

INTRODUCING THE THOUGHT LEADER DEVELOPMENT MODEL

**Be the message,
not the noise**

An abstract graphic consisting of several overlapping, wavy, translucent bands in shades of yellow, orange, red, and teal. The bands flow from the bottom left towards the right, creating a sense of movement and depth. The colors blend into each other, with the teal band being the most prominent on the right side.

Introducing the Thought Leader Development Model

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**Be the message,
not the noise**

FRANK WAMMES



Colophon

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Foreword

Way back in the eighties – when I was slightly younger than today – I was asked to speak at a Unix conference about the Korn shell, a shiny command-line novelty that I happened to know quite a lot about. I took the stage, delivered my story and, much to my surprise, it kind of resonated. People actually cared about the message and loved the pitch. I was told to do it more often (I complied). That moment taught me something: when you believe your message matters, your audience leans in.

It's the advice I've repeated ever since: you must be convinced you have something interesting to say. Otherwise, why should anyone listen? If you don't project the confidence that your audience better sit up straight, then your thoughts are not leading; they're just words drifting into the noise.

And that's the catch with thought leadership. You don't get to proclaim yourself a 'thought leader.' It's not a badge you stick on your LinkedIn profile. It's something others might grant you: if your ideas land, if they echo, if they move people. The moment you self-declare, you've already lost.

Noise, after all, is cheap. Anyone can make it. Clarity is expensive. It requires courage, craft, and the discipline to cut away until only the essence remains. A real thought leader isn't the loudest voice in the room. It's the voice still ringing in your head after the room has gone silent.

That's exactly what this book helps you practice. Frank Wammes has taken the overused label of 'thought leadership' and rebuilt it into something you can work with. A pendulum swinging between confidence and humility, vision and pragmatism, content and context. You won't master every swing, but you'll learn where to shine, when to ask for help, and how to keep momentum. Frank knows what it means to turn ideas into impact: on stage, in client conversations, and in

building networks of people who make things happen. He doesn't just talk about thought leadership, he's lived it, shaped it, and now distilled it into this book.

And yes, especially in a world of generative and agentic AI, leadership remains ours. Machines can spew correct, yet soulless content by the ton. And by now, by our very nature we start to sense it already from a distance. Meaning, irony, authenticity, realness: it's more than ever in our department, and nowhere else.

Some words of advice: don't just consume this book. Use it. Make notes in the margins. Play the 'Change Game'. Push your message until it no longer sounds like a pitch, but like the only thing you could possibly say.

In the end, thought leadership is not about claiming a title. It's about delivering a message with such conviction that your audience has no choice but to sit up straight and pay attention. Just like I learned, years ago, with nothing more than a new story and a room full of skeptical engineers.

Ron Tolido

Executive Vice President, CTO and Chief Innovation Officer, Capgemini Insights & Data global business line

A Few Words from the Author

In a world overflowing with noise, clarity has become a rare and powerful asset. The ability to rise above the static and deliver a message that resonates – authentically, consistently, and with impact – is what defines a true thought leader.

This book, the second edition of the Thought Leader Development Model, is more than just an update. It's a transformation. What began as a self-published passion project, an attempt to capture a personal framework and make it accessible, has evolved into a practical, hands-on guide for anyone ready to lead with purpose.

The first edition was met with enthusiasm from a wide range of professionals: consultants, sales leaders, creatives, and strategists alike. Readers called it "practical," "clear," and "a framework that works". But one piece of feedback stood out: "There could be a whole book on each element." That insight sparked a deeper dive, through international trainings, real-world application, and countless conversations with aspiring thought leaders.

This edition reflects that journey. It's more interactive, more actionable, and more relevant than ever. You'll find new exercises, updated insights on Generative AI, and a fresh section on Agentic AI – a tool I believe will shape the next generation of impactful leadership.

You'll also notice the new subtitle: Be the Message, Not the Noise. Because in the end, it's not about the model – it's about the message. Your message. And how you choose to show up in the world.

This book is built on the wisdom, encouragement, and belief of many. To Ron Tolido, my lighthouse. To Andy Mulholland, who saw my potential. To Jeroen Versteeg, who gave me the space to own it. And to Aleksandra – thank you for the belief, the space, and the love that made this possible.

As you turn these pages, I hope you don't just read this book – I hope you use it. Write in it. Reflect with it. Let it challenge you, guide you, and help you become the kind of thought leader who doesn't just speak – but truly moves people.

Frank Wammes

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1

Introduction

■ 1.1 THE ORIGIN OF THIS BOOK

When I step onto the stage to deliver a keynote at a grand conference or present to an audience on innovation, my priority is to ensure that my content is not only up to date but also relevant and tailored to achieve the specific goals of that audience. While I have a set of foundational building blocks that I frequently utilize, one section that consistently draws the most attention (and has prompted numerous requests for sharing my deck) revolves around the insights of my early guru, Tom Peters.

The powerful message prominently displayed on that slide is this:

“Nearly 100% of innovation is inspired not by market analysis, but by people who are supremely pissed off by the way things are.”

This message acted as the catalyst for this book. Between 2013 and 2019, I held the position of Chief Technology Officer for Capgemini Europe – a role that allowed me to facilitate innovation and technological advancements within our company while also evangelizing these ideas to our clients. Taking the stage to talk about my passion was undeniably one of the greatest pleasures that accompanied this position.

However, living in the Netherlands and being well known in the Dutch IT industry, I found myself overflowed with requests for keynotes, client meetings, and conference discussions. While this was certainly a fortunate situation, it also presented challenges as I needed to fulfil my responsibilities as CTO for the rest of Europe. This led to frustration for both the people I had to disappoint and my family, as frequent work-related evenings compromised my time spent at home in the Netherlands.

Fuelled by this dissatisfaction (or as Tom Peters would put it, being “supremely pissed off”), I set out to build a broader network of thought leaders – individuals whom I could recommend in cases where I couldn’t fulfil requests myself. I embarked on a journey within our organization, seeking experts who were exceptionally skilled in their specific fields.

However, in this quest, I met a lot of people who were good in speaking a lot of words, but not in leading the client with a very clear message on their specific topic of expertise. Hence the subtitle of this book: “Be the Message, Not the Noise”.

Wherever I looked, there were always some elements where I saw room for development, amongst others:

- The inability to tell a compelling story that captivates the audience.
- Being too narrow in focus and lacking a broader perspective.
- Proficiency in describing the current state, but an inability to envision the future.
- Excelling in one field but struggling to apply this expertise to new or unfamiliar industries.
- Failing to inspire action and mobilize the audience after a presentation.

These requirements may seem demanding, but in my view, they are what truly defines a genuine thought leader in today’s world.

Unable to find the ideal team to support me, I opted for a different approach. I decided to deconstruct the skills I possessed and observed in other industry leaders. Based on this analysis, I developed a program to nurture our talented experts into becoming genuine thought leaders.

I initiated the first ‘Thought Leader Class’ in 2014, where ten participants eagerly joined. It was an enjoyable and energizing experience that also provided me with insights into the essential skills that required development. This led me to identify the five key elements of thought leadership.



Figure 1 Five key elements of thought leadership

However, I soon realized that not everyone could excel in all five elements. Reflecting on research conducted by Fred Crawford and Ryan Mathews during the millennium change, I found a valuable analogy. In their book *The Myth of Excellence*, Crawford and Mathews demonstrated that successful retailers in the market always shared specific characteristics:

- They excelled in one of the 5 Ps (Product, Price, Place, Promotion, and People)
- Performed above par in one of the other 5 Ps
- And were at par in all remaining 3 Ps

The argument was that if you excel in more than one area, this would always come at a cost where you would be below par in one of the other Ps, which is typically not accepted by clients, regardless of how much expertise you might demonstrate in the other Ps.

Inspired by this idea, I adopted a balanced approach to grow our thought leaders. As within retailers, thought leaders will also be unable to excel in each of the five elements, and each of the thought leaders will have different talents and hence will maintain a distinct balance.

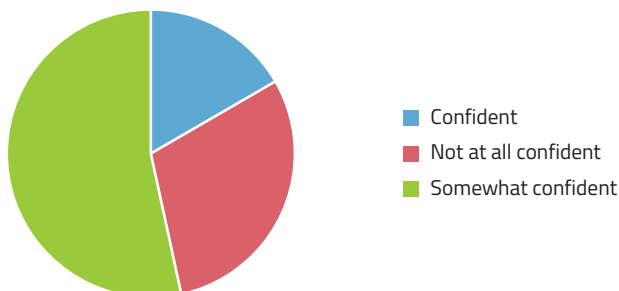
This model proved to be highly effective, and over the years the 'Thought Leader Development Model' (TDM) came to fruition. The model that will help you achieve clarity in your message and will strengthen you in where and how to bring your message to really make an impact and lead your clients.

Surprisingly, this development program extended beyond potential CTOs. Individuals who might never become a CTO found that through the model, they could enhance their impact on clients (e.g., Architects), improve the conversion of RFPs into winning deals (e.g., Consultants), excel in managing clients in large engagements (e.g. Engagement Directors), and drive greater value for the client (e.g. Sales).

The training has proved to be invaluable in helping the confidence of the participants. 90% of participants said that their confidence as thought leaders have increased after attending the Thought Leadership Program based on the model presented in this book. More importantly, 83% of responders said that the Thought Leadership Model allowed them to create a roadmap for their personal growth as a thought leader.

In Figure 2, you will find the shift in confidence from the participants of the Thought Leader course over the last three years.

Before participating in the Thought Leadership Program, how confident did you feel as a thought leader?



After participating in the Thought Leadership Program, how confident did you feel as a thought leader?

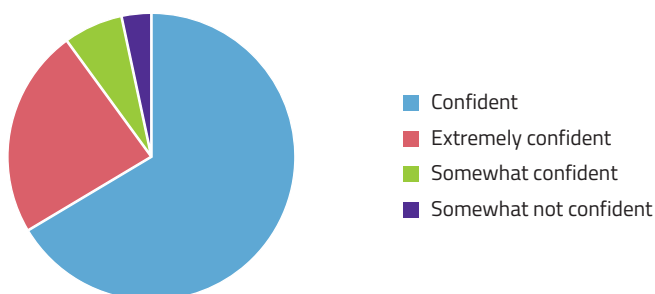


Figure 2 How the Thought Leadership Program has improved attendees' confidence

■ 1.2 WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS BOOK

1. Identify your current strengths

Embark on a transformative journey by first recognizing your existing strengths. You don't need to excel in every thought leadership element; the key is finding the optimal mix for your unique profile. Discover where you shine and pinpoint areas for development.

2. Map your growth journey

With insights from your initial self-assessment and a deep understanding of the model, chart your ideal state. Although your journey may start as a mere sketch, establishing a starting point is crucial to kickstart your transformation.