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GOOD LEADERSHIP



LESSON 1: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 1

The three most important questions every leader needs to ask.

Ultimately good leadership comes down to three main questions that every leader needs to ask and answer about themselves. ***What do you want? What are you afraid of?*** and, ***What are you actually good at?***

It is tempting to begin talking about leadership starting with the position that you hold or the responsibility that you have within the context of your organization. This is mainly due to the simple fact that where you are in the org chart is the most visible aspect of your leadership. And, depending upon the culture of your organization, your value as an employee, and even as a human, may also be largely determined by how far up or down you are in that hierarchy. But if we're really honest, the reality is that you were not put in your position *because* of your leadership. Rather, you were put there in hopes that you would ***become the right leader*** for this organization for this time.

The truth is that virtually everyone achieves their positions within their organizations through the evaluation of secondary elements such as your education and degrees, the people that you know, the connections that you have, or your reputation. And while your experience is also considered, as are your references, organizations put people in positions with the good faith and trust that things will work out. But there is always a level of uncertainty in every hire.

This is why we all feel that everyone within our organization, including ourselves, are being evaluated by every other person in the organization, not just the supervisors. Have you ever gossiped about the people in your organization, both positive and negative sharing of observations or opinions that you have about someone's decision or behavior? Ever talked about your boss or supervisor to co-workers or friends? Ever heard of a performance review? Ever read a journalistic report on a business that you know? ***If you sign up for any endeavor, any pursuit, or any leadership responsibility, you are signing up for a lifetime of scrutiny.*** Everyone in every position is constantly being evaluated as to whether or not they're actually going to be the kind of leader the organization needs them to be.

So, while leadership may be the default fact of your position, *good* leadership has nothing to do with the position that you hold in the organization. Let me say that again. ***Good leadership has nothing to do with the position that you hold in the organization. Good leadership has everything to do with how you hold the position that has been entrusted to you. And how you hold the position is largely determined by what you really want, what you're afraid of, and what you are actually good at.***

In light of this truth, good leaders submit to this reality and not only accept that we are constantly being critically analyzed by others, but takes on **the discipline of self-analysis, and self-critical questioning**. *What do I want? What am I afraid of? What am I actually good at?* Good leadership embraces these questions and deploys them consistently and responsibly throughout one's life of leading.

Now, asking and addressing these questions has two main effects. First, it develops the **critically important skill of introspection**. Throughout your life you will lead several different categories of people. For example, you will lead your subordinates because you are their supervisor or manager. At times, you will lead your peers; working on a project together, or managing a crisis together. There are even moments when you will lead your leader; providing feedback, and even advice. This dynamic is known as 360° leadership. But consistently, **the most difficult and challenging person you will ever lead is yourself**. And introspection—the ability to look at and examine what is going on inside of you—is the most critical skill and discipline you need to be the best leader you can be. So, questioning your wants, fears, and skills is a crucially important exercise in introspection.

But the second effect of asking and addressing these questions is that it will **increase the respect you will have for yourself and the respect and trust your colleagues and constituents have for you**. Asking and addressing these questions will grow your self-esteem, embolden your self-confidence, and will exemplify a quality of humility to those around you. And that example will foster **trust**, the bedrock of any healthy organization. Questioning your wants, fears, and skills demonstrates your modesty. And not only does it show that you accept scrutiny, you see it as **a valuable asset** to bettering yourself, and the whole of the organization. As such, you will model for your people this kind of introspection, and will set the foundation for developing amazing leaders under your care. And that is an incredible skill and gift that has tremendous benefits to your organization.

Ultimately good leadership comes down to three main questions. ***What do you want? What are you afraid of?*** and, ***What are you actually good at?*** In the next lesson we'll go through each of these three questions to show how to ask these questions in a way that will help guide our thinking and our change our behavior.

GOOD LEADERSHIP



Reflection Questions

How well do you handle scrutiny? Be honest. What is keeping you from interrogating your “wants,” “fears,” and “skills?”

How would you view your leaders if they went through a process of “self-scrutiny” regarding their own wants, fears, and abilities? How would you feel about the kind of organization you are in?

Was this lesson uncomfortable in any way or did you have any disagreements? Why?

If you were to sincerely embrace the truism that your current position has nothing to do with the quality of your leadership, how would this change you?

LESSON 2: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 2

How to answer the three most important questions every leader needs to ask.

Most leaders simply assume the answers to these questions and operate on those assumptions. The consequence of not interrogating wants, fears, and skills, however, is ignorance and confusion, two incredibly damaging elements for leading an organization. Leaders who make decisions without a clear sense of what they actually want pass that ambiguity on down the line, and the further this goes, the greater the damage to the cohesion of the organization. Leaders who have not identified clearly the fears that may be driving their perspectives and decisions begin shaping the organizational culture around anxiety and avoiding catastrophe, and unless anxiety and avoiding catastrophe is your mission, this will lead an organization astray from its stated purpose. Perhaps most damaging, if a leader isn't clear on what they are good at, they can wreak havoc in areas of incompetence, marginalize capable people, and completely divert attentions away from effective work. So while these questions can feel personally invasive, they are actually critical to your leadership and to the health of your organization.

Now, there are two principles for how we ask these questions. The first principle is that ***asking these questions regularly and diligently is as important as answering them.*** The encouragement here is to persist in asking these questions over and over again in various circumstances and contexts, to make sure you understand what the real answer is. This repetition is also to ensure that you keep up with the inquiry, because how you answer these questions may actually change over time.

The second principle is that ***the effectiveness of these questions is equal to the level of honesty you're willing to have in asking and answering them.*** Most money spent on leadership development programs is wasted simply because the people who engage with the activities are not honest. Please know, this is not a test you have to pass, or a mere exercise you can forget about. ***These questions are an interrogation of reality. Be committed to getting to the truth of the matter.*** These questions are really just tools for mining the depths of your soul, your psyche, the stuff that makes you behave the way you do. And it is ultimately your behavior that makes or breaks your leadership. So, pledge yourself to truly understanding your wants, your fears, and your skills.

I once consulted with two organizations who were already working together and were considering the possibility of joining together as one organization. The vision of this

**Be committed
to the truth.**

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merger made absolute sense; both organizations had similar and compatible missions, they had a long-standing relationship, and the skill-sets in each respective organization were incredibly compatible and mutually beneficial; the strengths that one brought to the table were commensurate with the weakness of the other. In short, they answered question three really well, *What are they actually good at?* They had both identified their strengths and weaknesses and as a result, our discussions were filled with excitement at the possibilities of what would come about as a result of the two joining forces.

After hours of discussions and mutually agreeing to the benefits of this move to our hopes and dreams, we simply could not cut a deal. Now, while these kinds of negotiations are always complicated, a main reason why we couldn't come together is that while the two leadership teams clearly stated that they wanted to accomplish this joint mission together, the reality is that the leaders of one of the organizations were actually afraid, and wanted something other than what they had verbalized in our talks. It became clear, the leaders of one side wanted to protect their investment, the integrity of their brand, and the positions of their leaders. A merger on paper was good for their mission, but a threat to their wants and an exacerbation of their fears. While they stated that they were willing to make sacrifices for this greater vision, the reality is that they were afraid of what they would lose. And they had a more primal "want" motivating and informing their discussion points in our conversations. How do I know this? Simple. Once we started talking about the logistics of how all this would work, the topics they brought up and the questions they asked began to revolve around the protection of their organization, their leaders, their brand, and their financial investment. Rather than working together around the stated "want" that brought the two organizations together in the first place, the conversations shifted to a different want. One side truly wanted a merger. The other side actually wanted an acquisition.

Now, there is nothing wrong with wanting to protect the integrity of your brand or your investment. There is nothing wrong even with wanting to acquire another organization, it happens all the time. And there's certainly nothing wrong with strategizing how you move forward in talks; these things are always filled with certain delicacies. There is something, however, terribly wasteful and damaging to relationship by not being honest with what you really want. The negotiations would have been far more productive if this organization had simply stated up front, that they wanted to be the name, and the controllers, and to hold the reigns of power. Think of how much time, energy, effort, and money could have been saved if they simply stated up front that they were actually looking to negotiate, not a merger, but an acquisition.

The end result was an increase in mistrust between the two organizations and the needed assistance of lawyers, which, of course, increases costs both in time and money, resources that could have been spent more beneficially elsewhere.

What you want, what you fear, and what are you actually good at are the three most important questions any leader needs to ask and address. Principle one. Asking these questions persistently and diligently is as important as answering them. Principle number two. Be honest. With yourself, and with others.

Let's start with question number one, *What do you want?*



LESSON 3: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 3

What do you want?

Question #1: What do you want? Really.

It is possible you may never have really considered this question, “What do want?” And, that makes sense because most of the cultures that we grew up in prescribed a pathway for us that we simply followed; go to school, get a degree, get a job, etc. And let’s be honest, most of us don’t really know what we want anyway. So, stopping to ask the question, *What is it that I really want?* can be a daunting task and the answer may feel elusive and intimidating.

First don’t worry. As we mentioned before, you will consistently and persistently ask this question over and over again, and in time, the answer to that question will become more clear.

But second, let’s take a stab at the question and get to the heart of it. ***What is it that really drives you?*** What is it that moves you, that leads you to continue in this vocation? What do you actually want out of your leadership, out of your work? I’m going to ask you to write something down, and we’ll proceed to the next step.

So, *What do you really want?*



Now that you've written something down, we're going to interrogate your answer through three steps, and each step along the way will hopefully bring clarity and insight to why this question is so important. Again, if you can engage with this exercise with honesty and thoughtfulness, what you do in this moment may forever change how you live your life and how you lead.

First, we need to recognize there is a difference between your **stated want** and the **primal want** that is actually driving you and the decisions you make.

When I first began learning how to speak in public, whether that was in a classroom or to a large audience, it was easy to identify my stated want: "I want to be an effective communicator." And while there was truth in that, and still is, the reality was that there was a more primal want that was distracting me from that ultimate aim. More than wanting to be effective, I wanted to be liked. I wanted to be affirmed and applauded. I wanted to be *known* as a great speaker. And, I wanted to get invited back, because that was self-affirming. Now, without making any moral judgments, it is enough to say that those primal wants absolutely influenced how I wrote and presented my talks.

Step one in this exercise is to write down what we want. Step two in this exercise is to critically analyze what we wrote down and to question if there is a more primal want that is secretly hidden underneath the stated want that you wrote down. It is possible that you were absolutely honest with the stated want, and that the primal and stated wants are identical. But chances of that being true are very low.

So consider carefully. Is there a "primal want" underneath the "stated want" that you wrote down?

The problem with our psychologies is that if we do not discipline ourselves to consciously interrogate our thinking, we will be driven by automatic and unconscious motivators, such as identified in our primal wants, which are usually rooted in fear, insecurity, or pride. And those motivators foster dysfunction and can destroy organizations.

But, now that we've identified a stated want and a primal want, the skill and discipline that will transform you into a really good leader, is step three, to **consciously, intentionally, and persistently lead toward the wants that are grounded in your stated aims and values**. So, let's say your stated want was to achieve your organization's mission. Fantastic. But you have also honestly identified a primal want which is to be thought of as a good leader, or a better leader than your predecessor. Again, we're be honest with ourselves. As you navigate your way through leading your organization, consciously, intentionally, and persistently ask whether or not the decisions you make are being driven out of your stated or your primal want. Most of all, **discipline yourself to fight against any primal distraction**. And make a habit of asking this question over and over again throughout your leadership career.

Asking the question "What do you really want?" will be a question that you will need to take with you for the rest of your life. Ask it when you apply for a job, or when you launch a new product or program. Ask it when you make small decisions, or find yourself in a complex and challenging situation. Ask it when you find yourself, perhaps a bit uncertain, and re-ground yourself in the stated aims and values that are core to your being and the focus of the organization you lead.

Most of all, **do not settle for the mere primal wants of personal rewards, self-preservation, accolades, or material gain. Leadership is a responsibility and a stewardship**. People are looking to us to solve real problems, and cause real transformations that make this world a better place. Do not compromise that vision for a fleeting sense of self-affirmation. And the more and more you practice this discipline of asking and living out of a stated want that is commensurate with your values and your organization's mission, the more it will become second nature—a habit and a practice—that will achieve great results and bring about a better world.

In the next video, we'll discuss the other primal emotion within us that could derail it all. Fear.

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responsibility
and a
stewardship.**

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Reflection Questions

A word that is commonly used to describe these “wants” is the word “motive,” the luring force that drives your behavior and your decisions. Motives are not morally good or bad, but neither are they neutral. Motives, by definition, take a side. The choice is yours.

If you were to be honest with your colleagues and staff about your motives, what would happen?

How tempted are you to judge or evaluate someone else’s motives more than interrogate your own?

SIGN A COMMITMENT

Consider the following commitments, or craft your own. Either way, commit!

*“I recognize that leadership is a **responsibility**, not a reward, and I commit to **stewarding** this responsibility well.”*

*“I commit myself to **behavior** and **decisions** that advance the cause of the organization’s **mission** rather than my own desires.”*

*“I submit myself to an **intentional and persistent interrogations** of my **motives**.”*

LESSON 4: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 4

What are you afraid of?

Question #2: What are you afraid of?

Fear is the most universal, most powerful, and most pernicious of our primal emotions. Fear is a defense mechanism. It can move us, quite literally, away from threats. But fear is also a debilitation, keeping us from taking risks. Both expressions of fear by themselves, however, are ultimately a distraction from the kind of leader this world needs you to be, and the kind of leader you *want* to be. Fear can keep your organization from achieving its goals. It can sabotage innovation, exploration, and discovery. Neurobiologically, fear suppresses the cognitive parts of your brain. Unattended fear can actually inhibit your thinking and obstruct you from seeing things clearly and intelligently. So, knowing how to navigate fear is a critical skill in good leadership.

One quick note. Please hear that what we're talking about is *unattended* fear, emphasis on the "unattended." Fear is going to happen, and it can actually be a helpful tool. The problem is when fear is unnoticed and/or ignored. It is then, that fear becomes a driving force behind how you lead, and that tends to bring about deleterious results. So, the goal is not to eliminate fear; that's never going to happen. The goal is to become aware of the presence of fear, to understand it, and to direct in ways that are going to be helpful, rather than hurtful. So, ***don't be afraid of fear. Be disciplined with it.***

To help us do that, I'd like to give you two simple filters, and they are, simply, ***name it and frame it.***

Name it

Now, I hope you'll forgive the cheesy and clichéd simplicity of this, but every now and then, cheesy and clichéd simplicity is helpful for remembering.

First, name it. Filter one is simply to actually identify what the fear is. The exercise here is not too dissimilar to what we went through before in naming what it is that we want. The problem here is the same. What we say that we're afraid of may not actually be what we're truly, primarily afraid of. And according to our understanding of the power of linguistics, naming it, and actually saying it out loud is a powerful tool in addressing your fears because it allows you to begin having power over your fears, rather than having your fears unconsciously control and have power over you. So, name it. What is it truly that you're afraid of?

**Don't be afraid
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For example, you may be afraid of the competition. Say that out loud. But then, ask yourself the question, *Is this really what you're truly afraid of?* Because the reality may be that you're not so much afraid of the competition as you are afraid that you may not be up to the task of facing the competition. Your real fear, then, is not them. Your real fear is actually rooted in your insecurity, your uncertainty as to whether or not you believe you have the skills to get the job done. By the way, do not be ashamed of this kind of fear. The reason why I am using this example is because **insecurity is at the heart and root of virtually every dysfunction.** We are all deeply insecure. Only sociopaths lack insecurity.

So first, name it. If you were to do a search on leadership fears, you'll find list after list of things that we're all afraid of as leaders, from the fear of making hard decisions, the fear of being criticized, to the fear of not being liked, or the fear of being lonely, all relevant to how we lead. Naming and recognizing the thing you're afraid of is the first step in diminishing its power over your motivations and actions. And as we discussed in the previous lessons, naming your fears ensures that you're not distracted by the sub-conscious and automatic impulses of our primal emotions. And, by the way, it's okay to have named and identified stated fears and primal fears. Both are going to be helpful to name, and both may actually be true at the same time, in their own particular ways.

Frame it

Second, frame it. And there's really only one question you need to ask here. **Is the fear a positive or negative motivator?**

A positive motivator is a fear that leads you to action in accordance with your mission. If you lead a non-profit in education, a positive motivator is being afraid that if children do not get educated, the community's flourishing will decline, and there will be greater suffering. If you're in business, a positive motivator is being afraid that the market is going to shift and you may miss that opportunity to capitalize on that change. **A negative motivator is a fear that channels your energies toward avoidance or aversion.** If you lead a church, a negative motivator would be the fear of losing congregants, and so you perhaps compromise a bit on your stated mission and values, and you may avoid speaking the truth in the way you know you need to. If you lead a team, a negative motivator is being afraid of not being liked, and so you don't keep some people accountable for their delinquencies; you avoid a fundamental responsibility of a leader. Recognizing whether or not the fear is a positive motivator or a negative motivator is critical in understanding what place it has within your leadership, and as you can guess, fears that are positive motivators can be tremendously beneficial to your leadership whereas fears that are negative motivators can be tremendously detrimental to your leadership. And if you can identify and live out of fears that are positive

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motivators and ignore or disempower the fears that are negative motivators, you've got a good foundation upon which you can achieve success.

So, name it, and frame it. And once you've done that, **act**.

It is important not to simply complain or berate the organization with the fear. That will only lead your people to a negative motivator; "do not tick off our leader." Rather, take the necessary steps to leverage your fears in the development of **actionable steps** that help your organization achieve its stated goals. Behave in a way that directly addresses the positively motivating fear, and use that energy to inspire and empower your people toward your mission. In our examples just mentioned, being afraid of children not getting educated might lead you to audit the actual educational outcomes of the children you serve, and to begin analyzing ways in which your pedagogy could improve, or addressing the social environment that affects children's learning behavior. If you are afraid of missing a market shift, don't just yell at your people about it. Turn that positively motivating fear into a decision about what departments continue to operate, and which ones do not with the input from various segments of your constituency.

The point again is to avoid negative motivators that *keep* you from acting. Embrace the positively motivating fears that lead you to action, that inspire your people to change or develop, that improve your outcomes and objectives. And if you can persistently discipline your organization to process fear through the lens of a positive motivator that moves you to action in accordance with your mission and values, you've kinda got a leadership superpower.

So, what do you want? What do you really want? What is your true motive? What do you fear? What is keeping you from acting? The last question we must ask is *What are you truly good at?*



GOOD LEADERSHIP



WRITE

Take the first steps towards identifying your fears and whether or not they are positive or negative motivators. If you can, identify what action step you can take that is commensurate with your stated values as a leader, and the aims and goals of your organization.

<i>What are you really afraid of?</i>	<i>Is this a positive or negative motivator</i>	<i>What is your action step?</i>

LESSON 5: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 5

What are you good at?

Question #3: What are you good at?

The secret sauce to this question is the willingness and ability to separate out what you like with what you're actually competent at doing. Unfortunately, and painfully, these two are very different categories, and good leaders know the difference. Good leaders are able to humbly and critically examine what it is that they're actually good at, and to evaluate objectively that reality without conflating it with their personal identity or personal pleasure. Also, identifying what you're really good at is an extremely helpful tool when navigating the trajectory of your vocation and the people with whom you work. It is still far too common for us to be conditioned by the overwhelming onslaught of messaging that says that your value and your worth is equal to your stature in your company, be that the title you hold or the dollars you make. The reality is that **the good life consists, not in more money, more accolades, or prestigious titles, but rather in finding the right fit.**

Fit is what happens when the truth of who you are matches with the work that you do. Fit is when you don't even think about how much money you're making, or the title you hold, because every morning you wake up you are consumed with the joy of the work you get to do, work that is in most ways blind to the benefits or accolades of your position, because the work itself is what is most satisfying. And identifying fit is what makes for really good leadership, someone who knows that they have a work responsibility that is in alignment with their skills. And so this is why asking the question, "What am I really good at?" is really important.

Here are three main ways to evaluate what you're really good at.

First, pay attention to what you like to do. Now, this may sound contradictory at first given the principle mentioned earlier, but the distinction here is to **use what you like to do as an analytical tool for evaluating what you're good at** where as the pitfall is *equating* what you like to do with what you're good at. Frequently, enjoyment can lead to greater skill. If you really like playing music, most likely you'll play more and more, and you'll become better and better at it over time. You're watching this because you like to lead, or you like to manage organizations and because you like it, you're getting training that is going to make you better and more effective. This is very different from people who like to be in charge, but who don't like to actually lead. For example, if you hear someone say they really like being the executive or a manager, but they don't like meetings, don't like

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evaluating people, and don't like communicating vision, well, they like being in charge, but they don't actually like the *responsibility* of being in charge, and therefore, will not become more competent and skillful. (This is why our first question is so important, *What do you really want?*) This is also why the goal is not to achieve a status but to find the right fit. So, pay attention to what you like, and what you really like. It's very probable that you'll find what you're good at as you follow the path of what you really like to do.

Second, pay attention to what others say about you. Now, this is different from what they say *to* you, which is not the same thing, and so, this can be a bit tricky. To find out what others say *about* you, you have to first be willing to humble yourself, and second, do a little digging. You'll also need some trusted confidants around you who will tell you the truth, and that humility we just mentioned will be needed for you to hear the truth. Oh, and by the way, did I mention that you'll need to be humble?

The fact of the matter is, we are all being evaluated regularly. As we discussed in a previous lesson, while gossip has a negative connotation in our culture, gossip is simply a universal way in which we all navigate our environments and evaluate our circumstances by sharing information with one another. People not only complain when they gossip, but they share positive things too. We just don't think of positive sharing as gossip, but we should. So, how do we get at what others are saying about you? In short, **ask**. Just ask someone to give you honest feedback. Ask a friend, or colleague to share with you what others are saying. Allow information to be anonymous if necessary, and *do not get defensive or argumentative*. Remember, **you're not trying to advocate for your skills. You're trying to evaluate what your skills truly are.**

And because asking others about yourself is so rarely done, you'll be astonished at how much valuable information you will get, and how much respect you will gain as a leader by being open and transparent about this kind of evaluation. People actually don't mind sharing with you the truth of the matter. People are just averse to hurting someone's feelings, or damaging a relationship, or in a hierarchical organization, losing a job. And so, your willingness to humbly ask for honest feedback will alleviate these fears and hindrances of the truth, and will elevate your leadership in ways you never thought possible.

Third, pay attention to your actual results. In other words, evaluate yourself as you would any other employee or staff member. Are you actually accomplishing what you set out to accomplish? Can you actually do what you said you were going to do? If you claim to be a fantastic pianist, listen to a recording of yourself. If you claim to be a good communicator, watch or listen to your talks. If you claim to be a good leader, assess the effectiveness of your organization under your leadership. Pay attention to what is actually happening in the real world and ask yourself the

**Don't advocate
for your skills.
Evaluate them.**



hard question of whether or not you're good at this particular skill, task, or responsibility.

One quick closing note. **Do not confuse skill with perfection.** To err is human. You're not looking for the absence of mistakes. You're simply looking for the presence of competency.

Stay humble. Be honest. Continue to improve your craft. And in all of that, find your fit.



GOOD LEADERSHIP



WRITE

So, what are you good at? What are you really good at? Write down some of the things you like to do, some feedback that you've heard others give about you, and some results that are worth celebrating. Then, with humility, identify and own your skill. Write down, "I am good at..." And it's okay to celebrate more than one skill. What we're going for, in leadership, is to identify the skills that are specific to the task of leading.

What do you like to do?	What do others say about you?	What results are you actually achieving?

I am good at (My fit is...): _____

LESSON 6: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 6

BONUS: Leadership is a human endeavor.

When I first started learning about leadership, I was coming from the religious sector where I had been trained and conditioned in beliefs, vices, and virtues all within the context and language of theology and spirituality. And so I had the expectation that my interest in leadership was an interest in a different world, a corporate and business world that had a completely different set of ways of thinking about values, ethics, and insights. And so I began to study, anxiously awaiting to discover some brilliant and sophisticated knowledge that was secretly being deployed in making corporations, and non-profits, and governments successful at what they were doing in the world. But that all turned when I read Jim Collins' classic book *Good To Great*. I remember being stunned after turning the last page, because the fundamental message of the book could be summed up in one word: **discipline**. And the areas of discipline were virtues like humility, honesty, and truth-telling, responsibility, purpose, and values, things that I thought were only discussed in the religious sector about how to be a good human being.

Over the course of my leadership development and consultation career, I have come to understand that good leadership begins and ends with the pursuit of a good humanity, and that **leadership is fundamentally about what kind of people we are and want to become**. In other words, leadership is about purpose, integrity, a commitment to making the world a better place, and the principles of care, such as trust, kindness, self-control, and joy, all elements of what we sometimes call "love."

Now, there is no doubt that there are organizational and group dynamics that must be studied and understood, and we're going to discuss much of that in later lessons. But what is stunningly obvious is that **all organizations are shaped, molded, and influenced by human beings. Leadership is fundamentally a human endeavor**, and what kind of leader we are is directly related to what kind of human we are. Leadership is that simple, and incredibly difficult.

So whether you're pursuing these virtues through religion in spiritual disciplines, or you're discerning the behavioral sciences of economics, sociology, or organizational psychology, just remember that the goal of being a good leader begins and ends with being a good human. And you get to decide what kind of good you want to be.

And that, my friends, is why we began our study of leadership with these three questions that are all based around the fundamental human categories of desires, fears, and abilities. Questions like these are soul-searching questions, interrogations of who we are. And they are the questions that we need to continually evaluate in order to maintain our leadership skill.

LESSON 7: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 7

BONUS: The Good and The Truth.

I cannot overstate how important the truth is in good leadership. All of what we've done in this first section is really an exercise in truth-telling. And this is important because we humans are really good at fabricating fictional stories about ourselves and our world around us to which we then attempt to make the real world conform. In other words, we lead out of alternative realities. The problem, of course, is that due to the tenacious character of truth, this kind of leadership leads to all sorts of dysfunctions, waste, and even an exacerbation of the problems we are trying to fix. This is why I've been using the word "good" to describe the quality of leader we are striving to be. It is to signal to ourselves that **this kind of leadership is a virtue that is committed to the truth**, as we say, "in good faith." Good leaders are honest with themselves, and honest with their evaluation of the very real situations and circumstances in which their work is deployed. And because good leaders are committed to real results, they have a fierce commitment to the truth of the matter because a fictional story can lead to irrelevant or perplexing decisions that have nothing to do with the real problem, and decisions based on false understandings can lead to devastating results. Truth matters. Good leaders are fiercely committed to the truth.

So, in addition to learning about yourself and the principles of good leadership in this first section, recognize that we have also practiced the disciplines of **humility**, **curiosity**, and **interrogation** that help us understand the truth about ourselves, our work, and our organizations,...and our world. And this disciplined commitment to the truth will need to go with us for the rest of our leadership career.

**Have a fierce
commitment to
the truth.**



LESSON 8: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 8

Now act.

There is really only one thing that determines your leadership and that is what you do. Now, since what you do is essentially a manifestation of who you are, the previous lessons are foundational for how you lead and will continue to be relevant every step of the way. You will need revisit and reapply the questions of what you want, what you're afraid of, and what you're good at, frequently and diligently. And if you can remember that, you're ready to move forward. It's now time to act.

How you behave is how you lead. And we can evaluate your leadership by looking at three main behaviors; **what you say, what you do, and the decisions you make.** It's really that simple. Your effectiveness as a leader is going to be determined by your words, your actions, and your decisions. If you are delinquent in paying close attention to what you say, do, and decide, you are being careless, irresponsible, and even damaging as a leader.

Now, there are two main caveats to this. The first is that it's not exactly true that you need to pay attention to what *you* say, do, and decide. What you're really paying attention to is **what kind of effect your behavior is having on the people that you lead.** This is a frequent mistake that a lot of leaders make. In other words, you cannot simply say you're a good leader if you can look at the track record of your talks, meetings, and emails. Leaders, out of defensiveness, will frequently recount the historical record and look to their behaviors in the past as evidence of their responsible leadership. "I did make that decision, right?" Or, "I did send that email." But as you can already tell, simply appealing to what you said or decided, is mere defensiveness, and, as we learned, that fear of being attacked manifesting in defensiveness is a negative motivator, leading you to avoid engagement with good evaluation.

Good leadership, on the other hand, takes into consideration what was said or decided *with what resulted* in the organization; *the outcome* of what you said, did, or decided. Did the meeting, email, or talk actually accomplish what you set out to accomplish? That's the question we have to ask. Caveat number one is to recognize that what you do, say, and decide must be understood in combination with the **actual outcomes** of the organization.

The second caveat is that **all three—words, actions, and decisions—must be consistent.** If what you say does not match up with what you do, and what you do is contrary to what you've decided, you will lose credibility. That kind of inconsistency results in significant mistrust sown into the

**How you
behave is how
you lead.**



culture of the organization, and people will no longer be committed to the goal of the organization, but rather, to their own self-preservation which dominos into causing significant fragmentation, factionalizing, silos, and politics. Each one of these behaviors is essentially a reinforcement of the other. Just like the proverbial three-legged stool, the only kind of stool that does not wobble, you protect the integrity of your leadership and of your organization by ensuring that your words, your actions, and your decisions are all on the same plane. Call it **alignment**, **agreement**, **consistency** ... whatever. Make sure that what you say, do, and decide, are all headed in the same direction.

GOOD LEADERSHIP



WRITE

It all begins with a decision. Once a decision has been made, commit to it in word and deed. For what you say, identify specific words and phrases that are consistently used in your communications. It could be a company value, the mission statement, or even a fun exclamation that brings adhesion to the team. Whatever words you use, they need to be memorable and regularly explained with stories, illustrations, and even real examples. For behaviors, there's one simple lesson here. Submit yourself to the decision as if you were a subordinate. Leadership is more about the example you set rather than the position you hold. As previously discussed, you are being evaluated, not by your title, but by how you behave. And your people will follow suit.

Name the decision.	What words or phrases encapsulate the decision?	What actions do I expect of myself and my people in light of this decision.

LESSON 9: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 9

You have two jobs: First “who,” then “what.”

While we’ve talked extensively about the characteristics of a leader, *What really is the leader’s job?* What areas of responsibility must a leader attend to? Well, there are really only two jobs you have that we’ll sum up with this phrase that should become a guiding principle for you as you continue in your leadership: **“First who, then what.”**

This principle recognizes first and foremost that **people are the organization’s most important resource**—physically and intellectually—to your mission and your vision. Without people, you quite simply do not have an organization. And the kind of people that comprise your organization is equal to the kind of results your organization gets. A leader’s first job is to think through very carefully who should be on the team, and what positions they need to be in. Then, once you’ve formed your team, recognize and deploy the tremendous value, intellect, and experience that your people bring to your organization. Failure to do so is an abdication of your responsibility as a leader, and jeopardizes everything you actually want to accomplish.

Now, this principle of “first who” does not mean that the “what” only comes *after* you’ve taken care of the people. The nuance and paradox here is that the vision or mission is frequently what gathers and coheres a group of people in the first place as you all together embark on a shared journey in the same direction. To say “first who, then what” is to simply recognize that your “what”—which is essentially your vision—will not come to pass if you have not first *taken care of* your “who” because **a vision only comes to fruition through the people who realize it**. And so, you must avoid the trap that many leaders fall into, which is to pursue your vision, your objective, your goal *at the expense of your people*.

Employees, staff, and volunteers want to feel as if they are part of something significant, something of great value to themselves and to this world. Being a cog in the wheel of someone else’s vision, someone else’s dream is not terribly motivating, nor meaningful. Really good leadership has a vision, but good leaders see that vision through the eyes of the people who will be commissioned to carry it out. And, really good leaders recognize the power of that vision to compel people to collaboration and meaningful work, to make a difference in this world, to put a dent in the universe.

And so, your first job as a good leader is to **encourage, inspire, and enable others**.

LESSON 10: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 10

Inspire, encourage, and enable others.

First, **inspire others with a compelling vision**. Here is where the overlap of “what” and “who” is most stark, and so, it is understandable if you think, “but isn't this a ‘what’?” Yes, it is. But it is mostly a “who.” In short, this is because a vision is **aspirational**, a compelling future reality that we imagine can be achieved. A vision is also **ennobling**, directly related to solving a problem in the world and replacing that problem with a good solution.

And so we start with a vision because good leadership recognize that the vision is the engine of any healthy organization. Vision is what motivates, drives, and empowers the people to act. It is recognized by the behavioral sciences that humans are driven by several different kinds of motivators, and each has its time and place, and level of efficaciousness. Punishment, incentives, social pressure; these are all part of the influencer’s toolkit. For good leaders, however, the most powerful and effective motivator in keeping an organization healthy and on target is by inspiring your people with a compelling vision. By deploying this motivator rather than the others, you will experience several positive effects. First, a well articulated vision will **draw people** to the organization who are **intrinsically motivated** to accomplish the vision. And, if you get people on the team whose primary internal driver for work is the vision, you’ve got the makings of an incredibly effective organization. The inverse is also true, that a well-articulated vision will **repel people** who are not terribly compelled by that vision. And so, vision is not just a marketing phrase, but it is something that can be a determining factor of how the organizational energies are directed. And one of the primary ways that energy is directed is as a filter of *who* will and will not be committed to the organization in the first place.

First, inspire others with a compelling vision. Second, **encourage others with honest assessments**. Some may hear the word “encouragement” and immediately think about the nice things people tell us to make us feel good. A common phrase might be “you’re doing a great job,” or “well done.” Some may hear the phrase “honest assessment” through the lens of harsh accountability, the “hard” part of being a responsible boss. In other words, “Listen, it’s my job to tell you the truth, and you’re just bad at your job.” When we say “encourage others with honest assessments,” however, what we’re talking about here is the combination of both as a unified approach to feedback, an encouragement *with* an honest assessment. Here’s how this works.

An encouragement *without* an honest assessment can be received as patronizing or mere flattery without a lot of

**Vision is the
determining
factor for
energies.**



substance. While it may feel nice to be told compliments, when it comes to work, that kind of feedback can feel trivial and unimportant if not accompanied with substantive assessment. I once worked with someone who operated this way. His feedback was always positive, and was intended to make us feel good. To this day, I dearly love this person because he was an encouraging person who cared deeply about how I felt. But honestly, I never felt like I was engaged in anything important that mattered because there was no real, honest assessment of my work in the context of our organization. Encouragement without honest assessment communicates that how a person feels is more important than the vision. And this can be especially difficult for people who are a part of your organization because they believe in the vision.

Likewise, if you give an honest assessment without an encouragement, you run the risk of leaving your people feeling disconnected, deflated, or possibly demeaned or dehumanized. I also worked with someone who operated in this fashion, and while there was a constant critique of my performance, there was no sense that I as a person actually mattered. And I was left with the feeling that I was really disposable. Though I believed in the vision, I no longer felt connected to the team, nor did I trust or respect my leader. Honest assessment without encouragement communicates dispassionate productivity, and that what matters is only how you perform, but not who you are.

So, both of these behaviors will degrade your credibility as a leader, and more to the point, both are counter productive to good leadership because they both can leave a person focused on themselves. Encouragement without honest assessment, and honest assessment without encouragement gives attention primarily to the individual over the whole of the organizational vision, and that will turn people inward. And as soon as people begin to focus on themselves, you've lost the vision engine.

Encouraging others with honest assessments is to provide **positive uplifting feedback that is commensurate with your organization's culture, values, and vision**. Don't just pat people on the back. Tell them that you appreciated how they exemplified a core cultural commitment of the organization. Celebrate someone's accomplishments that helped advance the vision. Commend someone's actions as being true to the organization's values. And let people know that they are valued as a human being and a contributing member of the organization.

First, inspire others with a compelling vision. Second, encourage others with honest assessments. Third, **enable others with the right the environment**.

One of the clearest signs of a successful leader is the success of the people they lead. And there are two main ways you help your people succeed. The first is to **remove the barriers and hindrances that keep your people from achieving their objectives**. The second is to **resource your people**. It is astonishing how much energy is wasted by

**Encourage
others with
honest
assessments.**

vialeadership

people fighting against obstacles, hurdles, and frictions just to get their work done. And most of the time, removing those obstacles is something that only a leader with organizational authority can do. There are systems that are inefficient or unnecessary, processes or policies that are outdated or even antiquated, and political structures that can cause hesitation or uncertainty. Whatever it is, get it out of the way and **liberate your people from the tyranny of the complicated, convoluted, and confusing ways in which your organization works**. This will empower your people to pursue their objectives directly and effectively, and with a lot more satisfaction.

The second way to help your people succeed is to *resource them*. A leader's job is to provide for the people everything the leader can to help them get their job done. This can be in the form of something physical like a desk or computer. But it can also be something psychological or cultural, like certain permissions or insights into the politics of your particular organization.

Now, here's what's really important about why removing barriers and providing resources is critical to your leadership and to the organization you lead. First, it will force you to listen to the people of the organization. You can't resolve a hindrance or give a resource if you don't know what your people need. So addressing these items will help you, and indeed force you to *pay attention* to your people. One of the most challenging responsibilities of a leader is to persistently bridge the gap between the corporate office and what is really happening "on the ground" of your organization. This is a discipline and a skill, and by being committed to resourcing your people, you have a tool that will help you do that. But second, by enabling your people to act with these resources, you are actually creating *an environment* in which your people *feel enabled* to act. You are actively communicating that this is the kind of place where their work is supported, and you will be the kind of leader that will help them get their job done, and to do it well. It is that kind of environment that is key. **Leadership is as much ecological as it is personal**, and by creating an environment that is clear on what the organization is there to do, and by removing the barriers and ensuring there's resources, you're creating an environment that supports good work getting done.

You have two jobs. "First who, then what." When it comes to the "who," inspire your people with a compelling vision, encourage your people with honest assessments, and enable your people with the right environment. Once you do that, you will have a brilliant team with whom you can shape and refine the "what" of your work. Over the course of the next several lessons, we'll discuss "the what," how to think about and craft your mission, vision, and values.

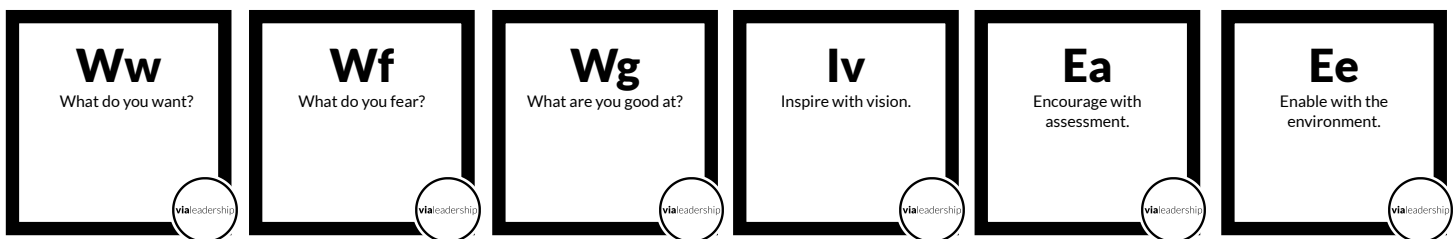
**Leadership is
ecological.**

vialeadership

LESSON 11: GOOD LEADERSHIP, part 11

BONUS: Lead well, manage less.

Okay friends. I hope you've been enjoying our journey thus far. You have three questions to ask. *What do you want? What are you afraid of? What are you good at?* And you have two jobs, *First who, then what. Inspire your people with a compelling vision. Encourage your people with honest assessments.* Then, *empower your people with the right environment by removing barriers to their work and providing resources that empower your people to act.* We've described good leadership as being a full and complete recognition that our work is a *human endeavor*—that it is ultimately about people—and that we must be committed to a *humble acceptance of the truth* of the matter in order to be effective. Perhaps most important, we discussed how each and every one of these things is a *discipline*. This doesn't just happen. You have to work at each one, often times with a little discomfort, and most definitely with a lot of *humility*.



Here's the bonus. If you lead well in all of what we've just discussed you will find yourself not having to manage as much.

The distinction between leadership and management is extremely important. And while there are a lot of elements to discuss, for now I'd like to simply say that **leadership is about inspiring people in a mission towards a vision**, while **management is about getting the work done to get there**. If you attend well to your leadership responsibilities, you will need the tool of management less and less, because people who are led well manage themselves.

Now, there is no question that management is an important tool in running an organization. There are necessary aspects of human resources that are crucial, such as hiring, firing, compliance, and performance reviews. But how all of those elements are handled and deployed is ultimately predicated upon how well you lead your people in the organization. And most anyone would tell you that they would prefer someone who led them well but didn't manage them much rather than someone who led them poorly, but managed them more. This is an almost universal feeling in organizations and actually one of the ways you can assess your leadership effectiveness. If you find yourself *managing*



more than you or they want, there is something essentially amiss about how you are leading. This illuminates a fundamental principle that most everyone believes, but that most leaders completely miss. It is this: ***The greater your leadership skill, the less you have to manage.*** Likewise, the lower your leadership skill, the greater your need to manage.

As we progress through our program together, everything that now follows is built upon these previous lessons because, the culture of the organization, how your teams function together, and the results you achieve are all contingent upon what kind of leadership guides the organization. So as we continue you will see these themes over and over again through the rest of the program. The repetition of these principles, and the redundancy of their application is intentional. You will see the power and application of these principles and disciplines in the various aspects of your organization, and hopefully solidify their usage throughout your leadership career.

And the icing on that cake is that leaders who do this well gain the respect of their people and increase the trust they have in their leader. And that trust will be the first step in creating a healthy culture, the next essential in our program

GOOD LEADERSHIP



Reflection Questions

How good do you think you are at attending to the “who” as a priority before the “what?” Are there other nuances to consider with this principle?

Of the “encouragement” and “honest assessment” discipline, which one do you need to strengthen to provide a more wholistic organizational focus to your feedback?

Have you ever considered leadership to be “ecological?” How does leading an “environment” differ from “managing?”

What other “ecological” factors go into creating the right environment for your people to succeed?



WRITE

Consider what decisions you need to make that will inspire, encourage, and enable your people. Begin drafting feedback that is both encouraging, and an honest assessment. List the barriers that can be removed, and resources that you can provide that cultivates a healthy leadership ecology. Write down other items that contribute to that kind of environment.

HEALTHY CULTURE



LESSON 12: HEALTHY CULTURE, part 1

Culture is everything

There are two main categories of work that any organization needs to do well in order to succeed. First, an organization needs to be **smart**. That is, you need to attend to the technical and strategic aspects of the work. This would be anything from the actual technologies used, the systems you put in place, the marketing you deploy, the brand identity and reputation you push forward into the world, and of course budgets, how you handle money. But in addition to being smart, an organization must also be **healthy**. A healthy culture includes things like high morale, high confidence, low politics, open and effective communication, and a clear understanding of the **What, Why, Who, and How** of the organization's identity and mode of operations. All of these things affect how people feel and how people act in your organization. And all of them put together make up "the way we do things around here," the "rules" that people follow—written or unwritten. In other words, *the culture* of your organization.

Now, while most leaders naturally tend to spend most of their energies and time on the technical and "smart" side of the organization, the reality is nothing matters more in any organization than the health of the culture. **The culture you create will make or break your strategy, every time.** What kind of culture you foster and sustain, influences and affects everything about how your organization operates, and what kind of end results you actually achieve. This cannot be overstated. ***Culture is everything in an organization.***

If you feel as if you're dealing with a lot of exhausting bureaucracy, biting politics, divisions, silos, lack of productivity, and other dysfunctions in your organization, the reason is directly tied to the absence of a healthy culture.

Now, to some that may sound obvious. But this is extremely important to emphasize because many leaders are tempted to blame that kind of dysfunction, not on the culture, but on the people. And if you blame the people, you will use individual accountability or punishments as a corrective, which may put out a fire or two, but it won't solve the root problem. Some leaders amazingly ignore such behaviors by simply believing it's a quirk of an individual that others will just have to put up with, after all, quote, "nobody's perfect." It's really amazing how many leaders simply think that problems go away if you ignore them. Here's pro-tip: ***That which you permit you promote.*** Ignoring dysfunction is actually a tacit approval of dysfunction.

The truth of the matter is, organizational dysfunctions are an indicator of a *cultural* dysfunction, which means the



solution needs to address the culture. And *that* is the leader's responsibility. And it all comes down to two main behaviors. First, ***a leader builds and fosters trust.*** Second, ***a leader communicates clearly.***

**That which you
permit, you
promote.**



HEALTHY CULTURE



DISCUSS & REFLECT

Are there other elements of your organizational “culture” that you can identify, especially as it pertains to how you work?

Are there any dysfunctions that are currently being “permitted?” Name them.



WRITE

To help with understanding your particular organization, write down the items that you need to do well in each of the respective columns of “smart” and “healthy.” This will help you identify specific areas of your work, and can help you create a roadmap for how to be better in each.

Smart	Healthy

LESSON 13: HEALTHY CULTURE, part 2

Trust.

Ask any anthropologist, child psychologist, behavioral scientist, neuroscientist, and they will *all* consistently say that trust is the foundation of all human relationships. Read any book on leadership, any study on relationships, or any journal on parenting, and you will see the concept and idea of trust over and over again. It cannot be overstated how important trust is in any human endeavor, and so it should be no surprise that ***trust is the first and most important component of leadership and the fabric of building a healthy culture.***

And just in case you may think that trust is a “soft” skill, one that is more about coddling people’s feelings rather than real work, you couldn’t be more wrong. If you have low trust in an organization, people are hesitant to act and so the organization spends more time and money trying to get things done. Conversely, if you can establish a high-trust, high-confidence culture, the amount of time and money you spend goes down, and your effectiveness goes up. Trust truly does provide bottom line results. And in the next few moments we’ll explore how trust, as an essential to good leadership, is something that you ***earn*** and something that you ***extend***.

In parenting, trust is built by providing for a child’s needs, according to something like Maslow’s hierarchy. In love, trust is built by your ability to truly know, understand, and respond to the other. In organizations, ***trust is a function of the leader’s character and competence, and the leader’s ability to be true and honest about both.***

Character

The idea of character has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, a word and concept that is etymologically tied to a stamp or an engraving. The idea is that a craftsperson or artisan who makes something marks their product as being genuine and is therefore of good quality. That mark, or engraving carries and communicates the reputation of the craftsperson, and the public claim that the product will actually perform what it was designed to perform. It is the congruence between what a person claims and what a person produces, that comprises that person’s character, what we might also call ***integrity***.

For leaders and organizations, this is exactly the definition we are going for. Character is not just about thinking you’re a good person. ***Character is the summation of who you say you are as a leader, congruent with who you actually are,*** how you perform in the real world. And this is important, because a lot of leaders sincerely believe they

**Trust is earned,
and extended.**



are good and that they care. And that may very well be true. But a good leader recognizes, and a healthy organization demands that you recognize that what you believe about yourself alone is insufficient to building trust.

So there are two parts here that are really important. First, what really are your motives? What really is your intent when you behave a certain way? What **claims** are you making, about yourself, of your character? What **principles** do you say you live by? And, what **commitments** have you made and kept, to yourself, your team, and to the organization that you lead? Quite simply, **building trust is about committing to behaving in a way that is congruent with your character claim.** Your reputation, and the trust that people have in you, will naturally follow as you do.

Competence

In short, the question of competence is the truth of your skills and abilities. Trust is built when people can depend upon you to do a good job with quality, diligence, and effectiveness. And, if you're in a position tasked with responsibilities in areas in which you are not competent, trust will decline as people will recognize that you're really not up to the task of doing what needs to get done.

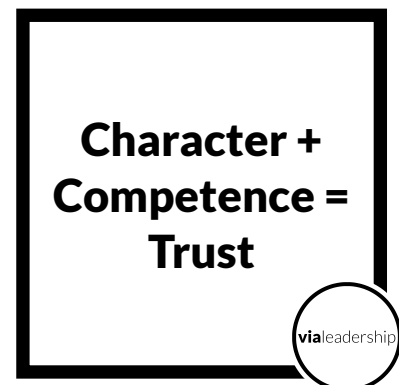
Now, recognize that competence does not mean perfection. Most people are forgiving when it comes to making mistakes, and especially when someone is forthcoming about it, and owns it responsibly. However, persistent inadequacies in performance is an indicator of incompetence, and requires an honest look at what truly are your skill sets.

Character + Competence = Trust

So, trust is a result of leader's character and competence, and as the leader models that kind of culture, and as the rest of the organization persists in emulating those disciplines, trust will be strengthened, and you will find yourself in a healthy organization. It is upon that trust that the rest of the organizational functionality is built; how to have productive conflict, how to keep one another accountable, how to measure results, how to correct mistakes, how to analyze and evaluate systems. All of these, and more, if predicated upon trust, will be highly efficient and low on time and cost, saving you from wasted money and energy. Trust is everything. Build it, foster it, and protect it, at all costs. If you don't, it will cost you.

Your people already know

Now, you may notice that these two aspects of trust are directly connected to two of the three questions every good leader must ask and answer, "What do you want?" and "What are you good at?" I would also remind you that "What are you afraid of" is still quite apropos, as fear has the ability to completely overshadow the work you do on your character and competence. But, notice how the



question of character is tied to your “intent” and “motives,” all derivatives of what you ultimately “want.” And your competency, which can include your “track record” and “reputation,” is a derivative of what you’re actually good at. So, being honest with the three most important questions every good leader must ask is vital to the development, as you can now see, of not just yourself as a good leader, but is directly related to the health of your organization.

So, be honest. If you must, be brutally honest, with yourself, and your team. And if you really want to know, here’s the truth. **Your people are evaluating you anyway.** They’re already thinking about it, and most likely, they’re already gossiping about it. And so, while trust is built by your character and competence, **trust is solidified by your integrity which is built upon your honesty.**

Your organization deserves to be healthy; your work demands it. Be coherent in your evaluation of the character and competence of yourself, and every person in your organization. And recognize you’re not going to be perfect. Just be honest, and grow from there.



HEALTHY CULTURE



WRITE

Actually write down what your character claim is. Then, interrogate your words, actions, and behaviors to see if they support the claim. To be truly honest, ask others to provide feedback on the claim.

Also, identify all personal and public commitments and whether you have kept them.

My character and competency claims: _____

<i>Words, actions, or decisions that <u>support</u> the claim</i>	<i>Words, actions, or decisions that <u>oppose</u> the claim</i>

LESSON 14: HEALTHY CULTURE, part 3

Be clear.

A healthy culture could be described as the absence of politics, silos, and factions, divisions and divisiveness that cause team members to fight *against* one another rather than fight *with* one another for a common cause. The problem is that the framing of health by those negative characteristics can incline a leader to focus on the wrong solution. If a leader begins to use conflict management tools to help workers get along as a way of leading the organization, there is something terribly amiss in the leader's understanding of how to build a healthy culture. Now, there is a place for conflict management in certain circumstances. But again, according to the principle of "lead well, manage less," if conflict management tools become the remedy for an unhealthy culture, leaders will have neglected the most effective tool they have for establishing health, and run the risk of abdicating their responsibility to lead the organization well.

That tool is summed up in one word, "**clarity.**" When it comes to organizational health, confusion, ambiguity, and uncertainty are your enemies. Clarity is your most important and most effective tool at getting your team to align, and if done well, an organization with clear alignment does not need to deploy conflict management in the same way, or with the same frequency.

Now, clarity is a pretty simple concept, but it is admittedly difficult to achieve. There are several reasons for this. The world is inherently uncertain, we are inherently insecure, there are some things that are difficult to actually determine in the course of running an organization, and change happens rapidly. And all of these things combined can make our absolute declarations feel tenuous. Many leaders, faced with this reality, succumb to the ambiguities of life, and do their best to simply problem solve their way through the organization. Ironically, it is because of all these realities that clarity is even more crucial, and is in fact necessary. Clarity is what we are all seeking. And *clarity is why organizations exist*, to give people an anchor for their identity, their work, their purpose, and their value in this world.

So, a healthy organization is built on trust, and is absolutely clear in **why** the organization exists, **what** the organization wants to accomplish and **how** the organization is going to get there. These categories are also known as your **mission**, your **vision**, and your **values**, and your job as a leader is to be crystal clear on all three.



LESSON 15: HEALTHY CULTURE, part 4

Clear Mission: Everyone knows “why.”

Clear Vision: Everyone knows “what.”

Mission

A mission is quite simply the answer to the question, “**Why do you exist?**”

Now, the challenge in answering that question is first, to identify the true reason for your existence, your *raison d'être*. The temptation here is to codify in your founding documents what you *want* your reason to be, or to articulate a reason so lofty and full of jargon that it may sound sophisticated and professional, but it really doesn't mean anything, which is the second challenge. Your mission must be meaningful, to you, and to your constituents, which is admittedly a challenge. How do you clarify meaning, when meaning itself is somewhat ethereal, contingent upon culture and definitions? Now, without getting lost in existential philosophy, there are some ways you can identify a clear and effective mission that is both true to reality, and clear for your people.

First, **just start writing what you think your reason for existence is**. Putting thoughts into words is a powerful tool and exercise that helps to clarify and bring to light what resides in our consciousness. Second, as we've done before, **interrogate what you've written, over and over**. Be as honest as you can, and ask, is this really “the why?” Third, **ensure that it answers the question, “Why?” in a form that is easily received by someone who knows nothing of your organization, and perhaps very little about your industry**. If your mission statement is unclear to someone on the outside, it is unworthy of being on the inside. Fourth, and perhaps most important, after you've gone through various drafts and iterations and different terms that you think encapsulate what you really mean, **Does your mission inspire you?** Does your mission excite you to get to work? Does it give new energy to your focus, and new focus to your energies? Ultimately, does your mission give you and your people purpose? Purpose is the result of a well crafted, and more importantly, well-lived mission. Giving people purpose is the most powerful and effective way to inspire action. And what is critically important, is that the effect of your identified mission, your answer to the question “Why?” will not be limited to the people that you work with. If articulated correctly, and, as we will discuss later, communicated thoroughly throughout your organization, every person on down to the end recipient of your work—be that a customer or a client—will also know and feel the purpose and reason why they are working with you, and

**Give people
purpose.**

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not someone else.

So, *Why do you exist?* Another way to put it is **Why does your work matter?** For what purpose is our energies and the existence of our organization. The health of your organization is dependent upon being clear in your identified mission.

Vision

While the mission is the purpose, the vision is the product. Here are some fundamental characteristics that you should keep in mind thinking through how to identify and clarify your vision.

A vision is the **achievable, tangible, measurable** end result of your work. It is achievable. That is, it is grounded in reality, not fantasy. A vision cannot be lofty or unreasonable. It is tangible. That is, it is a real thing that can be realized in the real world. And because of those two things, it is generally measurable. You can most likely put some numbers on the vision, and depending upon your vision, even a time frame. Now, I say “generally” measurable because a vision is frequently confused with an objective or a goal that an organization wants to reach. And this makes sense because the day-to-day work turns our attentions and focus to the tasks that we have at hand. But the daily work, and even the projects that we are all working towards must still remain the means to the end, and not the end themselves. Do not call a seasonal objective or a project your vision. The most egregious way in which this confusion manifests itself is with the raising of money. A thermometer with dollar amounts on it is not a vision. That’s a fundraising event. And that objective, while an important goal, cannot under any circumstances be your vision.

Now while a vision cannot be lofty or unreasonable, it must be **aspirational**. A vision is something that goes beyond the status quo because, a vision is by definition, to see a reality not yet realized. Perhaps we should say that a vision is **envisioning** a future that has yet to come to pass. And so, it does take some thoughtfulness to ensure that your vision is beyond what currently is, but not outrageously nonsensical.

Perhaps most important, **a vision must be an extension of your mission**. Just like alignment and integrity is important in your leadership, so too is coherence important for your mission and vision. Your “what” must be some expression or realization of your “why.”

Examples

Okay, the mission is the why, the vision is the what. The mission gives you purpose, the vision drives your work. What is most important to both is that both are absolutely clear, and that both are deeply meaningful and informative as part of the culture of your organization. I find that even after explaining all that, it is still conceptually challenging to distinguish between the two. So, to help guide our thinking,



here are a few examples that exemplify these characteristics.

- Purpose/Mission: Connect people to what's important in their lives through friendly, reliable, and low-cost air travel.
- Vision: To be the world's most loved, most efficient, and most profitable airline.

Now, let's run it through the test. The mission is really powerful, to connect people to what's important in their lives. The added bonus is that they list the mechanism by which that happens which is clearly their industry. When you believe your business is to connect people, that is a profoundly important reason and purpose.

The vision is aspirational, meaning, they're not necessarily there, but they have their sights set on getting there. The vision is also achievable. In this case, it is also measurable. You could survey people regarding levels of love. You could audit the operations to find out how efficient they are in comparison to other airlines. And, you can simply run the books to find out how profitable you are in comparison to others. Most important, this is a vision that can be achieved in the real world. You could see a world in which Southwest Airlines owns the majority of the customer satisfaction and positive brand recognition. And, the vision is tied to the mission, for a customer could very easily fall in love with a company that truly cared about connecting them to what was important in their lives.

Next example.

- Mission: Tesla's mission is to accelerate the world's transition to sustainable energy.
- Vision: To create the most compelling car company of the 21st century by driving the world's transition to electric vehicles.

Again, the "why" is compelling and meaningful. Sustainable energy is at the forefront of our current ecological crisis, and I personally know many people who like the Tesla brand and cite their mission as a primary reason. The vision is clearly connected to the mission, is aspirational but achievable, and could very well be measured. In this case, there is even a time frame listed, the 21st century.

Now, regardless of what you may personally think of these two companies, I hope their identity statements help to clarify for you the importance of having a mission, a vision, and the importance in articulating both well.

Once you've identified your "why," and your "what," you must, and I mean *must* take care of your "how." The last element in a healthy organization is being clear on your core values.

HEALTHY CULTURE



WRITE YOUR VISION

Begin writing a draft of your vision. What is it that you want to achieve? What future do you envision?

VISION. To... _____

Now interrogate what you've written and explain how it meets these four criteria:

- Aspirational but Achievable*
- Tangible*
- Measurable*
- Commensurate with Mission*

LESSON 16: HEALTHY CULTURE, part 5

Clear Values: Everyone knows “how.”

The area of confusion for a lot of leaders is that **values are not rules** even though they behave, essentially, in the same way. Follow the rules, and if you don't, there are consequences. Similarly, you're supposed to follow your values, and if you don't, there are consequences. The difference is that rules are there generally to achieve compliance. Values are there because they shape who you are, your identity, as a leader, and as an organization. The consequence to breaking a rule is some form of punishment. The consequence of compromising your values is the degradation of your identity, integrity, reputation, and credibility. And *that* is important, because when you're running an organization, the benefactors of your work, the end recipients of the products or services you provide don't pay attention to how you were compliant with all the rules. But they do pay attention to who you are, and what kind of business you run, and frequently, customers, clients, and constituents will spend more money, and give their business to the organizations that are consistent and true to their values. And so, very much like trust is directly related economically to speed and cost, so are values. **Clarify and live your values well** and ensure that your core values penetrate your organization, and the number of rules you need declines, the cost of doing business declines, and the economic value of your organization increases, which of course means an increase in revenue.

So, what are values, and how do you clarify them?

Values are essentially the fundamental principles to which you are committed.

They are the guiding moral or ethical codes that govern how you behave in everything you do. And, no surprise here, they are commensurate with your mission and your vision. Also no surprise, your values exist, not on paper, but in the life you live in the context of your leadership, and your work. In fact, one of the great tragedies in business is that virtually every organization in the world has some written or stated values that they claim to be their guiding principles. But as you already know, not every organization actually lives by them. Once again, **how you live must match with what you say you value.** The nuance here is that if you really have these values, if they are core to your identity and your work, you don't have to work very hard to live by them, because your values are *that* core and basic to your being. They are, in many ways, second-nature to you. And one of the best ways to test whether or not they are truly core values is when values confront opportunism.

Throughout your leadership career, you are going to be tempted to compromise your values because of an opportunity that comes your way, an opportunity most



**Live your
values.**

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likely in the form of some kind of financial gain or preservation. For business, this can come in the form of a high paying customer, or a shareholder with a lot of capital. For a church or non-profit, it is usually in the form of a donor. The problem with money is that it is a form of power that asserts itself as control, and people use this form of persuasive influence all the time for their own particular selfish gain. And so, organizations will be tempted to take the money, especially if it is a substantive amount, even if it means the money is tied to some agreement, what may appear to the leader to be some seemingly innocuous stipulation. The leader can convince themselves that the obligation really isn't that big of a deal, and then they rationalize how the windfall could do the organization good.

Now if the money is in direct support and perfect alignment with your core values, then there's really no conflict. However, if you find yourself making rationalizations, you're in trouble, because that is the beginning of compromising some value-sets for the sake of the financial gain. And when you do that, then your values are not core, nor are they clear, and you begin to erode the trust you have in yourself, and the trust your people have in your organization. In situations like these, you must understand that **core values always compromise short-term gain for long-term integrity**. In other words, you are not just willing, but *committed* to taking a loss now for the sake of your core values knowing that your values will sustain the success of your organization over the long-haul.

Be clear in your values, in how you operate, in the "way" you do business. And do not compromise those values for opportunistic gain. Be committed to your values by living them. Your leadership, and your organization depends upon it.

Now, in the process of identifying and developing your values, here are five things you need to keep in mind that will guide you along the way.

First, identifying your core values takes time. This will be a process that could take months or even years to hash out. It doesn't mean that you won't have anything written down immediately, but it simply means that you'll need time to identify and solidify your core values. Part of the reason is that values remain consistent throughout various situations and circumstances, and you'll need time to observe that consistency.

Second, and related to the first, audit the past. One way to truncate the future time needed to identify your values is to think through the past several years of your life, or of your organization's life. Do a brief analysis of the most important decisions you've made, and ask yourself, "Why?" Why did you make those decisions in those ways? Most of the times you will find yourself identifying some sort of value. For example, in a business, you may discover that you have a track record of always doing a bit extra for the customer. You may have identified "going above and

**Values are
committed to
long-term
integrity.**

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beyond” as a core value of your customer experience. If you’re a not-for-profit organization, you may have noticed that you consistently attend to the wider problems of your community, and not just the specific issues of which your organization attends. You may have identified “think wider” as a core value.

Third, get past, what I call, the “you must be this tall to ride” values. Those are values such as honesty, respect, and don’t steal. These are not core values. These are minimal entry requirements for being a decent human being. The point of identifying *your* organizational core values is that they are specific to you and how you work. Basic human decency is necessary, but they are not core values.

Fourth, a core value is something that exemplifies the personality of your organization. There are some organizations that care deeply about being polished, and opulent. Other organizations really are about having fun, and being relaxed. And others might value always exceeding expectations. Whatever it is, again, it has to be true to you, and you must be committed to them.

Fifth, don’t have too many. No more than 4-5 core values. More than that, and you simply complicate things for your people. Narrow down your core values to the top 4-5 phrases and ideas that fit the above requirements, and stick to them.

Okay friends. Establish trust through your character, your competence, and your honesty with both. Be clear on why you exist, what you wish to achieve, and how you’re going to get there. Once you’ve done this, you must effectively and persistently communicate these commitments, over and over again!

HEALTHY CULTURE



WRITE YOUR VALUES

What patterns have you noticed in your past behaviors and decisions? What elements of your way of working persistently characterize your “style” or “personality?” Another way to think about values is to think about things you absolutely hate or disdain. On the other side of that is probably a core value that you will not compromise.

VALUE #1: _____

VALUE #2: _____

VALUE #3: _____

VALUE #4: _____

VALUE #5: _____

As before, interrogate what you’ve written, and ask yourself, “would a large sum of money tempt me to compromise these values?” Also, pay attention to your physiology. As with mission and vision, values can evoke deep emotions that affirm your core commitments, the “heartbeat” of who you and your organization are.

LESSON 17: HEALTHY CULTURE, part 6

Communicate. Communicate again. Over, and over. Repeatedly.

It cannot be overstated how frequently leaders and organizations under communicate. After going through exercises like the ones we just did, leaders have a tendency to move on to implementation, as if the mission, vision, and values are all done. Nothing could be further from the truth. Once you have established your mission, vision, and values—what I will call your **core commitments**, or **core identity**—your job as a leader is to communicate those commitments to every corner of your organization. And after you've communicated, communicate again. Communicate these commitments over and over again, repeatedly, continually. By the way, did I mention that your job as a leader is to communicate?

Now, most everyone understands that communication is done with words, through talking, texting, or emails. But a leader, a good leader, understands that communication is far more expansive. A good leader understands that they communicate through every decision they make, every meeting they attend, every meeting they do not attend, and through every interaction, with every staff member, customer, or constituent, even if it is just passing through the hallways. In fact, you've been communicating as a leader this whole time, even if you didn't know it. That last meeting you attended when you checked your email during the more mundane portions of the meeting. You not only communicated what you think of the value of the agenda, you communicated what *your team should think* of the value of their time. The last staff meeting you had where you celebrated someone, or perhaps gave out an award. You not only communicated that we are an organization that honors one another, you communicated to your team *what* we should be honoring. Most important, **every decision you have made is a form of communication** as to what is the direction, the aims, the values, and the priorities of the organization. What we've just described is just a truism; **everything you do communicates**. A good leader, then, recognizes this reality and leverages every moment, every meeting, every decision, and every word when passing another in the hallway as an **opportunity and a responsibility** to communicate what the values are, what the mission is, and what the priorities are at this moment to get us there. Communication is the leader's responsibility. To truly ensure the organization is in alignment around its why, what, and how, leaders must leverage all avenues of communication to reinforce these commitments and to do so repeatedly, over and over again.

There are two main reasons for this redundancy. The first is that your people will know that you and your organization are **serious about your commitments**, only after they hear them being referred to on a regular basis

**Everything you
do
communicates.**



without compromise. The second reason is that various diverse avenues of communication provide a **reinforcing context** that drives home the commitments and makes your core identity truly come alive. If you write in an email that we care deeply about “going above and beyond,” then celebrate an employee who added extra work outside of their stated responsibility for the sake of a customer getting a little additional service, then invite that customer to come and share at your next all-hands-on-deck meeting, and then tie compensation perks to an employee’s customer service record, and in addition, commission your analytics team to run “beyond expectations” scores from your customer base on a regular basis; if you do all that, I guarantee you the data, the memo, and the stories will all reinforce each other, and make “going above and beyond” more real and more central to your people’s work identity in the context of your organization. That diversity solidifies the value, and therefore, the energies and focus of your business.

Here are some additional strategies that will help you communicate your mission, vision, and values to your team.

Simply ask. Ask clarifying interrogatives tied directly to the mission, vision, and values. Ensuring that the context is proper, if someone presents a project or an idea without explicitly stating an alignment with your core identity, simply ask how this proposal is in alignment with the mission, vision, or values. Ask your team to draw the connection. And if they can’t, perhaps you need to decide to move on from the idea.

Solicit feedback, in both formal and informal settings. Encourage your people to explain what the organization’s core commitments mean to them. You will get an understanding as to what aspects need better communication, and you yourself will also gain some insights as to how the core commitments are actually being understood.

Most importantly, **think small.** Never, ever, underestimate the power of a 10 second conversation in the life of your organization. Because you’re the leader, everything you do has impact, down to every last second. Leverage that second. Take advantage of that moment to infuse your organization with another reminder and focus on your core commitments. You are already aware of how big presentations, or long emails and slide decks communicate. Once those have been deployed into the organization, **your people are now watching and observing, and yes even questioning whether or not what you said in the big moments are true in the small.** So, reinforce your core commitments with the small seconds that you have with your team.

Once you have established your mission, vision, and values, your job as a leader is to communicate those commitments to every corner of your organization. And after you’ve communicated, communicate again. Communicate these commitments over and over again, repeatedly, continually, in every small second, in every big celebration, every decision you make; in every moment. By the way, did I mention that your job as a leader is to communicate?

LESSON 18: HEALTHY CULTURE, part 7

BONUS: How to handle criticism.

There is one incredible benefit to having done all the hard work in the previous 17 lessons, a benefit that you will be glad you have for the rest of your leadership career. That benefit is the ability to **handle criticism properly and objectively by transforming someone's criticism of you or your organization into a powerful tool of clarity.** Remember, clarity is the key to a healthy organization. If you can convert the negative energy of criticism into a positive energy of clarity and organizational health, you've got the golden key. Here's how it works. It's really quite simple.

Criticism hurts for one straightforward reason. Criticism feels personal. Our psychologies are especially susceptible to social approval. Regardless of what we say, what people think of us really does matter. We want to be loved and accepted by the people around us, be that our staff members or our customers, and that's a good thing. It's what make us human.

Here's the trick. Apply this one mental shift whenever you receive criticism. As a leader of an organization, **rid yourself of the category of personal**, when it comes to criticism. Rather, **consider all criticism to be an opportunity for assessment. Think about every criticism you receive as merely an evaluation of the organization's core commitments.** Criticism in this view is not an attack. It's a test. It is an opportunity to check, once again, whether or not your mission, vision, and values are true or whether or not you and your organization are *being* true to your why, what, and how. In other words, start to **view criticism as a way to ensure you're actually on the right track.**

If you find yourself reacting personally to the criticism you receive, take a deep breath, and ask yourself the question, "How can I evaluate what this person is saying against the core commitments that I've made?" If the criticism is commensurate with my commitments, meaning that I or the organization is somehow falling short of our stated mission, vision, or values, then the criticism is a welcomed gift, a reminder that we're off track, and now I can begin working to course correct. If however, the criticism is about something that either has nothing to do with our core commitments, or is a distraction from what we're ultimately about, then we can simply ignore it, relegating it to the bin of irrelevancy.

It's kinda that simple.

Leverage all criticism against the core commitments of your organization. Don't receive criticism as a threat. Use criticism as a tool. Then, respond according to your already identified and stated mission, vision, and values.

**Criticism is an
opportunity
for assessment.**

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EFFECTIVE TEAMS

LESSON 19: EFFECTIVE TEAMS, part 1

A group is not a team

The great challenge for organizations when it comes to building effective teams is that the word and concept of “team” and “teamwork” can easily be understood primarily as a virtue, some sort of quality that somehow inspires a group of people to work better together. It is easy to confuse a group of friends or a staff that gets along fairly well as a team. But while those characteristics are important, we need to understand teams in a more precise manner because calling your group a team just by this perspective is really just cheerleading. And so the first thing we must say about building an effective team is that the leadership must recognize that to transform a group into a team the people in the group must commit themselves to three specific disciplines; **a common commitment, a performative challenge, and an attitude of positive interdependence.**

Common Commitment | Understanding

The first, and most important characteristic of a team is a crystal clear understanding of the mission, vision, and values of the organization; the why, what, and how of your work. And so obviously it is imperative that each member of the team understands and is committed to the common understanding of that identity. This should be of no surprise, nor is there any complicated principle here. How to ensure this is the case is the work of leader and is covered in the first two sections of good leadership and healthy cultures. The good news is if you’ve done that work, then you’ve done much of what is needed to foster effective teams.

However, there are two additional tools that you can use to assess and even promote this common commitment to strengthen and maximize the effectiveness of your team. The first is to do a comparative assessment. The second is to do a collective assessment.

The **comparative assessment** is quite simple. Ask each team member to write down very simply what they understand the mission, vision, and values of the organization to be. Now, depending upon how well you have communicated this language, they may simply rearticulate the verbiage that you have developed in your documents or articles of incorporation. And so, you’ll need a follow up question which is just as important which is to ask them to briefly explain what those terms mean to them. You could even ask them give some prime examples of how the mission, vision, and values were exemplified in the organization. Make sure you let your people know *this is not a performance evaluation*, and that their responses are not at all tied to any compensation or review of their employment. You may even want to make this anonymous, depending upon your situation.

Once you have collected their responses, simply compare them across the board to see what kind of alignment you have in your team. This exercise may be quite illuminating for you as a leader in two main ways. First, you may see in this assessment the very language you have been using while you've been communicating about your organization. Congratulations. You're getting through. You'll be encouraged to know that there's a common understanding, and you have a highly engaged team. You'll also come to understand the effectiveness of your communication, and you can use that knowledge to capitalize on that skill. However, you may also notice what is missing, or where there's misalignment. Congratulations. You're understanding better the truth of the status of your team, and knowing where there are gaps is also very valuable information.

This insight should then lead you to either reinforcing what is working well, or directly addressing and fixing the messaging gap using the disciplines we've discussed in previous lessons. The goal, of course, is to get your team to have a commitment to a *common understanding* of the mission, vision, and values.

The **collective assessment** is a group exercise, where team members share with one another together as a team what they understand to be the mission, vision, and values of the organization. Through this exercise, they can elaborate on their perspectives, share examples, and even encourage one another. The group process is valuable because it allows the team members to hear from others the nuances and perspectives of meanings that exist in the terms that are used. This will not only enlighten, but sharpen each team member's views on the mission, vision, and values.

Now, the two most important results of doing this kind of collective assessment is that team members get to, A) form a team bond by **sharing and listening** to each other's perspectives, views, and even personal reflections on the core identity of the organization. And, B) team members get to **contribute** to the collective understanding of the organization's identity and core commitment. I cannot overstate how valuable and important this can be, and how it could change the dynamics of your team. When people know one another, and feel known, and when they get to contribute to the thing that bonds the team together, a person's dedication and devotion grows exponentially. Commitment results when a person feels connected, and a collective assessment is a way to generate that connection to the team members, and the team identity, enhancing and empowering your team to be even more effective.

Now, there is one cautionary note here. Just like you might find gaps in the comparative assessment, you may find misalignment in the collective assessment as well. If the collective discussion is devolving away from the mission, vision, and values, and shifts more to opinions, and criticisms, stop the meeting. You've got more foundational work to do, and the collaborative assessment is not the way to do it.

**Contribution
leads to
commitment.**

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Performative Challenge | Focus

Once a team has a shared understanding and commitment to the core identity of the organization, the next characteristic is to focus on a performative challenge that the team needs to face. **A performative challenge is an objective that the team must reach together by utilizing both individual and collective skills and wisdom.** It is important to note this is not a “team building exercise” where most frequently the activities focus on esoteric and obscure feelings of getting along. Again, the work of effective teams is *not cheerleading*. Rather, this objective and challenge must be *performative*, some sort of action that results in some material or tangible outcome, and of course, it must be commensurate with your mission and vision.

One key word to consider here is the word *focus*, the ability for the performative challenge to channel the energies and activities of the team. A lack of focus, or worse yet a variety of focuses where people say they’re on board with an objective, but are actually working on something else, is detrimental to the objective, and destructive to the team.

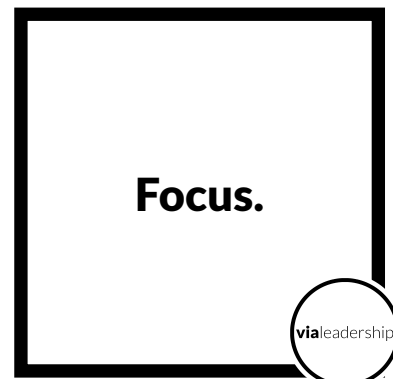
Now, in addition to being performative, the objective must also be a challenge, something that goes beyond what any one individual can do, and even beyond what the group can do unless they pool their resources together. The challenge must be a difficulty or problem that the team must overcome or solve together. The reason for this is because part of what makes a team cohesive is a mutual respect of each other’s capabilities, and a challenge that focuses team members’ energies toward accomplishing something difficult together creates amazing cohesion.

Positive Interdependence | Reciprocity

Once you have a common commitment and a performative challenge, you need to foster a positive interdependence, the sense that each member is mutually responsible to and for each other. This is the kind of team where no one shines without illuminating each other. This is the kind of team characterized by a collective confidence in one another’s abilities and capabilities.

A trait of positive interdependence is **reciprocity**, the idea that team members exemplify a willingness to **give and receive both cooperation and responsibility**. You might call this a mutuality between team members, and in simple terms it is fundamentally the idea that **we need each other** in this work.

The interesting thing about reciprocity is that it is both a discipline and a result and can therefore grow in its power and effectiveness the more you practice this discipline. Remember how trust is the outcome of both character and competence in our previous lesson? Well, the truth is that **trust is also something that you give** to someone else when you are a part of a team. When you, as a leader, trust



another person with a particular responsibility, the attentiveness of that person increases, the care they have for their work becomes more focused, and therefore the quality of their work goes up. That result is a product of our psychologies, where we seek to live up to the expectations of others, especially those in authority. And what happens in return? Your people begin to trust you even more, and they begin to extend that same trust to their team members. This is the power of reciprocity in building a positive interdependence, again, the giving and receiving of both cooperation and responsibility. This kind of team fosters trust, humility, and high levels of commitment.

Commit to a common understanding of the mission, vision, and values, tackle performative challenges with focus, and foster positive interdependence through reciprocity. Where all this happens is in your meetings. And so to have effective teams, you must have effective meetings.

EFFECTIVE TEAMS



COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT

Ask your team individually to respond. Reassure your people this is not an assessment. Collect and compare their responses.

What do you understand our mission, vision, and values to be?

What do those statements mean to you?

What examples can you point to in your work, or in the team's work that exemplify those core commitments?

EFFECTIVE TEAMS



COLLECTIVE ASSESSMENT

As you gather your team to do a collective assessment, remember, the goal is not to get things right. The goal is for everyone, including yourself, to listen, and listen well to one another, so that your understanding is sharpened. The other goal for you, as a leader, is to ensure that your people feel as if they have contributed to the ultimate purpose and vision of the organization. That contribution will lead to higher levels of commitment. Last, remember to stop the meeting if the sharing devolves away from perspectives towards opinions and criticism. If that happens, you've got more fundamental work to do in creating a healthy culture. Return to those previous lessons, and work diligently on those essentials.

What do you understand our mission, vision, and values to be?

What do those statements mean to you?

What examples can you point to in your work, or in the team's work that exemplify those core commitments?

EFFECTIVE TEAMS



PERFORMATIVE CHALLENGE

A performative challenge must be beyond what the individual or group could do without working together. The objective must be commensurate with your mission, vision, and values, and also must be tangible, and achievable. You will have more than one, they will change over time, and they will generally be subsets of a larger objective that is part of your vision. Most important is that the performative challenge coheres the team; brings them together in a mutual and positive interdependence.

Performative Challenge #1: _____

Performative Challenge #2: _____

Performative Challenge #3: _____

Performative Challenge #4: _____

LESSON 20: EFFECTIVE TEAMS, part 2

Effective meetings make effective teams

It is astonishing how meetings have the reputation of being drudgery, boring, or worse yet, a waste of time. Meetings should be the place where everything happens; where ideas get hashed out, confusions get clarified, distractions get refocused, and changes and developments are worked out. Most importantly, meetings are where your mission, vision, and values get communicated and instantiated. Far from being boring, meetings should have the reputation in your organization for being exciting, engaging, and productive. In fact, ***you can assess the health of your culture and the effectiveness of your teams simply by analyzing the quality of your meetings.*** And likewise, you can make this same assessment by measuring the satisfaction, excitement, and engagement levels of your people when it comes to meetings. Attending to making your meetings effective is critical for building and sustaining effective teams.

We should say briefly, that a meeting is any interaction between two or more members of a team. In other words, the gathering in a conference room is absolutely a meeting, but so are the impromptu unplanned conversations between you and a staff person or volunteer. Those are also meetings, and the process by which you make conference room meetings effective can also apply to small group improvised meetings as well.

Okay, with that said, here are the five questions you need to ask and answer before and during every meeting that will ensure your meetings are effective.

Question 1: Why meet?

It is actually astonishing how many meetings are called for the simple reason “we need to have a meeting.” If that is truly the reason for calling a meeting, and that persists in being the underlying purpose of the meetings in your organization, your team will grow cynical and tired, and the seeds for selfish dysfunction will begin to set in. The key principle here is ***don't waste anyone's time.*** Wasted time on purposeless activities degrades your credibility, and will foster mistrust in the organization by communicating that “busy work” is a value.

Now, the reason for a meeting doesn't always have to be grandiose, such as debating a key decision, or the coordination of an IPO. The reason could be as simple as “touching base,” or “reconnecting.” Those are valid and important reasons. The point is simply that you consciously know the reason, and you use that reason to govern the



agenda, how much time you spend in the meeting, and what participants get out of the time they did spend. Even if it is a brief “reconnecting” meeting, the end result could very well be that they feel more connected to the leadership of the organization, and therefore more committed to the organization’s core commitments. That is a worthwhile outcome. Again, the point is that you have to have first asked and addressed *why* you are having the meeting.

So, first identify the purpose of the meeting, and—no surprise—the purpose of the meeting must be commensurate with your core commitments.

Question 2: Is this meeting mission-, vision-, or values-informed?

Now, this of course does not mean that you are meeting *on* your mission, vision, or values at every meeting. To say the meeting is mission-, vision-, or values- “*informed*” is to simply say that the subject or topic of the meeting must be connected in some way to your core commitments. In other words, there is a good sense by you and the team, that what we discuss in this meeting will shape and form the expression or development of our mission, our vision, or our values. As you meet about project updates, product launches, industry news updates, structural changes, and even budget reviews, communicate, even if very briefly, how this meeting is connected to your core commitments.

One way to do this is an “**As you know...**” statement. Let’s say you’re meeting on the budget, and you’re going over the numbers. At the beginning, you can simply set the tone and direction of the meeting by saying, “As you know, we set out on this project for the express purpose of achieving [our vision] and so, as we discuss these numbers, let us keep in mind how we can navigate the budget towards that end.” Another way to do this is through **an interrogative**, and allow your team to remind each other of the importance of the agenda item. For example, let’s say you’re meeting around some tragic news in the industry that affects your work. You could, after some discussion, simply ask, “Okay, now that we have a decent update on the news, does this help us understand why our particular values are so important?” Or, “Does this news change anything about how we go about our vision?”

These are just two very brief examples of hundreds of possibilities how you can ensure that your meetings are mission-, vision-, or values-informed.

Question 3: Have I planned well?

There’s really only one word that can make or break a meeting, and that is the word “planning.” The degree to which the leader plans for the meeting is directly correlated with how well the meeting will go, and how well meetings go is directly correlated with how your team functions and the culture you foster.

Planning involves you, the leader, thinking through and processing some scaffolding around the fundamental questions of “why,” “what,” and “how” of your meeting. We just covered the “why,” which are the first two questions we just asked of the reason

of the meeting, and the connection the meeting has with the core commitments of the organization. The “what” is the agenda. Very simply, identify the **key issues** that need to be discussed, and—very importantly—the **key questions** that need to be answered. **Meetings are where clarity happens**, and so ensure that you’ve prepared or collected the questions or confusions that need to be directly addressed. The “how” of the meeting could be understood as the tone of the meeting, and the process by which decisions are made. Tone is actually very important in how people feel and engage with the culture of the organization. A team that is light-hearted, encouraging, and inspiring yields different results than a team that is high-pressure, competitive, and intolerant. All of those elements are part of the culture of the organization, and how a meeting is run establishes that culture in the team.

This kind of planning may take some time, but the payoff is tremendous, and before you know it, your people will not only appreciate, but come to anticipate meetings with enthusiasm, engagement, and excitement. And that energy can be channeled towards great results.

Question 4: Who needs to be there?

When building an organization, the principle to follow is “first who, then what.” When calling a meeting, the principle is “first what, then who.” Good leaders recognize that there are different levels of engagement in an organization and not every meeting is an “all-hands-on-deck” meeting. Once you’ve planned and determined the agenda, you then need to decide who needs to be there. First, ensure that the principal parties are present. The absence of critical people is inefficient. You’ll find yourself having to play catch up. Second, consider the possible benefits of expanding your circles of inclusion. Depending upon your aims or goals for the meeting and for individual people in your organization, there may be a strategic payoff to inviting non-principal parties to your meeting as it can exemplify transparency and vulnerability, make post-meeting communication efforts far more efficient, and provide leadership development possibilities for gifted team members, expanding and raising the quality of leadership in your organization. This is by all means not a requirement. You simply need to understand this possibility, and the potential it has for your organization.

Question 5: On what do we need to be clear?

Most important, never, ever end a meeting without stating clearly **what was decided** and **who is now responsible** for what. It is frustrating how many meetings end after hours, only to require an additional meeting to clarify the ambiguity of what was decided and who was going to accomplish what. Meetings, by their nature, are full of discussion, debate, arguments pro and con, and a variety of other sharing and reflections. This is an incredibly important process for your organization. It helps deepen the team’s understanding of the challenges, and allows

**Meetings are
where clarity
happens.**

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people to contribute to the life of the mission and vision. The downside is that if not clarified at the end, team members will leave with uncertainty, wondering what was actually decided, and who was going to do what.

So, before adjourning any meeting, ask yourself, and the team, these two questions:
What did we actually decide? Who is now responsible for what?

Pro-tip: As you get more seasoned in deploying these questions you'll quickly learn to ask them sooner in the meeting. Oftentimes, these questions, as simple as they are, elicit further discussion because clarity in one direction can lead to questions that arise in what that decision implies for various aspects of the organization, which means, further clarity is needed. Remember, ***meetings are where clarity happens***. So, ***discipline yourself with a fierce commitment to clarifying what decisions are made and who is responsible***.

**What did we
decide? Who is
responsible?**

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EFFECTIVE TEAMS



MEETING CHECKLIST

Why meet?

How is (or will) this meeting (be) mission-, vision-, or values-informed?

Have I planned (the agenda) well?

Key issue(s): _____

Key question(s): _____

How do I want the meeting to go?

Who needs to be there? Ought I expand the circle?

What needs to be clarified?

What did we decide? _____

Who is responsible for what? _____

GREAT RESULTS



LESSON 21: GREAT RESULTS, part 1

What problem are you trying to solve?

Results are the prize for your work. Results are what make work worth it, and whether we are building more water water wells, connecting people, or growing financially, all of us are pursuing **ROI, the “results of investment.”** To achieve great results, however, we must first recognize this truth, that ***all organizations exist to be a solution to a problem.*** Therefore, you cannot achieve great results, indeed, you don’t even know what kind of results you’re aiming for if you have not first identified the problem for which you and your organization are attempting to be a solution. So, think through and identify *the problem* for which your organization is a *solution*. As you consider this keep in mind these two absolute necessities.

First, ***the problem cannot be a fabricated problem.*** You cannot simply just make up or even contrive a problem out of your imagination. The problem you identify must be a real, tangible problem of the people you serve. Perhaps most importantly, the skill that we need to get to that understanding is called **“empathy.”** Part of the discipline of identifying the right problem is that it forces you to open your eyes to the real world around you, or at the very least to your circles of influence. And if you do that well, if you truly do pay attention and are able to articulate the problem in a way that makes sense to your organization and the people that you serve, you will be able to make a connection that is of tremendous value, and it will sustain and infuse your organization with energy and purpose and a drive to achieve great results. So, first empathize with the people you serve to identify the true problem.

Second, ***let that true problem be the architect for your organization’s operations.*** There is a delicate balancing act in organizations between the necessary legal and financial administration of the organization, and the actual mission of the organization. This dual reality creates a constant fight for your attention. The discipline here is to persistently keep the problem/solution aspect that we just talked about in the driver’s seat of your organization’s energies. One key way to do this is another interrogative: ***Can I draw a direct line of influence from the administrative operations to the organization’s core commitments, and are the core commitments, directly related to the true problem of our organization’s constituents?***

This program that I’ve developed—The Essentials—is my solution to a problem. What is that problem? Bad, ignorant, or insufficient leadership and dysfunctional organizations. This problem has been identified through my personal experience, but also through listening intently to my friends and colleagues who have shared with me their headaches, disappointments, and pain in their work.

**Your
organization is
a solution to a
problem.**



Though they believed in the mission and vision of the organization, they spent so much of their time, energy, and effort, just fighting to stay sane, cleaning up the messes of their leaders, or sometimes just trying to keep out of the way, and stay employed. It has been through listening to these lamentations over the years that I've tried to build my brand, my products, and my services around solutions that will meet those very needs, and I've try not to spend too much time on the minutiae of things that don't ultimately matter to my constituents' problems. Accordingly, the results that I am aiming for are bad leaders becoming good leaders, or at least better leaders than they were before, and dysfunctional organizations becoming healthier and more effective.

Now, there are certain legal and administrative requirements needed. I need to register my business with the IRS and the state. I need to setup payment accounts, and websites, and communication avenues. I need to think through my marketing, and branding. But the key question for me in the development of this program has been, *Are the energies I'm pouring into this directly related to the end results I want to see, which is to solve the problems of bad leadership and dysfunctional organizations?* That question has led me to simplify and clarify various aspects of how I administrate, for the express purpose of making this content more easily accessible to leaders like you. Over time, I will revisit how I work with attention paid directly to the problem I'm trying to solve, and how I can be a better solution for that problem.

Great results are the outcome of first empathizing with people to identify real problems for which your organization can be the solution. Great results become realized when you begin to construct the operations of your organization around the solution you are attempting to be for your constituents. Once you posture your leadership and your team around this focus, knowing how great your results are comes from one activity. Measure.

**Great results
are the
outcome of
empathy.**



GREAT RESULTS



ROI: RESULTS OF INVESTMENT

Empathize. What is the problem that ails the people you are serving with your organization?

State specifically, in clear and tangible terms, how your organization is the solution to that problem.

Identify various operational or administrative activities of your organization. How are they directly tied to the results you want to achieve?

(finances/budget): _____

(compliance): _____

(marketing): _____

(office administration): _____

LESSON 22: GREAT RESULTS, part 2

Measure.

When it comes to great results, start counting. Now, some may not like the idea of using metrics in their work because they can simply sense or feel their way through whether or not their mission is being accomplished. I would encourage you to consider that **there's really only two options, knowing your results and thinking you know your results.** The first is called measured, the second is called ignorance.

Now while this principle seems pretty straightforward, there are several nuances that leaders need to know and deploy when using numbers to guide your understanding of your organization. First, measure everything important. Second, measure the inverse. Third measurements are not the same thing as meaning.

Measure everything important.

The key principle here is not to waste your time on metrics that are not directly related to the results that you want. Just as we've discussed repeatedly throughout this program, you must ensure you are taking measurements that are directly related to your core commitments. Don't measure things that are good, simply because it makes you feel better about your organization. Measure things that are commensurate with your mission, the vision, and the problem for which you are attempting to be the solution.

Measure the inverse.

The principle here is that you should not just measure what you have achieved, but also measure what you haven't achieved. Don't just measure what is, but what is not. If you've measured what percentage growth you had this year, measure also what percentage of growth you missed, or didn't achieve, but could have. If you measured how many people attended an event, measure also how many people did not attend. Because this sounds counterintuitive, let's flesh out the philosophy a bit more, why this is important, and how to go about it.

There is a popular line attributed to Mark Twain that states, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." This quip is identifying the delusion that we are all susceptible to when we see numbers that support what we have already decided to be right, and true, and good. Statistics have a way of providing evidence and verifying what we already believe. This is called "**confirmation bias,**" and it is the tendency to interpret evidence through a lens of affirmation. In other words, statistics can make us feel good about our work. This is the reason why you get year-end reports printed on thick, glossy paper, with big numbers on them in full color. It is fundamentally a story that we are telling about our success and achievements.

Measuring the inverse is a way of ensuring that we do not delude ourselves into feeling great about our results at the cost of actually achieving great results. When we say “measure the inverse,” it is to call our conscious attention not just to what is, but also to what could be or could have been. And, it is to use that insight to better our organization, and improve the service we provide to our people.

Let’s say you’re in the education business, and you begin measuring test scores. From one year to the next you see that test scores have improved 13% over all. Now, first, celebrate that you’re making gains, and the fact that something you’re doing is working. This principle of “measuring the inverse” is not opposed to honoring the good work you do. With a focus on achieving great results, it is simply to ask the question, *What percentage gains did we NOT achieve?* In other words, could it have been possible to gain an additional 3%, and what was it that prevented us from getting there?

If you’re measuring sales growth, measuring the inverse might mean asking what additional growth was not achieved, and why. If you’re in public health, and you see a decline in the spread of disease, measuring the inverse might mean asking why that decline wasn’t more rapid.

Now, what is absolutely critical about this principle is that measuring the inverse is not about shaming or blaming you or your performance. **Measuring the inverse is an analytical tool** you use, and it will help you to accomplish two things. First, it helps you to understand why and how you got the results you got. Not understanding how or why you achieved is a significant delinquency in leadership. It is very difficult to get better results if you don’t know where to pour your time and energies, and knowing precisely what efforts caused your results is really important for understanding where to put more time and energy.

Second, measuring the inverse as an analytical tool is about **imagination**. It is to open the possibilities of your thinking in accordance with the result that you want to achieve. If you measure the inverse as a performance review, you’re missing the point. Measuring the inverse is simply to partner the celebration of the gains you’ve made with a critical analysis of those results to provide you with the information and insight needed to make tweaks or improvements that could make your results even greater. Understanding measuring the inverse in this way provides you with a powerfully creative, imaginative process by which you can maximize the results you get in your organization.

Measure everything important. Measure the inverse. Last contextualize.

Make the measurements meaningful.

Measurements are not the same thing as meaning. When it comes to dollars, product sales, and customer satisfaction

**Measuring the
inverse is
about
imagination.**



numbers, these are all measurements that, when they go up, the general feeling is good. But it is not uncommon for good numbers to be both welcomed and disagreeable at the same time. The reason for this dissonance is simple. **Measurements are not meaningful without a proper context**, and when it comes to healthy organizations, **meaning is far more important than measurements**. Your core commitments include a mission, a purpose, a reason for existence. And if your numbers are not directly related to that mission, or if they cannot be reasonably contextualized as commensurate with that mission, the numbers, by themselves, will devalue the power of your mission, and it will slowly degrade the health and focus of your organization. Measurement is a way of **assessing the effectiveness of your organization**. They are *not the reason* for your organization's existence. Confuse the two, and your organization is on the decline. **Discipline yourself to contextualizing measurement within the context of your organization's mission and purpose**, and you've got a solid foundation for a healthy organization.

Your job as a leader is to make sure you measure what is important, measure its inverse to provide insight, and contextualize those measurements against your mission and stated goals to provide perspective and meaning.

GREAT RESULTS



MEASURE

What are the most important results of your organization, commensurate with your mission, that you need to measure? What is that measurement's inverse?

RESULTS TO MEASURE	INVERSE MEASUREMENTS

What context do I need to provide that makes these measurements meaningful?

LESSON 23: GREAT RESULTS, part 3

BONUS: Your results are your brand.

Many leaders, especially when first starting out, get really excited about the aesthetic brand of the organization. And this is understandable. The look, the feel, the logo, the colors, the website; these are all things that give the appearance of a really well run organization, and they offer an air of professionalism and excitement, especially for burgeoning entrepreneurs.

But ***your logo is not your brand***. Your logo is your icon, and your icon is simply the visual representation of your brand. Do not confuse the two. ***Your brand is your reputation***, the thing that people sense, feel, and remember about their interaction with you as a company, or an organization. And, ***your reputation is the summation of your results***.

With that understanding, the more you attend to your results—the solution you are providing for the people you serve—the greater the strength of your brand identity. In many ways, the aesthetic of your logo, your name, and the colors on your website are virtually irrelevant. Psychologically, those elements will simply take on the meaning and experience structures of what people felt when they encountered your services.

Now, yes, it is true, that a rebranding often means a change of logo, colors, fonts, and style, But a true rebranding is an attention to the results of your organization, the services and solutions you provide for your constituents. Attend well to the relationship you have with your constituents by attending well to your results and you will maximize every dollar you spend on marketing and advertising.

In other words, your results are your brand.

**Your brand is
your
reputation.**

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BETTER WORLD

LESSON 24: BETTER WORLD, part 1

The moral imperative.

We have now come to the last portion of our time together in this program on the essentials of leadership and organizational health. And this is, in my opinion the most important section we will cover.

To state clearly, all of the work we have developed to this point, all of the principles of leadership we have discussed, and all of the disciplines of organizational health we have covered has been brought together in *this* program for the express purpose of helping leaders and organizations become more healthy and effective so that **together we can create a better world**. While we have discussed the fundamental principles and essentials of the behavioral science of leadership and the group psychologies of organizational health, those disciplines alone are insufficient if we do not have a moral imperative that informs our work.

You already know the countless examples of people who deploy these very same principles for nefarious and destructive means. And it could be fairly argued that dictators, authoritarians, and corrupt corporate executives are really good leaders, who have a clear mission and vision, who build really effective teams, and who get great results. Evaluated simply on their ability to deploy these techniques, we could give these leaders high marks (?) because the disciplines of leadership are universally true and universally applicable. However, it is the quality of the moral imperative that distinguishes whether or not that leadership yields a better world or a worse world, and it is my conviction that leveraging our work to make the world a better place is the right thing to do. And so, regardless of whether or not you consider yourself a spiritual or religious person, you must have a moral imperative, the most important characteristic of good leadership that should pervade your very being and thus, everything you ever do.

It is my conviction that a moral imperative leads us to create a kind of world in which every human thrives, every person belongs and is respected, where beautiful creativity inspires and moves us, and each generation has the liberty to discover these virtues afresh and anew. A moral imperative leads us to **universal human rights** of freedom and dignity, *and* to **universal responsibilities**, to care for one another, to steward well our planet and ecologies, and to sustain our world for the generations to come. A moral imperative relishes the present joys and preserves future possibilities. A moral imperative is the ultimate, universal mission to which every single person on the face of the planet is called.

**Your brand is
your
reputation.**



This moral imperative is not something you achieve. It is something you believe in. It is something to which you commit. This moral imperative grounds your personhood, and connects you to a purpose that is larger than yourself, a dynamic and awe-inspiring sense of transcendence. Perhaps most importantly, this moral imperative inspires us beyond our own perceptions of our abilities and capabilities. This moral imperative compels us to believe that we truly can transform this world and cause a metamorphosis that brings the highest sense of human flourishing possible.

This kind of moral imperative understands that **life is a gift**, and to experience the fullness of this life means to engage in work that is infused with the most powerful of purposes, of caring for our fellow human beings, valuing our mutual connectedness, and believing that together **we can overcome the chaos** and depravities that come our way. This, my friends, is leadership at its best. This is what organizations are for. This is why we discipline ourselves. This is what makes the hard work worth it.

I commend to you this moral imperative: **Discipline yourself into becoming the very best leader you can be so that you and your organization can help create a better world.** And the most powerful way to shape that world is to tell better stories than your competitors or critics.



LESSON 25: BETTER WORLD, part 2

Good leadership tells better stories.

Humans are storytellers. This is not only true in the fables we share at bedtime, but in the structures, governments, and systems by which we live. Democracy, dollars, and design are all stories that we tell ourselves that make the world in which we live functional. And those stories provide the scaffolding upon which we build our lives.

As for products and services, whenever we tell someone about a brand that we like, we are telling them a story about a company, and what they did for me, and how it made my life better. That story then compels another person to consider how they can be a part of that story too. When we write an online review, we don't just simply recount objective happenings, we tell a story of what this product did or did not accomplish—and why—and what this product tells us about what kind of company produced it. And, whenever you engage in marketing or advertising, you're telling a story about who you are, why you exist, what journey you're on, and what your company or organization does to make lives better and more enriched.

What does this mean for leadership and organizational health? ***Really good leaders who truly desire to make the world a better place ultimately tell better stories than competitors and complainers.*** It is not that you have a better product, and it is definitely not about you having a better budget. It is ultimately about you having a better story. It is about you crafting a narrative, a drama, a sketch of reality that is compelling, exciting, and meaningful. Most important, it is a story of which others can imagine themselves playing a part. And it is this ***invitational inclusivity*** that makes storytelling so powerful. Stories allow all sorts of people to see themselves as main players, actors, or characters in the drama that has been depicted. The best stories are ones in which you illustrate how your people are the heroes of the story, and once we're engaged at that level, we feel compelled to live that story out to its final or full resolution.

Believe it or not, everything that we have discussed in this program has been one big exercise in storytelling. All of the lessons about what you want, what you're afraid of, why you exist, positive interdependence, and even planning for meetings have been aspects of storytelling. The drama is that the world will decline and degrade if we don't get our leadership act together. The heroes are you and your people. The struggle is to overcome the dysfunctions and insecurities of our humanity. This program is your guide, helper, or sage that comes alongside you, to cheer you on and encourage you with wisdom and insight. And the resolution—the *denouement*—are the results that you get, the vision you

**Invitational
inclusivity.**



realize, and the mission achieved.

The alternative stories frequently told in business are honestly underwhelming and lame. Business exist to make money, and beat out competitors. CEOs are more valuable than employees as exemplified in pay structures. The natural world is a resource that is there to be extracted for all its worth. And we, workers and leaders, are heroes of our own fate and success, self-made, and self-accomplished. Honestly, these stories and derivations like it are false, juvenile, and derelict.

You, my friends, have a moral imperative and responsibility to embrace the lifelong practice of telling and retelling the most powerful and compelling stories we can, about ourselves and our lives, so as to invite others to participate in building a better world. We must recognize that storytelling is a critical skill and discipline of good leadership, the shaping of healthy cultures, the building and development of effective teams, and the way we know we're getting great results. Most importantly, we must pay close attention to the stories we tell for **not only do we shape our stories, but our stories shape us**. We will live by the stories we tell. We lead, by the stories we tell. Be intentional, disciplined, and persistent in telling a better story that is commensurate with your moral imperative, and your exemplification of hope to make the world a better place.

Here are three fundamental principles of leading by storytelling that you should keep in mind.

Stories are personal

Many non-profit organizations are well-versed at this, but this principle is true across all organizations. Whenever you talk about your work, avoid abstract concepts, theoretical ideas, superlatives, grandiosity, and yes, statistics. Rather, bear witness to how your organization meets the needs of real people, with real names, and real problems to which your work was a real solution. Don't just give reports, share testimonies. And as you do, you, as a leader connect with those people, always reminding yourself to keeping the stories you tell deeply personal.

Stories are visional & hopeful

That is, stories are always **future-oriented**, and **imaginative**. Even with testimonies, you share those events of the past because they are the model for what you want to achieve in the future. All that work you did on **your mission and vision form the essential story** you are telling to yourself and your constituents. And it is a story that is designed to drive your organization *forward*, and to dream about what could come about. This is why communicating your mission and vision persistently and consistently is so important. And this is why you contextualize criticism appropriately, for critics are simply telling a less compelling and even negative and

**We shape our
stories, and our
stories shape
us.**



backwards story. Your story is visionary, imaginative, and hopeful.

Stories are invitational

As you tell stories that inspire imagination about the future, ensure that it is told in such a way as to invite others to contribute. You can even state directly, *“Here’s how you can help us accomplish this goal.”* There are many ways to create an invitational culture, and storytelling is perhaps the most effective. As you do, be open and prepared to receive responses to your story so you can capitalize on the energy and excitement people bring to your team and organization. And as they join your efforts, you will have additional personal stories to tell, and the story engine will grow, and so will your organization, your vision, and your results.

Tell better stories. Ground your stories in a moral imperative, and an exemplified hope. Be prepared to welcome new people from that invitation. And make this world a better place.

**Your mission
and vision form
your essential
story.**



LESSON 26: BETTER WORLD, part 3

Hope exemplified.

The word “hope” is like the word “love” deeply meaningful, but profoundly misused. In American English, the word “hope” is most commonly used to describe a feeling that we have about the future, such as when we say, “I’m hopeful.” When we say that, what we’re really saying is that we “feel good” about what is to come. This definition of hope is one of optimism, cheerfulness, and positivity. We might call this definition of “hope” a “Hallmark” definition; sanguine, or promising. But there is another definition of hope that is far more profound, what we might call a *classical* definition of hope.

Hope in the classical sense has nothing to do with how you *feel* about the future. **Hope in the classical sense is the attitude, the posture, and the drive that you deploy to create the future. Hope is the discipline of transformational work that you leverage when things are chaotic, corrupt, or unjust. Hope is the strategy you deploy to transform dysfunction into order.** Hope in this definition is not fatalistic, nor delusional. Hope in this classical sense is **determined** and **disciplined** to look confusion and disorder in the face to say “*You will not win.*”

It is my conviction, that leadership is hope exemplified. The great delusion of many leaders is that they become leaders so they can feel as if they’ve achieved something. Too many leaders live out of a contemporary definition of hope, as exemplified in statements such as, “I hope to make it big,” or “I hope we beat out the competition.” The classical definition of hope would call us to realize that we become leaders, not because we get to achieve, but because we have a commission on our lives to transform some existing chaos into something meaningful, purposeful, ordered, and good. In fact, this is the very reason why we need leaders like yourself, because this world is full of dysfunction, corruption, inequity, and suffering, and leadership is the human behavior we use to transform it into something better. And that is why I say that leadership is hope exemplified. Leadership is not about feeling good about the future. **Leadership is about doing something to shape and manually determine the future.** Leadership is about deploying every skill and discipline in our toolkit to quite literally alter reality in accordance with our moral imperative. And it is to this calling, to this hope, that you are being commissioned as a leader.

Be a leader of hope

May I commend to you, my friends, that you really are the solution the world has been waiting for. You are the answer to the dilemma facing our fellow human beings. You and the organization you lead are desperately needed to **be the hope**, the engine that drives change. Do not let this

**Hope is
determined
and disciplined.**



moment pass without giving it your all. Don't waste another moment on dysfunction, primal fears, miscommunication, and confusion. Become the best leader you can be. Lead your organization to the greatest health it can have. Pursue your mission and vision while being deeply rooted in your values in accordance with your moral imperative. And deploy your work and your organization for the greatest purpose you could ever achieve, and that is to make this world a better place.



CONCLUSION

Thank you.

I am so humbled and honored that you took the time to journey with me through these lessons and I sincerely hope you feel empowered and equipped to be the very best kind of leader that you can be, for yourself, your organization, and for the world. It was the aim of this program to provide you with a foundation upon which you can now build your organization. **These essentials will go with you for the rest of your leadership career**, and I encourage you to refer to these principles and disciplines on a regular basis to remind yourself of what you already know, and to discover nuances and new applications for new contexts.

I would also be honored to assist you more personally if that would be of help to you. Simply visit my website, www.vialead.center, or email me at kevin@vialead.center, and I'll look forward to working with you one day.

Most of all, thank you. Truly, thank you.

Thank you for being a leader who cares. Thank you for being humble enough to learn and grow. Thank you for deploying your life and abilities for the betterment of this world. As I mentioned in the introductory video, we truly are facing some of the most critical and urgent challenges of our time from socio-political divisions and hostilities to our current and rapidly worsening ecological crisis of climate change. The fact that you took the time to become the very best you can be in your humanity and in your leadership inspires me.

As you lead your organization to a purpose far greater than mere existence or profit, may you be astonished and inspired at how much you can accomplish in contributing to a **better world** with the **results** you get in partnership with your **effective team** as you live out a **healthy culture** forged and guarded by your **good leadership**.

Now, let's go change the world.



Kevin Neuner
M.B.A. Leadership & Organizational Health
Founder, VIA Leadership Center

**Thank you.
Truly, thank
you.**

