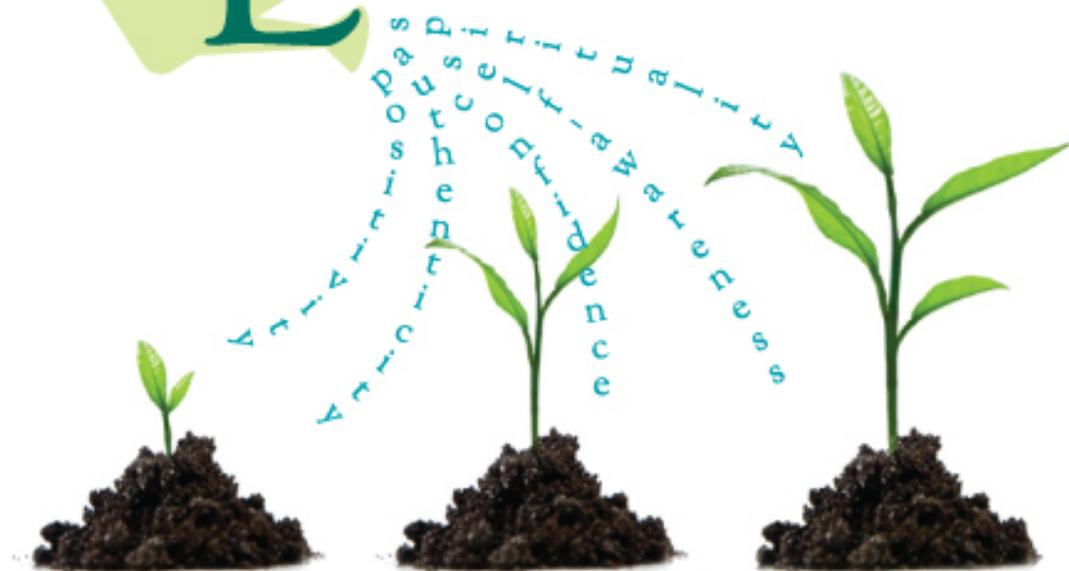


THE CONSUMMATE LEADER



a holistic guide to
inspiring growth in others
... and in yourself

PATRICIA THOMPSON, PhD

"The Consummate Leader is an uplifting book about the person behind the leader. With a healthy balance of examples, evidence, and exercises, Patricia Thompson guides us toward greater authenticity and self-awareness."

—ADAM GRANT

Wharton professor and bestselling author of *Give and Take*

consummate

adjective | 'kənsəmət |

Carried to the utmost extent or degree; of the highest quality; complete; perfect; showing a high degree of skill and flair.

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FOREWORD

In the aftermath of the dot-com crash, I found myself at a crossroads. I was a failed entrepreneur whose dreams of wealth and fame had evaporated along with the NASDAQ; I was also a young father who was worried that my lack of financial success had let down my wife and kids. Worst of all, I wasn't sure who I was. I had been proud, even arrogant, when looking back over what seemed like an unbroken string of academic and professional success. I measured myself based on my bank account, news articles, and awards. Now, I wasn't sure what to think.

Fortunately, for my happiness and my career, it was then that I discovered the teachings of positive psychology. As I read the works of pioneers like Martin Seligman and Edward Deci, I discovered that other people had researched my pathologies and challenges and had found authentic, proven ways to be happier and more productive.

By applying the principles of positive psychology to my own life, I became a better husband, father, and businessman. Not only did my life become happier and more meaningful, I also became more "successful" in the eyes of the world after starting several more companies and helping dozens of my fellow entrepreneurs as an investor and advisor.

When other people asked me to share the secrets that brought me success and happiness, I would provide them with a long reading list of essential works like Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow* and Carol Dweck's *Mindset*. I even prepared a 43-slide presentation that laid out the lessons I'd learned. But what I really wanted was a single book that would encapsulate the principles that had so improved my life, specifically aimed at a market of business professionals.

Selfishly, I had hoped to write that book myself someday. But when Patricia shared *The Consummate Leader* with me, I realized that she had already written it – and had done a far better job of conveying the key ideas than I could have done.

With wisdom, humor, and grace, Patricia has written a book that should be an essential part of any leader's bookshelf. Not only does she explain the principles of authentic leadership in a clear, concise way, she also provides detailed, concrete stories that illustrate these principles, both from her own life and from her practice as a corporate psychologist.

The Consummate Leader is not merely an inspirational read (though it certainly delivers in that regard); each chapter includes specific tools and exercises to help you discover insights into your particular situation and circumstances. Whether you're a young leader starting out in your career or a self-styled management expert like me, this book can help you improve your leadership skills, your business performance, and your life.

The Consummate Leader is an important work that deserves to have a major impact on today's workplace. I'll be sharing it with all the leaders I work with ... and once you finish it, I suspect you'll do the same.

—Chris Yeh

Entrepreneur, Investor, and Co-Author of
The Alliance: Managing Talent in the Networked Age

INTRODUCTION

This may be the world's only leadership book for which the genesis was a breakup (or for which the author actually *admits* that its genesis was a breakup). In early 2009, a relationship I had thought would turn into happily-ever-after turned into miserably-no-longer-to-be. At the time, I was five years into my current career as a management consultant (and happened to have a PhD in Clinical Psychology), so I had the benefit of years of training and education in constructive strategies to deal with this unexpected change of affairs.

I exercised (when I could drag myself away from marathons of *Love Actually*, *The English Patient*, and *Before Sunrise*), made time to socialize with friends (when I wasn't taking preposterously long naps and single-handedly increasing Kleenex's stock value), read self-help books (when I wasn't blowing unconscionable amounts of money on my newly acquired purse fetish), and wrote in my journal (in which I penned unfit-for-print entries about my ex).

After a few weeks of alternating between the productive and ridiculous, I eventually reached the conclusion that I should probably begin putting some of my self-help readings and graduate school training into practice in order to gain

some perspective and move on from the experience. Yes, my ex had engaged in some blameworthy behavior, but I didn't want to continue to focus on that. Instead, I decided to use the occasion to take a hard look at myself, better understand my role in the proceedings, and gain greater self-awareness. I figured that if I actually walked away from the experience having acquired some sort of life lesson, I could prevent myself from becoming bitter, and actually become a better person for having gone through it.

So, looking at myself deeply is exactly what I did. I engaged in a period of self-reflection (that continues to this day), so that I could more fully understand myself. I decided to take on an attitude of "radical self-responsibility" (as Claire Zammit and Katherine Woodward-Thomas call it) so that I could work on controlling the one thing over which I had control – myself.

After reflecting on the relationship, I decided to focus more broadly on my interactions with others. Instead of focusing outward when someone behaved in a way I didn't like or when some disappointment occurred, I made a practice of looking at the role I played in the situation. If the same scenario seemed to be playing itself out over and over again, I chose not to curse the unfairness of the world, but instead to see how I contributed to repeating patterns as the common denominator. In this way, I was better able to monitor my reactions to events that arose in my life, and as you might expect, ended up breaking patterns and creating more positive outcomes.

I also focused on spirituality – meditating regularly, looking for meaning in the events that happened to me, and being truly grateful for the many positive aspects of my life. Across time, all this self-reflection created even more positive outcomes: I lost weight, increased my energy, and improved my confidence. And, as luck (or self-responsibility) would have

it, about six months after the breakup with said ex and all the ensuing work on myself, I began dating my now-husband.

Now I'm sure that as many of you read this you may be thinking, "Well that's all well and good, and I'm glad you're now healthier and paired off, but when I picked up this book, I was expecting information on leadership. So, excuse me for asking, but what does all of this have to do with becoming a more effective leader of people?"

Quite a bit, actually. While I was doing all of this work on myself, an interesting side effect was that my efficacy working with others increased. Before all of this occurred, I would say I was a good executive coach and consultant who helped people to work toward their goals. However, after my self-development journey, I noticed I was able to help people even more effectively.

Having a deeper understanding of myself increased my ability to monitor my reactions to others' behaviors and to use that data to inform my work with them. Further, by checking in with myself more regularly, I was able to connect with others in a way that I had not previously been able to do. My empathy and ability to stay present with others increased, as did my facility in helping them to capitalize on their strengths, reach within, and make changes that may have been challenging for them. By going through a process of better understanding myself, I was able to better understand others – and help them to understand and develop themselves.

As a management consultant, I have come across a lot of books geared toward helping people to become more effective managers and leaders. There are books on how to manage change, how to delegate, how to be more organized, and how to hold people accountable; books on managing talent, influencing others, and presenting in the most effective manner. I have found these to be wonderful resources for myself and my clients; however, one thing I have found

lacking is that there are not enough books that encourage the reader to take the kind of deep, hard look at himself* required to maximize his personal and professional development. It is one thing to apply a behavioral technique, and quite another to connect with others in such a way that the technique becomes secondary. This book is my attempt to fill that gap.

Lest you think you do not need this book because you are already highly effective, or perhaps too old a dog to be taught new tricks, I encourage you to suspend your disbelief for the moment and continue reading. For example, I have come across some clients who have asserted to me, "I'm 55 years old. I've always been this way, so that's the way I'm always going to be." I'm sorry to offend you if you're one of those people, but I believe this sort of reasoning is a cop-out. From experience, I know that we are never "fully cooked" unless we believe we are.

As the psychologist Karen Horney stated: "There is no good reason why we should not develop and change until the last day we live." By engaging in the regular habit of looking within and striving to better ourselves, we can continue to grow by leaps and bounds. It is my sincere hope that by reading this book and completing the exercises within it, you too will be able to have new insights and breakthroughs that will lead to greater accomplishments and contributions as a leader, both at work and in your personal life.



Freedom is man's capacity to take a hand in his own development.

It is our capacity to mold ourselves.

—ROLLO MAY

* I will be alternating between using the masculine and feminine pronouns for ease of readability.

CHAPTER ONE



THE CONSUMMATE LEADER

Out of all the leaders with whom I have had the pleasure to work, one of the most inspirational ones is a woman named Grace.[†] I first met Grace in my role as a corporate psychologist when I was assessing her for a position as an office leader for a Fortune 500 global consulting firm. From the moment we first started chatting, I found myself drawn to her – aside from an undeniable charisma and presence, she had the sort of infectious and upbeat personality that puts others at ease and encourages connection.

Grace was smart, mature, collaborative, and driven. She was someone who set aggressive goals and was willing to put in the time and effort to achieve them; she knew her strengths

[†] Names and some details have been changed to ensure individuals' confidentiality.

and areas for development and was very open about them. She was making efforts to improve in the areas that needed to be addressed, but she was incredibly undefended when talking about them, as she was aware that sharing with others was the best means to receive further feedback to help her grow. As you may expect, Grace impressed everyone throughout the interview process and was enthusiastically hired.

Once she began working with the firm, however, things did not proceed as she had hoped. Part of the reason Grace had been brought into the organization was to leverage her creativity and entrepreneurial spirit to drive organizational change. However, as anyone who is attempting to transform a culture knows, it is a process that takes time and is often met with resistance. Grace experienced the frustration associated with coming into a new workplace with big dreams and goals, only to find out that the organization's readiness for change was not what she had anticipated. Like a lot of driven people, she had hoped that results would come immediately. So, when this did not happen, she was understandably disappointed.

To her credit, she recognized her frustration and knew that if she wasn't careful, she would become disillusioned, and so she took various steps to take care of herself during that time. She knew that to be effective, she had to prevent herself from burning out by managing her stress and focusing on controlling the things over which she had control. She hired a like-minded individual to be an ally in the office to help with achieving her objectives, socialized with friends to ensure she got the support she needed, engaged in her hobbies when she was able to do so, and stayed focused on her reasons for selecting her chosen career path when things became particularly difficult.

Despite some of the resistance she faced, Grace had a strong sense of belief that her vision for the office was one that would

help them to be more financially profitable. So, with her confidence and optimism intact, she purposefully went through a process of planting seeds to gain buy-in for her ideas.

Because she was an outstanding relationship builder, she was intentional about establishing and maintaining relationships with client prospects and colleagues throughout the firm. She balanced her desire to persuade with a genuine spirit of openness, which allowed her to better understand the people she was hoping to influence. When others observed her success in securing meetings with prospective clients, they were curious to know how she was accomplishing feats that others had previously been unable to do. As a result, she started to get pulled into various meetings and corporate initiatives, which further enhanced her visibility and ability to influence.

The people in her office appreciated Grace's upbeat spirit, strategic thinking skills, and participative management style. She focused on mentoring and developing people, and as a result, the junior people who worked with her had the sense that she sincerely cared about them and their careers. While her lighthearted and sometimes irreverent style was quite different from approaches to which they had become accustomed, they were inspired by her vision for the future. They saw the success she was having in positioning herself within the firm, and they were intrigued to see if she could garner more corporate resources for their relatively small office.

As I worked with her over time, it was clear that although Grace cared about people a great deal and had wonderful interpersonal skills, she was anything but a pushover. In fact, she was frequently the only person in the room who was willing to appropriately challenge others' perspectives or make a potentially unpopular comment. She would "call a spade a

spade” or pleasantly push back in response to unreasonable bureaucratic demands. However, because she had effectively built relationships and was clearly coming from a position of wanting to do what was best for the firm (as opposed to political wrangling), her assertiveness and contributions were well respected by others.

At the time of this writing, the outcome of Grace’s story at this particular organization is still to be determined. She is still planting seeds and gradually coaxing people around her to move toward the sort of culture they had originally stated they desired. However, in the relatively short time she has been there, she has been identified as a valued employee who is perceived as having the potential to make a significant impact within the company.

Grace has given herself a reasonable timeline for effecting the changes she believes will move her office in the desired direction. At that point, she will reassess whether she believes the company’s culture is a good fit for her and evaluate whether or not it will provide her with the sort of meaning and purpose in her career that she needs to maintain a sense of fulfillment. In the meantime, she soldiers on, pursuing her goals with a dogged sense of determination.

WHAT IS A CONSUMMATE LEADER?

I share Grace’s story because she is the epitome of a consummate leader, an individual who knows herself deeply and is comfortable in her own skin. She realizes, as all of us should, that she is a work in progress who has (and always will have) opportunities for further growth and development. In fact, unlike many people I have assessed who listen to the feedback I present during a follow-up session and move on

from that session without making much of an effort to integrate it into their work lives, she proactively asked if we could periodically check in with one another to discuss her experiences at the firm and explore ways to increase her effectiveness.

Grace takes a holistic approach to life and leadership – she understands that to be at her best in a work environment, she likewise needs to be at her best in her life in general. In contrast to most clients who dig in and put in more effort and hours when faced with work stress, she knows that she has to get a handle on her stress and work *smarter*, as opposed to *harder*. Thus, despite the demands of her job, she makes some attempt at maintaining work-life balance by engaging in hobbies and taking time away to clear her mind so she can stay mentally and emotionally sharp when focused on her professional obligations.

Grace is also someone who connects with people on an authentic level. She possesses exceptional interpersonal skills; however, in my view the key component that makes her a consummate leader is not her inherent extraversion, but the underlying sincerity in her relationships with others. She has a genuine interest in and curiosity about others, and this concern comes through in her interactions with them. Grace's authenticity also shines in her willingness to speak her mind. She is assertive in voicing her opinions but is always respectful and productive when she does so. As a result, people trust her and want to follow her because they know they are getting the straight story from her, and they believe she has their best interests at heart.

Grace is also optimistic and upbeat. The ability to anticipate the future with a positive outlook not only makes it more pleasant for others to be around her, it also encourages them to develop solutions to problems more effectively. Her

ability to enthusiastically paint a picture that inspires others allows her to gain buy-in and build a sense of excitement that encourages others to persist in the face of difficulties or uncertainty.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A CONSUMMATE LEADER

Each of us has the potential to be a consummate leader like Grace. Although no two leaders are going to go about accomplishing goals in exactly the same way, we each have the capacity to inspire others to accomplish great things. Every one of us has the ability to help others grow by encouraging them to stretch beyond what they may have thought possible. And by helping others to perform at their peaks, we can achieve outstanding results for our organizations, whether they are businesses, community groups, or our families.

There is no cookie-cutter approach to managing people. Because we are all different, there is plenty of room to put our own personal stamps on our approaches to leadership. This is why I believe that it is most important to develop the aspects of our character that underlie whatever leadership choices we make, as opposed to merely focusing on specific techniques.

Based on my years of experience dealing with leaders, I have identified seven key characteristics that are found in consummate leaders.

1. SELF-AWARENESS

Socrates' advice to "Know thyself" is critical for any leader (and actually, for anybody who has interactions with other human beings). Without an in-depth understanding of your values, strengths, weaknesses, triggers, and the like, you leave yourself

susceptible to blindly reacting to occurrences in your environment. By having the goal of continuously learning about one of the most interesting people on the planet – you! – you can prevent yourself from becoming stagnant and work toward fulfilling your potential.

2. SPIRITUALITY

A consummate leader views her career as a calling of sorts and finds a sense of meaning and purpose in her work. Whether or not she is religious, per se, she is inspired to make a contribution to her organization, her colleagues, and the community through her work. This sense of purpose enables her to persist when the going gets tough, and the sense of passion she exudes for her work is motivating to those around her.

3. SELF-MANAGEMENT

A consummate leader is skilled at managing himself. He understands his emotional hang-ups and how his thoughts and beliefs can have the potential to trip him up. He focuses on having a positive mindset that allows him to confidently take on challenges. He is willing to take calculated risks, but when setbacks occur, he is able to maintain perspective, learn from the disappointment, and be better equipped the next time a similar challenge arises. In addition to putting energy into his work life, he understands the importance of tending to his life outside of work so he can be a healthy and balanced human being. He engages in hobbies and takes care of his body so he can recharge effectively during his off-time. This enables him to have the energy at work needed to put forth his best effort and achieve the greatest results.

4. POSITIVITY

A consummate leader maintains a positive outlook. She knows that focusing on being happy and grateful not only helps her to feel better, it also creates better organizational outcomes. Although she is not a naïve Pollyanna, she expects the best of people and of situations. She realizes that employees want to follow someone who gives them a sense of hope, and her positive attitude enables her to create the air of excitement required to catalyze people to accomplish great things.

5. AUTHENTICITY

A consummate leader is genuine, open, and comfortable in his own skin. He has his own opinions and is comfortable voicing them respectfully in a way that others are able to hear. Though he does not seek out conflict, he realizes that differences of opinion arise in the workplace and cannot be ignored. He is able to set boundaries and address difficult issues, and in so doing, gains others' respect. He recognizes that to earn his seat at the table, he needs to express his perspectives directly.

6. EFFECTIVE RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

In organizations, work gets done through people. It makes sense that people are most likely to want to work for and be influenced by people with whom they have good relationships, and consummate leaders recognize this truism. While I have heard some people describe relationship building in pejorative terms such as “schmoozing,” the reality is that human beings are social creatures. Given the choice between working with someone who is competent and standoffish versus someone who is competent and warm, who wouldn't choose the latter? A consummate leader understands that most people want to

have pleasant interactions at work, and by connecting with others to put their audiences in a more positive state of mind, they are able to be more effective.

7. SKILLFUL COACHING AND DEVELOPING

Consummate leaders are able to get the best out of the people who work for them, and they understand that the only way to do this is by being intentional about employee development. Just as a skillful coach can help a young athlete to capitalize on her gifts and improve the weaker aspects of her game, an adept coach in the business world can assist his employees in broadening their skills and shoring up their weaknesses so they can advance in their careers. In both cases, the team benefits from the individuals' successes.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In the chapters that follow, I will be describing each of the characteristics of a consummate leader in greater detail and providing you with tools and exercises to develop each of these qualities in yourself. While this book could potentially be a fairly quick read, and you could learn a good deal by skimming through it, you will not accomplish much in terms of your personal growth by doing so.

Instead, to get the most out of this book, you will need to take your time to reflect on the questions I pose and work through the suggested exercises. Many of my clients find it helpful to maintain a journal in which they can answer questions, make notes on any insights that arise, and keep track of how they are progressing toward their goals. Research shows that self-monitoring (writing things down) increases the odds

for success when making personal changes. Therefore, I encourage you to keep a journal, make notes on a tablet, or find some other strategy that works for you to get your thoughts out as you work through the book.

I cannot stress enough the importance of taking your time with this endeavor. Just as researching the proper technique for doing a backflip may provide you with some theoretical knowledge, you can't actually have a hope of becoming the next Gabrielle Douglas without some practice. Likewise, while reading the various exercises that I suggest will make you a more informed individual, actually taking the time to put in the work and try out the activities will be where the rubber meets the road in terms of your development.

Finally, even if you are not yet in a position in which you are leading people, working on these seven areas will be an excellent preparation to ready yourself for the opportunity when it arises. In fact, going through this process may make you a more attractive candidate for promotions. I believe that we all have the potential to be consummate leaders with enough effort and attention, and I encourage you to now take on the challenge to become one!



*Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character.
But if you must be without one, be without the strategy.*

— NORMAN SCHWARZKOPF

CHAPTER TWO



SELF-AWARENESS

*He who knows others is wise.
He who knows himself is enlightened.*

—LAO TZU

Of all the characteristics of the consummate leader, self-awareness is the most important. Quite frankly, I believe it is impossible to be a great leader without it. If you don't have an in-depth understanding of your strengths, how can you possibly leverage them to your best advantage? If you are unaware of the areas on which you need to work, how can you prevent yourself from allowing them to potentially derail you? If you don't know the prospective baggage you could be dragging around, how can you make sure that it doesn't unduly affect your decisions or interactions with others?

The importance of self-awareness is illustrated in the example of Tessa, an executive I once coached who worked in the finance area of a non-profit organization. Her boss, Anne, was hoping that Tessa could become her successor in the future, but she had some significant concerns about a few aspects of her style. On the positive, Tessa was seen as someone who was incredibly dedicated to her job. She had an outstanding work ethic, and she was consistently one of the first people to arrive at the office in the morning and one of the last to leave at the end of the day. She was attentive to detail, knowledgeable about her field, and always willing to go the extra mile to help others. She was logical, practical, and focused on generating the highest quality work product for those around her.

While some of Tessa's responsibilities involved "number-crunching," a lot of her work required her to get things done through people over whom she had no authority. For example, one of her tasks was to put together financial reports for Anne to present to senior executives. This was frequently challenging as it required her to collect information from coworkers, many of whom had no interest in administrative matters and did not see her requests as being a top priority.

Another one of Tessa's responsibilities was to enforce organizational policies. Clearly, this aspect of her role required her to address others' misbehaviors and say "no" a lot of the time, which certainly didn't always ingratiate her with others. Anne perceived Tessa as struggling and asked me to work with her to help her to be more effective.

When I first spoke with Tessa, she was at a loss as to why people tended to be unwilling to comply with her requests for information. For example, when she was in the process of putting together one of her monthly reports, she would reach out to coworkers, most frequently by email, requesting the

data she required. She saw herself as the victim who was at their mercy, as they would often ignore her emails or only respond after numerous reminders and reprisals. She found the situation incredibly frustrating since in her view, she was simply doing her best to complete her responsibilities, persisting to get the job done despite obstacles erected by unprofessional colleagues.

Tessa also felt that Anne's concerns about her performance were unfair. While it was true that people frequently gave her a hard time, she still managed to deliver on what was asked of her. Also, she felt Anne didn't understand the stress she was under as a result of dealing with uncooperative coworkers, not to mention caring for her aging mother. Tessa knew that others would "screw her over" if given the opportunity, and her coworkers' behavior clearly proved this belief to be true.

As a starting point in our work together, we conducted a psychological assessment and a 360° survey. The assessment included an interview and some problem-solving and personality testing to provide us with objective data about her psychological makeup, strengths, and opportunities for growth. The 360° survey (a tool used to solicit feedback from Tessa's boss, direct reports, and peers) allowed her coworkers to anonymously report their assessments of her strengths and developmental opportunities as another source of information upon which we could draw.

The strengths that emerged from her assessment were just as we would have expected: Tessa's data showed that she was hardworking, responsive, disciplined, organized, reliable, and results oriented. However, many of the areas for development came as a surprise to Tessa. The results of the assessment and the feedback suggested that she could be rigid and unwilling to entertain others' perspectives. She had unrealistic expectations

of others and could actually be critical or sarcastic in her interactions with them. Because she was shy and private, she didn't focus on building relationships with others; in fact, she made a concerted effort to compartmentalize her work life from her personal life. And, while her results orientation could be a strength, the flip side of it was that she quickly became impatient when others weren't responding to her requests at her desired rate.

It became clear that coworkers did not want to go out of their way to help Tessa when she made requests of them because their interactions with her were usually unpleasant. Because she only interacted with her colleagues when she wanted something from them, they never had the opportunity to get to know her as a whole person; instead, they knew her as "that person in finance" who was always making requests of them, sometimes brusquely. They further saw her as someone who was never willing to listen to their side of the story; rather, she was always quick to deny their requests without explanation or discussion, sometimes with a cutting remark and a smirk thrown in for good measure.

Before receiving the feedback, Tessa could not think of anything she could do differently to encourage people to be more willing to help her. In her opinion, the issue was her coworkers' irresponsibility, as they were simply not responding to her appeals for assistance. In her view, if the shoe had been on the other foot and someone had sent her an email asking for information, she would respond to it in a timely manner, since "that is what a responsible worker does!" She genuinely could not fathom any alternative explanations for the struggles she was having, aside from the conclusion she had reached that her coworkers were ne'er-do-wells.

After receiving the feedback, she still maintained that none of her liabilities *should* have affected her coworkers'

willingness to cooperate with her, since providing her with information was in the best interest of the organization. However, with a greater awareness of how she was coming across, she was at least able to entertain the idea that she might be contributing to the difficulty she was having, and that by changing her behavior, she may achieve better results.

TRUCKING ALONG

Tessa's case is a clear example of how limited self-understanding can reduce one's effectiveness. Not only was she unaware of the negative impact she was having on others, she was so focused on blaming others that she was unwilling to even consider that her approach might play a role in their responses to her. In other words, by continually looking outward instead of inward, she wasn't following the prudent advice from Luke 6:42: "How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

One of my wittier clients has a running joke with his colleagues that I once told him he has a "blind spot the size of a trucker." While I would never say such a thing to anyone (or at least not to his face), his notion is a useful metaphor. Think of it: a trucker with a massive blind spot still has a pretty good likelihood of being able to get to his desired destination. However, on the way there, he may unintentionally disturb those around him by cutting them off, creating unpleasant driving conditions, and putting them on edge. In the worst case scenario, he could cause an accident that makes accomplishing his goal of completing a delivery impossible.

On the other hand, a trucker who has all her mirrors positioned to avoid blind spots is able to make her delivery effectively, taking the most direct route without causing difficulty for the other drivers with whom she shares the road. Clearly, consummate leaders want to be the second sort of trucker, who have no blind spots and can maneuver efficiently.

Quite simply, people who are self-aware interact more effectively with others than those who are not. They know how they are likely to be coming across, and they take steps to ensure they monitor themselves to increase their chances of being perceived as intended. They can sense when they are getting upset or defensive and make sure they are managing their emotions so they don't create issues in their relationships with others. They are aware of the sides of themselves that can prevent them from working at their peaks, whether it is a tendency to be disorganized, a potential to come across as aloof, or a fear of taking risks, for example. They actively work to make sure they are taking advantage of their strengths, and they consistently focus on minimizing and/or developing the areas that need work. In this way, they fulfill their potential in the workplace.

HOW TO BECOME MORE SELF-AWARE

Who in the world am I? Ah, that's the great puzzle.

—LEWIS CARROLL, *ALICE IN WONDERLAND*

The task of becoming more self-aware is an ongoing process that requires a spirit of curiosity and a willingness to learn. Your goal in this respect is to develop a balanced, well-rounded view of yourself. All of us have strengths and areas in

need of work, and your task in increasing your level of self-awareness is to learn about all sides of yourself, without judgment. As the rabbi and author Joshua Liebman asserted: “Self-understanding rather than self-condemnation is the way to inner peace and mature conscience.”

If you can take the perspective of viewing life as a journey during which you will always have opportunities to gain deeper insights into yourself and find new areas in which to develop, you will be in the right frame of mind to self-reflect and grow. While some people view the need for personal development as suggesting they have some sort of deficiency, a healthier view is to think of yourself as always being able to be fine-tuned and developed. So, with that in mind, let’s begin to explore a number of strategies you can use to increase your level of self-awareness.

1. WRITE DOWN YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

A good starting point for self-discovery is to take stock of your strengths and developmental opportunities.¹ Your aim is to make an exhaustive list of all the areas in which you are strong, and all the areas on which you need to work. In addition to listing *behaviors* at which you are good (e.g., meeting deadlines, making sales, doing math), list adjectives to describe yourself in terms of your *personality characteristics* (e.g., compassionate, outgoing, hardworking). Use this same process when listing your developmental opportunities.

For example, some behaviors in need of work may include public speaking, listening, or delegating, while some personality characteristics you address may be shyness, impatience, or low assertiveness. Try to be as specific as possible as you create your list. So, instead of listing “being a great leader” as a

strength, think about the qualities you possess that make you a strong leader. Ask yourself, for example:

- ✦ *Am I someone who is visionary and can rally the troops to follow me?*
- ✦ *Am I someone who is compassionate and able to create a comfortable environment in which others can stretch themselves and take risks?*
- ✦ *Am I knowledgeable in my area of expertise and able to teach people?*

As you self-reflect, think about yourself in both your personal and professional pursuits. For example, I have seen some individuals who are highly involved leaders in their community organizations but have not had the opportunity to display these skills in the workplace. Conversely, I have interacted with some highly organized and driven stay-at-home mothers who are adept leaders in their households or in their children's activities. Even if you have not yet been able to demonstrate your leadership at work, it doesn't mean it is not a strength for you; perhaps you simply need to be intentional with respect to figuring out how to show this quality to others in your organization.

While some people have an easy time determining their strengths and developmental opportunities, others can have some difficulty with this exercise. For example, I have come across clients who are so self-critical that they struggle to think of any positive qualities they may possess. If this is you, I insist you set a goal of coming up with *at least* 10 positive qualities – even if you are having a hard time – while doing this exercise. *Everyone* has strengths. Think about successes you have had in your life and reflect on your qualities that contributed to them. What are you proudest of? Where are you most effective? If,

after putting in a good deal of effort, you find you are still having difficulty coming up with your strengths, refer to the Appendix for some ideas. Make sure, though, to give it your best effort first or you will deprive yourself of this useful exercise in introspection and self-discovery.

In contrast to the overly self-critical, I have also worked with individuals who have difficulty recognizing their developmental opportunities. If this is you, take this exercise seriously, as I can almost guarantee you have a blind spot (since none of us is perfect). Think about times when situations haven't gone as planned. How may you have contributed to these events? Also consider that sometimes our strengths, when taken to extremes, can become developmental opportunities.

For example, while being an enthusiastic talker is a strength, it can become a liability if others have difficulty getting a word in edgewise. Likewise, although being thoughtful while making decisions is an asset, it can work against you if you consistently take so long to take action that you miss out on opportunities.

Do you have any strengths that you need to monitor to ensure they don't become liabilities for you? Look through the strengths list in the Appendix and consider whether your lack of a given strength – or an overplayed one – can work against you in some areas.

Make it a habit to pay attention, self-reflect, and internalize others' feedback so you can continue to add or remove items from your list over time.

2. TAKE PERSONALITY MEASURES

Another effective way to improve your level of self-insight is to take objective personality measures. If you are able to do so, it can be valuable to meet with a psychologist who is adept at

career counseling or executive coaching, as he can conduct a psychological assessment that will provide you with greater self-understanding. While the specific instruments used in an assessment will vary, they may include cognitive tests, personality instruments, and/or an interview. If you are unable to meet with a psychologist, I recommend searching online for personality instruments. You will not have access to many of the ones a psychologist is able to use (as many require education and training to interpret ethically and effectively), but it can still be a helpful means of learning more about yourself.

Once you have received the output from the instruments, be sure to add to your list of strengths and developmental opportunities. As you review the data you receive from a computerized assessment, it is normal if you feel like there are certain things that may not apply to you – human beings are complex, and there is only so much a computer-generated report based on general population norms can explain. For now, however, write down the characteristics or behaviors about which you are uncertain, and put a question mark beside them on your list. As you pay closer attention to yourself and your behaviors in your daily life, try to monitor if these characteristics about which you were uncertain actually *are* true for you.

3. SEEK FEEDBACK

Another important means of increasing self-awareness is to ask others for feedback. By its very definition, if you have a blind spot, the only way to become aware of it is for others to tell you about it. I recommend seeking feedback from as many people as you possibly can, and make it an ongoing practice. In addition to being a great way to learn about yourself and how

you are perceived, it can be a valuable means of building relationships.

I have found that a lot of us have a love-hate relationship with feedback. Most of us love getting positive recognition for things we do well; after all, who doesn't love a good compliment? I've even known some people who enjoyed it so much they would toot their own horn before I had the opportunity!

On the other hand, a lot of us find constructive criticism a whole lot less palatable. Even for those of us who recognize the benefits of it on a theoretical level, it can still cause a bit of an emotional sting when we actually hear it. But, if you think about it, feedback (even of the negative variety) is a gift. It means that someone cares enough to give you guidance to help you improve or to make a better impression on others.

For example, if you were unknowingly walking around with spinach in your teeth (a great example of a blind spot), wouldn't you want to know about it? Similarly, wouldn't you want to know if everyone in the office thinks you come across as arrogant? Feedback is empowering, as it provides you with additional information and greater self-awareness. Even if you disagree with some feedback you receive, at the very least it will give you greater insight into how others may perceive you.

While most people are happy to tell others about their strengths, a lot of us are uncomfortable telling them about areas upon which they can work. How many of us have been told, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all"? Since many of us experience a negative emotional reaction in response to constructive criticism, we are reluctant to take the risk to give others negative feedback for fear that we may hurt their feelings. However, if you understand how difficult it can be for others to give you feedback, you will realize how important it is for you to make it as easy for them as possible.

To receive the highest quality feedback, therefore, it is your job to make it a pleasant experience for both parties.

To ensure a productive experience on your end, it is critical to prepare yourself appropriately before asking for feedback by anticipating the sorts of reactions you may have. The acronym “SARA” is used to describe the four types of responses you are likely to experience when receiving negative feedback.

First, you may be *surprised*. Like Tessa, if you are getting feedback you have never heard before, you are likely to be a little shocked or unsettled in response to it. Second, you may become *angry*. I can think of several occasions in which I have received unsolicited feedback (usually from a significant other), during which I became annoyed and felt a need to provide him or her with some unsolicited feedback of my own! (It doesn’t take a psychologist to predict that engaging in that sort of behavior probably isn’t going to accomplish the goal of making the feedback experience a pleasant one!) Third, you may *rationalize*. This involves explaining away the feedback and minimizing its importance. Finally, you can hopefully get to the point at which you *accept* the feedback.

By expecting certain internal responses, you can put yourself in a better position to monitor your reactions so that you don’t ruin all chances of ever getting feedback again. In fact, when someone is providing you with feedback, stay calm (breathe deeply if you need to, to keep your mind and body relaxed) and control your nonverbal reactions (now is not the time to roll your eyes or look incredulous, even if you are shocked). Ask questions in the habit of striving to understand what the other person is saying, without being defensive. When you are receiving feedback, do not argue or explain yourself. Simply allow the person you are speaking with to explain himself, then say “thank you.”

It can also be helpful to provide others with context when you are asking for feedback. For example, you may tell a coworker that you are working on your professional development, and you have picked her to give you her perspective because she is someone you trust and whose opinion you value. Depending on the person, she may need some time to think about what she would like to say. As such, it's usually helpful to give her a heads up about the sorts of questions you will be asking.

If you are a senior person asking for feedback from someone who is at a lower level within the organization, it will be particularly important to make sure you take the time to put the other person at ease. If, in response to your request for feedback, he responds that you have nothing to work on, gently encourage him to really think about it, letting him know that he can sincerely help you by providing you with ideas about areas for growth. Asking people who report to you for feedback is also an excellent way of modeling the sort of behavior that will enable them to develop more quickly. So, make sure you model an openness to hearing about ways in which you can improve.

Some sample questions you may ask include:

- ✧ What do you think I'm good at? What are my strengths?
- ✧ What do you think I need to work on to be more effective and achieve my maximum potential?
- ✧ What sorts of things should I stop doing? Why?
- ✧ What should I continue doing? Why?
- ✧ What would you like me to do more of? Why?
- ✧ What is my greatest contribution to the organization?
- ✧ How do I most detract from the organization?

If you happened to have taken any personality instruments and had some areas that came up about which you were uncertain, you may want to ask others for feedback about them, as well as address to possible blind spots. A question you may ask to get at this would be, “Have you noticed any times when I do *behavior X*?”

Don’t forget that it is critical to respond positively when you are receiving feedback. Watch out for your reactions! Providing feedback is a skill (one that we will talk about later in this book), and so try to be forgiving if others’ attempts to do so are somewhat clunky. If they seem to be sugarcoating it, try to guide them to be more direct (without sounding like you are engaging in an inquisition).

Similarly, if the feedback is coming across more abruptly than you may have liked, listen to the content of what they are presenting, as opposed to the way in which they are saying it. Try to separate yourself from the emotions of the situation so you can gain the most benefit from the information with which you are presented. Make sure to do this even when asking for feedback from those who are close to you. Remember, the purpose of this exercise is to help you grow, not to get even with others. Also, if you make giving feedback a painful experience for the other person, you will likely never receive it from her again!

Finally, if you have the resources, a 360° or multi-rater survey can be a helpful means of receiving feedback. As noted previously, a 360° survey is an instrument designed to allow others to provide you with anonymous feedback, through a series of questions that tap into particular work-related behaviors on a numerical scale. As a result, you can get a sense of how others rate you in a variety of areas, determining your relative strengths and developmental opportunities based on the numbers. If you decide to use a 360° survey, I would

encourage you to follow up to ask some of the people who rated you for in-person feedback. Not only will it provide you with a richer understanding of their perspectives, it can also be helpful for deepening relationships.

Look for themes in the feedback you receive and add them to your list of strengths and developmental opportunities, which by this point, should be pretty well rounded.

GOING DEEPER

*Until we see what we are,
we cannot take steps to become what we should be.*

—CHARLOTTE P. GILMAN

The strategies I listed in the previous section are an excellent way to get started with respect to increasing your level of self-awareness. However, in my view, they are only a start. This next step is an opportunity for you to engage in deeper self-examination so you can have an even greater understanding of yourself.

Very often in business, people like to limit their self-exploration to thinking about themselves purely in the work setting. I believe this is a mistake. As I noted in the introduction, when I engaged in development that was entirely focused on my personal life, it inadvertently had a positive impact at work. Similarly, I am sure we have all come across people whose difficulties in their personal lives bleed over into their work lives, despite concerted attempts to keep their personal and professional lives separate. This is why a holistic approach to leadership development is so important – we are whole people and our whole selves show up wherever we go.

Therefore, this next step will require you to take a good, hard look at yourself. I will be encouraging you to reflect on your developmental history, family background, world views, and the like. For many of you, it may be a difficult exercise, as you will be faced with questions about which you may have never put much thought. That's okay – take it as a sign that this is an area in which you can learn a lot!

I would encourage you not to rush through this portion of the book. Even if you struggle to answer the questions initially, tuck them away in your mind or make a note in your journal. Across time, with additional reflection, you may come up with valuable new insights a few days, a few months, or even a few years from now.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR CHILDHOOD ...

We are going to start with having you consider your family history. I know, I know, some of you may be rolling your eyes right now as you think about the stereotype of the psychologist asking you to lie back on the couch and talk about your mother. Rest assured, however, that in this day and age, most psychologists actually allow you to sit up in a vertical position! Seriously, though, for those of you who are uncomfortable with this and are tempted to skip ahead, bear with me for a minute and consider my rationale.

First, even if you don't enjoy thinking about topics like this, it is hard to deny that your family experiences had a measurable impact on shaping you. So if you truly want to understand yourself, this is something you need to think about. Second, just to put your mind at ease, this is not going to turn into an assignment of blaming mommy and daddy. It is

my opinion that even people who are less-than-optimal parents tend to be doing the best they can do, given their background, issues, and knowledge at any given time. So, I am asking you to reflect on these topics to gain an objective understanding of *yourself*, as opposed to pointing fingers.

Third, I am solution focused, and as a result, I don't believe you necessarily need to engage in years of analysis and psychotherapy to unlearn various behaviors. However, if you are unaware of them and how they came to be, it is much more difficult to address them. This exercise is designed to give you a bit more insight into where certain tendencies originated.

Finally, I can honestly say that while I have worked with individuals who have developed significantly as a result of engaging in the sorts of exercises I suggested earlier in this chapter, those who have made the greatest gains are the ones who have been willing to work harder and grapple with deeper issues, such as the ones on which we are going to now focus.

Going deeper by answering the questions on the next several pages should not be an exercise that you gloss over quickly. If you do it properly, it should be a process that takes you some time to complete. Thus, even after taking your first stab at answering the questions, it is likely that you will continue to gain insights that will further deepen your self-understanding across time.

To start, I want you to think back to your family of origin (the people around whom you grew up) and answer the following questions (I suggest you write down your responses in a journal).

1. Who comprised your family? Who were the significant people in your life when you were growing up?

2. How would you describe your mother? What were her positive qualities? What were her not-so-positive qualities? How are you most like her? How are you most different from her? How did she affect your development? What lessons (good and bad) did you learn from her?
3. How would you describe your father? What were his positive qualities? What were his not-so-positive qualities? How are you most like him? How are you most different from him? How did he affect your development? What lessons (good and bad) did you learn from him?

As you think about the impact your parents had on your development, try to be as balanced as possible. For example, some people may report that their father taught them integrity, honesty, and how to treat others. Some may report that because their father wasn't around much, he didn't have an impact on them. In this case, you might consider what effect his *absence* had on you. Did it teach you to be more independent? Did it cause you to be wary of people?

Also, think about behaviors your parents modeled for you. Some people indicate that they learned hard work and dedication through watching a parent who was committed to providing for the family. In other cases, people report that their parent showed them what not to do, and as a result, they decided to behave differently. Alternately, we may at times pick up unwanted habits from our parents.

Remember, there is no perfect parent, and even wonderful parents sometimes unintentionally shape their kids in not-so-perfect ways. For example, a parent may have taught you to be competitive and strive for perfection. However, did this have a

flip side of making you fear failure and be reluctant to take risks?

Remember, this exercise is not about placing blame; rather, it is about helping you to fully understand yourself on a deep level. Also, keep in mind that the same experience can affect two people in different ways. The key of this exercise is to consider how it affected *you*.

4. Did you have any other significant parental figures, such as grandparents or stepparents? What were their positive qualities? What were their not-so-positive qualities? How are you most like them? How are you most different from them? How did they affect your development? What lessons (good and bad) did you learn from them?
5. Do you have siblings? Are they older or younger than you? How did you interact with them? What were each of your psychological roles in the family?
6. What was it like growing up in your home? How close was your family? How did they communicate with one another?
7. What were your relationships like with peers? How were you viewed by classmates? How did that shape you?
8. Were there any other significant people who affected you in your childhood (e.g., coaches, teachers, religious figures)? How did they influence you?
9. What were your greatest challenges in childhood? What were your greatest triumphs? How did these shape you?

10. Were there any significant events that occurred as you were growing up? For example, did your parents get divorced? Did you move? Did you deal with any deaths? Did you experience successes in hobbies or extracurricular activities? How did these shape your outlook?

As you reflect on these various questions, you may be having some “aha” moments or connecting some dots that give you greater insight into why you do some of the things you do, or why you look at things a certain way. Also, as you compare yourself to other people, it may give you some additional ideas about strengths you possess and developmental opportunities on which you can work. Having this knowledge can better inform your ability to work through issues that may affect you as a leader.

Now, move ahead to your current situation:

11. Do you have a significant other? What was it about this person that attracted you? How does he or she complement you? How would he or she describe you in terms of your strengths and developmental opportunities?
12. Do you have children? How are they most like you? What have you learned about yourself through the parenting process?
13. Do you have any failed long-term relationships? What did you learn from these experiences? How did you contribute to the outcome of the relationship? Does that experience affect your current interactions with others?

Again, each of these questions is designed to help you to look at yourself objectively, to have a greater understanding of yourself, and to note any patterns that may cause issues for you.

Let's say, for example, that a marriage ended because your spouse cheated on you. Obviously that person violated a boundary in the relationship. However, is there anything you can learn about yourself as a result of having gone through that experience? For example:

- ✧ Did you ignore gut instincts?
- ✧ Has the experience affected your ability to trust and connect with others?
- ✧ Did your perfectionism and critical attitude contribute to making your partner feel unwanted?

The key here is not to place blame, but to learn about yourself in a compassionate way. Even if you make every attempt to compartmentalize your work self from your home self, it is likely that your core characteristics show themselves in both arenas. Self-knowledge is power.

Let's now focus on some more global questions:

14. How do you view people? Do you think they are inherently good? Do you believe you have to be on guard around them? Where did you get those ideas from?
15. Were there any significant events that shaped you during your adulthood? How did they affect you? For example:

- ✦ Did you have a boss or mentor who influenced your outlook?
 - ✦ Did you go through a divorce?
 - ✦ Did you have any health issues?
 - ✦ Did you have any accomplishments that shaped your view of yourself?
 - ✦ Did you have any major disappointments that influenced you?
16. What drives you?
 17. What are you afraid of? Why?
 18. How are you most likely to be misperceived by other people? How do you contribute to these misunderstandings?
 19. What are you like under stress? What triggers cause you to have an undesirable response?
 20. What aspects of yourself would you change if you could?

At this point, you should have a lot of information on which to reflect. To help you to pull it together coherently, answer the following questions:

1. What insights have I gained that help me better understand how I deal with people?
2. What insights have I gained that help me better understand how I approach my work?
3. What are the best parts of my personality? What strengths have I developed as a result of my varied experiences?
4. What developmental opportunities need to be addressed to allow me to maximize my potential?

Use your journal to keep track of the various insights you will continue to learn about yourself. When one of the behaviors that is problematic for you arises, notice what might be contributing to it. Are you able to identify any triggers?

When you are experiencing a day during which you are at your best, take note of what influences that as well. As you notice patterns, you will put yourself in a much better position to manage your behaviors and reactions. That is what being a consummate leader is all about.

As you continue through the book, you will be doing a lot more self-examination before pulling it all together to create a plan of attack for your professional development. However, even at this point, you may find that pondering these questions has given you some valuable insights that can guide your efforts to grow. Read on for a brief example of how delving into your history can increase your self-awareness and ability to be your best.

CASE STUDY

Evan was a talented consultant who was recognized in his firm as someone who was creative, articulate, intelligent, and skilled at developing solutions. In his job, there were two major outcomes for which he was responsible. The first was helping clients by providing them with wise counsel to assist them in making decisions. He excelled in this aspect of his role – he was a responsive professional who genuinely enjoyed assisting others and loved the challenge of solving a puzzle.

The second aspect of work, however, which was to sell to clients and bring in new business, was more difficult for him. Despite the fact that he managed his time effectively in other

areas, he consistently procrastinated when it came to sales and marketing activities. He would tell himself he didn't have the time to reach out to potential clients or that selling was actually "sleazy," and as such, he needed to devote himself to the "more honorable" work of actually helping people. While his rationalizations helped him to feel fine about focusing on the work with which he was more comfortable, he knew deep down that his excuses also limited his progress and the level of recognition he was able to attain within his company.

After some self-reflection, Evan came to realize that some of the experiences of his youth had shaped his beliefs and expectations. He had been born to a young unwed mother. His biological father was an irresponsible and somewhat self-absorbed man who relied on others to keep him financially afloat. Despite Evan's desires, he was unable to develop a close relationship with his father. In fact, he remembered several occasions during which he would wait in vain for his father to visit, as promised, only to end up feeling disappointed, wondering what he had done wrong to make his father not want to see him. Eventually, he "hardened" himself and developed a sense of apathy about that relationship.

Evan's mother eventually married, and he had two much younger half-siblings. While his stepfather was a positive influence in his life, he (perhaps unwittingly) favored his biological children. While they were cute and charming preschoolers who could seemingly do no wrong, Evan was an awkward adolescent who was held to different standards. As a result, Evan frequently felt like an outsider at home. The one area in which Evan excelled, however, was academics. He had always been one of the top students in his class, and in addition to winning awards at school, he always received praise for his academic ability from his mother and stepfather, who would describe him as the "family brain." Despite his insecurities in

some areas, he always had a strong sense of self-assurance about his intellect based on his parents' accolades and his stellar report cards.

As a result of contemplating these aspects of his childhood, Evan was better able to understand his current work situation. He realized that he excelled in the technical areas of his job that required him to engage his intellect. This was an area about which he felt confident and competent, and his work reflected that. Sales, however, brought up some uncomfortable feelings for him. Inherent in sales is the possibility of rejection; he could put forth his best effort and still have someone decide that she didn't want to work with him. Evan also had the insight that in his personal life, he tended to avoid situations in which he might experience feelings of rejection.

Just as he had developed a sense of apathy about his father, he had become an eternal bachelor who hadn't found a suitable woman to commit to because he "just wasn't quite ready and couldn't find the right woman." He recognized that he had actually developed an expectation that he was going to be rejected when selling to others, whether personally or professionally. Further, he identified his procrastination and rationalizations related to sales as a form of self-protection that prevented him from "putting himself out there" and potentially getting hurt or rejected. This understanding was the first step in being able to address his issues related to sales.



*It takes courage ... to endure the sharp pains of self-discovery
rather than choose to take the dull pain of unconsciousness
that would last the rest of our lives.*

—MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

CHAPTER THREE



SPIRITUALITY

It isn't until you come to a spiritual understanding of who you are - not necessarily a religious feeling, but deep down, the spirit within - that you can begin to take control.

—OPRAH WINFREY

I almost didn't include this chapter. As one senior banking executive who was a devout Christian said to me, "My faith is deeply important to me, but I can't really talk about it at work."

I'm sensitive to the fact that people can be reticent to talk about faith in the workplace. After all, spirituality is a deeply personal topic, and it's one about which people have some very strong convictions. I have witnessed conversations in which the topic of faith created a sense of divisiveness instead of closeness in a group because individuals were unwilling to respect their colleague's right to have different beliefs. I have seen leaders abuse religion in the workplace to the extent that their employees felt they were working under some sort of

patriarchy in which only one view of the world was deemed to be an acceptable one. I have observed people who were of a religion that was non-dominant in the U.S., such as Buddhism or Islam, who carefully kept their religious affiliations secret for fear they would be ostracized by non-tolerant others.

I point these areas out to underscore that I get it. Religion is a touchy topic, and one that, like politics, we have been taught is generally prudent to avoid discussing in mixed company. In some of the interviews I have conducted as a corporate psychologist, I have seen people tentatively mention the topic of their faith as if they were putting it out there, like a test balloon, to see how I would respond. When I openly and non-judgmentally engaged them on the topic, they became visibly more relaxed, as if some sort of burden had been lifted off them, causing them to feel at liberty to talk about a central part of their identity that shaped every aspect of their daily lives.

According to a recent Gallup survey, Americans' confidence in organized religion is at an all-time low of 44% since 1973 (when they started collecting data on the topic).² At the same time, however, 92% of Americans report that they believe in God.³

Given that my purpose in writing this book is to put forth a holistic guide to leadership that goes deeper than other books typically do, it would be remiss of me to avoid a topic that is relevant to the vast majority of the population simply because it may make some people uncomfortable. Also, based on my experience coaching leaders, I have seen how accessing one's spirituality can enhance one's leadership skills and general effectiveness in the workplace.

Spirituality is something that you don't necessarily need to talk about at work, but if you don't reflect on it for yourself, you are probably missing out on an important opportunity. So, because it is my intention to give you the tools I believe are

most important to becoming a consummate leader, I have decided to include this chapter.

WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

While the two concepts are intertwined for many people, for the purpose of this chapter, I am drawing a distinction between spirituality and religion. Whereas religion is defined by Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary as "any specific system of belief, worship, conduct, etc., often involving a code of ethics and a philosophy ..." spirituality is defined as "the quality or state of being spiritual" or "sensitivity or attachment to religious values." Thus, religiosity is associated with an organized institution having a prescribed set of practices and beliefs, whereas spirituality is defined more broadly as having spiritual values (although they may or may not be strictly associated with a specific organization or religion, *per se*). As opposed to espousing any particular religious ideology, my focus in this chapter is on spirituality.

Peterson and Seligman⁴ argued that spirituality is universal: "Although the specific content of spiritual beliefs varies, all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred, and divine force." At the core, therefore, spirituality is a belief in something greater than oneself. Along with this is often the idea that we are here for a reason, that we have a purpose, and by living in accordance with that purpose, we can live fuller, happier, more productive lives. Determining one's purpose and ensuring he or she is living in accordance with it, is a lifelong pursuit for many people. Having an attitude of curiosity, as is required for developing self-awareness (as covered in the previous chapter), also forms the foundation for doing effective spiritual exploration.

To begin to explore how your spirituality informs your life and work, reflect on the following questions:

1. What (if any) spiritual practice did I have in my formative years? How did that shape me?
2. What are my views about religion? What feelings come up for me when I think about it?
3. What are my views about spirituality? What feelings come up for me when I think about it?
4. How central is spirituality in my daily life?
5. How do my views about spirituality affect me at work (if at all)?
6. How do my views about spirituality affect how I interact with others (if at all)?

The above questions provide a good starting point for examining your own views about spirituality and religion. As you might expect, I have worked with many people who have had negative experiences with religion and spirituality, and as such, have strong emotions evoked when the topic is discussed. If you are someone for whom religion brings up negative connotations, I still encourage you to continue reading this chapter. I promise, this chapter is not designed to proselytize or to convert you to a certain set of beliefs. Instead, it is designed to encourage you to think about some deep existential questions.

At the very least, contemplating these issues can be another opportunity for you to self-reflect and deepen your level of self-awareness in understanding how your negative views of religion and spirituality may affect you. At the very best, tackling some of the issues in this chapter may cause you to shift some of your perceptions, find a greater sense of

meaning in your life and work, and develop a deeper sense of contentment and motivation in your career.

WHAT'S IT ALL FOR ANYHOW?

*Your purpose in life is to find your purpose
and give your whole heart and soul to it.*

—GAUTAMA BUDDHA

“Why am I here?”

It is a rare person who has never pondered this question. Exploring the existential issue of determining one’s reason for existence is one of the most important exercises in one’s life. Many would argue that having a sense of purpose is critical to imbuing life with a sense of meaning and direction; yet, in the hustle and bustle of our daily existence, many of us ignore the call of this significant question.

It is not uncommon in my work with leaders to come across individuals who feel as though they are running on a treadmill in their careers. They are accomplishing all the goals that have been set for them, earning their potential bonuses and salary increases, getting invited to take part in highly visible and prestigious projects, and receiving all the requisite recognition associated with these accomplishments, yet they are unfulfilled by it all. In many cases, their high achievement is rewarded not only with positive reinforcement, but also with higher expectations for success. They are chasing the accolades and money as an end in itself, and finding that despite living a life of comfort (or often, luxury), they still feel a niggling void in their lives.

Without a sense of purpose directing our actions, it is all too easy to mindlessly engage in our work and get caught up in

doing for the sake of doing, without experiencing any sense of fulfillment in the process. Without a “North Star” guiding us, we can become ensconced in the trees and lose sense of the forest of our lives. In this scenario, we may consistently have the feeling that our lives would be better if only we had different jobs or responsibilities, yet feel too stuck to do anything about taking action to change things. Why? Because we don’t have the slightest clue what else we should be doing.

A sense of purpose provides us with an overarching view of why we are here. It can provide us with motivation when our work piles up or when we are dealing with a difficult situation or person. The feeling that our work is in service to some larger goal can help us to “dig deeper” and persist when the going gets hard. Even when things are going well, having a purpose can provide us with inspiration and passion.

Having a deep feeling of knowing what you are here to do creates a sense of energy, excitement, and direction. Instead of viewing professional life and personal life as two separate entities, people who have a sense of purpose view their work as an extension of who they really are, perhaps even a ministry of sorts, and a means of positively affecting the world.

In fact, there has been research that suggests that when you perceive your job as a “calling,” or something about which you are passionate that is fulfilling in its own right, you experience greater job satisfaction than if you simply perceive your work as a “job” or something you do solely to get paid.⁵ Further, with a calling mentality, you are likely to have better job performance because you are more committed to putting in the time and energy to be successful. Given that we spend one-third of our lives at work, it is not surprising that seeing your work as a calling generalizes to other aspects of your existence, such as greater life satisfaction and better health.