To get the best from yourself and others, you must understand what gives meaning and purpose to your work.

To Challenge the Process, you must *search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and look outward for innovative ways to improve*. This means you must:

1. Do something each day so that you are better than you were the day before.
2. Seek firsthand experiences outside your comfort zone and skill set.
3. Always be asking, “What's new? What's next? What's better?” and not just for yourself but also for those around you.
4. Find a significant purpose for addressing your challenging and most difficult assignments.
5. Ask questions, seek advice, and listen to diverse perspectives.
6. Be adventurous; don't let routines become ruts.

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## Chapter 8

# Experiment and Take Risks

**Pivotal Software had long employed** agile methodologies in their software development process but rarely used these practices in other parts of the organization. After taking a training course on agile development and lean startup principles, Cathryn Meyer was eager to put the concepts into practice. “I decided to take a more agile, iterative approach to a new project I was leading,” she told us.

Her challenge was a project to standardize the job titles used across the company into a coherent, simple structure. In the past, similar projects had involved a few HR people diagnosing the problem, coming up with a solution, and finally pushing it out to the organization. “Usually, the solution was developed in a vacuum,” Cathryn lamented, “and if it wasn't perfect upon reveal, too bad—it was too late to change it.”

The lean approach I took with this project was very different. It involved identifying the end goal and a hypothesis for reaching it, conducting mini experiments to test the hypothesis, and using the feedback to learn and iterate on a solution. The project team recognized early on that none of us knew the ideal solution to our problem. We designed experiments to help us look for good ideas everywhere and gather as many possibilities as we could.

Cathryn and her team sent brief surveys to employees to gather opinions and ideas. They spoke individually with staff to probe deeper. They researched external best practices. They called in an expert on lean methodologies to gain feedback. “The result was a proposal we felt confident in,” she said, “one that had gone through multiple iterations based



on feedback obtained from various sources. We finalized the proposal knowing that we had made the best possible choice based on the information we were able to gather.” Ultimately, Cathryn's team gained approval from the necessary stakeholders because of the thorough and thoughtful process they had followed.

Their next challenge was implementing the new job titles across the organization. Cathryn broke down the implementation process into small chunks based on job function: “Implementing the new job titles one function at a time was an effective way to make incremental progress against our end goal while gaining further support for our approach with each successful milestone.”

Learning from their experiments in those initial phases gave Cathryn the inspiration to start streamlining and consolidating job families, further modernizing the company's job title methodology. “This had always been an area that I knew needed work,” she told us. “After gaining momentum with our initial proposal, it gave me confidence to seize the initiative and make the necessary changes.”

Early on in the process, many people told us that our task was impossible and we'd never find a solution that met everyone's needs. We took on this challenge with gusto and refused to give up, even when our research gave inconclusive results. We continued to learn, experiment, and tweak until we came to the best solution. I now know that I can challenge convention and confidently lead a team through a new way of doing things, even in the face of adversity.

To achieve the extraordinary, you have to be willing, like Cathryn, to do things that have never been done before. Every single Personal-Best Leadership Experience case speaks to the need to take risks with bold ideas. You can't achieve anything new or extraordinary by doing things the way you've always done them. You have to test unproven strategies. You have to break out of the norms that box you in, venture beyond the limitations you usually place on yourself and others, try new things, and take chances.

Leaders must take this one step further. Not only do they have to be willing to test bold ideas and take calculated risks, but they also have to get others to join them on these adventures in uncertainty. It's one thing to set off alone into the unknown; it's entirely another to get others to follow you into

the darkness. The difference between an exemplary leader and an individual risk-taker is that leaders create the conditions where people *want* to join with them in the struggle.

Leaders make risk safe, as paradoxical as that might sound. They turn experiments into learning opportunities. They don't define boldness as primarily go-for-broke, giant-leap projects. More often than not, they see change as starting small, using pilot projects, and gaining momentum. The vision may be grand and distant, but the way to reach it is by putting one foot in front of the other. These small, visible steps are more likely to win early victories and gain early supporters. Of course, when you experiment, not everything works out as intended. There are mistakes and false starts. They are part of the process of innovation. What's critical, therefore, is that leaders promote learning from, and building upon, these experiences.

Exemplary leaders make the commitment to *Experiment and Take Risks*. They know that making extraordinary things happen requires that leaders

- ▶ ***Generate small wins***

- ▶ ***Learn from experience***

These essentials can help leaders transform challenge into an exploration, uncertainty into a sense of adventure, fear into resolve, and risk into reward. They are the keys to making progress that becomes unstoppable.

## Generate Small Wins

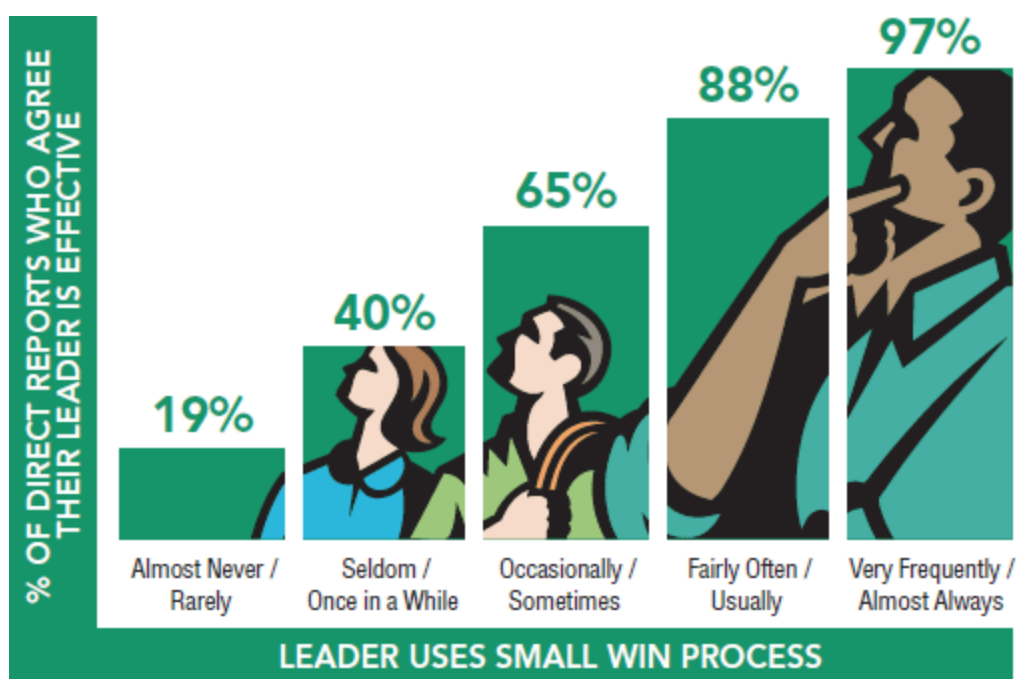
There's an African proverb that advises, “Never test the depth of the water with both feet.” Wise counsel whenever you're trying something brand new. Leaders should dream big but start small. Consider what Gary Jamieson, executive director of Comcast's Silicon Valley Innovation Center, told us about a project he worked on while at a multinational networking company:

At the start of the project, there was this general belief that it could never be completed. It was important to prove to the team early in the project that it could be achieved. To do so, I structured the project so that key early milestones had significant and distinct deliverables that could be seen as clear achievements under difficult circumstances. Making these early milestones gave the team members confidence in their ability to deliver. I then ensured that intermediate milestones were announced as small achievements within the larger project, and demonstrated the benefits of achieving the milestone. This helped to build not only excitement but also momentum.

To get people to do things they have never been done before, you make progress incrementally, just like Cathryn and Gary. You break the long journey down into milestones. You move step by step, creating a sense of forward momentum by generating what University of Michigan professor emeritus Karl Weick called *small wins*. A small win is “a concrete, complete, implemented outcome of moderate importance.”<sup>1</sup> It identifies a place to begin. Small wins make the project seem doable, that is, within the parameters of existing skills and resources. They minimize the cost of trying and reduce the risks of failing. What's exciting about this process is that once people achieve a small win, it sets in motion natural forces that favor progress over setbacks. Planting one tree won't stop global warming, but planting one million trees can make a difference. It's that first tree that gets things started. While Google's “moonshot” factory is inspiring and ambitious and gets most of the publicity, the less talked-about route to many of Google's great innovations is small wins—the consistent, short-term, and incremental “roofshots” that make their products better year after year.<sup>2</sup>

[Figure 8.1](#) shows that the percentage of people who agree/strongly agree that their leader is effective increases dramatically with the extent to which they observe that individual utilizing the process of small wins.

Effectiveness rises from just under 19 percent at the bottom of the scale to over 97 percent at the high end of the scale, more than a five-fold increase. Key engagement factors for direct reports indicate similar sentiments. For example, when their leaders are very frequently/almost always employing a small win process, then over 90 percent of their direct reports indicate they feel highly productive in their jobs, clear about what is expected of them, and effective in meeting the demands of their jobs.



[Figure 8.1](#) Using Small Wins Increases Leader Effectiveness Ratings

The scientific community has always understood that major breakthroughs result from the work of hundreds of researchers, as countless contributions finally begin to add up to a solution. All the “little” improvements in technology, regardless of the industry, have contributed to a greater increase in organizational productivity than all the great inventors and their inventions.<sup>3</sup> Rapid prototyping, and plenty of it, brings higher-quality products more quickly to the marketplace.<sup>4</sup> Studies have generally found that people, across multiple occupations and disciplines, are able to come up with more ideas than they initially give themselves credit for being able to do.<sup>5</sup>

Through extensive investigations into what makes knowledge workers effective, Harvard Business School professor Teresa Amabile and independent researcher Steven Kramer found that “people are more creative and productive when their inner work lives are positive—when they feel happy, are intrinsically motivated by the work itself, and have positive perceptions of their colleagues and organizations.”<sup>6</sup> These feelings are triggered by supporting progress in meaningful work: “When we think of progress, we often imagine how good it feels to achieve a long-term goal or experience a major breakthrough. These big wins are great—but they are relatively rare. The good news is that even small wins can boost inner work life tremendously.”<sup>7</sup> Small, incremental, and consistent steps forward have a significant impact on people's motivation. Our data shows that there's a direct relationship between the extent to which leaders “identify measurable milestones that keep projects moving forward” and the clarity around job expectations reported by their direct reports, as well as their levels of motivation and commitment to the success of their organization.

If people can see that you are asking them to do something that they're quite capable of doing, they feel some assurance that they can be successful at the task. When people don't feel overwhelmed by a task, their energy goes into getting the job done, instead of wondering, “How will we ever solve that problem?” By finding all the small ways that people can succeed at doing things differently, exemplary leaders make people want to be involved, and stay involved.

## **Build Psychological Hardiness**

Problems presented too broadly, or too expansively, can appear daunting and suffocate people's capacity to conceive of what they can do in the future, let alone right now. Leaders face this dilemma because they want people to reach for great heights, but not become fearful of falling. They want people to feel challenged but not overwhelmed, curious but not lost, excited but not stressed. For example, Kirstyn Cole, business operations analyst at Intel, told us about how she was both “excited and anxious” when stepping into her first significant leadership responsibility and appreciated that “being a leader means being scared sometimes.” She said that she could have just come into that job and done the same old things, been afraid to rock the boat or unwilling to put in the extra time and hard work to change

it, but realized that she had the necessary determination, stamina, and enthusiasm needed to make things better.

Psychologists have discovered that people who experience a high degree of stress and yet can cope with it in a positive manner have a distinctive attitude, one they call “psychological hardiness.”<sup>8</sup> Whether corporate managers, entrepreneurs, students, nurses, lawyers, combat soldiers, or prisoners, people with high psychological hardiness are much more likely to withstand serious challenges and bounce back from failure than those with low hardiness.<sup>9</sup> Hardiness is a quality that people can learn and that leaders can support.

There are three key factors to building psychological hardiness: *commitment*, *control*, and *challenge*. To turn adversity into advantage, you need first to commit yourself to what's happening. You have to become involved, engaged, and curious. You can't sit back and wait for something to happen. You also have to take control of your life. You need to make an effort to influence what is going on. Even if it's unlikely that all your attempts will be successful, you can't sink into passivity. Finally, you need to view challenge as an opportunity to learn from both negative and positive experiences.

Take the challenging situation Della Dsouza faced in her transition from working in IT, in a cubicle, with little interpersonal interaction, to another company where she was in sales and directly interacting with customers. This new job, she told us, was a move into uncharted territory and required her to “think out of the box.”

There were three aspects to this challenge: I was in a different place outside of my own country; English was not my first language; and I had no prior experience in sales. For the first few weeks, I could barely make one sale a day (the required minimum was four sales). So I set a target for myself that I would try to increase that number by at least one each week. This meant staying back a little longer than required to close in on sales. I had to keep the bigger picture in mind that I must reach the required target. I had to focus on small wins and build on them.

After a while, Della found she was feeling more confident in dealing with customers. Her sales numbers began to go up. Setting those little milestones

helped her move forward, she said.

Soon the minimum sales number did not worry me as much, as I felt more confident with each sale, which spurred me on to my next one. Each day I encountered something new, it was a constant learning curve. Over the course of the year, my skills in this field improved drastically. From the shy, clueless newbie, I became a confident sales representative. It took persistence and grit to move ahead.

Della used small wins to keep herself focused and motivated while she built the psychological hardiness required to deal with obstacles and continuously improve. As her experience demonstrates, the ability to cope with change and stress depends on your viewpoint. For you to start that new project, to take that first step, you have to believe that you can influence the outcome. You have to be curious about whatever is happening, and look for ways to learn every step of the way. With a hardy attitude, you can transform stressful events into positive opportunities for growth and renewal. What's more, you can help your team feel the same way.

## **Break It Down and Accentuate Progress**

Leaders like Della appreciate that they have to break down big problems into small, doable actions. They also know that when initiating something new, they have to try many little things before they get it right. Not every innovation works, and the best way to ensure success is to experiment with many ideas, not just one or two big ones. Exemplary leaders help others see how breaking the journey down into measurable milestones moves them forward and promotes continued progress.

Dr. Geeta Ramakrishnan joined a leading private hospital in New Delhi (India), with responsibility for their microbiology department, where she couldn't help noticing that many current processes needed improvement. Geeta was aware that changing the existing system would be both complicated and risky. She also felt that if she broke down the needed changes into their parts, and methodically implemented them, the risk could be mitigated and positive results achieved. Before proposing her idea, Geeta conducted intensive research to check the practicality of her plan and investigated the processes followed in other top-rated labs across the country.

She made a priority list of the possible changes, starting with her department's manual testing processes, which consumed a lot of time and had high error rates. She convinced the laboratory head that buying the required equipment to automate the testing process would significantly reduce labor costs, improve turnaround time, and lower error rates. They decided that her department would implement the change first, and the results there would determine whether to expand it to the whole lab. The proposal presented to hospital management included her detailed research on the initial equipment investment, labor force reductions, training required for staff to run and monitor the machines, outplacement of redundant lab technicians into other departments, future time and cost savings, and percentage reduction in errors leading to reduced liability. Not surprisingly, management gave the green light and they moved forward.<sup>10</sup>

As is so often the case, Geeta saw that “big things are done by doing lots of small things,” a common refrain from the Personal-Best Leadership Experience cases. Whatever you call your experiments—model sites, pilot studies, demonstration projects, laboratory tests, field experiments, market trials—they are methods for trying lots of little things in the service of something much bigger. These tactics continually generate numerous possibilities for small wins.

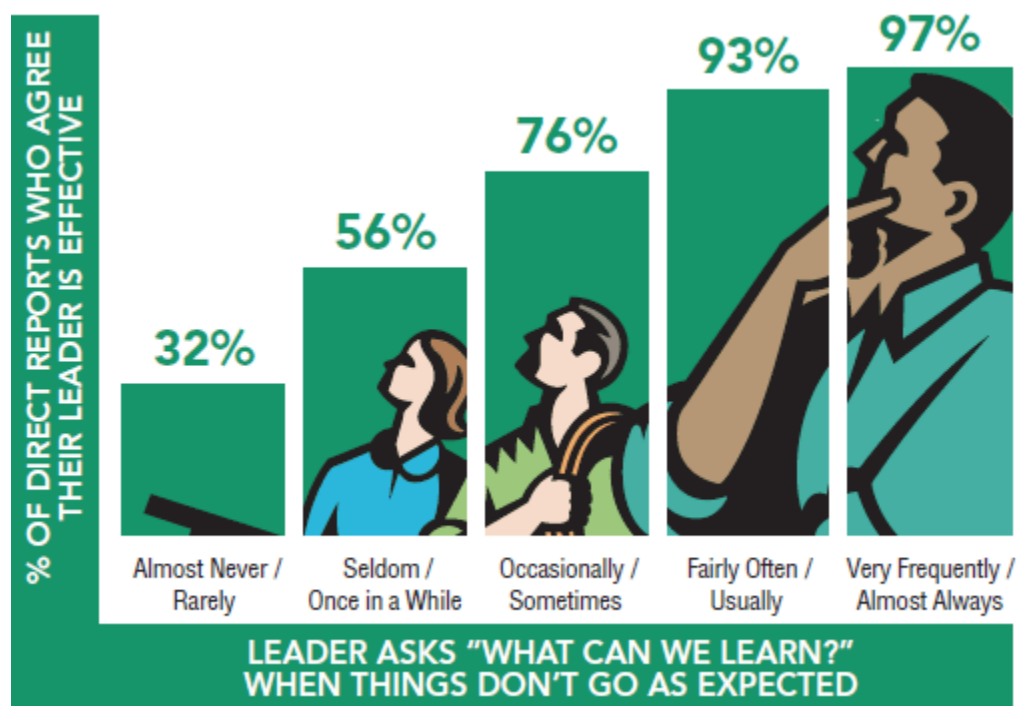
Experiments are laboratories for trying and learning. They're also great visual aids. By showcasing some “little thing” you've experimented with, you give people a tangible sense of what success looks like, boosting morale and confidence. You help people understand how all the small wins are making big results possible. They see that it's possible to do something about what they might otherwise perceive as an intractable problem.

Justina Wang, assistant general manager, China Merchants Bank, told us about an early leadership experience in which she was responsible for the global sales control for a multinational company, where she discovered some problems in certain overseas processes. She knew that the system needed to change, but she didn't necessarily know how, especially because this was a lengthy and complex process, scattered across many different divisions. After asking everyone in the global sales chain for input and getting them talking, she broke the problem down into various parts and decided to test an idea in one overseas subsidiary. This turned out to work quite well, and subsequently, it was quickly rolled out to thirty subsidiaries



on six continents. Reflecting back on her experience, Justina said, “No change can be made in one jump. Many small wins can generate big successes.”

There was an implicit, and often explicit, “learning frame” placed around Personal-Best Leadership Experiences. Exemplary leaders are always asking, “What can we learn?” when things don't go as expected. In [Figure 8.2](#) you see how steeply ratings by direct reports of their leader's effectiveness climb with the use of this leadership behavior. Just asking this question to a moderate extent brings significant returns in effectiveness evaluations from direct reports.



**Figure 8.2** Asking “What Can We Learn?” Increases Leader Effectiveness Ratings

While there is a very real human tendency to focus on the negative, you need to concentrate on progress—not on the gap between aspirations and reality, but on how much you have advanced. Negativity can quickly become pervasive and contagious, stifling performance. Appreciate that there are outside influences affecting the situation—many of which you had no control over. Reframe the outcome, emphasizing what people are accomplishing and learning in the process. Mistakes don't result in learning if people keep making them over and over. Exemplary leaders do what it

takes to rectify mistakes, and use the incident as prime time for learning. They also make certain to let the rest of the team know that progress is being made. By learning from experience and focusing on the positive, the same mistakes won't likely happen again. You and your colleagues will be better prepared for the next challenge or opportunity.

Leaders who emphasize the positive are not just getting themselves and their constituents to learn and succeed in future undertakings. Research also shows that people who can maintain a positive outlook are more creative and innovative because they don't wallow in setbacks and disappointments. They continue to be open to new possibilities. At a personal level, they have lower rates of depression and cardiovascular disease, and hence live longer.<sup>[11](#)</sup>

Exemplary leaders accept reality, but they do not easily accept defeat; nor do they become consumed by self-pity and grief. They regroup, reassess, and prepare to go forward.<sup>[12](#)</sup> They inspire others by sharing their determination to beat the odds. Take it from Carolina Rojas Salcedo, senior project manager with Hormigon Reforzado (Colombia), who told us that her most admired leader had a “yes, it is possible” attitude. “While this outlook won't make problems disappear,” she said, “it helped me and others to believe the future will be better. In addition, this positive thinking lets you discover an amazing power from people when they think this way.” To turn setbacks into an advantage, you have to have a positive outlook and commit to learning from experience.

# Learn from Experience

Whenever you challenge the status quo, you will sometimes fail. Despite how clearly you see challenge as an opportunity, how focused you can be, or how driven you are to succeed, there will be setbacks. When you engage in something new and different, you make mistakes. That's what experimentation is all about, and, as scientists know very well, there's a lot of trial and error involved in testing new concepts, new methods, and new practices.

The most effective leaders, according to their direct reports, as shown previously in [Figure 8.2](#), are the ones who ask, “What can we learn when things don't go as expected?” rather than pointing fingers or assigning blame. Their managers and their colleagues report this same relationship between perceptions of the leader's effectiveness and learning from experience. Additionally, more than two times the number of direct reports feel that the organization values their work when their leader employs this leadership behavior than do those who report their leader infrequently asks this question.

Repeatedly, people in our studies tell us how mistakes and failure have been crucial to their success both personally and professionally. Without mistakes, they wouldn't know what they can and cannot do (at least at the moment). Without the occasional failure, respondents said, they would not have been able to achieve their aspirations. It may seem paradoxical, but many echo the thought that the overall quality of work improves when people have a chance to fail. This was precisely the lesson from an experiment one ceramics teacher carried out in his classroom. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher divided the students into two groups. He told the first group they could earn better grades by producing more pots (e.g., thirty for a B, forty for an A), regardless of the quality. He told the second group that their grades depended solely on the quality of the pots they produced. Not surprisingly, students in the first group got right to it, producing as many pots as possible, while the second group was quite careful and deliberate in how they went about making the best pots. The teacher found, to his surprise, that the students who made the most pots—those graded on quantity rather than quality—also made the best ones. It

turned out that the practice of making lots of pots naturally resulted in better quality; for example, these students became more familiar with the intricacies of the kiln and how various firing positions affected the aesthetics of their products.<sup>13</sup>

In this experiment, the students who failed the most were the ones who succeeded the most, which is entirely consistent with other studies of the innovation process. For example, a study of employees in NASA's space shuttle program concluded that they learned more from their failures than successes, and retained those lessons more thoroughly in subsequent projects.<sup>14</sup> Success does not breed success, researchers conclude; success breeds failure. It is failure that breeds success. Of course, failure is never the objective of any endeavor. However, success always requires some amount of learning, and in turn, learning always involves mistakes, errors, and miscalculations.

## **Be an Active Learner**

Curious about the relationship between leadership and learning, we conducted a series of studies to find out if the range and depth of learning tactics affected leadership behavior. We investigated how engaged leaders were in learning, appreciating that people have various preferences in terms of how they go about learning. What we found was that people who are more, rather than less, engaged in learning made the greatest use of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, regardless of their preferred learning style.<sup>15</sup> Leaders with a learning orientation are more ready to embrace the ambiguity, complexity, and paradigm shifts that go along with experimentation, and with leadership.

Other researchers have found a strong relationship between learning and leadership effectiveness. Being able to reflect on your experiences, and subsequently to adjust and engage in new behaviors, is the single best predictor of future success in new and different managerial jobs.<sup>16</sup> You need to examine your values and actions honestly, seek feedback, be open-minded to suggestions, and feel comfortable with experimenting with new behaviors. This process is quite similar to a learning experience that Colonel Scott “Scooter” Drennon shared with us about his stint as commander of a medical task force at Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan.

Early in his deployment, his headquarters detachment commander came to him with an idea that caught him off guard: let's challenge the commander of the Navy Surgical Hospital in Kandahar to an Army-Navy flag football game to take place on the same day as the actual Army-Navy game back in the United States. Before signing on to the idea, Scooter paused to reflect on the risks and opportunities. Some people might frown upon playing a football game in the middle of a combat deployment as lacking proper mission focus. Injuries could affect key personnel. Furthermore, since the Navy Hospital staff outnumbered their Army counterparts by at least two to one, there was a good chance the Army team would take a licking, which might be bad for morale. After reflecting on the pros and cons, Scooter decided that the risks were not only acceptable, but he felt the benefits far outweighed them. As he explained, "I determined that even if we lost the game, just letting the troops participate, and take their minds off the deployment, would be good in and of itself." He issued the challenge and his Navy counterpart enthusiastically accepted.

Word about the game spread quickly and what Scooter thought was going to be a little interservice rivalry contest that only a few would notice began to take on a life of its own. He started thinking they'd gotten in over their heads when the Kandahar Morale, Welfare, and Recreation office heard about the game and volunteered to supply real pinstripe referees, plus announcers, and a sound system for calling the game and playing the national anthem. If that wasn't enough visibility, the Armed Forces Network (AFN) visited and said they would televise the match.

When game day finally arrived, the spectacle lived up to all the hype. The AstroTurf field they played on was in the middle of the Kandahar base camp at a place called the Boardwalk, an elevated circular walkway with shops and eateries surrounding the field. People from every branch of U.S. services, and coalition partners from several different countries at the joint-coalition base, filled the Boardwalk to watch both teams play hard in a genuinely historic football game. When the final whistle blew, Army had outscored Navy 39 –22.

What did Scooter learn from this experience? At first, he told us, "I didn't fully appreciate the impact that this 'small win' in the big scheme of things was going to have on my unit."

When I came to work the next day, and for weeks and months to follow, I couldn't help but notice the positive attitudes, and everyone was smiling, confident, and proud to be part of our Medical Task Force. I also noticed significantly improved work performance in all areas and a decrease in disciplinary actions. In fact, the morale of our unit was so high our troops actually thought they owned Kandahar Airfield! As icing on the cake, AFN kept replaying the winning team game interviews for months after the victory. Every time our troops started feeling a little homesick, they'd see the victory again on AFN and regain their winning spirit. This was a gift that never stopped giving.

Learning is the master skill. When you fully engage in learning—when you throw yourself wholeheartedly into experimenting, reflecting, reading, or receiving coaching—you are going to experience the thrill of improvement and the taste of success. More is more when it comes to learning. It's clear that exemplary leaders approach each new and unfamiliar experience with a willingness to learn, and an appreciation for the importance of learning, as well as the recognition that learning inevitably involves making some mistakes.

Consider what A. G. Lafley, retired Procter & Gamble chairman, president, and CEO, realized: “I think I learned more from my failures than from my successes in all my years as a CEO. I think of my failures as a gift. Unless you view them that way, you won't learn from failure, you won't get better—and the company won't get better.”<sup>17</sup> His perspective is quite similar to that of baseball's home run champion Hank Aaron: “My motto was always to keep swinging. Whether I was in a slump or feeling badly or having trouble off the field, the only thing to do was keep swinging.” *Harry Potter* author J. K. Rowling's viewpoint is the same: “It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all, in which case you have failed by default.”<sup>18</sup> Studies of entrepreneurs find that those who tried, and subsequently abandoned, self-employment (or the entrepreneurial life) do better financially in comparison to salaried employees who don't have this “failure” experience as part of their career portfolios.<sup>19</sup>

You need to heed these lessons. History will not judge you harshly for your failures if you learn from them, but it will be unkind if you fail to try, if you

stop swinging, or live too cautiously. Those who have left the most lasting legacies are those who have made mistakes, failed, but then tried again. That final try makes all the difference. Regardless of the field, there is no success without the possibility of failure.<sup>20</sup>

Building your capacity to be an active learner begins with what Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck refers to as a *growth mind-set*, which she says “is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts.” She compares this to a *fixed mindset*, which assumes “that your qualities are carved in stone.”<sup>21</sup> Individuals with a growth mindset believe that people can learn to be better leaders. Those with a fixed mindset think that leaders are born, not made, and that no amount of training is going to make you any better than you naturally or already are. Researchers have shown, for example, that when working on simulated business problems, those individuals with fixed mindsets gave up more quickly and performed more poorly than those with a growth mindset. The same applies to kids in school, athletes on the playing field, teachers in the classroom, and even partners in relationships.<sup>22</sup> Mindsets and not skill sets make the critical difference in taking on challenging situations.

To develop a growth mindset and to nourish it in others, you need to embrace the challenges you face. That's where the learning is. When you encounter setbacks—and there will be many—you have to persist. You have to realize that your effort, and that of others, is your means of gaining mastery. Neither raw talent nor good fortune leads to becoming the best; hard work is what gets you there.<sup>23</sup> Ask for feedback about how you're doing. Learn from the constructive criticism you receive from others. View the success of others around you as inspiration and not as a threat. When you believe that you can continuously learn, you will. Only those who believe that they can get better make an effort to do so.

## Create a Climate for Learning

Most important in promoting learning and nurturing a growth mindset, according to our survey of 225 leadership educators, developers, and coaches, is trust.<sup>24</sup> If leaders are going to grow and thrive, people need to trust one another. They need to feel safe around each other and believe they can be open and honest. They need to support each person's growth, have



one another's backs, and be there to lift others up when they stumble or fall. They need to be able to collaborate and cheer everyone on. They need to show respect for differences and be open to alternative viewpoints and backgrounds. Studies of top performers strongly suggest that people require a supportive environment in order to become the best they can be. Researchers have found that when high-quality relationships in the workplace exist, people engage in more learning behaviors.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, a climate that supports collaborative action is going to be more hospitable to the development of leaders than one that is internally competitive and focuses on a winner-take-all approach to selecting and promoting people.

Phil Martens, former chief executive of Novelis, noted that one of his earliest leadership lessons was about the importance of trust.<sup>26</sup> Being a micromanager, he realized, was not the path to success:

You have to let go and let others make mistakes as long as they're not catastrophic. The most important thing I can do is create a safe highway to operate in, and define clearly what the bumpers are—whether it's a code of conduct or how we make decisions. As long as people are within the boundaries of that highway, then let them go as fast as they can. But if they hit a bumper, pull them in and remind them what the bumper is and why it's there.

In his book, *The Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace*, Ron Friedman confronts the myth that “mistakes are few” in great workplaces. He observes that the best workplaces have more, not fewer, mistakes. The reason for this is because people feel more secure and safe in taking ownership and responsibility for their mistakes.<sup>27</sup> Mistakes are the pathway to great ideas and innovation, and with the support of their leader, people are set up to learn (rather than set up to fail) from experimenting and venturing outside of their comfort zones. Studies have found, for example in looking at the performance of nursing units, that counterintuitively, the units with the best relationships between leaders and co-workers had the greatest number of mistakes (e.g., drug treatment errors). However, it was not because they were less effective; rather, in these units people were more willing to acknowledge a mistake when it happened, and then figure out how to ensure that same mistake never occurred again.<sup>28</sup>



Organizations serious about creating a climate for learning provide a variety of systematic opportunities to do so. These include both formal and informal opportunities for development such as classroom-based learning programs, online learning options, and external seminars, as well as mentoring and coaching. Rotational job assignments or special projects also challenge people to develop themselves. The global consulting firm Aon Hewitt reported that 100 percent of the top companies for developing leaders have a “strong reputation for internally cultivating talent throughout the organization” compared to only 66 percent of other companies.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, organizations that encourage learning and innovation provide time for working on projects outside of formal responsibilities. Such environments nurture curiosity, an essential antecedent to thinking outside the box. Studies at the Center for Neuroscience, University of California, Davis, reveal that being curious prepares the brain for learning. It makes learning a more gratifying experience by stimulating the brain circuits associated with reward and pleasure.<sup>30</sup> Having a strong sense of curiosity regarding what's going on around you is often the antecedent to sensing and understanding what's to come next.

Brian Grazer is one of the most successful movie producers ever. Among his credits are many popular films of recent years, including *Apollo 13*, *A Beautiful Mind*, *Splash*, and *Parenthood*. To what does he attribute his phenomenal success? His answer: “Curiosity has, quite literally, been the key to my success, and also the key to my happiness,” and he goes on to add: “Curiosity is what gives energy and insight into everything that I do. . . . For me, curiosity infuses everything that I do with a sense of possibility.”<sup>31</sup> Asking questions is how Brian expresses his curiosity, which, he says, sparks interesting thoughts and builds collaborative relationships.

Think about how you can have what Brian refers to as “curiosity conversations” with people inside and outside of your organizational setting. You can begin with something like this: “I've always been curious about how you ended up as a [whatever that position or profession is], and I was wondering if you'd be willing to spend twenty minutes talking to me about what it took to get you where you are—what the key turning points in your career were?”<sup>32</sup> In that conversation, you can ask about a big challenge they faced in their careers, or why they do something in a

particular way, or how they handled a particularly difficult situation, or how they came up with a certain idea. There is no fixed set of questions. You have to tailor them to the person and situation, but questions, sparked by curiosity and with an underlying interest in learning, always get the conversation started. Preparing to ask questions forces you to think about what you'd like to learn.

In her book *Stop Playing Safe*, *Forbes* columnist Margie Warrell describes how creating a climate conducive to learning involves helping people to think realistically about what risk means to them.<sup>33</sup> She notes how advances in brain imaging technology prove that people's brains are wired to overestimate risk, exaggerate its consequences, and underestimate their ability to handle it. Accordingly, fear about what people don't want to happen drives their choices more often than a commitment to what they wish to see. Ryan Diemer, senior merchandise planning manager for Quidsi, affirms Margie's view from his own Personal-Best Leadership Experience: "Taking risk is never easy and sometimes scary." However, he realizes, "Taking risks is necessary because it requires you and those you are working with to challenge not only what you are working on but how you work. Sometimes the risks pay off and sometimes they do not, but what is always true is that if you do not take a risk, you won't get any gain."

People know that they don't always get it right the first time they try something and that learning new things can be a bit scary. They don't want to embarrass themselves in front of peers or look stupid in front of their managers. To create a climate for learning, you have to make it safe for others to try, to be curious and ask questions, and fail with the ultimate objective of being able to learn from their experiences.

## **Strengthen Resilience and Grit**

It takes determination and strength to deal with the adversities of life and leadership. You can't let the setbacks get you down, or allow roadblocks to get in your way. You can't become overly discouraged when things don't go according to plan. You can't give up when resistance builds or the competition gets stiff. Nor can you let other tempting new projects divert your interest or distract your focus.

This perspective characterizes Pat Williams, senior vice president of the National Basketball Association's Orlando Magic.<sup>34</sup> In his nearly fifty years as a sports executive—from managing a minor league baseball team to co-founding an elite basketball franchise—Pat has had his fair share of wins and losses. A lesson he learned early on?

You don't waste those tough times. When the tough times hit, and the setbacks and the disappointments come, you're a lot more teachable. I wouldn't be where I am today if I had not taken advantage of the disappointments and the setbacks. . . . Through those setbacks I've learned more, and made more advances, than through the good times.

A student of leadership throughout his career, Pat reminded us that the greatest leaders in history all faced tremendous obstacles. He said they all should have given up about thirty times. But they didn't. They had, Pat said,

what Walt Disney called “stick-to-it-ivity.” They've all battled through horribly tough times, and the reason we admire these leaders was because they didn't quit. Leadership always, always, always rests on the man or woman who can finish.

Resilience is the capacity Pat describes—that ability to recover quickly from setbacks and continue to pursue a vision of the future—and similar to what Angela Duckworth, professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, calls *grit*. She and her research colleagues define grit very simply as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals,” and report that it “entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress.”<sup>35</sup> Showing grit involves setting goals, being obsessed with an idea or project, maintaining focus, sticking with things that take a long time to complete, overcoming setbacks, and the like. In their empirical research, whether with kids in school, cadets in the military, working professionals, artists, academics, or others, there is convincing evidence that people with the most grit are the most likely to achieve positive outcomes. The more grit you demonstrate, the better you do.<sup>36</sup>

Resilience and grit can be developed and strengthened, much like growth mindsets. People who don't give up, according to researchers, have “a habit of interpreting setbacks as temporary, local, and changeable.”<sup>37</sup> When a failure or setback occurs, don't obsess with blaming yourself or the people

working on the project. Instead, consider situational circumstances that contributed to the failure and convey the belief that this particular situation is likely to be temporary, not permanent. Emphasize that the failure or setback is a problem in this one instance and not in every case. Even in times of high stress and extreme adversity, resilient people remain committed to moving forward by believing that what has happened isn't going to be permanent and that they can do something about the outcome.

Breed a growth mindset when reaching milestones and achieving success by attributing these to the hard work and effort of the individuals in the group. Convey a belief that many more victories are at hand and be optimistic that good fortune will be with your team for a long time. Bolster resilience as well by assigning tasks that are challenging but within people's skill level, focusing on rewards rather than punishments, and encouraging people to see change as full of possibilities.<sup>38</sup>

The Personal-Best Leadership Experience cases all involved change and stressful events in the lives of these leaders, and nearly everyone described the experience in terms consistent with the conditions for psychological hardiness, resilience, and grit. They experienced commitment rather than alienation, control rather than powerlessness, and challenge rather than threat. They had passion. They persevered. They didn't give up despite the failures and setbacks. They showed that, even in the toughest of times, people could experience meaningfulness and mastery. They can overcome great odds, make progress, and change the way things are.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Experiment and Take Risks***

Change is the work of leaders. It's what they do. They are always looking for ways to improve, to grow, and to innovate. They know that the way things are done today won't get people to the tomorrow they envision, so they experiment, tinker, and shake things up. They ask, “Where can we experiment and how can we improve?”

However, change can overwhelm, frighten, and immobilize some people. Exemplary leaders believe, and get others to believe, that change is a challenge they can successfully address and that individuals can control their life and influence outcomes. They make sure that everyone clearly understands the meaning and purpose of change, and they create a strong sense of commitment to the mission.

Using small wins to get things moving in the right direction, they break tasks down and set short-term goals. Taking a small bets approach (e.g., setting up experiments, beta tests, pilot projects) gets people started, makes progress imaginable, builds commitment, and creates momentum.

Whenever you try new things, big or small, stuff happens and, inevitably, mistakes and even failures occur. You never get it right the first time—and may not on the second or third try, either, which is why exemplary leaders create a climate that's conducive to learning. This means not punishing people for experimentation and risk-taking, and ensuring that people feel safe enough to learn from their experiences

and pass those lessons forward. The truth is that the best leaders are the best learners. You need a growth mindset, believing that improvements happen when everyone puts in the effort to learn. You also need to create a learning climate—one in which people feel trusted, are encouraged to persist despite the odds, share successes and failures, adopt continuous improvement as the routine way of doing things, and have opportunities to view and interact with positive role models.

To Challenge the Process, you must *experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience*. This means you must:

1. Create opportunities for small wins, promoting meaningful progress.
2. Set incremental goals and milestones, breaking big projects down into achievable steps.
3. Keep people focused on what they can control in their work and commit to in their lives.
4. Make it safe for people to experiment and take risks by promoting learning from experience, debriefing successes and failures, capturing lessons learned and disseminating them broadly.
5. Emphasize how personal fulfillment results from constantly challenging oneself to improve.
6. Continuously experiment with new ideas through small bets.

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# ENABLE OTHERS TO ACT



## Practice 4 Enable Others to Act

- Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.

- Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.



## Chapter 9

# Foster Collaboration

**“When I took my first step** in the corporate world,” recalled Poonam Jadhav, “I had an excellent opportunity to experience how performance was dependent on the team leader creating an environment of collaboration and trust, where there is an open flow of ideas and information.”

While a technical associate at Citi Technology Services in Mumbai, Poonam served six-month rotations with two teams working on a project at two different locations. One team leader, she told us, did not trust her team. She would micromanage every team member's efforts, even though they were all talented engineers who knew their jobs well. People were unhappy working under her leadership, and they didn't perform at their best, Poonam explained, because the team leader wouldn't let them make any decisions.

Whenever there was an issue or any bug to be fixed, she never allowed her team members to take action on their own. She instructed them to escalate every issue to her, get her input, and then resolve it. This would mean taking a long time to resolve an issue, as she had to handle escalations of twenty members. They were very frustrated with her style of working as there was no autonomy and little trust.

This leader's approach hampered the team's productivity and performance. During breaks, they complained about how she distrusted them, undermined everyone's talent, and damaged the team's morale. According to Poonam, that leader hardly ever had any face-to-face interaction with the team; all communication was via email. “There was no bonding, no trust, no motivation, and no commitment to either the team's or organization's goals,” she said.

Her experience on the other team was entirely different, Poonam explained, because that leader trusted and respected her team members. The leader interacted with them face to face and gave them the autonomy to make their own decisions. She urged her team to come up with their solutions to problems they encountered and not to worry about making mistakes. She would help them generate solutions by asking questions, thus improving their critical thinking. As a result, Poonam said, this team fixed software bugs much faster than the other team. The team members could openly discuss their issues with their leader and were comfortable sharing with her their professional and personal issues, too. She would listen intently to their concerns and provide useful guidance. Her actions built empathy and understanding and thus created a climate of trust within the team. For example, when any team members were on leave, Poonam observed, they were ready to work from home or a remote location in case some critical issue on their task arose. All her actions made the team stronger and helped them produce extraordinary outcomes, says Poonam.

She strengthened the team members' self-determination by giving them a chance to use their best judgment in applying their knowledge and skills. She gave them choices and latitude to take on personal responsibility. She fostered accountability and confidence. Her team was self-assured, innovative, responsible, and committed to their work. They outperformed because a competent and confident team had a competent and confident leader.

As Poonam's experience demonstrates, leadership is a relationship, and how leaders act to facilitate collaboration makes a difference in how people behave.<sup>1</sup> When talking about personal bests and about leaders they admire, people speak passionately about teamwork and cooperation as the interpersonal route to success, especially when conditions are challenging and urgent. Leaders from all professions and economic sectors around the globe consistently appreciate that “You can't do it alone.” Exemplary leaders understand that to create a climate of collaboration, they must determine what the group needs to do their work, and build the team around a common purpose and with mutual respect. Leaders make trust and teamwork high priorities.

Extraordinary performance isn't possible unless there's a strong sense of shared creation and shared responsibility. Exemplary leaders make the

commitment to *Foster Collaboration* by engaging in these essentials:

▶ ***Create a climate of trust***

▶ ***Facilitate relationships***

Collaboration is a critical competency for achieving and sustaining high performance. As organizations become increasingly diverse and globally dispersed, collaborative skills are essential to navigating the conflicting interests and natural tensions that arise. Our empirical research shows that leaders who spend the most time and energy developing cooperative relationships among the people they work with are viewed by their direct reports as the most effective, and, in turn, have the highest levels of engagement by their direct reports. Trust is required to build collaboration and promote relationships where people work together cooperatively.



# Create a Climate of Trust

Trust is the central issue in human relationships. Without trust, you can't lead. Without trust, you can't get people to believe in you or each other. Without trust, you can't accomplish extraordinary things. Individuals who are unable to trust others fail to become leaders, precisely because they can't bear to be dependent on the words and works of others. They end up doing all the work themselves or supervising work so closely that they become micromanagers. Their lack of trust in others results in their lack of trust in them. To build and sustain social connections, trust must be reciprocal and reciprocated. Trust is not just what's in your head; it's also what's in your heart.

## Invest in Trust

Studies demonstrate that trust strongly predicts personal, team, and organizational performance.<sup>2</sup> People who are trusting are more likely to be happy and psychologically adjusted than are those who view the world with suspicion and distrust.<sup>3</sup> People perceived as trusting are sought out more as friends, more frequently listened to, and subsequently more influential. Drawing from 112 studies, representing over 7,700 teams, researchers found that the extent to which team members trust one another made an important difference in the team's performance.<sup>4</sup> Karen Twaronite, the global diversity and inclusiveness officer with Ernst & Young, concurs. Her firm's survey of approximately 9,800 full-time workers in Brazil, China, Germany, India, Mexico, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States concluded that “trust is the cornerstone for creating a workplace where employees are engaged, productive, and continually innovating.”<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, trusted companies significantly outperform their counterparts in achieving key business goals—including customer loyalty and retention, competitive market position, ethical behavior and actions, predictable business and financial results, and profit growth.<sup>6</sup> For example, the stock price performance of trustworthy public companies is routinely 1.8 times that of the S&P 500.<sup>7</sup> In the United Kingdom, outsourcing contracts that were managed based on trust, rather than on specific agreements and

penalties, were shown to add as much as 40 percent more value to the contract.<sup>8</sup> The variable of “trust” comprises two-thirds of the criteria for *Fortune* magazine's listing of the 100 Best Companies to Work For, and these companies consistently outperform their peers in regard to financial performance, along with decreased incidents of absenteeism, on-the-job injuries, voluntary turnover, and so on.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, nearly two-thirds of people surveyed around the world indicated that they had refused to purchase from a company they did not trust.<sup>10</sup>

The most effective leadership situations are those in which each member of the team trusts the others. When trust is the norm, decisions are made efficiently and swiftly, innovation is higher, and profitability increases. In a role-playing exercise, several groups of business executives were given identical facts about a difficult manufacturing-marketing policy decision and then asked as a group to solve a problem related to that information. Half of the groups were briefed to expect trustworthy behavior (“You have learned from your past experiences that you can trust the other members of top management and can openly express feelings and differences with them”); the other half were told to expect untrustworthy behavior. After thirty minutes of discussion, all team members completed a brief questionnaire about their experiences.<sup>11</sup>

Those told that their role-playing colleagues could be trusted reported their dialogue and decisions to be significantly more positive than did the members of the low-trust group on every factor measured. The members of the high-trust groups were more open about feelings, experienced greater clarity about the group's fundamental problems and goals, and searched more for alternative courses of action. They also reported higher levels of mutual influence on outcomes, satisfaction with the meeting, motivation to implement decisions, and closeness as a management team because of the meeting.

In the other groups, genuine attempts to be open and honest were ignored or distorted. The managers who experienced rejection responded in kind: “What a bunch of turkeys. I was trying to be honest with them, but they wouldn't cooperate. If I had my way, I would have fired the entire group.” The responses from their team were no less hostile: “I was sick of working with you—and we had only been together for ten minutes.” Not

surprisingly, more than two-thirds of the participants in the low-trust groups said that they would seriously consider looking for another position.<sup>12</sup>

Keep in mind that this was a *simulation*. These real-life executives responded as they did because they had been *told* that they couldn't trust their role-playing colleagues. It shows that trust, or distrust, can come with a mere suggestion—and in mere minutes. Asked after this simulation to think about what factors might have accounted for the differences between the outcomes and feelings reported by the various groups, not one person perceived that trust had been the determining variable.

When you create a climate of trust, you create an environment that allows people to contribute freely and to innovate. You nurture an open exchange of ideas and an honest discussion of issues. You motivate people to go beyond compliance and inspire them to reach for the best in themselves. You foster the belief that people can rely on you to do what's in everyone's best interests. To get these kinds of results, you have to ante up first in the game of trust, you have to listen and learn from others, and you have to share information and resources with others. Trust comes first; following comes second.

## **Be the First to Trust**

A key lesson learned in the Personal-Best Leadership Experience of Jacob Philpott, supply chain program manager with Google, was that “to earn someone's trust, you have to be able to give them your own.” He explained, “If you cannot trust others, then you will fail to become a leader precisely because you are not able to be dependent on the words and works of others. You will end up doing all of the work yourself or micromanaging the work so intensely that your constituents will despise you.” He told us about an example of just such a failure by one manager he worked with at another company:

When this manager (AJ) first started, he was so eager to prove to upper management that his team could be successful that he would not trust them to do the work by themselves. He felt that too much was riding on the outcome to give any level of autonomy to his reports.

AJ would force his techniques and methods on his constituents and when they did not comply, he would literally sit over their shoulder to show them exactly what he wanted to be done. That ended up being the only work to get done and most of it was done by AJ himself, sitting at the desk of his reports. My colleagues could not stand his approach. They did not have any respect or trust for him, and they continuously talked badly about him behind his back.

AJ's approach is exactly the opposite of what exemplary leaders do. Building trust is a process that begins when someone (either you or the other party) is willing to risk being the first to open up, to show vulnerability, and to let go of control. Leaders go first. If you want the high levels of performance that come with trust and collaboration, you have to demonstrate your trust in others before asking them to trust you.

Going first is a scary proposition. You're taking a chance. You're betting that others won't betray your confidence and that they'll take good care of the information you communicate, the resources you allocate, and the feelings you share. You're risking that others won't take advantage of you and that you can rely on them to do what's right. This requires considerable self-confidence, but the payoff is huge. Trust is contagious. When you trust others, they are much more likely to trust you. However, should you choose not to trust, understand that distrust is equally contagious. If you exhibit distrust, others will hesitate to place their trust in you and their colleagues. It's up to you to set the example and be willing to overcome the need for invulnerability. As Keni Thomas reflected on his experience as a U.S. Army Ranger, "Trust doesn't come issued. It's earned."<sup>13</sup>

Self-disclosure is one way that you go first. Letting others know what you stand for, what you value, what you want, what you hope for, and what you're willing (and not willing) to do reveals information about yourself. You can't be certain that other people will appreciate your candor, agree with your aspirations, or interpret your words and actions in the way you

intend. But once you take the risk of being open, others are more likely to take a similar risk and work toward mutual understanding.

This is exactly what Masood Fakharzadeh, managing director for Semedsol Consulting, experienced when he assembled an offshore product development team as part of his Personal-Best Leadership Experience. Masood brought that team together, and “early on,” he said, “I asked everyone for their help. I told them that this is the first time that I'm leading such a project, and I needed their help and expertise to make the project successful. I wanted to show them that I had full trust in them by asking them to help me.” His demonstration of trust in them, Masood said, “resulted in people opening up and sharing lots of information. This got them fully engaged, and they took ownership.”

Trust can't be forced. If someone refuses to understand you, viewing you as neither well intentioned nor competent, there may be little you can do to change their perceptions and behavior. However, keep in mind that placing trust in others is the safer bet with most people most of the time. Humans are hardwired to trust, and without it would be unable to function effectively in the world.<sup>[14](#)</sup>

## **Show Concern for Others**

The concern you show for others is one of the clearest and most unambiguous signals of your trustworthiness. When others know you will put their interests ahead of your own, they won't hesitate to trust you.<sup>[15](#)</sup> However, this is something people need to see in your actions—actions such as listening, paying attention to their ideas and concerns, helping them solve their problems, and being open to their influence. When you show your openness to their ideas and your interest in their concerns, people will be more open to yours.

Consider the relationship we found between the extent to which direct reports indicate that their leader actively listens to diverse points of view and how they feel about their workplace. Nearly 100 percent of direct reports who agree or strongly agree that their leader actively listens describe themselves as having a “strong sense of team spirit.” Less than one-third of direct reports experience intense team spirit when they indicate that their leader almost never, rarely, or even seldom listens. The results for how

direct reports evaluate their levels of motivation and productivity are also directly correlated with the extent they gauge their leader's actively listening.

Active listening involves more than simply paying attention. The best listeners, according to a study involving nearly 3,500 participants in a coaching skills development program, did much more than remain silent while the other person talked.<sup>16</sup> They demonstrated that they were listening by asking questions that “promoted discovery and insight.” The act of active listening is like having a conversation. It requires more than just hearing the other person's words. It means being engaged in a way that makes the conversation a positive experience, causing the person you are listening to feel supported and valued. Showing appreciation for another's unique viewpoint demonstrates respect for them and their ideas. Being sensitive to what others are going through creates bonds that make it easier to accept one another's guidance and advice. Great listeners also tend to offer suggestions, and have been described as “trampolines” in that you feel you can bounce ideas off of them.<sup>17</sup>

These actions build mutual empathy and understanding, and that in turn builds trust. As Sinisa Ljubic, global supply manager at Canada's Christie Digital Systems, explained, “For the sake of the people you lead, you need to be accepting of others as they are. We are all human, and we need to treat people respectfully. I listen to what people have to say so that I know what is going on in their heads and hearts. Only then can I work with them to improve.”<sup>18</sup> His listening and attending to the needs of others are evident every day. You see it when he encourages people to solve problems on their own, rather than jumping in to solve them himself. You see it when he arrives early to greet everyone and inquire about how he or she is doing. You see it when he takes the time to coach people who are assuming new jobs and responsibilities.

Demonstrating empathy goes a long way in building trust.<sup>19</sup> Meg Bear, group vice president, Social Cloud at Oracle, goes so far as to say, “Empathy is the critical twenty-first-century skill.”<sup>20</sup> Empathy may not be what you'd expect to hear from a technology executive, but it's becoming increasingly evident that the more technology automates jobs, the more valuable relationship skills will be to everyone's work, and especially to the

work of leaders. Studies reveal that managers who show the most empathy toward direct reports are viewed by their managers as better performers.<sup>21</sup> Showing interest in others, being sensitive to others' problems, and conveying compassion toward others increases leaders' and constituents' capacities to do their jobs. Roman Krznaric, drawing upon more than ten years of research, writes in his book *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It*, that empathy “is not just about seeing things from another's perspective. It's the cornerstone of smart leadership. The real competitive advantage of the human worker will be their capacity to create relationships, which means empathy will count more than experience.”<sup>22</sup>

Consider how Mark Anderson, finance manager with Apple, described the empathy and concern for others in the actions of his new sales director. Even though that leader had over fifteen years of experience, Mark recounted, from day one, that the director placed trust in the team by listening to their guidance and recommendations before inserting himself.

This small action had a significant impact on our view of him, as we believed he trusted our analysis and viewpoints. In addition to this, he took the time to schedule lunches with us to get to know who we were as individuals instead of just talking about work. This action resulted in our team developing a personal relationship with him because he showed concern for who we were as individuals. These initial actions piqued our interest in him as a leader, and we began to slowly listen to his thoughts and seek his advice more frequently because of the strong foundational relationship he built at the beginning.

Actions like these, which show concern for others, foster collaboration, because, as Mark says, “we viewed him as a partner that we wanted to work with rather than someone simply issuing directives.”

Exemplary leaders know that you need to see the world through others' eyes and make sure that you consider alternative viewpoints. Which is exactly the lesson Andy Cheng, worldwide product marketing manager at Apple, said he would share with others based on his Personal-Best Leadership Experience: “Empathy is critical. You have to understand how others feel and determine what you can do to help others to be successful. I want to be remembered for how I served my team and not as the one being served.” The relationships you build, Andy says, “make all the difference.” People



have to feel that they can talk freely with you about their challenges. For them to be open to sharing their ideas, their frustrations, and their dreams with you, they have to believe that you'll be caring and constructive in your responses. They have to feel that you care about their best interests.

It's interesting how these same skills of nonjudgmental listening show up in the people referred to as friends—and every successful leadership relationship has some element of friendship in it. Although you are not expected to be everyone's best friend, researchers have demonstrated across a variety of settings that having a friend at work, and having a friendly relationship with your supervisor, contribute significantly to healthy and productive workplaces.<sup>23</sup> For example, people assuming the role of CEO in a management simulation were informed that their financial vice president was or was not a “friend.” The VP's influence was less readily accepted when they were not friends—even though in all cases the “information” that individual provided was adequate to solve the company's problem.<sup>24</sup> When people believe that you have their interests at heart—that you care about them—they're more likely to be open to your influence.

## **Share Knowledge and Information**

Competence is a vital component of trust and confidence in a leader. As our studies have demonstrated, people want to know that their leaders are individuals they believe know what they're talking about and what they're doing. One way to demonstrate your competence is to share what you know and encourage others to do the same. You can convey your insights and know-how, share lessons learned from experience, and connect team members to valuable resources and people. Leaders who play this role of knowledge builder set the example for how team members should behave toward each other. As a result, team members' trust in one another and the leader increases, along with their performance.<sup>25</sup>

That was exactly the approach compensation consultant Cathryn Meyer learned to take when she supervised her first summer intern at Pivotal Software. She set up a series of “job shadowing” days in which her intern, Jenna, spent a full day following around other team members who had roles very different from Cathryn's. The intent was to expose Jenna to many different facets of the human resources organization, enhancing her



knowledge of the core skills of each function as well as how the various functions complemented each other. Cathryn also held regular feedback sessions, where she would give Jenna constructive feedback and receive some informative pointers from Jenna in return. Actions like these, says Cathryn, “helped strengthen our relationship and created mutual trust between us.”

The fact that trust among team members goes up when people share knowledge and information, and the fact that performance increases as a result, underscores how important it is for leaders to stay focused on the needs of their team. If you show a willingness to trust others with information (both personal and professional), constituents will be more inclined to overcome any doubts they might have about sharing information. However, if you display a reluctance to trust, and withhold information—or if you're overly concerned about protecting your turf and keeping things to yourself—you'll dampen their trust and their performance. Managers who create distrustful environments tend to take self-protective postures. They're directive and hold tight to the reins of power. Those who work for such managers are likely to pass on the distrust by withholding and distorting information.<sup>26</sup> This reinforces why it's so important for you to go first when it comes to sharing information.

## Facilitate Relationships

People work together most effectively when they trust one another. Asking for help and sharing information then come naturally. Setting a common goal becomes almost instinctive. These were lessons Cristian Nuñez learned from his experience as deputy manager, business development at Ultramar (Chile). Company growth had stalled, and margins were in decline primarily because the eighteen fairly autonomous agencies scattered along the country's principal ports were fiercely competing with one another. Moreover, the head office's detached managerial style generated mistrust, resulting in both sides thinking the other was not doing enough to improve the bottom line.

Cristian realized that the agencies needed better cooperative relationships, starting with more communications at all levels to promote common goals and cooperation between units. Both he and his supervisor went to each of the agency sites to visit with the people involved. “I learned,” recalls Cristian, “how much relationships can improve when people meet face to face, even if they'd been talking on the phone almost every day. The power and long-lasting effect of direct interaction can hardly be replaced by other means of communication.”

They subsequently brought representatives from each of the agencies together to talk about the problem and propose solutions. They quickly realized that there was a need to align incentives to favor a common way of doing business and they designed a profit-sharing method for collaborative deals. They also agreed to have all the agents participate in weekly telephone meetings, with an expectation that they would share business opportunities—in their own as well as others' territories. With new levels of cooperation, revenues followed an upward trajectory.

When Divya Pari joined India's central banking institution, she immediately appreciated how relationships matter. Divya was initially apprehensive; she had no prior banking experience and wasn't familiar with either the local community or language. However, she told us, “My fears were put to rest on the very first day,” beginning with the greeting from her new manager.

She congratulated me for landing the position and inquired about how I was feeling in this new place and role, whether the accommodation provided was comfortable, about my aspirations, interests, etc. She assured me that language would not be a problem and indeed my co-workers communicated in English while speaking to me. She shared various aspects of the division's work and information on critical issues facing the division. The friendly interaction, sharing of information, concern for my problems and for my comfortable transition to the new role in the division generated trust and I immediately felt positive and optimistic about my work. It also helped me open up, which in turn generated trust with my boss.

Divya's experience illustrates that facilitating relationships is how leaders build a climate of trust in the team. As she told us, “It proves that showing concern for people's problems and aspirations and intently listening generates trust and fosters collaboration.”

To collaborate, as documented by both Cristian and Divya, people have to be able to rely and depend on one another. They have to appreciate that they need each other to be most successful. To create conditions in which people know they can count on each other, a leader needs to develop cooperative goals and roles, support norms of reciprocity, structure projects to promote joint efforts, and encourage face-to-face interactions.

## **Develop Cooperative Goals and Roles**

Whether in sports or healthcare, in education or management, or in the public or private sector, for a team of people to have a positive experience they must have shared goals that provide a specific reason for being together. No one person can single-handedly educate a child, build a quality car, make a movie, create a world-class guest experience, connect a customer to the cloud, or eradicate a disease. The most important ingredient in every collective achievement is a common goal. Common purpose binds people into cooperative efforts. It creates a sense of interdependence, a condition in which all participants know that they cannot succeed unless everyone else succeeds, or at least that they can't succeed unless they coordinate their efforts. Without the sense that “we're all in this together”—that the success of one depends on the success of the other—it's virtually impossible to create the conditions for positive teamwork. If you want

individuals or groups to work cooperatively, you have to give them a good reason to do so, such as a goal that can be accomplished only by working together.

This is exactly what Sara Balducci, project manager for an international performance management services provider, recalls about her Personal-Best Leadership Experience. After her group was reorganized, she was promoted to lead the division. Shortly thereafter, the division more than doubled in headcount. With so many new positions and new people, it wasn't apparent how each person's day-to-day job activities played an important part in the overall organization. Sara wasted no time in calling everyone together and explaining how each of the new management positions would support their work.

I reminded the agents that I knew how capable each of them was, as we had been working together for quite some time, and reiterated what I had already discussed with many: how we would leverage the strengths of one another to continue to provide excellent service to our customers.

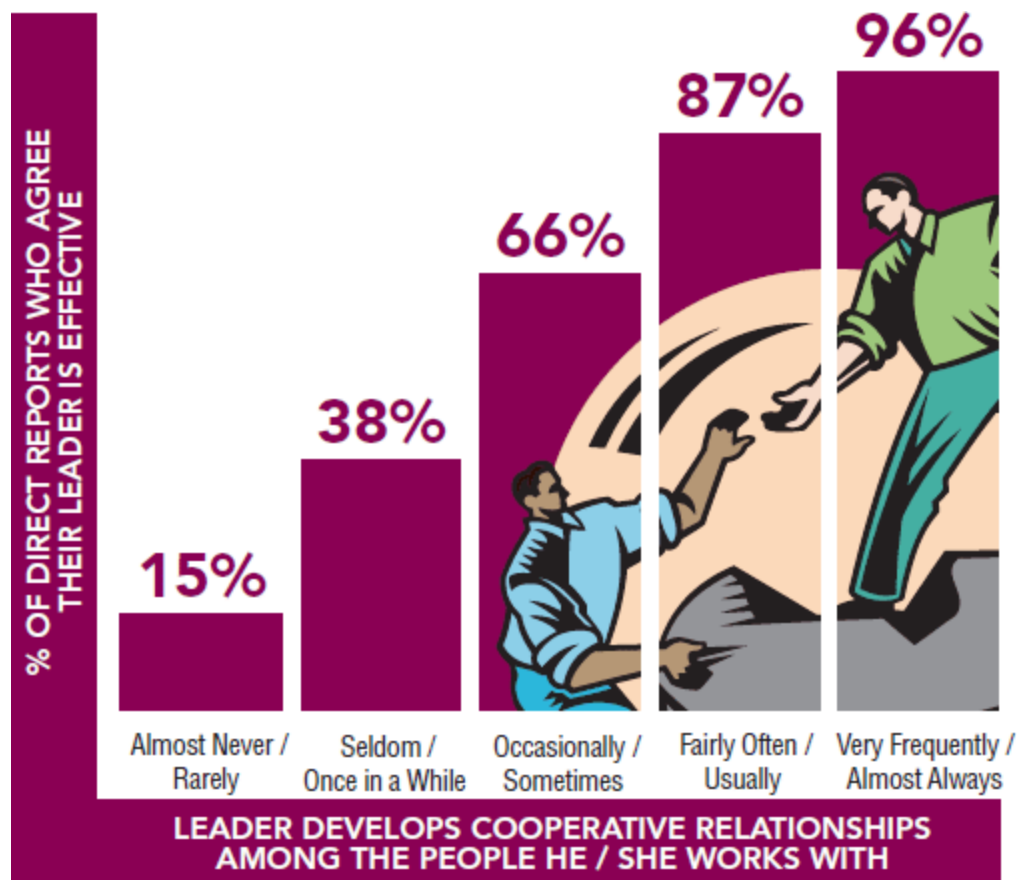
This important first step allowed me to create a climate of trust and facilitate relationships with my staff. I was showing them that I was concerned about them and had faith in their skills. This action fostered the team members' self-confidence. And I was supporting norms of reciprocity by requesting that colleagues count on each other to leverage the strengths of one another to get the work completed efficiently and with quality.

To underscore their interconnectedness, Sara broke the division's work into segments and assigned people to one of six different crews based on their areas of expertise. For example, the Foreign Crew worked with both English and non-English-speaking customers outside the United States; the Shipping Crew worked with customers who had questions regarding all aspects of shipping; and a Refunds Crew helped customers needing to return items and receive credit for them. To give team members a chance to demonstrate and develop their leadership skills, Sara created a new position called Crew Lead. Each would ensure work was spread evenly among the agents, completed on time, and met quality standards. She also channeled vital information through them to the rest of the crew, and they, in turn,

would be the liaison for information from their crew to her. This structure reinforced how they were a team, needing to work together to serve their customers best, and get their work completed most efficiently and effectively.

Sara, like other leaders we studied, realized that keeping individuals focused on a common goal promotes a stronger sense of teamwork than emphasizing individual objectives. For cooperation to succeed, roles must be designed so that every person's contributions are both additive and cumulative to the outcome. Individuals must clearly understand that unless they each contribute whatever they can, the team fails. For two people in a fishing boat, one can't say to the other, "Your side of the boat is sinking, but my side looks just fine."

Shubhagam Gupta, a software development manager at Oracle, told us how he had two very capable engineers on his team, but they weren't working very well together; each was quite critical of the other one. He decided to assign them to a joint project, one they needed to deliver together. What he found was that "when they both worked on a common goal, it built mutual respect, they both recognized each other's strengths and how much they needed each other to excel." Shubhagam realized that "leaders need to provide a common purpose and break down barriers and functions to foster collaboration in the team." The data shows that the overall effectiveness ratings of leaders by their direct reports are directly linked with the extent to which they are seen as developing cooperative relationships among people, as illustrated in [Figure 9.1](#).



**Figure 9.1** Developing Cooperative Relationships Raises Leadership Effectiveness Ratings

## Support Norms of Reciprocity

In any effective long-term relationship, there must be a sense of reciprocity. If one partner always gives and the other always takes, the one who gives will feel taken advantage of, and the one who takes will feel superior. In such a climate, cooperation is virtually impossible. University of Michigan political scientist and National Medal of Science recipient Robert Axelrod dramatically demonstrated the power of reciprocity in a series of studies involving the Prisoner's Dilemma paradigm.<sup>27</sup> The dilemma is this: two parties (individuals or groups) confront a series of situations in which they must decide whether to cooperate. They don't know in advance what the other party will do. There are two basic strategies—cooperate or compete—and four possible outcomes based on the choices players make: win-lose, lose-win, lose-lose, and win-win.

The maximum *individual* payoff comes when the first player selects an uncooperative strategy and the second player chooses to cooperate in good faith. In this “I win, but you lose” approach, one party gains at the other's expense. If both parties choose not to cooperate and attempt to maximize individual payoffs, then both lose. If both parties choose to cooperate, both win, though the individual payoff for a cooperative move in the short run is less than for a competitive one.

Bob invited scientists from around the world to submit their strategies for winning in a computer simulation of this test of win-win versus win-lose strategies. “Amazingly enough,” he says, “the winner was the simplest of all strategies submitted: cooperate on the first move and then do whatever the other player did on the previous move. This strategy succeeded by eliciting cooperation from others, not by defeating them.”<sup>28</sup> Simply put, people who reciprocate are more likely to be successful than those who try to maximize individual advantage.

The dilemmas that are successfully solved by this strategy are by no means restricted to theoretical research. Similar predicaments arise every day: What price might I pay if I try to maximize my own personal gain? Should I give up a little for the sake of others? Will others take advantage of me if I'm cooperative? Reciprocity turns out to be the most successful approach for such daily decisions, because it demonstrates both a willingness to be cooperative as well as an unwillingness to be taken advantage of. As a long-term strategy, reciprocity minimizes the risk of escalation: If people know that you'll respond in kind, why would they start trouble? If people know that you'll reciprocate, they know that the best way to deal with you is to cooperate and become recipients of your cooperation.

Reciprocity leads to predictability and stability in relationships; in other words, trust. It's less stressful to work with others when you understand how they will behave in response—especially to your own behavior in negotiations and disagreements.<sup>29</sup> Harvard professor of public policy Robert Putnam explains, “The norm of generalized reciprocity is so fundamental to civilized life that all prominent moral codes contain some equivalent of the Golden Rule.”<sup>30</sup> Treat people as you'd like them to treat you, and it's likely that they'll repay you many times over. Once you help others succeed, acknowledge their accomplishments, and let them shine, they'll never forget it. The *norms of reciprocity* comes into play, and people

are more than willing to return the favor and do what they can to make you successful. Whether the rewards of cooperation are tangible or intangible, when people understand that they will be better off by cooperating, they're inclined to recognize the legitimacy of others' interests in an effort to promote their own welfare.

## **Structure Projects to Promote Joint Effort**

People are more likely to cooperate if the payoffs for working together are greater than those associated with working by themselves. Many people who grow up in Westernized countries that emphasize individualistic or competitive achievement have the perception that they'll do better if everyone is rewarded solely based on his or her individual accomplishments. They're wrong. In a world that's trying to do more with less, competitive strategies lose to strategies that promote collaboration.<sup>31</sup>

The motivation for working diligently on one's job, while keeping in mind the overall common objective, is reinforced when it is the end result that gets rewarded and not merely individual efforts. Most profit-sharing plans, for example, are based on meeting the company's goals and not just those of separate independent units or departments. Certainly, each individual within the group has a distinct role, but on world-class teams, everyone knows that if they do only their separate parts well, they are unlikely to achieve the group's goal. After all, if you could do it alone, why would you need a team?

Cooperative behavior requires individuals to understand that by working together they will be able to accomplish something that no one can accomplish on his or her own. Andrew Zong, CEO at PHNIX in Guangzhou, China, has put this principle into practice through the business's "spin-off start mode" by which new independent companies are generated under the umbrella of the parent company. Every manager or employee who has a good idea and a valid business plan can potentially create a new startup company. Each startup is staffed, led, and even invested in directly by PHNIX employees, which means they share in both the risk and the reward of PHNIX's continuous market expansion. The parent company provides initial support in the form of know-how, infrastructure, offices and laboratories, but then the newly funded company functions as an independent entity, with its own shareholders. The managers



of the new startups have complete decision-making authority and, as owners, are fully accountable for their choices. After a decade, more than ten companies have been launched; none have closed. They have extended PHNIX's product portfolio or served as backward integration, producing components that external suppliers used to provide. General Manager Forth Zuo believes that their success comes down to a system that transforms employees into business partners through structuring opportunities for interdependent enterprises with overlapping objectives. The success of any one venture relates to the success of the whole enterprise.<sup>32</sup>

Wharton professor Adam Grant argues in his book *Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success* that organizations filled with “givers”—those who help others—are consistently more effective than those loaded with “takers.” Knowing about the amount of help people are willing to give one another, it turns out, is a highly accurate predictor of the team's effectiveness.<sup>33</sup>

For example, in a series of studies, teams were rewarded for being the highest-performing team as a whole, prompting members to work together as givers, whereas a taker-culture was prompted in teams in which the rewards went to the highest-performing individual within each team. While the competitive teams finished their tasks faster than the cooperative teams, they were less accurate because members withheld critical information from each other.<sup>34</sup>

To boost the accuracy of the competitive teams, the researchers next had them complete a second task under the cooperative reward structure—that is, rewarding the entire team for high performance. The result this time? Accuracy didn't go up, and speed dropped because people struggled to transition from competition to cooperation—that is, shifting from taking to giving. It seems that once people had experienced their colleagues as competitors, they couldn't trust them. Completing even a single task under a structure that rewarded taking created win-lose mind-sets, which persisted even after the structure was removed.

Joint efforts reinforce the importance of working collaboratively and helping one another out. Figuring out how to take as much as possible from others, while contributing as little as possible, has the opposite effect. You have to make certain that the long-term benefits of joint efforts are greater

than the short-term benefits of working alone or competing with others. You need to get people to realize that by working together they can complete the project faster than by thinking about any short-term (or individual) victories resulting from doing their own thing, complaining, blaming, or competing with others for scarce resources.

## **Encourage Face-to-Face and Durable Interactions**

Group goals and roles, shared identity, reciprocity, and promoting joint effort are all essential for collaboration to occur. Also vital are positive face-to-face interactions. People can act as a cohesive team only when they can have some amount of face time with each other. This is true not only locally but also in globally distributed relationships. Getting to know others firsthand is essential to cultivating trust and collaboration. And this need for face-to-face communication increases with the complexity of the issues.<sup>35</sup> As Wilson Chu, principal product manager at VMware, realized: “Until you see someone's face, they are not a real person to you.”

This is why while managing an offshore development team, Wilson asked people to turn on their webcams so that everyone could see one another. He felt that this practice made “everyone more comfortable with expressing their ideas because it made the interactions more personal—we each had more than just a name; we also had a face.” It's the leader's job, as Wilson points out, to provide frequent and lasting opportunities for team members to associate and intermingle among disciplines, among departments, and across continents. Technology and social media can certainly enhance communications. Virtual connections abound, and in a global economy, no organization could function if people had to fly halfway around the world to exchange information, make decisions, or resolve disputes. That said, the stroke of a key, the click of a mouse, or the switch of a video doesn't get you the same results as an intimate in-person conversation. There are limits to virtual trust. Firsthand experience with another human being is just a more reliable way of creating identification, increasing adaptability, and reducing misunderstandings.<sup>36</sup>

Virtual trust, like virtual reality, is one step removed from the real thing. Human beings are social animals; it's in people's nature to want to interact, and bits and bytes or pixelated images make for a very fragile social

foundation.<sup>37</sup> It's certainly true that work relationships in today's global economy depend more and more on electronic connections, and many work “places” are virtual in nature. Nevertheless, you have to reconcile the reality of virtual organizations with the knowledge that building trust depends on getting to know one another deeply. In addition to relying on emails, instant messages, teleconferences, and videoconferences, you need to look to other technologies such as the bicycle, the car, the train, and the airplane to bring people together.

People who expect their interactions to be more than a single incident, who believe they will continue to interact with one another in the future, and who like being in a relationship are more likely to cooperate in the present. Knowing that you'll have to deal again with someone tomorrow, next week, or next year ensures that you won't quickly forget about how you've treated one another. Durable relationships make the impact of today's actions on tomorrow's dealings that much more pronounced. Also, frequent interactions between people promote positive feelings on the part of each for the other party. Encouraging people to transfer between team sites ensures familiarity with the culture and practices of their peers. This notion of durable interactions may seem quaint and anachronistic in this global economic environment, in which speed is a competitive advantage and loyalty is no longer a valued virtue. But that doesn't make the reality disappear. If you wish to maximize your leadership effectiveness, begin with the assumption that you'll be interacting in some way with this person again in the future, and that this relationship will be critical to your mutual success.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Foster Collaboration***

“You can't do it alone” is the mantra of exemplary leaders—and for good reason. You can't make extraordinary things happen by yourself. It's collaboration that enables corporations, communities, and even virtual classrooms to function effectively. Sustain collaboration by creating a climate of trust and facilitate effective long-term relationships among your constituents. Promote a sense of mutual dependence—the feeling that everyone in the group knows he or she needs the others to be successful. Without that sense of “we're all in this together,” it's impossible to keep effective teamwork going, stimulating people to look out for one another and do what they can to make the whole team successful.

Trust is the lifeblood of collaboration. To create and sustain the conditions for long-lasting connections, you have to be able to trust others, they have to trust you, and they have to trust each other. Without trust, you cannot lead or make extraordinary things happen. Share information and knowledge freely with your constituents, show that you understand their needs and interests, open up to their influence, make wise use of their abilities and expertise, and—most of all—demonstrate that you trust them before you ask them to trust you.

The challenge in facilitating relationships is making sure people recognize how much they need one another to excel—how truly interdependent they are. Cooperative goals and roles contribute to a

sense of collective purpose, and the best incentive for people to work to achieve shared goals is the knowledge that you and others will reciprocate, helping them in return. Help begets help, just as trust begets trust. By supporting norms of reciprocity and structuring projects to reward joint efforts, you enable people to understand that it's in their best interest to cooperate. Get people interacting and encourage face-to-face interactions as often as possible to reinforce the durability of relationships.

Exemplary leaders Foster Collaboration by *building trust and facilitating relationships*. This means you must:

1. Extend trust to others, even if they haven't already extended it to you.
2. Spend time getting to know your constituents and find out what makes them tick.
3. Show concern for the problems and aspirations others have.
4. Listen, listen, and listen some more.
5. Structure projects so that there is a common goal that requires cooperation, making sure that people understand how they are interdependent with one another.
6. Find ways to get people together face to face and increase the durability of their relationship.

## Notes

1. We use *cooperate* and *collaborate* synonymously. Their dictionary definitions are very similar. In the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged* online dictionary, the first definition of *cooperate* is, “To act or work with another or others to a common end: operate jointly.” (<http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/unabridged/cooperate>). The first definition of *collaborate* is, “To work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor” (<http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/unabridged/collaborate>).
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## Chapter 10

### Strengthen Others

**Casey Mork**, supply chain strategy and transformation advisor with DSV–Global Transport and Logistics, has worked with a variety of organizations and witnessed many times how a leader's actions can make or break a team's effectiveness. He shared a transitional experience of a new manager who took over the reins from their previous one who believed he was smarter than everyone else was.

From the outset, when the new manager took over, he shared information with Casey's team, involved them in discussions and deliberations, allowed them discretion over their decisions, and provided sufficient latitude to create their own boundaries. As a result, Casey and his team began to realize that they were now accountable for their own success and failure. They became more self-determining, Casey said.

Our team suddenly felt much more powerful because of this transfer of decision making. When [the manager] told us the project looked fantastic, it made us feel like *we* created something, instead of executed on someone else's plan. He shared his power with us, which led to an increased ability and desire to execute. Given more opportunities to be self-directed and make real decisions, we began to gain this incredible new sense of competence and confidence—because we knew our success and failure was on us and us alone.

Looking back on this experience, Casey reflected on how “real latitude and not close supervision allowed for the most efficient means of collaboration.” Transferring power to group members, he noted, “also conveys trust, which will almost always lead to a better work product.”

Casey realized that the most effective leaders help people both feel and be more powerful and capable of making things happen on their own.

Casey's experience illustrates how exemplary leaders make a commitment to *Strengthen Others*. They enable people to take ownership of and responsibility for their group's success by enhancing their competence and their confidence in their abilities, by listening to their ideas and acting on them, by involving them in important decisions, and by acknowledging and giving credit for their contributions.

Creating a climate in which people are fully engaged and feel in control of their own lives is at the heart of strengthening others. Exemplary leaders build an environment that develops people's abilities to perform a task and bolster their self-confidence. In a climate of competence and confidence, people don't hesitate to hold themselves personally accountable for results, feel profound ownership for their achievements, and do all they can to make extraordinary things happen.

To Strengthen Others, exemplary leaders engage in two essentials. They

- ▶ ***Enhance self-determination***

- ▶ ***Develop competence and confidence***

Leaders significantly increase people's belief in their ability to make a difference. They move from being *in control* to *giving over control* to others, becoming their coach. They help others learn new skills, develop existing talents, and provide the institutional supports required for ongoing growth and change. In the final analysis, leaders turn their constituents into leaders.

## Enhance Self-Determination

Leaders accept and act on this paradox of power: you become more powerful when you give your power away. Long before *empowerment* entered the mainstream vocabulary, exemplary leaders understood how important it was for their constituents to feel strong, capable, and efficacious. People who feel weak, incompetent, and insignificant will consistently underperform; they are disengaged, hoping to flee the organization, and are ripe for disenchantment, even revolution.

Individuals who are not confident about their power, regardless of their organizational position or place, tend to hoard whatever shreds of influence they have. Powerless managers tend to adopt petty and dictatorial styles. Powerlessness also creates organizational systems in which political skills are essential, and “covering your backside” and “passing the buck” are the preferred modes of handling interdepartmental differences.<sup>1</sup>

We've asked thousands of people over the past thirty years to tell us about their own experiences of feeling powerless as well as powerful. Think about actions or situations that have made you feel powerless, weak, or insignificant, like a pawn in someone else's chess game. Are they similar to what others have reported?

## **Representative Actions and Conditions That People Report *Make Them Feel POWERLESS***

*“No one was interested in, listened to, or paid attention to my opinion or questions.”*

*“I had no input into an important decision that affected the way I did my work.”*

*“My boss argued with me in front of my colleagues—even called me names.”*

*“My decisions were not supported, even though my manager said he would back me up.”*

*“Someone else took credit for my hard work and results.”*

*“Information essential to my work was withheld, or I was excluded from the information loop.”*

*“I was given responsibility but no authority to hold others accountable.”*

Now think about what it's like when you feel powerful—strong, efficacious, like the creator of your own experience. Are your recollections similar to what others recall?

## **Representative Actions and Conditions That People Report Make Them Feel POWERFUL**

*“All the important information and data were shared with me.”*

*“I was able to exercise discretion about how we would handle a situation.”*

*“I made decisions about key aspects of the project.”*

*“The organization invested resources in helping me to learn.”*

*“Management publicly expressed great confidence in my ability.”*

*“The supervisor told others about the great work I was doing.”*

*“My manager took the time to let me know how I was doing and where I could be improving.”*

As you examine what people say about powerless and powerful times, there is one clear and consistent message: *feeling powerful—literally feeling “able”—comes from a profound sense of being in control of your life.* People everywhere share this fundamental need. When you feel able to determine your own destiny, when you believe you can mobilize the resources and support necessary to complete a task, then you will persist in your efforts to achieve. However, when you feel controlled by others, when you believe that you lack support or resources, you naturally show little commitment to excel. Even though you may comply, you still realize how much more you could contribute, if you wanted to.

In strengthening others, leaders show they believe that people are smart and capable of figuring things out. As Ritesh Mehta, product manager and enterprise architect at SAP Success Factors, recalls:



When I was given a leadership role for the first time, I just treated it as powerful position. I used to follow a dictatorial style, and found that I had a hard time winning my team's trust; and I saw resentment everywhere. I quickly realized my mistake and then started giving away my power to my team. As a result, my team started trusting my actions, the team's results provided us high visibility in the organization, and I got special appreciation for being the leader of this high-performing team.

Similarly, Kinjal Shah, a software engineering leader with Quisk, views leadership as “not about having more power,” but, he says, “about empowering and enabling others around you to be leaders. People feel more empowered when they have decision-making power that could make real impact.” In their development of new software designs, every member is expected to give their input, and if a team member has questions or concerns, they are fully addressed before moving forward with the development. According to Kinjal, this serves two purposes: “Because everyone's input is considered, they feel empowered, and everyone is aware of what is happening in other parts of the Quisk system and they have a say in how it gets developed.” As a result, he says, “team members feel more responsible for the system as a whole. And since people feel powerful, they are willing to take on leadership responsibilities in other parts of the organization as the opportunities present themselves.”

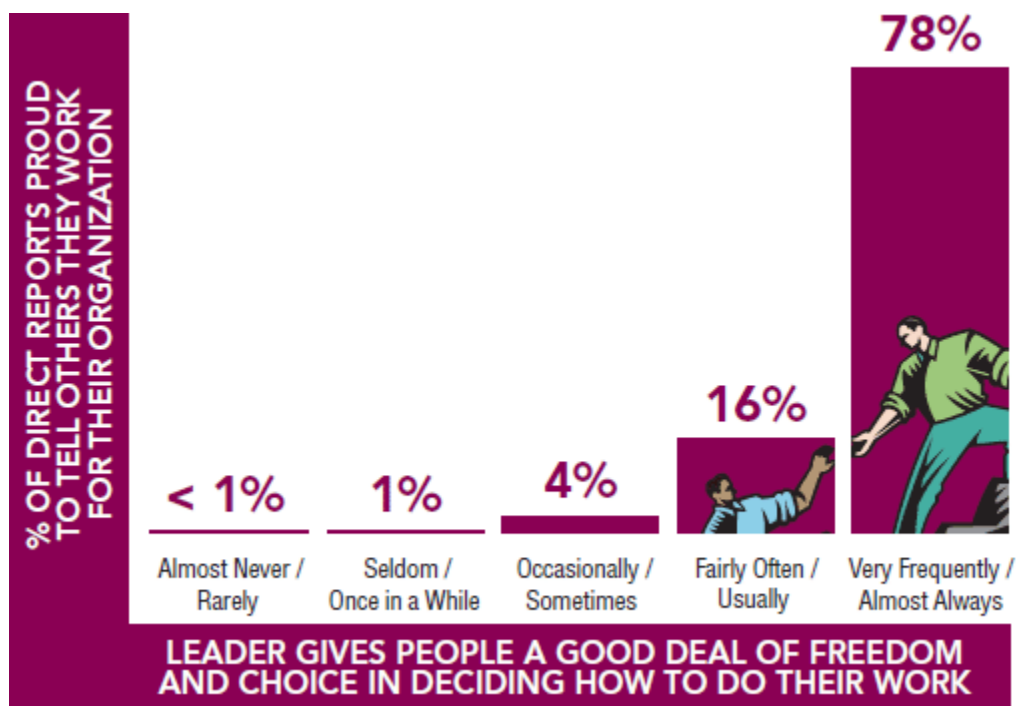
Exemplary leaders, like Ritesh and Kinjal, give their power away by enhancing their constituents' self-determination, based on the core principles of choice, latitude, and personal accountability. They soon realize that leadership actions that increase others' sense of self-determination, self-confidence, and personal effectiveness make them more powerful and significantly enhance the energy and commitment they put forward.<sup>2</sup>

## **Provide Choices**

Freedom is the ability to make choices. People who perceive they don't have any choices feel trapped, and like rats in a maze, when left with no alternatives, they typically stop moving, and eventually shut down. By giving employees genuine autonomy, leaders can reduce the sense of powerlessness and stress that people feel and increase their willingness to exercise more fully their capabilities. Researchers at the Delgado Lab for

Social and Affective Neuroscience at Rutgers University report that the perception of increased choice in itself activates reward-related circuits in the brain, which makes people feel more at ease, enhancing their willingness to experiment and venture outside of their comfort zones.<sup>3</sup> High-performing organizations result from people willing to work beyond their job descriptions, and this is because they have the latitude and discretion to make choices about both the work they do and how they do it.

In our research, we ask people about the extent to which their leader “gives people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work,” and we examine how this leadership behavior affects their attitudes about the workplace. Look at the results in [Figure 10.1](#) in regard to how proud they feel to tell others they work for their organization. Notice that less than 1 percent of direct reports strongly agree that they feel proud to tell others they work for their organization when their leader “almost never or rarely” gives them much freedom and choice. This sentiment improves very little even when the leader “fairly often or usually” engages in this leadership behavior. The dramatic shift in pride occurs (rising to nearly 80 percent) when people report that their leader provides freedom and choice “very frequently” to “almost always.” The shape of this curve is similar to that produced in regard to feelings of commitment, motivation, and productivity by direct reports as a function of feeling freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work.



**Figure 10.1** People's Pride in Their Work Increases With The Freedom and Choice They Have in Doing Their Jobs

How direct reports evaluate the overall effectiveness of their leader is also strongly related to how frequently that leader gives people freedom and choice. Again, the increase in the slope of the curve is dramatic. Only 20 percent of direct reports agree or strongly agree that their leader is effective at the low end of the continuum and this increases to nearly 95 percent agreement when that leader very frequently or almost always uses this leadership behavior.

Tim Haun is a chiropractor and personal trainer, affiliated for over thirty years with the Bay Club Santa Clara (California). He's experienced numerous changes in senior management, and some have worked out better than others.<sup>4</sup> He recounted one restructuring that underscores the significance of providing choices when expecting high performance in return.

One of the first organizational changes was the establishment of monthly group goals for the number of hours worked, which gave trainers the freedom to both set individual goals for themselves and take responsibility for recruiting clients to fill that number of hours. The trainers' goals and the actual number of hours that each worked were announced at monthly

meetings, and this accountability made them all feel in charge of their own destiny. They felt as though each was running his or her own business within the larger business, which enhanced their sense of control and power. What's more, the company hosted continuing education workshops, free of charge, at various points during the year. Trainers could choose to attend these events or not, but most of them did.

The result, according to Tim, was not just an increase in their overall total number of billable hours (and thus salaries); greater freedom and choices about various aspects of the trainers' responsibilities built their commitment and fostered productivity. This example shows how leaders exercise guided autonomy: they set standards and hold everyone accountable for the shared values and vision while giving people the opportunity to make choices about how they will enact them.

You want people to take initiative and be self-directed. You want them to think for themselves and not continually ask someone else, “What should I do?” You can't develop this ability if you tell people what to do and how to do it. People can't learn to act independently unless they get to exercise some degree of choice. If they can act only in ways prescribed by the organization, then how can they respond when the customer or another employee behaves in ways that aren't in the script? If they have to ask the “boss” what to do—even if they think they know what needs to be done and feel they could do it—then they are going to be slowing down the entire organization. Moreover, if their boss doesn't know, then that person will have to ask his or her manager; and up the ladder it goes. The only way to create an efficient and effective organization is to give people the chance to use their best judgment in applying their knowledge and skills. This implies, of course, that you've prepared them to make these choices and that you've educated them in the guiding principles of the organization.

Give people choices, and let them make decisions on their own, and then it becomes quite difficult to blame “the company” (or management) when things don't go their way or when they don't like the way things are going. After all, if they don't like the way something is done, they can do something about it—and taking initiative is unerringly one of the things leaders do. By providing choices, you are enabling people to lead themselves.

## Structure Jobs to Offer Latitude

If you want higher levels of performance and greater initiative from your constituents, you must be proactive in designing work that allows them latitude, a close cousin of choice. To feel in control of their own work lives, people need to be able to take nonroutine action, exercise independent judgment, and make decisions that affect how they do their work, without having to check with someone else.<sup>5</sup> It means being creative and flexible—liberated from a standard set of rules, procedures, or schedules—and the payoff can be enormous.

Integrating global operations is a challenge for many companies, and Gyan Patra's experience as a software development manager at [Walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) was no exception. Gyan had learned early in his career that most issues “related to *offshore* team integration are hardly anything about technical competency.” His own research revealed that the best practices of successful offshore teams were not different from those of any highly successful team, for example, making sure everyone has clarity about their roles and responsibilities and clearly defined deliverables, where contributors have end-to-end responsibility. As Gyan explained:

In the design phase, the offshore team members were able to do end-to-end design and their own research instead of the onsite coordinator looking over everyone's shoulders all the time. The offshore team members felt they had the freedom to be creative and had ownership of the product they developed, good or bad. The offshore developers felt they had the latitude to develop the product and were able to use their skillsets at an optimum level. They stopped finger pointing, and the ensuing culture fostered a high degree of accountability. The offshore team members no longer felt bossed around. Now, they spent more time fixing real technical issues versus arguing with the home office.

Responsiveness emerges, along with additional discretionary efforts, when people have the necessary leeway to meet customer needs (whether internal or external) and sufficient authority to take action to meet customer wants.

There's a fundamental difference between being in an organization where people are trusted and given the latitude to use their judgment, and one where people are seen merely as cogs in some machine, neither trusted nor respected for their common sense. Of course, there may be a certain amount

of risk in giving people the latitude to make important decisions, but with providing a greater degree of trust also comes a larger degree of accountability, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction and profitability. Researchers have shown, for example, that increasing buyers' discretion on procurement decisions increases their effectiveness, as well as finding that managers who avoid making decisions have a negative impact on organizational performance.<sup>6</sup>

Only adaptive individuals and organizations will thrive in today's dynamic global environment. This means you need to support more and greater individual discretion to meet the changing demands of customers, clients, suppliers, and other stakeholders. With increased discretion comes an increased ability to use and expand one's talents, training, and experience. The payoff is improved performance.

## **Foster Accountability**

If you were to ask people the question, “Do you wash a rental car before returning it?” they would laugh and think you must be crazy for asking. “Of course not,” they’ll say. Why? Because they don't own that car, they're only renting it; they know the rental company will wash the car when they return it. Ask those same people if they wash their own car or take it to a local carwash and most everyone will say, “Yes.” Why? Because it's their car; they own it. When people feel they own something, that it's theirs, they will take care of it. However, when they feel they're only renting it, they are much less likely to treat it with the same care as they would something they own. People just do not strive to maintain, protect, and take responsibility for things they feel they don't own or for which they have no accountability.

How many people in your organization would say they don't take responsibility for something because it's not theirs? Figuratively speaking, how many would say that they aren't accountable for “washing the car”—or for taking safety precautions, fixing software glitches, attending to someone else's customer, or the like? How many are just renting their workspaces? For those who feel that way, the effect on their engagement in the organization is quite negative. While people may not own their work in the formal or legal sense of the word, research indicates that when they feel psychological ownership of it, they are significantly more likely to be committed to their organizations.<sup>7</sup> Exemplary leaders appreciate that they

have to create this sense of psychological ownership if they are going to make extraordinary things happen.

Justin Depenhart admitted that when he first became a manager, he didn't appreciate how important it was to foster accountability. He confessed:

I often would lead by telling my team what needed to be done and then essentially standing over their shoulder ensuring that it was being done correctly. I thought I was doing a great job providing support for my team and value for the company. Many of the members of my team were inexperienced and at first, they liked this style of leadership. However, after gaining some experience, they began to show their frustration with my style. I realized I was not allowing the team the freedom to perform their jobs and develop. After the first six or so months, I realized I needed to change my behavior.

As operations leader for Owens Corning's Santa Clara (California) plant and regional technical leader with their Toronto and Edmonton (Canada) plants, Justin realized he needed to behave differently. His experience taught him many things, "but one stands out above all," he said.

It is a statement that I make to the team: "The more a leader develops his or her team, the stronger the team members and the better the results will be." However, to develop a team, you have to allow them to take on new challenges and risks. If you only focus on today's result and pay no attention to the potential of tomorrow, you and your team will never grow.

When people take personal responsibility and are held accountable for their actions, their colleagues are much more inclined to want to work with them and are more motivated to cooperate in general. Individual accountability is a critical element of every collaborative effort. Everyone has to do his or her part for a group to function effectively.

While leading a process improvement initiative for Citibank Philippines, Ana Aboitiz Delgado realized that she would have to get many people involved and responsible for the project's success. However, dividing tasks and assigning responsibilities were difficult for her because, Ana explained, "I had full responsibility for the project's success, and I did not know how to pass on this sense of accountability to team members who did not report

to me directly. I was afraid that they would fail, and this would reflect on me.” She started by acknowledging to her team that she didn't have much knowledge about the particulars of the bank's statement rendition process and recognized that they had the technical expertise. As a result, she proposed that her role would be to provide guidance, Six Sigma training, and support for eliminating obstacles the team might encounter along the way. Just as she proposed her role, she decided to give team members a chance to identify responsibilities where each felt they could add the most value based on their expertise or interests. Given the opportunity to mold their role in the project, they became more engaged in the project. Right away, they began to brainstorm aloud and interact with each other.

Ana shared her power (in this case, her knowledge) with the team and validated them by highlighting that they were the experts. She provided choices and the latitude to take on responsibility because they were the stakeholders in this process. She made them powerful by following through on her promise to implement on the operations floor the ideas they came up with. “I learned,” said Ana, “that to foster accountability, you need to delegate authority and give others a chance to take responsibility. By trusting others with responsibility, you are letting them know you believe in them and that you have confidence that they can achieve it.”

Ana understood something very fundamental about strengthening others: the power to choose rests on the willingness to be held accountable. She learned that the more freedom of choice people have, the more personal responsibility they must accept. There's also a bonus: the more that people believe that everyone else is taking responsibility for his or her part of the project—and has the competence to do it—the more trusting and the more cooperative they're going to be. People will be more confident in doing their part when they believe others will do theirs. This interconnectedness between choice and accountability takes on increasing importance in virtually linked and global workplaces. Another benefit is that as others assume more responsibility, leaders can expend more energy in other areas, enhancing their spheres of influence, and bringing additional resources back to their units.

Some believe that teams and other cooperative endeavors minimize individual accountability. They argue that if people are encouraged to work collectively, somehow they'll take less responsibility for their actions than if



they are encouraged to compete or to do things on their own. The evidence doesn't support this point of view.<sup>8</sup> It's true that some people become social loafers when working in groups, slacking off while others do their jobs for them. However, this doesn't last for long, because their colleagues quickly tire of carrying the extra load. Either the slacker steps up to the responsibility, or the team wants that person removed—provided the team has shared goals and shared accountability.

Enhancing self-determination means giving people control over their lives. It means you have to give them something of substance to control and for which they are accountable. Here are some examples on how to foster individual accountability:

- ▶ Make certain that everyone, no matter the task, has a customer.
- ▶ Substantially increase signature authority at all levels.
- ▶ Remove or reduce unnecessary approval steps.
- ▶ Broadly define jobs (e.g., as projects, not tasks).
- ▶ Provide greater freedom of access, vertically and horizontally, inside and outside the organization.

Remember to provide the necessary resources—for example, materials, money, time, people, and information—for people to perform autonomously. There's nothing more disempowering than to have lots of responsibility for doing something but nothing to do it with. People's increased sphere of influence should be relevant to the pressing concerns and core technology of the business. Choosing the color of the paint for the hallways may be a place to start, but you'd better give people influence over more substantive issues in time. For example, if quality is the top priority, find ways to expand people's influence and discretion over issues of quality control and process improvements.

# Develop Competence and Confidence

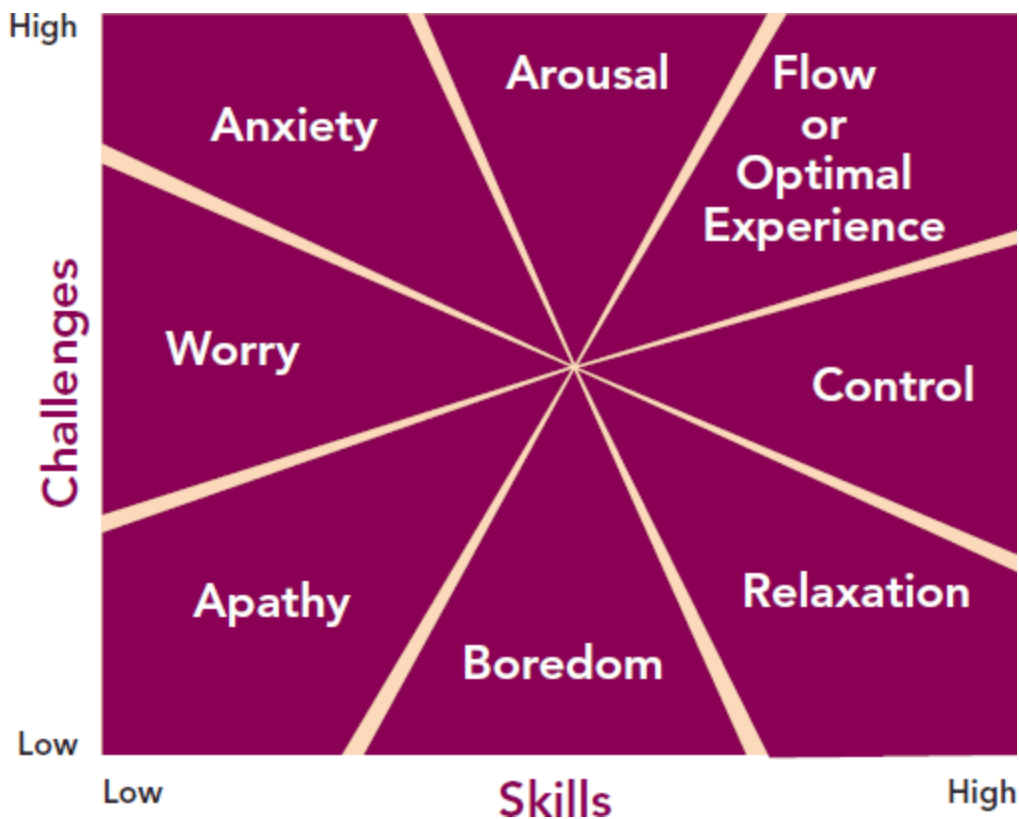
Choice, latitude, and accountability fuel people's sense of powerfulness and control over their lives. However, as necessary as enhancing self-determination is, it's insufficient. Without the knowledge, skills, information, and resources to do a job expertly, and without feeling competent to execute skillfully the choices required, people feel overwhelmed and disabled. Even if they have the resources and skills, there may be times when people don't have confidence that they're allowed to use them or that they'll be backed up if things don't go as well as expected. There may be times when they just lack the self-confidence to do what they know they need to do.

Developing competence and building confidence are essential to delivering on the organization's promises and maintaining the credibility of leaders and team members alike. To make extraordinary things happen, you must invest in strengthening the capacity and the resolve of everyone in the organization. This is especially important during times of great uncertainty and significant change.

Think about a time when the challenge you faced was greater than the skills you had. How did you feel? If you're like most people, you felt anxious, nervous, scared, and the like. Now think of a time when your level of skill was greater than the level of challenge in the job. How did you feel? Bored and apathetic is most likely. Do you do your best work when you're anxious or bored? Of course you don't. You do it when the challenge you face is just slightly greater than your current level of skill. That's when you feel stretched but not stressed out.

People often refer to being “in the flow” when they feel that they are performing effortlessly and expertly despite the difficulty of the experience. They are confident that their skills match the level of challenge in the experience, even though it might be a bit of a stretch. Claremont Graduate University professor of psychology, founder and co-director of the Quality of Life Research Center, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has spent his entire academic career studying the relationship of challenge and skill to optimal performance. He finds that “when high challenges are matched with high

skills, then the deep involvement that sets flow apart from ordinary life is likely to occur.”<sup>9</sup> [Figure 10.2](#) shows a graphic illustration of this relationship.



**Figure 10.2** Optimal Performance, Challenge, and Skill

Source: M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books, 1997, p. 31.

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Although flow is not possible with every single task in every situation, it characterizes peak performances. Exemplary leaders strive to create the conditions that make flow possible. That means you need to assess continuously your constituents' capacity to perform in the context of the challenges they face. Such assessment requires attention to the willpower and the skills of each person they lead. Jeff Allison, director of operations for PW Enterprises, confronted precisely this situation when he relocated the company's operations center in Fargo, North Dakota, to the research and development center in Santa Cruz, California. This change meant the Fargo operations staff no longer had daily interactions with him, and as Jeff explained, “they had to learn to trust themselves and each other, and

become more independent in solving problems on their own.” He realized, “that if I built up their competencies and had them take ownership of operations, their confidence would increase and that they would do a great job.” In taking these actions, Jeff was intuitively making use of the “flow” paradigm.

## **Educate and Share Information**

People can't do what they don't know how to do. Therefore, when you increase the latitude and discretion of your constituents, you also have to increase expenditures on training and development. When people aren't sure about how to perform critical tasks or are fearful of making mistakes, they may be reluctant to exercise their judgment. “Ensuring that employees are given the training they need and involving them in decisions that impact their work creates both competence and commitment,” observe researchers Michael Burchell and Jennifer Robin from their studies of “great workplace” companies. Those organizations “understand that as the business continues to grow, they will need employees who can readily step into tomorrow's jobs rather than having them develop necessary skills on the fly, hiring from the outside, or simply losing market opportunity.”<sup>10</sup>

In Jeff Allison's situation, he took about a month with the Fargo staff to walk through a list of twenty to thirty problems he had addressed over the past year, thereby, in his words, “ensuring that they had the core competencies to solve these or similar situations in the future.” For example, Jeff asked them if they could think of better ways to solve the problem, or better yet, think of ways to prevent these problems from happening.

My goal was to get them actively involved in solving issues and proposing ideas. My hope was that the more they thought through the process, the more they would understand the process. Operations are the heart of the company, and I wanted the group to trust themselves and believe with confidence that they were capable of anything. They needed to know that any ideas they had were valuable to the company and that we wanted to hear them.

Once Jeff could see them developing the core competencies and the confidence that comes with knowledge, he took the training a step further.

He gave each employee a set of hypothetical problems and put them in charge of figuring out how to solve them. He wanted them to use their competencies built up from the training to help instill confidence, he told us.

By problem solving, they could use their skills and develop new ideas on how to make operations better. Once they were confident and had solved a problem, I had them teach the entire team how to solve that problem. This training exercise turned out to be the best activity I could have done and did much more for the team than I ever imagined. While walking through the problems with the team, other team members were very engaged, and you could see their confidence rise. They knew that they could rely on each other, and they knew that they were capable of solving any problem thrown their way.

Strengthening others, as Jeff's experience demonstrates, requires up-front investments in initiatives that develop people's competencies and foster their confidence. Such investments produce profits. Studies find that those companies that spend above-average amounts on training have a higher return on their investment than companies that are below-average spenders. The former also enjoy higher levels of employee involvement and commitment, better standards of customer service, along with greater understanding of, and alignment with, company visions and values.<sup>[11](#)</sup> Furthermore, studies report that 40 percent of employees who report receiving poor training leave their positions within the first year. The lack of skills training and development was the determining factor cited in their leaving.<sup>[12](#)</sup>

Sharing information is another important educational tactic, and recall that this factor showed up prominently on the list of what made people feel powerful, and when absent made them feel powerless. Silicon Valley author and global strategist Nilofer Merchant echoes this observation: “Everyone is better off when they know why decisions are made with as much accuracy as possible. It gives them an understanding of what matters and provides information on which to base the trade-offs being made constantly at every level. When reasons behind decisions are not shared, the decisions seem arbitrary and possibly self-serving.”<sup>[13](#)</sup>

For leaders, developing the competence and confidence of their constituents so that they are more qualified, more capable, and more effective, and so that they are leaders in their own right, reflects their appreciation of the truth that they can't get anything extraordinary accomplished all by themselves. Making people smarter is the job of every leader. In today's world, if your constituents aren't growing and learning in their jobs, they're highly likely to leave and find better opportunities.

## **Organize Work to Build Competence and Ownership**

People confronted critical organizational issues in their Personal-Best Leadership case studies. Although it may seem obvious that people do their best when the work is essential to success, this principle is often lost in the day-to-day design of work. Do as exemplary leaders do and organize assignments so that people feel that their work is relevant to the pressing concerns of the business. Moreover, ensure that people experience variety in their tasks and have opportunities to make meaningful decisions about how their work gets accomplished. Find opportunities to involve your team on the task forces, committees, teams, and problem-solving groups dealing with the critical functions and issues. Engage them in programs, meetings, and decisions that have a direct impact on their job performance. Actions like these build competence and promote a sense of ownership and accountability.

Remember that your constituents can't act like owners and provide leadership if they lack a fundamental understanding of how the organization operates. To fully comprehend critical organizational issues and tasks, they need to be able to answer such questions as “Who are our most valuable customers, clients, suppliers, and stakeholders? How do they perceive us?” “How do we measure success?” “What has our track record been over the past five years?” “What new products or services will we initiate in the next six months?” If your constituents can't answer critical questions like these, how can they work together to transform shared values and common purposes into reality? How can they know how their performance affects other teams, units, divisions, and ultimately the success of the entire enterprise or endeavor? How can they feel very strong or capable if they don't know the answers to the same questions every “owner” or CEO would know?<sup>[14](#)</sup>

Penny Mayo is the accounting supervisor of a local government agency that has been consolidating services. As a result, Penny had to take on more responsibility, and found herself struggling to let go of some of her payroll duties. While she was committed to ensuring that no payroll mistakes were made, she also recognized that it was a time-consuming task that other people could learn to do. “The problem was me, not the team,” she said. “Several people were good candidates to take on these responsibilities. It occurred to me that by not letting go, I wasn't demonstrating the trust I truly had for my team.” She finally realized that this was an opportunity to collaborate and strengthen others, and she built ownership in stages. First, she asked for a volunteer who'd be willing to learn payroll; then she offered training and coaching opportunities for that individual to learn and improve. It didn't take too long before that new person was up and running on her own, taking responsibility and assuming ownership of the payroll function.<sup>15</sup>

Like Penny, exemplary leaders carefully look at what constituents are doing in their jobs and figure out where and how to enrich their tasks and positions. They provide sufficient information so that people feel that they have the perspective of owners in making decisions, which fosters greater competence and enhances their self-confidence.

## **Foster Self-Confidence**

Even if people know how to do something, a lack of confidence may stop them from doing it. Strengthening others is an essential step in a psychological process that affects the intrinsic need for self-determination. People have an internal need to influence other people and life's events to experience some sense of order and stability in their lives. Feeling confident that they can adequately cope with events, situations, and people prepares them to exercise leadership. Without sufficient self-confidence, people lack the conviction to take on tough challenges. The lack of self-confidence manifests itself in feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, and crippling self-doubt. By building people's belief in themselves, you are bolstering their inner strength to forge ahead in uncharted terrain, to make tough choices, to face opposition and the like because they believe in their skills and decision-making abilities.

Self-confidence affects people's performance. In a classic study, researchers told one group of managers that decision-making was a skill developed through practice: the more one worked at it, the more capable one became. In the other group, they told the managers that decision-making reflected their basic intellectual aptitude: the greater one's underlying cognitive capacities, the better his or her decision-making ability. Working with a simulated organization, both groups of managers dealt with a series of production orders requiring various staffing decisions and the establishment of different performance targets. When faced with demanding performance standards, those managers who believed that decision-making was an acquirable skill continued to set challenging goals for themselves, used good problem-solving strategies, and fostered organizational productivity. Their counterparts, who thought that decision-making ability was latent (that is, you either have it or you don't), lost confidence in themselves over time as they encountered difficulties. They lowered their aspirations for the organization, their problem solving deteriorated, and organizational productivity declined.<sup>16</sup>

In a related set of studies, researchers told managers either that people are easily changeable, or that “work habits of employees are not that easily changeable, even by good guidance. Small changes do not necessarily improve overall outcomes.” Those managers with the confidence that they could influence organizational outcomes through their actions maintained a higher level of performance than those who felt that they could do little to change things.<sup>17</sup> Still another study, involving entry-level accountants, found that those with the highest self-confidence were rated ten months later by their supervisors as having the best job performance. Their level of self-confidence was a stronger predictor of job performance than the actual level of skill or training they had received before being hired.<sup>18</sup> In applying these same concepts to teenagers, researchers found that in national field hockey championship competition in Turkey, those with the strongest self-confidence were the most highly motivated, as evidenced, for example, by their intensive practice routines.<sup>19</sup>

These studies document what experience underscores: having confidence and believing in your ability to handle the job, no matter how difficult, are essential to promoting and sustaining consistent effort. By communicating



to constituents that you also believe that they can be successful, you help them extend themselves and persevere through challenging circumstances.

## Coach

Although it's true that exemplary leaders communicate their confidence in others, you can't just tell people they can do something if they actually can't. Leaders need to provide coaching, because no one ever got to be the best without the constructive feedback, probing questions, and active teaching by respected coaches.<sup>20</sup> Among sales managers, for example, developing their staff is the competency most frequently found among those at the top of their field. In a three-year study of the impact of training, high-improvement learners were four times more likely to have had coaching conversations with their managers than individuals who showed little or no improvement.<sup>21</sup> In other words, improvement isn't merely about the training; it's the coaching associated with it. You have to make yourself available to offer advice and counsel as people apply what they have learned in real-time situations.

Mark Soden, the lead performance coach for the Harlequins, a Premiership Rugby Union team in the United Kingdom, and a senior facilitator with a management consultancy firm, Mission Performance, takes the viewpoint that “coaches have to empower each player's dream.” He views the coach's role—whether working with athletes or would-be leaders—as needing to move from pushing (the coach's agenda), which operates from a fixed mindset, to pulling (the player's agenda), which generates a growth mindset.<sup>22</sup> The Travelers Companies have found that their employees are eight times more engaged when their leaders are evaluated as effective coaches. These employees demonstrate improved capacity, efficiency, and commitment, and they feel most strongly supported by the company.<sup>23</sup>

Abhijit Chitnis, the manager for business excellence with India-based Tata Consultancy Services, experienced effective coaching and benefitted from the difference it made in his development. He was just starting out in the corporate world when he was facing his first “really tough” consulting assignment. The pressure only increased when he was chosen to make the solution proposal presentation to their client. Since this was his first client presentation in front of a sizable and senior audience, he was

understandably tense and anxious. Abhijit said that his manager, however, took him aside, told him that he was fully confident in his ability and the proposal, and coached Abhijit to take advantage of this opportunity. At delivery time, he told Abhijit during a short break that it was going great, not to worry, and the client loved the proposal. These actions, Adhijit said, boosted “my confidence, and I finished the presentation to great applause.” Reflecting on this experience, Abhijit appreciated how “leaders have to coach their teams and keep the motivation and energy flowing so that people can reach their full potential.”

When at their best, leaders never take control away from others. They leave it to their constituents to make decisions and assume responsibility for them. When leaders coach, educate, enhance self-determination, and otherwise share power, they're demonstrating deep trust in and respect for others' abilities. When leaders help others grow and develop, that assistance is reciprocated. People who feel capable of influencing their leaders are more strongly attached to those leaders and more committed to effectively carrying out their responsibilities. They own their jobs. Good coaches understand that strengthening others requires paying attention and believing that people are smart enough to figure things out for themselves when given the opportunity to make choices, provided with support, and offered feedback. Coaching stretches people to grow and develop their capabilities, and it provides them with opportunities to both hone and enhance their skills in challenging assignments.

Good coaches also ask good questions. This practice is summed up in the motto of Frances Hesselbein, former CEO of the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. and the founding president and CEO of the Francis Hesselbein Leadership Institute: “Ask, don't tell.” She learned this from renowned management guru Peter Drucker, who noted, “The leader of the future asks; the leader of the past tells.”<sup>24</sup> The benefits of asking questions are numerous. For one, it gives others the room to think and to frame issues from their perspective. Second, asking questions indicates an underlying trust in people's abilities by shifting accountability, and it has the benefit of creating almost immediate buy-in for the solution. (After all, it's their idea.) Asking questions also puts leaders in a coaching position, more of a guiding role, which frees them up to think more freely and strategically.

The success of every organization is a shared responsibility. As we said in Chapter Nine, you can't do it alone. You need a competent and confident team, and the team needs a competent and confident coach. While you're at it, think about getting a coach yourself. There's no better way to model the behavior you expect from others than by doing it yourself.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Strengthen Others***

Strengthening others is essentially the process of turning them into leaders—making people capable of acting on their own initiative. Create a virtuous cycle by extending more power and responsibility to others as they respond successfully. Leaders strengthen others when they make it possible to exercise choice and discretion, when they design options and alternatives to the ways that work and service are conducted, and when they foster accountability and responsibility that compel action.

Leaders develop in others the competence, as well as the confidence, to act and to excel. They make certain that constituents have the necessary data and information to understand how the organization operates, gets results, makes money, and does good work. They invest in people's continuing competence, and they coach them on how to put what they know into practice, stretching and supporting them to do more than they might have imagined possible. Exemplary leaders use questions to help people think on their own, and actively coach people on how to be at their best.

To Enable Others to Act, you must strengthen others by increasing their self-determination and developing competence. This means you must:

1. Take actions that make people feel powerful and in control of their circumstances.

2. Provide people opportunities to make choices about how they do their work and serve their customers.
3. Structure jobs so that people have opportunities to use their judgment, developing both greater competence and self-confidence.
4. Find a balance between people's skills and the challenges associated with their work.
5. Demonstrate your confidence in the capabilities of constituents and colleagues.
6. Ask questions; stop giving answers.

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# ENCOURAGE THE HEART



## **Practice 5** **Encourage the Heart**

- Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
- Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.



## Chapter 11

# Recognize Contributions

**Anita Lim**, manager of HR and Operations at Wavefront, says that she's experienced firsthand the impact of a positive leader on her productivity and satisfaction. She has also experienced how exhausting and miserable an environment can be under the guidance of a person who is not supportive of those she is managing. This breadth of experience has made her sensitive to the importance of recognizing and appreciating people so that everyone can get behind driving the organization to higher levels.

When she worked at an upscale fashion retailer, Anita told us, the store manager “ruled by instilling fear in her team members, threatening our jobs if we did not meet our quotas.”

Her moods changed daily and were especially worse when we had suboptimal performance the day before. She expected us to come to her office every morning when we arrived and to stop by again before leaving so that she could track the hours we worked each day. We were expected to answer specific questions on the spot, such as “How many of x item had we sold in the last week?” without being given the opportunity to pull up reports. When business was tough, she made it very clear how disappointed she was in us, and that we needed to step it up. When we achieved results, however, we received nothing more than an insincere smile and were told to make sure we did the same the next day.

One month Anita achieved a double-digit sales increase in her department, a rare event for the store. “I received no public recognition for this achievement,” she told us, “nor did my store manager ever congratulate me

directly.” Instead, the manager wrote a cursory thank-you letter and left it in Anita's mailbox. The next time Anita spoke to her, there was no mention of her accomplishment. “It was back to business as usual,” Anita said. “It cast a shadow on my achievement, and I did not feel particularly motivated to exceed performance expectations a second time. This manager's approach discouraged the entire team and resulted in an extremely high turnover rate.” In the end, Anita decided she could no longer take the manager's temperamental and distant behavior and left for another company.

Contrast this experience with Anita's next one working as the store manager for a national coffeehouse chain.

My district manager was a complete turnaround from my previous manager. She was warm, welcoming, and encouraging of all her team members. She believed that we all had the potential to do great things and so always expected the best of us. She made sure to make the time to sit with us and walk us through our business opportunities and weaknesses so that we could better tackle the problems at hand. She knew what it was like to be in our shoes and understood the challenges we faced on a daily basis.

Rather than berate her team when they had below average results, the district manager would offer methods she had used in the past to help overcome obstacles. She visited the store managers regularly in their respective stores and would spend the entire day with them, working alongside store staff in areas that needed additional help, getting “personally involved.” When a store had a week with great results, she would show up to congratulate the team in person. If she could not make the trip, she would call to tell the team how proud she was.

“At our quarterly managers' meeting,” Anita told us, “she would deliver awards to the store managers who had proven themselves to have gone above and beyond in their duties.”

She did not base these awards on sales quotas alone—rather, she found ways to reward people for stepping outside the box. For example, there were awards for most improved, most supportive, and even most courageous. When presenting these awards, she would accompany them with a personalized speech for the recipient and highlight all the achievements this individual had made in their time with the company. One time, her emotions got the best of her, and she became teary-eyed during the speech. Seeing this made me realize how much she cared about her team members. Rather than feel envy over my co-worker getting a reward when I did not, I instead felt joyful that I was a part of such a high caliber team.

Because the district manager created a spirit of community, Anita and her fellow store managers were highly motivated to do their best. As Anita summed up her experience: “Being under the leadership of an individual who found ways to connect personally with all her team members made me realize how much more you can accomplish as a team when you are surrounded by positivity and encouragement every step of the way.”

Like Anita's district manager, exemplary leaders know how important it is to connect with the people around them, not taking anyone for granted, and appreciating folks for both who they are and what they do. All exemplary leaders make the commitment to *Recognize Contributions*. They do it because people need encouragement to function at their best and continue to persist over time when the hours are long, the work is hard, and the task is daunting. Getting to the finish line of any demanding journey demands energy and commitment. People need emotional fuel to replenish their spirits.

To Recognize Contributions, you need to utilize these two essentials:

- ▶ ***Expect the best***
- ▶ ***Personalize recognition***

By putting these essentials into practice, you uplift people's spirits and arouse the internal drive to strive. You stimulate their efforts to reach for higher levels of performance and to aspire to be faithful to the visions and values of the organization. You help people find the courage to do things that they have never done before.

# Expect the Best

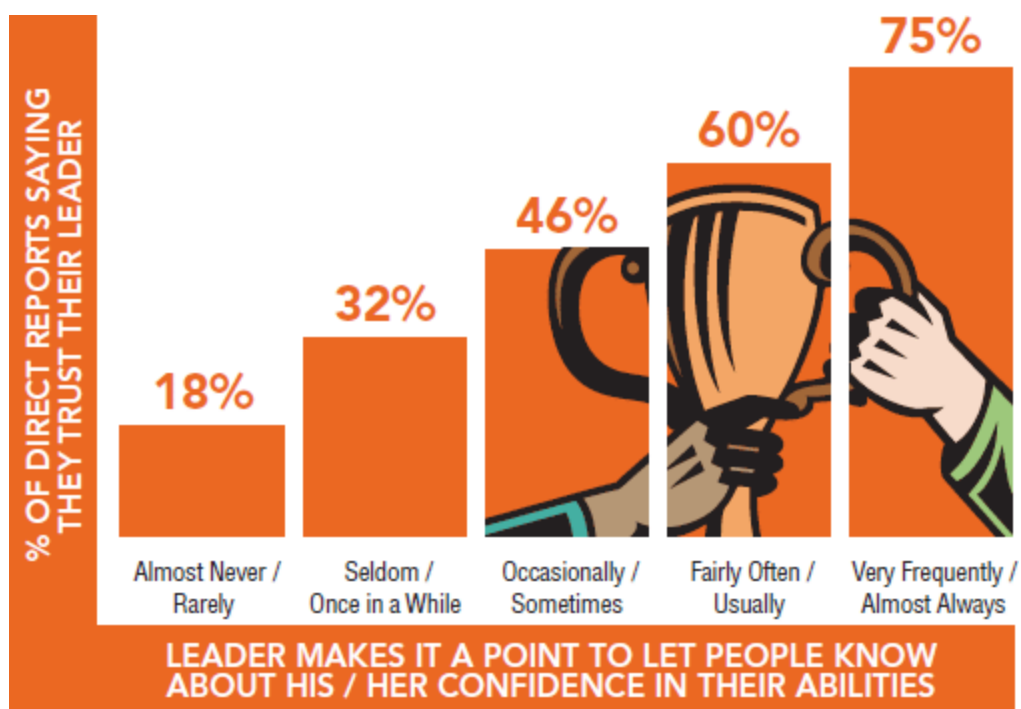
Belief in peoples' abilities is essential to making extraordinary things happen. Exemplary leaders elicit high performance because they firmly believe in the abilities of their constituents to achieve even the most challenging goals. That's because positive expectations profoundly influence not only your constituents' aspirations but also, often unconsciously, how you behave toward them. You broadcast your beliefs about people in ways you may not even be aware of. You give off cues that say to people either "I know you can do it" or "There's no way you'll ever be able to do that." You can't realize the highest level of performance unless you let people know in word and deed that you are confident that they can attain it.

Social psychologists refer to this as the "Pygmalion Effect," from the Greek myth about Pygmalion, a sculptor who carved a statue of a beautiful woman, fell in love with it, and appealed to the goddess Aphrodite to bring it to life. Aphrodite granted his prayers. Leaders play Pygmalion-like roles in developing their constituents. Ask people to describe the best leaders they've ever had, and they consistently talk about individuals who brought out the best in them. Research on self-fulfilling prophecies provides ample evidence that people act in ways that are consistent with others' expectations.<sup>1</sup> When you expect people to fail, they probably will. If you expect them to succeed, they probably will. As Sumaya Shakir, IT strategy director at Amtrak, explained in her Personal-Best Leadership Experience: "I trusted in the team's abilities. I knew they were capable of delivering, and I made them aware of that high level of expectations. My belief in them ultimately turned into their belief in themselves of being able to achieve extraordinary things."

Exemplary leaders bring others to life, figuratively speaking. They bring out the best in their constituents, and if the potential exists within someone, they always find a way to release it. These leaders dramatically improve others' performance because they care deeply for them and have an abiding faith in their capacities. They nurture, support, and encourage people in whom they believe. In a series of studies, psychologists showed that by starting with the statement "I'm giving you these comments because I have

very high expectations, and I know that you can reach them,” the feedback they provided proved to be 40 percent more effective in subsequently changing targeted behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

The levels of motivation, commitment, team spirit, and productivity reported by direct reports correlate significantly with the extent to which their leaders make it a point to let people know about how confident they are in their abilities. What comes around goes around, as shown in [Figure 11.1](#), because the degree to which direct reports trust their leader relates directly to how often they observe the individual sharing his or her confidence in people's abilities.



**Figure 11.1** How Expressing Confidence in Direct Reports' Abilities Increases Their Trust in The Leader

## Show Them You Believe

Leaders' positive expectations aren't fluff.<sup>3</sup> They're not just about keeping a positive outlook or getting others psyched up. The expectations you hold as a leader provide the framework into which people fit their realities. They shape the way you behave toward others and how they behave on the task. Maybe you can't turn a marble statue into a real person, but you can draw out the highest potential of your constituents.

When Barbara Wang joined one of the largest and fastest growing social sector organizations in China, the beliefs and actions of her leader helped her believe in herself. Within months of joining the firm, Barbara's manager assigned her the responsibility for the organization's business plan, and she told us: “This freaked me out because I was coming from an entirely different setting, having worked previously in IT as a programmer analyst.” When she told her manager that this responsibility made her nervous, he said that he had been watching the way she worked for the past few months and that if he had any doubts, he would not have assigned the project to her. “His belief in my skills and talent was what made me believe that I could handle the project on my own and made me psychologically stronger and motivated me to go ahead with a positive attitude. He brought out the best in me by expecting the best and showing me that belief. He believed that I was already a winner.”

The manager acted toward Barbara as if she were a winner. For example, whenever she had any slight problems or doubts, her manager was supportive and reassuring, answering her questions and identifying methods for improvement. “This made me feel respected,” she told us, and “encouraged me to do better rather than sulking about the fact that my work was not up to the standards he was expecting.”

Believing in others is an extraordinarily powerful force in propelling greater performance. If you want your constituents to have a winning attitude, you need to do what Barbara's leader did: show that you believe your constituents are already winners. It's not that they will be winners someday; they are winners right now! When you believe that people are winners, you behave in ways that communicate to them that they are precisely that—not just in your words but also through tone of voice, posture, gestures, and facial expressions. No yelling, frowning, cajoling, making fun, or putting them down in front of others. Instead, it's about being friendly, positive, supportive, and encouraging. Offer positive reinforcement, share lots of information, listen deeply to their input, provide resources sufficient to do their jobs, give them increasingly challenging assignments, and lend your support and assistance.

“I use three pennies to help me practice encouragement,” said Ravi Gandhi, chief financial officer, United Auto Credit Corporation.<sup>4</sup> When he gets into work, he sets three pennies on the left side of his computer, and during the



day, he says, “I look for opportunities to recognize, thank, and encourage good work that people are doing around me.” After encouraging someone, he moves a penny from the left side of the computer to the right side. When not at his desk, he puts the pennies in his left pocket and moves them to the right pocket as he encourages people during the day. This small reminder, explains Ravi, “keeps me mindful of the fact that we live in an encouragement-starved world—I am just trying to do my small part to fix that—at least with my work team.” If Ravi gets to the end of the day with pennies in his left pocket, he calls his kids and friends on the way home and offers them some encouragement!

Put yourself in this situation: If you knew someone was coming around to check up on you, how would you behave? Conventional wisdom holds that as soon as they spot the boss coming, people put on their best behavior. Wrong. They may put on different behavior, but it's not typically their best. In fact, it can be their worst because they get nervous and tense. Also, when you know that people are coming around to look for problems, you're more likely to hide them than to reveal them. People who work for highly controlling managers are more likely to keep information to themselves, conceal the truth, and be dishonest about what is going on. Counterintuitively, as we pointed out in Chapter Eight, organizations where lots of mistakes are reported may simply be because people feel safe to share problems and obstacles and get the assistance needed to solve them, and continuously move forward.

It's a virtuous circle: you believe in your constituents' abilities; your favorable expectations cause you to be more positive in your actions; and those encouraging behaviors produce better results, reinforcing your belief that people can do it. Another virtuous circle begins as people see that they are capable of extraordinary performance, they develop that expectation of themselves.

## **Be Clear About the Goals and the Rules**

Positive expectations are necessary to generate high performance, but that level of performance isn't sustainable unless people are clear about the ground rules and expected outcomes.<sup>5</sup> When you were a kid, you might have read Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Do you remember the croquet match? The flamingos were the mallets, the playing-

card soldiers were the wickets, and the hedgehogs were the balls. Everyone kept moving, and the rules kept changing all the time. There was no way of knowing how to play the game or what it took to win. You don't have to fall down the rabbit hole to know how Alice felt.

Adam Harmon, M.D., is a cardiac surgeon who shows that he expects the best from people by being clear about aims and expectations.<sup>6</sup> He takes the time to get to know his patients and their families personally, and he explains what they can expect in what is often a traumatic surgical experience. He does the same for his cardiac team. He expects the best out of them, and he demonstrates it by what one member described as “his habit of praising exceptional team members [that] creates an atmosphere where everyone improves their performance, seeking to be the next recipient of his gracious recognition.”

For any team members who do not perform to high standards, Adam clearly outlines what they need to do to improve. He takes this a step further, for example, by also saying to the team member he has just coached, “I know you can do it because you've done it before!” He reassures team members that they can do the job and connects their performance to the outcome for the patient, enabling team members to develop an emotional bond with their work. He consistently focuses attention on the major goal: “The better we do, the better the outcome for the patient,” he says to the team. “He shows us how to be the best we can be,” said one member, “and we love working under his leadership.”

Believing that people can succeed is only part of the equation. If you want people to give their all, to put their hearts and minds into their work, you must also make certain that people know what they are supposed to be doing. You need to clarify what the expected outcomes look like and make sure that there are some consistent norms governing how the game is played and points are scored.

Goals and values provide people with a set of standards that concentrates their efforts. Goals are typically short-term, while values (or principles) are more enduring. Values and principles serve as the basis for goals. They're your standards of excellence, your highest aspirations, and they define the arena in which you must set goals and metrics. Values mediate the path of action. Goals release the energy.

The ideal state—on the job, in sports, and in life generally—is often called “flow.” “Flow experiences,” as described in Chapter Ten, are those times when you feel pure enjoyment and effortlessness in what you do. To experience flow, you need to have clear goals. Goals help you concentrate and avoid distractions. Goals give your actions intention and meaning; they provide a purpose for doing what you do. Action without goals, at least in an organizational context, is just busywork. It's a waste of precious time and energy.

But what do goals have to do with recognition? What do they have to do with Encouraging the Heart? Goals give recognition context. They give people something to strive for, something important to attain—for example, coming in first, breaking a record, setting a new standard of excellence. Goals enhance the significance of recognition because the acknowledgment is for something a person accomplishes or exemplifies. While it's vital to affirm the worth of every one of your constituents, recognition is most meaningful when you reward appropriate behaviors and achievement of something everyone knows is highly desirable.

Goals focus people's attention on shared values and standards. They help people keep their eyes on the vision. They help keep people on track. Goals enable people to choose the kinds of actions they need to take, know when they are making progress, and see when they need to course correct. They help people put the phone in do-not-disturb mode, appropriately schedule their time, and focus their attention on what matters most.

Goal setting also affirms the person. Whether you realize it or not, goals contribute to what people think about themselves. As Claremont Graduate University professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi points out, “It is the goals that we pursue that will shape and determine the kind of self that we are to become. . . . Without a consistent set of goals, it is difficult to develop a coherent self.”<sup>7</sup>

## **Provide and Seek Feedback**

People need to know if they're making progress toward the goal or simply marking time. Their motivation to perform a task increases only when they have a challenging goal *and* receive feedback on their progress.<sup>8</sup> Goals without feedback, or feedback without goals, have little effect on people's

motivation and willingness to put discretionary effort into the task. A global study of over 1,000 organizations in more than 150 countries found that more than one-third of all employees had to wait more than three months to get feedback from their manager; nearly two-thirds wish they received more feedback from their colleagues.<sup>9</sup>

While a senior manager at W. L. Butler Construction, Eddie Tai was responsible for the recruiting, training, career development, promotion, and retention of project engineers and interns. Eddie points out that “giving regular feedback helps people self-correct and understand their respective role in the bigger picture. Setting goals without feedback on achievement and performance toward these goals is woefully incomplete.” And what do his constituents say about this? One told us, “Receiving feedback is the most important thing in my growth because without knowing where I am, how can I plan where I need to go?” She went on to say, “I also enjoy getting feedback when I make a mistake because I take note and try to improve for the next time. Without making mistakes, it is hard to learn, and without a colleague who can point out your mistakes, they can sometimes be overlooked and not corrected.”

Feedback is at the center of any learning process. For example, consider what happens to self-confidence without feedback. In one study, researchers told people that their efforts would be compared with how well hundreds of others had done on the same task. They subsequently received praise, criticism, or no feedback on their performance. Those who heard nothing about how well they did suffered as great a blow to their self-confidence as those criticized. Only those who received positive feedback improved their performance.<sup>10</sup> Saying nothing about a person's performance doesn't help anyone—not the performer, not the leader, not the organization. People hunger for feedback. They prefer to know how they are doing, and no news has the same negative impact as bad news. In fact, people actually would prefer to hear bad news rather than no news at all. As one of Eddie Tai's constituents said, “It sharpens people's skills when they get feedback. I believe the more you know about your performance, and how you are doing, the better. It lets me know what I need to work on.”

Learning doesn't happen without feedback—it's the only way for you to know whether you're getting close to your goal and whether you're executing properly. Feedback can be embarrassing, even painful. While

most people realize intellectually that feedback is a necessary component of self-reflection and growth, they are often reluctant to make themselves open to it. They want to look good more than they want to get good! Researchers consistently point out that the development of expertise or mastery requires receiving constructive, even critical, feedback.<sup>11</sup>

In this regard, Wharton Professor Adam Grant suggests “stop serving the feedback sandwich,” a traditional technique for giving feedback where you put a slice of praise on the top and bottom and stick the meat of any criticism in between. The data, he argues, shows that the “feedback sandwich doesn't taste as good as it looks,” and he offers several suggestions for making feedback more constructive. First, explain why you are giving the feedback. People are more open to criticism when they believe it's intended to help them and you show that you care personally. Second, because negative feedback can make people feel inferior, he recommends leveling the playing field by sharing how feedback has been helpful in your career. Third, ask if the person wants feedback because once they take ownership of this decision, they're less defensive about whatever you have to offer.<sup>12</sup> Framing feedback in this manner goes a long way toward transforming feedback into guidance, which is what most people hunger for.<sup>13</sup>

Feedback and guidance are vital to every self-correcting system, and essential to the growth and development of leaders. However, we've found in our research that seeking feedback is not that easy for leaders to do. On the *Leadership Practices Inventory*—our 360-degree leadership assessment tool—the statement on which leaders consistently report engaging in least frequently is “asks for feedback on how my actions affect other people's performance.” In other words, the behavior that leaders and their constituents consider being the most uncomfortable with is the behavior that most enables leaders to know how they're doing! How can you learn very much if you're unwilling to find out more about how your actions are affecting the behavior and performance of those around you? The short answer is “You can't.” It's your job as a leader to keep asking others, “How am I doing?” If you don't ask, they're not likely to tell you.

Openness to feedback, especially negative feedback, is characteristic of the best learners, and it's something all leaders, especially aspiring ones, need to cultivate. Remaining open to feedback, Hilary Hall, strategic marketing

and technology director at Cargill, told us was the key lesson from her Personal-Best Leadership Experience. “It can be somewhat of a painful and embarrassing experience,” she said, “to admit that there are parts of us that are unflattering, but it is a necessary component of self-reflection and growth.” She appreciated how “becoming a great leader takes practice and the willingness to view oneself with a critical eye.”

When leaders provide a clear sense of direction and feedback along the way, they encourage people to reach inside and do their best. Information about goals and progress toward those goals strongly influences people's abilities to learn and to achieve, and also applies to leaders themselves.<sup>[14](#)</sup> Encouragement is more personal and positive than other forms of feedback, and it's more likely to accomplish something that other forms cannot: strengthening trust between leaders and their constituents. Encouragement, in this sense, is the highest form of feedback.

# Personalize Recognition

One of the more common complaints about recognition is that it's far too often highly predictable, mundane, and impersonal. A one-size-fits-all approach to recognition feels insincere, forced, and thoughtless.

Bureaucratic and routine recognition, along with most incentive systems, doesn't make anyone very excited. Over time, they can even increase cynicism and damage credibility. Moreover, generalized statements of encouragement fail to generate a significant effect because no one is very certain about either to whom the comments are directed or for what particular actions.

Nathalie McNeil, HR director in Australia for Novartis, contends that personalizing recognition is precisely what makes it genuine. That genuineness comes from actually knowing people on a personal level and sincerely caring about them. “If you can't recognize something specific,” she says, “you're not paying attention. And good leaders pay attention. They know their people. When you truly know someone, not only do you recognize them for things they've done, but you also do it in a way that they personally value, because it's relevant to what they care about.” At Yum! Brands, the world's largest restaurant company by units, they require that every recognition award has to be personal—it must carry a handwritten message.<sup>15</sup>

To be able to deliver the appropriate type of recognition, leaders need to learn about the motivations of each constituent. Luis Zavaleta, a corporate banker manager with Wells Fargo, recalls one manager he worked for who was simply not interested in getting to know the people on his team. As a result, Luis explained, that manager relied solely upon financial means for encouragement, which had the opposite effect from what he doubtlessly intended.



Most members of the team viewed the financial reward that we received from our manager with indifference. We would get anonymous bonuses attached to our paychecks without any warning or knowledge of where it came from, or what was the reason behind the reward. The lack of immediate acknowledgment for our work left people unhappy with management. The lack of feedback left most members unable to determine if they were doing a good job, which further decreased morale and productivity.

Because the manager was not interested in learning about the goals or needs of his constituents, Luis told us, “This lack of care led to a decrease in satisfaction and retention levels.”

When people tell us about their “most meaningful recognition,” they consistently report that it's *personal*. They say that it feels special. You get a lot more emotional bang for your buck when you make recognition and rewards personal. That's why it's so important for leaders to pay attention to the likes and dislikes of each individual. Alexey Astafev, deputy head of the International Cooperation Department at Russian Railways, observed, “To encourage people to do their best, you should be able to recognize their achievements and make them feel trusted and valued. It has to be personal, precise, and visible. Even if it is a great reward, if you don't give it out right—or get it right—it will be forgotten soon without achieving the purpose of bringing out the best in people.” Doug Conant, while working to dramatically improve the performance of the Campbell Soup Company, spent up to an hour each day scanning his emails and the company intranet for news of employees who were “making a difference.” He estimates that he wrote at least ten notes each day, over 30,000 notes to employees at all levels, during his ten-year tenure as CEO. He says, “I made sure the notes went a step beyond gratuitous greetings and were focused on celebrating contributions from them.”<sup>16</sup>

## **Get to Know Constituents**

As one of the coaches for the girl's developmental team associated with Major League Soccer club San Jose Earthquakes, Stephanie Sorg recognized that many of her actions were “unintentionally bland and repetitive, and as a result, my players failed to feel appreciated or fully motivated.” She told us, “I needed to make it a priority to stoke the



individual fires in each person in order to foster a healthy atmosphere that encouraged improvement.”

Stephanie started paying more attention to the needs of the players and less time on the game fundamentals, dedicating more time toward recognizing their efforts and meeting with each individual to express her satisfaction with their efforts. She had to get closer to the players so that she could comment on specific things they were doing, as well as genuinely express her commitment to and interest in them. For example, Stephanie made a special effort to pull aside one of the players after a drill and comment on her exemplary efforts.

I noted how it was obvious that she dedicated herself to fully embracing the practice drill and pointed out the tactical decisions she made that helped her succeed in completing the task to the best of her ability. In addition to meeting with this player, I would also make an effort to stop drills when the group made an excellent play and pointed out the specific teammates that made it successful. After a few practice sessions and games, I began to notice a difference in the way some of the players regarded and interacted with me. When I gave feedback, I saw the girls give their full attention to me and even provided visual feedback that they understood and appreciated the points I made.

As Stephanie's story illustrates, to make recognition personally meaningful, you first have to get to know your constituents. If you're going to personalize recognition and make it feel genuinely special, you'll have to look past the organizational diagrams and roles people play and see the person inside. You need to get to know who your constituents are, how they feel, and what they think. You need to repeatedly walk the halls and plant floors, regularly meet with small groups, and frequently hit the road for visits with associates, key suppliers, and customers. Paying attention, personalizing recognition, and creatively and actively appreciating others increases their trust in you. This kind of relationship is even more critical as workforces are becoming increasingly global and diverse. If others know that you genuinely care about them, they're more likely to care about you. Showing that you care is one important way you bridge cultural divides.

Because proximity is the single best predictor of whether two people will talk to one another, you have to get close to people if you're going to find

out what motivates them, what they like and don't like, and what kinds of recognition they most appreciate. Yet, managerial myth says that leaders shouldn't get too close to their constituents, that they can't be friends with people at work.<sup>17</sup> Let's set this myth aside.

Over a five-year period, researchers observed groups of friends and groups of acquaintances (people who knew each other only vaguely) performing motor-skill and decision-making tasks. The results were unequivocal. The groups composed of friends completed, on average, more than three times as many projects as the groups made up of acquaintances. Regarding decision-making assignments, groups of friends were 20 percent more effective than groups of acquaintances.<sup>18</sup> There is an important caveat, however. Friends have to be strongly committed to the group's goals. If not, then friends may not do better. This is precisely why we said earlier that it is necessary for leaders to be clear about standards and to create a condition of shared goals and values. When it comes to performance, commitment to standards and good relations between people go together. Furthermore, employees who report having a friendly relationship with their manager are two-and-a-half times more satisfied with their job.<sup>19</sup> People are just more willing to follow someone that they feel knows who they are and what they need. Feeling a connection with others motivates people to work harder for the simple reason that people don't like to disappoint or let down individuals they consider friends. People also stick around longer at their companies when they feel they have friends at their workplace.

## **Be Creative About Incentives**

You can't be a broken record when it comes to recognizing and appreciating others, praising people the same way again and again. Making sure to acknowledge people creatively for their contributions is critical to both the effectiveness assessments of leaders and to how their people feel about the workplace. For example, less than 8 percent of direct reports strongly agree that their leaders are effective when they *almost never* make sure that people are creatively recognized. Contrast that percentage with over 82 percent who rate their leader as effective when they observe that individual engaging *almost always* in this leadership behavior. Levels of commitment and motivation are over two times higher between direct reports at the two ends of the continuum on this leadership behavior.

Donna Wilson showed creativity in her efforts to personalize recognition. As the VP and general manager of station KJRH, the NBC affiliate in Tulsa, Oklahoma, she figured that if she took \$300 of her own money and spent it on recognition efforts, it probably would not touch that many people. Instead, she split that money among fifteen people and asked *them* to spend it over the course of a month to encourage the hearts of others.<sup>20</sup>

Donna believed this would be great fun—and it sure was. Some gave gas cards to photographers (to ease the burden of rising prices at the pump), or bought iTunes cards for IT folks (so that the song fit the person rather than being something generic), or took someone out to lunch. Some gave unusual mementos to people outside their department. One example was the “Big Fish” award—a giant plastic fish hung over the cubicle of the “star performer” in sales each month. It was creative, fun, and a way for recognition to go on and on long after the month had passed.

As Donna's experience underscores, leaders don't need to rely exclusively on the organization's formal reward system, which offers only a limited range of options. After all, promotions and raises are scarce resources. Don't make the mistake of assuming that individuals respond only to money. Although salary increases and bonuses are certainly valued, individual needs for appreciation and rewards extend beyond cash. Spontaneous, unexpected rewards are often more meaningful than predictable, formal ones.

Rewards are the most effective when they're highly specific and given soon after the appropriate behavior. One of the most significant consequences of being out and about as a leader is that you can personally observe people doing things right and then reward them either on the spot or at the next public gathering. “The form of recognition that has the most positive influence, and that should be used most often, is on-the-spot recognition,” says Sonia Clark, chief human resource officer with Oportun. “When something really terrific happens, I comment on it right away and to anyone who might be close enough to hear.”

Biswajit Sahoo, manager of analytics with Walmart Global eCommerce, admits that he was initially reserved about praising a team member, assuming it might make them complacent. He said that he often waited until the completion of a task before he provided any positive feedback. Having

reflected on the impact of receiving positive encouragement himself, Biswajit now maintains that he passes along “feedback about a job well done instantly. I realize that even a small measure of positive appreciation given right away has much more meaning than giving that feedback at a later point of time. In the weekly status meetings within our team, I take the opportunity to recognize the good work done by any team member. This also encourages other team members to recognize each other's work openly.” In many organizations, the time lag between performance and recognition is typically too long to be meaningful. It's tough to remember much about what you did when the feedback follows many months later.

While it is true that money may get people to do a job, it doesn't get them to do particularly outstanding work.<sup>21</sup> Your options are also quite limited if you rely exclusively on the organization's formal reward system. The truth is that people respond to all kinds of informal recognition and rewards, which is the beauty of being creative and personalizing them. We've seen people give out stuffed giraffes, rainbow-striped zebra posters, mugs with team photos, crystal apples, classic car rides, and hundreds of other imaginative expressions of appreciation. We've seen recognition done verbally and nonverbally, elaborately and modestly. There are no limits to kindness and consideration.<sup>22</sup>

It's important to understand that genuine recognition does not have to include anything tangible. Exemplary leaders make extensive use of intrinsic rewards—rewards built into the work itself, including such factors as a sense of accomplishment, a chance to be creative, and the challenge of the work—all directly tied to an individual's effort. These rewards are far more important than salary and fringe benefits in improving job satisfaction, commitment, retention, and performance.<sup>23</sup>

It's all about being considerate. The techniques that you use are less important than your genuine expression of caring. People appreciate knowing that you have their best interests at heart, and they are more caring about what they are doing as a result. When you genuinely care, even the smallest of gestures reap huge rewards.

## **Just Say “Thank You”**

Not enough people make sufficient use of the most powerful but inexpensive two-word reward: “thank you.” That is, in fact, precisely what they found at Sullivan and Cromwell, one of the oldest and most respected law firms in the United States. For years, they noticed that they were routinely losing high-value first-year associates recruited from the top law schools, so they conducted a survey to find out why. What they found was a shock: it wasn't because of the money, the hours, or the work. It was because the young lawyers didn't feel appreciated by the partners. Consequently, the firm instituted a very simple policy: Every partner was required to say, “Please” and “Thank you” whenever he or she made a request. In one year, attrition was reversed, and Sullivan and Cromwell was voted the best law firm to work for by *American Lawyer* magazine.<sup>24</sup> Surveys reveal that the clear majority of people (81 percent) indicate that they'd be more willing to work harder if they had an appreciative manager, and 70 percent report they would feel better about themselves and their efforts if their manager thanked them more regularly.<sup>25</sup>

At TFE Hotels, a leading accommodation provider across Australia, New Zealand, and Europe, CEO Rachel Argaman is quite adamant in saying that “people want to be part of an encouraging workplace, where what they do makes a difference and is recognized.”<sup>26</sup> Leaders, she believes, must make sure that people see the difference they make, and one way, she says, is just to tell them: “Thanking people lets them know what leaders feel are the core triggers that drive performance.” For example, Rachel writes a personal note on each person's annual bonus letter, a task that takes her over four full days. For each employee, she references a particular event, action, or behavior through which they made a difference, and then writes, “I'm saying thank you.” In describing what kept her going through a particularly difficult situation, one TFE associate said it was “the little handwritten personal notes” she received from Rachel that helped her carry on. “Those handwritten notes are what kept me here.”

There are few basic needs more important than to be noticed, recognized, and appreciated for one's efforts. Personal congratulations rank at the top of the most powerful nonfinancial motivators identified by employees.<sup>27</sup> Extraordinary achievements bloom more readily in climates marked with a high volume of appreciative comments. Research shows that performance recognition significantly impacts employee engagement at a rate of more

than two to one. The same research finds that employees who receive strong recognition are more innovative, generating two times the number of ideas per month compared to those who receive weak recognition.<sup>28</sup>

In our studies, those direct reports who rated their leaders above average on the leadership behavior “praises people for a job well done” were significantly prouder, more motivated, and more committed to the organization's success than the direct reports whose leaders are rated below average on this behavior. Researchers have found that members of top-performing teams provide at least three, and as many as six, times the number of positive comments for every negative one they make. Medium-performing teams average about twice as many positive comments to negatives ones, but the average for the low-performing teams is almost three *negative* comments for every positive one.<sup>29</sup>

It is always worth the time to recognize someone's hard work and contributions. All too often, people forget to extend a hand, a smile, or a simple “thank you.” People naturally feel a little frustrated and unappreciated when their manager or a colleague takes them for granted. Sometimes they overlook this because people are under the pressure of deadlines, and the mandate to deliver on time overtakes expressing gratitude. However, it's critical that you stick around for that extra minute to say thanks. Olivia Lai recalled that when managing the customer service team at Kimberly-Clark, it genuinely mattered to her constituents that she said “Thank you” and “I really appreciate your help.” “You should see the smile that it generates,” she says. “It gives them a warm feeling knowing that their work was welcomed and recognized by others.” Olivia understands that for leaders, it's not just about achieving financial results and delivering on annual objectives. It's also about creating a winning team through trust and a personal connection. It includes extending a simple pat on the back, a handshake, a smile, and a “Thank you for your hard work.”

Expressing your thanks also has another, more personal benefit. Robert Emmons, professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, finds that people who practice gratitude, compared to those who do not, are healthier, more optimistic, more positive, and better able to cope with stress. They are also more alert, more energized, more resilient, more willing to offer support to others, more generous, and more likely to make progress toward important goals.<sup>30</sup> From a similar perspective, David Novak, as co-

founder and former chief executive officer of Yum! Brands, observed that the path to success wasn't about tasty food, excellent service, innovative menus, and value; it was in the power of recognition. “The important thing to understand about recognition,” he maintains, “is that it's simply good for people—*all people*—no matter who they are, what they do, or where they come from.”<sup>[31](#)</sup>

The wonderful thing about expressing gratitude and providing recognition is that they aren't hard to do, and you don't need to be in a hierarchical perch to dispense them. They cost you next to nothing, and yet pay daily dividends. You can't ask for a better investment than that.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Recognize Contributions***

Exemplary leaders have positive expectations of themselves and their constituents. They expect the best of people and create self-fulfilling prophecies about how ordinary people can produce extraordinary actions and results. Exemplary leaders' goals and standards are unambiguous, helping people focus on what needs doing. They provide clear feedback and reinforcement. By maintaining a positive outlook and providing motivating feedback, they stimulate, rekindle, and focus people's energies and drive.

Exemplary leaders recognize and reward what individuals do to contribute to the vision and values. They express their appreciation far beyond the limits of the organization's formal systems. They enjoy being spontaneous and creative in saying thank you. Personalizing recognition requires knowing what's appropriate individually and culturally. Although recognizing someone's efforts may be uncomfortable or embarrassing at first, it begins by making a personal connection with each person. Learn from many small and often casual acts of appreciation what works for each of your constituents and how best to personalize recognition.

To Encourage the Heart, you must *recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence*. This means you must:

1. Maintain high expectations about what individuals and teams can accomplish.



2. Communicate your positive expectations clearly and regularly.
3. Create an environment that makes it comfortable to receive and give feedback.
4. Find out the types of encouragement that make the most difference. Don't assume you know. Ask. Take the time to inquire and observe.
5. Be creative when it comes to recognition. Be spontaneous. Have fun.
6. Make saying “thank you” a natural part of your everyday behavior.

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## Chapter 12

# Celebrate the Values and Victories

**“Life is too short to be miserable,”** says Charles Ambelang. “You want to have a work experience that allows you to engage with others, share a laugh, see the humor in a situation, and thank people for doing a good job.”<sup>1</sup> Officially, Charlie is the assistant vice president for human resources, Santa Clara University. Unofficially, he is HR's CEO—chief encouragement officer.

When Charlie took the helm of the HR work group, it was demoralized and fearful. The team was used to an environment where there was little recognition of success coupled with severe consequences for failure. As one of his constituents told us, “The HR team needed someone to appreciate our individual and collective efforts. Charlie focused on encouraging everyone to be a contributing member of the team and to work toward a collective commitment to deeply held values and service to the campus community.”

Charlie regularly encourages members of the department by letting them know that he believes in them and has confidence that they will be successful. Charlie also does crazy, spur-of-the-moment things to celebrate the team's accomplishments, like going to the local grocery store and buying boxes of popsicles and ice cream bars. He'll return to the office with his booty of icy goodness, empty the mail cart, load it up with treats, and then play ice cream truck music on his smartphone while cruising through the office giving everyone their pick of a cool delight.

Charlie sets up celebratory outings for the team, such as an “HR at the movies” night. When a recent blockbuster movie was released, he bought enough tickets so each HR staff member could ask a family member or

friend to join them for the film and then dinner afterward to discuss what they saw and how it translated back to their work. He organizes an annual Friday-night trip to the local minor-league baseball game for HR staff and their families. “It’s a fun and relaxing way to end the week and spend time getting to know more about our fellow team members as well as their families,” another of his constituents told us. Then there are the personal touches Charlie puts on the way he expresses gratitude for the team’s work. For example, on a recent “Employee Appreciation Day” Charlie hand wrote over thirty thank-you notes to the staff and student employees and gave out small, personalized toys that he had selected as a reminder of how highly he regarded each individual.

Charlie took HR from a work group that was scared to say or do anything outside of normal channels to a team that works well together and supports one another. As individuals and work teams, everyone is empowered and encouraged to innovate and offer up ideas, and then to take the time to celebrate individual and team accomplishments. There is more team cohesion and cooperation than ever existed before. Here’s how one constituent summed up Charlie’s approach:

As the Chief Encouragement Officer of HR, Charlie has shown us that we all contribute to the success of the entire team, and he regularly and repeatedly comes up with enjoyable and unique ways to keep us fully engaged and doing great work. He has a talent for making work rewarding and fun!

The actions of Charlie Ambelang and the experience of the HR department confirm our research. Performance improves when leaders publicly honor those who have excelled and been an example to others when they demonstrate that “we are all in this together,” and when they make the work environment a place where people want to both be and stay. That is why exemplary leaders make a commitment to *Celebrate the Values and Victories* by mastering these essentials:

- ▶ ***Create a spirit of community***
- ▶ ***Be personally involved***

When leaders bring people together, rejoice in collective successes, and directly display their gratitude, they reinforce the essence of community.



Being personally involved makes it clear that everyone is committed to making extraordinary things happen.

## Create a Spirit of Community

Too many organizations operate as if social gatherings were a nuisance. They aren't. Human beings are social animals—hardwired to connect with others.<sup>2</sup> People are meant to do things together, to form communities, and in this way demonstrate a common bond.

When social connections are strong and numerous, there's more trust, reciprocity, information flow, collective action, and happiness—and, by the way, greater wealth.<sup>3</sup> Some of the fastest-growing and most successful businesses these days are evidence of the need for social connection. Facebook, WhatsApp, QQ, WeChat, QZone, Instagram, Twitter, and Skype are only a few of the social networking sites with over one hundred million users.<sup>4</sup> Researchers have found that “social networking site users have more friends and more close friends” than nonusers.<sup>5</sup> Social capital is as significant a source of success and happiness as are physical and intellectual capital.

Corporate celebrations are among the best ways to capitalize on the need to connect, to socialize, and to create a feeling of community. Research on corporate celebrations has found that they “infuse life with passion and purpose. . . . They bond people together and connect us to shared values and myths. Ceremonies and rituals create community, fusing individual souls with the corporate spirit. When everything is going well, these occasions allow us to revel in our glory. When times are tough, ceremonies draw us together, kindling hope and faith that better times lie ahead.”<sup>6</sup> The gap in levels of pride, motivation, and commitment among employees we found is wide—almost 25 percent—between those people who report their managers *always* find ways to celebrate accomplishments and those whose managers *seldom* do so. With celebrations, leaders create a sense of team spirit, both building and maintaining the social support necessary to thrive, especially in stressful and uncertain times.

Sometimes celebrations can be elaborate, but more often, they are about connecting everyday actions and events to the values of the organization and the accomplishments of the team. Exemplary leaders seldom let an opportunity pass to make sure that constituents know why they're there and

how they should act in service of that purpose. For example, Kurt Richarz, executive vice president of sales at Seagate Technology, uses regular monthly conference calls with the entire sales organization to shine the spotlight on people who have been given “Standing Ovations.”<sup>7</sup> This program is very simple: peers nominate colleagues by filling out a brief form highlighting their contributions or an achievement. Monthly sales calls feature the recipient's photo and a summary of accomplishments, and Kurt reserves time to highlight and congratulate the “heroic efforts” of people in supporting the sales organization. Afterward, Kurt goes back to thank the nominators, because, after all, he says, these folks are all very busy, and he appreciates them taking the time to do this. This public, enthusiastic, and heartfelt recognition goes a long way in making both the recipients and bystanders feel that they are valued and building a positive, empowering community. Actions like these are especially important these days when seven in ten Americans wish they received more recognition, while 83 percent readily admit they could do more to recognize others.<sup>8</sup>

Whether they're to honor an individual, group, or organizational achievement or to encourage team learning and relationship building, celebrations, ceremonies, and similar events offer leaders the perfect opportunity to explicitly communicate and reinforce the actions and behaviors that are important in realizing shared values and common goals. Exemplary leaders know that promoting a culture of celebration fuels the sense of unity essential for retaining and motivating today's workforce. Besides, who wants to work in a boring place that neither remembers nor celebrates anything? David Campbell, a former senior fellow at the Center for Creative Leadership, said it well:

A leader who ignores or impedes organizational ceremonies and considers them as frivolous or “not cost-effective,” is ignoring the rhythms of history and our collective conditioning. [Celebrations] are the punctuation marks that make sense of the passage of time; without them, there are no beginnings and endings. Life becomes an endless series of Wednesdays.<sup>9</sup>

## **Celebrate Accomplishments in Public**

As noted in Chapter Eleven, individual recognition increases the recipient's sense of worth and improves performance. Public celebrations have this effect as well, and they add other lasting benefits for individuals and organizations that private individual recognition can't accomplish.

For one thing, public events are an opportunity to highlight actual examples of what it means to demonstrate that we “do what we say we will do.” When the spotlight shines on certain people, and others tell stories about what they did, they become role models. They visibly represent how the organization would like everyone to behave, and concretely demonstrate that it is possible to do so. Public celebrations of accomplishment also build commitment, both among the individuals recognized as well as among those in the audience. When you communicate to individuals, “Keep up the good work; it's appreciated,” you are also saying to the larger group, “Here are people just like you who are examples of what we stand for and believe in. You can do this. You too can make a significant contribution to our success.”

The data shows that the extent to which leaders publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values correlates significantly with the degree to which they feel their organization values their work and that they are making a difference. Raymond Yu's experience underscores this finding. Ray is a manager in the new product introduction engineering team at Intuitive Surgical, and his division is responsible for surgical stapler instruments. He thought it would be fitting, creative, and fun to present a red paper stapler as an award. He took the initiative to order both a red stapler and a display case. At a weekly team staff meeting, Ray announced the Red Stapler Award and spoke about what it meant: “I explained that this was a means to foster expression and communication of values; to recognize peers who have demonstrated values that we admire.”

Both his manager and the team loved the concept so much that they suggested that he open up the award to other departments within the stapler business unit. At the monthly stapler manufacturing review meeting, a large public forum, Ray again explained the Red Stapler Award:

The Red Stapler Award is a mechanism to appreciate and recognize peers, to encourage behaviors that model shared values, and to foster communication. To the grantor, it is a statement of “These are my values, and this is how I see your values.” It shows public support for the contributions being made. A month after receiving the Red Stapler award the recipient will then pay it forward and recognize someone else.

This is not management dictating what your values should be from some DOP [department operating procedure]. This is for you and by you. Make it about what you want, what you value, and why you are here.

And so for this month, I want to give the Red Stapler to Sunny Ranu for taking the initiative in the data analysis tools effort using modern search tools even though the internal group is heading in another direction. It shows ownership and courage to do what is best for the company, not to be a bystander; and to do what is right and not simply accept what others have decided.

Sunny then came up to the stage to receive the award. He not only showed the data analysis tool he had created, but he also thanked many other people in the organization who had helped him on this skunk works project. The audience, Ray said, “was blown away by what transpired.”

The Red Stapler was a creative award that circumvented the limitations of the existing corporate recognition schemes. It meant more to the team members, according to Ray, than any of the company's monetary awards: “After I had awarded the Red Stapler, Sunny told the assembled group that receiving it meant more to him because it was from a peer and not from management through a vetted approval process. It was real, sincere, and from the heart.”

Public ceremonies, like the one Ray described, serve as a collective reminder of why people remain with an organization, and of the values and visions they share. By making celebrations a public part of organizational life, leaders create a sense of community. The process of building community helps ensure that people feel that they belong to something greater than just themselves and that they are working together on a

common cause. Celebrations serve to strengthen the bond of teamwork and trust.

Some people are reluctant to recognize others in public, fearing that it might cause jealousy or resentment. Forget these fears. All winning teams have MVPs (Most Valuable Players), usually selected by their teammates. Public celebrations are meaningful opportunities to reinforce shared values and to recognize individuals for their contributions. They give you a chance both to say thanks to specific individuals for their outstanding performance and to remind everyone of exactly what it is that the organization stands for, and the significance of the work or service they provide.

Private rewards may work fine to motivate individuals, but they have little impact on the team. Researchers have shown that people tend to pick up on the mood and attitudes of those around them, called “emotional contagion,” and often in ways they don't consciously realize.<sup>10</sup> Circuits in the brain are activated when people see others act in a certain way; it's as if they had taken action themselves. Watching someone else can impact the brain in ways that mirror experiencing it directly.<sup>11</sup>

To generate community-wide energy and commitment for the common cause, you need to celebrate successes in public. Ceremonies and celebrations are opportunities to build healthier groups, to enable members of the organization to know and care about each other. Also, as Brian Dalton, finance manager with Rocket Fuel, observed, “it sets up an expectation that everything else that is done will be at that level or above.” Which is why he realized that in “publicly acknowledging someone for doing a good job, you help to set a standard of what is judged to be good work. You want the recipient of the praise to feel valued and recognized for their contributions, but you also want to publicly celebrate those values and victories so that others can see and replicate them.”

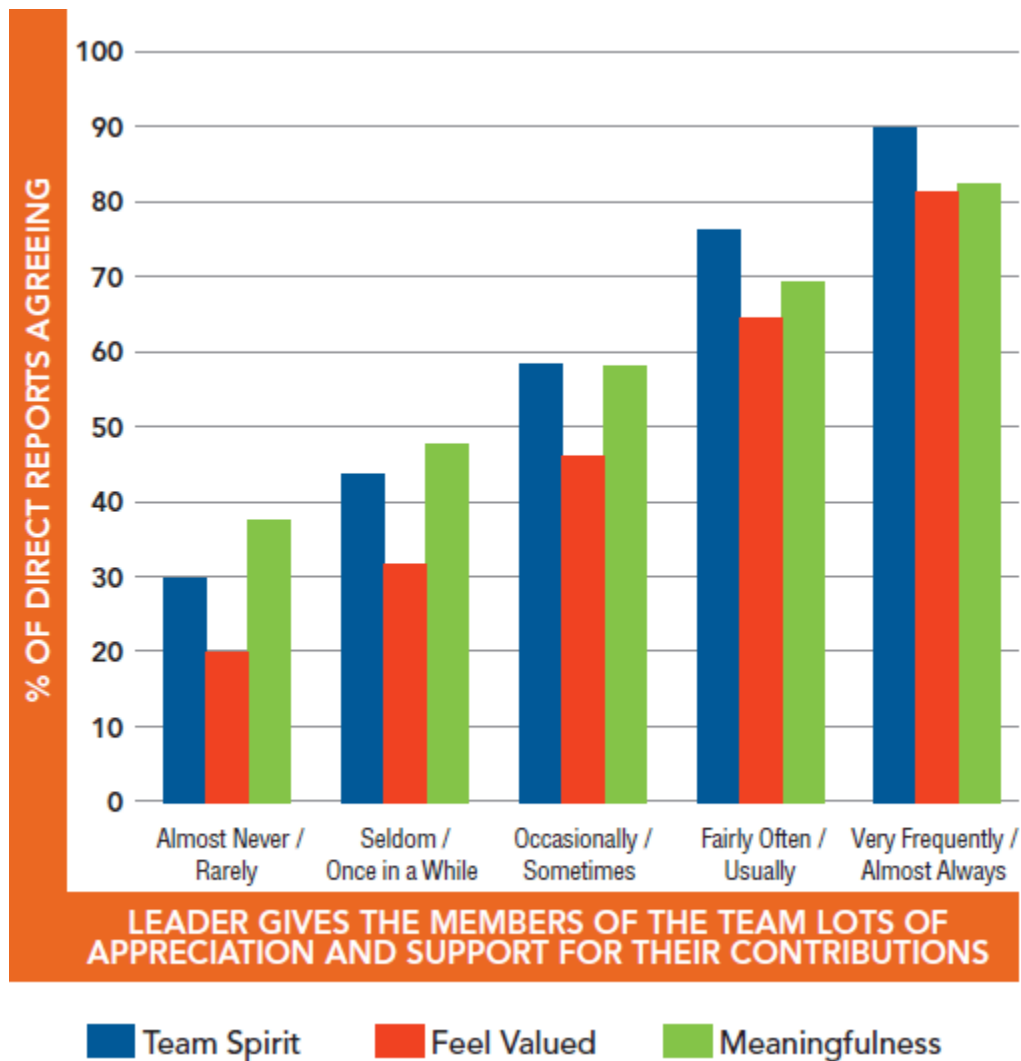
## **Provide Social Support**

Supportive relationships at work—relationships characterized by a genuine belief in and advocacy for the interests of others—are essential in maintaining personal and organizational vitality.<sup>12</sup> People who don't like the folks they're working with don't do their best work or stick around very long. Consider what studies have found about the differences between the

task performances of groups of friends versus acquaintances. In groups composed of acquaintances, individuals prefer to work alone, and speak with others in the group only when necessary. Consequently, they are reluctant to seek help or point out mistakes being made by others. Groups made up of friends, on the other hand, talk with one another right from the project's get-go. They evaluate ideas more critically, give timely feedback when others are veering off course, and offer teammates positive encouragement every step of the way.<sup>13</sup> Feeling a sense of connection with co-workers fosters greater accountability, engagement, and commitment to the organization.

Employees with a best friend at work are seven times more likely to engage fully in their work than those reporting no such friendships.<sup>14</sup> Longitudinal studies, in the United States and Europe, also reveal that people who make use of social support have higher incomes compared to those people who don't tap into the power of a social network. This was true both two and nine years after the study's baseline period.<sup>15</sup> Lacking social support, individuals regularly ignored cooperative opportunities, distrusting other people and their motives. Studies involving more than three million people around the world show that social isolation is worse for people's health than obesity, smoking, or alcoholism.<sup>16</sup>

Our data shows that people feel connected and experience a strong sense of team spirit when their leaders provide lots of appreciation and support for their contributions. In turn, those same people report feeling highly valued, and firmly believe their work is meaningful and making a difference. These sentiments translate into people who are willing to go the extra step to meet organizational challenges and demands. Engaging in this leadership behavior also generates favorable evaluations of the leader from their direct reports. [Figure 12.1](#) shows these relationships graphically.



**Figure 12.1** How Appreciation and Support Affects Team Spirit, Feeling Valued, and Experience of Meaningful Work

These findings are aptly illustrated by what Ferhat Zor told us about his experience working on a performance management project with Borusan Logistics in Turkey. The Tuzla warehouse manager reviewed the performance of the various operational units at his monthly meetings and made the point that they needed to support and help one another. These meetings always ended with celebrating any accomplishments as an entire group. After successfully completing one very challenging project, the company congratulated each employee by hosting a “spontaneous” surprise party, where, Ferhat observed, “happiness and pride were evident.” Lots of photographs were taken, which were later shared on the Web and in the company's newsletter, “in order,” said Ferhat, “to show that each person



makes an important contribution and each doing their best makes the company a success.”

Research across a broad variety of disciplines consistently demonstrates that this kind of social support enhances productivity, psychological well-being, and even physical health.<sup>17</sup> Social support not only improves wellness but also buffers against disease, particularly during times of high stress. This finding is true irrespective of an individual's age, gender, or ethnic group. For example, even after adjusting for such factors as smoking and histories of major illness, people with few close contacts were two to three times more likely to die at a younger age than those who had friends to turn to regularly.<sup>18</sup>

Social support is also vital to outstanding performance. Consider what researchers found when analyzing the speeches made by baseball players when inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame. As elite athletes, they had achieved the highest recognition in a field demanding top physical skills. Yet for almost two-thirds of them, their words of appreciation were not so much about technical or practical assistance as they were about emotional support and friendship.<sup>19</sup>

What's true at home, in the community, and on the playing field is just as true at work. Researchers have found that people who indicate having a best friend in the workplace, compared to those who do not, “are significantly more likely to engage customers, get more done in less time, have more fun on the job, have a safe workplace with fewer accidents, innovate and share ideas, feel informed and know that their opinion counts.”<sup>20</sup> Friends are not only good for your health but also good for business. And there are plenty of prospects for strengthening these relationships, because less than one in five people indicate that they work for organizations that provide opportunities to develop friendships in their workplace.<sup>21</sup>

Our files are full of personal-best leadership cases in which strong human connections produced spectacular results. When people feel a strong sense of affiliation and attachment to their colleagues, they're much more likely to have a higher sense of personal well-being, to feel more committed to the organization, and to perform at higher levels. When people feel distant and detached, they're unlikely to accomplish much of anything.<sup>22</sup> When people

are personally involved with the task and feel connected with their colleagues, they can achieve extraordinary feats.

Leaders understand that celebrations provide concrete evidence that individuals aren't alone in their efforts, that other people care about them, and that they can count on others. Celebrations reinforce the fact that people need each other and that it takes a group of individuals with a common purpose working together in an atmosphere of trust and collaboration to get extraordinary things done. By making achievements public, leaders build a culture in which people know that their actions and decisions are not being taken for granted. They see that their contributions are recognized, appreciated, and valued. “Public celebrations in my experience,” Andrea Berardo, former technical project manager at Alstom (Switzerland), explained, “are crucial to the self-esteem of the employees, and they are essential in building that sense of community that allows people to see themselves as part of one team.” In addition, he points out, “Public events are perfect occasions to reiterate the shared values and common goals.”

## **Have Fun Together**

Fun isn't a luxury at work. Every Personal-Best Leadership Experience was a combination of hard work *and* fun. In fact, most people agreed that without the enjoyment and the pleasure they experienced interacting with others on the team, they wouldn't have been able to sustain the level of intensity and hard work required to do their personal best. People just feel better about the work they're doing when they enjoy the people they're working with.<sup>23</sup> One key leadership lesson that Shawn McKenna, the co-founder and managing director of a chain of American-style restaurants in Russia, shared with us: “Make sure that you and the team are having fun.”

Similarly, Mike Sawyer, vice president of marketing with PerimeterX, explained that his Personal-Best Leadership Experience involved ensuring that his team had fun while not consuming lots of their outside-of-work time. One example was changing the character of department-wide planning meetings. “We set up an informal meeting area in the marketing department,” Mike explained, “with couches, a TV, and other things that allowed both standing and ad-hoc meetings to seem more like a friendly environment. This area was in the middle of where everyone sat, so even if just a few people were meeting, it let everyone know what was going on,

and they could freely join others if they wanted. We also did group ‘fun’ dinners semi-regularly around milestones to encourage camaraderie as well as to reward progress.”

Having fun sustains productivity, creating what researchers refer to as “subjective well-being.” Moreover, it's not all about parties, games, festivities, and laughter. Wayne Tam, a certified financial planner and principal of Generation Wealth & Investments, described a former manager as someone who really had fun dissecting complex computer code or translating business processes into functional specifications. Wayne said that these tasks could be quite difficult, but his manager “was always positive and built up our skills so that we could meet these challenges with the same attitude he had and showed us how to have fun with this work.” Wayne went on to say, “I learned that though you get paid to do a job, it's better to be able to enjoy what you do and have fun.”

Research demonstrates that having fun enhances people's problem-solving skills. They are more creative and productive, which fosters lower turnover, higher morale, and a stronger bottom line. For example, the Great Place to Work Institute annually asks tens of thousands of employees to rate their experience of workplace factors, including, “This is a fun place to work.” On *Fortune's* 100 Best Companies to Work For list, which the Great Place to Work Institute produces, employees in the best organizations responded overwhelmingly—an average of 81 percent—that they are working in a “fun” environment.<sup>24</sup> “Laughter,” says Robert Provine, a neuroscientist at the University of Maryland and author of *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*, “is not primarily about humor, but about social relationships. In fact, the health benefits of laughter may result from the social support it stimulates.”<sup>25</sup>

Leaders set the tone. When they openly demonstrate the joy and passion they have for their organizations, team members, clients, and even challenges, leaders send a very powerful message to others that it's perfectly acceptable for people to make public displays of playfulness. They know that in today's organizations work is demanding, and consequently people need to have a sense of personal well-being to sustain their commitment. It works for everyone when leaders show enthusiasm and excitement about the work performed. As Jeanette Chickles, director of telecom operations

with Polaris Wireless, shared when relating her Personal-Best Leadership Experience:

I like to have fun at work. Since you spend so many hours of your life at work, you should be enjoying it! Be serious and work hard, but you can find ways to celebrate accomplishments and sneak in a little lightheartedness when things are really intense. If your team is enjoying the work they are doing and feel recognized for their hard work, they are more likely to go the extra mile when you need it most.

What you preach and what you celebrate must be one and the same. If they aren't, the event will come off as insincere and phony—and your credibility will suffer. Any celebration must be an honest expression of commitment to fundamental values and the hard work and dedication of the people who have lived the values. Elaborate productions that lack sincerity are more entertainment than encouragement. Authenticity makes conscious celebrations, and fun, work.

## Be Personally Involved

We started our discussion of exemplary leadership with Model the Way, and we've come full circle. If you want others to believe in something and behave according to those beliefs, you have to set the example by being personally involved. You have to practice what you preach. If you want to build and maintain a culture of excellence and distinction, then you must be personally involved in celebrating the actions that contribute to and sustain the culture.

Mushfiq Rahman, contracts manager in Australia for ALS Industrial, noticed an immediate difference in performance when “I spent some time with everyone individually and thanked them personally for their contribution. People felt appreciated that I was spending a lot of time with them, and trying genuinely to understand their concerns.” When it comes to sending a message throughout the organization, nothing communicates more clearly than what leaders do. Directly and visibly showing others that you're there to cheer them along, you're sending a positive signal. When you set the example, like Mushfiq, that says, “Around here we say thanks, show appreciation, and have fun,” others will follow your lead. The organization will develop a culture of celebration and recognition. Everyone becomes a leader, everyone sets the example, and everyone takes the time to celebrate the values and victories. When this happens, organizations develop a reputation for being great places to work.

In case there's any doubt that being personally involved in celebrations has an impact on others or their assessment of your leadership, look at what we consistently find in our research. Direct reports who indicate their leaders *almost always* get personally involved in recognizing people and celebrating accomplishments consistently score themselves over 20 percent higher than their colleagues on various engagement variables, like motivation, pride, and productivity. This gap grows dramatically to between 40 and 50 percent when comparing the former to those leaders seen as *occasionally* (or less) being personally involved. Why people report feeling valued by their leaders—and how they rate the trustworthiness and effectiveness of their leaders—traces directly to the extent that their leader

gets personally involved in recognizing people and celebrating accomplishments.

Wherever you find a strong culture built around strong values, you'll also find endless examples of leaders who live its values. Beth Taute, while a financial analyst with Citibank, observed how her manager (Jo) was personally involved in demonstrating appreciation. Jo would do small things such as taking the team out for a surprise lunch or letting team members leave early if she knew they had something special happening in the evening. She let team members with children come in late or leave early on special occasions like birthdays. She scattered small and silly gifts with hidden jokes or meaning on everyone's desks. Being personally involved at this level resulted in Jo's team, according to Beth, "being completely dedicated to her. She was an inspiration, and that meant they would work until all hours to ensure the project was completed."

Because of her hands-on personal involvement, Jo's team wanted to show that they warranted her confidence and trust in their abilities and dedication. According to Beth, "Jo had such close relationships with a varied group of individuals that she knew how to get each person to perform beyond their comfort zone and to remain dedicated to the cause. She made coming to work and being there late seem fun and not like a hard slog."

The lesson from this experience for every aspiring exemplary leader, in Beth's view, is that you "have to be involved and connected with what's going on and that the best recognition is ongoing, without being expected or predictable." She went on to say, "To have done great work and be recognized by Jo was more valued than any other recognition team members wanted." Personal dedication and involvement earn leaders the respect and trust of their teams. It's what builds credibility and loyalty, and creates an engaged and productive workforce.

## **Show You Care**

People don't care about how much you know until they know how much you care for them. In other words, they believe that you want to ensure that they are safe and secure, feel supported and valued; that you want them to be successful, learning and growing; and you wouldn't ask them to do something where they could intentionally be injured or hurt. Demonstrating

this isn't rocket science. For example, Jane Binger, responsible for leadership development and education for years at Lucile Packard Children's Hospital, Stanford University, found that most of the medical and administrative staff just desired simple gestures showing that she and others cared about how they were doing. This usually took the form of a personal note or email, a comment during a meeting or in the corridor, or just a quick stop by their office. "They want to know that I value them. That I think they are doing a great job. That I am not taking them or their contributions for granted. This doesn't require any grand over-the-top actions," said Jane. Empirically, we found a strong and positive relationship between the extent to which a leader "praised people for a job well done" and their direct reports' favorable responses to the statement, "The people who are part of this person's work group feel that the organization values their work."

Showing someone that you care about them makes them feel that you have their best interests at heart. How direct reports respond to a question about the extent their leader has "the best interests of other people at work" relates directly to their level of team spirit and pride. It's also directly related to how favorably they evaluate the leader's effectiveness and the likelihood that they would recommend that individual to a friend as a good leader. When the executive team at Australia's Macquarie Bank made the decision to close their mortgage operation in the United States, Peter Maher, then group head of banking and financial services, could have delivered the news via email or even through a lower-level manager.<sup>26</sup> Peter realized that the best thing he could do to show he cared was to be completely honest and up front throughout the process and to treat his staff with respect and intelligence.

He flew to Florida and sat down with about 100 employees to deliver the news personally. Peter says of the experience, "It was how you did it, not what you did. I deliberately sat on a chair in front of the people and just talked about what was going on." He admitted that "it was a really painful conversation," but he believed that the best thing he could do was to "be real" with them. "I just told them everything that was going on. It was interesting that a number of them afterward, while disappointed, told me how they appreciated the honesty in the way the decision was communicated." People who perceive their colleagues as caring, research shows, are most likely to be sought out for advice and be seen as a leader,

and this, in turn, results in higher performance levels.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, people indicate that when they feel they're being treated uncaringly at work (for example, rudely by a colleague), they respond by deliberately decreasing their effort or lowering the quality of their work.<sup>28</sup>

Showing up to deliver bad news in person, as Peter did, is an important way to demonstrate you care. So is just being *visible* in day-to-day undertakings. It not only demonstrates you care, but also makes you more real, more genuine, more approachable, and more human. Attending important meetings, visiting customers, touring the plants or service centers, dropping in on the labs, making presentations at association gatherings, being at organizational events (even when you're not on the program), recruiting at local universities, holding roundtable discussions, speaking with analysts, or just stopping by your constituents' cubicles to say hello—all are instances that show people that you are interested in them, the work they do, and the contributions they make. Being where they are helps you stay in touch, literally and figuratively, with what's going on. It shows that you walk the talk about the values you and your constituents share.

## **Spread the Stories**

Personally getting involved in showing that they care gives leaders the opportunity to both find and convey stories that put a human face on values. First-person examples are always more powerful and striking than third-party examples. It's that critical difference between “I saw it for myself” and “Someone told me about it.” You need to be constantly on the lookout for whatever is being done well so that you can both let that person know to keep up the good work and be able to tell others about it. That way, you can give “up close and personal” accounts of what it means to put into practice shared values and aspirations. In the process, you create organizational role models to whom everyone can relate. You put the behavior in a real context. Values become more than simply rules; they come alive. Through the stories that you tell, you dramatically and memorably illustrate how people should act and make decisions.

After studying professionals in life-and-death situations, cognitive psychologist Gary Klein concludes that stories are the most powerful method for both eliciting and disseminating knowledge.<sup>29</sup> The reason for



this is that stories, by their nature, are public forms of communication. Storytelling is how people pass along lessons from generation to generation, culture to culture. Emory psychology professor Drew Westen argues that “the stories our leaders tell us matter, probably almost as much as the stories our parents tell us as children, because they orient us to what is, what could be, and should be; to the worldviews they hold and to the values they hold sacred.”<sup>30</sup> Moreover, stories are tailor-made for celebrations. In fact, you can think of stories as celebrations—celebrations of adventure and accomplishment, of courage and perseverance, of being true to deeply held values and beliefs.

Leaders find numerous ways to perpetuate the important stories; for instance, by publishing an example in the company newsletter or annual report, relating a story in a public ceremony, or making a video and broadcasting it on the internal television network, or streaming it on social media. Leaders shine the spotlight on someone who's lived out an organizational value and provide others in the organization with an example they can emulate.

Leaders who tell stories of encouragement about the good work of others have direct reports who feel personally valued, and believe that their leaders bring out the best of people's talents and abilities. The extent to which people would give a strong recommendation about their leader to a colleague relates directly to how frequently their leaders tell stories of encouragement about the good work of others. Leaders rated in the top 20 percent on this leadership behavior are four to five times more favorably recommended than their counterparts in the bottom 20 percent on this leadership behavior. Dustin Schaefer, regional account manager with Flexera Software, told us how he was surprised during an all-hands call when his vice president of worldwide sales recognized him and told a story about the way Dustin displaced a top competitor. The VP gave a very descriptive overview of how Dustin worked with the executive team to create enough uncertainty with their recent decision, and the current implementation, that they scratched the competitor's solution midstream. The VP went on to characterize the lessons from this experience—the moral of the story—and how the team could use the lessons from that success to create more wins in the marketplace. “He connected my win,” says Dustin, “in a way that showed it was a collective win for the company. He got

others to gather behind my story, in what was an otherwise competitive sales group, and realize we can all celebrate together, learning and growing from each other's successes. He also connected my results to the values and accomplishments of our company.”

Dustin's story resonated with his colleagues, and after the call, several of them who had not engaged much with Dustin in the past reached out to him, and asked for more information on his experience. Says Dustin, “I found we were sharing and exchanging more information than we had in the past. This helped to strengthen our sense of rapport and community toward a common goal.”

By telling stories, you accomplish more effectively the objectives of teaching, mobilizing, and motivating than you can through bullet points in a PowerPoint presentation or tweets on a mobile device. Listening to and understanding the stories leaders tell does more to inform people about the values and culture of an organization than do the company policies or the employee manual. Well-told stories are much more effective in reaching people's emotions and pulling them along. They make the message stick. They simulate the experience of actually being there and give people a compelling way of learning what is most important about the experience. Reinforcing stories through celebrations deepens the connections.

## **Make Celebrations Part of Organizational Life**

You need to put celebrations on the calendar. These scheduled events serve as opportunities to get people together so that you can show people how they are part of the larger vision and a shared destiny. They are highly visible ways for you to affirm shared values, mark meaningful progress, and create a sense of community.

You probably already calendar birthdays, holidays, and anniversaries. You also should do it for the significant milestones in the life of your team and organization. Giving them a date, time, and place announces to everyone that these things matter. It also creates a sense of anticipation. Scheduling celebrations doesn't rule out spontaneous events; it just means that certain occasions are of such significance that everyone needs to pay particular attention to them.

In setting up celebrations, you first need to decide which organizational values, events of historical significance, or singular successes are of such importance that they warrant a special ritual, ceremony, or festivity. Perhaps you want to honor the group or team of people who created the year's breakthrough innovations, praise those who gave extraordinary customer service, or thank the families of your constituents for their support. Whatever you wish to celebrate, you need to formalize it, announce it, and tell people how they become eligible to participate. At a minimum, you ought to have at least one celebration each year that involves everyone, though not necessarily at the same site, and draws attention to each of the core values of your organization.

Leaders make celebrations as much a part of their organization's life as they can. Think about what might work for your organization. Here are some examples that University of Southern California professor Terrence Deal and clinical community psychologist M. K. Key provide in their book *Corporate Celebration*:<sup>[31](#)</sup>

- ▶ *Cyclical celebrations* (e.g., seasonal themes, key milestones, and corporate anniversaries)
- ▶ *Recognition ceremonies* (e.g., public applause and acknowledgment for a job well done)
- ▶ *Celebrations of triumph* (special occasions for accentuating collective accomplishments, e.g., launching a new product or strategy, and opening a new office, plant, or store)
- ▶ *Rituals for comfort and letting go* (e.g., loss of a contract, layoffs of employees, and death of a colleague)
- ▶ *Personal transitions* (e.g., entrances and exits)
- ▶ *Workplace altruism* (e.g., doing good for others and promoting social change)
- ▶ *Play* (e.g., games and sporting events, spoofing and poking fun)

At Zeno Group there are many such celebrations during the year, such as the Friday after-work sing-alongs and other informal get-togethers and recognitions. They have an annual New Year's Eve party every June 30th, the end of Zeno's fiscal year. On that day, all the offices connect by

teleconference. They pop champagne and raise a virtual toast. CEO Barby Siegel communicates with everyone via teleconference, reflecting on what they've accomplished, and talks about what's ahead in the future. Then all of the offices continue with their own celebrations.

Of course, celebrations don't have to be about a single achievement or for one person. Justin Brocato, senior manager for marketing operations at Cisco Systems, told us about the impact an annual awards banquet had at one of his former companies:

It was a wonderful way to celebrate our accomplishments and spread that sense of community. Significant others were encouraged to attend, so it was a nice way to get to know people outside of an office setting and further build upon existing relationships. It was also the perfect forum to publicly recognize all of the contributions of the team and reflect on what we had accomplished.

In reflecting further on this experience, Justin wondered, "What if management had just sent out an email to announce and congratulate the winners?" He concluded people would have appreciated it, but it would have paled in comparison to the roar of applause and whistles when someone goes on stage to accept their award and hears their manager tell that person and an audience full of his or her peers why these accomplishments were worthy of recognition. "Celebrating in public is so much more memorable," Justin felt, "and the impact that it has on the recipient and the team is longer lasting. People get energized, and suddenly they have a renewed sense of commitment for the year to come."

Whether they're to honor an individual, group, or organizational achievement or to encourage team learning and relationship building, celebrations, ceremonies, and similar events offer leaders the perfect opportunity to explicitly communicate and reinforce the actions and behaviors that are important in realizing shared values and mutual goals. Exemplary leaders know that promoting a culture of celebration fuels the sense of unity essential for retaining and motivating today's workforce. Celebrations, the data shows, significantly affect how people feel about their organization and their leader. The more people report their leader finds ways to celebrate accomplishments, the more effective they feel in meeting

their objectives, and the more highly they rate the overall effectiveness of their leader.

There is no shortage of opportunities to bring people together to celebrate your organization's values and victories. In good times or bad, gathering together to acknowledge those who've contributed and the actions that have led to success signals to everyone that their efforts made a difference. Their energy, enthusiasm, and well-being—and yours—will be all the better for it.



## ***Take Action***

### ***Celebrate the Values and Victories***

Celebrating together reinforces the fact that extraordinary performance is the result of many people's efforts. Visibly and publicly celebrating accomplishments creates community and sustains team spirit. By basing celebrations on acting congruently with fundamental values and attaining critical milestones, leaders reinforce and sustain people's focus.

Social interaction increases individuals' commitments to the standards of the group and has a profound effect on their well-being. When people are asked to go beyond their comfort zones, the support and encouragement of their colleagues boosts their resistance to the possible debilitating effects of stress. Make sure that people do not regard your organization as the place where “fun goes to die.”

Leaders set the example by being personally involved in celebration and recognition, demonstrating that encouraging the heart is something everyone should do. Telling stories about individuals who have made exceptional efforts and achieved phenomenal successes provides opportunities for leaders to showcase role models for others to emulate. Stories make people's experiences memorable, often even profound in ways that they hadn't envisioned, and serve as a marker for future behaviors. Making personal connections with people in a culture of celebration also builds and sustains credibility. It reduces we –they

demarcations between leaders and constituents. Adding vitality and a sincere sense of appreciation to the workplace is essential.

To Encourage the Heart, you must *celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community*. This means you must:

1. Find, and also create, occasions to bring people together to publicly celebrate accomplishments.
2. Take actions that demonstrate that you “have people's backs” and ensure they feel “part of the whole.”
3. Make fun a portion of your work environment—laugh and enjoy yourself, along with others.
4. Get personally involved in as many recognitions and celebrations as possible. Show you care by being visible in the tough times.
5. Never pass up an opportunity to relate publicly true stories about how people in your organization went above and beyond the call of duty.
6. Calendar celebrations and look, as well, for spontaneous opportunities to link shared values with victories.

## Notes

1. We are grateful to Cheryl Johnson for sharing this example.
2. See D. Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York: Random House, 2011).
3. W. Baker, *Achieving Success Through Social Capital: Tapping the Hidden Resources in Your Personal and Business Networks* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000); R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Touchstone, 2001); and W. Bolander, C. B. Saturnino, D. E. Hughes, and G. R. Ferris, “Social Networks Within Sales Organizations: Their Development and Importance for Salesperson Performance,” *Journal of Marketing* 79, no. 6 (2015): 1–16.
4. Source: “List of Social Networking Websites,” *Wikipedia*, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_social\\_networking\\_websites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_social_networking_websites).
5. K. N. Hampton, L. S. Goulet, L. Rainie, and K. Purcell, “Social Networking Sites and Our Lives,” *Pew Internet & American Life Project*, June 16, 2011, <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/Technology-and-social-networks.aspx>.
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## Chapter 13

# Leadership Is Everyone's Business

**Throughout this book** we've told stories of ordinary people who've made extraordinary things happen. They are from all over the globe, from all age groups and walks of life. They represent a wide variety of organizations, public and private, government and nongovernmental, high-tech and low-tech, small and large, educational and professional services. Chances are you haven't heard of them. They're not public figures, celebrities, or megastars. They're people who might live next door or work in the next cubicle over. They are people just like you.

We've focused on everyday leaders because leadership is not about position or title. It's not about organizational power or authority. It's not about celebrity or wealth. It's not about the family you are born into. It's not about being at the organization's apex, as CEO, president, general, or prime minister. And it's *definitely* not about being some sort of hero. Leadership is about relationships, about credibility, about passion and conviction, and ultimately about what you *do*.

You don't have to *look up* for leadership. You don't have to *look out* for leadership. You only have to *look inward*. You have the potential to lead others to places they have never been. But before you can lead others, you have to believe that you can have a positive impact on others. You have to believe that your values are worthy and that what you do matters. You have to believe that your words can inspire and your actions can move others. Moreover, you have to be able to convince others that the same is true for them. In these turbulent times, the world needs more people who believe

they can make a difference and who are willing to act on that belief. As Natraj Iyer, product manager at eBay, told us,

We often think of leadership as something big and grand, but based on my experiences, I think real leadership is everywhere and in the daily moments. We all have several opportunities in our daily lives to seize the moment and be the leaders we can be. Each and every one of us has a choice to be that leader.

At this very moment, leadership is in you and in where you are. The question is: What are you going to do to put it into practice?

## Exemplary Leadership Is Local

For a long time, we've been asking people of all ages and backgrounds about the people in their own lives who are role models for leadership—not well-known historical leaders, but leaders with whom they've had personal experience. We ask them to identify the person they'd select as their most important leadership role model, and select from a list of eight possible categories from which these leaders might come.<sup>1</sup> Is their role model a business leader, community or religious leader, entertainer or movie star, family member, political leader, professional athlete, teacher or coach, or other/none/not sure? Think about whom you would choose before looking at the results in [Table 13.1](#).

**Table 13.1** Who Are Role Models for Leadership?

Role Model Category	Respondent Age Category	
	18–30 Years Old	Over 30 Years Old
Family Member	40%	46%
Teacher Or Coach	26%	14%
Community Or Religious Leader	11%	8%
Business Leader	7%	23%
Political Leader	4%	4%
Professional Athlete	3%	0%
Entertainer / Movie Star	2%	0%
None / Not Sure / Other	7%	4%

Regardless of age, when thinking back over their lives and selecting their most important leadership role models, people are more likely to choose a family member than anyone else. In second place, for respondents thirty years of age and under, is a teacher or coach. For the over-thirty crowd, business leader is number two; and upon probing further, people tell us that

“business leader” really means an individual who was an immediate supervisor who essentially served as a teacher and coach in the workplace.

What do you notice about the top groups on the list? Who are these people? Most likely, you notice that they are the people you know well, and who know you well. They're the leaders you are closest to, and who are closest to you. They're the ones with whom you have the most frequent contact. Leadership role models are local.

This finding has extremely important implications. As a parent, teacher, or coach, *you* are the person who's setting the leadership example for young people. It's not hip-hop artists, movie stars, professional athletes, or others making news on social media who inspire them about leadership. *You* are the one they are most likely going to look to for the example of how a leader responds to competitive situations, handles crises, deals with loss, or resolves ethical dilemmas. It's not someone else. It's you.

The data also reveals that if you're a manager in an organization, to *your* direct reports *you are the most important* leader in your organization. *You* are their teacher and coach, and more likely than any other person in the organization to influence their desire to stay or leave, the trajectory of their careers, their ethical behavior, their ability to perform at their best, their drive to wow customers, and their motivation to share the organization's vision and values.

There's no escape. You are now on notice that regardless of title or position, be it at home, in school, the community, or workplace, you must take responsibility for the quality of leadership the people around you observe and receive. You are accountable for the leadership you demonstrate. You set an example, whether you like it or not, whether intentional or not. The conscious decision you must make is how good a leader and role model you want to be. People are watching you, regardless of whether you know it or not. You are having an impact on them, regardless of whether you intend to or not.

Everyone—and that literally means every person—is potentially a role model for someone, and this means that *leadership must be everyone's business*. The most lasting test of your leadership effectiveness is the extent to which you bring forth and develop the leadership abilities in others, not

just in yourself. You have the capacity to liberate the leader within everyone.



# Exemplary Leadership Matters

Debi Coleman is one of the first leaders we ever interviewed about Personal-Best Leadership Practices and the first leader we quoted in the original edition of *The Leadership Challenge*. At that time, Debi was vice president of worldwide manufacturing for Apple. When we caught up with her recently as managing partner of SmartForest, a venture capital firm, she told us that her perspective on leadership hasn't changed over the years from what she originally said: "I think good people deserve good leadership. The people I manage deserve the best leadership in the world."

Debi expresses the sentiments of all exemplary leaders. They strive mightily to deliver the best leadership in the world because they firmly believe that people deserve it. Most likely that's exactly what you want from your leaders and what your constituents want from you: nothing less than the best. No doubt, you're reading this book for the same reason!

Debi's commitment to exemplary leadership matters. Yours does, too. It matters because great leadership creates great workplaces. Not-so-great leadership creates not-so-great workplaces. You know this from your own experience. We know this because we've continued to find evidence that leadership has a significant impact on people's engagement levels and their performance. You've seen data for this in every chapter. Let's look at one more study that underscores this point.

We've asked thousands of people to think about the worst leader and the best leader they've ever worked with. We then posed this question: What percentage, from 1 to 100, of your talents (skills and ability plus time and energy) would you say each of these leaders used? [Figure 13.1](#) shows the results.



**Figure 13.1** The Range of Their Talents People Report Being Utilized by Their Worst and Best Leaders—A 3x Difference!

When people think about their experience with their *worst* leaders, the percentage of talent utilized typically ranges between 2 percent and 40 percent, with an average of 31 percent. In other words, people report that they expended less than a third of their available talents in their experiences with their worst leaders. Many continued to work hard, but few put all that they were capable of delivering into their work. Exit interviews reveal a similar phenomenon: people aren't quitting their companies as much as they are quitting the relationship with their manager. Surveys show that one in two people at some point in their careers have left their job to get away from their managers.<sup>2</sup>

This dismal situation is in sharp contrast to what people report when they think about their experience with their best leaders. These leaders bring out a minimum of 40 percent of their talent, and note that this *bottom* was the *top* of the range for the *worst* leaders. In fact, many claim that their best leaders actually got more than 100 percent of their talent! You know that it's

mathematically impossible to get more than 100 percent of an individual's talent, and yet people shake their heads and say, “No, that leader really did get me to do more than I thought I was capable of doing or that it was even possible to do.” The *average* percentage of talent utilized by people's best leaders is a whopping 95 percent.

The performance difference between people's worst and best leaders is huge. The best leaders bring out more than three times the amount of talent, energy, and motivation from their people compared with their counterparts at the other end of the spectrum.

This data, and other evidence presented throughout this book, confirms that *leadership makes a difference*. That difference can be negative or it can be positive, but it does matter. Leadership has an impact on people's commitment, their willingness to put forth discretionary effort, to take personal initiative and responsibility, and to perform beyond the ordinary. Bad leaders have a dampening effect on these behaviors, and exemplary leaders have just the opposite effect. What sort of difference do you want to achieve through your leadership? The choice is yours.

We're confident that you want to become the best leader you can be—and not just for your own sake, but also for the sake of others and for the success of the endeavors you are pursuing. After all, it's unlikely you'd be reading this book if you didn't have this aspiration. How can you learn to lead better than you do now?

# Learning Leadership Takes Practice

Nearly every time we give a speech or conduct a workshop, someone asks, “Are leaders born or made?” Whenever we're asked this question, our answer, always offered with a smile, is this: “We've never met a leader who wasn't born. We've also never met an accountant, artist, athlete, engineer, lawyer, physician, writer, or zoologist who wasn't born. We're all born. That's a given.”

You might be thinking, “Well, that's not fair. That's a trick answer. Everyone is born.” That's precisely our point. Every one of us is born, and every one of us has the necessary material to become a leader—including you. The question you should be asking yourself is not “Am I born to be a leader?” In becoming a better leader, the more demanding and significant question you should be asking is: “Can I become a better leader tomorrow than I am today?” To that question, our answer is a resounding “YES!”

Let's get something straight. Leadership is not some mystical quality that only a few people have and everyone else doesn't. Leadership is not preordained. It is not a gene, and it is not a trait. There is no hard evidence to support the assertion that leadership is imprinted in the DNA of only some individuals, and that everyone else missed out and are doomed to be clueless.

We've collected assessment data from millions of people around the world. We can tell you without a doubt that there are leaders in every profession, every type of organization, every religion, and every country, from young to old, male and female. It's a myth that leadership can't be learned—that you either have it or you don't. There is leadership potential everywhere we look. As Ian McCamey, senior content producer for the OZO product suite at Nokia Technologies, commented, “By examining the behaviors that all leaders engage in, the concept of leadership becomes an attainable skill rather than a mysterious power.”

Leadership is an *observable pattern of practices and behaviors*, and a *definable set of skills and abilities*. And any skill can be learned, strengthened, honed, and enhanced, given the motivation and desire, along with practice, feedback, role models, and coaching. When we track the

progress of people who participate in leadership development programs, for example, the research demonstrates that they improve over time.<sup>3</sup> They learn to be better leaders.

Here's the rub. Leadership can be learned; however, not everyone wants to learn it, and not all those who learn about leadership master it. Why? Because becoming the very best requires a strong belief that you can learn and grow, an intense aspiration to excel, the determination to challenge yourself constantly, the recognition that you must engage the support of others, and the devotion to practice deliberately. Moreover, the best leaders realize that no matter how good they might be, they always can be even better, and are open to learning how to do so.<sup>4</sup>

This is music to Don Schalk. Don has served as the chief executive officer of several companies in his career and is now on the faculty at Alvernia University (Reading, Pennsylvania). He shared with us a personal experience that exemplifies the point that the best performers always strive to improve. Don was a highly skilled baseball player, and he related how his collegiate coach and mentor, Dick Rockwell, regularly told him and his fellow players: "Practice begins at 3:00 p.m. and ends at 5:00 p.m. If that's all you do, we won't win and you won't play." The message was very clear. Getting to play on the team required more than just showing up for two hours of practice each day. Winning ball games meant that everyone on the team had to do more, not just one player. That's the attitude of champions, and it applies to leadership as much as it does athletics. If you want to become exemplary, you have to train hard and put in extra effort to practice and hone your skills. As the old saying goes: *Hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard.*

Florida State University professor and noted authority on expertise K. Anders Ericsson made this same point when he said:

Until most individuals recognize that sustained training and effort is a prerequisite for reaching expert levels of performance, they will continue to misattribute lesser achievement to the lack of natural gifts, and will thus fail to reach their own potential.<sup>5</sup>

Anders and his colleagues have found, over the decades of their research, that raw talent is not all there is to becoming a top performer. It doesn't

matter whether it's in sports, music, medicine, computer programming, mathematics, or other fields. Talent is not the key that unlocks excellence.

Staggeringly high IQs don't characterize the great performers, either. Sometimes world-class performers are really brilliant, but in many cases they possess just average intelligence. Similarly, years of experience don't necessarily make someone a high-performer, let alone the greatest performer. And, as startling as it might sound, sometimes more years of experience can mean poorer performance compared to those newly graduated in a specialty because people can get trapped into old paradigms that are no longer relevant.

You must have a passion for learning in order to become the best leader you can be. What truly differentiates the expert performers from the good performers is devotion to *deliberate* practice. Practicing *deliberately* doesn't mean you engage in just any activity. Instead, you engage in experiences designed specifically to improve performance. *Designed* is the key idea, meaning there is a methodology, and there is a very specific goal. Second, practice is not a one-time event. Engaging in a designed learning experience just once or twice doesn't cut it. It has to be done over and over, and over again, until it's automatic, and that takes hours of repetition.

Another important characteristic of deliberate practice is the availability of feedback. Without knowing how you are doing, it's difficult to gauge whether you're getting close to your goal and whether you're executing correctly. While there may come a time when you're accomplished enough to assess your performance, you need a coach, mentor, or some other third party to help analyze how you did.

Furthermore, and let's be realistic, deliberate practice isn't much fun. What keeps the top performers going during the often-grueling practice sessions is not the enjoyment that they are having in that activity, but the knowledge that they are improving and getting closer to their dream of superior performance when it counts.

Finally, there's just no getting around the fact that practice takes time. You may be familiar with the popularized notion that it takes “10,000 hours of practice” if you want to become an expert,<sup>6</sup> but the truth is there is no specific number. You have to put the time in, but don't make a big deal about the number of hours required. For some, it will take more than 10,000

hours to master the art of leadership; for others, it will be less. What is true of all champions, however, is that mastery is a lifelong pursuit.

The most meaningful and important way that you can take charge of becoming an exemplary leader is to make learning leadership a daily habit. Learning leadership is not something that you add on to your already busy schedule when you get around to it. It's not something that you do on a weekend or once a month at a retreat. It's not something that gets cut from the calendar when times are tough. It's something you do as automatically and instinctively as your other important priorities in the day. It's something that happens as routinely as checking your email, texting a colleague, or conducting a meeting. It's something you consider essential to your personal success. Just like physical exercise, you must do it daily to get fit, and stay in shape. The “aha” moment for Tommy Baldacci, sales associate with Rhumbix, was when he realized the importance of daily practice:

I had to learn how to be a leader before I could be one. I had to make a decision that I was going to be a leader. Once I decided what I wanted and made it a part of every thought of my waking day, it began to consume me. Every action that I took was a contributor to the goal of being a leader. This is the same with every path to being successful. You have to make a decision that practicing leadership will take conscious effort.

## Contrasts and Contradictions

In our research, we learned that in performing at their personal bests leaders Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. And we found that leaders who most frequently engage in The Five Practices are significantly more likely to achieve extraordinary results than leaders who don't make much use of these practices.

But there's a catch. *You can learn to do all of this perfectly and still get fired!* Maybe we should have told you this sooner, but no doubt you knew it already. There's absolutely no way that we can say that any of these leadership practices will always work all the time with all people. We know for certain that there's a much greater probability that they will, and there's no ironclad, money-back guarantee. And if anyone ever stands in front of you and claims that they have *the* three, five, seven, or nine-factor theory that's 100 percent certain to get you results and rewards, then grab onto your wallet and run. There's no get-rich-quick, instant weight-loss program for leadership.

There's still another catch. Any leadership practice *can* become destructive. Virtues can become vices. There's a point at which each of The Five Practices, taken to extremes, can lead you astray.

We know that finding your voice and setting an example are essential to credibility and accomplishment. But an obsession with being seen as a role model can lead to being too focused on your own values and your way of doing things. It can cause you to discount others' views and be closed to feedback. It can push you into isolation for fear of losing privacy or being “found out.” It can also cause you to be more concerned with style than substance.

Being forward-looking and communicating a clear and common vision of the future are what set leaders apart from other credible people. Yet, a singular focus on one vision of the future can blind you to other possibilities as well as to the realities of the present. It can cause you to miss the exciting possibilities that are just out of your sight or make you hang on just a little too long to an old, tired, and out-of-date technology. Exploiting your



powers of inspiration can cause others to surrender their will. Your own energy, enthusiasm, and charm may be so magnetic that others stop thinking for themselves and mindlessly agree with your perspective.

Challenging the process is essential to promoting innovation and progressive change. Seizing initiative and taking risks are necessary for learning and continuous improvement. However, take this to extremes and you can create needless turmoil, confusion, and paranoia. Routines are important, and if you seldom pause long enough to give people an opportunity to gain confidence and competence, they'll lose their motivation to try new things. Change simply for change's sake can be just as demoralizing as complacency.

Collaboration and teamwork are essential to getting extraordinary things done in today's hyperactive world. Innovation depends on high degrees of trust, and people must feel a sense of control in their own lives if they are to accomplish great things. However, an overreliance on collaboration and trust may reflect an avoidance of addressing critical issues or providing negative feedback. It may be a way of *not* taking charge when the situation requires. Delegating power and responsibility can become a way of dumping too much on others when they're not fully prepared to handle it and evading your responsibility.

We know that people perform at higher levels when they're encouraged. Personal recognition and group celebration create the spirit and momentum that can carry a group forward, even during the toughest of challenges. At the same time, constantly worrying about who should be recognized and when there should be celebrations can turn us into gregarious minstrels. You can lose sight of the mission and any sense of urgency because you're having so much fun. You can become so consumed by all the perks and pleasures that you forget the purpose of it all.

Far more insidious than these potential problems, however, is the dangerous lure of hubris. It's fun to be a leader, gratifying to have influence, and exhilarating to have scores of people cheering your every word. In many all-too-subtle ways, it's easy to be seduced by power and importance. All evil leaders have been infected with the disease of hubris, becoming bloated with an exaggerated sense of self and pursuing their own sinister ends. How do you avoid this?

Humility is the antidote for hubris. You can avoid excessive pride only when you recognize that you're human and need the help of others. Exemplary leaders know that they “can't do it alone,” and they act accordingly. They lack the pride and pretense displayed by many leaders who succeed in the short term but leave behind a weak organization that fails to remain viable after their departure. They remain interested in the ideas of others, learning about matters for which they don't already have the answers. They are resilient and demonstrate a willingness to experiment. They appreciate the lessons learned from experience, including the disappointments. With self-effacing humor, deep listening to those around them, and generous and sincere credit to others, humble leaders achieve higher and higher levels of performance.

The word *human* and the word *humble* both derive from the Latin *humus*, meaning earth. To be human and humble is to be down-to-earth, with your feet planted firmly on the ground. Interesting, isn't it, how as you climb the ranks, you often climb to a higher floor in the building, getting farther and farther away from the ground? Is it any wonder that the higher you go, the harder it gets to keep your footing?<sup>7</sup>

You must have courage to be human and the courage to be humble.<sup>8</sup> It takes a lot of courage to admit that you aren't always right, that you can't always anticipate every possibility, that you can't envision every future, that you can't solve every problem, that you can't control every variable, that you aren't always congenial, that you make mistakes, and that you are, in a word, human. It takes courage to admit all these things to others, but it may take even more courage to admit them to yourself. If you can find the humility to do that, you invite others into a courageous conversation. When you let down your guard and open yourself up to others, you invite them to join you in the creation of something that you alone could not create. When you become more modest and unpretentious, others have the chance themselves to become visible and noticed.

Nothing in the research hints that leaders should be perfect. Leaders aren't saints. They're human beings, full of the flaws and failings like everyone else. They make mistakes. Perhaps the very best advice for all aspiring leaders is to remain humble and unassuming—to always remain open to learning more about yourself and the world around you.

# First Lead Yourself

The instrument of leadership is the self, and mastery of the art of leadership comes from mastery of the self. Engineers have computers; painters, canvas and brushes; musicians, instruments. Leaders have only themselves.

Becoming the best leader you can be means becoming the best self you can be. Therefore, leadership development is fundamentally self-development.

Self-development is not about stuffing in a whole bunch of new information or trying out the latest technique. It's about leading out of what is already in your soul. It's about liberating the leader within you. And it starts with looking inside.

The better you know yourself, the better you can make sense of the often incomprehensible and conflicting messages you receive daily. Do this, do that. Support this, support that. Decide this, decide that. Change this, change that. You need internal guidance to navigate the turmoil in today's highly uncertain environment.

Brian Alink, whom we introduced in the first chapter of this book, told us that to grow as a leader, it was extremely important to better understand himself. He came to this realization while leading the customer operations function for Capital One's Auto Finance business. To get to know members of his large and diverse team, Brian created “snack and chats” in which eight to ten associates from various areas gathered in an informal setting to talk about their greatest passions outside of work. Brian heard some fascinating personal stories. The informal gatherings also provided him with a chance to start telling his own story.

Reflecting on his early life experiences, during which his family had endured financial hardship and moved into a travel trailer, gave Brian a pathway to exemplary leadership:

My strong drive to succeed was born lying awake at night in the trailer at the K.O.A. campground promising myself I would still dream big, work hard, and voraciously learn to accomplish great things to take care of my family someday. Little by little, I began to share my personal story with groups of associates I met with, just to put myself out there a little. The response was incredibly supportive. I find that everyone has challenges in their lives that are just really tough. And it's those moments, it's those hard moments that shape who they are and what they stand for.

These experiences helped Brian to realize that “leadership comes from the heart and from a place of being genuine, being vulnerable, and bringing your whole self to work.”

Bringing your whole self to work requires the kind of self-exploration in which Brian engaged. It requires looking back over your life to understand the experiences that shaped you and the values those experiences taught you. As you continue your journey toward exemplary leadership, you must wrestle with some difficult questions:

- ▶ What were the peak moments in my life, and what motivated me to achieve them?
- ▶ What are the values that should guide my decisions and actions?
- ▶ What do I need to do to improve my abilities to move this team or organization forward?
- ▶ Where do I think the organization should be headed over the next ten years?
- ▶ What gives me the courage to continue in the face of uncertainty and adversity?
- ▶ How solid are my relationships with my constituents? How trustworthy am I?
- ▶ What can I do to keep hope alive—in others and myself?

While not an exhaustive list, all exemplary leaders have wrestled with questions like these. Such personal searching is essential in the development of leaders. You can't lead others until you've first led yourself on a journey of self-discovery. Research has found that taking the time each

day—even as little as ten to fifteen minutes—to reflect on what you have learned from your experiences significantly improves your subsequent performance.<sup>9</sup>

If you are to become the leader you aspire to be, then you must take the time to step back and reflect on your past, your present, your future, and discover your passions.

# Leading Is Doing

Learning about yourself and about leadership, however, are not the same as leading. Deciding to be an exemplary leader is not the same as *being* one. Leading is doing. You need to make leading a daily habit. You need to do something every day to learn more about leading, and you need to put those lessons into practice every day.

Sergey Nikiforov, senior director of sales at Persistence Systems, pondered this challenge, explaining to us that the question of “Where do I start becoming a better leader?” had been nagging him for some time. Sergey assumed he had to do something grand and ambitious to demonstrate that he was a leader, but then it dawned on him.

I found that every day I had an opportunity to make a small difference. I could have coached someone better, I could have listened better, I could have been more positive toward people, I could have said “Thank you” more often, I could have . . . the list just went on and on.

At first, I was a bit overwhelmed with the discovery of how many opportunities I had in a single day to act as a better leader. But as I have gotten to put these ideas into practice, I have been pleasantly surprised by how much improvement I have been able to make by being more conscientious and intentional about acting as a leader.

Sergey is right on point. Each day provides countless chances to make a difference. The chance might come in a private conversation with a direct report or in a meeting with colleagues. It might come over the family dinner table. It might come when you're speaking at a conference on the future of your business, or it might come when you're listening to a friend talk about a current conflict with a peer, or as a result of asking for feedback from a customer, client, or partner.

Leadership is in the moment. There are many moments each day when you can choose to lead. Each day you can choose to make a difference. Each of these moments serves up the prospect of contributing to a lasting legacy.

# Remember the Secret to Success in Life

There's one final leadership lesson that we'd like to pass along. It's the leader's secret to success in life.

When we began our study of leadership bests, we were fortunate to cross paths with then –U.S. Army Major General John H. Stanford. We knew that he had grown up poor, that he failed sixth grade but went on to graduate from Penn State University on an ROTC scholarship, that he survived multiple military tours in both Korea and Vietnam, that he was highly decorated, and that the loyalty of his troops was extraordinary. John headed up the Military Traffic Management Command for the U.S. Army during the Persian Gulf War. When he retired from the Army, he became county manager of Fulton County, Georgia, when Atlanta was gearing up to host the 1996 Summer Olympics. John then became superintendent of the Seattle public school system, where he sparked a revolution in public education, before his untimely passing away from leukemia.

All that we learned of John's public service was impressive, but his answer to one of our interview questions significantly influenced our own appreciation of leadership. We asked John how he'd go about developing leaders, whether in universities, in the military, in government, in the nonprofit sector, or in private business. He replied:

When anyone asks me that question, I tell them I have the secret to success in life. The secret to success is to stay in love. Staying in love gives you the fire to ignite other people, to see inside other people, to have a greater desire to get things done than other people. A person who is not in love doesn't really feel the kind of excitement that helps them to get ahead and to lead others and to achieve. I don't know any other fire, any other thing in life that is more exhilarating and is more positive a feeling than love is.

“Staying in love” isn't the answer we expected to get—at least not when we began our study of leadership. But after studying leadership for over thirty years, through thousands of interviews and case analyses, we are constantly reminded about how many leaders use the word *love* freely when talking about their own motivations to lead. As Anna Blackburn, whom we

introduced in Chapter One, told us about her career at Beaverbrooks, where she started at the shop floor and became CEO: “Find something you love. When you genuinely love what you do, you'll excel and do well.”

Of all the things that sustain a leader over time, love is the most lasting. It's hard to imagine leaders getting up day after day, putting in the long hours and hard work it takes to make extraordinary things happen, without having their hearts in it. The best-kept secret of successful leaders is love: staying in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations provide, and with those who honor the organization by using its products and services.

Leadership is not an affair of the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart.



## Notes

- [1.](#) Public Allies conducted this survey in 1998 to those eighteen to thirty-two years old. We adapted the survey and have administered it to a wider range of ages over the past two decades.
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## About the Authors

**Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner** have been working together for more than thirty years, studying leaders, researching leadership, conducting leadership development seminars, and serving as leaders themselves in various capacities. *The Leadership Challenge* has sold more than 2.5 million copies worldwide and is available in twenty-two languages. It has won numerous awards, including the Critics' Choice Award from the nation's book review editors and the James A. Hamilton Hospital Administrators' Book of the Year Award, been named a Best Business Book of the Year by *Fast Company*, and continues to be included in *The 100 Best Business Books of All Time*.

Jim and Barry have co-authored more than a dozen other award-winning leadership books, including *Learning Leadership: The Five Fundamentals of Becoming an Exemplary Leader*; *The Truth About Leadership: The No-Fads, Heart-of-the-Matter Facts You Need to Know*; *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It*; *Encouraging the Heart: A Leader's Guide to Rewarding and Recognizing Others*; *A Leader's Legacy*; *The Student Leadership Challenge*; *Extraordinary Leadership in Australia and New Zealand: The Five Practices That Create Great Workplaces* (with Michael Bunting); and *Making Extraordinary Things Happen in Asia: Applying The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership*.

They also developed the highly acclaimed *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI), a 360-degree questionnaire for assessing leadership behavior, which is one of the most widely used leadership assessment instruments in the world, along with *The Student LPI*. More than 800 research studies, doctoral dissertations, and academic papers have used their The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership framework.

The Association for Talent Development's highest award for Distinguished Contribution to Workplace Learning and Performance is among the honors that Jim and Barry have received. In addition, they have been named Management/Leadership Educators of the Year by the International Management Council; ranked by *Leadership Excellence* magazine in the top twenty on its list of the Top 100 Thought Leaders; named among the 50

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Barry received his BA with honors in political science from the University of California, Santa Barbara; his MA in public administration from The Ohio State University; and his PhD in organizational behavior and administrative theory from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Having consulted with a wide variety of public and private sector organizations worldwide, Barry also works at a strategic level with a number of community-based and professional organizations. He has served on the board of directors of Uplift Family Services, Global Women's Leadership Network, American Institute of Architects (AIA), SV Creates, Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Santa Clara County, Center for Excellence in Nonprofits, Junior Achievement of Silicon Valley and Monterey Bay,

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## Index

# A

Aaron, Hank

Accountability:

- fostering
- individual
- sense of
- shifting
- trust and

Accuracy

Actions:

- celebrating values and victories
- to clarify values
- of credible leaders
- to enlist others
- to envision the future
- to experiment and take risks
- to foster collaboration
- power and
- to recognize contributions
- to search for opportunities
- to set example
- to strengthen others
- values as guide for

Adlestone, Mark

Adventure, job as

Adversity, leadership and

Affirming shared values

forging unity and

giving people reasons to care

necessity of

Aggarwal, Gautam

Ahmed, Marwa

*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Carroll)

Alignment:

“behavioral integrity” and

clarification of values and

cultural

dreams and

Three Pillars and

values and

vision and

Alink, Brian

Allison, Jeff,

Alm, Clay

Amabile, Teresa

Ambelang, Charles

*American Lawyer*

Anderson, Mark

Animating vision

- capability for
- communication for
- expressing emotions for
- images of future for
- symbolic language for

Appealing to common ideals

- by aligning dreams
- by connecting to what's meaningful
- with pride in uniqueness

Appreciation, showing

- by saying thank you

See also [Recognizing contributions](#); [Rewards](#)

Argaman, Rachel

*Art of Positive Leadership, The* (Michel)

Ashkenazi, Ari

Astafev, Alexey

Attention:

- coaches and
- recognition and
- spending your

Attitudes:

of champions

negative

positive

small wins and

work, performance and

Authenticity:

admired leaders and

celebrations and

clarification of values and

conveying

Authority, delegation of

Autonomy, leadership and

Awards. See [Recognizing contributions](#); [Rewards](#)

Axelrod, Robert

## B

Baldacci, Tommy

Balducci, Sara

Ballagh, Courtney

Barger, Bonnie

Bear, Meg

Beattie, Ed

Beaverbrooks the Jewellers, Limited

“Behavioral integrity”

Belief:

- making a difference and

- passion and

- in people's abilities

- sense of purpose and

- in skills and talent

Benchmarking

Berardo, Andrea

Berns, Gregory

*Best Place to Work: The Art and Science of Creating an Extraordinary Workplace, The* (Friedman)

Binger, Jane

BioCardia

Blackburn, Anna

Blum, Arlene

Brain:

curiosity and  
neural networks and  
novelty of information and  
reward-related circuits in  
risk and

Brainstorming

Breakthroughs:

asking questions and  
feelings and  
requirements for

Brocato, Justin

Brocklebank, John C.

Burchell, Michael

## C

Calpine

Campbell, David

Campion, Dina

Capital One Financial Corporation

Care:

- expression of
- giving people reasons to
- hearts, minds and
- lack of

Carrol, Lewis

Carton, Andrew

Causes, commitment to

Celebrating values and victories

- actions for
- by creating spirit of community
- example of impact of
- by getting involved
- having fun together
- public events
- social support and

Celebrations:

- authenticity and
- personal involvement and



Challenge:

“curiosity conversations” and  
meeting new  
mind-sets and  
optimal performance and  
purpose and  
risks, opportunities and  
searching for opportunity and  
stress and

Challenging the process (practice 3):

overview and

*See also* [Experimenting and taking risks](#); [Searching for opportunities](#)

Change:

catalyst for  
employee habits and  
meeting challenge with  
proactivity and  
regulations and  
restructuring and  
viewpoint and  
vision in times of rapid

Chapman, Cheryl

Charisma

Cheng, Andy

Chickles, Jeannette

Chitnis, Abhijit

Choices:

feelings and

freedom and

providing

Christensen, Kent

Chu, Wilson

Clarifying values:

actions for

finding commitment through

by finding your voice

modeling the way and

necessity of

workplace behavior and

Clark, Sonia

Coaching:

for confidence and competence

encouragement and

service consolidation and

winning and

Coats, Steve

Cole, Kirstyn

Coleman, Debi

Collaboration:

climate supportive of  
conducive environment for  
as critical competency  
empathy and  
fostering  
importance of  
individual achievement and  
project structuring and  
synergy and  
teamwork and  
trust and

Commitment:

to causes  
challenges and  
follow through and  
goals and  
impact of shared values on  
leader's personal example and  
personal values and  
risk and  
shared values and  
training and

*See also [Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership](#)*

## Communication:

- durable interactions
- email
- expectations and
- face-to-face
- groups and
- negative
- positive, practicing
- signal-sending actions and
- stories as
- vision and

*See also* [Conversations](#); [Language](#); [Listening](#); [Social networking sites](#); [Storytelling](#)

## Community:

- commitment to
- common bond and
- marketplace metaphor and
- pride in being unique and
- scientific
- spirit of

## Community building

- human need for connection and
- by investing in fun
- by providing social support
- by publicly celebrating accomplishments

Competence:

advice seeking behavior and  
coaching and  
core competencies  
demonstrated by sharing information  
developing  
leadership  
opportunities and  
structuring work to build  
trust and

Conant, Doug

Confidence:

coaching and  
developing  
expression of  
impact on performance

Consistency over time and place

## Constituents:

bringing out best in  
difficult situations and  
focus on future and  
getting to know  
guidelines, standards and  
leaders and  
listening to  
positive communication and  
shared values and  
time spent and  
value statements and  
vision and

Control. *See also* [Power](#)

## Conversations:

about values  
“curiosity conversations”  
feedback and

## Cooperation:

goals, roles and  
Prisoner's Dilemma paradigm  
responsibility and  
rewards of

*See also* [Collaboration](#)

## Corporate celebrations

Corporate culture:

- accountability and
- celebrations and
- “givers” and “takers”
- shared values and
- teammates and

Corporations. See [Organizations](#)

Courage

Creativity:

- freedom and
- incentives and
- positivity and
- “thinking out of the box”

Credibility:

- action of leaders with
- behavioral definition of
- as foundation of leadership
- importance of
- recognition and

Critical incidents

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly

Cultural alignment, language and

Culture. See [Corporate culture](#)

“Curiosity conversations”

Customer satisfaction survey, setting example and

Customer service:

responsiveness and  
setting example and



## D

Dalton, Brian

Deal, Terrence

Decision making:

- groups of friends and
- opportunities for
- self-confidence and

Delgado, Ana Aboitiz

Demographics, Millennials

Denning, Steve

Depenhart, Justin

Developing competence and confidence

- by educating and sharing information
- by fostering confidence
- need for
- by organizing work
- through coaching

di Bari, Paul

Diemer, Ryan

Differentiation, uniqueness and

Digital diary

Disney, Walt

Distinctiveness, success and

Distrustful environments

Donahue, Robin

Doshi, Neel

Do What You Say You Will Do (DWYSYWD)

Dreams:

alignment with people's

coaches and

empathy and

meaning, purpose and

Drennon, Scott

Drucker, Peter

Dsouza, Della

Duckworth, Angela

Durrani, Yamin

Dweck, Carol

DWYSYWD (Do What You Say You Will Do)

# E

Education, information sharing and email

Emmons, Robert

Emotions:

- card loss exercise
- discomfort with expression of
- expression of
- social media and
- “staying in love”
- storytelling experiment

Empathy:

- trust and

*See also* [Feelings](#)

*Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (Krznaric)

Empowerment. *See also* [Power](#)

Enabling others to act (practice 4):

- overview and

*See also* [Fostering collaboration](#); [Strengthening others](#)

Encouragement:

- feedback and
- practicing

Encouraging the heart (practice 5):

overview and

*See also* [Celebrating values and victories](#); [Recognizing contributions](#)

Engagement:

key factors for

productivity and

Enlisting others

actions for

by animating vision

by appealing to common ideals

example of impact of

Enthusiasm. *See* [Passion](#)

Entrepreneurship

Envisioning the future

actions for

common purpose and

imagining possibilities

importance of

larger purpose and

past, present and

*See also* [Vision](#)

Ericsson, K. Anders

Excellence:

rewards and

talent and

Exemplary leadership:

- language and
- local nature of
- matterings
- setting example and

Expectations:

- communication and
- outcomes, expected
- positive

Expecting the best

- by clarifying goals and rules
- by giving regular feedback
- impact of
- by showing that you believe

Experimenting and taking risks

- actions for
- example of results of
- generating small wins
- learning from experience

# F

Facebook

Face time

Facilitating relationships

- by developing common goals

- example of impact of

- with face-to-face interactions

- with joint projects

- with reciprocity

Failure:

- accountability for

- common goal and

- learning and

- mind-set and

- mistakes and

- small wins and

- success and

Fakharzadeh, Masood

Feedback:

focus groups and  
growth mind-set and  
learning and  
negative  
openness to  
practice and  
providing  
seeking

*See also* [Encouragement](#)

“Feedback sandwich”

Feedback sessions

Feelings:

choices and  
connection and  
meaningful work and  
positive  
senses and

*See also* [Empathy](#); [Passion](#)

Fernandes, Shandon Lee

Finding common purpose

in cause worthy of commitment  
importance of  
by listening to others  
in times of rapid change

Finding your voice

- by clarifying values

- by clarifying your leadership philosophy

- by letting your values guide your actions

- by stating values in your own words

Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership:

- active learning and

- challenging the process

- enabling others to act

- encouraging the heart

- importance of each of

- inspiring shared vision

- making a difference

- modeling the way

- overview of

- personal-best leadership cases and

Ten Commitments and

Flow experiences:

- defined

- “flow” paradigm

Focus groups, Three Pillars and

Followers. See [Constituents](#)

Forecasting, affective

*Fortune*

Forward-looking approach. See also [Envisioning the future](#)



Fostering collaboration

actions for

creating climate of trust

by facilitating relationships

illustration of

Fradenburg, Joshua

Frames, language and

Fredrickson, Barbara

Friedman, Ron

Friendships:

social networking and

workplace and

Fun

Future:

articulating vision for

asking questions and

creating images of

dialogue about

prospecting the

reflecting on past and

vision and

*See also* [Envisioning the future](#)

Futurists

## G

Gandhi, Ravi

Geary, James

Genuineness, speaking and

Gerstner, Lou

Gilbert, Daniel

*Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success* (Grant)

Goals:

- clarity about

- commitment and

- cooperative

- feedback and

- grit and

- recognition and

*See also* [Purpose](#)

Golden Rule

Google

Grant, Adam

Gratitude. *See* [Thank you](#)

Grazer, Brian

Grit:

- defined

- strengthening of

Groups:

higher-performing

power transfer and

Growth, feedback and

Growth mind-set

Gupta, Shubhagam

# H

Hall, Doug

Hall, Hilary

Hamel, Gary

Harmon, Adam

*Harry Potter* (Rowling)

*Harvard Business Review*

Harvey, Kyle

Haun, Tim

Hayashi, Alden M.

Hesselbein, Frances

Hewitt, Aon

History, personal

Honesty

Hsieh, Tony

Hubris

Humility

I

Iatomase, Marina

Ideals:

value preferences and

*See also* [Appealing to common ideals](#)

Ideas:

collaboration and

collection methods

digital diary for

diverse perspectives and

empathy and

generation of

mistakes and

openness to

receptivity to

testing

trust and

Image-based language

Imagining possibilities

as ability of leaders

by expressing passion

by paying attention to present

by prospecting the future

by reflecting on past

Improvements:

- asking questions and suggestions for

Incentives:

- alignment of creativity and examples of

*See also [Rewards](#)*

Industrial Revolution

Information:

- multiple perspectives on seeking up-to-date sharing withholding

Initiative

- being proactive challenging with purpose effectiveness ratings and encouraging others to take fostering

Innovation:

asking questions and  
external realities and  
ideas and  
leadership and  
listening and  
mistakes and  
opportunities for  
positivity and  
risk-taking and  
small wins and  
trust and  
willingness to work hard and

Inquisitiveness. See [Questions](#)

Insight, oversight and

Inspiration

Inspiring shared vision (practice 2):

as central task  
overview and

See also [Enlisting others](#); [Envisioning the future](#)

Integrity, value of

Interactions. See [Communication](#)

Interdependence

Introversion

Intuition

Iyer, Natraj

## J

Jackson, Melinda

Jadhav, Poonam

Jamieson, Gary

Janis, Michael

Job, as adventure

“Job shadowing”

Job structure:

- job titles and

- latitude and

Johnson, Cheryl



# K

Kane, Phillip

Kanter, Rosabeth Moss

Key, M. K.

Key performance indicators (KPIs)

Kiel, Fred

King, Martin Luther Jr.

- “I Have a Dream” speech

- image-based words and

- observations on speech of

Klein, Gary

Knowledge:

- limitations of one's

- sharing

*Kouzes-Posner Second Law of Leadership*

Kramer, Steven

Kroghrud, Ivar

Krznaric, Roman

## L

Ladonnikov, Ruthy

Lafley, A. G.

Lai, Olivia

Lai, Theresa

Language:

frames and

future and

game-playing experiments and

image-based

metaphorical

values reflected in

watching your

*Laughter: A Scientific Investigation* (Provine)

Law, Charles

Leader effectiveness ratings

Leaders:

admired, characteristics of

best

central task for

competence and

consistency of

constituents and

forward-looking

as great listeners

inspiration and

performance and

ratings by direct reports

shared vision and

worst

Leadership:

as daily habit

defined

effectiveness of

foundation of

information sharing and

innovation and

introversion and

key characteristics and

looking inward for

potential

practice and

as relationship

“staying in love” with

uncertain times and

See also [Exemplary leadership](#)

*Leadership Challenge, The*

Leadership philosophy:

clarity of

defining personal values and

importance of knowing your

Leadership practices. See [Five practices of Exemplary Leadership](#)

Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)

*Leading the Revolution* (Hamel)

*Lead with a Story* (Smith)

Learning:

active  
climate for  
effectiveness ratings and  
feedback and  
growth mind-set and  
leadership and  
“learning frame” and  
as master skill  
mistakes and  
passion for  
practice and  
relationships in workplace and  
systematic opportunities for

Learning from experience

by being active learner  
by creating climate for learning  
of failures  
strengthening resilience and grit

Lee, Deanna

Levine, Andrew

Lim, Anita

Listening:

active

innovation and

nonjudgmental

team spirit and

Living shared values

by asking questions

importance of

language for

by seeking feedback

by use of time and attention

Ljubic, Sinisa

Lockheed Martin

Long, Erika

Lotwala, Tanvi

Loyalty:

leadership and

trust and

Lui, Jade

Lustig, Niki

## M

Mackenzie, Andy

Maher, Peter

Malik, Eakta

Martens, Phil

Masiello, Wendy

Matinpour, Bobby

Matouk, Nicole

Mayo, Penny

McCamey, Ian

McGaugh, James

McGregor, Lindsay

McKenna, Shawn

McNeil, Nathalie

Mehta, Ritesh

Merchant, Nilofer

Messages. *See* [Communication](#)

Meyer, Cathryn

Michel, John

Micromanagement

Milestones. *See* [Small wins](#)

Millennials

Mindfulness, power of

Mind-set:

fixed

growth

meaning

setbacks and

Mission

Mistakes:

critical thinking and

learning from

Modeling the way (practice 1):

clarification of values and

overview and

*See also* [Clarifying values](#); [Setting example](#); [Teaching modeling of values](#)

Money:

contingent rewards study and

outstanding work and

purpose and

Morale:

leader's personal example and

small wins and

trust and

Morality

Mork, Casey



Motivation:

challenges and

confidence and

extrinsic

feeling a connection and

focus on future and

internal

intrinsic

leader's personal example and

meaningful work and

mission and

pride in being unique and

productivity and

small wins and

Myths, leadership and

# N

Negativity

Neural networks

Neuroscience. *See also* [Brain](#)

Newberg, Andrew

Nikiforov, Sergey

Novak, David

Nuñez, Cristian

## O

Obstacles, overcoming

100 Best Companies to Work For list

O'Neill, Tyrone

Online chat rooms

Operating system. See [Five practices of Exemplary Leadership](#)

Operations

Opportunities:

- can-do attitude and

- decision-making and

- encouragement and

- engagement and

- innovation and

- market

- meaningful work and

- preparation for

- risks and

- for taking initiative

Organizational commitment. See [Commitment](#)

## Organizations:

climate for learning and

“great workplace”

innovative ideas global study

performance of

restructuring and

sense of purpose and

spin-offs and

up-to-date information and

values reinforced by systems and processes of

vision of units within

*See also* [Corporate culture](#)

Ostrea, Kerry Ann

Outperformance. *See* [Performance](#)

## Outsight

defined

looking outside your experience as

promoting diverse perspectives as

treating job as adventure as

# P

Pacas, Jan

Pacific Eagle Holdings

Paradigm shifts

Pari, Divya

Passion:

- challenges and
- expressing your
- genuineness and
- for learning
- meaningfulness and

Patra, Gyan

Patterns, recognition of

## Performance:

best vs. worst leaders  
challenge, skill and  
confidence and  
escalation of issues and  
feedback and  
improvement in  
optimal  
self-confidence and  
shared values and  
stock price  
true leaders and  
trust and  
work attitudes and

## Personal-Best Leadership Experience:

change and  
constituents and  
empathy and  
feedback and  
grit and  
organizational issues and  
personal values and  
proactive behavior and  
resilience, grit and  
shared goals and  
small wins and  
social support and  
trust and

Personal history

Personal involvement

impact of  
by showing you care  
through celebrations  
through storytelling

Personalizing recognition

with creative incentives  
by getting close to people  
importance of  
by saying thank you

Pham, Anh

Philpott, Jacob

Pilot projects

Podcasts

Positivity:

- creativity and
- neural networks and
- small wins and

Power:

- actions, conditions and
- believing in others and
- dictatorial style and
- information sharing and
- knowledge sharing and
- leader's personal example and
- of mindfulness
- powerlessness and
- transferring

“Praise moments”

Present, mindfulness and

Pride:

- freedom, choice and
- leadership and
- meaningful work and
- in uniqueness

*Primed to Perform* (McGregor and Doshi)

Prisoner's Dilemma paradigm



Proactivity

Problem solving

Processes:

reinforcement through

SOPs and

Productivity:

challenges and

choices and

commitment to cause and

confidence and

engagement and

escalation of issues and

motivation levels and

Profits, investments and

Projects, structuring of

Promises, follow through and

Prototyping

Provine, Robert

Pualuan, Omar

Purpose:

challenging with  
finding common  
importance of common  
initiative and  
leadership effectiveness ratings and  
listening and  
making money and  
meaningfulness and  
productivity and  
vision and

*See also* [Goals](#)

Purpose, Values, and Principles (PVP)

Purpose Statement Workshop, The

Putnam, Robert

PVP (Purpose, Values, and Principles)

“Pygmalion Effect”

# Q

Quality, quantity vs., experiment

Questions:

asking purposeful

coaches and

innovation and

listening and

organizational issues and

self-exploration and

SOPs and

“What's next?”

## R

Rahman, Mushfiq

Ramakrishnan, Geeta

Ramakrishnan, Sharada

Reciprocity, supporting norms of

Recognizing contributions

- actions for

- example of impact of

- by expecting the best

- goals as context for

- publicly

- See also* [Personalizing recognition](#); [Thank you](#)

Reflection, self-

Reforzado, Hormigon

## Relationships:

cooperative  
durable  
empathy and  
establishing  
facilitation of  
feedback and  
globally distributed  
leadership as  
reciprocity and  
trust and  
workplace and

*See also* [Facilitating relationships](#)

## Reorganization

### Research methodology:

decision-making and  
game-playing experiments  
image-based words and  
listening and  
meaningful work and  
neural networks and  
quality vs. quantity  
storytelling experiment  
stressing the “why” and

Resilience:

positive words and  
strengthening of

Resources, providing

Responsibility:

long-term view and  
performance and  
resources and  
roles and  
success and

Responsiveness

Restructuring

Rewards:

contingent  
effectiveness of  
extrinsic  
financial  
intrinsic  
short-term  
specificity of  
unexpected

Richarz, Kurt

Risk:

- brain and
- calculated
- complexity and
- decision-making and
- opportunities and
- team development and

Risk taking. *See also* [Experimenting and taking risks](#)

Robin, Jennifer

Rodriguez, Bob

Rodriguez, Javier

Role:

- cooperative
- responsibilities and

Role models. *See also* [Setting example](#)

Rowling, J. K.

Rules:

- clarity about
- Golden Rule

Ryan, Matt

Rzepa, Andrew

## S

Sahoo, Biswajit

Salcedo, Carolina Rojas

Sasser, Richard

Saudagaran, Priya

Sawyer, Mike

Schaefer, Dustin

Schalk, Don

Schedule slippage, reduction in

Schultz, Kevin

Schwab, Dan

Seaman, John

Searching for opportunities

- actions for

- by exercising oversight

- meeting challenges and

- by seizing initiative

Sedlock, Julie

Self-confidence:

- coaching and

- feedback and

- fostering

- performance and

- training and

- trust and



Self-determination:

accountability and  
and actions making others feeling powerless/powerful  
enhancing  
by fostering accountability  
by providing choices  
strengthening of  
by structuring jobs to offer latitude  
trust and

Self-development

Self-disclosure

Self-employment

Self-esteem, feeling unique and

Self-exploration

Self-fulfilling prophecies

Self-protective postures

Self-reflection, future success and

Self-respect, feeling unique and

Setbacks:

grit and

resilience and

*See also* [Failure](#); [Mistakes](#)

Setting example

actions for

essentials of

illustration of

living by shared values

by modeling teaching of values

Shah, Kinjal

Shakir, Sumaya

Shared values:

creation of

goals and

living by

outperformance and

power and

work attitudes, performance and

*See also* [Affirming shared values](#); [Living shared values](#)

Shared vision:

communication of

genuineness and

inspiring

mental images and

Sharing information, competence and

Sharma, Pranav

Sharp, Debbie

Siegel, Barby

Singh, Emily

Skarke, Steve

Skills:

challenges and

leadership

skillsets

training and

Small wins

from breaking down big problems

to build psychological hardiness

defined

experiments as

impact of focusing on

origin of concept of

positivity and

Smith, George David

Smith, Paul

Social capital

Social networking sites

Facebook

Twitter

Social support

Soden, Mark

Sorg, Stephanie

Speaking, genuineness and

Standard operating practices (SOPs)

Standards, clarity and

Stanford, John H.

Starbucks

Startup companies

*Stop Playing Safe* (Warrell)

Storytelling:

- experiment and
- personal involvement through
- setting example and

Straka, Denise

Strengthening others

- actions for
- developing competence and confidence
- enhancing self-determination
- example of

Stress:

- challenges and
- positivity and
- psychological hardiness and
- resilience and
- viewpoint and

Success:

accountability for  
commitment to goal and  
distinctiveness and  
emotional expression and  
empathy and  
failure and  
keys to  
passion and  
secret to  
small wins and  
teams and

Sullivan, Nancy

*Sunday Times*

Supply chain, vision for

Swain, Bernie

Systems, reinforcement through

# T

Tai, Eddie

Talent:

- hard work and
- utilization of

Tam, Wayne

Taute, Beth

Taylor, Emily

Teaching modeling of values

- by confronting critical incidents
- importance of
- with organizational systems
- by telling stories

Team:

- development of
- effectiveness of
- information sharing and
- long-lived
- offshore
- praise and
- trust and

Teamwork:

- anchoring teams and
- cohesion and
- collaboration and
- interdependence and
- listening and

Technology. *See also* [Social networking sites](#)

Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership. *See also specific commitments*

Thank you:

- handwritten notes
- saying

Thomas, Keni

360-degree leadership assessment tool. *See* [Leadership Practices Inventory\\_\(LPI\)](#)

Three Pillars, The

Time:

- practice and
- spending your

Tolmare, Amit

Training:

- continuing education
- difficult situations and
- new processes and
- return on investment and
- skill-building and
- sustained

Trends:

reading about

spotting

Trust:

accountability and

building

climate of

collaboration and

competence and

as contagious

empathy and

expressing confidence and

follow through and

growth mind-set and

importance of

information sharing and

micromanagement and

power transfer and

reciprocity and

role-playing exercise and

virtual

work ethic and



Trust building

- by being first to trust

- by investing in trust

- by sharing knowledge and information

- by showing concern for others

- vulnerability and

Twaronite, Karen

Twitter

# U

Uniqueness, focusing on  
Unity

# V

## Values:

annual reports and  
as guide for actions  
means and ends classification of  
ownership of  
personal, clarity about  
personal-best leadership experience and  
as personal bottom line  
sense of purpose and  
signal-sending actions and

*See also* [Affirming shared values](#); [Celebrating values and victories](#); [Clarifying values](#); [Living shared values](#); [Shared values](#); [Teaching modeling of values](#)

Verdant, Aristotle

## Viewpoints:

appreciation for others'  
trust and

Vision:

alignment with people's  
clear  
described  
as ends values  
fog analogy and  
inspiring shared  
long-term interests and  
metaphorical language and  
origin of  
rapid change and  
risk-taking and

*See also* [Animating vision](#); [Envisioning the future](#)

Vision message

Vision statements

Voice. *See* [Finding your voice](#)

Vulnerabilities, exposing

## W

Waldman, Mark

Wang, Barbara

Wang, John

Wang, Justina

Warrell, Margie

Washington, George

Watkins, Michael

Webcams

Weick, Karl

Westen, Drew

Williams, Pat

Wilson, Donna

Win-win vs. win-lose strategies

Wong, Anne

Wong, Bert

*Words Can Change Your Brain* (Newberg and Waldman)

Workplaces:

attitudes about

attitude scores in

behavior in

calling in to your

excitement in

“great workplace” companies

meaning, purpose and

mindfulness and

mistakes in

relationships in

trust and

*See also* [Job structure](#)

# Y

Young Storytellers Foundation (YSF)

YouTube

Yu, Raymond

## Z

Zavaleta, Luis

Zaveri, Azmeena

Zong, Andrew

Zor, Ferhat

Zuo, Forth



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