



THE FIVE PRACTICES OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

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

Alan Keith, Lucas Digital

*Vision, conviction, and courage made the difference—
for all of us.*

Lindsay Levin, Whites Limited

Whites, a car dealership and repair group based in the southeast part of London, was no worse than its competitors, but probably no better, either. Though the firm seemed busy enough, deeper analysis revealed negligible profits, mediocre employee morale, outdated financial systems, and low customer retention rates. As with lots of similar businesses, much of the structure and systems at Whites had remained substantially unchanged for many years. Each of the three departments—sales, service, and parts—operated largely independently, frequently blaming the others for any problems. Performance measures centered on efficiency and the cost of overhead, with insufficient attention paid to the customer’s experience. This is a situation all too familiar to businesses around the globe, large and small.

“What do our customers really think of us?” was the starting point for Managing Director Lindsay Levin. If the customers didn’t feel about the business as she wanted them to, she wanted to know why: “I wanted to get Whites to the point where we could be totally confident that every customer

would have an excellent experience dealing with us. I didn't want it to be okay; I wanted it to be amazing—every time.” And so she started talking about this question with everyone.¹

Lindsay had no illusions about the size of the task facing her, especially as a twenty-nine-year-old woman without so much as a streak of grease under her fingernails. She took over the reins of this family business (founded by her great-grandfather), only a few years out of college. Although she had worked in various parts of the business as a teenager, mostly over the summer and holidays, to this day she still knows little about automobile engines and the product side of the enterprise.² What she does know, she says now, “is that this business is really all about people. And that our ability to deliver amazing customer service is all about people, and making them feel motivated, empowered, and trusted. They need to feel that they know what is at stake and how they make a difference. If we are not really committed to our own people, how can we expect them to be committed to our customers? My vision for Whites is of a company where everyone is treated with respect, feels involved and valued, and sees continuous improvement as part of their job, where people are free to get on and move the business forward with the minimum of bureaucracy, taking responsibility for their actions without fear of blame.”

One of the ways Lindsay got started was to hold focus groups of customers, videotaping the proceedings and playing them back to the employees. The results were electrifying. They revealed that comfortable assumptions about the job Whites was doing were not supported by the evidence. It was all the more powerful because employees recognized individual customers making complaints and could identify themselves as the subject of some of those complaints. Concerns ranged from poorly finished repairs and mistakes in billing to basic failures of communication such as not letting people know when their cars were ready to be picked up. Customers felt like a commodity. They didn't care which department they were talking to, they just wanted their car repaired.

As a first step, Lindsay asked people to talk about changes they would like to see happen and to form small voluntary teams to implement them. Initially these weren't earth-shattering shifts, they were tasks like redoing the kitchen and cleaning up the workshop—yet the response was enthusiastic

and immediate. Some projects did take longer than expected, but they put people into the right frame of mind about working as a team. “Getting something concrete done got people over the ‘I’ve heard it all before’ reaction,” recalls Lindsay: “It was an essential preliminary to changing attitudes and mindsets.”

Once the teams had a few successes under their belts, they had the confidence to move on to bigger projects like building a new vehicle storage compound and, ultimately, to making fundamental changes in working practices. Most notably, they began operating as integrated and self-managing units in direct contact with customers rather than as traditional functional divisions. “As a result,” says Lindsay, “a very new way of working in teams developed.” It also transformed relationships—with customers who can now put a face to a name and talk to “their” technician, just as technicians get to know “their” customers personally. This has created such strong bonds that it is not unusual for employees to drop in on their days off to check progress on a particular vehicle.

Lindsay also made a commitment to training: “Vehicle repair is becoming a knowledge process, calling for brain as much as brawn.” Sixteen hours a month—10 percent of time—was, and continues to be, devoted to training. She admits that it is expensive and that pulling people off the job is not always popular, but it’s a long-term strategy that pays off in two directions. One is that skills transfer is a reality and the people who have been on training courses (covering both technical and people skills) go on to train others on the job. The other is the bottom-line effect, where revenue and growth have more than doubled, contributing to many awards both inside and outside the industry.

Lindsay also realized that you can never stop communicating, nor do enough communicating with people. In the early days, she would sometimes meet with all the technicians and parts people and be greeted with a wall of silence. “I’d have to be really proactive to get anything back from them.” A big learning point for Lindsay and the leadership team was, as she says: “that it’s easy for the manager to say, ‘Well, I tried to get input from people but nobody wanted to contribute.’ To succeed, you’ve got to keep persevering and going back.” This level of commitment was required before people would really open up and be honest with Levin, other directors, managers, and even their peers:

I talk very much from the heart, from the soul. This was initially a very strange thing to do in the motor [car] business, because it's a very macho culture. You have to open up your heart and let people know what you really think and believe. This means talking about your values and the values in your organization. The key is being able to align these two—personal and organizational values—and being at home in your skin, and being honest with yourself. You may have a set of values or mission stuck up on the wall, but if it's not what you're about, then everyone in the business will know, and it's a complete waste of time, and you'd probably be better off not to do anything. Be honest with yourself about what really matters to you and motivates you. And you've got to make sure that what you're doing in your business is aligned with what you're really all about.

Lindsay knows the critical importance of doing what you say you'll do and leading from the front. She told us about a very recent incident where her actions in working with a new salesperson set an example for others and gave testimony to not only her values but also reinforced key organizational values in the process:

I went to our sales department and there was a new salesperson hired. There were a whole bunch of things he should have been shown as a new person, and hadn't been. Fairly simple things, like where to get the company telephone directory. So I sat down with him for half an hour, at his desk, and showed him where to get all the information, got on the Internet with him and showed him a whole bunch of mundane things. And I know that I'm chatting with this guy, and he's a great guy, and that my time with him will not only make an impression on him but also on others in the organization who notice how I just chose to spend half an hour coaching someone on how to do a better job.

Lindsay also makes sure that they do all kinds of things to recognize success at Whites. All managers take time out to say thank you personally to people at every opportunity. Each month twenty-five to fifty “Going the

Extra Mile” awards are given throughout the organization. Get three and trade them in for a gold pin with a winged W. Get three in a row and you’ve earned a dinner certificate. These awards are generated by anyone in the organization, recognizing the contribution, the “extra mile” taken by someone else in pursuit of serving the customer. “It uplifts everyone’s hearts,” says Lindsay, to see what people are doing on their own: like traveling up to Scotland to help a customer whose car has broken down, delivering a car after midnight to a customer who was returning home from an overseas flight, or rearranging one’s own schedule so that a teammate can attend a child’s celebration at school. The fact that this recognition is public makes all the difference, according to Lindsay, because you can’t pay people to care. Lindsay herself writes lots of personal memos to congratulate people on achievement, signed with a smiley face. This has become a Lindsay trademark and people talk about how many “smileys” they have received.

“We really try very hard at Whites,” says Lindsay, “to make certain that we are *zapping* and not *sapping* people. Zapping means giving people positive strokes—boosting their motivation by recognizing a job well done and giving them the confidence to push themselves further.” She believes you need to zap people on a regular basis. “If everyone is doing a great job, what’s the problem in letting them know that?” Lindsay also appreciates that in difficult and challenging circumstances, sometimes all people need is to be supported and propped up. “This can be as simple as asking people how they are feeling or taking them out for a cup of coffee. Putting a bit of time aside to acknowledge the efforts they are making, and also that change can be difficult, makes a big difference to how people feel.”

“I knew I’d never be able myself to make all the changes that I thought were necessary to revolutionize the business and make it truly customer, and people, focused,” says Lindsay, reflecting on her experience and the still-ongoing transformation at Whites. But these things were, and are, very important to her, and that comes across to people. She knows that if people trust her and she trusts them, then there are few limits to what they can accomplish. Further, Lindsay notes: “You can then expect people to take responsibility. We assume the best in people, that they want to do a good job, that they’ll check up, get on with it, and honor the responsibility they’ve been given so that everybody’s playing their part.”

Lindsay demonstrates exemplary leadership skills, and she shows how to both build and guide a talented and committed team in accomplishing exceptionally challenging goals. She serves as a model for how other leaders can get extraordinary things done in a world of constant chaos and change.

LEADERSHIP FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

Lindsay is a truly remarkable person, but her story is not. For over two decades we've been conducting research on personal-best leadership experiences, and we've discovered that there are countless examples of how leaders mobilize others to get extraordinary things done in virtually every arena of organized activity. We've found them in profit-based firms and non-profits, manufacturing and services, government and business, health care, education and entertainment, work and community service. Leaders reside in every city and every country, in every position and every place. They're employees and volunteers, young and old, women and men. Leadership knows no racial or religious bounds, no ethnic or cultural borders. We find exemplary leadership everywhere we look.

Sometimes a leadership opportunity directly confronts you as it did with Lindsay Levin. Sometimes it knocks on your door and invites you to participate. When that happens, you have to be ready to seize the moment. Just take a look at what happened with Alan Keith, for example.

In 1991 the Turner Broadcasting System (TBS) wanted to launch the Cartoon Network. To make the Cartoon Network work, though, TBS needed instant programming to fill the hours of airtime. So it immediately went searching for acquisitions, and Hanna-Barbera Cartoons seemed like the ideal purchase. With its extensive library of classic cartoons developed over nearly forty years—including *The Flintstones*, *Scooby Doo*, and *The Jetsons*—Hanna-Barbera had just what the Cartoon Network needed, so TBS happily closed the deal. Along with the library, the acquisition of Hanna-Barbera included the company's animation studio. At that time the studio wasn't producing cool programming that appealed to the younger audience, but then—TBS chairman Ted Turner thought it could be turned around. He gave the Hanna-Barbera team two years to make that happen. If they couldn't, he'd close the studio down.

Alan Keith, chief accounting officer and controller for the Turner Distribution Company, was recruited to be part of the acquisition team. Alan assumed he'd be involved in it for a while, and then once the deal was completed he'd go back to his other responsibilities. But it turned out very differently. Instead, he was asked to take on the role of vice president of business operations of Hanna-Barbera, move to Los Angeles, and become part of the senior team there. The challenge: completely reinvent the Hanna-Barbera studios. "It became," Alan says, looking back, "one of the most compelling experiences I've ever had in my career. It was an environment where leadership was working at its best."

At the time of the acquisition a manufacturing philosophy ruled the studio. "It was about doing it cheaply, getting it out the door and getting it on the air as quickly as possible," Alan says. "Their whole drive, their whole motivation was not so much on creativity or quality but on volume." Like most factories, there was a highly centralized structure in which all decisions about creative issues were being made by one or two people, and all the work was divided into functional departments. Creativity had been dampened because of that system, and there was no free flow of ideas. Something had to be done quickly to revive a once great entertainment force.

The new team had to make a dramatic shift from a manufacturing mentality to a focus on *creativity*. It seems like an obvious thing when you're talking about animation, but, Alan says, "It was a huge struggle to get to the place where we could actually admit that all we really care about right now is bringing the right kind of creativity into this organization." And, as with so many simple yet profound shifts in perspective, "Once we were able to articulate it, so many things flowed from that statement."

"The vision," Alan explains, "was to ultimately be viewed as the world's leader in producing cartoon animation." But vision is one thing, action is another. "After scratching our heads for a little while . . . we decided to launch a shorts program. . . . This was really the unique and risky concept out of the whole idea. Animation's expensive to produce, and the only way it gets cost-effective is if you're producing long-run syndicated programs where you can amortize your cost over long periods of time. To produce a seven-minute short is an expensive proposition. To produce thirty-nine of them certainly adds to the risk."

Thus began a huge, real-time R&D effort. “We had an opportunity to produce thirty-nine unique, individual shorts, all different characters, all different stories. And then the Cartoon Network would air them repeatedly in different time slots, up against other programs, promote them in different ways, and collect lots of data on ratings and viewer feedback. That feedback ultimately gave us the indications of which handful were really the ones that seemed to appeal, and therefore were the ones we wanted to pursue.”

To support this dramatic departure from the past, “We essentially turned the organization on its ear, and we questioned every paradigm that the business had about how it worked, how it was set up, how it was structured, and how it was operated,” explains Alan. The old departmental structure gave way to highly decentralized production units and cross-functional teams. Each unit, focused on one of the shorts, would hire its own team and develop its own ideas. The support functions, depending on what they did, were assigned to work with different teams in the facility. What evolved was a much thinner yet stronger support system. The job of all those in leadership roles shifted from control to providing the backing for people to do what they were brought on to do. “It was fascinating to me,” says Alan, “because it was such a radical process. And it involved a great deal of risk whether it would even work.” It might have been a risk, but what resulted was a higher sense of accountability.

“Creative people by nature,” Alan explains, “want some sense of ownership. They want some sense of empowerment and spirit. By focusing on the creator we were changing the whole leadership paradigm within our studio. . . . You can’t make people trust change and trust the system. You have to actually create a system that is trustworthy, then people will begin to move much, much faster when you’re trying to elicit change.”

Part of creating a trustworthy system was getting to know the people he worked with, so Alan spent a lot of time with his employees. “We had times periodically throughout the year where managers were not allowed to have any appointments on their schedule other than those specifically set up by employees to come and talk to them about whatever was on their minds.”

For Alan, this process of making deeper connections with people had a profound payoff. “To get the most out of people, you need to see them on more than a surface level. You really have to get to know what makes them

tick. When you do that you're a little bit more human, and you create a system that's more trustworthy. Learning about their interests and passions made a huge difference in getting them connected to what we were trying to accomplish. It allowed me and it allowed others an opportunity to figure out how to motivate these people in order to do something that was absolutely extraordinary."

The entire climate of the studio changed. "We did everything from completely overhauling and doing a face-lift on the space so that it spoke to the creative spirit to encouraging anybody in the company—anybody that had an idea for a cartoon short—to come in and pitch their idea. It was an open system." Alan recalls how one woman in the purchasing department had an idea about how to liven up the look and feel of the place. She knew that the company wasn't going to spend gobs of money on new furniture because they didn't have it. "She said, 'The lobby needs to be redone because it's really tacky right now. I found a place that sells fabric. Let's just reupholster some of the existing furniture with some really wild, zany sixties-looking stuff because that's really the era of the furniture and it would liven it up.' It was those sorts of things that came out of a context of being fiscally responsible but yet coming up with great new ideas."

To teach people how to work in this new trusting system, lots of team building, lots of offsites, and other forms of training took place. Significant time, energy, and resources were spent on developing leadership within the organization, something to which Alan dedicated himself personally. One of the interventions Alan sponsored was a 360-degree feedback review process. This was done on a multi-year basis so that employees' perceptions could be tracked over time. It was a rigorous process involving quantitative data and written comments that each manager was required to review and then sit with employees and talk about. Alan set the example, later telling us: "I think that was probably one of the most significant ways that I showed I was walking the walk and talking the talk. I started with me when it came to getting the upward feedback."

Although turning around the Hanna-Barbera Studio was serious business, "We played a lot," Alan recalls. "The place was about creating animation for kids, so it should be a fun place to work. We had celebratory parties around the shows, and we'd bring in the costume characters." Individual

recognition was also abundant. “It didn’t matter if it was somebody in the legal department, human resources, or facilities. If a person did something that was incredibly useful or important to our mission, they were recognized. Sometimes it was in town hall meetings, and other times one-on-ones; whatever the method, people got recognized for their contributions.”

There was also the company store. “We set up a store in our studio where employees could come and buy merchandise that we had created just for our production studio, unique merchandise that you couldn’t buy elsewhere. We wanted people to feel it was really special to work there. We wanted employees to walk out the door at the end of the day wearing a really, really cool Hanna-Barbera T-shirt with one of our characters on it. We wanted people to stop them, talk about it, and say ‘That’s really cool. Where did you get that?’”

“A lot of this stuff sounds kind of silly,” Alan remarks, “but from the time we acquired the company until I left, the whole face of the place changed. It was a very gray, dank-looking building when I first arrived. When I left, we had zany furniture in the lobby, the buildings were painted bright colors, and the conference tables had all of our characters’ names engraved in them. It was like coming to work in a cartoon every day. That stuff happened organically as we started to really change the place.”

The Hanna-Barbera turnaround was a huge success. It not only created programs and merchandise that have produced billions of dollars in revenue for the Cartoon Network, it also created a whole new, trustworthy system for producing cartoon animation. This new system had a lasting human impact as well. “To this day,” says Alan, “a number of people who are no longer there maintain extremely close contact. There was a group of people working shoulder to shoulder for many years, figuring out how to make things work, and we developed a bond that is a very rare thing in the workplace.”

Because of his success at Hanna-Barbera, Alan Keith was recruited by Lucas Digital Ltd. to become its chief administrative officer. “The purpose that I’m serving in this organization is one of change.” And in that role he’s applying the lessons he learned at Hanna-Barbera, trying to create another trustworthy system that will get even more extraordinary things done. What does he see as a key lesson? “Know what you value, be willing to take a risk, and lead from the heart—lead from what you believe in.”

INTRODUCING THE FIVE PRACTICES

Faced with different cultures and difficult circumstances, Lindsay Levin and Alan Keith each seized the opportunity to lead. They chose a pioneering path and led their organizations to new summits of excellence. And although their cultures and circumstances are distinct, we learned some important lessons about leadership from Lindsay, Alan, and the thousands of others who told us their personal-best experiences. From them we learned what it takes to mobilize other people—by the force of their own free will and despite hard work and potential risk—to want to climb to the summit.

Through our studies of personal-best leadership experiences, we've discovered that ordinary people who guide others along pioneering journeys follow rather similar paths. Though each case we looked at was unique in expression, each path was also marked by some common patterns of action. Leadership is not at all about personality; it's about practice. We've forged these common practices into a model of leadership, and we offer it here as guidance for leaders to follow as they attempt to keep their own bearings and guide others toward peak achievements.

As we looked deeper into the dynamic process of leadership, through case analyses and survey questionnaires, we uncovered five practices common to personal-best leadership experiences. When getting extraordinary things done in organizations, leaders engage in these Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership:

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

These practices—which we discuss briefly in this chapter and then in depth in later chapters—aren't the private property of the people we studied or of a few select shining stars. They're available to anyone, in any organization or situation, who accepts the leadership challenge. And they're not the accident of a special moment in history. They've stood the test of time, and our most recent research confirms that they're just as relevant today as

they were when we first began our investigation over two decades ago—if not more so.

Model the Way

Titles are granted, but it's your behavior that wins you respect. As Gayle Hamilton, a director with Pacific Gas & Electric Company, told us, "I would never ask anyone to do anything I was unwilling to do first." This sentiment was shared across all the cases that we collected. 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. Leaders *model the way*.

To effectively model the behavior they expect of others, leaders must first be clear about their guiding principles. Lindsay Levin says, "You have to open up your heart and let people know what you really think and believe. This means talking about your values." Alan Keith adds that one of the most significant leadership lessons he would pass along is, "You must lead from what you believe." Leaders must find their own voice, and then they must clearly and distinctively give voice to their values. As the personal-best stories illustrate, leaders are supposed to stand up for their beliefs, so they'd better have some beliefs to stand up for.

Eloquent speeches about common values, however, aren't nearly enough. Leaders' deeds are far more important than their words when determining how serious they really are about what they say. Words and deeds must be consistent. Exemplary leaders go first. They go first by setting the example through daily actions that demonstrate they are deeply committed to their beliefs. Toni-Ann Lueddecke, for example, believes that there are no unimportant tasks in an organization's efforts at excellence. She demonstrates this to her associates in her eight Gymboree Play & Music centers in New Jersey by her actions. As just one example, she sometimes scrubs floors in addition to teaching classes.

The personal-best projects we heard about in our research were all distinguished by relentless effort, steadfastness, competence, and attention to detail. We were also struck by how the actions leaders took to set an example were often simple things. Sure, leaders had operational and strategic plans. But the examples they gave were not about elaborate designs. 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. Modeling 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.

Inspire a Shared Vision

When people described to us their personal-best leadership experiences, they told of times when they imagined an exciting, highly attractive future for their organization. They had visions and dreams of what *could* be. They had absolute and total personal belief in those dreams, and they were confident in their abilities to make extraordinary things happen. Every organization, every social movement, begins with a dream. The dream or vision is the force that invents the future. Lindsay Levin saw a new and even more responsive Whites Group; Alan Keith imagined people at Hanna-Barbera taking creativity seriously—and playfully—to rejuvenate and reenergize a decaying organizational culture.

Leaders *inspire a shared vision*. They gaze across the horizon of time, imagining the attractive opportunities that are in store when they and their constituents arrive at a distant destination. Leaders have a desire to make something happen, to change the way things are, to create something that no one else has ever created before. In some ways, leaders live their lives backward. They see pictures in their mind's eye of what the results will look like even before they've started their project, much as an architect draws a blueprint or an engineer builds a model. Their clear image of the future pulls them forward. Yet visions seen only by leaders are insufficient to create an organized movement or a significant change in a company. A person with no constituents is not a leader, and people will not follow until they accept a vision as their own. Leaders cannot command commitment, only inspire it.

To enlist people in a vision, leaders must know their constituents and speak their language. People must believe that leaders understand their needs and have their interests at heart. Leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue. To enlist support, leaders must have intimate knowledge of people's dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions, and values.

Leaders breathe life into the hopes and dreams of others and enable them to see the exciting possibilities that the future holds. Leaders forge a unity of purpose by showing constituents how the dream is for the common good. Leaders ignite the flame of passion in others by expressing enthusiasm for the compelling vision of their group. Leaders communicate their passion through vivid language and an expressive style.

And leaders are in all places. When he was named captain of the soccer team as a high school junior, Dave Praklet knew he would have to do something to inspire his teammates to always give 110 percent. As he explained to us: “I had to get personal with them and tell them how good it feels to win a league championship. Or how good it feels as you step on the field for a championship game—how the adrenaline sends a tingling feeling through your entire body. Recounting these memorable moments helped me inspire the team to want to work hard. They wanted to see what it feels like and play with your heart.”

Whatever the venue, and without exception, the people in our study reported that they were incredibly enthusiastic about their personal-best projects. Their own enthusiasm was catching; it spread from leader to constituents. Their belief in and enthusiasm for the vision were the sparks that ignited the flame of inspiration.

Challenge the Process

Leaders venture out. None of the individuals in our study sat idly by waiting for fate to smile upon them. “Luck” or “being in the right place at the right time” may play a role in the specific opportunities leaders embrace, but those who lead others to greatness seek and accept challenge. Lindsay Levin, for instance, rose to the occasion when circumstances required her to take over the family business. In the process, she also found innovative ways to transform the business. Alan Keith succeeded in confronting a traditional culture with some radical new ideas.

Every single personal-best leadership case we collected involved some kind of challenge. The challenge might have been an innovative new product, 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 military program, or the start-

up of a new plant or business. Whatever the challenge, all the cases involved a change from the status quo. Not one person claimed to have achieved a personal best by keeping things the same. All leaders *challenge the process*.

Leaders are pioneers—people who are willing to step out into the unknown. They search for opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve. But leaders aren't the only creators or originators of new products, services, or processes. In fact, it's more likely that they're not: innovation comes more from listening than from telling. Product and service innovations tend to come from customers, clients, vendors, people in the labs, and people on the front lines; process innovations, from the people doing the work. Sometimes a dramatic external event thrusts an organization into a radically new condition.

The leader's primary contribution is in the recognition of good ideas, the support of those ideas, and the willingness to challenge the system to get new products, processes, services, and systems adopted. It might be more accurate, then, to say that leaders are *early adopters* of innovation.

Leaders know well that innovation and change all involve experimentation, risk, and failure. They proceed anyway. One way of dealing with the potential risks and failures of experimentation is to approach change through incremental steps and small wins. Little victories, when piled on top of each other, build confidence that even the biggest challenges can be met. In so doing, they strengthen commitment to the long-term future. Yet not everyone is equally comfortable with risk and uncertainty. Leaders also pay attention to the capacity of their constituents to take control of challenging situations and become fully committed to change. You can't exhort people to take risks if they don't also feel safe.

It would be ridiculous to assert that those who fail over and over again eventually 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 learning. In his own study of exemplary leadership practices, Warren Bennis writes that "leaders learn by leading, and they learn best by leading in the face of obstacles. As weather shapes mountains, problems shape leaders. Difficult bosses, lack of vision and virtue in the executive suite, circumstances beyond their control, and their own mistakes have been the leaders' basic curriculum."³ In other words, leaders are learners. They learn from their failures as well as their successes.

Enable Others To Act

Grand dreams don't become significant realities through the actions of a single person. Leadership is a team effort. After reviewing thousands of personal-best cases, we developed a simple test to detect whether someone is on the road to becoming a leader. That test is the frequency of the use of the word *we*. In our interview with Alan Keith, for instance, he used the word "we" nearly three times more often than the word "I" in explaining his personal-best leadership experience.

Exemplary leaders *enable others to act*. They foster collaboration and build trust. This sense of teamwork goes far beyond a few direct reports or close confidants. They engage all those who must make the project work—and in some way, all who must live with the results. In today's "virtual" organization, cooperation can't be restricted to a small group of loyalists; it must include peers, managers, customers and clients, suppliers, citizens—all those who have a stake in the vision.

Leaders make it possible for others to do good work. They know that those who are expected to produce the results must feel a sense of personal power and ownership. Leaders understand that the command-and-control techniques of the Industrial Revolution no longer apply. Instead, leaders work to make people feel strong, capable, and committed. Leaders enable others to act not by hoarding the power they have but by giving it away. Exemplary leaders strengthen everyone's capacity to deliver on the promises they make. As a budget analyst for Catholic Healthcare West, Cindy Giordano would ask "What do you think?" and use the ensuing discussion to build up the capabilities of others (as well as educate and update her own information and perspective). She discovered that when people are trusted and have more discretion, more authority, and more information, they're much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results.

In the cases we analyzed, leaders proudly discussed teamwork, trust, and empowerment as essential elements of their efforts. A leader's ability to enable others to act is essential. Constituents neither perform at their best nor stick around for very long if their leader makes them feel weak, dependent, or alienated. But when a leader makes people feel strong and capable—as if they can do more than they ever thought possible—they'll give it their

all and exceed their own expectations. When leadership is a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, keep organizations and movements alive. Through that relationship, leaders turn their constituents into leaders themselves.

Encourage the Heart

The climb to the top is arduous and long. People become exhausted, frustrated, and disenchanted. They're often tempted to give up. Leaders *encourage the heart* of their constituents to carry on. Genuine acts of caring uplift the spirits and draw people forward. Encouragement can come from dramatic gestures or simple actions. When Cary Turner was head of Pier 1 Imports' Stores division, he once showed up in a wedding gown to promote the bridal registry. On another occasion, he promised store employees he'd parasail over Puget Sound and the Seattle waterfront if they met their sales targets. They kept their commitment; he kept his. As mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani wore different hats (literally) to acknowledge various groups of rescue workers as he toured ground zero after the World Trade Center towers were destroyed on September 11, 2001. But it doesn't take events or media coverage to let people know you appreciate their contributions. Terri Sarhatt, customer services manager at Applied Biosystems, looked after her employees so well that at least one reported that the time she spent with them was more valuable than the tangible rewards she was able to give out.

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, we saw thousands of examples of individual recognition and group celebration. We've heard and seen everything from handwritten thank-yous to marching bands and "This Is Your Life" ceremonies.

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. Neither are they about pretentious ceremonies designed to create some phony sense of camaraderie. When people see a charlatan making noisy affectations, they turn away in disgust. Encouragement is curiously serious business. It's how leaders visibly and behaviorally link rewards with

performance. When striving to raise quality, recover from disaster, start up a new service, or make dramatic change of any kind, leaders make sure people see the benefit of behavior that's aligned with cherished values. And leaders also know that celebrations and rituals, when done with authenticity and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinarily tough times.

LEADERSHIP IS A RELATIONSHIP

Leadership is an identifiable set of skills and practices that are available to all of us, not just a few charismatic men and women. The “great person”—woman or man—theory of leadership is just plain wrong. Or, we should say, the theory that there are only a *few* great men and women who can lead us to greatness is just plain wrong. We consider the women and men in our research to be great, and so do those with whom they worked. They are the everyday heroes of our world. It's because we have so many—not so few—leaders that we are able to get extraordinary things done on a regular basis, even in extraordinary times.

Our findings also challenge the myth that leadership is something that you find only at the highest levels of organizations and society. We found it everywhere. To us this is inspiring and should give everyone hope. Hope, because it means that no one needs to wait around to be saved by someone riding into town on a white horse. Hope, because there's a generation of leaders searching for the opportunities to make a difference. Hope, because right down the block or right down the hall there are people who will seize the opportunity to lead you to greatness. They're your neighbors, friends, and colleagues. And you are one of them, too.

There's still another crucial truth about leadership—more apparent to us this time around than it was before. It's something that we've known for a long time, but we've come to prize its value even more today. In talking to leaders and reading their cases, there was a very clear message that wove itself throughout every situation and every action: *leadership is a relationship*. Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow.

Evidence abounds for this point of view. For instance, in examining the critical variables for success in the top three jobs in large organizations, Jodi

Taylor and her colleagues at the Center for Creative Leadership found the number one success factor to be “relationships with subordinates.”⁴ We were intrigued to find that even in this nanosecond world of e-everything, opinion is consistent with the facts. In an *on-line* survey, respondents were asked to indicate, among other things, which would be more essential to business success in five years—social skills or skills in using the Internet. Seventy-two percent selected social skills; 28 percent, Internet skills.⁵ Internet literati completing a poll on-line realize that it’s not the web of technology that matters the most, it’s the web of people.

Similar results were found in a study by Public Allies, an AmeriCorps organization dedicated to creating young leaders who can strengthen their communities. Public Allies sought the opinions of eighteen- to thirty-year-olds on the subject of leadership. Among the items was a question about the qualities that were important in a good leader. Topping the respondents’ list is “Being able to see a situation from someone else’s point of view.” In second place, “Getting along well with other people.”⁶

Success in leadership, success in business, and success in life has been, is now, and will continue to be a function of how well people work and play together. We’re even more convinced of this today than we were twenty years ago. Success in leading will be wholly dependent upon the capacity to build and sustain those human relationships that enable people to get extraordinary things done on a regular basis.

THE TEN COMMITMENTS OF LEADERSHIP

Embedded in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are behaviors that can serve as the basis for learning to lead. We call these The Ten Commitments of Leadership. These ten commitments serve as the guide for our discussion of how leaders get extraordinary things done in organizations and as the structure for what’s to follow. We’ll fully explore each of these commitments in Chapters Three through Twelve. Before delving into the practices and commitments further, however, let’s consider leadership from the vantage point of the constituent. If leadership is a relationship, as we have discovered, then what do people expect from that relationship? What do people look for and admire in a leader? What do people want from someone whose direction they’d be willing to follow?

THE FIVE PRACTICES AND TEN COMMITMENTS OF LEADERSHIP

PRACTICE



Model the Way



Inspire a Shared Vision



Challenge the Process



Enable Others to Act



Encourage the Heart

COMMITMENT

1. Find your voice by clarifying your personal values.
2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.
3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.
5. Search for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow, and improve.
6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes.
7. Foster collaboration by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.
8. Strengthen others by sharing power and discretion.
9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

Source: *The Leadership Challenge* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. Copyright © 2002.