JAMES M. **KOUZES** | BARRY Z. **POSNER**

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

SEVENTH EDITION

HOW TO MAKE EXTRAORDINARY THINGS HAPPEN IN ORGANIZATIONS

SAMPLE CHAPTER

The**Leadership**
Challenge®
A Wiley Brand

Kouzes and Posner have quite literally written the book on leadership. Not only that, but they're also generous and thorough enough to keep updating it, as our tumultuous times demand. This seventh edition of *The Leadership Challenge* is a masterpiece—informative, practical, and engaging. If you take these ideas to heart and apply the book's Five Practices assiduously, you will be well on your way to becoming a better leader. You will be well on your way to enriching the lives of others and making the organizations you care about better.

    —Amy C. Edmondson, Professor, Harvard Business School; Author
        of *The Fearless Organization*

Did we really need a seventh edition of *The Leadership Challenge*? The answer is a resounding *yes*. This seminal book-series is more important than ever, far more important. The world is a mess. And the best way out, as I see it, is to better our organizations and the lives of their employees. The Five Practices that are the keystone of the book can without doubt trigger an internal revolution of organizational excellence—which can, collectively, give one hope, on a global scale, for a brighter future. Bravo, Jim and Barry.

    —Tom Peters, bestselling business author and speaker

For years, the US Coast Guard Academy has relied upon the foundational principles set forth in *The Leadership Challenge* to develop the next generation of leaders of character who will serve the people of the United States. This exciting seventh edition draws upon conclusive research and is bursting with compelling, real-life examples to learn from and lead by; it's an indispensable resource for leaders at all levels who desire to make extraordinary things happen . . . in the workplace, at home, and in society. Jim Kouzes's and Barry Posner's 40-year collaboration in studying leaders, researching leadership, and leading brings us a masterful work designed to help people become the best leaders they can be. If you want to learn how to earn trust and respect as a leader others yearn to follow, let this book serve as your proven field guide.

    —Sandra Stosz, Vice Admiral, USCG (ret.), trustee for the US Coast
        Guard Academy James M. Loy Institute for Leadership; Author of
        Breaking Ice and Breaking Glass: *Leading in Uncharted Waters*

This is a classic—one of the few books on leadership that's actually worth reading. *The Leadership Challenge* is more relevant than ever: a practical, evidence-based resource on how to mobilize people around a common goal.

    —Adam Grant, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Think*
        Again and host of the TED podcast WorkLife

I've been a student of leadership derived from my time in the military and a practitioner of the five practices of *The Leadership Challenge* for nearly 30 years. I have found that *The Leadership Challenge* is a call to action for any individual who wants to lead through inspiration and accomplish only what others dream of achieving. It's required reading for my leadership team and has been a foundational training platform for my management teams over the years. If you are looking for an *X* factor in results for yourself, your team, or your company, look no further and devour and apply the principles in this book!

—**Mark Leposky,** Executive Vice President, Global Operations,
Callaway Golf

Jim and Barry's work has transformed our understanding of what constitutes leadership excellence over the last three-plus decades. This updated edition provides essential insights into what it takes to identify and develop stellar leaders now.

—**Sally Helgesen,** lead author, *How Women Rise*, author,
The Web of Inclusion

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

I'm a raving fan of Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner. There are few, if any, folks in the leadership field better than the two of them. If you don't believe me, read the seventh edition of their classic book, *The Leadership Challenge*. With every edition they upgrade the content with new research and observations. It continues to be a must-read!

—**Ken Blanchard,** Co-Author of *The One Minute Manager* and *Simple Truths of Leadership*

It has been my experience that many companies underestimate the importance of leadership. In my opinion, leadership is the common ingredient in America's great companies. *The Leadership Challenge* and the Leadership Practices Inventory create a common language with which leaders can discuss both strategic and everyday issues in leading organizations and people. The characteristics of admired leaders alone set a standard for all executives to follow. *The Leadership Challenge*'s teachings played a strong role in our success.

—**Jim Kerr,** Executive Chairman, D.A. Davidson Companies

Kouzes and Posner boil down the concepts of excellent leadership into easy-to-apply principles. I share this book with my entire team of young professionals. It is my "go-to" resource and truly helps people grow in their careers.

—**Jacquelyn McCormick,** Chief of Staff to Berkeley Mayor
Jesse Arreguin

Jim and Barry have done it again! An established classic in its field, *The Leadership Challenge* continues to provide valuable knowledge for today's fast-changing leadership dynamics. Filled with engaging case studies and updated research, this book is a must-read for anyone looking to improve their leadership, team, organization, or career.

—**Marshall Goldsmith,** Thinkers50 #1 Executive Coach; *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Earned Life*, *Triggers*, and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*.

The five practices of exemplary leadership have stood the test of time, and this revised and updated edition shows why. In these volatile and uncertain times, the world needs more leaders to rise to the leadership challenge.

—**David Burkus,** Author of *Leading from Anywhere*

Leadership is everyone's business. *The Leadership Challenge* is essential reading for anyone who wants to be an exceptional leader. Jim and Barry believe that every challenge is an opportunity and provide actions you can take to ensure that you reach leadership success. They demonstrate how you can rise to every occasion to be the best leader you can be.

—**Elaine Biech,** 2022 ISA Thought Leader, Author, *Skills for Career Success, The New Business of Consulting*

In 2020 the working world leaped from in-person interaction to virtual meetings. The change confronted leaders with new challenges, yet leadership basics remained the same. Kouzes and Posner hit it head-on in their seventh edition of *The Leadership Challenge* by building on the foundation of their earlier editions with evidence-based guidance for navigating the new normal.

—**Jim Hancock,** President and Founder, San Francisco Sailing Science Center

Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have once again provided leaders a great gift in the seventh edition of *The Leadership Challenge*. Truly tested over time, the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership continue to guide leaders at all levels in making positive contributions around the world. This book is not only filled with

captivating stories about what great leaders do but shares how they may go about developing themselves to make positive and remarkable differences with the individuals and organizations they encounter.

—**Brent Kondritz,** Executive Director, University of Dayton Center for Leadership

The Five Practices operating system is not some random set of rules but rather a well-researched framework. I experienced firsthand during these tough times how it made me a better leader.

—**Mainak Pal,** Senior Project Manager, Global Development, AGTEK Development Company, Inc.

The Five Practices are a timeless and all-encompassing operational leadership system. It is relevant during uncertain times like today and during settled times. It is practical, learnable, measurable, and effective. When put into practice, these skills have proven to be effective leadership tools and can bring out better leaders in all of us.

—**Maria Hirotsuka,** Senior Manager, Xilinx

When these practices are understood, adopted, and put into practice, anyone can become a better leader. This is not just a system but also a leadership guide. This guide serves as a resource for users to consult when faced with leadership challenges, turning difficulties into opportunities.

—**Rusty Stevenson,** Senior Contracting Officer, US Department of Veteran Affairs

The pandemic has added new variables and challenges to being a leader, but I have found that when I returned to The Five Practices for guidance and leadership, it helped me go a long way.

—**William Yuen,** Director, Western Digital

Applying The Five Practices has been a game-changer in the many challenges I have faced in the workplace. I encourage leaders at all levels to learn these practices to deal with any situation that calls for leadership.

—**Prashnath Thandavamuthy,** Director Portfolio Management & Strategy, Juniper Networks

By applying these five practices, we can all become better leaders in our workplaces, our homes, and our communities.

—**Jennifer Lee,** Senior Vice President, Provident Credit Union

Speaking from personal experience, The Five Practices is a very practical framework that focuses on developing and enhancing proven attributes that make leaders extraordinary. I have systematically executed this "operating system" during the last ~20 months in my organization and have seen a significant and continuing increase in team members' overall engagement, enthusiasm, ownership, and accountability.

    —Edwin Haghnazari, Director, The Jackson Laboratory

Everyone can become a better leader by adopting The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model. This model is an operating system guiding rail to develop future leaders with promising results.

    —Hong Lu, Manager, Cisco

That is what I love most about The Five Practices. It is not about here are steps to follow, once you do those steps you are done. It is about here are steps to follow, keep doing them over and over again and adapt and change as you find ways to do better and move forward.

    —David Mahal, Senior Global Sales Director, Flex

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Making Extraordinary Things Happen

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE has always been about how people go about mobilizing others to want to make extraordinary things happen. It's about the behavioral practices used to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards. It's about leadership that creates the climate in which challenging opportunities open the door to remarkable successes.

The fundamental purpose of *The Leadership Challenge* is to assist people in furthering their abilities to lead others to greatness. Whether you're in the private sector or public, an employee or a volunteer, a manager or an individual contributor, a student, teacher, or parent, we have written this book to help you further develop your capacity to guide others to places they have never been before.

What's New?

We've been researching the practices of exemplary leadership for over four decades, and every time we sit down to write a new edition of this

book, people ask us, "What's new and what's different? How has leadership changed since you started your studies?" These are understandable questions, and there certainly have been some significant changes in the world since the previous edition.

The COVID-19 pandemic tops the list. It was nowhere on anyone's radar in 2017, but by 2020 it had effectively disrupted every person's everyday life. It has been a crisis like none other in our lifetime. COVID-19 immediately impacted how we lived, cared for our sick and elderly, shopped, ate, learned, worked, worshipped, and were entertained. Everyone became more and more anxious as the sick and dying overwhelmed hospitals, and healthcare workers labored to exhaustion. All but essential businesses and services shut down worldwide for months, then opened up and shut down again. All organizations, at the very least, had to alter the way they conducted their operations. Millions were out of work, and individuals and businesses had to be protected with government loans and payments. Adults stayed home to go to work, and kids stayed home to go to school. People's sense of belonging declined, and many felt the pain of isolation. People put on masks and stood socially distanced in lines outside stores with fingers crossed, hoping to find toilet paper on the shelves when they entered. Ships backed up in ports, and supply chains broke down. Politicians publicly squabbled about how best to respond, and misinformation spread virally. Civic discourse became quite uncivil.

Then in the middle of all this, the world watched in horror when in the United States a black man, George Floyd, was murdered at the hands of a policeman. "I can't breathe" became a rallying cry for those who had felt strangled for decades by injustice. Protests erupted, not just in the United States but in many cities around the world. Thousands of frustrated citizens filled the streets. Longstanding grievances grew in intensity, and the cultural and political divide expanded. Ideological differences became more intense. Trust and confidence in institutional leaders hit an all-time low, and they've not yet turned much around.

Moreover, in the United States, what had historically been a peaceful transition of power from one presidential administration to the next was disrupted by a violent demonstration. Thousands stormed the halls of Congress, hundreds fought with police, and many even threatened to abduct and kill elected officials. A contentious debate ensued over the presidential election outcome. The political divide expanded, and trust in institutions fell even more.

After years of mask-wearing, social distancing, and staying at home, vaccines helped ease restrictions, and people began to venture out and return to work. But then something else unheard of happened. Fueled by disillusionment, discontent, and disaffection, a sizeable number of people voluntarily decided not to go back to work, at least with their same employer. What became known as the "Great Resignation" (or the Great Reshuffle, Great Exploration, or Great Imagination) emerged as another variance in economic recovery and organizational commitment.

And just as it seemed the world was emerging from the pandemic, a global conflict erupted in Ukraine, threatening the peace and security of Europe and perhaps the entire world. Refugees in the millions fled their homes with little more than a suitcase of belongings to their names. Economic inflation, already emerging as a concern, expanded to a major worry as fuel prices skyrocketed.

Concerns over climate change intensified, especially among the younger generations. With out-of-control wildfires, hurricanes, flooding, and other natural disasters devasting communities across the globe, they expressed pessimism about the world they are inheriting and its impact on their future lives and livelihoods. The beginning of the third decade of this century seems to be defined by a pervasive uncertainty that challenges individuals, institutions, communities, and nations. It was becoming the zeitgeist of the period.[1]

Yet among the tragedy and hardships, discord and discontent, people and organizations pivoted. Delivery trucks filled the otherwise empty streets as people turned to online shopping. Homebound workers adapted to remote Zoom meetings, and kids adapted to virtual schooling.

Government and businesses, often competitors, collaborated to develop vaccines in record time. Restaurants found ways to meet the demand for takeout meals and outdoor dining. Streaming services filled the pipeline with on-demand content. Families learned to connect through video chats. Organizations brought diversity, equity, and inclusion to the forefront of their agendas and addressed inequities. Physical and mental health became priorities. At-home workouts became commonplace. People began to reassess the meaning of work. Some decided that they'd change the career path they had been traveling, and others demanded more flexibility from the workplace they'd chosen. People started to reimagine the way they worked and the way they lived.

We'll return to many of these issues, and others, in the chapters to come. We'll do it through stories that people have told us about their experiences, research from scholars who've studied this period, and data we've collected on how leaders behaved and the impact their actions have had on engagement and work performance.

Before we do, however, let's take a step back and reflect on something else we observed because *there's an even more important lesson* that has emerged in these last few years.

Challenge Is the Opportunity for Greatness

The Leadership Challenge has its origins in a research project we began over forty years ago. We wanted to know what people did when they were at their "personal best" in leading others. These personal bests were experiences in which people set their individual leadership standards of excellence. They were, so to speak, their Olympic gold-medal-winning performances.

When we reviewed the Personal-Best Leadership Experience questionnaires we had received, it became evident that every single case involved some kind of challenge. The challenge might have been a natural disaster, a health crisis, a cutting-edge service, a groundbreaking piece

of legislation, an invigorating campaign to get adolescents to join an environmental program, a revolutionary turnaround of a bureaucratic government program, a heartbreaking injury to a child, an initiative to become the first female team to ascend one of the world's tallest peaks, a local emergency project to feed first responders and frontline workers, the startup of a new plant, the launch of a new product, the creation of a new market, or the turnaround of a failing business. Whatever the situation, all the cases involved overcoming great adversity. When people talked about making extraordinary things happen, they spoke about encountering obstacles, resistance, naysayers, hardened attitudes, seemingly impossible odds, uncertainty, hardship, setbacks, or other adversities. In other words, *challenge was the common denominator*. It was the context in which people said they did their best.

Keep in mind that we didn't ask people to tell us about their challenges. We asked them to tell us about their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences. They could have written about more stable, predictable, or conventional situations. But they didn't. Easy, undemanding endeavors simply aren't associated with award-winning performances. What people chose to discuss were challenging times. We continue to this day to ask people around the world about their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences, and we continue to find the same thing. Challenge defines the context in which people perform at their best.

That is *the* critical lesson from reviewing thousands of Personal-Best Leadership Experiences over forty years. *Challenge is the crucible for leadership* and *the opportunity for greatness*. Challenge shapes us, and challenge opens doors.

Leaders absolutely must address the current issues they, their organizations, and their communities face today. That was true in the past, and it is true today, and it will be true into the future. Contemporary dilemmas, such as those with which we began this introduction, must be on the agenda. Equally true is that there will be other challenges ahead, perhaps even more daunting than those we face in these moments.

Leadership challenges never cease, and leadership opportunities will always be there for those who choose to greet them. That is precisely why, from the beginning, we titled this book *The Leadership **Challenge***.

The study of leadership is how people guide others through adversity, uncertainty, and turbulence; triumph against overwhelming odds; take initiative when there is inertia; and activate individuals and institutions in the face of stiff resistance. This book describes what leaders did under challenging circumstances and what you can do to put their leadership behaviors into practice and make a difference.

An Evidence-Based, Best Practices Operating System

We persist in asking today the same fundamental question we asked in 1982 when we started our investigative journey into understanding exemplary leadership: What did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader? We've talked to people of all ages, spanning across educational levels and ethnicity, representing just about every type of organization there is, at all levels, in all functions, and from many different places around the world. Their stories, and the behaviors and actions they described, resulted in the discovery of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® framework, an operating system for leadership. When leaders do their best, they engage in The Five Practices—they Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. In the following chapters, we go into depth about each of these leadership practices, both conceptually and practically.

The Leadership Challenge is evidence-based. We derived The Five Practices from rigorous research, and we illustrate them with examples from real people doing real things. With each new edition, we continue to update the stories, cases, and examples of exactly what real people do when they are at their best. Their names are real, as are their experiences and quotations. However, for two reasons, we do not mention their organizations. First, most people are not still connected with that organization or in the same position. Second, the cases and our focus are about what *individuals* do, and not about their organizations, functions, or positions.

With each edition of the book, we update the quantitative research—both our findings and those from other scholars around the globe. In this regard, the *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI)—the instrument we designed to measure how often people use The Five Practices and how their frequency makes a difference with their teams and organization—provides ongoing empirical data that supports the validity of this leadership operating system. The LPI assesses the frequency with which leaders demonstrate the behaviors associated with The Five Practices—from the individual leader's perspective and from the observations of their manager, direct reports, colleagues, and others. There are over five million respondents in the normative LPI database. Respondents answer additional questions regarding how they feel about their workplace and their leader. For example, they respond to questions about their commitment and motivational levels, how proud they are to tell others they work for this organization, and whether they would favorably recommend their current leader to others. They also provide demographic data about age, education, gender, ethnicity, tenure, function, industry, hierarchical position, organizational size, and nationality. This robust database allows us to produce statistical analyses that support our claim that leadership makes a difference.

Furthermore, with each new edition we get the chance to reiterate what's still essential, discard what's not, and add what's new. We also take the opportunity to contemporize the framework and freshen up the language and point of view so that the book is highly relevant to current circumstances and conditions. With experience, and more cases and data, we can also be more prescriptive about the best practices of leaders. The empirical analyses show that personal and professional outcomes are directly related to how frequently you engage in these leadership practices. It's not about your title, position, function, age, gender, educational level, country of origin, or any other demographic variable. It's about how you behave. We firmly believe that exemplary leadership is within the grasp of everyone and that the opportunities for leadership are boundless and boundary-less.

We expect that all of you reading this book face vexing issues that not only make leadership more urgent but also require you to be more

conscious and conscientious about employing exemplary leadership practices and behaviors. 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're even more responsible to others. You may not know it, but they're expecting you to do your best.

A Field Guide for Leaders

Think of *The Leadership Challenge* 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 extraordinary things happen with your team or organization. We have designed the book to describe what leaders do, explain the fundamental principles that support these leadership practices, provide actual case examples of real people who demonstrate each practice, and offer specific recommendations on what you can do to make these practices your own and to continue your development as a leader.

In Chapter 1 we establish our point of view about leadership. Leadership is a set of skills and abilities that are learnable by anyone with the desire to learn and the persistence to practice them. We provide an overview of The Five Practices, summarize the findings from decades of empirical studies about what leaders do when they are at their best, and show that these leadership practices make a difference. We also remind you that a complete picture of leadership requires understanding that leadership is fundamentally a relationship, and hence it is important to understand and appreciate what people look for in an individual they would be *willing* to follow.

The ten chapters that follow describe the Ten Commitments of Leadership that people employ to make extraordinary things happen, and there are two chapters associated with each of The Five Practices. There are two essential behaviors associated with each of the Commitments.

We provide actual case examples of people who demonstrate each of the leadership practices, commitments, and essential behaviors. We also offer evidence from our research, and that of others, to support the concepts and how they are applied and prescribe specific recommendations on what you can do to make each practice your own, becoming the best leader you can be.

Each of these chapters ends with a set of actionable suggestions about what you need to do to make these leadership behaviors and practices an ongoing and natural part of your behavioral and attitudinal repertoire. Whether the focus is your own learning or the development of your constituents, you can take immediate action on every recommendation. They don't require a budget or approval from top management—or anyone else. They just require your personal commitment and discipline. Select at least one that you will do as soon as possible, if not immediately, to make the transition between learning and doing. In addition, we offer several suggestions to converse with the people around you about leadership. These conversations are opportunities to build and reinforce a culture of leadership and underscore how important it is to act and think like a leader.

In Chapter 12, we call on everyone to accept personal responsibility to be a role model for leadership. 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. We close, as we have in every edition, with this conclusion: Leadership is not an affair of the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart.

* * *

We recommend that you read Chapter 1 first, 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 Leadership Challenge

Challenge is the opportunity for greatness, and 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, the creation of new enterprises, the renewal of healthy communities, and greater respect and understanding in the world. We 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, community, and 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—opportunity available to everyone. We know that if you have the will and the way to lead, you can make extraordinary things happen. You supply the will. We'll do our best to supply the way.

James M. Kouzes
Orinda, California

Barry Z. Posner
Berkeley, California

When Leaders Are at Their Best

Leadership is ultimately about creating a way for people to contribute to making something extraordinary happen.[1]

Alan Keith

WITH LEADERSHIP, as with most things in life, experience is often the teacher. We learn what to do by trying it ourselves or by watching others. The problem is that not all of what's done or observed is effective or appropriate behavior. When recommending to leaders what they should and should not do, it's imperative to base leadership practices on the best of what people do and observe—the actions that represent the highest standards of excellence.

That was our objective when we first began our leadership research in 1983. We wanted to answer a simple question: What do people do when they are at their personal best as leaders?

To answer this question, we developed the *Personal-Best Leadership Experience* questionnaire and started collecting case studies. These were stories about times when, in their perception, leaders set their individual

standard of excellence. They could select a recent experience or one from their past. They could have been the official person-in-charge or have emerged as the informal leader. They could have held a paid position or been a volunteer, either in a workplace or nonwork setting. They could have been part of a corporation, agency, community group, professional association, sports team, or school. The timing and context were up to them; it just needed to be an experience they felt represented their best leadership performance.

The *Personal-Best Leadership Experience* questionnaire is 12 pages long, consisting of 38 open-ended questions, and generally requires one to two hours for reflection and expression. More than 550 of these *surveys* were collected initially, and that number today is well over 5,000. In addition, we have conducted hundreds of in-depth interviews on the same themes.

In those interviews and case studies, we asked questions such as: Where did your personal-best leadership experience occur? When did it take place? How long was it from start to finish? What kind of project or undertaking was it? What was your specific role in this project? What external or internal challenges did you face? What words best describe how you felt at the beginning of this experience? How would you describe your feelings during this experience? Who initiated this experience? What did you aspire to accomplish? Who was involved in this experience? What actions did you take to get people moving in the right direction? How did you overcome setbacks? What did you do to keep people motivated? What did you learn from this experience? What key lessons about leadership would you share with another person from this experience?

Wherever we look, we find examples of exemplary leadership. We have found them in for-profit firms and nonprofits, agriculture and mining, manufacturing and utilities, technology and financial services, education and healthcare, government and military, and arts and community services. These leaders have been in hierarchical positions, as well as nonmanagers, individual contributors, and volunteers. They have been young and old, women and men, and represent a broad range of organizations and functions as well as racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups.

Leaders reside in every city, country, and nation. And we find this diversity to be true to this day.

The inescapable conclusion from analyzing thousands of personal-best leadership experiences is that (a) *everyone has a personal-best leadership story to tell,* and (b) *leadership is an identifiable set of skills and abilities available to anyone.* These findings challenge the myths that leadership is something that you find only at the highest levels of organizations and society, that it's something reserved for only a handful of charismatic men and women, and that it's something that ordinary people can't learn.[2] The notion that only a few great people can lead others to greatness is just plain wrong.

From the stories we gathered in interviews and written cases, a pattern of leadership behavior emerged. There were common themes in what leaders did when performing at their best, which led us to formulate a behavioral framework of exemplary leadership. We subjected our qualitative findings to a series of empirical tests. In our initial quantitative study, we asked over 3,000 managers to assess the extent to which they used these leadership behaviors. Their direct reports were asked how often they had observed their leaders utilizing these leadership behaviors, and we also asked them questions about their level of motivation, team spirit, commitment, productivity, and other standard engagement measures. This research has continued over the years, with the creation and development of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), amassing a database that currently includes over 4.6 million people from more than 120 different countries.

The consistent results over five decades validate the model and yield another inescapable conclusion: Leadership matters. The frequency with which people engage in these leadership behaviors directly relates to assessments of workgroup performance and leadership effectiveness. There is a direct, positive correlation between the answer from direct reports of how effective their leader is and their perception of how often that leader engages in the leadership behavior—and this correlation actually increased over the two years of unprecedented volatility, ambiguity, and uncertainty experienced during the pandemic. In other words, exemplary leadership matters even more during times of extreme challenge.

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

Being a good leader is not something that casually occurs. It takes great thought, care, insight, commitment, and energy.

Mary Godwin

The critical lesson we've learned from carefully reviewing thousands of personal-best leadership cases is that the actions people take to make extraordinary things happen are much more alike than they are different, regardless of context. We continue to find that individuals who guide others along pioneering journeys follow surprisingly similar paths irrespective of the times or settings. Though each experience was unique in its expression, there were 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 property 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 guiding 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 particular mo-
ment in history. It has passed the test of time. While the *context* of leader-
ship has changed dramatically over the years, the *content* of leadership
has not changed much at all. Leaders' fundamental behaviors and actions
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
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.[3]

Let's briefly review each of The Five Practices and a few examples
that illustrate how leaders across a wide range of settings and circum-
stances use them to make extraordinary things happen. When you ex-
plore The Five Practices in depth in Chapters 2 through 11, you'll find
scores of additional 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 is fol-
lowed and earns you respect. In his personal best, Vince Brown, deputy
program manager for a large-scale military initiative, made it a point to
"set an example of what I wanted from my team." This was essential, he
reported, "to building trust with the team. Trust needs to be earned by
example, and I made sure to do what I said I would do. I would never ask
my team to do something I would not do myself." Similarly, in his person-
al best, leading an Army Ranger platoon, Brock Jas noted that "because
my team saw that I was putting all I had into the job, when I asked them
to do something extra, they responded in kind." 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 guid-
ing principles. You must *clarify values by finding your voice*. The personal
bests illustrate that to stand up for their beliefs, leaders must first have
some solid beliefs upon which to stand. When you understand who you
are and what you believe, you can act with integrity when giving voice to
those values.

In her personal-best leadership experience, Arpana Tiwari, a 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 each individual cherishes their values. However, leaders must *affirm the shared values* to which all group members must commit. This requires getting everyone involved and on the same page about the importance of certain values. Doing so, Arpana observed, "makes it relatively easy to model the values that everyone has agreed to." She realized that another benefit of shared values was that "it is also less difficult to confront people when they make decisions that are not aligned. When someone violates a value, leaders have to do or say something, or they run the risk of sending a message that this is not important." Eloquent speeches about common values aren't nearly enough. Deeds are far more important than words when constituents determine how serious leaders are about what they say. Words and deeds must be consistent. Exemplary leaders must also *set the example by aligning the shared values* of the group. Through their daily actions, they demonstrate their deep commitment to their and the organization's beliefs.

The personal-best projects were all distinguished by relentless effort, steadfastness, competence, and attention to detail. We were struck by how the actions leaders took to set an example were often simple things. They were about the power of spending time with someone, of working side by side with colleagues, of telling stories that made values come alive, of being highly visible during times of uncertainty, and of asking questions to get people to think about values and priorities. *Model the Way* is essentially about earning the right and the respect to lead through direct individual involvement and action. People first follow the person, then the plan.

In fact, 99 percent of direct reports who *always* observe their leader Model the Way would favorably recommend that individual to their colleagues as a good leader. Just being above the average frequency on this leadership practice gives a 28 percent bump in being recommended by direct reports as a good leader over those below the mean on Model the Way.

There's only a one in twenty-five likelihood of being assessed as an effective leader by direct reports for those leaders who seldom Model the Way.

Inspire a Shared Vision   People describe their personal-best leadership experiences as times when they imagined an exciting and attractive future for their organizations. They had visions and dreams of what *could* be. They had absolute 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 energizes the creation of the future.

Leaders *envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities*. You need to make something happen, change the way things are, and create something that no one else has ever created before. Before starting any project, leaders need to have both a realistic sense of the past and a clear vision of what success should look like. Leaders draw upon the lessons from the history of their organizations, and they also communicate a unique and optimistic view of the future. As a product manager with a full-service HR solutions provider, Puja Banerjee realized in her personal-best leadership experience that "my responsibility is always to communicate the big picture and vision of the initiative to my team and all of our stakeholders" because people always need to know the "why" for what they are being asked to do.

Too many people think that it's the leader's job to develop the vision when the reality is that people want to be involved in this process. You can't command commitment; you have to inspire it. You have to *enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations*. At every step of the project "from discovery, design, development and final launch," Puja made sure that she communicated "what was happening so that we were all working toward a shared vision and our deliverables were aligned to it." Leaders ensure that the people they work with can see how their work is meaningful and their contributions fit into the big picture. 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. To embrace the vision and make it their own, people have to see themselves as part of that vision and as able to contribute to its realization. Leaders forge unity of purpose by showing their constituents how the dream is a shared one and how it fulfills the common good.

When you express your enthusiasm and excitement for the vision, you ignite that same passion in others. When reflecting on her personal-best leadership experience, Amy Matson Drohan, a senior customer success manager, remarked, "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."

The empirical data backs up Amy's observation. Only three out of every one hundred direct reports—whose observations about the frequency with which their leaders Inspire a Shared Vision places them in the bottom quintile—strongly believe that this leader is effective. In contrast, more than one out of two leaders in the top quintile of the Inspire a Shared Vision distribution are evaluated as effective leaders by their direct reports.

Challenge the Process   Challenge is the crucible for greatness. Every 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, all personal bests involved overcoming adversity and embracing opportunities to grow, innovate, and improve. The importance of this discovery is underscored by the rating leaders receive from their constituents. Few direct reports—less than one in ten—would strongly recommend someone as a good leader who did not frequently challenge the process, probably because there is little opportunity to make a difference when their leader doesn't create a climate for innovation. More than four times that number strongly agree that they would recommend the leader who most frequently challenges the process.

What differentiates an ordinary team from an extraordinary team is how they react to challenges and setbacks. If you're proactive, you focus on preparing; and if you're reactive, you focus on repairing. 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 a multinational electronics contract manufacturer. "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 and learning from experiences, Srinath was able to keep the project moving forward.

Leaders are pioneers willing to step out into the unknown. However, they aren't likely to be the only creators or originators of new products, services, or processes. Innovations come more frequently from customers, clients, vendors, and people in the labs and on the front lines than from individuals in leadership roles. And sometimes, as we learned during the darkest days of COVID-19, dramatic external events can thrust individuals and organizations into radically new conditions that force them to think differently, create differently, and act differently. Innovation comes more from listening than telling and from constantly looking outside of yourself and your organization for new and innovative ideas, products, processes, and services. You need to *search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve*.

Because innovation and change involve *experimenting and taking risks*, the leaders' main contribution is to create a climate for discovery, recognizing good ideas, supporting those ideas, having the fortitude to challenge the system, and being willing to fail. It would be ridiculous to assert that those who fail over and over again succeed as leaders. Success in any endeavor isn't a process of simply buying enough lottery tickets. The key that unlocks the door to opportunity is *constantly generating small wins and learning from experience*. David Ojakian's fundraising experience with the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) illustrates the importance of this "small wins" approach.

The AGBU launched the Aid for Artsakh campaign in October 2020 to assist families uprooted by the Azeri attacks. As chair of his local "young professionals" chapter, David worked on the drive with the AGBU central office and many other chapters globally. He credits the campaign's success to breaking down the project into pieces, which helped make the

large-scale humanitarian initiative more manageable and possible, "allowing each chapter the ability to tailor their approach with their community and not feel overwhelmed in the process." This small win process gave each chapter the ability to tailor their approach, so as to not feel overwhelmed. In this way, each chapter could determine the best way within their local communities to start bringing awareness about the situation in Artsakh, see what they could learn as they progressed, and share best practices with other individual chapters. Chapters of all sizes and experience levels found innovative ways to raise funds despite the challenges, and this was a significant boost to everyone's 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 constantly learning from their errors and failures. Life is the leader's laboratory, and exemplary leaders use it to conduct as many experiments as possible. The best leaders are the best learners. They learn from their failures and their successes.

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. After reviewing thousands of personal-best cases, we found that a very simple way to determine whether someone is on the road to becoming a leader is the frequency with which they used the word "we." The word "we" was used nearly three to four times more often than the "I" when people spoke about their personal-best leadership experience. When reviewing his personal-best experience, Sushma Bhope, program manager of a pioneering Indian suppler of probiotic products, concluded that "no one could have done this alone. It was essential to be open to all ideas and 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*. This sense of teamwork goes far beyond a few direct reports or

close confidants. You have to engage everyone who must make the project work—and in some way, all who must live with the results. As the need for more inclusiveness grows and work-from-anywhere becomes more common, exemplary leaders find creative ways to connect with more diverse constituents.

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. Leaders make it possible for others to do good work. They know that when people feel a sense of personal power and ownership, they are significantly more likely to be engaged and produce exceptional results. Leaders work to make people feel strong, capable, and committed. Exemplary leaders don't hoard their power; they give it away so that others can excel.

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. In his personal-best leadership experience, Ankur Jaiswal, program manager with a multinational technology company, explained how he "worked hard to promote a creative and supportive work environment, where team success came ahead of individual recognition, and this fostered trusting relationships with one another." He appreciated how important it was to "empower the people around me and enable them to lead and be successful." When people are trusted and have more information, along with discretion and authority, they're much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results. The LPI data supports this assertion. It shows that the motivational levels of direct reports increase in direct proportion to the extent they indicate their leader provides them with the freedom to decide how best to do their work.

Encourage the Heart   The climb to the top is arduous and steep. People become exhausted, frustrated, disenchanted, and are often tempted to give up. Genuine acts of caring uplift people's spirits and draw people forward. Anne Moser, senior vice president with a corporate

dining company, learned how impactful those actions are during her personal-best leadership experience: "Celebrate and give the team and the individual members proper recognition. Acknowledging an accomplishment is a great way to demonstrate the value of their contributions. It builds their confidence, and they will want to help out even more on the next project."

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. It's part of the leader's job to show appreciation for people's contributions and to create a culture of celebration. In the cases we collected, there were thousands of examples of individual recognition and group celebration—from handwritten thank-you notes to elaborate "This Is Your Life" ceremonies. Eakta Malik, senior clinical research associate with a global medical device company, realized that many people were not feeling sufficiently appreciated and lacked a sense of team cohesiveness. She organized and designed some opportunities "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, 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."

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*. Recognition and celebration aren't about fun and games, though there is a lot of fun, and there are a lot of games when people encourage the hearts of their constituents. Encouragement is, curiously, serious business because it's how you visibly and behaviorally link rewards with performance. When done authentically and from the heart, celebrations and rituals build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinarily tough times. Bringing a team together after a critical milestone reinforces the fact that people accomplish more 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. "There's no way to fake it," is what Eddie Tai, project director with a global real estate developer, realized. 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." It is altogether too easy to get caught up in getting things done and not taking the time to acknowledge people for their contributions. Don't expect your direct reports to recommend you to their peers as a good leader if you aren't encouraging the heart. The LPI data indicates that four times the number of direct reports who observe their leader as frequently encouraging the heart would favorably recommend them as a good leader, compared with those direct reports that indicate their leader seldom encourages the heart.

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 they are at their best. There's abundant empirical evidence that these leadership practices matter. Embedded within The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are essential behaviors that serve as the basis for becoming an exemplary leader. We call these the Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership and they, along with The Five Practices, are displayed in Table 1.

These Ten Commitments serve as the template for explaining, understanding, appreciating, and learning how leaders make extraordinary things happen in organizations. They define the actions you need to demonstrate and with which you need to be comfortable. Each of them is discussed in depth in Chapters 2 through 11. Hundreds of studies have reported that The Five Practices make a positive difference in the engagement and performance levels of people and organizations. We highlight this research in the next section. In subsequent chapters, we report on much more of the evidence supporting this leadership operating system.

Table 1 The Five Practices and Ten Commitments of Exemplary Leadership

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

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

Challenge the Process
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.

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

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

The Five Practices
Make a Difference

Exemplary leadership behavior makes a profoundly positive difference in people's commitment and motivation, work performance, and to the success of their organizations. That's the definitive conclusion from analyzing responses from nearly five million respondents worldwide using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) to assess how often leaders engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership.

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 how engaged they are in the workplace. For example:

- ▶ How proud they are to tell others they work for this organization
- ▶ Their commitment to the organization's success
- ▶ Their willingness to work harder and for longer hours if the job demanded it
- ▶ How effective they are in their jobs
- ▶ How much they trust management
- ▶ The extent they feel valued
- ▶ The strength of their work group's team spirit

They also provide assessments about their leader's overall leadership effectiveness and job performance, whether they would recommend that individual to their colleagues as a good leader, the likelihood of this person derailing, and how well this person compares with other leaders with whom they have worked.

When examining the most engaged direct reports compared to those who are least engaged—that is, in the top 20 percent or bottom 20 percent of this distribution—there are clear differences in how frequently

they indicate their leaders utilize The Five Practices. The data shows that leaders of the most engaged direct reports are seen by them as using The Five Practices over 50 percent more often than those experienced by the least engaged direct reports. Similarly, when direct reports are asked, "Where would you place this person as a leader relative to other leaders inside and outside your organization?" there are clear differences in their responses directly attributable to their leaders' use of The Five Practices, as shown in Figure 1. It is quite evident that you are very unlikely to be considered among the best leaders by your direct reports unless you frequently demonstrate The Five Practices.

Figure 1 Being Considered "One of the Best" Leaders Increases with Greater Frequency of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership by Leaders

% Direct Reports Strongly Agree Their Leader Is One of the Best Leaders

Frequency That Their Leader Engages in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership by Decile
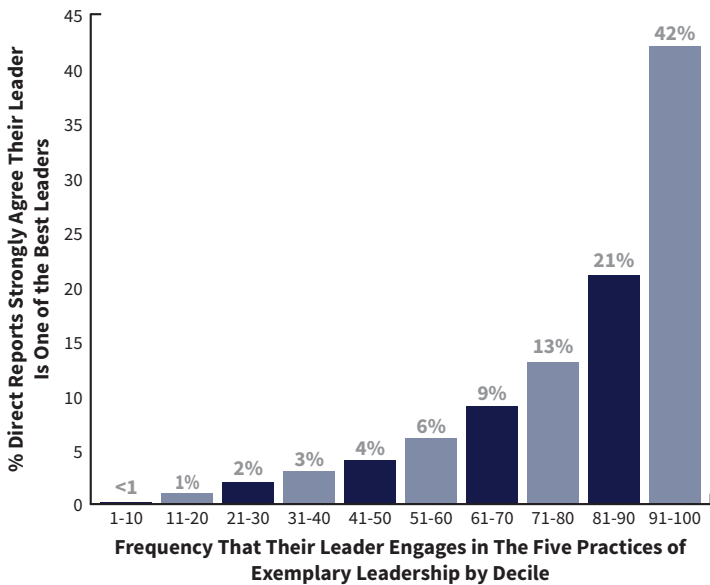
Multivariate analyses clearly show that how their leaders behave explains the extent to which their direct reports are engaged in the workplace. The alternative hypothesis is that demographic factors—individual characteristics like age, gender, educational level, length of service, and nationality—or that organizational factors—like function, hierarchical position, industry, and organizational size—are even more important in explaining why employees are engaged is simply not borne out by the data. All of these individual and organizational factors *combined* explain **nothing**—less than three-tenths of one percent—about why people are engaged. In contrast, leadership as measured by The Five Practices has over time consistently accounted for at least 33 percent, and in the past few years as much as 42 percent of the variance in engagement levels. No other variable or factor is as significant in explaining where people are in their level of engagement as is leadership. How leaders behave significantly influences people's engagement, and those behaviors are what make the difference regardless of who the direct reports are (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, or education) or their circumstance (e.g., position, tenure, discipline, industry, or nationality).*

The empirical conclusion is that the more you utilize The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, the more likely it is that you'll have a positive influence on other people and your organization. If you want to impact people, organizations, and communities significantly, invest in learning the behaviors that enable you to become the very best leader you can be.

Furthermore, consider the findings on the financial impact of exemplary leadership. Researchers examined the financial performance of organizations over five years and compared those where constituents rated senior leaders as actively using The Five Practices with organizations

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*Keep in mind that in the social sciences, we can't ever account for 100 percent of the variance (or explanation, as can generally be accounted for in the natural or physical sciences; e.g., two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen produce water). The unaccounted-for-variance is referred to as "noise" and results from errors associated with the measurement tools and the variability or lack of stability in the responses from humans.

whose leaders were significantly less engaged with 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 more frequently engaged in The Five Practices than their counterparts.[4]

The Five Practices clearly make a difference. However, they paint only a partial portrait of what's going on. The complete picture requires an understanding and appreciation of what constituents expect from their leaders. Leadership is not granted; it is earned from the people you aspire to lead. They choose, day in and day out, whether they will follow and fully commit their talents, time, and energy. In the end, leaders don't decide who leads. Followers do. You can gain additional insights into what's important to your constituents by considering leadership from their standpoint. What do people look for in a leader? What do people want from someone whose direction they'd be willing to follow?

Leadership Is a Relationship

Leadership is in the eyes of other people.
It is they who proclaim you as a leader.

Carrie Gilstrap

Another crucial truth that weaves 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. Leadership, as we define it, is *the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations*. Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It's the *quality* of this relationship that matters most when making extraordinary things happen. 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.[5]

Exemplary leaders focus more on others than on themselves. Success in leadership, work, and life is—and has always been—a function of how well people work and play together. Success in leading is wholly dependent upon the capacity to build and sustain positive relationships. Any discussion of leadership must attend to the dynamics of this bond. Strategies, tactics, skills, and practices are empty without understanding the fundamental human aspirations that connect leaders and constituents.

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. John Gardner—founder of Common Cause, advisor to six U.S. presidents, and respected author and scholar—expressed it this way: "A loyal constituency is won when the people, consciously or unconsciously, judge the leader to be capable of solving their problems and meeting their needs, when the leader is seen as symbolizing their norms, and when their image of the leader (whether or not it corresponds to reality) is congruent with their inner environment of myth and legend."[6] Knowing what people want from their leaders is the only way to complete the picture of how leaders can build and sustain relationships that will make extraordinary things happen.

What People Look for and Admire in Their Leaders   To better understand leadership as a relationship, we have investigated the expectations that people have of leaders. Over the years, we've examined responses from thousands of open-ended surveys about what people look for in a person they would be willing to follow.[7] Subsequent content analysis by several independent judges, followed by rounds of empirical analyses, resulted in a 20-item checklist called the *Characteristics of*

Admired Leaders (CAL) survey. Using CAL, we ask respondents to select the seven qualities, traits, or characteristics that they "most look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction they would willingly follow." The key word in this statement 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*.

Over 150,000 people around the globe have completed CAL, and we continuously collect responses and update the results. Remarkably, the findings have been quite consistent over the years, as the data in Table 1.2 show. There are some essential "character tests" individuals must pass before others are willing to grant them the designation of *leader*.

Although every characteristic receives votes, and therefore each is important to some people, what is most striking is that there continue to be four qualities that have always received the majority of votes. What people are looking for in a person whom they would *willingly* follow is someone who they believe is *honest, competent, inspiring,* and *forward-looking*. For all the dramatic changes in the world over these past four decades, what people look for has remained amazingly stable. Our analyses show that this is true across gender, ethnic background, educational levels, years of work experience, hierarchical position, industry, function, and nationality.[8] Despite all the changes over these past four decades in the world and workplace, whenever and wherever we have inquired about desirable leader attributes, the same qualities are selected most often.

Let's examine why each of these characteristics is essential for creating a sustainable relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who would be willing to follow. After that, we'll show how these characteristics reveal the foundation on which leaders must build that sustainable relationship.

Honest   In every survey administration, people select honesty 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 they perceive as being honest. This doesn't mean that every leader *is* honest, but people most want to see it.

Table 1.2 Characteristics of Admired Leaders: Percentage of Respondents Selecting Each Characteristic[a]

Characteristic	1987	1995	2002	2007	2012	2017	2023
Honest	83	88	88	89	89	84	87
Competent	67	63	66	68	69	66	68
Inspiring	58	68	65	69	69	66	54
Forward-looking	62	75	71	71	71	62	53
Dependable	33	32	33	34	35	39	46
Supportive	32	41	35	35	35	37	45
Intelligent	43	40	47	48	45	47	41
Broad-minded	37	40	40	35	38	40	38
Cooperative	25	28	28	25	27	31	36
Fair-minded	40	49	42	39	37	35	36
Ambitious	21	13	17	16	21	28	33
Straightforward	34	33	34	36	32	32	30
Caring	26	23	20	22	21	23	29
Loyal	11	11	14	18	19	18	21
Determined	17	17	23	25	26	22	19
Mature	23	13	21	5	14	17	17
Imaginative	34	28	23	17	16	17	14
Courageous	27	29	20	25	22	22	13
Self-controlled	13	5	8	10	11	10	12
Independent	10	5	6	4	5	5	6

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

And you readily know what happens when you find out your leader has lied or been deceptive: both current and future motivational levels decline, often dramatically.

It's clear that if people anywhere are to follow someone willingly, 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 this means they must believe that their leaders are individuals of authentic character and solid integrity.

Competent   To enlist in another's cause, people must believe that the person they are following is competent to guide them along the path to the future. They must see that person as capable and effective. If people doubt the leader's abilities, they're not readily going to enlist in the crusade. Studies point out that when people perceive their leader as incompetent, they reject the individual and that person's perspective.[9]

Leadership competence refers to the leader's track record and ability to get things done. This kind of competence inspires confidence—the leader can guide the entire organization in the direction in which it needs to go. When people talk about a competent leader, they aren't referring specifically to the leader's expertise in all of the core functions of the organization. People do need to believe that the person understands the company's current marketplace, operation, culture, and people. Still, they also know that as leaders move up in the organization's hierarchy, they can't be the most technically competent in every operational specialty. There's no expectation that a leader should be a super-human, all-seeing, all-knowing wizard. The type of competence demanded varies with the leader's position and the condition of the organization.

Inspiring   People expect their leaders to be excited, energetic, and positive about their prospects. 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 when they sense that *you* truly believe it. 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. 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.

You need more than a dream. A leader must be able to communicate that vision in ways that encourage others to sign on for the duration. 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, they 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.

Forward-Looking   People expect leaders to have a sense of direction and a concern for the future of the organization. After all, if the vision is simply same-old, 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 and offer a path forward.

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. 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.

Putting It All Together: Credibility Is the Foundation

These essential leadership characteristics, consistent over time and place, reveal a profound and crucial implication for leadership. It gets to the very essence of what enables leaders to attract and retain followers. In

assessing the believability of sources of communication—whether news reporters, salespeople, physicians, or priests; whether business managers, military officers, politicians, or civic leaders—researchers typically evaluate them on three criteria: their perceived *trustworthiness,* their *expertise,* and their *dynamism*. The more highly people are rated on these dimensions, the more they are considered credible sources of information.[10] Honesty, competence, and being inspiring are clearly aligned with "source credibility."

Link the concept of source credibility with the data about admired leadership qualities, and the striking conclusion is that, more than anything, people want to follow leaders who are credible. *Credibility is the foundation of leadership*. Above all else, constituents must be able to believe in their leaders. They must believe that their leaders' word can be trusted and that they have the knowledge and skill to lead. Credibility is particularly significant when you consider that leaders ask people to join them on a journey to an unknown future. This is why being "forward-looking" is also an essential expectation of those who aspire to lead others. To willingly follow, constituents must believe that their leaders know where they're headed and have the competence to get them there.

The consistency and pervasiveness of these findings on the characteristics of admired leaders—people someone would willingly follow—results in **The Kouzes-Posner First Law of Leadership: If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't believe the message**. Before people determine what they think about what you are saying, they decide what they think of you.

Leaders must always be diligent in guarding their credibility. Your capacity to take strong stands, challenge the status quo, and move in new directions depends upon being highly credible. You can't take your credibility for granted. 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 will require sacrifice, then people must believe in you.

Credibility Matters   You might reasonably wonder, "There are people who are in positions of power, and there are people who are enormously wealthy, yet people don't find them credible. Does credibility really matter? Does it make a difference?" These are sensible questions, and to answer them, we decided to ask the people whose responses matter the most—the leader's direct reports. Using a behavioral measure of credibility, we asked them to think about the extent to which their immediate manager exhibited credibility-enhancing behaviors.[11] The data revealed 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 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 credibility on employee attitudes and behavior provides clear dictates for organizational leaders. Credibility

makes a difference, and leaders must take it personally. Loyalty, commitment, energy, and productivity depend upon it.

Credibility goes far beyond employee attitudes. It also influences customer and investor loyalty. In an extensive study of the economic value of business loyalty, researchers find, "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."[12] Their findings underscore the importance of the First Law of Leadership.

What Is Credibility Behaviorally? How do you know credibility when you see it? We posed this question to tens of thousands of people around the globe. The answers we received were essentially the same, regardless of how they were phrased in one organization versus another or one country versus another. Here are some of the common expressions people use to describe how they know when people are credible:

- ▶ "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."*

The last is the most frequent response. When deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words, then observe the actions. They listen to the talk and then watch the walk. They listen to the promises of resources to support change initiatives, and then they wait to see if money and materials follow. They hear the pledge to deliver, and then they look for evidence that the commitments are met. A judgment of "credible" is handed down when words and deeds are consonant.

If people don't see consistency, they conclude that the leader is, at best, not serious, or, at worst, an outright hypocrite. If leaders espouse

one set of values but personally practice another, people find them to be duplicitous. If their leaders practice what they preach, people are more willing to entrust them with their livelihood and even their lives. This realization leads to a straightforward prescription on the most significant way to establish credibility. It is **The Kouzes-Posner Second Law of Leadership**: **DWYSYWD: Do What You Say You Will Do.**

This commonsense definition of credibility corresponds directly to the first 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 and 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."

How Does Credibility Link to The Five Practices?

The practice of Model the Way relates 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 leaders when their deeds and words match—and when they trust their leaders, they more willingly follow.

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.

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