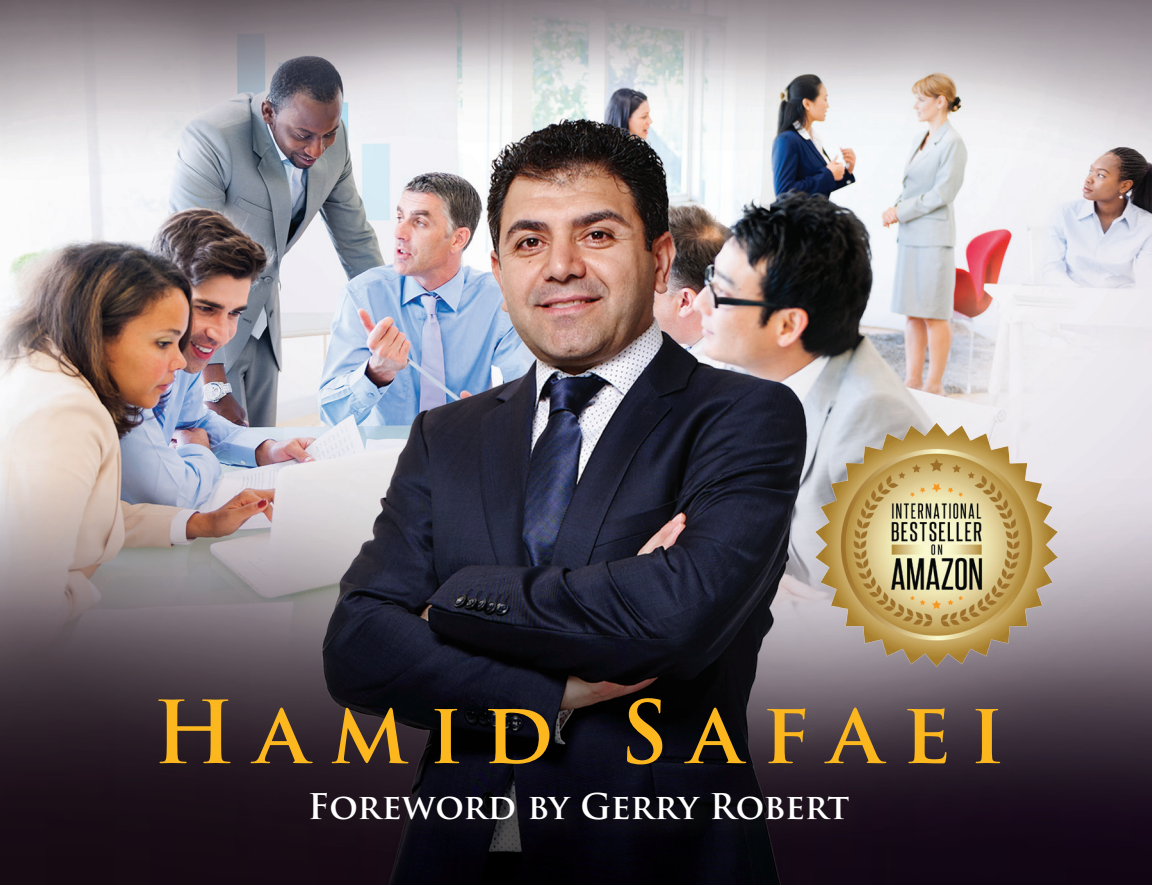


“First-Class Leadership is relevant more than ever before.”

—Prof. Dr. Balkenende, Prime Minister of the Netherlands (2002-2010)

FIRST-CLASS LEADERSHIP

HOW HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEAMS
CAN ACHIEVE BREAKTHROUGH RESULTS



HAMID SAFAEI

FOREWORD BY GERRY ROBERT

HOW HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEAMS
CAN ACHIEVE BREAKTHROUGH RESULTS

FIRST-CLASS LEADERSHIP

HAMID SAFAEI



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HOW HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEAMS
CAN ACHIEVE BREAKTHROUGH RESULTS

FIRST-CLASS LEADERSHIP

HAMID SAFAEI







DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to:

All great leaders who have made our planet a better place to live in
through their profound vision, inner flame, discovery,
and extraordinary achievements.

All upcoming leaders who will base their leadership on first-class
principles such as integrity, humility, leading by example,
authenticity, and responsibility.

The loves of my life:

My mother, my father, my wife Azadeh,
and our son Arwin.



HAMID SAFAEI

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I have learned a great deal from the many transformation and strategic sourcing assignments I have had the privilege of leading for respected corporations such as KPMG, Philips, FrieslandCampina, and ING and the countless coaching programs I have conducted for individuals and groups at large and small enterprises.

The greatest insights have come from working with CEOs and board executives. Their trust and faith in the way I implemented my assignments were essential to my learning—to push my limits every time—and I am grateful to all of them from the bottom of my heart.

First-Class Leadership has been fundamentally enriched by the wise advice I have had the privilege to receive from Gerry Robert, my publisher and the founder of Black Card Books. I am also thankful for all the support I have received from the Black Card Books team.

I am deeply grateful to the following celebrities, executives, academics, and friends who have contributed to *First-Class Leadership* through interviews, reviews, and endorsements: Prof. Dr. Balkenende, Gerry Robert, Brian Nieves, Lard Friese, Chantal Vergouw, Dirk Neelis, René Frijters, Eric van den Broek, Koen Devits, Emiel Eckstein, Dr. John Tros, Bas van der Veldt, Dr. Homayoun Dayani-Fard, Mirela Sula, Jan Kooiman, Sherief Abdalla, Prof. Dr. Wim Vanhaverbeke, Patrick Lammers, Prof. Dr. Hanmin Liu, Prof. Dr. Ilan Alon, Hans Timmerman,

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Pieter C. van der Vloed, Philip Holt, Prof. Dr. Nico Schraag, Stanley Schardijn, Prof. Lic. Fernando Julio Silva, Jitse Groen, Jon Miller, Rick Kruiswijk, and Britt Breure.

My parents, who never went to school, did whatever they could to educate me the best way possible. They set the foundations of a purposeful life by teaching me to first know and lead myself, and to stay true to core human values such as integrity, humility, and leading by example. There aren't enough words to describe how grateful I am to my parents.

I am grateful to Angela Eldering at A Scribing Hand, and Emma Steel for their work in editing the *First-Class Leadership* manuscript.

Many of my coaching clients have shared their ideas, issues, and very personal concerns during our coaching programs. This has created a profound level of fulfillment in me. By placing their trust in me, they allowed me to grow as an individual. I thank all of them.

As a lover of education and development, I have learned a lot from the greats such as Stephen Covey, Eckhart Tolle, Tony Robbins, and Deepak Chopra. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

Finally, special thanks to two beautiful souls who give meaning to my life, my wife Azadeh and our son Arwin. They created an environment where I could let my thoughts and ideas flow at any moment of the day or night. *First-Class Leadership* would never have come to fruition without their support.



ENDORSEMENTS

“*First-Class Leadership* is relevant more than ever before. On an individual level, many people are burning out and we are all collectively burning up the only planet we live in. The book invites all leaders to reconnect to their biggest ‘why’ and base their leadership on what matters most. And this is what we need now.”

—**Prof. Dr. Balkenende,**

Prime Minister of The Netherlands (2002 -2010)

“In an inspiring way, this book sums up what first-class leadership is all about. It covers how great leaders lead and what they have in common, such as their inner fire, their natural tendency to be proactive, their willingness to take risks and come up with solutions. A highly recommended read and a great source of inspiration for everyone who has affinity with leadership.”

—**Patrick Lammers,** CEO of Essent

“*First-Class Leadership* is a great manual to be mentally and emotionally fit for leading at the next level.”

—**Brian Nieves,** Missouri State Senator (Ret.),

International Speaker, Author of *The Dirty Dozen*
and COO MGB-Surgery, LLC

ENDORSEMENTS

“*First-Class Leadership* is a great reference for those who wish to deepen their knowledge of leadership. This book distinguishes itself from other leadership books and stories because Hamid Safaei highlights the person behind the ‘great leader,’ rather than just focusing on their actions or achievements. I highly recommend reading it. Even for seasoned leaders, it is a valuable resource.”

—**Chantal Vergouw**, CEO of Interpolis

“Anyone who’s ever wanted a great leadership book, here is a powerhouse of solid advice and strategies to make it to the next level. *First-Class Leadership* is a fantastic manual.”

—**Eric van den Broek**, CIO of KPMG NL

“*First-Class Leadership* is a magnificent manual and a great source of inspiration that contains everything you need to know to lead at your best.”

—**Koen Devits**, Chief Procurement Officer of DSM

“This book will not only bring out the best in your people but it will also help you tap the hidden potentials of your team. Learn how the achievers did it. Read *First-Class Leadership* now!”

—**George Bragadireanu**, Author of *The Leadership Spark*

“*First-Class Leadership* is a great source of inspiration for everyone interested in leadership.”

—**Dirk Neelis**, CFO of Transavia

FIRST-CLASS LEADERSHIP

“A revolutionary book that redefines what profound leadership means in the diehard business, and redesigns the roadmap to ultimate success. *First-Class Leadership* is a great source of inspiration, and a manual for everyone wishing to lead at the next level.”

—**Emiel Eckstein**, Chairman of the Board
of Directors at Omega Algae

“A fresh view on leadership. Hamid Safaei focuses on the fundamentals of first-class leadership by unpacking the qualities, principles and attitudes that make the difference. Hamid challenges clichés about leadership, brings to foreground the fundamental ‘why’ (purpose) questions of leadership and provides a roadmap for those who wish to take their leadership to the next level—both in business and in life.”

—**Dr. Homayoun Dayani-Fard**, Director at EY

“*First-Class Leadership* is a practical, functional guide for leaders. Grounded in research and peppered with examples, this well-researched and articulated book provides nuggets of wisdom and thoughtful recommendations from world-class leaders in politics, science and business.”

—**Prof. Dr. Ilan Alon**, University of Agder, Norway

“Keep in mind that top leaders also had their share of ups and downs. Hamid has identified the path you can create from potential leaders or ordinary individuals to real and first-class leaders!”

—**David Bunney**, Author of *Success Leaves A Trail*

ENDORSEMENTS

“When Hamid asked me to read *First-Class Leadership*, I wasn’t sure what to expect. What I encountered was a leadership book that really gave me pause to think. Unlike many leadership books, which immediately resonate and reinforce your views, Hamid, instead, challenges the reader to think differently and, whilst I didn’t always agree with his view, it did make me question my own, and that in itself made the book extremely worthwhile to read.”

—**Philip Holt**, Author of *Leading with Lean*

“As a how-to guide, *First-Class Leadership* contains everything you need to know about leading, and includes straightforward strategies that anyone can use to lead at a first-class level.”

—**René Frijters**, Founder of Alex
Vermogensbank & Knab Bank

“*First-Class Leadership* is a state-of-the-art book and a must-read for everyone who has affinity with leadership and wishes to lead at the best possible level. This is a book full of solid advice and breakthrough strategies.”

—**Bas van der Veldt**, CEO of AFAS Software

“When Hamid asked me to review his book, I was prepared to read a book that has pinned down how to be a good leader, like many other books on leadership. Instead, I was amazed by the great strategies top leaders have executed successfully. A magnificent book, down to earth and full of solid advice!”

—**Prof. Dr. Hanmin Liu**, Jinan University, China

FIRST-CLASS LEADERSHIP

“*First-Class Leadership* challenges all leaders to redesign their fundamental approach and convictions about how to lead. The book provides a fascinating roadmap with valuable insights for those who respond to the challenge positively.”

—**Jan Kooiman**, VP Delaware Consulting and
Advisory Board Member IMA

“*First-Class Leadership* is a must-read for anyone who wants to lead at the next level. Anyone who’s ever wanted to be able to lead confidently can benefit from the down-to-earth knowledge in this book.”

—**Pieter C. van der Vloed**, Co-founder AevesBenefit B.V.

“I found Hamid Safaei’s book interesting and engaging. Packed with excellent advice, strategies, and examples, *First-Class Leadership* is easy to read, informative, and is guaranteed to improve the reader’s leadership skills.”

—**Prof. Lic. Fernando Julio Silva**, MSc. ESEADE,
Buenos Aires, Argentina

“Hamid Safaei selflessly shares what he knows about First-Class Leadership. For only USD 38, this gem of a book is a steal.”

—**Michelle Watson**, Author of *Overcome and Rise Above*



FOREWORD

I met Hamid Safaei in July 2016 when we had lunch to discuss his ideas about penning *First-Class Leadership*. I immediately realized I was talking to a man with big dreams. Inspired by the power of his dream, Hamid enthusiastically shared his ideas as he talked about the impact his book would have on leaders and those who wish to develop themselves as future leaders. I was fascinated by his passion for this subject. While confident, he remained humble and eagerly sought my feedback.

As I read through his book, I was amazed by the powerhouse of solid tools available. It is full of strategies, moments of mindfulness, and to-do lists for those who wish to become profound leaders. Hamid outlines the pillars of first-class leadership as what he calls the QPA building blocks: Qualities, principles, and attitudes. He advises great leadership starts with mastering the fundamental principles, such as leading by example, followed by attitudes such as purposefulness. According to Hamid, you reach your peak performance by mastering premium leadership qualities, such as passion, decisiveness, and building highly effective teams.

As someone who has read many leadership books penned by the greats, I was intrigued by the fresh approach, fruitful nuggets, and profound wisdom *First-Class Leadership* offers. This book is the best I've read since *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teams* by Stephen Covey. In my opinion, three things make this book unique:

FIRST-CLASS LEADERSHIP

1. According to the author, the algorithm of leadership is based on genuine connection with the biggest why: The reason to exist.
2. Hamid places more weight on timeless and universal principles (such as responsibility), and attitudes (such as proactivity), rather than qualities.
3. And finally, this is not a book, it is a leadership manual. The author challenges your current way of leading by asking thought-provoking questions, which invite the reader to pause and reflect.

The author backs up his claims with proof. For example, he relates stories of the greats such as Steve Jobs, Harland Sanders, and Nick Vujicic. The book is an impressive reference for anyone interested in leadership. Whether you are a budding entrepreneur, a Fortune Global 500 CEO, or the president of your country, *First-Class Leadership* is a great source of inspiration and an insightful manual on how to lead.

—**Gerry Robert**

International Bestselling Author of
The Millionaire Mindset, Multiply Your Business,
and *Publish a Book & Grow Rich*
www.gerryrobert.com



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INTRODUCTION

Having coached executives, I have concluded that success has little to do with having access to the necessary resources; instead, the power of transforming into a resourceful state, the courage to take meaningful steps, the ability to focus, and communication mastery are the keys to success. I have seen my coaching clients transform their lives simply by changing their mindset and effectively using the resources they already had. First-class results are achieved from having an inner fire; leaders who have written history have not been lucky, nor were their successes an accident. They were determined and consistent and they persevered with a well-tested logical pattern of effective actions.

First-Class Leadership includes the secrets of great leaders and several first-class leaders' stories, and is the result of more than 20 years' work in the corporate world. As a leader, no matter how great your vision is, if you're unable to sell it to your followers, it remains with you. Therefore, the theme of this book focuses on leadership of teams; how it can be done, and how it should not be done, and I reveal how highly effective teams achieve breakthrough results.

What you can expect in this book

The book comprises of three parts. The first part: *First-class Leadership Principles and Attitudes*, has two chapters. Chapter 1 covers the *First-Class Leadership* principles, which include reality checking, integrity, leading by example, humility, authenticity, and responsibility. Chapter 2 covers common attitudes of first-class leaders and focuses on how they choose to act. I will reveal why great leaders seek out problems instead of running from them and explain why first-class leaders are the ultimate risk takers.

The second part (leadership qualities) looks at the premium qualities of first-class leaders. This section has nine chapters, and covers subjects such as how leaders connect with their biggest why, and how they kick start their amazing journey. In this section, we will also look at how leaders fuel their inner fire, find the courage to take risks, and learn to make life-changing and unpopular decisions. Other subjects include focus, communication, sound strategies, confidence, and perseverance.

The third section is devoted to highly effective teams, covering subjects including the importance of values and culture in highly effective teams, attracting and selecting valuable team members, and keeping talented employees.

At the end of the book, there is a self-assessment exercise designed to help you identify what aspects of your leadership needs developing or improving.

PART

I

**First-Class
Leadership
Principles and
Attitudes**

“Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity.”

—Mark Zuckerberg



CHAPTER 1



First-Class Leadership Principles

Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I sum up the most common principles first-class leaders apply. What is the first thing the most successful leaders do in many situations? I call this GPS positioning. Furthermore, I will reveal why integrity is the ultimate currency, and the importance of leading by example, and practicing what one preaches. Also covered in this chapter is humility, perhaps the principle we most miss in many leaders. What is the profound win when one is humble? Authenticity is another principle covered in this chapter,

and I explain why it is important to win the inner war. Finally, I explain how you can unlock the algorithm of responsibility as a critical principle, and why greatest leaders do the right things for the right reasons.

The Pillars of *First-Class Leadership*

In this book, I consciously distinguish between qualities, principles, and attitudes. Even though all three are interdependent parts of the same unit (the leader), I believe we need to view and analyze them separately. Quality is a level of excellence. Qualities determine how successful we become. Principles are fundamental assumptions by which we behave and live. They define whatever we are. One may possess remarkable leadership qualities while not believing in certain principles. For example, respectfulness is a principle, while inspiring others is a quality. Attitudes are choices we make in our lives, related to our principles and qualities. Attitudes define how we live our life. We cannot control what happens to us, but we can choose how to react to it.

**The first principle
many great
leaders apply is a
reality check.**



I would like to call the combination of qualities, principles and attitudes the pillars of first-class leadership. I've named the pillars QPA (see Figure 1). To my understanding, principles are the most important pillar of leadership, so let's start with the most common principles great leaders apply.

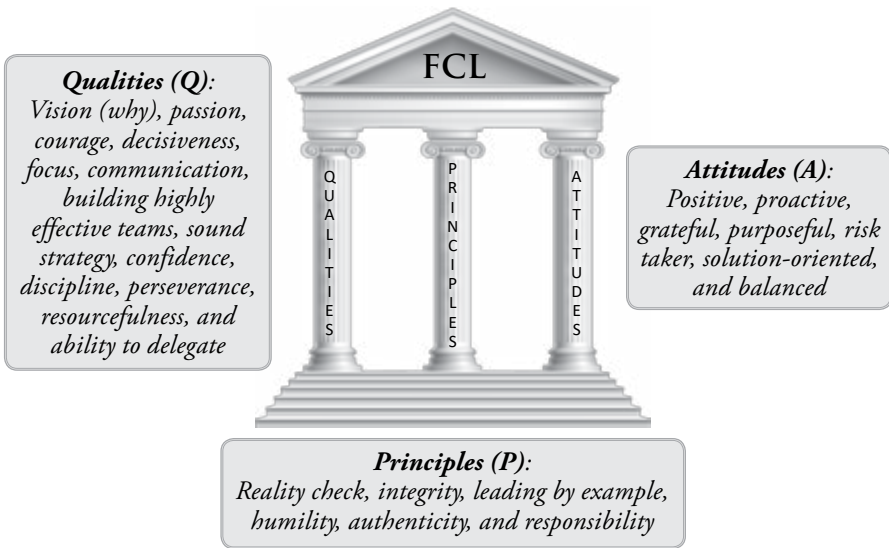


Figure 1: QPA - The Pillars of First-Class Leadership

Reality Check - GPS Positioning

The first principle many great leaders apply is a reality check. To avoid confusion, let's start with the definition. The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* has defined *reality check* as “something that clarifies or serves as a reminder of reality, often by correcting a misconception”. In fact, some people consider reality checking a matter of clarification. They want to see if the real situation is different from what they believed or hoped.

Have you ever sent an important email or text message and started to worry when you haven't received a response within a certain time? When this happens, many of us allow negative thoughts to take over. “Why does he/she ignore me? What have I done wrong? I was right. He/she just doesn't care about me.” Then you check, and you realize you never sent the email in the first place, and you have been eating yourself up with worry based on your assumptions.

Writing in *Their Finest Hour*, Sir Winston Churchill recalled his worries about WWII and the problems in Europe, and said: “*When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened*” (Lovelock, 2013).

Churchill was right. We hold ourselves hostage with our thoughts and assumptions. We wasted time thinking about things that never happened or would never happen. The more we think about certain things the more we believe in them, and when we believe in something, it may become a part of our identity. Ultimately, we behave based on what we believe.

Through reality checking, we gift ourselves a moment of mindfulness. We consider the possibility that we don’t know all the ins and outs,

**If you don’t know
where you are, you
cannot know how to
get to where you
want to be.**



and have to check things. Reality checks are important in our daily work. We base many of our disappointments with other people on our tendency to mind read. The truth is that, based on our thoughts and emotions, we often are unable to see beyond the meaning that we have given to what others have said or done.

A reality check is a fundamental checkpoint for professional coaches. As a coach, I first make sure I understand where my client stands and where he or she wants to go. I like to call reality checking your GPS (Global Positioning System). GPS systems start from where you are, and if you don’t know where you are, you cannot know how to get to where you want to be. We can avoid wasting a lot of time, energy, and money just by knowing where we are.

Use the following questions to conduct a reality check:

- Did I get that right?
- Do I understand this correctly?
- Am I sure of what I am thinking?
- Is this what you mean?
- Is this what I really want?

Why great leaders conduct reality checks

The bottom line of a reality check is acting based on the truth. The principle requires checking instead of thinking, guessing, or assuming. Reality checks are embedded in the attitudes of first-class leaders. Before making any major decisions, they make sure they know exactly where they stand in any given situation.

A reality check is just like a chess game—if you don't know what situation you have, it's not wise to move unless you want to meet with checkmate. If you want to make a strategic move, you check the reality before you decide what move to make. Great leaders conduct reality checks as follows:

They check the facts. There are managers who think they know everything, claiming they are master mind readers. When you talk with them, they interrupt you saying things like, “I know, I know. I know the guy well. I know exactly what he thinks and is up to. I'm telling you, it's not going to be like that. It's not going to work the way you think.” I subtly challenge such a manager and ask questions like, “Are you sure of what you're claiming? What makes you believe this? Have you checked

this yourself or have you had someone trustworthy doing the check?” Then they back down saying, “Well, I haven’t checked this. I just assumed based on my personal experience.”

Assuming rather than checking is the source of many misunderstandings, misconceptions, and miscommunications. First-class leaders validate their thoughts and ideas wherever possible. Their strategic moves are mainly based on fact checking, informatic analysis, and asking relevant questions.

They analyze opportunities, minimizing risks. A reality check makes it possible to identify opportunities and threats. Leaders want to know all the opportunities available to them before choosing the best one. The same applies to threats. Leaders need to know where to focus in order to make the right decisions, so they take mitigating actions to weaken or remove the most significant threats. In conducting a reality check, great leaders apply the 80/20 rule (I discuss this further in Chapter 2 and Chapter 11) for both opportunities and threats. They focus on the most important opportunities—first things first.

They maximize their return on investment. Great leaders identify their reality in terms of their resources, and then work out how they can employ their resources in the best way possible, including employing the right people in the right places and choosing the optimum implementation route. They identify their quick wins, avoiding trial and error wherever possible.

They reconnect with their “why”. Perhaps the most important bonus of a reality check is reconnecting with the biggest “why”, which they do prior to taking any action. They constantly assess how things fit in with their mission and why they should take action, and they have contingency plans in place for when they do take action.

Don't get confused, you can't check everything

The trick to mastering the principle of a reality check is to know what to check and when. It would be impossible to check everything, but certain things are imperative. For instance: Checking the fundamentals of a strategy. (What studies have you done? On what evidence have you based your conclusion?) Often, the hardest part of a reality check is the ability to park assumptions, prejudgments, and unchallenged thoughts. Leaders consult their inner circle, particularly when in a new organization. Nothing is certain without proof.

Conducting a reality check does not mean leaders lack the courage to be bold. There will be times when leaders have to make critical decisions on the spot when they have no facts, reports, or support. In these circumstances, they reconnect with their biggest “why” and take a calculated risk, confident that all will work out.

Integrity - the Ultimate Currency

Even leaders who do not meet the highest level of integrity appreciate people around them who do meet the diamond standard of integrity. Even liars don't want to be lied to. Even thieves don't want to be stolen from. Integrity is a universal principle appreciated by every healthy mind. Integrity is the ultimate currency for leaders. Leaders become rich with integrity and poor through lack of it. Yet it is not obvious that everybody meets the diamond standard.

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* has defined *integrity* as follows: “The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles.” This is also how I define integrity. It is the principle fueled and supported by one's inner values. John D. MacDonald described it this way: “Integrity

is not a conditional word. It doesn't blow in the wind or change with the weather. It is your inner image of yourself, and if you look in there and see a man who won't cheat, then you know he never will" (Canfield, 2009).

Integrity demonstrates the consistency between words and deeds, and is the factor that connects one's personal values, beliefs, words, and

Integrity is the ultimate currency for leaders. Leaders become rich with integrity and poor through lack of it.



actions as well as delivering on promises. It is the source of honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness. Integrity fires a deep passion to do the right thing for the right reason, regardless of the circumstances and possible consequences. Martin Luther King Jr. said it concisely: "The time is always right to do what is right," (Richardson, 2001).

People are measured on their integrity; how their behavior and deeds comply with the universal or organization-specific moral codes. Yet integrity is only assessable when one acts and starts to deliver. The principle should be followed even when it is hard or inconvenient to do so.

Integrity comes from within

Although many leaders and followers consider integrity a highly-ranked leadership quality, I see it as a principle, and I consider principles to be more precious than qualities. Integrity is a fundamental principle wired to one's values and beliefs, upon which choices are made. No leader should compromise when it comes to integrity.

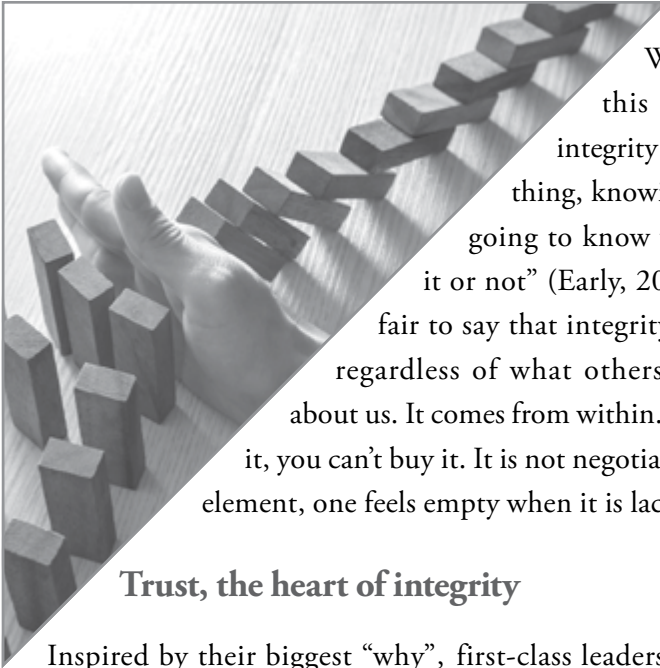
Zig Ziglar, the American entrepreneur and author of many insightful books, explained why integrity is so important: "With integrity, you have nothing to fear, since you have nothing to hide. With integrity, you will do the right thing, so you will have no guilt" (Demetrakis, 2010).

Integrity is the ultimate currency because you can lack many things and still stay clear of danger, maneuvering like a fearless shark in the ocean, but if you lack integrity it doesn't matter how great, iconic, loved, or respected you are; eventually, you will be brought down. In time, a lack of integrity takes its toll. There have been big names that have crashed and burned after being accused of lacking integrity. Michel Platini, the iconic former president of the UEFA, is an extraordinary example. He lost his position in 2016 after he was accused of not having integrity.

In many cases, in democratic environments, no matter how great a leader is, they would lose their leadership role if it became clear they didn't live by the principle of integrity. Followers expect their leaders to tell the truth in all situations. Having integrity is the basis for building trust. Would you follow someone you don't trust?

Honorable people commit to live to self-set expectations, regardless of what others think; they don't change what they believe in just because their circumstances change, they treat people the same irrespective of status or wealth, and regardless of what others can do for them. Treating others based on values is integrity, and is fueled from inside. The great thinker Johann Wolfgang von Goethe empowered this, saying, "You can easily judge the character of a man by how he treats those who can do nothing for him" (Sinek, 2013).

Your values should remain consistent, and there should be compliance between what you say and what you do. When you are fueled by an inner desire to do things because you believe those are the right things to do, you don't do those things for public acknowledgement, but for your own fulfillment. It is a form of silent giving: Only the giver knows.



Oprah Winfrey summed this up nicely: “Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody’s going to know whether you did it or not” (Early, 2015). I think it is fair to say that integrity is our true self, regardless of what others know or think about us. It comes from within. If you don’t have it, you can’t buy it. It is not negotiable. As it is a core element, one feels empty when it is lacking.

Trust, the heart of integrity

Inspired by their biggest “why”, first-class leaders set crystal-clear principles. They communicate these principles to their employees and partners, and integrate them in all strategies. They make it clear they will not tolerate anything compromising those principles. Their currency is integrity. Great leaders live by those principles day in day out.

In our interview, Bas van der Veldt, CEO of AFAS Software, said:

“Trust is the most important principle we live by in this company. If an employee comes to me and says he/she needs €10k, I will give that immediately. But if the same person steals a candy bar, he/she will be fired immediately. It is not about the value [of the deed] it’s about compromising the principle. In that sense, we have a zero-tolerance culture” (Safaei and van der Veldt, 2017).

Albert Einstein, empowered this, saying: “Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters” (Cockerell, 2013).

This is the core of integrity. If a person’s set of values is so shaky that they compromise them for small things, how would they comply with them when it comes to bigger things, such as large sums of money, or a lot of power? On the other hand, if a person can be trusted in small matters, they are more likely to be trusted with larger, more significant ones.

Let’s look at this from a personal perspective. Would you marry someone who is not trustworthy? Would you lend money to someone who is not reliable? Would you partner with someone in business that you—justified or not—didn’t trust? I believe you wouldn’t, because we all see integrity as the cornerstone of everything, business or personal.

As the leader’s decisions influence the life of their employees, it is important to know that leaders lead with integrity. People want to follow someone who is trustworthy, and appreciate leaders who remain loyal to certain principles, practice what they preach, and deliver on their promises. Trust is important for everybody. When you are certain a leader won’t let you down, you will be loyal to that leader and work with increased passion. That’s how integrity pays off.

Trust is like glass, it shatters easily

Trust is easier to earn than keep. It creates a profound personal fulfillment in leaders and drives them to become great people worthy of receiving it. Trust is an essential human value that quantifies interdependence in relationships. People choose to place trust in their leaders based on what

they observe and believe, until such times when they have a good reason not to. When trust is lost, it is hard to restore. Just like glass, trust is very hard to rebuild when it has been fractured or shattered.

I see both empathy and trust as fundamental pillars of one's integrity as does Bill McDermott, CEO of the world's largest business software company SAP. "Empathy is about getting out of your own head, ignoring ego, and getting into the heads and hearts of others—especially customers and employees. Listen to people's desires and feel their pain. Only when you understand others' problems can you offer simple solutions... Trust earns followers and ignites hard, impassioned work. Leaders of consequence trust people to understand their vision and execute their piece of it. In turn, leaders of consequence are trusted to deliver a compelling yet achievable vision" (Blue, 2016).

Integrity is complex

Integrity shines through when one has the power to deviate from the principle but chooses not to. Instead of power and short-term pleasure, great leaders with integrity remain true to the principles they believe in—honesty, fairness, and trustworthiness.

A remarkable advocate of integrity is Barack Obama, the 44th President of the United States. He said of running for president: "My attitude about something like the presidency is that you don't want to just be the president... You want to change the country. You want to make a unique contribution. You want to be a great president" (Weisberg, 2017). As Weisberg and Obama walked down the corridor of the Washington Hilton, viewing the pictures of America's past presidents, Obama told Weisberg, "You go through, and you think, who are these guys? There are, what, maybe 10 presidents in our history out of 40-something who

you can truly say led the country? And then there are 30 who just kind of did their best. And so, I guess my point is, just being the president is not a good way of thinking about it.”

Weisberg said of President Obama, “Listening to the farewell address he delivered in Chicago last week, I was struck by the remarkable consistency of his views and his approach. Despite the ways in which his worst fears have been borne out, he has remained rock-steady in his calm application of reason, his respect for opponents who have not respected him, and his methodical pursuit of common ground. Mr. Obama’s absence of bitterness is remarkable. He leaves a legacy of integrity, eloquence, and patient commitment in a dark hour of American politics.”

As Thomas John Watson, former Chairman and CEO of IBM, emphasized, “Nothing so conclusively proves a man’s ability to lead others, as what he does from day to day to lead himself” (Williams, 2016).

Many leaders come to power, yet few transform the world around them in a lasting way. The reason is simple: Lasting transformations start from within, just as it was the case with President Obama.

Like many other presidents and powerful leaders, there are always things one appreciates that another doesn’t. It is not about absolute right or wrong, nor is it about setting the standard. We need to put things in perspective. However, if you want an example of integrity—in our time—at the highest leadership level with the most complex politics, Barack Obama is one.

It may be hard to understand why leaders like Obama appear so soft. Some believe that if they had more bitterness (read: Courage), they might have achieved more for their countries and the world. I believe understanding the algorithm of great leaders with regard to integrity is more complex than it sounds.

My interpretation is that even in tough circumstances leaders with integrity remain true to their core principles fueled by values such as fairness, generosity, forgiveness, love, compassion, honesty, and integrity. Leaders with integrity never lose the battle to ego, anger, and the attractive fire of bitterness. Remember, integrity is the ultimate currency.

How to recognize leaders with integrity

We all show our true colors when our personal interests are at stake. However, genuine integrity is a natural part of great leaders' behavior. They demonstrate it through small and subtle actions.

First-class leaders protect the interests of the entire group rather than just their own. Leaders with integrity are able to divorce themselves from their ego and remain loyal to their core principles, even when the going gets tough, or after gaining power and wealth.

Great leaders take responsibility. They don't blame others for their own mistakes. They quickly intervene and take steps to rectify the situation.

They are respectful. Great leaders try to understand before making others understand them. They respect others regardless of their gender, age, sexual orientation, color, religion, expertise, and opinion.

They don't make a promise they can't keep. First-class leaders believe their word is their bond. When they cannot meet promised timelines, they communicate that, explaining why and emphasizing their endeavors to make it happen.

Leading by Example

The best way to set the standard for teams is to lead by personal example. For instance, if you require respectfulness from your team members, they'll look to see whether you respect others as you preach. If the leader's norms, principles, and values are solid, then they rightfully can require the same from their teams.

Many great leaders are, or have been, on the frontlines; they know what is required from certain positions. They know how it feels and how stressful it is to take emergency calls. They work hard and expect their followers to do the same. By setting an example of generosity, openness, credibility, and fairness, they show their followers how to behave. In this way, they acquire respect and credibility among their followers.

The best way to set the standard for teams is to lead by personal example.



Great leaders wish their followers the same as they wish for themselves, and they don't do to others what they don't like to have done to themselves. First-class leaders deliver on promises, and display what it is to be counted upon and accountable. Leading by example, they demonstrate for what they stand. As leadership expert John C. Maxwell said, "People may teach what they know, but they reproduce what they are" (Maxwell, 2008).

First-class leaders demonstrate they are made for the hard times. They jump to the front and embrace tough challenges with confidence and determination. They show their followers the road to success by leading the way. They outline strategies to positively change the circumstances. They make sure their direct reports follow the same line and so the whole organization is united.

Have you ever seen bosses who, in tough times, give instructions to avoid unnecessary spending, and then suddenly you see them driving a brand-new car or redecorating their office with luxury furniture? Is this leading by example? Of course not.

Let me tell you a personal experience. Many years ago, I started a conversation with a high-ranked leader saying, *“We’ve got to watch every penny, and now I see you ordering a brand-new, premium car, and when I look around and see your new office, I’m confused. Were the emailed instructions about cutbacks nonsense?”* He didn’t like my curiosity. While drinking his cappuccino, he said, *“Don’t interfere with things that are none of your business.”* This was hard to stomach and it immediately triggered me to make up my mind and pursue my career elsewhere. It didn’t take long for that leader to be fired.

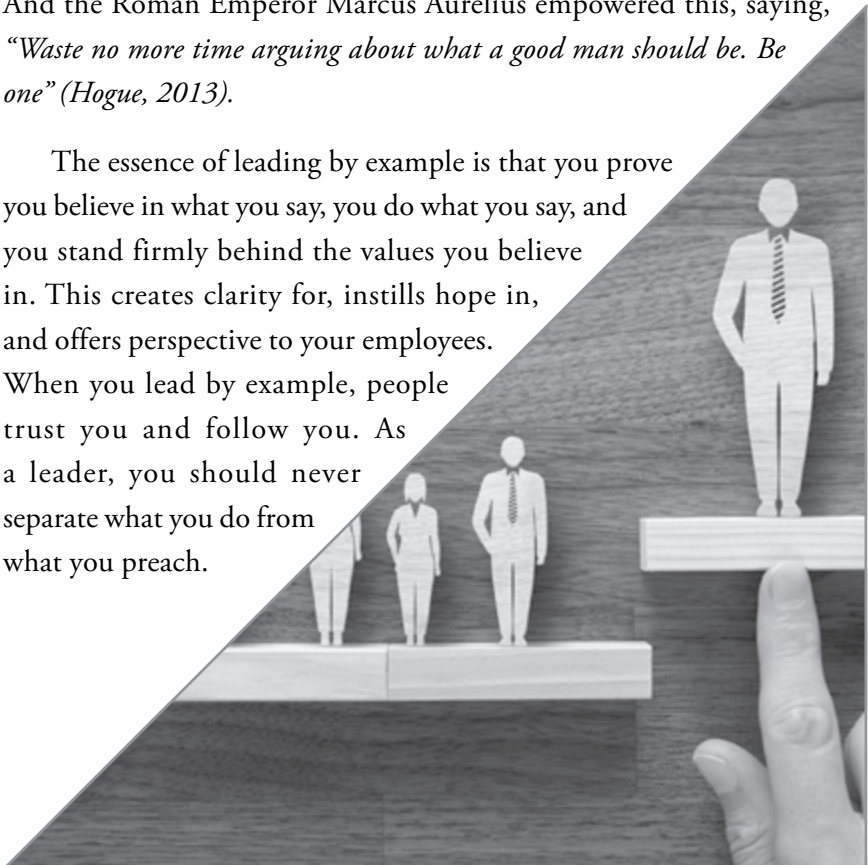
Imagine you were in such a situation. Would you feel valued or undervalued? Would you like to work for such a leader? What would happen to your productivity? How loyal would you be to such a leader? Would you compromise when it comes to principles such as integrity, respect, equality, and feeling valued at work? This is the opposite of leading by example.

Nothing will harm an organization more than a bad manager. Bankrupt companies have often been run by bankrupt leaders. Leaders who are psychologically broke and suffer from lack of core principles in the essence of their being cannot inspire, cannot motivate, cannot offer perspective, and cannot lead.

Why leading by example matters

The famous philosopher Epictetus wisely said, *“Make it your business to draw out the best in others by being an exemplar yourself”* (Ryan, 2000). And the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius empowered this, saying, *“Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one”* (Hogue, 2013).

The essence of leading by example is that you prove you believe in what you say, you do what you say, and you stand firmly behind the values you believe in. This creates clarity for, instills hope in, and offers perspective to your employees. When you lead by example, people trust you and follow you. As a leader, you should never separate what you do from what you preach.



Leading by example matters because people need a GPS, a guideline, a roadmap, and a leader to follow. Many people outsource thinking and inventing, preferring instead to follow. There are no better guidelines than leading by example. Nor are there excuses for doing something different to the example set by the leader. When you lead by example, you demonstrate in simple language how it works. You will be easy to follow.

A great leader who led by example was Jack Welch. Welch developed the philosophy of the “boundaryless organization”, and in doing so revolutionized General Electric. Welch made it possible for everyone to come up with ideas instead of waiting for orders from the people “upstairs”. To embed the culture he wanted, he became the culture by listening to ideas and implementing what made sense and was good for the company. The likes of Welch know the best way to influence followers is being the example.

Humility

What comes to mind when you hear the terms “leader” and “leadership”? Is it fair to say you probably think of a strong person full of confidence who can solve all problems? It is good when the leader does, and is capable of doing, what you expect; however, it is unlikely that they know all the answers.

In the last moments of his life and at the pinnacle of knowledge, the great Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) (980–1037), one of the brightest Persian scholars of his time, said, “I have come so far in my knowledge that I know I don’t know much.” The more we know the more we become conscious that we don’t know much.

The greatest leaders have been visionary, courageous, persuasive, decisive and humble. Humility does not mean one is insecure or incompetent. No one can know everything, and leaders are no exception. Humility is the ability to conduct a reality check and acknowledge you can't be right all the time; that you are conscious of the current situation and you are willing to admit you could be wrong. Great leaders continuously seek support from people who can be of help in particular situations.

Larry Bossidy, the former CEO of Honeywell, said, "The more you can contain your ego the more realistic you are about your problems. You learn how to listen, and admit that you don't know all the answers. You exhibit the attitude that you can learn from anyone at any time. Your pride doesn't get in the way of gathering the information you need to achieve the best results. It doesn't keep you from sharing the credit that needs to be shared. Humility allows you to acknowledge your mistakes" (Tracy, 2010).

Humility is the ability to conduct a reality check and acknowledge you can't be right all the time.



Would you agree that it's about achieving the ultimate success? If yes, what if you don't know the way to that ultimate success? We all perform differently at times, sometimes because of the mood we are in, the emotions that rule our behavior, and sometimes we just don't know the answer. If we need to know the answer, we need to raise our hand and ask for support. Great leaders bear in mind it is about getting to their destination. They don't care whether it is their idea or that of a team member.

Humble leaders care about people and the organization they lead. They admit their weakness and seek support from their advisors, coaches, and employees. Humble leaders do not feel threatened by the contributions of others; they are open to new ideas from team members.

By acknowledging their weak spots, they know they can learn and grow to new heights. Great leaders are humble because they care about their why, their mission, and the things that keep them alive.

Humility should not be confused with being unconfident, insecure, and indecisive. Great leaders' ability to admit their shortcomings is bigger than their ego and pride. Businessman and author Ken Blanchard said, "People with humility do not think less of themselves; they just think about themselves less" (Cruell, 2016).

A great example of humility is Michael Jordan, who said, *"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed"* (Stobart, 2014).

Jordan demonstrates how the road to success includes failures along the way, and he admits all people, including the great, can fail and make mistakes.

The essence of humility is being honest with yourself and true to your core values. When a leader is humble, they create an ocean of space to develop themselves, while less humble leaders never grow beyond a certain level because their pride, ego, and perhaps their arrogance stand in the way of opening themselves to development. When something is blocked on the inside, it doesn't matter what happens outside.

One of the greatest leaders in human history, Cyrus the Great, the builder of the Persian Empire, said, "There is a deep—and usually frustrated—desire in the heart of everyone to act with benevolence rather than selfishness, and one fine instance of generosity can inspire dozens more. Thus, I established a stately court where all my friends showed respect to each other and cultivated courtesy until it bloomed into perfect harmony."

According to historian Will Durant, “Cyrus the Great’s military enemies knew that he was lenient, and they did not fight him with that desperate courage that men show when their only choice is “to kill or die”. As a result, the Iranians regarded Cyrus the Great as ‘The Father’, the Babylonians called him ‘The Liberator’, the Greeks referred to him as the ‘Law-Giver’, and the Jews knew him as the ‘Anointed of the Lord’” (Xenophon, 2006). Being generous at the pinnacle of power is a great sign of humility.

**When something is
blocked on the inside,
it doesn’t matter what
happens outside.**



Several researchers (Ou et al, 2014) examined how CEOs’ humility linked to the processes of top and middle managers. Survey data was gathered from 328 top managers and 645 middle managers in 63 companies in China. The research concluded that CEOs with humility resulted in better employee engagement, more commitment, and improved job performance.

Some leaders pretend they are humble; however, when you sum up their behavior, you don’t see evidence of humility. Either they don’t really know what humility is, or they say they are humble because it is nice to say so. People soon figure out if their leader’s humility is real or fake.

In 1978, Józef Wojtya was elected Pope John Paul II, the first non-Italian Pope in 456 years. He refused the formal papal coronation in favor of a simple inauguration ceremony, choosing not to use the royal plural *we*, instead referring to himself plainly as *I*. Wojtya was not impressed by the trappings of power and its symbols. He made that clear from the day he was elected. He had a very simple, plain, and honest

way of communicating that endeared him to people. He exemplified the servant-leader role by embodying one of the titles of the Pope: *Servus Servorum Dei* (Servant of the Servants of God).

Leaders can learn from Wojtya's example by not isolating themselves in the corner office or hiding behind closed doors and a sea of fancy titles, diplomas, awards, certificates, and press clippings. Like Wojtya, great leaders are available to their people with open doors, they seek to understand, and they encourage dialogue.

How humility affects teams

Nowadays, when problems are increasingly complex, we are unable to learn without humility. Humility is one of the traits great companies look for in new hires because they know it boosts productivity and innovation.

Humble leaders create space for their team members to cooperate in problem solving, and come up with creative new ideas. Employees feel appreciated when they are given the room to share their ideas. They feel they belong to an organization that encourages creativity and appreciates active involvement.

Leaders teach their team members to learn from mistakes and to try again, which in turn helps teams break free from their comfort zone and allows them to develop their skills. Humble leaders make their employees feel valued, which in turn creates a sense of belonging and instills loyalty.

I have seen how humility can boost a team's atmosphere, loyalty, trust, and productivity. I have seen how junior employees have grown into senior management roles in a very short period of time. Humble leaders make it possible for their team members to dare to speak up, to take action, and to play wild cards leading to fantastic results.

I see it more as a psychological effect. When the leader is humble, they communicate with feeling. Admitting shortcomings builds a bridge to their followers. This sense of commonality creates common ground, thus connecting the leader and their followers.

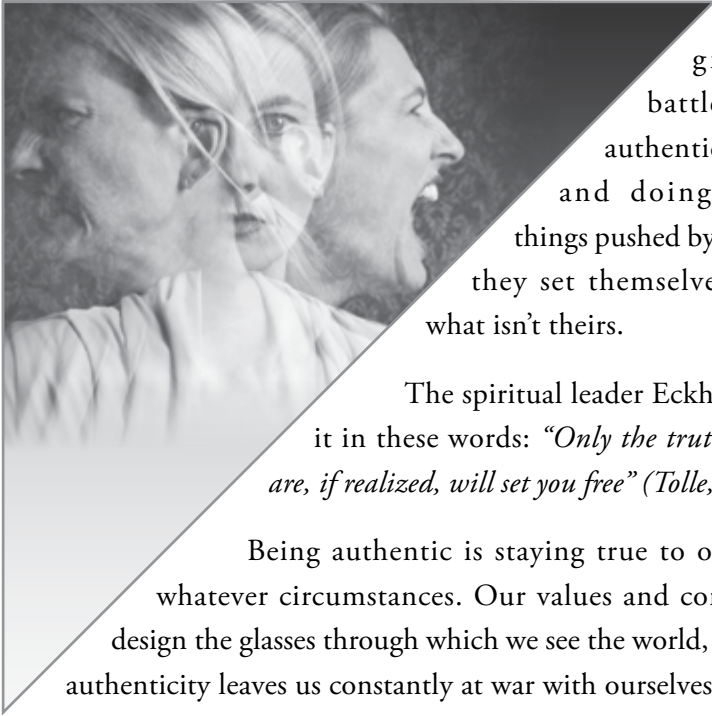
Authenticity

Authenticity makes everybody unique. This happens when everybody is themselves. Authenticity is the alignment of words, feelings, and deeds. Authentic leaders give their word and remain true to it. Being authentic is not the same as being rigid, inflexible, resistant to change, or sticking to one single leadership style, it is about being genuine. Authentic leaders are very flexible. They can adapt and lead changes, which ultimately accelerate their vision.

In his interview with ABC News *Real Biz*, Rebecca Jarvis asked Bill McDermott for his best piece of advice. McDermott said, “Be you. My mother told me the best part of you is be you. And always be authentic in your own skin, and don’t worry about what other people think about you. Your character and what you think about you is far more important than their opinion” (Jarvis and McDermott, 2014). In our interview, Mirela Sula, *Global Woman Magazine* editor-in-chief, said, “The very first principle for me is authenticity. As a leader, you have to lead by example” (Safaei and Sula, 2017).

The inner war

Have you wondered why many people, including leaders, confess certain important things, tell the truth, and finally reveal their authenticity in the last moments of their lives? I believe it is because they can no longer



wage the great inner battle. By being authentic and saying and doing the right things pushed by their values, they set themselves free from what isn't theirs.

The spiritual leader Eckhart Tolle put it in these words: *“Only the truth of who you are, if realized, will set you free”* (Tolle, 2006).

Being authentic is staying true to our values in whatever circumstances. Our values and core principles design the glasses through which we see the world, and a lack of authenticity leaves us constantly at war with ourselves, resulting in anxiety, depression, shame, blame, and grief.

Those who lack authenticity may achieve short-term successes because they please many people; however, it can never lead to lasting greatness. Horace Mann, American educational reformer, said it well: “If any man seeks for greatness, let him forget greatness and ask for truth, and he will find both” (Carr, 2016).

While authenticity brings challenges along the journey to greatness, lack of it can make it twice as difficult. Leaders may be able to lie to their followers for years, but no one can lie to themselves for one second. The true self knocks constantly on the virtual door of your heart, demanding to know why you did this or that, and this drives you to a point of feeling uncomfortable within yourself. I believe suicide can result from the inner war waged between one's values and deeds.

Leaders have to battle hard to sell their ideas, plans, and vision to their followers, and an inauthentic leader can't articulate a sound vision if it doesn't include their core principles and values. Great leaders like Cyrus the Great and Martin Luther King Jr. won their inner battles before setting out on their path to win the hearts of millions.

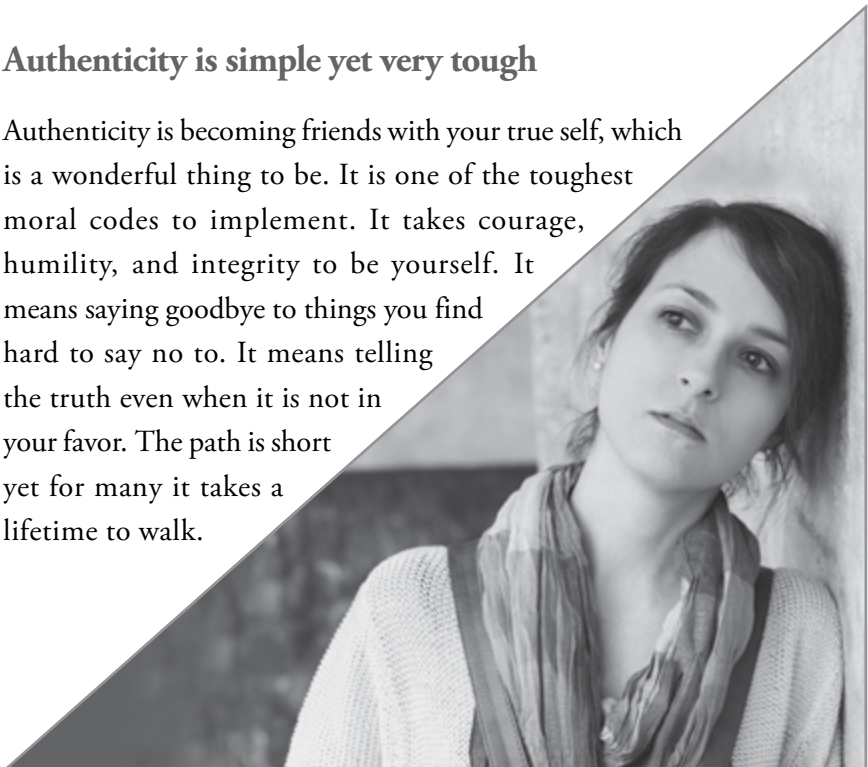
No one can lie to themselves for one second.



Inner accomplishment happens first, and then it grows wings to fly to the outside world. Deepak Chopra said, "The greatest leaders looked inward and were able to tell a good story with authenticity and passion" (Miller Burke, 2014). Being authentic is about tapping into your inner self where you're fueled by your natural energy and inner fire.

Authenticity is simple yet very tough

Authenticity is becoming friends with your true self, which is a wonderful thing to be. It is one of the toughest moral codes to implement. It takes courage, humility, and integrity to be yourself. It means saying goodbye to things you find hard to say no to. It means telling the truth even when it is not in your favor. The path is short yet for many it takes a lifetime to walk.





Being authentic is simple yet very tough. It is difficult, although being someone you are not is even more difficult. You will finally burn out by the fire of the inner war. It's an invisible war, so no one will offer help you'll need to seek it.

We have all been there. We meet wonderful people with whom we fall in love, or we are offered great jobs with excellent compensation packages. Of course, there is nothing wrong with either of those. The problem starts when people play a role to get what they want. In the short term this may work, but eventually their inner moral battle will eat them up, leave them feeling constantly guilty and with no purpose. When you are truly yourself, you feel light and alive. Your inner self whispers words of gratitude. It is a precious relief.

History remembers authentic leaders

Authenticity is an inclusive approach to leadership. Thanks to their own openness, authentic leaders encourage their employees and followers to be themselves and chase their inner purpose. Authentic leaders lead in a way they would want to be led, and their decisions are made based on core values and principles, which connect the dots to their biggest why. They are consistent in staying true to their values upon which they invest their time, soul, and energy in their enduring vision. They see themselves as those who have been gifted the privilege to serve their society.

Many years have gone by since the world recorded the deeds of leaders such as Cyrus the Great, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr.; however, the legacy of their authenticity will last forever. Great leaders possessing authenticity have a tremendous lasting effect on the world. Authentic leaders are prepared to take the hits for their purity. By taking sides fueled by their values and making tough but right decisions, they demonstrate that they are not compromising their core values.

A shining example of true authenticity was Pope John Paul II, Józef Wojtya. In 1979 he returned to Poland, his homeland, for the first time as pope, when the totalitarian communist regime held absolute power. Józef Wojtya risked his life by speaking authentically rather than diplomatically. Courageously, he spoke to his fellow citizens from his heart of hearts, encouraging them to walk tall and not be afraid. The Pope's words tapped into his audience's inner values and they started the march of independence and freedom that eventually brought down the communist regime.

First-class leaders know they are here to serve and not to please. They are not afraid of making tough and unpopular decisions that are right. They are aware and understand that not everybody will support their vision; however, they stay true to their core values, their biggest why, and their inner purpose. They transparently address the roadmap, outlining the tough challenges ahead, and the promised joy when goals are achieved.

How great leaders demonstrate their authenticity

Here are some ways to recognize authentic leaders:

Self-awareness and self-knowledge – Knowing themselves is their GPS to their destination. Great leaders possess a high degree of self-awareness, understanding their strengths and weaknesses. They know

when they can lead at their best and when it is time to seek help or to hand over to the next generation. Authentic leaders are honest with themselves and their team members.

True to codes of conduct – Great leaders lead based on human values. When things get tough, it becomes clear how valuable authenticity is—they have the courage to say no. Without being arrogant, authentic leaders are not afraid to show who they are and what they believe in. An admirable example is Mahatma Gandhi.

Speaking the truth – When they believe they have to speak out to do the right thing for the right reason, they will. First-class leaders do not keep quiet when their values and beliefs are under attack. Their courage makes them tell the truth and set things right.

Responsibility

Throughout history, some of the greatest leaders were people of vision—those who saw by the light of their heart things others could not see and shared their vision with the masses to improve the quality of many lives. They felt and took up this responsibility. Connecting to their inner purpose, they commenced journeys of responsibility and accomplishment. No leader ever became great by running away from their responsibility.

All great leaders responded to the call they received from their inner purpose. They felt courageous enough to follow in the glorious footsteps of previous greats to join the list of those who significantly made and changed human history. Whether it was Cyrus the Great or Nelson Mandela, Albert Einstein, or Galileo, they all felt the responsibility to chase a dream far bigger than themselves, and many paid the price for shedding light on our lives with their blood, sweat, and tears.

The algorithm of responsibility

Responsibility, in simple language, is tapping into your core values, appreciating the effort of others, and asking yourself, “Bearing the current situation in mind, what can I do right now?” Truly responsible leaders do not blame others for their shortcomings they admit they have failed, and they promise they will continue to deliver.

Responsibility means when you expect great results you take the right actions in the right direction. Great leaders know if they hold others responsible for the situation they are in, they will remain where they are, and nothing will change.

Denis Waitley puts it succinctly, saying, “*The greatest gifts you can give your children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence,*” (Yokley, 2008). Responsibility is an extremely important philosophy, which is often overlooked. A sense of responsibility acts as a form of insurance, something that doesn’t seem to have a clear value until you really need it.

Beyond ego and personal interest

The more you achieve, the more responsibility you acquire. Leaders at the height of their glory hold themselves responsible to lead and act in accordance with core human values. At the pinnacle of power, they choose forgiveness. Over 2,500 years ago, Cyrus the Great proclaimed he “would not reign over the people if they did not wish it” (Finkel, 2013). His sense of responsibility for the greater good, generosity, and integrity made him do so.

In 1983, despite experiencing several months of painful recovery, Pope John Paul II visited Mehmet Ali Agca in prison and offered his forgiveness to the man who attempted to assassinate him. In 2000, the Italian Government granted clemency to Agca at the Pope's request.

Having suffered a tough life, when Nelson Mandela came to power, he didn't take revenge; instead, he cherished love, peace, compassion, equality, and generosity. After all, these were the values he fought for and for what he spent 27 years of his life in prison. Great leaders know by offering forgiveness to people who err, it is unlikely that they will repeat their mistakes consciously. The majority become very loyal to their merciful leader.

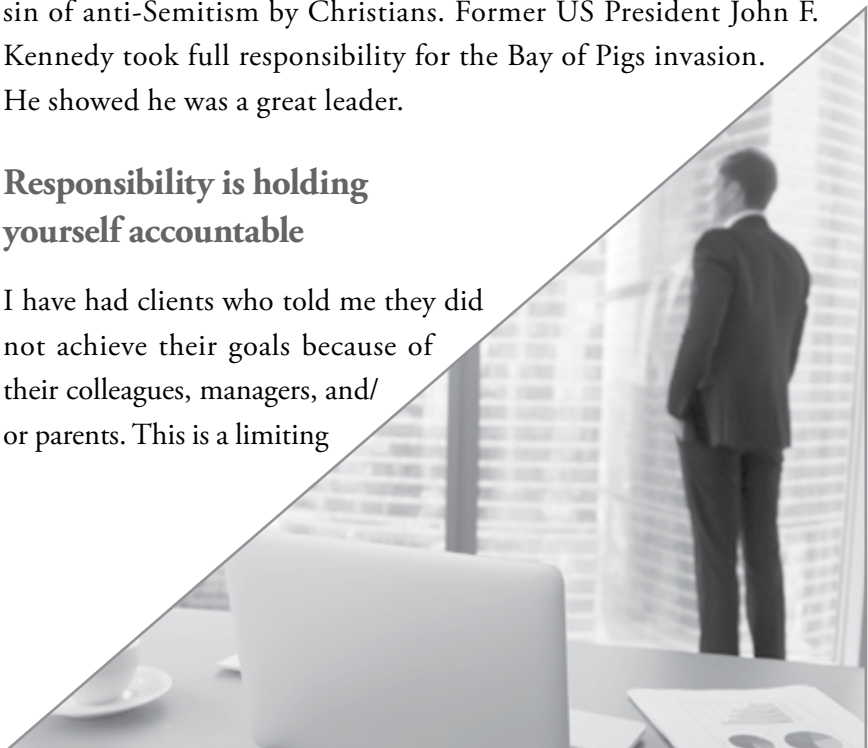
French President Emmanuel Macron's response to President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement on climate change is another great example. In a televised address in French and English on June 1, 2017, President Macron said President Donald Trump had "committed an error for the interests of his country, his people and a mistake for the future of our planet" (Irish and Pineau, 2017). Macron urged "scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs and anyone disappointed by the decision to see France as a 'second homeland'," adding, "I call on them come and work here with us." The French president said, "The Paris Agreement remains irreversible and will be implemented not just by France but by all the other nations. We will succeed because we are fully committed because wherever we live, whoever we are, we all share the same responsibility: Make our planet great again" (*The Guardian*, 2017). Taking responsibility means doing the right thing for the right reason regardless of consequences, no matter who likes or dislikes your actions. This was exactly what President Macron did.

Breaking taboos responsibly

While micro leaders hide away from apologizing for their fiascos, great leaders take full responsibility for whatever happens under their leadership. First-class leaders often do what their peers do not have the courage to do. In 2000, Pope John Paul II offered a day of apology for sins committed by members of the Catholic Church over the centuries. Józef Wojtya was the first Pope to visit Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. In 2000, he visited Jerusalem's Yad Vashem in remembrance of the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust. The Pope prayed for reconciliation between Christians and Jews, and apologized for the sin of anti-Semitism by Christians. Former US President John F. Kennedy took full responsibility for the Bay of Pigs invasion. He showed he was a great leader.

Responsibility is holding yourself accountable

I have had clients who told me they did not achieve their goals because of their colleagues, managers, and/or parents. This is a limiting



belief made up to hide from action. When you hand the responsibility for your life or career on a plate to someone else, you are making excuses for doing nothing.

On one side of the coin, it is a lot easier to blame others for what you are not, and when you do, you convince yourself you don't have to do anything because it is somebody else's job. On the other side of the coin, you need to face reality, which is often painful. As the great tragedian Sophocles (450 BC) said, "It is a painful thing to look at your own trouble and know that you yourself and no one else has made it" (Foster and Hicks, 1999).

Deep in your heart, you know the truth. If you really believed others were the reason of your dissatisfaction, you wouldn't be sitting down doing nothing, would you? When you dig deep, you will understand if you need to change your life; the responsibility for doing so is yours and yours alone.

All great leaders have held themselves responsible for their lives and careers. They have tapped into their inner purpose and made the best of their lives. Excellence is not a gift but a reward you receive if you responsibly have taken the right actions to achieve excellence.

Taking responsibility means taking the next steps to get what you want and change what you don't. Responsibility is the ultimate principle for personal freedom and living the dream life. When you decide not to take responsibility, you choose inaction and make your life dependent on the rules and plans of others. You become an ordinary follower. You will live the life others have prescribed for you and you blame others for the situation you are in. Thinking wishfully, you *hope* others become more generous and merciful and a bit nicer to you.

People who do not consciously take responsibility for their lives are not only hurting themselves but also the people around them. If you are in such a situation, I encourage you to go to a coach to help you figure out how you can take responsibility for your life.

Responsibility comes from within and not from the outside. Taking responsibility is wired to your inner belief, values, norms, and expectations. You decide what to do with your life in a given situation. You decide whether to accept the situation you are in even though you might have been put there by others.

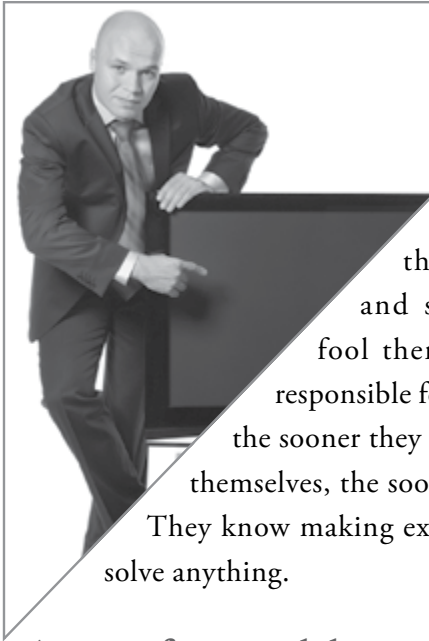
**Responsibility is the
ultimate principle
for personal freedom
and living
the dream life.**



Based on your inner core, you decide how to deal with what you like or don't like in your life and career. Life is a journey, and you are gifted with the right to get on the journey and drive at your pace and speed. When you are in charge of your own life, you decide what to do and how to do it. When you allow others to drive the vehicle of your life, you hand over the keys to your success and happiness to a stranger. To start the life you want to live, you need to believe it is not your privilege but your right to live as you wish.

Have you ever noticed how young children don't allow you to do certain things for them? They tell you loudly and clearly, "I want to do it myself. I can do this." When people do not take responsibility for their life, their self-esteem and, ultimately, their life suffers.

Look around you, turn on your TV, or search on the Web. You will see and hear many leaders who are unable to offer their people what they deserve; they choose to blame others for their situation. They are



masters of creating virtual and mental ‘enemies’ as the reason for their shortcomings.

Great leaders know they are the ones who have to take charge and solve their problems, and don’t fool themselves to think someone else is responsible for doing so. Great leaders know that the sooner they admit it is their duty to take care of themselves, the sooner they arrive at their destination. They know making excuses and blaming others does not solve anything.

A sense of responsibility is important for the top

High-profile positions are held by individuals who have conviction and a sense of responsibility. Stakeholders, shareholders, and boards of directors want someone reliable at the top to take responsibility for moving the organization to the next level. Free thinker and equality activist George Bernard Shaw once famously said, “We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future” (Kessler, 2007).

Having the courage to take on great challenges goes hand in hand with taking responsibility for the results and consequences. Great leaders take responsibility for what happens under their leadership. They take the blame and then come up with strategies for how to fix the problem as soon as possible.

First-class leaders stick to their convictions and are ready to accept justified and constructive criticism. They always hold themselves responsible for their organization, as they know taking responsibility is a continuous practice rather than a one-off occurrence.

A Moment of Reflection

Spend a few minutes on mindfulness, reflect on yourself and do a proper self-assessment.

- How do you make sure you are on the right path?
- Do you really believe integrity is the ultimate currency?
- Do you have consistency between your words and deeds?
- Do you practice what you preach?

When you lead by example, all your followers need to do is follow in your footsteps. Would you feel comfortable that your followers become like you?

Take your responsibility as a worthy leader to draw the best out in your people by being an example yourself. Become the GPS for your people.

*“It has long since come to my attention
that people of accomplishment rarely
sit back and let things happen to them.
They go out and happen to things.”*

—Leonardo da Vinci



CHAPTER 2



Common Attitudes of First-Class Leaders

Chapter Outline

Attitude is another pillar of the QPA building blocks great leaders employ. In this chapter I've summed up what great leaders have in common when it comes to attitude, and discuss why attitude is a choice. I will unpack why first-class leaders are positive minded and proactive, and look at the magic effect of gratitude on leaders' life and business. How does purposefulness affect a leader's performance? How is the risk appetite of great leaders wired? How serious do first-class leaders take

their responsibility to solve problems? Why are they inspired by huge problems? How do they encourage a culture of cooperation? And, finally, how do great leaders create balance in their lives? How do they make sure they do what matters most? These and many more questions are answered in this chapter.

Attitude Is a Choice

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* defines *attitude* as “a settled way of thinking or feeling about something”. This is pretty much how I define attitude. It is a conscious choice. Based on our attitude, we decide how to approach people and situations. We choose our attitude based on our knowledge, calculations, wisdom, situations, actions, reactions, and our experiences.

Attitude is simply how we look at life and the world around us. Do you see life as something meaningful, full of joy, excitement, and challenges? Or do you see life as something pointless without a happy ending? I have always said your life is how you approach it. If you approach your life as difficult, it becomes difficult, if you take life easy, it becomes easy. The same applies for leaders when they look at their organization, employees, environment, and their future.

Leaders who have hope and an enduring vision behave and perform purposefully, and because leadership is all about people, how leaders approach their people is crucial. How about you? Do you see your employees as replaceable machines? Do you see them as money suckers? Or do you view them as team mates with whom you can achieve breakthrough results? The way you approach your people, your environment, your partners, and circumstances is the way you lead. Remember, your attitude is your choice and yours alone.

Viktor Frankl, the famous Holocaust survivor and psychiatrist, said, “The one thing you can’t take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one’s freedom is to choose one’s attitude in any given circumstance” (Ituarte, 2017). This attitude enabled Frankl to survive the concentration camp and teach us something precious, which is that everything can be taken away from us (positions, properties, wealth, and loved ones), but our attitude can never be taken because we can choose not to allow that. We cannot control what happens to us, but we can control how to react to it.

**Highly qualified
leaders learn to lead
themselves before
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anything else.**



How one treats people or situations is a choice, which means we can change it to get the best possible results. William James, a respected American psychologist, said, “The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes” (Corbin, 2014). This is exactly what first-class leaders do. Highly qualified leaders know that the foundation of leadership is learning to adjust their attitude; they learn to lead themselves before leading anyone or anything else.

Great leaders have mastered certain attitudes to approach people around them, their environment and circumstances. Using positivity, purposefulness, and flexibility, they approach actual trends to get the best out of them for their business. They know they cannot resist or change the inevitable, only how they deal with it. Author Charles Swindoll said it best: “We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it” (Horn, 1997).

A leader's attitude has a lot to do with how they approach developments, think, implement strategies, hire new talents, and face challenges. First-class leaders have the capabilities to survive challenges and make breakthroughs because of their attitude. Attitude has a huge impact.

Here are the most common attitudes great leaders apply:

First-Class Leaders Remain Positive

When you think positively you act positively, and, in return, you will very likely receive positivity. On the other hand, negative thinking sends out negative signals, and, guess what? You will receive negative signals back. Having a positive attitude contributes to an optimistic culture, and is necessary for keeping your team together and energizing team members so they enjoy every moment.

The positivity of the leader is akin to the light of the biggest candle when all the lights are turned off. If the big candle remains burning for long enough, the smaller candles will gradually start to burn. Colin Powell, the former US Secretary of State, empowered this, saying, "Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier" (Calloway, 2013).

A positive attitude brings happiness and fulfillment, and it makes people feel hopeful, energized, and ready to take action, while a negative attitude leaves you feeling exhausted, tired, and low on energy. The good news is that we can decide to remain positive and think in terms of possibilities and opportunities instead of deadlocks and problems.

Positive leaders are optimistic and inspired by the power of their enduring vision, which means they can inspire the people around them to be positive so they focus on the progress and not how bad things are.

From this, they receive fresh fuel to push forward. Great leaders can create opportunities from most situations (positive or negative), and they view what many term as failures as learning curves. They see failures as steppingstones and take the positive lessons from them and push through. Great leaders have the attitude of sometimes you win and sometimes you learn. Napoleon Hill said, “Every adversity, every failure, every heartache carries with it the seed of an equal or greater benefit” (Yarnell, 2012).

Positive leaders take the initiative and make decisions; they don't hide away from duties or doing others a favor, they walk the extra mile, not only for themselves but also for others, they are open-minded and responsive to the needs of others. Positive leaders adopt an ethical approach to all their personal and organizational activities. They support their team members, which is repaid tenfold. As a leader, you cannot have a negative mind and expect glory for your organization.

**Strong leaders
create their own
circumstances.**



Great Leaders Are Always Proactive

Unlike those who blame the circumstances, the president, the weather, and their parents for not being successful, strong leaders create their own circumstances. Great leaders know that sitting down and hoping for the best does not lead to success; instead, they take charge and create situations from which to succeed. They are prepared for everything and they ensure they are in the right place at the right time and with the right people.

Proactive leaders are like fearless warriors hungry for innovation and new discoveries, they do not wait to be picked; they push themselves through and make others follow. They know that a prepared mind, combined with dedicated action, will be rewarded by an astonishing

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situation to succeed.**



discovery. First-class leaders constantly ask “Why not?” and “What if?” Elon Musk, Bill Gates and Richard Branson are always hungry for more, for better, for greater, they welcome sound ideas and they initiate them wherever possible.

Outstanding leaders focus on the things that matter. They devote their resources—above all, their time—to the ideas that can lead them to breakthroughs, and they strive to stay ahead by constantly improving their initiatives. While counting their blessings, they don’t fall in love with what they have achieved and stop there.

Proactive leaders count the seeds they plant every day. Those are the things that put them ahead. What they have achieved can be, and often is, copied by those who are happy to be the early adopters. The greatest leaders, however, are only happy with continuously reinventing. Being proactive is not a skill but an attitude of great leaders, frequently leading them to new heights of excellence. They proactively prepare to overcome their challenges and they succeed because they have created the situation to succeed.

Leonardo da Vinci hit the nail on the head when he said, “...people of accomplishment rarely sit back and let things happen to them. They go out and happen to things” (Ferris, 2010). Think about the achievements of Cyrus the Great, Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, Richard

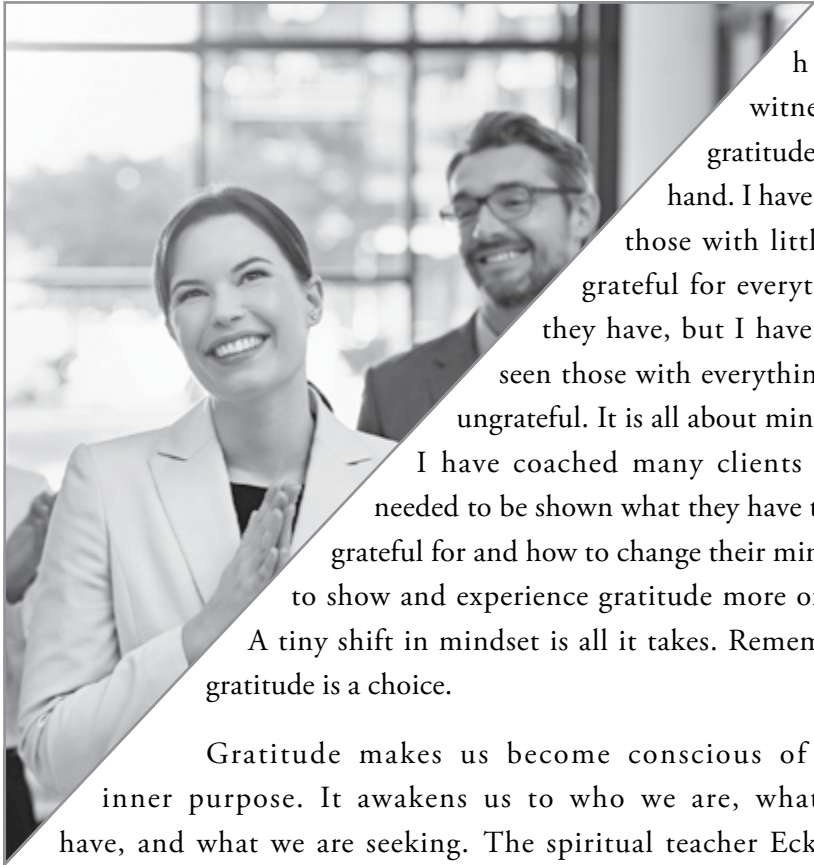
Branson, and Elon Musk. Did things happen to them, or did they happen to things? Now ask yourself this, as the leader of your life and business, do you happen to things or is it the other way around?

Glory is never given free of charge; it takes profound vision, courage, perseverance, and connected thinking followed by dedicated action. These golden qualities have been mastered by proactive leaders, so if you think you belong to the category of winners, you need act like them, create a space for winning, create your future, and don't wait for success to knock on your door.

Great Leaders Are Grateful

According to the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, the word *grateful* means “feeling or showing an appreciation for something done or received”. And this is exactly what great leaders do. Great leaders rarely complain, they are grateful for what they have achieved and are thankful to those who have made it possible.

Gratitude is neither gifted nor exclusive to a select few. It is a choice anyone can make. When you are grateful, you are likeable. Great leaders see and appreciate employees who do the right things, and with a grateful mind, they praise their employees for their great performance and share the rewards with those who deserve them, which encourage their employees to do more of what their leaders appreciate, and also increases commitment and loyalty. A simple thank you to your employees for their contribution is not too much to give. It shows your gratitude and understanding, and you will receive a ton in return.



I have witnessed gratitude first hand. I have seen those with little be grateful for everything they have, but I have also seen those with everything be ungrateful. It is all about mindset. I have coached many clients who needed to be shown what they have to be grateful for and how to change their mindset to show and experience gratitude more often. A tiny shift in mindset is all it takes. Remember, gratitude is a choice.

Gratitude makes us become conscious of our inner purpose. It awakens us to who we are, what we have, and what we are seeking. The spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle put it perfectly: “Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation for all abundance” (Gibbons, 2013).

I agree with Oprah Winfrey, who said, “Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough” (Kilpatrick, 2014). Gratitude is an inner richness. This richness puts us in a positive mood and opens our eyes to an ocean of potential things to achieve and enjoy, thus grateful people are generally much happier than people who never have

enough. Be grateful for the positive things you have in your life instead of grieving for what you miss and see how your life will change. The seeds of gratitude start to grow first in the mind, so start counting your blessings and experience the positive transformation in your life.

Appreciation can change your life. When we appreciate and understand the meaning of our being, we can share our gratitude with other people, thus impacting their lives in a positive way. Great leaders know they could not have realized their dreams without the support of their partners, children, employees, friends, mentors, and coaches. They acknowledge that help with appreciation and gratitude. They know that being ungrateful will head them toward the circle of negativity from which nothing positive will be born. By being grateful, they give meaning to who they are and what they have. Having a grateful mindset, they think positively and are energetic. This way, they inspire others to do and achieve more.

I believe it is wise to stop and think about what we have. How happy are you with what you have? If you continue with what you're doing, what will happen? What do you do with what you have? Have others benefited from your wealth, particularly those who contributed to your wealth?

**The best way to
receive more is giving
more. Giving is like
planting seeds.**



In our interview, Bas van der Veldt, CEO of AFAS Software, said, *“To receive a lot, you have to give a lot. This year, we donated 3% of our revenue to charities. Last year, it was 2.5%. We believe with great power comes great responsibility”* (Safaei and van der Veldt, 2017). I believe the best way to receive more is giving more. Giving is like planting seeds. The more you plant, the more you receive in return. Start to give, start being grateful, and feel the inner richness.

Why you must be grateful

Ungrateful people tend to be unhappy and unhappy people tend to be negative, and negative people lack energy, don't take on challenges to do more, feel more, or achieve more. The sooner you start practicing gratitude, the richer your personal and business life becomes.

Gratitude transforms the little into enough, it opens the door to happiness, self-acceptance, brings clarity, peace of mind, and helps us design our enduring life vision. The final word I would like to leave you with about gratitude is that it positively transforms your mindset.

Great Leaders Have Purpose

Have you ever felt empty within? Have you ever been confused, lacking a clear destiny? It feels like being left alone and vulnerable in the middle of a jungle on a dark night. You have no clue where you are or where to go. You feel exhausted and low on energy, even getting out of bed, taking a shower, and having breakfast feel like a marathon. You feel powerless and have no idea what to do. The emptiness drives you crazy and may turn into a deep depression.

If you have experienced these feelings, consider this as a call to listen to your inner voice because it needs you to awaken. All of a sudden, you tell yourself, "I can't live with myself like this any longer." Then you notice *I* and *myself* are not the same. You become curious and ask yourself, "If *I* is me, then who is *myself*?" If these are the same, why do they have different names? These thoughts put you in a mood of discovery, of discovering the world inside, discovering your true self, your inner self, your purpose. Gradually, you chase a meaning for your life. The greatest leaders have all walked such a spiritual journey. They have found their purpose to live a purposeful life.

Viktor Frankl believed our dominating driving force is to find meaning in life. While being horrifically tortured in the Nazi death camps, he discovered that there was a space between everything that was happening to him and his response and in that space he had the freedom and power to choose his response. Instead of asking, “Why should I have to suffer so as a Jew at the hands of these Nazis?” he asked, “What is life asking of me?” He would find a fellow prisoner ready to commit suicide and he’d ask them, “Why don’t you?” and the prisoner would respond, “Because of what it would do to my wife” (Covey, 2006). This was what Frankl meant about giving life meaning. When Frankl saw a prisoner starving, he shared his meager rations with that prisoner because Frankl’s conscience was asking him to do that, sharing his food kept that man alive and it gave Frankl’s life meaning. He sought meaning in the life he was living at the time, which in turn changed his life. Frankl taught us that we need to be careful about getting stuck in suffering mode and mistaking it for nobility, “To suffer unnecessarily is masochistic rather than heroic” (Frankl, 2017).

Frankl discovered that many survivors held something dear to live for, beyond the horrific situation they were in. The survivors, including Frankl, cherished their dreams in an ultra-harsh environment where giving up was the easiest option. They found meaning in their struggles. They found out why it was worth it to carry the unimaginable pain. And that’s why they survived.

Frankl postulated that to have a purposeful life, we need to find our purpose, our reason to fight, to breathe, and to survive. It is not surprising that Frankl went on to become one of the world’s most powerful, intellectual leaders in the field of psychotherapy. Read the astonishing story of Viktor Frankl, and then ask yourself, what is it you breathe for?

It is astonishing how far we can go when we comply with our true inner voice. What kept Nelson Mandela alive? What drove Martin Luther King Jr. to respond to hate with love? What gave hope to Mahatma Gandhi so that he could adhere to his phenomenal nonviolence strategy? What was Thomas Edison's response when his laboratory burned to the

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ground? "Thank goodness all our mistakes were burned up. Now we can start again fresh" (Maxwell, 2000). Now this may sound like a fairly pragmatic response, but bear in mind that Edison was 67 years old when he lost all his work, 67! Imagine having to start over at nearly 70 years old. That is an astonishing attitude to have.

The greatest leaders have the ability to reinvent themselves. They can identify the deepest tiers of their inner self. Before rigorously exploring the world outside, they have discovered their inner fire, which keeps burning and enlightening until their very last breath.

Great leaders don't retire when they have achieved a goal; their inner purpose, their GPS drives them on to other things. After transforming banking, the car industry, and space technology, Musk dreams of Mars. Warren Buffet, Jack Welch, and Richard Branson continue to explore and shine just as they did at the beginning of their astonishing rise. How is it possible for a human being to commit to dreams far beyond the imagination of the majority? We can all learn a lot from these giants.

First-class leaders follow their inner purpose, a purpose that is bigger than them, giving meaning to whatever they do. They have a thorough vision of their private and business life followed by smart goals and

dedicated actions; they know where they want to be and what they need to do to get there. They see and feel the targets they chase, and they can make their followers feel the same. It feels good knowing you can chase something bigger than yourself, doesn't it?

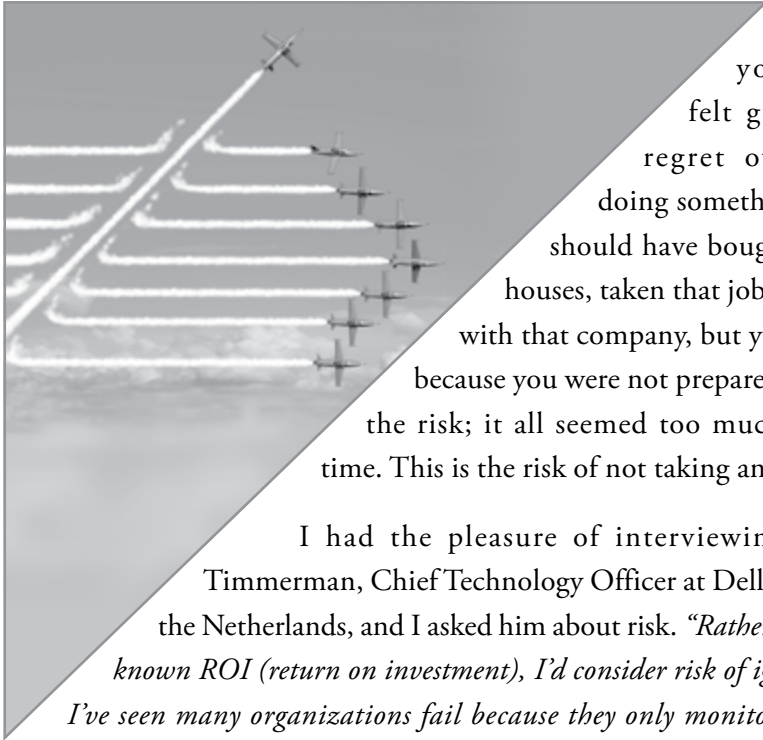
Find your purpose

Imagine you always knew what you were doing and why. Imagine every dot of your life was connected to your inner purpose, the reason for your existence. Imagine you had a magic inner GPS that told you exactly where to go. How would it feel? Wouldn't you enjoy every minute of your journey to your biggest why?

To find your purpose, you need to listen to the purest melodies of your inner voice and comply with them as best as you can. This will give you a sense of comfort about why you do what you do. Whoever you are, you need to examine your baggage before you can lighten your load and move forward.

First-Class Leaders Are Risk Takers

Everything may be sunshine and rainbows until you are about to push the button, and then fear raises its ugly head—fear of failure, fear of looking like an idiot, fear of losing credibility, fear of losing everything, even fear of growing to an unimaginable level of success. I believe that those who take risks deserve a badge of bravery, regardless of the outcome because taking risks is a sign of having the upper hand in the inner war against fear of failure.



Have you ever felt guilt and regret over not doing something? You should have bought those houses, taken that job, merged with that company, but you didn't because you were not prepared to take the risk; it all seemed too much at the time. This is the risk of not taking any risks.

I had the pleasure of interviewing Hans Timmerman, Chief Technology Officer at Dell EMC in the Netherlands, and I asked him about risk. *“Rather than the known ROI (return on investment), I'd consider risk of ignorance. I've seen many organizations fail because they only monitored their limited environment focused on efficiencies, but finally lost out to those who succeeded in applying new technologies”* (Safaei and Timmerman, 2017).

Those who never achieved anything significant were those who never took any risks, so if you want to achieve something in your life, you must be willing to take hits to be able to explore and grow.

Great leaders know that they are judged based on results achieved, so they need to be willing to take risks and continuously search for possibilities beyond their comfort zone. If Elon Musk had not risked all his money, Tesla Motors would not be the success it is today. In the long run, only leaders who have dared to take risks have made it to the top, the rest just continue on an average cycle until a crisis takes its toll. It is worth

taking note of Thomas Stearns Eliot, poet and cultural philosopher, who said, “Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far it is possible to go” (Juma, 2016).

In the end, it all comes down to whether you have the guts to push the button. Peter F. Drucker put it succinctly when he said, “What you have to do and the way you have to do it is incredibly simple. Whether you are willing to do it is another matter” (*Harvard Business Review Press*, 2011). The championship is always claimed by those who dare to enter the champions’ arena, not those who sit back and watch. Pearls do not rise to the surface of the sea. If you want pearls, you have to dive deep to get them.

Taking risks is a sign of having the upper hand in the inner war against fear of failure.



The secret of risk taking

The British poet Samuel Johnson said, “Nothing will ever be attempted, if all possible objections must be first overcome” (Shaw, 2014). Great leaders who have written history have been ultimate risk takers; they knew that it would be easier to ask for forgiveness than obtain bureaucratic permissions. This does not mean they suddenly decided to do something big while unprepared and uncalculated—they took their risks, considering the skin they put in the game.

When it comes to taking big risks, great leaders ask themselves questions such as the following:

- Why should I take this risk?
- What would be the best thing to happen?
- What is the worst-case scenario?

- What should happen first to make this work?
- Can I deal with the consequences if it doesn't work out?

When they have reliable answers to these questions, they decide whether or not to proceed.

Risks must be wired to the “why”

Before taking any risks, great leaders legitimize their actions. Time and again, they reach out to their biggest why and ask themselves if and how taking a particular risk could contribute to achieving their biggest goal, or how the “why” of the organization would benefit from the possible results of the risk being considered. The prerequisite for taking any risk is connected with the “why”. If the risk does not serve the biggest “why”, don't take it.

Leaders inject risk-taking into their culture

Great leaders establish a work environment that encourages risk-taking; they embolden their employees to think outside the box and challenge the status quo to achieve breakthroughs. When things go wrong, first-class leaders stand alongside their employees. They teach their followers how to learn from their failures and how to restart.

Having worked in the corporate world for two decades, I have heard many managers say they encourage risk taking; however, I have seen very little evidence of it. I think risk taking should be a staple of every organization's culture. Taking risks is like planting seeds—it is only successful if the soil and climate are ideal and the gardener can nurture the growing plants.

Great leaders are at peace with failure

Risk taking goes hand in hand with willingness to fail and acceptance of failure, and seasoned leaders consider whether or not they can carry the consequences of a possible loss, take the hits, cut costs, respond to complaining shareholders, and more. Great leaders are prepared to fail, and therefore, they fearlessly push forward.

Leaders don't hesitate too long

Great leaders are quick to test, evaluate, and adjust. Taking a calculated risk means minimizing the elements of uncertainty, but there will always be a nuance between what you have on paper versus the reality, and therefore, it is often easy to find a reason for not doing something, and first-class leaders know that too much analysis is paralyzing.

The secret here is, analyze smartly but don't overanalyze. Do not get lost in complex analysis. If you see a connection between your biggest why and the risk, and if it is the right thing to do, just do it and make it work. Of course, there will be times when you can't analyze everything (lack of information or time constraints) and you have to make a decision based on your faith in your intuition.

First-class leaders are prepared to pay the price

Great deeds come at great cost, and no one has unlimited resources. When you go for Plan X, it means there will be less or no resources left for other plans. The cost of taking a certain risk is missing the opportunities you could have taken but didn't because you chose plan X. Be it a new hire, an acquisition, or even extending your investment in your core business, the

**Not taking risks is
the biggest risk you
ever can take.**



pain will be felt. Are you prepared to pay the price? Have you decided how far you would go in budgeting, calculating possible losses, and tradeoffs? When great leaders take a risk, they are prepared to pay the price.

Of course, there are leaders for whom taking big risks is not an option. In these cases, they can make progress by taking baby steps, testing ideas in small portions and piloting. Keep in mind, however, there is a relationship between risk and reward; the lower risk may return a lesser reward or none at all, while the win or loss from taking big risk may be significant. I genuinely believe not taking risks is the biggest risk you ever can take.

Great Leaders Are Solution-Oriented

Employees expect their leaders to solve their problems, whether they are internal (lacking the right equipment or ergonomic workplace) or external (competitor pressure, tension with customers or suppliers). It's a fact of life that a leader's attention will be focused on issues of great significance (financial crises, unexpected mergers and acquisitions), which means that oftentimes the medium problems are forgotten, but beware, however small, they will return later with vengeance! Noble Peace Prize winner and former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger confirmed this by saying, "All too frequently a problem evaded is a crisis invited" (Kissinger, 2011).

Leaders who employ a broader perspective see different dimensions to problems and they ensure they don't create a new problem by solving one. There are also leaders who are more interested in the short term, only focusing on the problem at hand and not exploring the opportunities that can be derived from their

problem solving, such as a new marketplace or the standardization of certain processes. They overlook the broader perspective because of their limited focus.

Great leaders anticipate problems, tackle them, and avoid emergencies because when you are faced with an emergency, you have to significantly rethink the way you lead your organization.

How great leaders approach their problems

They use the “why” lens. Highly respected leaders share the full picture when they face a problem, and, so they don't waste time, they only solve the problems that are in their control and are connected to their biggest why. Having such a philosophy makes them look at problems from a fundamental point of view.

They ask themselves:

- Is this our problem?
- Why should we solve this problem?
- What happens if we don't?
- How would the solution contribute to accomplishing our most important goals?

Once they have answers to these questions, they explore solutions. Some companies change their strategies when they approach severe problems. Late 2013 to early 2014, I was involved in a project for Royal Philips in Amsterdam. There were signs that the lighting market would stagnate, and CEO Frans van Houten had serious questions about whether he wanted to stay in the lighting industry. After engaging strategy consultants to conduct extensive research, he finally concluded

it would not make sense for Philips to focus on lighting anymore. Philips' leaders decided to split the company into two divisions: lighting and health, with lighting eventually becoming a standalone company that could be sold off. Philips has now completely focused on healthcare technology for the future of the company. This is a clear example of how approaching problems through the “why” lens can be beneficial.

When you do not use the “why” lens, you risk being caught up in small issues. Great leaders address the issues to tackle using thorough problem-solving processes. Earlier in the book I mentioned the 80/20

First-class leaders embrace problems as opportunities to make breakthroughs.



rule: Highly respected leaders give priority to solve 20% of the issues that cause 80% of their problems. When a problem is relevant to the biggest why, they never close their eyes and ears and assume someone else will solve it, they take the lead.

They are inspired by problems. Problems are a part of business. Problems are how qualified leaders demonstrate their creativity, and they open doors to new markets. Without problems, a business will lose its fire, passion, and dynamic character. While many leaders perceive problems as distracters, first-class leaders embrace problems as opportunities to make breakthroughs. Leaders know that if they are unable to solve the problem their competitors will, and they will be pushed out of the market.

Problems are fresh fuel for great leaders, they are opportunities to learn, expand their problem-solving experience, and grow to the next level. Great leaders don't say, “Why me?” or “Why now?” They say, “Try me,” or “Let's make the most of it.” They know that if they want to be the best,

they have to solve the problems that arise and the greater the problem, the hungrier they are for a solution. Leaders like Richard Branson, Elon Musk, and Bill Gates view problems as golden opportunities to disrupt the market and revolutionize the customer experience.

They openly admit there is a problem. Great leaders acknowledge there is a problem and demonstrate the severity of the problem and the benefit of the solution to stakeholders, partners, and shareholders so they see what's in it for them and come up with ideas that may have been overlooked. This way, the leader not only takes responsibility for making the problem transparent, they explore different dimensions of the problem, consequently benefiting from others' ideas.

A clear understanding of a problem delivers two-thirds of the solution.



By creating an open environment, you avoid creating silos. Many traditional organizations operate in silos, which are the source of interpersonal and interdepartmental problems that have nothing to do with the values and mission of the organization. Avoiding individualism is a cultural thing. Great leaders avoid misrepresentation by encouraging openness through leading by example.

They separate problems from people. Great leaders distinguish facts from people, emotions, and prejudgments. Prior to judging, they keep asking questions until they understand the issue because a clear understanding of a problem delivers two-thirds of the solution. When managers and employees blame people for having caused a certain problem, highly qualified leaders interrupt the complainers and say, "OK, I get it. Now, what is the problem?" Great leaders have strategies to deal with sensitive issues, particularly when dealing with toxic people. They



separate the problems from people. They focus on the problem at hand, keeping their emotions controlled. By doing so, they can approach the situation fairly and even create common ground in finding a suitable solution.

They have a plan. Great leaders do not guess, they identify the core cause of the problem, forecast different scenarios, and produce backup plans before formulating and sharing a plan and the benefits of it with their stakeholders. This in turn creates trust and commitment necessary for implementation. Going forward, they assess their actions and adjust whenever necessary. Top leaders employ the right people and allocate sufficient resources. By analyzing, they focus on the easiest implementation route and any blocks standing in the way of solutions.

Top leaders make sure their organization stands steady when in deep crisis. They create a thorough problem-solving process. There is no chaos, everybody remains doing what they are doing, leaving space for those who have to deal with the problems. Great leaders know a significant part of victory in every battle is formed through motivation; therefore, they avoid panic at all costs. They remain cool and retain a sense of humor, even when they have reason to panic. They know if they panic, their team members will lose all hope and motivation.

They engage those affected by the problem. Great leaders know they only can solve problems sustainably if they engage with the people who are affected. Those who have a stake in the problem and the relevant solution often know what they want and what they don't. Solution-oriented leaders listen to the needs and concerns of all involved parties. This makes them respected by the majority and enables them to work on solutions because they have a buy-in. This caring attitude helps them build great relationships. When the relationship is good, people are prepared to walk that extra mile for their leaders.

Great leaders create an environment where team members can freely share their views without feeling insecure about their position. When all views have been shared, the problem can be reviewed from these differing points, and the solution can be found. I have seen bright minds keep their mouths shut when sensitive matters were being discussed, as they did not feel secure enough to share their opinions. It is the absolute duty of the leader to guarantee the freedom to speak up without the fear of negative consequences.

They don't point fingers. Great leaders know that blaming creates panic and does not contribute to any solution, and that finger pointing does not solve problems but adds new ones; it makes the employees pointed at feel broken, guilty, and belittled. Instead of blaming anyone, they start their problem solving by asking what the exact problem is. When the problem is addressed and potentially solved, they ask their team members what they learned from the experience and how they can improve vulnerable areas. Great leaders have a totally different mindset to ordinary people. First-class leaders know the only reason they are there is to help their employees solve their problems to be able to move to the next level.

Having read how great leaders solve their problems, ask yourself how you approach problems. How do you make sure you don't dwell on your problems? What are the first things you do when you encounter a severe problem?

Great Leaders Are Balanced and Have a Balanced Team

The concept of a healthy work–life balance has become increasingly important, especially in the corporate world, yet people tend to ignore this until something goes wrong, such as severe health issues or divorce. Savvy leaders know it is in their best interest to have a balanced healthy, energetic, and fit team if they want to maintain top productivity. It is the duty of leaders to create a good work–life balance for themselves and their employees so everyone can enjoy a fulfilling life. Top leaders understand that they and their employees need time to recharge. There are plenty of executives and employees who have successful careers but suffer poor relationships with their loved ones.

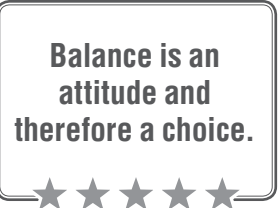
In this part of the book, we will take a close look at creating a good work–life balance for you and your employees.

Family first

We often see top executives step down from prominent, lucrative positions to spend more time with their families. There are also executives who have to travel as part of their job, leaving their partners and children behind for days or even weeks, telling them, “I’ll make it up to you, I promise.” That making up may never come, and a life of regret may be the result. If this is you then arrange it so that you take your family

with you occasionally. This way, everybody will be happy. You do your job, while your family is with you. They enjoy traveling with you and spending some quality time together.

Executives who miss important occasions, such as the birth of a child, first day of school, or a graduation ceremony, risk causing irreparable damage to their relationships with their children. When their children grow up they say things like, “Dad, when I needed you, you were too busy. Now I am too busy. I’m sorry. You were my example.” I have had clients quit their jobs to save their relationships, but it doesn’t have to be like that.



If you face tough choices, reconnect with your inner purpose. What is it you want to achieve in your life? Ask 10 CEOs what the most important thing is in their lives. Count how many of them say “family first”.

It’s not only about you, others matter too

When it becomes too much, many top executives are in a financial position to quit their job and pursue their private interests and personal life, spending time on family, leisure, sport, and health, etc. However, this is not the case for their employees whose hard work may have resulted in a relationship breakdown, burnout, or health complications, yet they are unlikely to have enough of a financial buffer to quit. Therefore, it is a leader’s moral duty to take care of their employees by helping them create a healthy work–life balance.

Offer work flexibility

Whether it is flex time, part time, work from home, or working remotely, offer them the flexibility to choose how and where they get their job done. This increases employee satisfaction and they feel their employer cares about their well-being. When employees can work from home, they do not have to spend hours in traffic jams. As long as the results are delivered, clever leaders don't mind if employees work to a flexible schedule. If they do have to work from an office, let them schedule their day. If they want to start early so they can finish in time to pick up their children from school, let them.

Companies that encourage a good balance between work and life have a much lower rate of sickness, burnout, and employee turnover. Productivity is much higher, and employees are engaged and happy.

Work technology

Technology has made it possible for many of us to work 24/7. If you are not careful, using technology can make a robot of you. You will constantly be bombarded with text messages, voicemails, and emails. When you are home, be at home and assume you haven't received any emails or text messages. Balance is an attitude, and therefore, a choice. You cannot control what happens around and to you, but you do have control over how to respond. Protect your time so you can control your time.

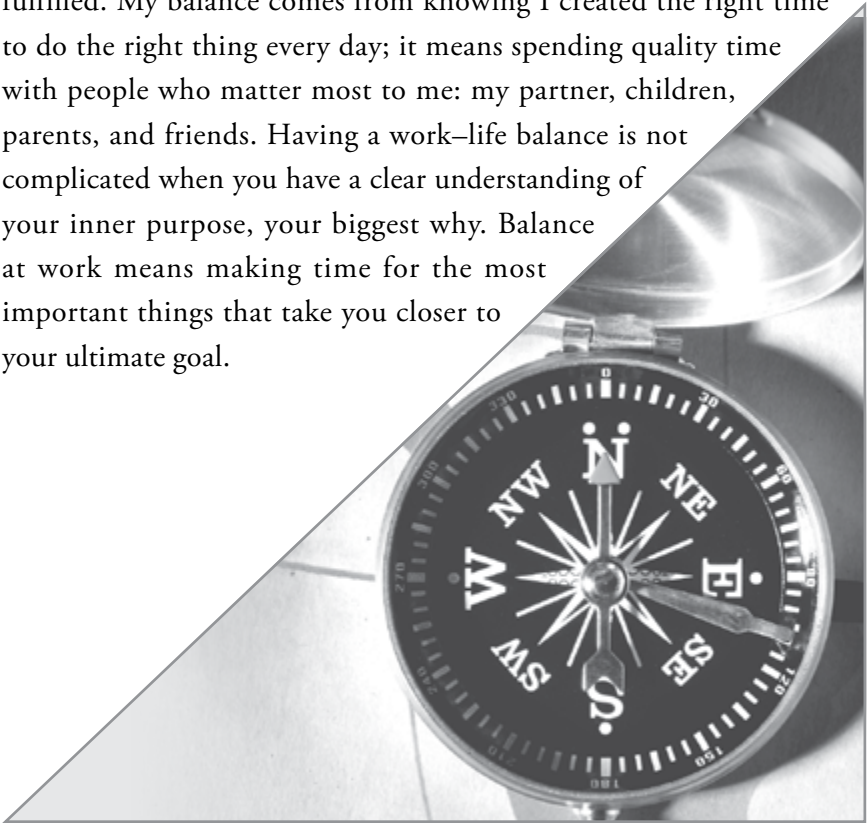
Below is a checklist to help you apply balance at work:

- Should we, as a company, do this at all?
- Is this task meant for me?
- Should I do it now?

- What if I don't do this?
- Who else can do this?
- Whose job is this?

Define your “why”

Earlier in the chapter, I discussed finding your inner purpose, and connecting with your biggest why. Many think that work–life balance is dividing their time between work and life the best way possible, but to me, balance is the right combination of things that leave me feeling fulfilled. My balance comes from knowing I created the right time to do the right thing every day; it means spending quality time with people who matter most to me: my partner, children, parents, and friends. Having a work–life balance is not complicated when you have a clear understanding of your inner purpose, your biggest why. Balance at work means making time for the most important things that take you closer to your ultimate goal.



Schedule everything

If you lack work–life balance, you’ll never go the distance. When lacking balance, many things can seem important and urgent. You try to set priorities, but you find yourself in chaos, until it is too late. The secret is planning.

Balance at work means making time for the most important things that take you closer to your ultimate goal.



You need to schedule whatever you do and stick to your schedule. Benjamin Franklin, one of the founding fathers of the United States, empowered this, saying, “For every minute spent organizing, an hour is earned” (Richter, 2017).

Great leaders plan their day as it best suits them. The majority gets up early (although there are some night owls). Some great leaders plan their day early each morning, while others do it the evening prior. No matter when they plan, great leaders focus on the most important thing to achieve that day.

Executives, particularly those with families, continuously face the challenge of when, where, and how to be accessible. Some leaders schedule only their work meetings in their calendar, while others schedule everything, including meeting preparations, mindfulness blocks, private parties, children-related events, weekend activities, and exercise. As an executive, whatever you do has to be scheduled in your calendar. This simple task—if done properly—becomes your best friend when it comes to balance. This makes your day discernible, not only for yourself but also for your staff, personal assistant, and team members.

Schedule to be unscheduled. Allow yourself 10 minutes between meetings for mindfulness. Block some time in your agenda to work as you want to without pressure and at your speed, clear your head, take

a walk, focus, or practice mindfulness. Give it a try, and soon you will realize small investments in the right places can improve the quality of your life. Psychologist William James described the impact of a schedule on creativity, saying that only by having a schedule, “We can free our minds to advance to really interesting fields of action” (Morgan, 2016).

Savvy leaders are disciplined. Perhaps the most important benefit of following a schedule is disciplining our minds, our most precious asset. Our minds learn fast how to focus on the things that matter the most. This is what great leaders do. They get the maximum possible out of every minute.

To remain balanced, great leaders do not let anyone interfere in their schedule. They see interference as a virus to their program. They filter whatever change others want to make to their schedule. If it’s beneficial—like an upgrade to a program—they will allow it. When they are working, they work; and when they are away from work, they remain away. When they spend time with their family and friends, they are fully present. This way, they maximize their time. It is called quality time. This does not mean great leaders operate as preprogrammed robots; they are wired to their biggest “why”. They schedule themselves so they can focus on what really matters. Whatever they can outsource, they do. This frees up their time, mind, and energy.

Take care of yourself

First-class leaders take good care of themselves; they know a healthy and creative mind feels at home in a healthy body. They exercise and eat and drink healthy, and stick to their schedule. Countless research shows that people who exercise a few times a week feel fitter, more confident and competent, and emotionally and intellectually stronger.

Sleep is also very important. We all function better after a good night's sleep, and leaders are no exception. When we feel rested, we have more energy and are more productive. When we sleep, toxic proteins are removed from our brains, a lack of sleep (and hence toxic proteins remain in the brain) hinders productive thinking. You may have experienced it yourself. When you have had insufficient sleep or an interrupted night, the following day is unproductive and quality suffers.

Leading a balanced life is like completing a puzzle. It is like a well-automated system with a phenomenal productivity rate. One of the benefits is that you don't have to think so much about everything.

We can all use support

Just like everyone else, from time to time leaders need support. We all face moments when we need to make tough decisions; therefore, we can all benefit from having a supportive network, both for work and private matters.

A Moment of Reflection

Take a moment of silence and reflect on your attitude.

- Do you see your life as one of purpose?
- Do you happen to things or do things happen to you?
- Do you consider yourself as an ultimate risk taker or a safe player?
- Do you have balance in your life? Do you do what really matters most? If not, do you know why?

Remember, nothing will ever change in your life or business unless you create the environment to change.



As Seen On . . .    

Best known for mentoring on leadership, personal development, and conflict resolution, **Hamid Safaei** is a certified executive coach who helps leaders, senior managers, and budding entrepreneurs discover and cultivate their potential. Hamid is passionate about helping both individuals and teams to always be at their best. He has led successful business transformations for a number of Fortune Global 500 companies. He has developed ImOcean Academy, a unique institute where he applies first-class coaching tools and techniques combined with best practices. He regularly publishes learnings on www.imoceanacademy.com and www.first-class-leadership.com on subjects such as leadership, realizing goals and dreams, the Wheel of Life, stress management, target setting, and bringing potential to fruition.

His passion is to create a better world by and with better leaders. His biggest dream is for peace in the Middle East, which he sees as a fundamental step for the peace in the world. Hamid aims to achieve breakthrough results in the peace process in the Middle East by 2025.

Originally from Iran, Hamid Safaei lives in the Netherlands with his family.

HOW HIGHLY
EFFECTIVE TEAMS
CAN ACHIEVE
BREAKTHROUGH RESULTS

FIRST-CLASS LEADERSHIP

First-Class Leadership is a comprehensive book that all managers and leaders should read. The amount of information is second to none. A brilliant book based on research and experience brings to the fore everything you need to know about being a first-class leader. The techniques and advice in this book are simple yet effective—you will wonder why you have never done them. In *First-Class Leadership*, Hamid Safaei discusses specific and actionable points from getting people to believe in your vision, building effective teams, communicating, inspiring, encouraging, and developing employees so they give their very best, caring and nurturing your workforce, to finding and keeping talent that will take your company to the next level. This book will change your perspective on how leaders should lead and how managers should manage. Inspired by icons such as Mahatma Gandhi, Bill Gates, Elon Musk, and Steve Jobs, what Hamid Safaei brings together is a wealth of information that will pave the way for everyone to become a first-class leader. A must-read gem on successful and effective leadership!

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