LEADING

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Enjoy the Journey with Clarity and Confidence

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EGIL WINJE NYBAKK

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Enjoy the Journey with Clarity and Confidence

COPENHAGEN CODEX

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Foreword

I first met Egil at the beginning of 2020, just before the Covid-19 pandemic. We had both enrolled on a coaching programme at Henley Business School and, on the first day, were paired to coach one another. Neither of us could have known that the conversation begun there would continue for years. Coaching became friendship, and the friendship has since found its way into long conversations, music and festivals, walks, disagreements, laughter, and the continuing exchange of perspectives that occurs when two people remain interested in how the other sees the world.

Knowing someone through friendship gives no privileged access to everything they are. There are, however, qualities that become difficult to mistake when encountered repeatedly over time. One I have come to associate strongly with Egil is something for which my native Danish has a particularly resonant word: *ordentlighed*. Its ancestry reaches back towards the Proto-Indo-European root *ar-, carrying the sense of fitting or joining something together. One of the old images associated with this family of meanings is concrete: the fitting of a door into its frame, so precisely that it can open and close smoothly and reliably.

I have come to think of *ordentlighed* through that image of the door, though in a more inward sense. There is a door within us, and something about who we are is revealed by whether it stands open or closed, when it moves, towards whom, and what we allow to pass through it. To live among others is continually to find ourselves at this threshold, receiving some things, keeping others outside, making room for another person, sometimes allowing a presence or perspective to alter something within us.

The English word *decency* comes close to *ordentlighed*, though something is left behind in translation. Egil's native Norwegian has a closely related expression, hel ved — literally meaning "solid wood all the way through". Where *hel ved* points towards the substance of character, *ordentlighed* reaches more directly into conduct, expressed in the way a person treats others, keeps their word and assumes responsibility. The two expressions meet in the way character shapes conduct and is, over time, shaped through it. Together, they describe qualities I have come to associate with Egil over the years I have known him, and which belong naturally in a book concerned with what happens when who we are enters the way we lead.

Leadership has accumulated an immense vocabulary around itself, and it is easy for language to travel further than the life from which it originates. This book has grown out of decades spent doing the work, including responsibility for projects of immense complexity, where different forms of specialist knowledge, human judgement, uncertainty and consequence have had to coexist. The pages that follow carry the traces of that experience, including mistakes, doubts, changes of mind and the recognition, acquired slowly, that knowing something about leadership and learning how to lead are never quite the same undertaking.

Early in the book, Egil writes that "how we lead is rooted in who we are as human beings". Later, he puts it even more plainly: "We are humans first, then leaders." Anyone who assumes responsibility for leading others arrives with a life already lived. Years of experience are present in what catches our attention and in what escapes it, in what troubles us, draws us closer, awakens curiosity or remains at the edge of awareness. We carry memories whose significance may only become apparent when a later event unexpectedly recalls

them. Our feelings, desires and intentions have histories. So do the ways in which we perceive other people and the events in which we find ourselves. Thought belongs within this larger human inheritance, continually accompanied by everything life has already taught us to notice and fear, cherish and remember.

Our values grow within this lived terrain. They are easily mistaken for the words through which we eventually learn to name them, especially in organisations where values have become familiar inhabitants of walls, websites and presentations. Yet a value may have been taking shape through a life long before the person living that life finds language adequate to it. Something has mattered repeatedly and certain events have acquired greater weight than others. We have been moved by particular encounters, recoiled from others, found ourselves willing to protect something, relinquish something else, carry a burden or remain with another person when leaving would have been easier.

Some years into our friendship, I helped Egil find words for three values that had come to carry particular weight in his life: *Vitality, Generosity and Clarity*. The words gave names to something that had already been forming through his life. Finding one's values is also an encounter with one's own history, with what has mattered enough to leave a trace and gradually become orienting for how one meets the world.

Egil writes of generosity as giving time, knowledge, resources and kindness, and of his belief that those with the broadest shoulders should be willing to carry the heaviest load. In leadership, generosity shapes how credit and responsibility are carried, allowing others to own their successes while accepting personal accountability when things go wrong. Generosity acquires substance when there

is something of ours to give, when giving carries a cost, or when another person's presence calls for something from us that we had not anticipated.

Values are at work in events whose course we cannot know beforehand, where other people bring purposes of their own, information remains incomplete and a decision may still have to be made. What we value shapes our attention and judgement, sometimes clearly enough for us to recognise it, sometimes beneath the level at which we can readily give an account of ourselves.

In August 2009, cracks discovered in an offshore platform placed Egil in the midst of a potentially catastrophic event for which no previous experience could have prepared him fully. Lives were at stake, specialist knowledge had to be gathered, decisions made, and responsibility carried while the event itself was still unfolding. Nearly thirty years earlier, as a seven-year-old boy, he had entered his parents' kitchen and heard the first reports of the *Alexander L. Kielland* rig, which capsized in March 1980, killing 123 people. Now an event from childhood returned within circumstances he could never have anticipated, giving the old memory a significance it had not possessed before.

Consequential events are never met from the present alone. Earlier experience can return with a significance it did not possess when first lived. What we know and value, together with the ways our attention and perception have been formed, bear upon how we understand what is happening. At the same time, other people bring knowledge and perceptions unavailable from where we stand.

Meanwhile, the event continues to unfold while we are trying to understand it. What we thought we knew can prove insufficient. Something previously unnoticed can alter the meaning of what has

already happened, while another person sees what we do not. What is happening affects us while we are attempting to judge it, and decisions may become necessary before the event has yielded anything resembling certainty. What we eventually consider, choose and do arises within this unfinished encounter between our own lived history, the lives of others, the material world in which we find ourselves, and an event still becoming.

Emotion has a prominent place in this book, particularly in Egil's account of emotional intelligence and his questioning of the faith we often place in rational thought alone. Reason remains indispensable to judgement, though it never arrives untouched by the person who reasons. We are affected by what happens to us. Fear can change the atmosphere of a room before anyone has spoken its name, while unease can draw our attention towards something that is not yet clear enough to be expressed as a reason. What we feel belongs to the way an event becomes significant to us and affects how we understand what is happening and how we respond.

To recognise what is moving within oneself, to sense what may be moving within another person, and to remain capable of judgement while both are present is part of what leadership asks of us. The offshore story makes this unusually visible because the stakes were so high, though the same demands arise in quieter circumstances. A difficult conversation or the sense that something is wrong before anyone can yet say exactly what it is can require us to respond before everything relevant has become explicit.

Egil describes Clarity as knowing "when I listen and when I speak, when I step back and when I intervene, when I ask for help and when I decide." Each of these choices takes place in time, while circumstances are moving and before their consequences can be fully

known. Clarity cannot depend upon the disappearance of uncertainty, since the moment for action may arrive while much remains unresolved. It requires enough attention to recognise the limits of our own understanding and remain open to what another person knows, while also seeing that waiting can itself shape what happens next.

In large and complex undertakings, no individual can possess all the knowledge dispersed among the people involved, nor perceive an event from every position from which it is being lived. The limits of one's own knowledge consequently belong within judgement itself. To listen is to make room for what can only become available through another person, allowing what is heard to affect one's understanding and, at times, alter the ground from which a decision is made.

Complexity also changes the meaning of expertise. The greater the undertaking, the more knowledge becomes distributed across disciplines, professions and different positions within it. Leadership takes place amid this plurality of knowing. A specialist may understand something with a depth unavailable to the person carrying overall responsibility, whose view must extend beyond any single specialism. That wider view has to draw on different forms of knowledge, each disclosing something of the event without exhausting what the event is.

When Egil read *The Neo-Generalist*, a book I wrote with Richard Martin, he recognised something of his own way of working in its account of people who move between specialist depth and generalist breadth. A neo-generalist moves across different domains of knowledge and experience, following curiosity far enough for unexpected connections to become possible. The same range can

be present in a life as a whole, where seriousness, curiosity, intellectual depth and the enjoyment of being among other people can coexist.

In complex undertakings, different specialists can be working within the same project while understanding it through their own disciplines and professional languages. What appears decisive from one position can recede in importance from another. A technical judgement may rest on knowledge unavailable outside a particular field, even though its consequences extend far beyond that field. Moving between these forms of knowledge therefore requires enough understanding of another person's field to engage with it without mistaking that partial understanding for mastery.

The neo-generalist moves between breadth and depth as the context requires. In leadership, that is also a matter of translation. Knowledge held in one part of an organisation may need to become intelligible somewhere else before it can affect a decision. A leader needs the ability both to move closer to a narrow specialist problem and to step back to understand its connection to the wider whole.

The movement between specialism and generalism has a counterpart in Egil's account of the interdependence of leadership and management. Management organises tasks, executes strategy and maintains the processes through which work is carried out. Leadership comes more fully into play when direction is uncertain or people cannot simply be instructed towards a predetermined answer. New ideas and pathways may have to be explored, and some decisions reach beyond what procedure can settle. The emphasis on each will shift with the circumstances.

Many people arrive in leadership after becoming exceptionally skilled in a specialised field. That expertise has earned them trust

and, eventually, promotion. The difficulty is that the knowledge which helped them advance can also make it tempting to continue providing the answers, correcting the work and solving problems that others need the opportunity to encounter themselves. Egil writes that leadership can require letting go of some of the professional expertise that earned the promotion in the first place, enabling others to learn, flourish and grow through their own practice.

Egil developed the WOW3 framework from his own experience, alongside what he had absorbed from reading and observing other leaders. *Why* and *Objective* precede *What*, *Who* and *When*, keeping purpose and intended achievement present before roles and actions are determined. The framework connects meaning and direction with execution.

As purpose becomes action, the person who acts also comes into view. What is to be done cannot be separated from who is doing it. This gives rise to two questions that run through the work of leadership: *Who do I wish to be*? and *What should I do*? The question of who I wish to be reaches towards the person I am becoming and the qualities I wish to bring into my relations with others. What I should do arises within the circumstances at hand, where consideration has to become choice and action.

The person deciding what to do is already someone, shaped by values, experience and ways of attending to the world. What appears worth protecting, whose knowledge we trust, which risks we are prepared to accept and which compromises we cannot make all shape the decision that becomes possible. Values acquire worldly consequence when they enter consideration, choice, action and behaviour. Vitality is present in the energy and curiosity brought to what confronts us. Generosity becomes discernible in what we

are prepared to give and in how we carry responsibility for others. Clarity concerns how attention is directed, where our focus lies and how decisions are made while circumstances remain uncertain.

What we do does not end with the action itself. It affects the lives of others and alters the event in which we are acting, while its consequences also return to us. A decision that appeared sound beforehand can look entirely different once its effects have become visible. An error we made can remain with us long enough to change what we notice when a similar situation arises years later. Over time, such consequences become part of experience. They affect how readily we conclude, what we learn to question, which uncertainties we can remain with and which patterns we recognise. Some of this learning is deliberate, but much of it is absorbed through practice itself and through having to live with what follows from what we do.

Our character is formed within the relation between being and doing, often without our noticing. Consistency and correction go hand in hand in shaping the person we become. Consistency allows certain ways of acting and certain qualities to become more firmly established in how we meet other people and take responsibility. Correction becomes necessary when consequences, reflection or later experience require us to alter what we have been doing. Practice is therefore a history of character formation. Being enters doing, and through consistency and correction, doing gradually alters our being.

Books written by practising leaders can be especially helpful when you are new to leadership, or considering whether to take it on. They allow you to encounter situations, questions and approaches before you have met them in your own working life. Their rele-

vance changes with experience, and something that seems remote on a first reading can acquire weight when circumstances later give it a context. Egil is clear that leadership is not necessarily the right path for everyone. The book can help you test your own inclination towards leadership against what the role asks of you, and give you something to work with if you decide to pursue this path.

Throughout the book, Egil offers models, frameworks and tools drawn from his own practice. Their value becomes clearer when you try them in situations of your own and attend to what they help you understand or do. A framework that proves useful in one setting can require alteration in another because the people and circumstances have changed. Egil himself describes frameworks as loose and flexible, providing parameters within which a leader can operate and experiment.

What ordentlighed and hel ved name is tested most clearly when responsibility places our conduct and character under pressure. It shows itself in what we consider and how we act when much remains uncertain and others must live with what follows from our decisions and behaviour. This book offers material for that work.

Kenneth Mikkelsen

1

The Journey Begins

The greatest leaders create the environment in which others can blossom.

In at the Deep End

Responsibility for fifty-three people in a life-or-death situation was not something I expected when I signed up to be a leader. But that was what happened on 31 August 2009. I was overseeing efforts to save an oil platform from collapse 330 kilometres off the coast of Denmark after cracks had been found in its huge steel structure by an unmanned submarine.

We had never experienced anything like this before and, with no clear and obvious way out of the mess, I was scared. At thirty-six years of age, I was convinced that my older, more experienced colleagues were much more competent than I was and better equipped to take the lead. I suggested several alternative candidates to head up the task force, but the Senior Vice President stood firm. The responsibility was to fall on my shoulders.

While we had received training in crisis management and in the total evacuation of a facility, nothing had prepared us for the com-

plexity of this situation. The first steps involved the formation of a task force and the gathering of information that would enable us to make crucial and timely decisions. The consequences of a misstep, of poor decision-making, were front of mind. The shadow of previous disasters, including those involving the *Piper Alpha* platform, *Alexander L. Kielland* rig and *Exxon Valdez* tanker loomed over us all. Events just over half year later at *Deepwater Horizon* in Gulf of Mexico would show exactly what could go wrong.

As a child, I was always the first to get up, making coffee and toast for my parents. I still remember, as a seven-year-old child, what an impression the radio bulletins made on me when I went into the kitchen on that fateful day in March 1980 and learned of the *Alexander L. Kielland* accident. I can still remember the sombre voices of the newscasters as they described Norway's biggest disaster since the Second World War, resulting in 123 lives lost.

Now it was 2009 and I was caught up in another crisis, fearing that history was about to repeat itself. Cracks in the steel could cause the platform to collapse. I almost didn't know what to do, feeling overwhelmed and lost. We decided to shut down production to avoid a major oil spill and to evacuate non-essential personnel from the platform. That still left the challenge of ensuring that the facility didn't collapse and protecting the lives of the twenty-one people still on board. Should we evacuate them too?

Gradually, I became more assured, consulting with colleagues in group meetings and on a one-to-one basis. As the evening progressed, though, we received reports from the crew still on the platform that they believed one of the cracks was expanding. They were terrified. I summoned a team of specialists to examine the evidence and spoke on the phone with the SVP who promised his support, whether I opt-

ed to evacuate or not. That was not the message I wanted to hear as I hoped he would make the decision and ease the pressure I was feeling.

The easiest option would be to order a total evacuation. But that would be irreversible. Was it necessary? Was the platform about to collapse? With no one on board, we would not be able to do anything to save it. I decided to gather more information. I worked through the night with four experts analysing video footage from our unmanned submarine, seeking to verify what the remaining platform crew had reported.

Not all the footage was clear. Visibility is often poor at sixty metres of depth, but we were struck by the reality of the situation when a fish appeared before the camera. This was about more than steel; it was about life. Some of structural surfaces were covered with debris, whereas others had been cleaned by the team controlling the submarine. However, late in the morning, we finally found the fissure that had caused such concern. We determined that this was neither new nor growing. It was the movement of the water that created the visual effect of something opening and expanding. With this evidence, I could then make the decision not to abandon the platform. Work ethics had helped diminish my fear, while teamwork and the opportunity for reflection had boosted my confidence.

A couple of days later, I felt both humble and vulnerable as I addressed a town hall meeting in the organisation. I had learned early in my career to be clear about objectives and about why we do what we do. I set out three goals for the team:

1. Find a temporary solution to save the integrity of the platform.
2. Start production.
3. Find a permanent solution.

These were deliberately vague. I didn't have any ready-made solutions, and we needed everyone to start thinking creatively about the risks we faced, pulling together as a team, drawing on our collective knowledge and capabilities. At one point, my emotions got the better of me and my voice cracked.

That was the moment others engaged in the conversation. One member of our leadership team began to question the decisions taken so far. In particular, he challenged my decision not to evacuate everyone from the platform. Didn't I have respect for the lives of the twenty-one people still on board? We always talked about safety first, but how did that marry up with the current situation? This was a fair question and had been discussed extensively. I'm sure I was defensive in my response, feeling ambushed by a manager in my team, and this prompted an emotional response from other attendees. I tried to explain as best I could the evidence we had gathered, our assessment of the ongoing risk, and how that had led us to determine that the better option was to maintain a presence on the platform.

After the meeting, I spoke with the manager. I told him that the questions he had raised were valuable and important. I encouraged him to continue challenging me in the future, but to do so directly on a one-to-one basis or in our leadership meetings. I explained that in a more public forum, like a town hall meeting, there was a need for leaders to demonstrate loyalty to the decisions made, regardless of whether they agreed with them or not. Otherwise, there was a danger of causing harm, undermining the team. The last thing we wanted was people to doubt what we were trying to accomplish or to feel scared, confused, frustrated or lost. Despair would inhibit any confidence they had in their own strengths and abilities, and it would muddy our messaging when clarity was es-

sential. We needed to stand together in public and save disagreement and discussion for elsewhere.

After the town-hall meeting and my call for creative solutions, there was competition within the team as nearly fifty different proposals were put forward to save the platform. We needed only one, which was selected for its safety, speed and quality. With cost not an issue, we were able to implement an initial fix with four months of the structural cracks first being detected. Because of the complex environment and operation of the platform, though, it took several years to fully implement a permanent solution.

Clarity and Confidence

There was so much that I learned from this experience that would inform my leadership behaviours and practice in subsequent years. It was transformational, helping me appreciate the theoretical grounding I had received at business schools, the benefits of which aided me during such a stressful and difficult period. It provided me clarity in my leadership journey, clarity that enabled me to act. With that action came confidence. Of course, I had self-doubt, but that is a quality essential to leadership; an acceptance that the leader doesn't have all the answers. It is at the edge of what is possible where we develop. Sometimes, we can transform what appears impossible into the possible.

I was aware of the theoretical distinctions between leadership and management, but these now became clearer to me. Leadership is not a science; it's an art. Management is science. When management is not enough, leadership takes over. I found that both were necessary, that a good leader needed to be skilled in both, stitch-

ing together their different qualities. We never know which will determine success in any given situation. But, as with art, leadership involves creative constraints, mistakes, learning, visibility and self-expression – with words, intonation and body language. A leader should provide direction, not detail. We should trust our team's knowledge and capabilities to get things done. Without this trust, we will never have a high-performing team. But when we trust the process and the team, the path will uncover itself. All we need to do is dare to step into the light and take the lead.

People will follow if they understand why, relating to how a leader communicates with them and enables their resourcefulness to solve challenges. They don't need to be told how. Often, the best thing a leader can do is acknowledge their colleagues' competence and get out of the way. On rare occasions, though, the leader must interfere and instruct. It depends on the situation, which is why leadership is an art. There are no recipes, no quick fixes. Leadership is a skill developed through practice. There is no fixed destination and each of us must identify our own purpose and goals along the way.

Our effectiveness as leaders is informed by the power and authority bestowed on us, how we manage it and when we use it. Action, tone and manner all can have a positive or negative impact depending on context. For example, demonstrations of humility and vulnerability can be extremely powerful, but there are also situations in which they are perceived as weakness. In The Art of War, the military strategist and philosopher Sun Tzu stated, 'Appear weak when you are strong, strong when you are weak.' In uncertain times, a team will look to their leader to show strength, instil confidence and encourage their colleagues. In times of greater certainty, the leader should make space for others, allowing them to step into

the spotlight. A confident leader serves their teammates, knowing both when to step up and when to step aside.

There are opportunities in any crisis, challenge or setback. Never waste them but take advantage of them for the individual or the team. Seek ways to turn things around and to learn. Feedback is one of the most powerful leadership tools we have. Yet few of us are competent in its use. Done properly, feedback can be transformational. On one occasion, the challenging conversation I had with a member of my leadership team was both uncomfortable and necessary. But we have had an excellent working relationship ever since, with him quickly accepting and growing into his role. Years later, he told me that our interactions that day taught him a valuable lesson that changed him as a leader. If something feels uncomfortable, it's usually the right time to act on it.

Unprepared

In my own case, I eventually found a way to lead during the 2009 oil platform crisis, overcoming self-doubt and mobilising the team. But that is not always the way. Some years ago, for example, I came across Anne who had a very different experience when she was moved into a position of authority.

Anne was a very good engineer and had quickly built a reputation in the organisation for her analytical mind and ability to solve complex problems. She was easy to like, and four years after joining the team, she was promoted to a managerial role with oversight of her colleagues. When I met Anne, she had been a manager for a year and had found the elevation problematic. Where Anne had previously enjoyed a sense of flow, making everything she did ap-

pear easy, she now struggled, feeling overloaded. The team's performance was no worse than before, but Anne didn't feel the same connection with her colleagues and missed the sense of fun that had made her enthusiastic about her job. She also found that her husband wasn't as supportive as he used to be now that she had to work longer hours.

This is something I have witnessed on numerous occasions. Someone is promoted to a management position because they excel at their job. But what many companies tend to forget is that management and leadership require different skills. Just because someone is a great engineer, architect, doctor or programmer, does not mean that they will be equally effective in a management or leadership role. Too often, people like Anne are promoted to these positions without any training, mentoring or other support. It is no wonder that they struggle to adapt and do a decent job.

There are readers who turn to books like this because they want to learn more about what it takes to be a leader or because they need a structured approached to a management role. There are also experienced leaders and managers who use such books to challenge themselves and revitalise their methods and practice. But these are all exceptions. Most leaders and managers don't actively seek new knowledge, insights or ways to improve.

Because there is a school of thought that leadership is innate, something that people are born with, it means that there are many new managers like Anne who wait futilely for relevant training and support. Without mentoring or coaching, they begin to doubt their own leadership ability. Yet, with effective guidance, most people can become good leaders. It just takes practice. Every day.

Simply because Anne was an excellent engineer, it did not follow

that she would make a good leader of engineers. Not without acquiring other skills and capabilities. When I began to question Anne about her situation, she realised that the problem did not rest with her alone. Responding to my enquiries allowed her to look in the mirror and reflect: *What do you enjoy the most, your role as an engineer or as a leader? For how many years did you study to be an engineer? Did you receive any specific training before you became a leader? Do you believe that leadership is important? Would you become a better leader if you received training, mentoring and support? If you had to choose one right now, would you prefer to continue your career as an engineer or as a leader?* I went through the same exercise with Benjamin, which generated the same results. Then I made a framework for Benjamin to work with, the same framework that this book is based on.

It starts with our purpose. We need to ask ourselves why we want to be leaders. Purpose is the foundation, informing everything we do as leaders. The next step is to explore our core values. Knowing who we are, what we view as fundamental, is essential to our effectiveness as leaders. When we have done that, we can set out a direction, defining goals for ourselves and our teams. Underpinning all of this, though, is an understanding that leadership and management are relational. Effective leaders are confident, courageous and charismatic. They have mastered communication and human interaction. They can provide honest feedback, to motivate their colleagues, to encourage diversity of perspective and to deliver change. This is not for everyone.

My hope is that *Leading* may help the reader identify their true calling. There may be some readers who suspect already that leadership and management is not what they were meant to do. If this book helps them remove any doubts, confirming their suspicions, then I will consider it a success. If others recognise leadership qualities in

themselves, then I hope the following pages will assist as they adapt to the role and develop their capabilities. In Benjamin's case, he decided to revert to his work as an engineer. Anne, on the other hand, committed herself to the new role and has become a great leader.

Leadership Challenges

What are the typical challenges that leaders face?

Failure to listen and learn. Many leaders make the mistake of assuming they know everything and don't take the time to listen to their team members or learn about the organization's culture and history. This can result in misunderstandings, lack of trust and missed opportunities.

Micromanagement. Leaders may feel they need to assert their authority and control every aspect of their team's work. However, this can stifle creativity, hinder collaboration and lead to burnout for both the leader and the team.

Lack of clarity and communication. Leaders may struggle to articulate their vision and goals clearly or to communicate effectively with their team. This can cause confusion, low morale and lack of direction.

Failure to delegate. Leaders may be hesitant to delegate tasks to their team members either because they don't trust them or because they want to prove themselves. This can result in overwork, burnout and missed opportunities for growth and development.

Lack of adaptability. Leaders may have a rigid approach to leadership. They then struggle to adapt to changing circum-

stances and to different personalities on their team. This can lead to missed opportunities, low morale and a lack of engagement.

By understanding these typical failures, leaders can take steps to avoid them. We can learn from our peers and from the successes and failures of the leaders who preceded us. This can make the experience of becoming a leader with impact that much more enjoyable.

Leadership Principles

Modern complexities, challenges and opportunities place our world in dire need of people who will lead in the best interests of the planet, society, organization, team and family. Leadership is a vast topic, generating countless books and articles that explore different aspects of it. My intention with this book is to provide leaders with an overview of what can make a difference for them and their teams.

Many people are promoted or recruited into incompetence. Leadership is a profession, and its fundamental philosophy is often not acknowledged:

It's all about the people.

How we lead is underpinned by two principles.

Principle 1: It's not about you

When we take on leadership responsibilities, the first thing we

need to understand is that this is about the people we lead, not us. It's about them delivering results and adding value to the company. If we try and do their work for them, instructing rather more than facilitating, we will end up with dissatisfied and disengaged workforce. They will follow because they are paid to, deferring to power because it is in their interests to do so. Before long the best employees will be transformed into quiet quitters.

As leaders, we need to learn the importance of getting out of the way. The people we lead have their own ambitions, aspirations and intrinsic motivations. The majority take pride in what they do and will deliver work in the best way they know how, drawing on their own skills, knowledge and experience. They should be trusted to do their jobs without any interference or attempts at control. They should be acknowledged for what they do well and guided where there are opportunities to learn.

In short, leadership is not about individual leaders, it's all about the people.

Principle 2: It's all about you

There are occasions when a leader, however briefly, must dare to step into the spotlight, assert their authority and role model the behaviours and actions they expect of others. This is when leadership is about them and the effect they have on others.

Knowing when to prioritise each of these principles, for how long and with what level of intensity is what makes leadership an art.

While it is possible to identify a range of leadership characteristics, it is also important to remember that how we lead is rooted in who

we are as human beings. We can 'steal' ideas from and imitate the behaviour of other leaders we admire, but this will only be effective when we do so in a way that is authentic and true to ourselves. We cannot be great leaders without self-understanding.

Knowing who we are and what we stand for can increase our confidence, improve clarity of communication and raise our own awareness of the effect our leadership has on others. With *Leading*, my aspiration is to help people attain this self-knowledge. I also hope to catalyse the transformation in leadership style of more experienced leaders and managers.

Leading

The ideas contained in *Leading* are not revolutionary but rely on pragmatic experience. Throughout, I will refer to concepts and frameworks that are timeless, while also challenge the notion of the heroic leader that has dominated much leadership discourse for the past hundred years or so. That style of leadership is unsuited to the world we find ourselves in today. In fact, it can be dangerous, as witness the global conflicts and suffering with which we have become all too familiar.

The type of leader I have in mind is anti-heroic. They are self-aware and confident, without being over-confident. They know they don't have all the answers. Instead, they trust the knowledge and expertise of their colleagues. Because they accept that uncertainty and ambiguity are ever-present, this stops them from becoming complacent. They acknowledge that they can never be the 'finished article', that there are always opportunities to improve, grow and learn. They are a work in progress just like everyone else.

With humility, vulnerability, facilitation, curiosity and open-ended questioning, this type of leader draws followers, encourages collaboration and enables their teams to deliver and flourish. They bring clarity and purpose, establishing what needs to be done when and why, while always seeking opportunities to learn. Such leaders praise their team members for their successes and protect them from blame when things don't go well. They are concerned with the development of others, as individuals and as a team. These leaders look to the long term, even as they ensure the delivery of projects and objectives within the short term.

Establishing a shared purpose, defining objectives and agreeing how they will be met is fundamental to how leaders should work with others, to how they build and transform teams, even to how they hold meetings. Leadership is relational and should be all about putting people first. Formal titles are irrelevant. What matters is serving others and seeking to become a better leader day by day.

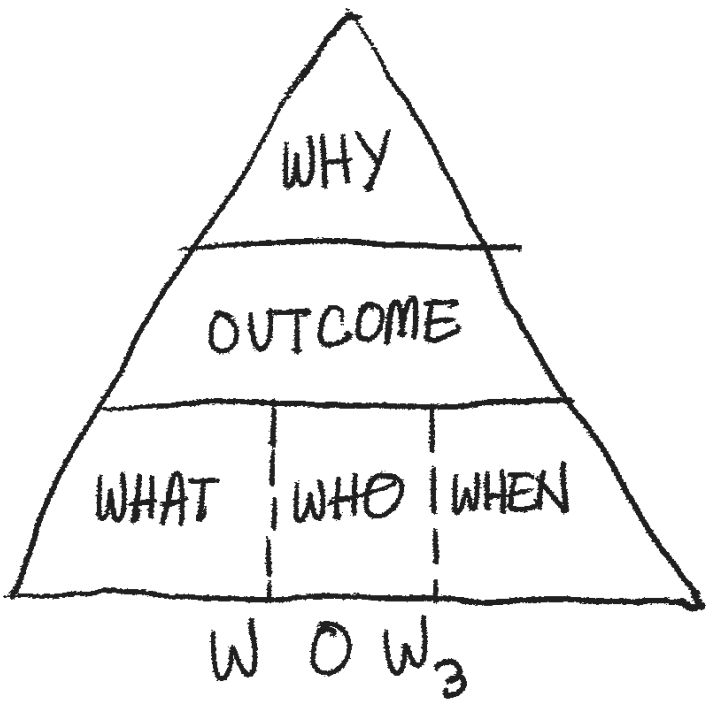
WOW3 Framework

As I have adapted to the role of leader, I have made sketches and notes, some of which I intend to share in *Leading*. These have been valuable to me. They have helped me develop a framework based on my own experiences and ideas, as well as the personalisation of what I have absorbed from reading leadership literature and observing other leaders in action.

I began to fully appreciate the usefulness of frameworks when studying for an MBA. A framework can be loose and flexible, helping to establish some rough parameters within which to operate and experiment. This is not necessarily about rules, regulations and pro-

cedures. But a framework can provide creative constraints, linked to purpose and objectives, that prompt critical thinking and innovation. As a leader gains mastery, they can widen the scope of their frameworks, just as an artist can start to paint on a larger canvas. A framework helps us keep the fundamentals in mind, like a musician with their scales, while simultaneously freeing us to explore.

When in doubt, a framework provides a leader with clarity and confidence to attack challenges and explore opportunities. It provides a starting point that prevents overthinking and the feeling of being overwhelmed.



The WOW3 framework provides a simple tool for any process a leader begins. It reminds us of the importance of identifying purpose and direction prior to defining what is to be done, by whom and when.

The WOW3 framework is one I turn to constantly, regardless of the context. WOW3, as its name suggests, prompts admiration and excitement because of its simplicity. The acronym stands for Why, Outcome, Who, What, When.

W	WHY	What is the purpose and meaning?
O	OUTCOME	What do we want to achieve?
W3	WHAT	What are we going to do?
	WHO	Who will do it?
	WHEN	When will the activity start and when will it end?

I find this framework appropriate for all walks of life. It is equally relevant in business, education, charity work and sport, for board meetings, project management, workshops and family matters. It is just as useful for the individual as it is for the collective, for fellowship, whether that relates to a team, organisation, community, nation or global institution. I find myself turning to it for team development, meetings, planning, task managements, problem solving, innovation, project reviews and large-scale transformation. The WOW3 framework helps establish shared purpose and understanding, bringing people together and keeping them on the same page. In my own experience, it has helped me navigate when I have felt lost, providing me with clarity about direction and objective, helping me understand what I am doing in terms of the big picture, as well as the priorities that need to be set and the decisions made.

Whenever I have not followed the WOW3 framework in full, I have found that our results have been poor and there has been a detrimental impact on one or more of the people I work with. When I have achieved buy-in from my colleagues and we have applied the framework in full, I have seen an improvement in how we work together, how we prioritise and make decisions and, ultimately, in our results. This is its *wow factor*. Too many leaders fail to do the obvious, which is the appeal of the WOW3 framework.

Leading is built upon the foundations of the WOW3 framework, the leadership fundamentals it captures and the sequence in which it does so, starting with purpose.

Visualising the Journey

Leading will make you reflect about your own practice. It is a reference guide and a story collection that will help the reader understand what it is to be a leader in the twenty-first century. My own story and that of other leaders will help illuminate the utility of the WOW3 framework and surface several interrelated themes.

Part I: Fundamentals for Leading

As we have seen, effective leadership requires a loose framework within which to operate. Part I examines its constituent elements.

The first chapter addresses the concept of *Purpose*, which is fundamental for both leader and team, giving meaning to what we do and the roles we fulfil. *Values* help leaders identify what is important and inform team culture. *Direction* covers how we deal with objectives, goals, visions or any other means of navigation. It provides