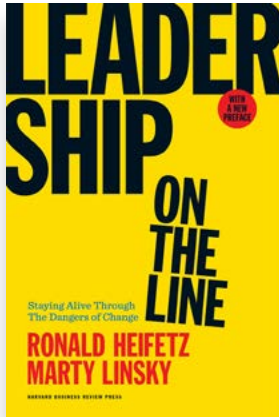


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## Leadership on the Line

### THE SUMMARY

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#### Introduction

To lead is to live dangerously because when leadership counts, you challenge what people hold dear—their daily habits, tools, loyalties, and ways of thinking—with nothing more to offer than a possibility. Moreover, leadership often means exceeding the authority you are given to tackle the challenge at hand. People push back when you disturb the personal and institutional equilibrium they know. People resist in all kinds of creative and unexpected ways that can get you taken out of the game feeling pushed aside, undermined, or eliminated.

It is no wonder that when the myriad opportunities to exercise leadership call, you often hesitate. Anyone who has stepped out on the line, leading part or all of an organization, a community, or a family, knows the personal and professional vulnerabilities. However gentle your style, however careful your strategy, however sure you may be that you are on the right track, leading is risky business.

Leadership is worth the risk because the goals extend beyond material gain or personal advancement. By making the lives of people around you better, leadership provides meaning in life. It creates purpose. We believe that every human being has something unique to offer, and that a larger sense of purpose comes from using that gift to help your organizations, families, or communities thrive. The gift might be your knowledge, your experience, your values, your presence, your heart, or your wisdom. Perhaps it's simply your basic curiosity and your willingness to raise unsettling questions.

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# Leadership on the Line

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## PART ONE: THE CHALLENGE

### Chapter 1: The Heart of Danger

Leadership would be a safe undertaking if your organizations and communities only faced problems for which they already knew the solutions. Every day, people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high. We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways by changing attitudes, values, and behaviors, people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in the new environment. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.

In the twenty-first century, people and organizations face adaptive pressures every day, in their individual lives and at all levels of society. Each leadership opportunity to respond to these challenges also carries with it attendant risks. For example, when your car breaks down, you go to a mechanic. Most of the time, the mechanic can fix it. However, if the car breaks down because of the way members of the family use it, the problem will probably happen again. The mechanic might be able to get the car on the road once more, but by continuing to deal with it as a purely technical problem a mechanic can solve, the family may end up avoiding the underlying issues demanding adaptive work, such as how to persuade the mother to stop drinking and driving, or the grandfather to give up his driver's license, or the teenagers to be more cautious. No doubt, any family member would find it difficult and risky to step forward and lead the prickly conversations with the mother, grandfather, or even the teenage driver.

Generally, people will not authorize someone to make them face what they do not want to face. Instead, people hire someone to provide protection and ensure stability, someone with solutions that adaptive problems may involve upending deep and entrenched norms. Consequently, leadership requires disturbing people, but at a rate they can absorb.

Frequently, people who seek to exercise leadership are amazed that their organizations and communities resist. Why should people oppose you when you are helping them change habits, attitudes, and values that only hold them back, or when you are doing something good for them?

Habits, values, and attitudes, even dysfunctional ones, are part of one's identity. To change the way people see and do things is to challenge how they define themselves. Habits are hard to give up because they give stability. They are also predictable. In going through the pains of adaptive change, there is no guarantee that the result will be an improvement. Smokers understand this. They know that the odds of getting cancer are uncertain, while they know for sure that an enormous source of relaxation and satisfaction will be lost when the cigarettes are gone. Perhaps the deepest influence is

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that habits, values, and attitudes come from somewhere, and to abandon those means to be disloyal to their origin.

Indeed, our deeply held loyalties serve as a keystone in the structure of our identities. Loyalty is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it represents loving attachments to family, team, community, organization, and religion. Staying true to these attachments is a great virtue. On the other hand, our loyalties and attachments also represent our bondage and limitations. Intuitively, people play it safe rather than put at risk the love, esteem, and approval of people or institutions they care about. The experience of disloyalty to our deeper attachments is often so painfully unacceptable that we avoid wrestling with them altogether. Witness the turmoil of teenagers trying to grow up and decide what to take from home and what to leave behind.

The dangers of exercising leadership derive from the nature of the problems for which leadership is necessary. Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people's habits, beliefs, and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures. Adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity and it also challenges their sense of competence. Loss, disloyalty, and feeling incompetent are a lot to risk. No wonder people resist.

## Chapter 2: The Faces of Danger

The dangers of leadership take many forms. Although each organization and culture has its preferred ways to restore equilibrium when someone upsets the balance, we've noticed four basic forms, with countless ingenious variations. When exercising leadership, you risk getting marginalized, diverted, attacked, or seduced. Regardless of the form, however, the point is the same. When people resist adaptive work, their goal is to shut down those who exercise leadership in order to preserve what they have.

Marginalization often comes in seductive forms. For example, it may come in the guise of telling you that you are special, *sui generis*, that you alone represent some important and highly valued idea, with the effect of keeping both you and the idea in a little box. First, the role of "special person" keeps you from playing a meaningful part on other issues. You are kept from being a generalist. Second, after a while you are devalued even on your own issue, because it's all people hear you talking about. Third, as with other forms of marginalization like tokenism, the organization can sing its own praises for welcoming unusual people without investigating the relevance and implications of their work to the central mission of the enterprise. If only you can do what you do, then the organization doesn't have to develop and institutionalize your innovation.

Another time-honored way to push people aside is to divert them. There are many ways in which communities and organizations will consciously or subconsciously try to make you lose focus. They do this sometimes by broadening your agenda, sometimes by overwhelming it, but always with a

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seemingly logical reason for disrupting your game plan. Some people are promoted or given new, glamorous responsibilities as a way of sidetracking their agenda. Whenever you get an unexpected promotion, or when some fun or important tasks are added to your current role, pause and ask yourself: Do I represent some disquieting issue from which the organization is moving to divert me, and itself, from addressing?

Attacking you personally is another tried-and-true method of neutralizing your message. Whatever the form of the attack, if the attackers can turn the subject of the conversation from the issue you are advancing to your character or style, or even to the attack itself, it will have succeeded in submerging the issue. Attention, the currency of leadership, gets wasted. If you can't draw people's attention to the issues that matter, then how can you lead them in the right direction or mobilize any progress?

Many forms of bringing you down have a seductive dimension. We use the word seduction, a politically charged word, as a way of naming the process by which you lose your sense of purpose altogether, and therefore get taken out of action by an initiative likely to succeed because it has a special appeal to you. In general, people are seduced when their guard is down, when their defense mechanisms have been lowered by the nature of the approach. We are not talking about neurotic needs only. People are diverted by initiatives that meet normal, human interests, too. One of the everyday forms of seduction, for example, is the desire for the approval of your own faction, your own supporters.

Disappointing your own core supporters, your deepest allies on your issue, creates hardships for you and for them. Yet you make yourself vulnerable when you too strongly give in to the understandable desire to enjoy their continuing approval, rather than disappoint them. Over and over again we have seen people take on difficult issues, only to be pushed by their own faction so far out on a limb that they lose credibility in the larger community.

## PART TWO: THE RESPONSE

### Chapter 3: Get on the Balcony

Few practical ideas are more obvious or more critical than the need to get perspective in the midst of action. Any military officer, for example, knows the importance of maintaining the capacity for reflection, even in the "fog of war." Great athletes can at once play the game and observe it as a whole; as Walt Whitman described it, "being both in and out of the game." Jesuits call it "contemplation inaction." Hindus and Buddhists call it "karma yoga," or mindfulness. We call this skill "getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony," an image that captures the mental activity of stepping back in the midst of action and asking, "What's really going on here?"

Why do so many of the world's forms of spiritual and organizational life recommend this mental exercise? The reason is that few tasks strain our abilities more than putting this idea into practice. We all get swept up in the action, particularly when it becomes intense or personal and we need

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most to pause. Self-reflection does not come naturally. It's much easier to adopt an established belief than create one's own. Most people instinctively follow a dominant trend in an organization or community, without critical evaluation of its merits. The herd instinct is strong. A stampede not only tramples those who don't keep pace, it also makes it hard to see another direction until the dust settles.

The balcony metaphor captures this idea. Let's say you are dancing in a big ballroom with a balcony up above. A band plays and people swirl all around you to the music, filling up your view. Most of your attention focuses on your dance partner, and you reserve whatever is left to make sure that you don't collide with dancers close by. You let yourself get carried away by the music, your partner, and the moment. When someone later asks you about the dance, you exclaim, "The band played great, and the place surged with dancers."

If you had gone up to the balcony and looked down on the dance floor, you might have seen a very different picture. You would have noticed all sorts of patterns. For example, you might have observed that when slow music played, only some people danced; when the tempo increased, others stepped onto the floor; and some people never seemed to dance at all. Indeed, the dancers all clustered at one end of the floor, as far away from the band as possible. On returning home, you might have reported that participation was sporadic, the band played too loud, and you only danced to fast music.

Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment. The only way you can gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray. Otherwise, you are likely to misperceive the situation and make the wrong diagnosis, leading you to misguided decisions about whether and how to intervene.

If you want to affect what is happening, you must return to the dance floor. Staying on the balcony in a safe observer role is as much a prescription for ineffectuality as never achieving that perspective in the first place. The process must be iterative, not static. The challenge is to move back and forth between the dance floor and the balcony, making interventions, observing their impact in real time, and then returning to the action. The goal is to come as close as you can to being in both places simultaneously, as if you had one eye looking from the dance floor and one eye looking down from the balcony, watching all the action, including your own. This is a critical point: When you observe from the balcony you must see yourself as well as the other participants. Perhaps to see yourself objectively is the hardest task of all.

To see yourself from the outside as merely one among the many dancers, you have to watch the system and the patterns, looking at yourself as part of the overall pattern. You must set aside your special knowledge of your intentions and inner feelings, and notice the part of yourself that others would see if they were looking down from the balcony. Moving from participant to observer and

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back again is a skill you can learn. When you are sitting in a meeting, practice switching roles, watching what is happening while it is happening, even as you are part of what's happening. When you make an intervention, resist the instinct to stay perched on the edge of your seat waiting to defend or explain what you said. Simple techniques, such as pushing your chair a few inches away from the meeting table after you speak, may provide some literal as well as metaphorical distance to help you detach just enough to become an observer. Don't jump to a familiar conclusion. Open yourself up to other possibilities. See who says what and watch the body language. Watch the relationships as well to see how people's attention to one another varies. Is it supporting, thwarting, or listening?

## **Chapter 4: Think Politically**

There are six essential aspects of thinking politically in the exercise of leadership: one for dealing with people who are with you on the issue; one for managing those who are in opposition; and four for working with those who are uncommitted but wary. Those are the people you are trying to move.

*Find Partners:* Partners provide protection, and they create alliances for you with factions other than your own. They strengthen both you and your initiatives. With partners you are not simply relying on the logical power of your arguments and evidence, you are building political power as well. Furthermore, the content of your ideas will improve if you take into account the validity of other viewpoints, especially if you can incorporate the views of those who differ markedly from you. This is especially critical when you are advancing a difficult issue or confronting a conflict of values.

*Keep the Opposition Close:* People who oppose what you are trying to accomplish are usually those with the most to lose by your success. In contrast, your allies have the least to lose. For opponents to turn around will cost them dearly in terms of disloyalty to their own roots and constituency; for your allies to come along may cost nothing. For that reason, your opponents deserve more of your attention, as a matter of compassion, as well as a tactic of strategy and survival.

As you attend to your allies and opposition in advancing your issue, do not forget the uncommitted and wary people in the middle, the people you want to move. You need to ensure that their general resistance to change doesn't morph into a mobilization to push you aside. What follows are four steps you can take that are specifically focused on them.

*Accept Responsibility for Your Piece of the Mess:* when you are too quick to lay blame on others, whether inside or outside the community, you create risks for yourself. Obviously, you risk misdiagnosing the situation. You also risk making yourself a target by denying that you are part of the problem and that you, too, need to change. After all, if you are pointing your finger at them,

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pushing them to do something they don't want to do, the easiest option for them is to get rid of you. The dynamic becomes you versus them. On the other hand, if you are with them, facing the problem together and each accepting some share of responsibility for it, then you are not as vulnerable to attack.

*Acknowledge Their Loss:* People are willing to make sacrifices if they see the reason why. Indeed, boys go to war with the blessings of their parents to protect values even more precious than life itself. So, it becomes critically important to communicate, in every way possible, the reason to sacrifice which means explaining why people need to sustain losses and reconstruct their loyalties. People need to know that the stakes are worth it.

Beyond clarifying the values at stake and the greater purposes worth the pain, you also need to name and acknowledge the loss itself. It's not enough to point to a hopeful future. People need to know that you know what you are asking them to give up on the way to creating a better future. Make explicit your realization that the change you are asking them to make is difficult, and that what you are asking them to give up has real value. Grieve with them, and memorialize the loss.

*Model the Behavior:* Leaders should be willing to model the behavior that they are asking others to do. Even symbolic modeling can have substantial impact. When Lee Iacocca reduced his own salary to \$1 during Chrysler's troubles, no one worried that Iacocca would go without dinner. But the fact that he was willing to make a personal economic sacrifice helped motivate employees to do likewise as part of the company's turn-around plan.

*Accept Casualties:* If people simply cannot adapt, the reality is that they will be left behind. They become casualties. This is virtually inevitable when organizations and communities go through significant change. Some people simply cannot or will not go along. You have to choose between keeping them and making progress. For people who find taking casualties extremely painful, almost too painful to endure, this part of leadership presents a special dilemma. But it often goes with the territory.

Accepting casualties signals your commitment. If you signal that you are unwilling to take casualties, you present an invitation to the people who are uncommitted to push your perspectives aside. Without the pinch of reality, why should they make sacrifices and change their ways of doing business? Your ability to accept the harsh reality of losses sends a clear message about your courage and commitment to seeing the adaptive challenge through.

## **Chapter 5: Orchestrate the Conflict**

Orchestrating the conflict may be easier to do when you are in an authority role because people expect those in authority to manage the process. However, the four ideas we suggest are also options for people who seek to enact change but are not in senior positions of authority.

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*Create a Holding Environment:* When you exercise leadership, you need a holding environment to contain and adjust the heat that is being generated by addressing difficult issues or wide value differences. A holding environment is a space formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying apart. Creating a holding environment enables you to direct creative energy toward working the conflicts and containing passions that could easily boil over.

A holding environment will look and feel quite different in different contexts. It may be a protected physical space you create by hiring an outside facilitator and taking a work group off-site to work through a particularly volatile and sensitive conflict. It may be the shared language and common history of a community that binds people together through trying times. It can be characterized in some settings by deep trust in an institution and its authority structure. It may be characterized by a clear set of rules and processes that give minority voices the confidence that they will be heard without having to disrupt the proceedings to gain attention.

A holding environment is a place where there is enough cohesion to offset the centrifugal forces arising when people do adaptive work. In a holding environment, with structural, procedural, or virtual boundaries, people feel safe enough to address problems that are difficult, not only because they strain ingenuity, but also because they strain relationships.

*Control the Temperature:* Any community can take only so much pressure before it becomes either immobilized or spins out of control. The heat must stay within a tolerable range—not so high that people demand it be turned off completely, and not so low that they are lulled into inaction. You can constructively raise the temperature and the tension in many ways. First, bring attention to the hard issues, and keep it focused there. Second, let people feel the weight of responsibility for tackling those issues. Conflicts will surface within the relevant group as contrary points of view are heard.

To reduce heat, you can start on the technical problems, deferring adaptive challenges until people are “warmed up.” A little progress on a partial, relatively easy problem may reduce anxiety enough that the tougher issues can then be tackled. Negotiators commonly use this tactic: strengthen the relationships by creating shared successes. You can provide structure to the problem-solving process by breaking down the problem into its parts, creating working groups with clear role assignments, setting time parameters, establishing decision rules, and structuring reporting relationships. You can frame the problem in a less threatening way, or speak to people’s fears. You can temporarily bear more of the responsibility yourself. You can use humor or find an excuse for a break, even a party, to provide a temporary release. People may then be able to return to the tough questions. You can separate the conflicting parties and issues, pacing and sequencing the rate at which people challenge one another. Finally, you can speak to transcendent values so that people can be reminded of the import of their efforts and sacrifices.



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*Pace the Work:* Leadership addresses emotional as well as conceptual work. When you lead people through difficult change, you take them on an emotional roller coaster because you are asking them to relinquish something (such as a belief, a value, or a behavior) that they hold dear. People can stand only so much change at any one time. You risk revolt, and your own survival, by trying to do too much, too soon.

Pacing the work typically requires people in authority to let their ideas and programs seep out a little at a time, so they can be absorbed slowly enough to be tested and accepted. This kind of patient withholding of information must be done carefully, with openness to the testing and revision of one's ideas, lest it be interpreted as deceitful or misleading.

*Show Them the Future:* To sustain momentum through a period of difficult change, you have to find ways to remind people of the positive vision that makes the current angst worthwhile. As you catalyze change, you can help ensure that you do not become a lightning rod for the conflict by making the vision more tangible; reminding people of the values they are fighting for, and showing them how the future might look. By answering, in every possible way, the "why" question, you increase people's willingness to endure the hardships that come with the journey to a better place.

To lead people, we suggest you build structures of relationships to work the tough issues, establishing norms that make passionate disagreement permissible. Keep your hands on the temperature controls. Don't provoke people too much at any one time. Remember, your job is to orchestrate the conflict, not become it.

## **Chapter 6: Give the Work Back**

You gain credibility and authority in your career by demonstrating your capacity to take other people's problems off their shoulders and give them back solutions. The pattern begins early in school as children receive positive reinforcement for finding the answers, and continues throughout life as you become an increasingly responsible adult. All of this is a virtue, until you find yourself facing adaptive pressures for which you cannot deliver solutions. At these times, all of your habits, pride, and sense of competence get thrown out of kilter because the situation calls for mobilizing the work of others rather than knowing the way yourself. By trying to solve adaptive challenges for people, at best you will reconfigure it as a technical problem and create some short-term relief. But the issue will not have gone away. It will surface again.

Moreover, shouldering the adaptive work of others is risky. When you take on an issue, you become that issue in the eyes of many. It follows, then, that the way to get rid of the issue is to get rid of you. Whatever the outcome, you will be held responsible for the disequilibrium the process has generated, the losses people have had to absorb, and the backlash resulting from those who feel left behind.

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You stay alive in the practice of leadership by reducing the extent to which you become the target of people's frustrations. The best way to stay out of range is to think constantly about giving the work back to the people who need to take responsibility. Place the work within and between the factions who are faced with the challenge, and tailor your interventions so they are unambiguous and have a context. In the ongoing improvisation of leadership in which you act, assess, take corrective action, reassess, and intervene again, you can never know with certainty how an intervention is received unless you listen over time. Therefore, just as critical as the quality of your actions will be is your ability to hold steady in the aftermath in order to evaluate how to move next.

## Chapter 7: Hold Steady

Holding steady in the heat of action is an essential skill for staying alive and keeping people focused on the work. The pressure on you may be almost unbearable, causing you to doubt both your own capacities and your direction. If you waver or act prematurely, your initiative can be lost in an instant.

*Take the Heat:* Learning to take the heat and receive people's anger in a way that does not undermine your initiative is one of the toughest tasks of leadership. When you ask people to make changes and even sacrifices, it's almost inevitable that you will frustrate some of your closest colleagues and supporters, not to mention those outside your faction. Your allies want you to calm things down for them rather than stir things up. As they put pressure on you to back away, drop the issue, or change the behavior that upsets them, you will feel the heat, uncomfortably. In this sense, exercising leadership might be understood as disappointing people at a rate they can absorb.

No two people are wired exactly alike, and so we all respond differently to our environment. Some of us have a higher tolerance for heat and stress than others; indeed, there are those who thrive under peak pressure. But for most of us, who prefer to minimize opposition or avoid it altogether, the truth is that rarely, if ever, can we escape people's anger when leading any kind of significant change. Thus, the more heat you can take, the better off you will be in keeping your issue alive and keeping yourself in the game. Increasing your capacity for taking the heat takes practice. Again and again, you must train yourself to be deliberate and keep your cool when the world around you is boiling. Silence is a form of action.

*Let the Issues Ripen:* In your efforts to lead a community, you will often be thinking and acting ahead of them. But if you get too far ahead, raising issues before they are ready to be addressed, you create an opportunity for those you lead to sideline both you and the issue. You need to wait until the issue is ripe, or ripen it yourself. True, patience is not a virtue typically associated with people passionate about what they are doing, but holding off until the issue is ready may be critical in mobilizing people's energy and getting yourself heard. An issue becomes ripe when there is widespread urgency to deal with it. Something that may seem to you to be incredibly important and requiring immediate attention may not seem so to others in your organization, but it may become important to them in time.

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*Focus Attention on the Issue:* Getting people to focus their attention on tough problems can be a complicated and difficult task, particularly in large organizations or communities where, typically, ways of avoiding painful issues have developed over many years. The most obvious example of work avoidance is denial. Even our language is full of shorthand reminders of this mechanism: “out of sight, out of mind;” “swept under the carpet;” “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Other typical work avoidance mechanisms are scape-goating, reorganizing (yet again), passing the buck (setting up another committee), finding an external enemy, blaming authority, and character assassination. Actual physical assassination usually represents an extreme act of work avoidance.

These mechanisms reduce the level of distress in an organization or community by deflecting attention from the tough issues and shifting responsibility away from the people who need to change. In leading, you need to hold steady in the face of these distractions, counteract them, and then redirect attention to the issue at hand. Undoubtedly, you have experienced and observed the pressure on you to back off when you point to difficult, conflictive, value-laden issues in an organization or community. Although hard to do, holding steady allows you to accomplish several things at once. By taking the heat, you can maintain a productive level of disequilibrium, or creative tension, as people bear the weight of responsibility for working their conflicts. By holding steady, you also give yourself time to let issues ripen, or conversely to construct a strategy to ripen an issue for which there is not yet any generalized urgency. Moreover, you give yourself time to find out where people are at so that you can refocus attention on the key issues.

## PART THREE: BODY AND SOUL

### Chapter 8: Manage Your Hungers

From our own observation and painful personal experience, we know that the cleanest way for an organization to bring you down is to let you bring yourself down. Then no one else feels responsible. All too often we self-destruct or give others the ammunition they need to shoot us down. Frequently people are defeated because, though they are doing their best, they make mistakes in how they assess and engage their environment. Sometimes we bring ourselves down by forgetting to pay attention to ourselves. We get caught up in the cause and forget that exercising leadership is, at heart, a personal activity. It challenges us intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. With the adrenaline pumping, we can work ourselves into believing we are somehow different, and therefore not subject to the normal human frailties that can defeat more ordinary mortals on ordinary missions. We begin to act as if we were physically and emotionally indestructible.

We all have hungers, which are expressions of our normal human needs, but sometimes those hungers disrupt our capacity to act wisely or purposefully. Perhaps one of our needs is too great and renders us vulnerable. Perhaps the setting in which we operate exaggerates our normal level of need, amplifying our desires and overwhelming our usual self-controls. Our hungers also might be unchecked simply because our human needs are not being met in our personal lives.

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Every human being needs some degree of power and control, affirmation and importance, as well as intimacy and delight. We know of no one who prefers to feel entirely powerless, unimportant, or untouched in life. Yet each of these normal human needs can get us into trouble when we lose the personal wisdom and discipline required to manage them productively and fulfill them appropriately.

In leading people, you will tune into their needs as well as your own. In connecting with their hopes and frustrations, it is easy to become the storehouse of their yearnings. However, the desire to fulfill the needs of others can become a vulnerability if it feeds into your own normal hungers for power, importance, and intimacy. This is especially true if you have strong hungers to begin with, or if your own needs are not being adequately met. Then, all too frequently, people end up bringing themselves down. They get so caught up in the action and energy that they lose their wisdom and self-discipline, and slip out of control.

We're not suggesting that leadership requires repressing your normal human passions. To return to our original metaphor, it is crucial to get to the balcony repeatedly to regain perspective, to see how and why your passions are being stoked. When you take on the tasks of leading, invariably you resonate with many feelings expressed by people around you. No doubt some of the feelings you bring to your professional role are "inherited;" we all carry both virtues and baggage from our parents and previous generations. Many other feelings in your job are produced by the way you resonate with the job environment itself. In each professional role you take on, you must be careful about your emotional inclination to carry the issues and sentiments of others in the organization, and be aware of how others in the environment affect you.

When you lead, you participate in collective emotions, which then generate a host of temptations which include invitations to accrue power over others, appeals to your own sense of importance, opportunities for emotional intimacy and sexual satisfaction. Connecting to those emotions is different from giving in to them. Yielding to them destroys your capacity to lead. Power can become an end in itself, displacing your attention to organizational purposes. An inflated sense of self-importance can breed self-deception and dysfunctional dependencies. Inappropriate sexual relationships can damage trust, create confusion, and provide a diversionary justification to get rid of you and your perspective on the issue.

How do you learn to manage such visceral hungers? First, know yourself, tell yourself the truth about what you need, and then appropriately honor those human needs. Every human being needs power and control, affirmation and importance, intimacy and delight. You cannot lead and stay alive by simply putting a silencer on yourself. Managing your hungers requires knowing your vulnerabilities and taking action to compensate for them. This begins with respecting your hungers.

## **Chapter 9: Anchor Yourself**

To anchor ourselves in the turbulent seas of the various roles we take in life, professionally and personally, we have found it profoundly important to distinguish between the self, which we can

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anchor, and our roles, which we cannot. The roles we play in our organization, community, and private lives depend mainly on the expectations of people around us. The self relies on our capacity to witness and learn throughout our lives, and to refine the core values that orient our decisions, whether or not they conform to expectations.

It is easy to confuse yourself with the roles you take on in your organization and community. The world colludes in the confusion by reinforcing your professional persona. Colleagues, subordinates, and bosses treat you as if the role you play is the essence of you, the real you. Confusing role with self is a trap. Even though you may put all of yourself into your role, the people in your setting will be reacting to you, not primarily as a person, but as the role you take in their lives. Even when their responses to you seem very personal, you need to read them primarily as reactions to how well you are meeting their expectations. In fact, it is vital to your own stability and peace of mind that you understand this so that you can interpret and decipher people's criticism before internalizing it.

You have control over whether your self-worth is at stake. If you take what is said personally, your self-esteem becomes an issue. "You are a jerk" is not necessarily a personal attack, even though it is framed that way. It might mean that people don't like the way you are performing your role. Perhaps you have not been tactful enough in making your challenge. You may have raised the temperature too high or too quickly, or you may be raising an issue people would rather leave alone. In fact, they may be right to criticize your sensitivity or your pacing, and you may have a lot to learn to correct your style, but their critique is primarily about the issue, not about you. In the guise of attacking you personally, people are trying to neutralize the threat they perceive in your point of view.

Indeed, say you put forth an idea and it is attacked. If you accept the notion that the purpose of your intervention is to stimulate the group's work, then the attack becomes a form of the work. It is an opportunity. The resistance you receive is not a criticism of you, or even necessarily a dismissal of your point of view. On the contrary, it suggests that your input was worth reacting to, that it provoked engagement with the issue.

When you take "personal" attacks personally, you unwittingly conspire in one of the common ways you can be taken out of action by making yourself the issue. In an election campaign, a candidate's character and personal qualities are accepted as appropriate subjects of debate. In most situations, even in politics, the attack is a defense against the perspectives you embody, which threaten other people's own positions and loyalties. As we've asked before, does anyone ever critique your personality or style when you hand out big checks or deliver good news? We don't think so. People attack your style when they don't like the message.

To draw people's attention back to the issues after you have been attacked or unduly flattered, you have to divert them from your personality, personal judgment, or style. The absolute best long-term defense against personal attack is to be perfect and make no mistakes in your personal life. But, of

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course, none of us is perfect. Our human hungers and failings are there always, causing us to lose our tempers in public, to hit the send button before thinking twice about the effects of an e-mail, to lie reactively when we feel cornered, to make an off-handed remark that offends people we are trying to reach. We have been susceptible to these behaviors ourselves, as everyone has. The key, however, is to respond to the attack in a way that places the focus back where it should be, on the message and the issues.

Remember, when you lead, people don't love you or hate you. Mostly they don't even know you. They love or hate the position you represent. Indeed, we all know how quickly idealization turns into contempt when suddenly you disappoint someone. By knowing and valuing yourself, distinct from the roles you play, you gain the freedom to take risks within those roles. Your self-worth is not so tightly tied to the reactions of other people as they contend with your positions on issues. Moreover, you gain the freedom to take on a new role once the current one concludes or you hit a dead end.

No role is big enough to express all of who you are. Each role you take on including parent, spouse, child, professional, friend, and neighbor is a vehicle for expressing a different facet of yourself. Anchored in yourself, and recognizing and respecting your distinct roles, you are much less vulnerable to the pains of leadership.

## **Chapter 10: What's on the Line?**

The answer to the question "Why lead?" is both simple and profound. The sources of meaning most essential in the human experience draw from our yearning for connection with other people. The exercise of leadership can give life meaning beyond the usual day-to-day stakes such as approval of friends and peers, material gain, or the immediate gratification of success, because, as a practical art, leadership allows us to connect with others in a significant way. The word we use for that kind of connection is love.

To some, talking about love in this context may seem soft and unprofessional, but the fact that love lies at the core of what makes life worth living is undeniable. Love gives meaning to what you do, whether in a corporation, a community, a classroom, or a family. We take risks for good reason: we hope to make a difference in people's lives.

For some people, stepping out on the line is worth the risk only if success can be seen, touched, felt, and, most of all, counted. But trying to take satisfaction in life from the numbers you ring up is ultimately no more successful than making survival your goal. We have rarely met a human being who, after years of professional life, has not bought into the myth of measurement and been debilitated by it. After all, there is powerful pressure in our culture to measure the fruits of our labors, and we feel enormous pride as we take on "greater" responsibility and gain "greater" authority, wealth, and prestige. But using measurement as a device is not the same as believing that measurement captures the essential value of anything. You cannot measure the good that you do.

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Measurement is an extraordinarily useful tool. Where we teach, many things are based on measurement: cost-benefit analysis, economic analysis, policy analysis, financial analysis. The same is true in medical schools and business schools. But measurement is simply one artifice among many that cannot capture the essence of what makes our lives and organizations worthwhile.

If you buy into the myth of measurement, what happens to you after being in a job for twenty or thirty years? After becoming a big and important person with a big and important role, what happens when you lost that role? You are likely to think the next job, the next form of your work, has to be just as “big and important.” Otherwise, it isn’t worth doing; otherwise, you cannot find yourself. Having bought into the myth of measurement, you cannot define new modes of loving and caring, giving and mattering, unless they can be measured in the same terms as your previous work. We all know people who shriveled up inside after retiring or leaving a career because they could not find the big next thing to do.

Measurement will distract you from truer appreciations of the form of your contribution and it is far less important than the content. If the essential ingredient of meaning in life is the experience of connection and contribution, then part of the magic of life in our organizations and communities lies in the human capacity to generate many forms for its expression. Meaning derives from finding ways, rather than any one particular way, to love, to contribute to the worldly enterprise, and to enhance the quality of life for people around you.

Fundamentally the form doesn’t matter. Any form of service to others is an expression, essentially, of love. The opportunities for service are always present, so there are few, if any, reasons that anyone should lack for rich and deep experiences of meaning in life. The most common failing is that we get caught up in the form, and lose sight of what’s essential and true. Having purpose differs from having any particular purpose. You get meaning in life from the purposes that you join. After working in a particular discipline, industry, or job for twenty or thirty or forty years, you begin to be wedded to that specific purpose, that particular form.

The vehicles we find for meaning obviously take some tangible form, and certainly that form matters in significant ways. Some jobs suit your interests, personality, skills, and temperament; others do not. The point here is not to diminish the importance of finding forms and taking roles that personally gratify you, but simply to rekindle that youthful capacity to imagine a host of possibilities. Then, when you are forced to compromise, or when you suffer a deep setback, you can recover your natural ability to generate new forms of expression.

## **Chapter 11: Sacred Heart**

The most difficult work of leadership involves learning to experience distress without numbing yourself. The virtue of a sacred heart lies in the courage to maintain your innocence and wonder, your doubt and curiosity, and your compassion and love even through your darkest, most difficult

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moments. Leading with an open heart means you could be at your lowest point, abandoned by your people and entirely powerless, yet, remain receptive to the full range of human emotions without going numb, striking back, or engaging in some other defense. In one moment, you may experience total despair, but in the next, compassion and forgiveness. You may even experience such vicissitudes in the same moment and hold those inconsistent feelings in tension with one another. Maybe you have. A sacred heart allows you to feel, hear, and diagnose, even in the midst of your mission, so that you can accurately gauge different situations and respond appropriately. Otherwise, you simply cannot accurately assess the impact of the losses you are asking people to sustain, or comprehend the reasons behind their anger. Without keeping your heart open, it becomes difficult, perhaps impossible, to fashion the right response and to succeed or come out whole.

A sacred heart means you may feel tortured and betrayed, powerless and hopeless, and yet stay open. It's the capacity to encompass the entire range of your human experience without hardening or closing yourself. It means that even in the midst of disappointment and defeat, you remain connected to people and to the sources of your most profound purposes. A sacred heart is an antidote to one of the most common and destructive "solutions" to the challenges of modern life, which is numbing oneself. Leading with an open heart helps you stay alive in your soul. It enables you to feel faithful to whatever is true, including doubt, without fleeing, acting out, or reaching for a quick fix. Moreover, the power of a sacred heart helps you to mobilize others to do the same, to face challenges that demand courage, and to endure the pains of change without deceiving themselves or running away.

You choose to exercise leadership with passion because a set of issues moves you, issues that perhaps have influenced you for a long time. These issues might have roots that were planted before you were born, in your family or in your culture; they may reflect questions that live within you and for which you've decided to devote a piece of your life, perhaps even the totality of your lifetime. Keeping a sacred heart is about maintaining innocence, curiosity, and compassion as you pursue what is meaningful to you.

Opportunities for leadership are available to you, and to us, everyday. But putting yourself on the line is difficult work, for the dangers are real. Yet the work has nobility and the benefits, for you and for those around you, are beyond measure. We have written this book out of admiration and respect for you and your passion. We hope that the words on these pages have provided both practical advice and inspiration; and that you have better means now to lead, protect yourself, and keep your spirit alive. May you enjoy with a full heart the fruits of your labor. The world needs you.