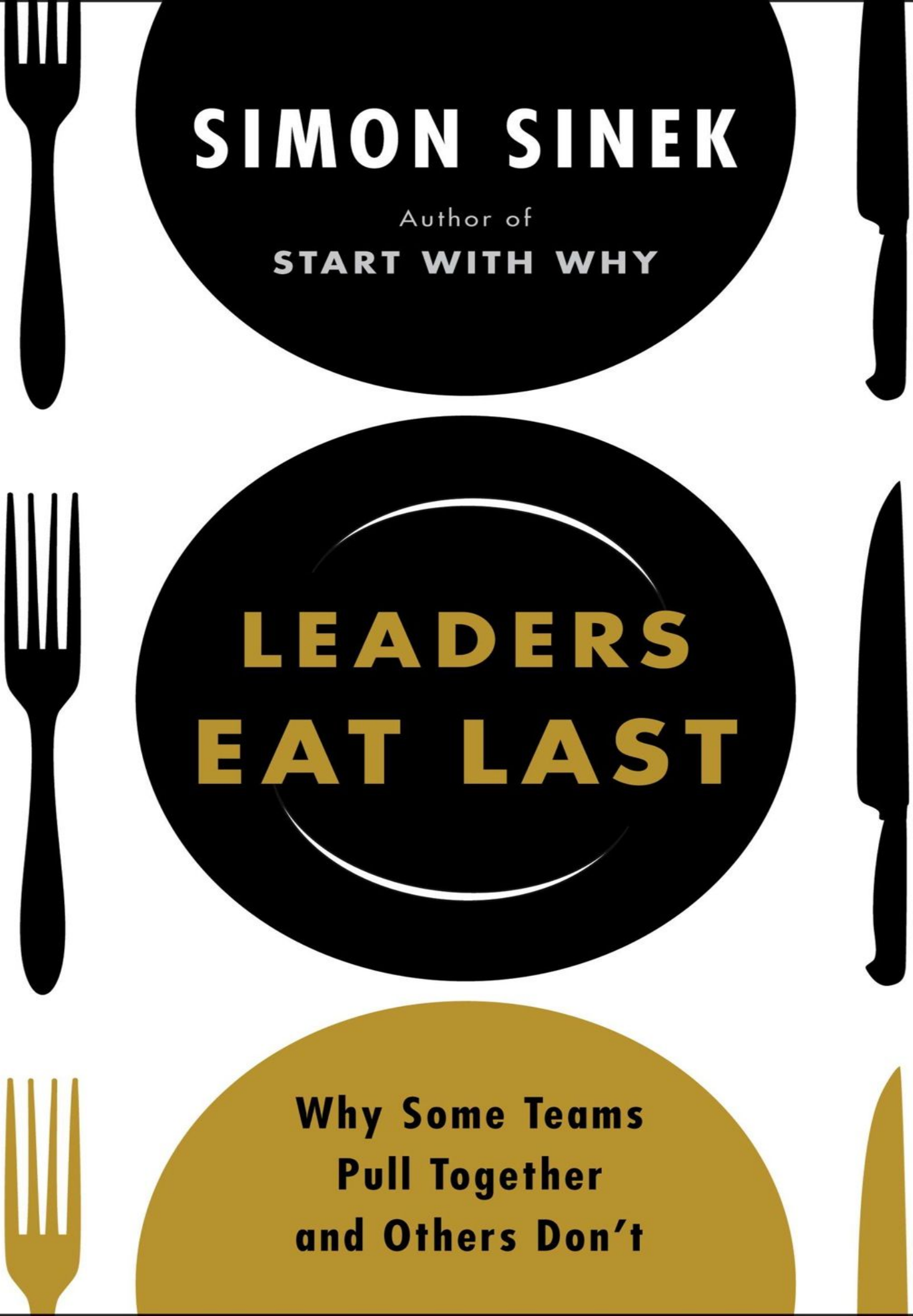
SIMON SINEK
Author of
START WITH WHY
LEADERS EAT LAST
Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't

**ALSO BY THE AUTHOR**

*Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*


SIMON SINEK
LEADERS EAT LAST
Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't
PORTFOLIO / PENGUIN

PORTFOLIO / PENGUIN
Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Group (USA) LLC
375 Hudson Street
New York, New York 10014

USA | Canada | UK | Ireland | Australia | New Zealand | India | South Africa | China
penguin.com
A Penguin Random House Company

First published by Portfolio / Penguin, a member of Penguin Group (USA) LLC, 2013



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sinek, Simon.
Leaders eat last : why some teams pull together and others don't / Simon Sinek.
pages cm
Includes index.
ISBN 978-1-101-62303-9
1. Leadership. 2. Corporate culture. 3. Organizational change. I. Title.
HD57.7.S5487 2014
658.4'092—dc23
2013039108



Version_1

To the men and women I've met in the United States Air Force—

You have taught me more about what it means to be human than anyone who wears a suit ever did.

# CONTENTS

Leaders are the ones who run headfirst into the unknown.

They rush toward the danger.

They put their own interests aside to protect us or to pull us into the future.

Leaders would sooner sacrifice what is theirs to save what is ours.

And they would never sacrifice what is ours to save what is theirs.

This is what it means to be a leader.

It means they choose to go first into danger, headfirst toward the unknown.

And when we feel sure they will keep us safe,

we will march behind them and work tirelessly to see their visions come to life

and proudly call ourselves their followers.

# FOREWORD

I know of no case study in history that describes an organization that has been managed out of a crisis. Every single one of them was led. Yet a good number of our educational institutions and training programs today are focused not on developing great leaders but on training effective managers. Short-term gains are viewed as the mark of success and long-term organizational growth and viability are simply the bill payers. *Leaders Eat Last* is an effort to change this paradigm.

In *Leaders Eat Last,* Simon Sinek does not propose any new leadership theory or core principle. He has a much higher purpose to his writing. Simon would like to make the world a better place for all of us. His vision is simple: to create a new generation of men and women who understand that an organization's success or failure is based on leadership excellence and not managerial acumen.

It is not an accident that Simon uses the U.S. military, and in particular the United States Marine Corps, to explain the importance of leaders being focused on their people. These organizations have strong cultures and shared values, understand the importance of teamwork, create trust among their members, maintain focus, and, most important, understand the importance of people and relationships to their mission success. These organizations are also in a position where the cost of failure can be catastrophic. Mission failure is not an option. Without a doubt, people enable the success of all our military services.

When you are with Marines gathering to eat, you will notice that the most junior are served first and the most senior are served last. When you witness this act, you will also note that no order is given.

Marines just do it. At the heart of this very simple action is the Marine Corps' approach to leadership. Marine leaders are expected to eat last because the true price of leadership is the willingness to place the needs of others above your own. Great leaders truly care about those they are privileged to lead and understand that the true cost of the leadership privilege comes at the expense of self-interest.

In his previous book, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action,* Simon explained that for an organization to be successful its leaders need to understand the true purpose of their organization—the Why. In *Leaders Eat Last,* Simon takes us to the next level of understanding why some organizations do better than others. He does this by detailing all elements of the leadership challenge. Simply stated, it is not enough to know "the Why" of your organization; you must know your people and realize that they are much more than an expendable resource. In short, professional competence is not enough to be a good leader; good leaders must truly care about those entrusted to their care.

Good management is clearly not enough to sustain any organization over the long term. Simon's in-depth explanation of the elements of human behavior clearly demonstrates that there are real reasons why some organizations may do well over a short period of time but eventually fail: The leadership has failed to create an environment where people really do matter. As Simon points out, organizations where people share values and are valued succeed over the long term in both good and bad times.

John Quincy Adams would have understood Simon's message because he clearly understood what it was to be a leader when he stated: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." In this quote, I think you will find the message of *Leaders Eat Last.* When leaders inspire those they lead, people dream of a better future, invest time and effort in learning more, do more for their organizations and along the way become leaders themselves. A leader who takes care of their people and stays focused on the well-being of the organization can never fail. My hope is that after reading this book readers will be inspired to always eat last.

GEORGE J. FLYNN,

Lieutenant General, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)


THE
FORCE

PART
1

# [ OUR NEED TO FEEL SAFE ]

CHAPTER 1

## Protection from Above

A thick layer of clouds blocked out any light. There were no stars and there was no moon. Just black. The team slowly made its way through the valley, the rocky terrain making it impossible to go any faster than a snail's pace. Worse, they knew they were being watched. Every one of them was on edge.

A year hadn't yet passed since the attacks of September 11. The Taliban government had only recently fallen after taking a pounding from U.S. forces for their refusal to turn over the Al Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden. There were a lot of Special Operations Forces in the area performing missions that, to this day, are still classified. This was one of those teams and this was one of those missions.

All we know is that the team of twenty-two men was operating deep inside enemy territory and had recently captured what the government calls a "high-value target." They were now working their way through a deep valley in a mountainous part of Afghanistan, escorting their high-value target to a safe house.

Flying over the thick clouds that night was Captain Mike Drowley, or Johnny Bravo, as he is known by his call sign or nickname. Except for the whir of his engines, it was perfectly peaceful up there. Thousands of stars speckled the sky, and the moon lit up the top of the clouds so brightly it looked like a fresh layer of snow had fallen. It was beautiful.

Johnny Bravo and his wingman were circling above in their A-10 aircraft, waiting should they be needed below. Affectionately known as the Warthog, the A-10 is not technically a fighter jet; it's an attack

aircraft. A relatively slow-flying, single-seat armored plane designed to provide close air support for troops on the ground. Unlike other fighter jets, it is not fast or sexy (hence the nickname), but it gets the job done.

Ideally, both the A-10 pilots in the air and the troops on the ground would prefer to see each other with their eyes. Seeing the plane above, knowing someone is looking out for them, gives the troops below a greater sense of confidence. And seeing the troops below gives the pilots a greater sense of assurance that they will be able to help if needed. But given the thick cloud cover and the mountainous terrain that night in Afghanistan, the only way either knew the other was there was through the occasional radio contact they kept. Without a line of sight, Johnny Bravo couldn't see what the troops saw, but he could sense how the troops felt from what he heard over the radio. And this was enough to spur him to act.

Following his gut, Johnny Bravo decided he needed to execute a weather letdown, to drop down below the clouds so he could take a look at what was happening on the ground. It was a daring move. With the thick, low-hanging clouds, scattered storms in the area and the fact that Johnny Bravo would have to fly into a valley with his field of vision reduced by the night-vision goggles, performing the weather letdown under these conditions was extremely treacherous for even the most experienced of pilots.

Johnny Bravo was not told to perform the risky maneuver. If anything, he probably would have been told to hang tight and wait until he got the call to help. But Johnny Bravo is not like most pilots. Even though he was thousands of feet above in the safe cocoon of his cockpit, he could sense the anxiety of the men below. Regardless of the dangers, he knew that performing the weather letdown was the right thing to do. And for Johnny Bravo, that meant there was no other choice.

Then, just as he was preparing to head down through the clouds into the valley, his instincts were confirmed. Three words came across the radio. Three little words that can send shivers down a pilot's neck: "Troops in contact."

"Troops in contact" means someone on the ground is in trouble. It is the call that ground forces use to let others know they are under

attack. Though Johnny Bravo had heard those words many times before during training, it was on this night, August 16, 2002, that he heard the words “troops in contact” for the first time in a combat situation.

Johnny Bravo had developed a way to help him relate to the men on the ground. To feel what they feel. During every training exercise, while flying above the battlefield, he would always replay in his mind the scene from the movie *Saving Private Ryan* when the Allies stormed the beaches of Normandy. He would picture the ramp of a Higgins boat dropping down, the men running onto the beach into a wall of German gunfire. The bullets whizzing past them. The pings of stray shots hitting the steel hulls of the boats. The cries of men hit. Johnny Bravo had trained himself to imagine that that was the scene playing out below every time he heard “Troops in contact.” With those images vividly embossed in his mind, Johnny Bravo reacted to the call for assistance.

He told his wingman to hang tight above the clouds, announced his intentions to the flight controllers and the troops below and pointed his aircraft down into the darkness. As he passed through the clouds, the turbulence thrashed him and his aircraft about. A hard push to the left. A sudden drop. A jolt to the right. Unlike the commercial jets in which we fly, the A-10 is not designed for passenger comfort, and his plane bounced and shook hard as he passed through the layer of cloud.

Flying into the unknown with no idea what to expect, Johnny Bravo focused his attention on his instruments, trying to take in as much information as he could. His eyes moved from one dial to the next followed by a quick glance out the front window. Altitude, speed, heading, window. Altitude, speed, heading, window. “Please. Let. This. Work. Please. Let. This. Work,” he said to himself under his breath.

When he finally broke through the clouds, he was less than a thousand feet off the ground, flying in a valley. The sight that greeted him was nothing like he had ever seen before, not in training or in the movies. There was enemy fire coming from both sides of the valley. Massive amounts of it. There was so much that the tracer fire —the streaks of light that follow the bullets—lit up the whole area.

Bullets and rockets all aimed at the middle, all aimed squarely at the Special Operations Forces pinned down below.

In 2002 the avionics in the aircraft were not as sophisticated as they are today. The instruments Johnny Bravo had couldn't prevent him from hitting the mountain walls. Worse, he was flying with old Soviet maps left over from the invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. But there was no way he was going to let down those troops. "There are fates worse than death," he will tell you. "One fate worse than death is accidentally killing your own men. Another fate worse than death is going home alive when twenty-two others don't."

And so, on that dark night in August, Johnny Bravo started counting. He knew his speed and he knew his distance from the mountains. He did some quick calculations in his head and counted out loud the seconds he had before he would hit the valley walls. "One one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand . . ." He locked his guns onto a position from which he could see a lot of enemy fire originating and held down the trigger of his Gatling gun. "Four one thousand, five one thousand, six one thousand . . ." At the point he ran out of room, he pulled back on the stick and pulled a sharp turn. His plane roared as he pulled back into the cloud above, his only option to avoid smacking into the mountain. His body pressed hard into his seat from the pressure of the G-forces as he set to go around again.

But there was no sound on the radio. The silence was deafening. Did the radio silence mean his shots were useless? Did it mean the guy on the radio was down? Or worse, did it mean the whole team was down?

Then the call came. "Good hits! Good hits! Keep it coming!" And keep it coming he did. He took another pass, counting again to avoid hitting the mountains. "One one thousand, two one thousand, three one thousand . . ." And another sharp turn and another run. And another. And another. He was making good hits and he had plenty of fuel; the problem now was, he was out of ammo.

He pointed his plane up to the clouds to fly and meet his wingman, who was still circling above. Johnny Bravo quickly briefed his partner on the situation and told him to do one thing, "Follow me."

The two A-10s, flying three feet apart from each other, wing to wing, disappeared together into the clouds.

When they popped out, both less than a thousand feet above the ground, they began their runs together. Johnny Bravo did the counting and his wingman followed his lead and laid down the fire. “One one thousand. Two one thousand. Three one thousand. Four one thousand . . .” On cue, the two planes pulled high-G turns together and went around again and again and again. “One one thousand. Two one thousand. Three one thousand. Four one thousand.”

That night, twenty-two men went home alive. There were no American casualties.

## The Value of Empathy

**THAT AUGUST NIGHT** over Afghanistan, Johnny Bravo risked his life so that others might survive. He received no performance bonus. He didn’t get a promotion or an award at the company off-site. He wasn’t looking for any undue attention or reality TV show for his efforts. For Johnny Bravo, it was just part of the “J.O.B.” as he puts it. And the greatest reward he received for his service was meeting the forces for whom he provided top cover that night. Though they had never met before, when they finally did meet, they hugged like old friends.

In the linear hierarchies in which we work, we want the folks at the top to see what we did. We raise our hands for recognition and reward. For most of us, the more recognition we get for our efforts from those in charge, the more successful we think we are. It is a system that works so long as that one person who supervises us stays at the company and feels no undue pressure from above—a nearly impossible standard to maintain. For Johnny Bravo and those like him, the will to succeed and the desire to do things that advance the interests of the organization aren’t just motivated by recognition from above; they are integral to a culture of sacrifice and service, in which protection comes from all levels of the organization.

There is one thing that Johnny Bravo credits for giving him the courage to cross into the darkness of the unknown, sometimes with the knowledge that he might not come back. And it's not necessarily what you would expect. As valuable as it was, it isn't his training. And for all the advanced schooling he has received, it isn't his education. And as remarkable as the tools are that he has been given, it isn't his aircraft or any of its sophisticated systems. For all the technology he has at his disposal, empathy, Johnny Bravo says, is the single greatest asset he has to do his job. Ask any of the remarkable men and women in uniform who risk themselves for the benefit of others why they do it and they will tell you the same thing: "Because they would have done it for me."

Where do people like Johnny Bravo come from? Are they just born that way? Some perhaps are. But if the conditions in which we work meet a particular standard, every single one of us is capable of the courage and sacrifice of a Johnny Bravo. Though we may not be asked to risk our lives or to save anybody else's, we would gladly share our glory and help those with whom we work succeed. More important, in the right conditions, the people with whom we work would choose to do those things for us. And when that happens, when those kinds of bonds are formed, a strong foundation is laid for the kind of success and fulfillment that no amount of money, fame or awards can buy. This is what it means to work in a place in which the leaders prioritize the well-being of their people and, in return, their people give everything they've got to protect and advance the well-being of one another and the organization.

I use the military to illustrate the example because the lessons are so much more exaggerated when it is a matter of life and death. There is a pattern that exists in the organizations that achieve the greatest success, the ones that outmaneuver and outinnovate their competitors, the ones that command the greatest respect from inside and outside their organizations, the ones with the highest loyalty and lowest churn and the ability to weather nearly every storm or challenge. These exceptional organizations all have cultures in which the leaders provide cover from above and the people on the ground look out for each other. This is the reason they are willing to

push hard and take the kinds of risks they do. And the way any organization can achieve this is with empathy.

CHAPTER 2

# Employees Are People Too

Before there was empathy at the company, going to work felt like, well, work. On any given morning, the factory employees would stand at their machines waiting to start at the sound of the bell. And when it rang, on cue they would flip the switches and power up the machines in front of them. Within a few seconds, the whir of the machinery drowned out the sound of their voices. The workday had begun.

About two hours into the day, another bell would ring, announcing the time the workers could take a break. The machines would stop and nearly every worker would leave their post. Some went to the bathroom. Some went to grab another cup of coffee. And some just sat by their machines, resting until the bell told them to start work again. A few hours later, the bell would sound again, this time to let them know they were now allowed to leave the building for lunch. This was the way it had always been done.

“I didn’t know any better,” said Mike Merck, an assembly team leader with a thick Southern drawl who had been with HayssenSandiacre for fourteen years. “I think anyone in the building would have told you the same thing.”

But things would change after Bob Chapman took over the South Carolina company. Chapman is CEO of the equally cumbersomely named Barry-Wehmiller, a collection of predominantly manufacturing companies that Chapman had been steadily buying over the years. Most of the companies that Chapman bought were in distress. Their financials were weak and, in some cases, their cultures were worse. HayssenSandiacre was his latest acquisition. Other CEOs may have brought with them a team of consultants and a new strategy, ready to tell everyone what they had to do to “return the company to profitability.” What Chapman brought, in stark contrast, was a

willingness to listen. As he did with every company he acquired, he started by sitting down to hear what employees had to say.

Ron Campbell, a twenty-seven-year veteran of the company, had just returned from three months in Puerto Rico, where he had been responsible for installing HayssenSandiacre's manufacturing equipment in a customer's plant. Sitting in the room with Chapman, Campbell was hesitant to talk about what life was like at the company. "First of all," Campbell asked, "if I tell the truth, will I still have a job tomorrow?" Chapman smiled. "If you have any trouble tomorrow about what you say today," he assured him, "you give me a call."

And with that, Campbell started to open up. "Well, Mr. Chapman," he started, "it seems like you trust me a lot more when you can't see me than when I'm right here. I had more freedom while I was away at a customer site than I do here," he said, referring to his time away in Puerto Rico. "As soon as I stepped in the plant, it's like all my freedom just slipped away. It feels like someone has their thumb on me. I had to punch a time clock when I walked in and again when I left for lunch, came back and when I was done for the day. I didn't have to do that in Puerto Rico." This was nothing Chapman hadn't heard before at other factories.

"I walk in the same door with engineers, accountants and other people who work in the office," Campbell went on. "They turn left to go to the office and I go straight into the plant and we are treated completely differently. You trust them to decide when to get a soda or a cup of coffee or take a break; you make me wait for a bell."

Others felt the same. It was like there were two different companies. No matter how much effort they put in, those who stood by the machines didn't feel like the company trusted them simply because they stood on a factory floor instead of sitting at desks. If an office employee needed to call home to let their kids know they would be late, they would simply pick up the phone and call them. On the factory floor, however, if a worker needed to do the same thing, they had to ask permission to use the pay phone.

When Campbell finished, Chapman turned to the personnel leader and told him they needed to take down the time clocks. The bells were to go too. Without making any grand proclamations and

without asking for anything in return from the employees, Chapman decided that things were going to be different from now on. And that was just the start.

Empathy would be injected into the company and trust would be the new standard. Preferring to see everyone as human instead of as a factory worker or office employee, Chapman made other changes so that everyone would be treated the same way.

Spare machine parts had always been kept inside a locked cage. If a worker needed a part, they would have to stand in line outside the cage and ask a parts employee to get what they needed. Workers were not allowed to go into the cage themselves. This was management's way of protecting against theft. It may have prevented theft, but it was also a powerful reminder that management didn't trust people. Chapman ordered all the locks removed and all the fences taken down and allowed any employee to go into the area to check out any part or tool they felt they needed.

Chapman took out all the pay phones and made company phones available that any employee could use at any time. No coins needed, no permission required. Any employee would be allowed to go through any door and visit any part of the company whenever they wanted. Every employee would be treated the same way regardless of whether they worked in the administrative offices or on the factory floor. This was going to be the new normal.

Chapman understood that to earn the trust of people, the leaders of an organization must first treat them like people. To earn trust, he must extend trust. He didn't believe that simply because someone went to college or was good at accounting they were more trustworthy than someone who had a GED and was good with their hands. Chapman believed in the fundamental goodness of people and he was going to treat them as such.

In a short period of time, the company started to feel more like a family. Simply by changing the environment in which people worked, the same people started acting differently toward each other. They felt like they belonged and that enabled them to relax and feel valued. People started to care for others as they felt cared for. This caring environment allowed people to fully engage "their heads and

hearts," as Chapman likes to say, and the organization began to thrive.

An employee in the paint department faced a personal crisis. His wife, a diabetic, was going to lose her leg. He needed time to help her, but as an hourly worker, he could not afford to lose any pay. He couldn't afford not to work. But this was a different company now. Without being asked, his fellow employees quickly came up with a plan: to transfer their own paid vacation days so he could have more days off. Nothing like this had ever been done before at the company. What's more, it was in clear violation of official company policy. But that didn't matter. "We're thinking about other people more," Merck said. And so with the help of those in the administrative office, that is exactly what they did.

"I never thought you could enjoy a job," said Campbell. "When you have people who trust you, they're going to do a better job for you to earn or keep that trust." In the more than ten years since the chain-link fence came down, there has been almost no theft. And if an employee has a personal problem, they know the leaders of the company—and their fellow employees—will be there for them.

Employees didn't just become more willing to help each other solve problems, however. They also looked after their machines better. This meant fewer breakdowns and fewer work stoppages (which also meant expenses were kept in check). The changes were not only good for the people, they were good for the company too. In the period since Chapman took over, HayssenSandiacre saw revenue increase from $55 million to $95 million, which reflected organic and acquisition growth. They grew without any debt and without the help of a management consultant–driven reorganization. The company grew because of the people who already worked there. They had a renewed commitment to the organization, and it didn't come as a result of any promises of bonuses or threats. They were more committed because they wanted to be. A new culture of caring allowed the people and strategies to flourish.

This is what happens when the leaders of an organization listen to the people who work there. Without coercion, pressure or force, the people naturally work together to help each other and advance the company. Working with a sense of obligation is replaced by

working with a sense of pride. And coming to work for the company is replaced by coming to work for each other. Work is no longer a place to dread. It is a place to feel valued.

## We See What We Want to See

**CHAPMAN LIKES TO** tell the story about the first time he visited HayssenSandiacre, which was five years before the transition that Mike Merck and Ron Campbell talk about. It was shortly after Chapman had acquired the company. As the new CEO, no one knew who he was or paid any attention to him as he sipped a cup of coffee before his first meeting. They just went about their business as usual, waiting for the day to start. And it was what Chapman saw while sitting in the cafeteria that March morning in 1997 that started his experiment with the company. He saw something he had never seen before in all of his years in business. It was a scene powerful enough to force him to reexamine nearly every lesson he had ever learned about how to run a company. What he did at HayssenSandiacre would become the basis for how Chapman would run his entire operation. More important, it would transform how he managed the people who worked for him.

As he sat there, Chapman watched a group of employees having their morning coffee together before work . . . and they were having fun. Joking, laughing like they were old friends. They were placing bets for the NCAA March Madness basketball tournament airing that night. They were getting along and seemed to really enjoy each other's company. But as soon as they stood up to start their day, Chapman noticed a dramatic change in their demeanor. As if on cue, their smiles were replaced with sullenness. The laughing stopped. The camaraderie evaporated. "The energy seemed to drain from them," said Chapman.

Chapman was overcome with a feeling of despair. He had bought distressed companies like this before. He had been around their employees before. But, for some reason, he had never been able to see what he saw that day. He couldn't help but feel touched by what

he just witnessed, which spurred a thought: Why can't we enjoy ourselves at work like we do when we're not at work?

Up until that day, Chapman had been exactly the kind of executive we teach our MBAs to be. He was good with numbers and he loved the game of business. He made decisions based on data, market conditions and financial opportunities. He was tough when he needed to be and could charm the pants off someone, if that's what was required. He thought business was something that was measured on spreadsheets, and he saw people as one of the many assets he had to manage to help him achieve his financial goals. And as that kind of executive, he was very effective.

Before that moment in the cafeteria, Chapman was able to make hard decisions far too easily. The St. Louis-based company with the hard-to-spell name was saddled with debt and close to bankruptcy when Chapman took over after his father died in 1975. And given the dire situation, he did what any responsible CEO would do in his position. He laid off employees when he felt it was needed to achieve the desired financial goal, renegotiated his debt obligations, was dependent on banks to support growth and took big risks that would create growth that any high-flying executive would have understood. And as a result the company slowly built back up to profitability.

Chapman left the cafeteria and headed to his first meeting. It was supposed to be a meet-and-greet, a simple formality. He, the new CEO, was to introduce himself to the customer service team, and they were to bring the new CEO up to speed. But based on what Chapman saw that morning, he realized that he and his team had the power to make the company a place people wanted to go every day. So he set out to create an environment in which people felt they could express themselves honestly and be recognized and celebrated for their progress. This is the basis of what Chapman calls truly human leadership.

***When the people have to manage dangers from inside the organization,***

*the organization itself becomes less able to face the dangers from outside.*

Truly human leadership protects an organization from the internal rivalries that can shatter a culture. When we have to protect ourselves from each other, the whole organization suffers. But when trust and cooperation thrive internally, we pull together and the organization grows stronger as a result.

Nearly every system in the human body exists to help us survive and thrive. Thousands of years ago, other hominid species died off while we lived on . . . and on and on. And even though we have been on the planet for a relatively short period of time compared to other species, we have fast become the most successful and the only unrivaled animal on earth. So successful, in fact, that the decisions we make affect the ability of other animals—even other human beings—to survive or thrive.

The systems inside us that protect us from danger and encourage us to repeat behavior in our best interest respond to the environments in which we live and work. If we sense danger our defenses go up. If we feel safe among our own people, in our own tribes or organizations, we relax and are more open to trust and cooperation.

A close study of high-performing organizations, the ones in which the people feel safe when they come to work, reveals something astounding. Their cultures have an eerie resemblance to the conditions under which the human animal was designed to operate. Operating in a hostile, competitive world in which each group was in pursuit of finite resources, the systems that helped us survive and thrive as a species also work to help organizations achieve the same. There are no fancy management theories and it is not about hiring dream teams. It is just a matter of biology and anthropology. If certain conditions are met and the people inside an organization feel safe among each other, they will work together to achieve things none of them could have ever achieved alone. The result is that their organization towers over their competitors.

This is what Chapman did at Barry-Wehmiller. Quite by accident, he created a work environment and company culture that, biologically, gets the best out of people. Chapman and others like him didn't set out to change their employees—they set out to change the conditions in which their employees operate. To create cultures that inspire people to give all they have to give simply because they love where they work.

This book attempts to help us understand why we do what we do. Almost all of the systems in our bodies have evolved to help us find food, stay alive and advance the species. However, for a lot of the world, and certainly throughout the developed world, finding food and avoiding danger no longer preoccupy our days. We no longer hunt and gather, at least not in the caveman sense. In our modern world, advancing our careers and trying to find happiness and fulfillment are the definition of success. But the systems inside us that guide our behavior and decisions still function as they did tens of thousands of years ago. Our primitive minds still perceive the world around us in terms of threats to our well-being or opportunities to find safety. If we understand how these systems work, we are better equipped to reach our goals. At the same time, the groups in which we work are better able to succeed and thrive as well.

Yet sadly in our modern world, given the systems we've developed to manage our companies, the number of organizations that inspire employees to truly commit themselves is a slim minority. The cultural norms of the majority of companies and organizations today actually work against our natural biological inclinations. This means that happy, inspired and fulfilled employees are the exception rather than the rule. According to the Deloitte Shift Index, 80 percent of people are dissatisfied with their jobs. When people don't even want to be at work, progress comes at much greater cost and effort . . . and often doesn't last. We don't even bother measuring a company's success in decades, instead we focus on successive quarters.

A business environment with an unbalanced focus on short-term results and money before people affects society at large. When we struggle to find happiness or a sense of belonging at work, we take that struggle home. Those who have an opportunity to work in

organizations that treat them like human beings to be protected rather than a resource to be exploited come home at the end of the day with an intense feeling of fulfillment and gratitude. This should be the rule for all of us, not the exception. Returning from work feeling inspired, safe, fulfilled and grateful is a natural human right to which we are all entitled and not a modern luxury that only a few lucky ones are able to find.

There was no “one thing” that Chapman did to transform his organization. It was a series of little things that, over time, dramatically affected how his company operates. Lots and lots of little things, some successful, some less so, but all focused on what he understood in his gut needed to happen. It wasn’t until years later, while attending a wedding, that Chapman was able to articulate in much clearer and more human terms what was driving his decisions. Given his love and tenacity for business, how Bob Chapman explains why he made the course change he did may surprise you.

## The Awesome Responsibility

**SITTING IN THE** pews of a church, Chapman and his wife watched a wedding ceremony unfold. The groom stood, staring at his approaching bride. The feeling of love the two had for each other was palpable. Everyone there could feel it. And then, as tradition dictated, the father handed his daughter, his baby girl, to her future husband.

“That’s it!” Chapman realized. A father who would do anything to protect his daughter now ceremonially hands the responsibility of that care to another. After he gives her hand away, he will take his place in the pews and trust that her new husband will protect her as he did. “It’s exactly the same for a company,” Chapman realized.

***Every single employee is someone’s son or someone’s daughter. Like a***

*parent, a leader of a company is responsible for their precious lives.*

Every single employee is someone's son or someone's daughter. Parents work to offer their children a good life and a good education and to teach them the lessons that will help them grow up to be happy, confident and able to use all the talents they were blessed with. Those parents then hand their children over to a company with the hope the leaders of that company will exercise the same love and care as they have. "It is we, the companies, who are now responsible for these precious lives," says Chapman, as he balls his hands into fists with the conviction of a devoted preacher.

This is what it means to be a leader. This is what it means to build a strong company. Being a leader is like being a parent, and the company is like a new family to join. One that will care for us like we are their own . . . in sickness and in health. And if we are successful, our people will take on our company's name as a sign of the family to which they are loyal. Those who work at Barry-Wehmiller talk of their "love" for the company and each other. They proudly wear the logo or the company's name as if it were their own name. They will defend the company and their colleagues like they were their own flesh and blood. And in the case of nearly every one of these kinds of organizations, the people use the company's name as a very symbol of their own identity.

The great irony of all this is that capitalism actually does better when we work as we were designed—when we have a chance to fulfill our very human obligations. To ask our employees not simply for their hands to do our labor, but to inspire their cooperation, their trust and their loyalty so that they will commit to our cause. To treat people like family and not as mere employees. To sacrifice the numbers to save the people and not sacrifice the people to save the numbers.

Leaders of organizations who create a working environment better suited for how we are designed do not sacrifice excellence or performance simply because they put people first. Quite the contrary. These organizations are among the most stable, innovative and

high-performing companies in their industries. Sadly, it is more common for leaders of companies to see the people as the means to drive the numbers. The leaders of great organizations do not see people as a commodity to be managed to help grow the money. They see the money as the commodity to be managed to help grow their people. This is why performance really matters. The better the organization performs, the more fuel there is to build an even bigger, more robust organization that feeds the hearts and souls of those who work there. In return, their people give everything they've got to see the organization grow . . . and grow . . . and grow.

To see money as subordinate to people and not the other way around is fundamental to creating a culture in which the people naturally pull together to advance the business. And it is the ability to grow one's people to do what needs to be done that creates stable, lasting success. It is not the genius at the top giving directions that makes people great. It is great people that make the guy at the top look like a genius.

I cannot be accused of being a crazy idealist, of imagining a world in which people love going to work. I can't be accused of being out of touch with reality to believe in the possibility of a world in which the majority of company leaders trust their people and the majority of people trust their leaders. I can't be an idealist if these organizations exist in reality.

From manufacturing to high tech, from the United States Marine Corps to the halls of government, there are shining examples of the positive results an organization will enjoy when the people inside are willing to treat each other not as adversaries, competitors or opposition but rather as trusted allies. We face enough danger from the outside. There is no value in building organizations that compound that danger by adding more threats from the inside.

Only 20 percent of Americans "love" their jobs. Chapman and those like him have called upon us to join them to make that metric grow. The question is, do we have the courage?

We need to build more organizations that prioritize the care of human beings. As leaders, it is our sole responsibility to protect our people and, in turn, our people will protect each other and advance the organization together. As employees or members of the group,

we need the courage to take care of each other when our leaders don’t. And in doing so, we become the leaders we wish we had.

CHAPTER 3

# Belonging

## From “Me” to “We”

“**FROM THIS DAY** on,” he shouted, “words like ‘I,’ ‘me,’ ‘my’ will no longer be in your vocabulary. They will be replaced with words like ‘we,’ ‘together’ and ‘us.’”

This is how it begins.

George’s mind raced. He was completely confident when he decided to go, but now that he was actually there, he felt he had made the biggest mistake of his life. But it didn’t matter now. Any thoughts he had about what he could have done or should have done would be interrupted by someone yelling inches from his face. Any feelings of excitement he may have felt before were instantly replaced by feelings of stress, isolation and helplessness.

George was part of a process that has happened thousands of times before him and will continue countless times after him. A process honed by years of trial and error. The process of transforming someone into a United States Marine.

It starts in the wee hours of the morning when a new group of recruits, tired and disoriented, arrive at one of two boot camps, one on the East Coast and one on the West Coast. The recruits are greeted by red-faced drill instructors, their voices permanently hoarse from years of straining their vocal cords, who quickly make it abundantly clear who’s in charge. Here’s a hint: it’s not the recruits.

Thirteen grueling weeks later, each Marine will be given their Eagle, Globe and Anchor pin, the symbol that they have completed the process and earned their place inside the organization. Many will grasp the pin tightly in their fist and feel a pride so intense it will bring them to tears. When they arrived at boot camp, each recruit felt

insecure and responsible only for themselves. Upon leaving, they feel confident in their own ability, a commitment to and responsibility for their fellow Marines, and a certainty that their fellow Marines feel the same for them.

This feeling of belonging, of shared values and a deep sense of empathy, dramatically enhances trust, cooperation and problem solving. United States Marines are better equipped to confront external dangers because they fear no danger from each other. They operate in a strong Circle of Safety.

## The Circle of Safety

> A lion used to prowl about a field in which Four Oxen used to dwell. Many a time he tried to attack them; but whenever he came near they turned their tails to one another, so that whichever way he approached them he was met by the horns of one of them. At last, however, they fell a-quarrelling among themselves, and each went off to pasture alone in a separate corner of the field. Then the Lion attacked them one by one and soon made an end of all four.
>
> —Aesop, sixth century B.C.

**MARINE BOOT CAMP** is not just about running, jumping, shooting and warfare. Like the skills on our résumés, those skills may be part of the job description, but they are not what make Marines so effective. And though Marines will need to learn those skills, just as we are taught skills to help us in our jobs, those things do not build the trust required for the kind of teamwork and cooperation that gets the job done better than everyone else. Those things are not what make high-performing groups perform so remarkably. The ability of a group of people to do remarkable things hinges on how well those people pull together as a team. And that doesn't happen in a vacuum.


The world around us is filled with danger. Filled with things trying to make our lives miserable. It's nothing personal; it's just the way it is. At any time and from anywhere, there are any number of forces that, without conscience, are working to hinder our success or even kill us. In caveman times, this was literally the case. The lives of early humans were threatened by all sorts of things that could end their time on earth. Things including a lack of resources, a saber-toothed tiger or the weather. Nothing personal, it's just life. The same is true today—the threats to our survival are constant.

For our modern-day businesses and organizations, the dangers we confront are both real and perceived. There are the ups and downs of the stock market that can affect a company's performance. A new technology could render an older technology or an entire business model obsolete overnight. Our competitors, even if they are not trying to put us out of business, even if they aren't trying to kill us, are still trying to frustrate our success or steal our customers.

And if that's not enough, the urgency to meet expectations, the strain of capacity and other outside pressures all contribute to the constant threats that a business faces. At all times, these forces work to hinder growth and profitability. These dangers are a constant. We have no control over them, they are never going to go away and that will never change. That's just the way it is.

There are dangerous forces inside our organizations as well. Unlike the forces outside, the ones inside are variable and are well within our control. Some of the dangers we face are real and can have immediate impact, like layoffs that may follow a bad quarter or an underperforming year. Some of us face the very real threat of losing our livelihoods if we try something new and lose the company some money. Politics also present a constant threat—the fear that others are trying to keep us down so that they may advance their own careers.

Intimidation, humiliation, isolation, feeling dumb, feeling useless and rejection are all stresses we try to avoid inside the organization. But the danger inside is controllable and it should be the goal of leadership to set a culture free of danger from each other. And the way to do that is by giving people a sense of belonging. By offering them a strong culture based on a clear set of human values and beliefs. By giving them the power to make decisions. By offering trust and empathy. By creating a Circle of Safety.

By creating a Circle of Safety around the people in the organization, leadership reduces the threats people feel inside the group, which frees them up to focus more time and energy to protect the organization from the constant dangers outside and seize the big opportunities. Without a Circle of Safety, people are forced to spend too much time and energy protecting themselves from each other.

It is the company we keep, the people around us, who will determine where we invest our energy. The more we trust that the people to the left of us and the people to the right of us have our backs, the better equipped we are to face the constant threats from the outside together. Only when we feel we are in a Circle of Safety will we pull together as a unified team, better able to survive and thrive regardless of the conditions outside.

The Spartans, a warrior society in ancient Greece, were feared and revered for their strength, courage and endurance. The power of the Spartan army did not come from the sharpness of their spears, however; it came from the strength of their shields. Losing one's shield in battle was considered the single greatest crime a Spartan could commit. "Spartans excuse without penalty the warrior who loses his helmet or breastplate in battle," writes Steven Pressfield in his account of the Battle of Thermopylae (the battle upon which the movie *300* is based), "but punish the loss of all citizenship rights the man who discards his shield." And the reason was simple. "A warrior carries helmet and breastplate for his own protection, but his shield for the safety of the whole line."

Likewise, the strength and endurance of a company does not come from products or services but from how well their people pull together. Every member of the group plays a role in maintaining the Circle of Safety and it is the leader's role to ensure that they do. This is the primary role of leadership, to look out for those inside their Circle.

***Letting someone into an organization is like adopting a child.***

As gatekeepers, leaders establish the standards of entry—who should be allowed into the Circle and who should be kept out, who belongs and who doesn't. Are they letting people in because of their grades in college or where they worked before or because of their character and whether they fit the culture? Letting someone into an organization is like adopting a child and welcoming them into your home. These people will, like everyone else who lives there, have to share in the responsibility of looking after the household and the others who live in it. The standards a leader sets for entry, if based on a clear set of human values, significantly impact people's sense of belonging and their willingness to pull together and contribute to the team.

Leaders are also responsible for how wide the Circle of Safety extends. When an organization is small, by the nature of its size it is

more susceptible to the dangers outside. It is also much simpler to manage the Circle. A small business is often a collection of friends who already know and trust each other. There is little need for bureaucracy to keep those in the Circle safe from internal dangers. As an organization grows, however, the leaders at the top must trust the layers of management to look out for those in their charge. However, when those inside the bureaucracy work primarily to protect themselves, progress slows and the entire organization becomes more susceptible to external threats and pressures. Only when the Circle of Safety surrounds everyone in the organization, and not just a few people or a department or two, are the benefits fully realized.

Weak leaders are the ones who only extend the benefits of the Circle of Safety to their fellow senior executives and a chosen few others. They look out for each other, but they do not offer the same considerations to those outside their “inner circle.” Without the protection of our leaders, everyone outside the inner circle is forced to work alone or in small tribes to protect and advance their own interests. And in so doing, silos form, politics entrench, mistakes are covered up instead of exposed, the spread of information slows and unease soon replaces any sense of cooperation and security.

Strong leaders, in contrast, extend the Circle of Safety to include every single person who works for the organization. Self-preservation is unnecessary and fiefdoms are less able to survive. With clear standards for entry into the Circle and competent layers of leadership that are able to extend the Circle’s perimeter, the stronger and better equipped the organization becomes.

It is easy to know when we are in the Circle of Safety because we can feel it. We feel valued by our colleagues and we feel cared for by our superiors. We become absolutely confident that the leaders of the organization and all those with whom we work are there for us and will do what they can to help us succeed. We become members of the group. We feel like we belong. When we believe that those inside our group, those inside the Circle, will look out for us, it creates an environment for the free exchange of information and effective communication. This is fundamental to driving innovation, preventing problems from escalating and making organizations

better equipped to defend themselves from the outside dangers and to seize the opportunities.

Absent a Circle of Safety, paranoia, cynicism and self-interest prevail. The whole purpose of maintaining the Circle of Safety is so that we can invest all our time and energy to guard against the dangers outside. It's the same reason we lock our doors at night. Not only does feeling safe inside give us peace of mind, but the positive impact on the organization itself is remarkable. When the Circle is strong and that feeling of belonging is ubiquitous, collaboration, trust and innovation result.

This is an important point. We cannot tell people to trust us. We cannot instruct people to come up with big ideas. And we certainly can't demand that people cooperate. These are always results—the results of feeling safe and trusted among the people with whom we work. When the Circle of Safety is strong, we naturally share ideas, share intelligence and share the burdens of stress. Every single skill and strength we have is amplified to better compete and face the dangers in the world outside and advance the organization's interests vastly more effectively.

But there's a twist.

Leaders want to feel safe too. No matter what place we occupy in the pecking order, every single one of us wants to feel like we are valued by the others in the group. If we are having a bad day at work and our performance is suffering, instead of yelling at us, we wish our bosses would ask us, "Are you okay?" And likewise, we as members of the Circle have a responsibility to our leaders—that's what makes us valuable to them, not our numbers. So when our boss comes down hard on us and we don't know the reason, it is equally our responsibility to express concern for their well-being. That's how the Circle of Safety stays strong.

Whether you're in a leadership role or not, the question is, how safe do you feel where you work?

CHAPTER 4

# Yeah, but . . .

Ken is a midranking executive who works in operations for a large multinational bank. He makes a good living, though he is not as rich as some of the analysts and traders at the company. He lives in a lovely home in the suburbs with his wife and two kids. From the outside looking in, he should be happy. And, for the most part, he's fine. He wouldn't say he loves his job; "It's fine" is how he generally thinks about it. Ken likes the idea of quitting to do something else, but with kids and a mortgage to pay, that day may have passed. Right now, he needs to be a responsible husband and father. And if that means not loving his work, that's the price he's willing to pay.

What an amazing thought to love our jobs. To feel safe at work. To work for a company that actually cares how we feel about ourselves and the work we do. The number of leaders of companies who work hard to make their employees feel safe when they come in is, sadly, fewer than most of us would like to admit. Work is, well, work.

The kind of idealism I speak about is fine for books that wax on about what our jobs could be like, but the reality is most of us, even if inspired by stories of companies like Barry-Wehmiller, aren't in a position to change anything. We have bills to pay. We have kids to feed. College educations to fund. There is just too much on our plates. And the world out there, the great unknown, is a dangerous place. So we stay put.

Equally so, the idea of running a company in which nearly everyone feels safe and works to take care of each other sounds great. Most leaders intellectually understand the importance and value of putting the well-being of people first. It is the subject of books and many articles in the *Harvard Business Review*. We all

write about this stuff like no one knows it. But the reality of running a business, big or small, private or public, makes it nearly impossible to do the things folks like me write about. The pressures from Wall Street, corporate boards and the threats from our competition are intense. And for a small business, just finding enough clients to help keep the doors open is hard enough. What's more, this stuff is expensive, hard to measure and often seems "soft" or "fluffy." And the ability to prove ROI can be near impossible . . . at least in the short term. For any organization that is looking to hit annual goals or simply stay alive, the choice to put people first just can't be a priority. And understandably so. The threats from the outside are just too great to worry about how people feel inside.

As nice as it sounds to build a company like Barry-Wehmiller, the reality is it's just not happening. And without those companies it is going to be harder for us to find a job in a company that truly does care about our well-being. So, we tell ourselves, what we have will have to do. What would be the point of rocking the boat or taking unnecessary risk? The risk is just too high that we may land somewhere worse or get more of the same. So why change? But there is always a cost for the decisions we make.

Our ability to provide for our kids, make ends meet or live a certain lifestyle sometimes comes at the cost of our own joy, happiness and fulfillment at work. That's just reality. And for many of us, that's okay. We convince ourselves that the outside, the unknown, is always dangerous (which it is). At least inside there is a hope of feeling secure. A hope . . .

But there is more to that reality than most of us know about. The price we pay for a perception of stability comes at its own cost. And that cost is far greater than happiness. It's actually a matter of health. Of life and death.

First, that sense of safety we may have now is, for many of us, a lie we tell ourselves. The ease with which many companies use layoffs to help manage expenses to meet annual projections means that we're a lot less safe than we used to be—and certainly less safe than we think we are. If it were a true meritocracy, we could tell ourselves that if we work hard and do well, our jobs will be safe. But this is hardly the case. Although that may be true some of the time, it

is not something we can bank on. For the most part, especially for larger organizations, it's a matter of arithmetic. And sometimes the cost to keep us employed simply falls on the wrong side of the equation. And at many companies, that equation is reevaluated annually, which means every year we are at risk.

But the myth of job stability may be the least of our concerns. A 2011 study conducted by a team of social scientists at the University of Canberra in Australia concluded that having a job we hate is as bad for our health and sometimes worse than not having a job at all. Levels of depression and anxiety among people who are unhappy at work were the same or greater than those who were unemployed.

Stress and anxiety at work have less to do with the work we do and more to do with weak management and leadership. When we know that there are people at work who care about how we feel, our stress levels decrease. But when we feel like someone is looking out for themselves or that the leaders of the company care more about the numbers than they do us, our stress and anxiety go up. This is why we are willing to change jobs in the first place; we feel no loyalty to a company whose leaders offer us no sense of belonging or reason to stay beyond money and benefits.

Another study, conducted by researchers at University College London that same year, found that people who didn't feel recognized for their effort at work were more likely to suffer from heart disease. The reason, they surmised, "is largely due to feelings of control [or lack thereof]," said Daryl O'Connor, professor of health psychology at the University of Leeds. "If you feel you've put in a lot of effort and it has not been rewarded," he explained, "this increases stress and, in turn, the risk of heart disease." And . . . it's also bad for business.

> ***Misery may love company, but it is the companies that love misery that suffer the most.***

According to a Gallup poll conducted in 2013 called "State of the American Workplace," when our bosses completely ignore us, 40 percent of us actively disengage from our work. If our bosses

criticize us on a regular basis, 22 percent of us actively disengage. Meaning, even if we're getting criticized, we are actually more engaged simply because we feel that at least someone is acknowledging that we exist! And if our bosses recognize just one of our strengths and reward us for doing what we're good at, only 1 percent of us actively disengage from the work we're expected to do. Added to the fact that people who go to work unhappy actually do things, actively or passively, to make those around them unhappy too and it's amazing that anyone gets anything done these days. I would like to say that misery loves company, but in this case, it is the companies that love misery that suffer the most.

## The Whitehall Studies

**OUR INSTINCTS TELL** us the higher we climb up the ladder, the more stress we feel and the weaker our feeling of safety. Consider the stereotype of the high-strung executive facing relentless pressure from shareholders, employees and the firm's largest customers. We are hardly surprised when one of them suddenly drops dead of a heart attack before hitting fifty. It even has a name: "executive stress syndrome." So maybe it's not so bad toiling away in middle management, or even the mailroom. At least our health won't suffer . . . we think.

Decades ago, scientists in Britain set out to study this link between an employee's place on the corporate ladder and stress, presumably in order to help executives deal with the toll stress was taking on their health and their lives. Known collectively as the Whitehall Studies, the studies' findings were both astounding and profound. Researchers found that workers' stress was not caused by a higher degree of responsibility and pressure usually associated with rank. It is not the demands of the job that cause the most stress, but the degree of control workers feel they have throughout their day. The studies also found that the effort required by a job is not in itself stressful, but rather the imbalance between the effort we give and the reward we feel. Put simply: less control, more stress.

The Whitehall Studies are seminal because the scientists studied government employees who have equal health benefits. This meant they were able to control for variances in healthcare standards, which may not be the case if they were to have studied a large public company in the U.S. Though even U.S.-based studies show similar results.

In 2012, a similar study conducted by researchers at Harvard and Stanford examined the stress levels of participants in Harvard's executive MBA program. In this study, researchers looked at participants' levels of cortisol, the hormone the body releases during times of stress, and compared those to levels found in employees who hadn't made it to the top. Leaders, the study showed, have overall lower stress levels than those who work for them.

"It's possible, in other words, that the feeling of being in charge of one's own life more than makes up for the greater amount of responsibility that accompanies higher rungs on the social ladder," wrote Max McClure, of the Stanford News Service, in announcing the findings.

The findings of the Whitehall Studies are even more dramatic when you consider the connection between job stress and health. The lower someone's rank in the organizational hierarchy, the greater their risk of stress-related health problems, not the other way around. In other words, those seemingly strung-out top executives were, in fact, living longer, healthier lives than the clerks and managers working for them. "The more senior you are in the employment hierarchy, the longer you might expect to live compared to people in lower employment grades," said a report based on the studies that was conducted in 2004 by public health researchers at University College London. And the discrepancy is not a small one. Workers lowest in the hierarchy had an early death rate four times that of those at the top. Jobs that gave workers less control were linked to higher rates of mental illness as well.

It's not just in humans that we find this—non-human primates that live in social groups display higher rates of disease and illness, and greater levels of stress-related hormones, when they're lower in the hierarchy. But this is not about our place in the hierarchy per se. For one, we're evolutionarily programmed for hierarchies and we can't

get rid of them. More important, the hierarchy is not the solution. Simply earning more money or working our way up the ladder is not a prescription for stress reduction. The study was about our sense of control over our work and, indeed, our lives.

What this means is that the converse is also true. A supportive and well-managed work environment is good for one's health. Those who feel they have more control, who feel empowered to make decisions instead of waiting for approval, suffer less stress. Those only doing as they are told, always forced to follow the rules, are the ones who suffer the most. Our feelings of control, stress, and our ability to perform at our best are all directly tied to how safe we feel in our organizations. Feeling unsafe around those we expect to feel safe—those in our tribes (work is the modern version of the tribe)—fundamentally violates the laws of nature and how we were designed to live.

The Whitehall Studies are not new, and their findings have been confirmed over and over. Yet even with the preponderance of data we still do nothing. Even when we know that feeling insecure at work hurts our performance and our health, sometimes even killing us, we stay in jobs we hate. For some reason, we are able to convince ourselves that unknown dangers outside are more perilous than the dangers inside. And so we adapt and put up with uncomfortable work environments that do not make us feel good or inspire our best work. We have all, at some time, rationalized our position or our place and continued doing exactly what we were doing.

Human resources consultancy Mercer LLC reported that between fourth quarter 2010 and first quarter 2011, one in three employees seriously considered leaving their jobs, up 23 percent from five years prior. The problem was that less than 1.5 percent of employees actually voluntarily left. This is one of the issues with a bad working environment. Like a bad relationship, even if we don't like it, we don't leave. Maybe it's the feeling of the devil-you-know-is-better-than-the-devil-you-don't or maybe it's something else, but people seem to feel stuck in unhealthy work environments.

That a third of all employees want to leave their jobs but don't tells us two things. One, it says that an uncomfortably high number of people would rather be working somewhere else, and two, that

they see no other option to improve how they feel about their jobs beyond quitting. There is an alternative route, however. One much simpler and potentially more effective, and it doesn't require us to quit our jobs. Quite the contrary. It requires that we stay.

But that doesn't mean we can get away with doing nothing. We will still need to change the way we do things when we show up at work. It will require us to turn some of our focus away from ourselves to give more attention to those to the left of us and those to the right of us. Like the Spartans, we will have to learn that our strength will come not from the sharpness of our spears but from our willingness to offer others the protection of our shields.

Some say a weak job market or bad economy is the reason to stick it out, in which case leaders of companies should want to treat their people better during hard times to prevent a mass exodus as soon as things improve. And in a good economy, leaders of companies should also want to treat their people well so that their people will stop at nothing to help the company manage when the hard times return (which, inevitably, they will). The best companies almost always make it through hard times because the people rally to make sure they do. In other words, from a strictly business standpoint, treating people well in any economy is more cost effective than not.

Too many leaders are managing organizations in a way that is costing them money, hurting performance and damaging people's health. And if that's not enough to convince us that something has to change, then perhaps our love for our children will.

A study by two researchers at the Graduate School of Social Work at Boston College found that a child's sense of well-being is affected less by the long hours their parents put in at work and more by the mood their parents are in when they come home. Children are better off having a parent who works into the night in a job they love than a parent who works shorter hours but comes home unhappy. This is the influence our jobs have on our families. Working late does not negatively affect our children, but rather, how we feel at work does. Parents may feel guilty, and their children may miss them, but late nights at the office or frequent business trips are not likely the

problem. Net-net, if you don't like your work, for your kids' sake, don't go home.

So what is the price we pay for not demanding that our leaders concern themselves with our well-being? We are not, as we think, putting up with miserable so that we may provide for our children. By putting up with miserable, we may be doing them harm.

As for the leaders of companies who think that it's OK to save a number before saving a person, consider the chain of events that ensues as a result.

There is only one way we can solve this problem. By building and maintaining Circles of Safety where we work. Pointing fingers is not the solution, pulling together and doing something is. And the good news is, there are powerful forces that can help us. If we can learn to harness these seemingly supernatural forces, we can put right what is so wrong. This is no soapbox rambling. It is just biology.

PART
2

# [ POWERFUL FORCES ]

CHAPTER 5

## When Enough Was Enough

To say it was a rough neighborhood is an understatement. It was about the worst place anyone would want to live. It was incredibly dangerous. There was no such thing as heating in the winter and there certainly wasn't any air-conditioning in the summer. There were no supermarkets of any sort; the residents were left to forage or hunt for any food they could find. Survival, under these conditions, was something people really had to think about. Every moment of every day, there could always be something out there that could do them harm. Worrying about an education or getting a job wasn't even on the radar. There were no classrooms, and there were no hospitals. As things stood, there were no jobs to be had. None. And for good reason, there were no companies. There weren't even any countries yet. That stuff was so far off in the future, they didn't need to think about it. This is not some post-apocalyptic *Mad Max* scenario. The time is fifty thousand years ago and modern man, *Homo sapiens,* is taking his first steps out in the world. This is where we come from.

Our ancestors were born dirt poor. Opportunities didn't come their way because of the schools they went to or who their parents knew. Any opportunities came from their will and hard work to create them. And create them they did. Our species was built to manage in conditions of great danger and insufficient resources.

Life in Paleolithic times was not like the aftermath of a hurricane. That's not scarcity, that's destruction. Our ancestors were not the stereotypical cavemen we like to imagine. They didn't have

oversized brows or walk around hunched over carrying a club. They looked like we do today and were just as smart and capable as we are today. The only things they didn't have yet were all the advancements and advantages of our modern world. Other than that, they were just like you and me.

Nearly everything about humans is designed to help us survive and perpetuate the species through tough times—very tough times. Our physiology and our need to cooperate both exist with our survival in mind. We are at our best when we face danger together. Unfortunately, there are too many leaders of companies who believe, in the face of external challenges, that the best way to motivate their people is by creating a sense of internal urgency or pressure. Based on our biology and anthropology, however, nothing could be further from the truth.

When we feel like we belong to the group and trust the people with whom we work, we naturally cooperate to face outside challenges and threats. When we do not have a sense of belonging, however, then we are forced to invest time and energy to protect ourselves from each other. And in so doing, we inadvertently make ourselves more vulnerable to the outside threats and challenges. Plus, with our attention facing inward, we will also miss outside opportunities. When we feel safe among the people with whom we work, the more likely we are to survive and thrive. That's just the way it is.

## In the Beginning . . .

**THERE IS SOMETHING** about *Homo sapiens* that makes us much better adapted to survive and prosper in the austere conditions into which we were born, even better than some of the other hominid species that were bigger and stronger than we were. Part of our advantage is thanks to the neocortex—our complex, problem-solving brain. It also gives us the ability for sophisticated communication. Unlike other animals able to communicate, we're capable of syntax and grammar. But another critical reason we survived was thanks to our