CHAPTER **1**

The Journey

Today's Leadership Challenges

This book presents insights I have gained as a business professional for over 35 years and from my experiences as a racecar driver. The lessons I have learned in the boardroom and in the driver's seat have been the key to my personal leadership growth. Being a leader is about more than your experience in the workplace—it is about the way you conduct your life and the lessons you learn from your life experiences.

In racing, driving the car is the smallest part of the effort required to compete successfully. By far the largest part of that effort is your preparation for a race and your ability to collaborate with your crew and your team. Leadership is about building a team that you can work with, developing trust among the members of your team, and sharing your successes. It is about knowing how to get the most out of every personal relationship and developing the interpersonal skills necessary to address any situation you encounter. Becoming a trusted leader is about developing the self-knowledge, experience, and skills that serve as a foundation of your personal leadership style. This foundation provides you with the comfort and confidence others seek in a leader. The social, economic, and corporate climates have changed dramatically over the last few decades. Leaders today need to develop an entirely new set of skills to effectively

perform in all three of those arenas. Leadership today is more about personal relationships and your personal comfort zones than ever before; in the chapters that follow, I discuss how to build strong personal relationships and expand your comfort zone to prepare you for the challenges facing leaders today.

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Throughout the book, I stress that leadership is personal and not something you can learn by studying a business textbook. Personal knowledge, combined with your experiences and relationships, is the foundation on which today's successful leaders build. Developing a personal leadership style with which you are comfortable is the key to meeting the many challenges you will face throughout your life. You need to develop a style that is consistent with your unique ideals and aspirations—you can't stray too far from who you are. To be successful as a leader, you need to be at peace with yourself and operate in your personal comfort zone. Leadership is not about being flamboyant and overly expressive; it is about building the best model for you. I talk often throughout the book about things like how self-evaluation, understanding your leadership style, and learning from personal experience can help you become a more effective leader. I also offer examples from experiences in my personal, business, and racing lives.

One of the largest hurdles to becoming an effective leader and business partner is building trust, and the same holds true in racing. When you are about to be strapped into a car that you will drive at over 140 miles an hour you need to have the utmost trust in your crew team and the faith that they have done

their job and prepared your car so it is not only competitive but safe. This type of trust does not come easily; it takes years to build, through multiple experiences both good and bad. While the immediate consequences are less dire, trust in your team is just as important in corporate life. No matter what the situation, it is impossible to be a strong leader without trust. People are people whether you encounter them at a racetrack or in an office. We all have similar motivations, aspirations, prejudices, and experiences. What I attempt to do in this book is help to guide you through your personal journey—to help you understand more about yourself, your surroundings, and your reactions to the world. This understanding will help you establish the foundation on which to build your own personal leadership style.

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One of the themes of this book is the importance of building strong personal relationships. Without them, it is impossible to be effective in your personal or business endeavors. We have more ways to communicate today than ever before, but many of the methods available to us—such as text messages, e-mail, and voicemail—are impersonal. Despite the ease of these communication methods, direct personal interaction with others is the glue that holds people together, and to succeed as a leader you must use personal interaction to build trust and bind people to one another. I place a high value on making direct personal contact whenever possible. I will sometimes drive several hours just for a one-hour meeting so I can have that personal interaction with someone. You can learn so much when you

deal face-to-face with others that a little extra effort on your part can be handsomely rewarded. When you meet someone in person, you have an opportunity to learn from facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice in a way that is not currently possible through the different types of electronic communication available to us. We live in a global world, and it can be difficult for us to always interact personally; however, you should take the opportunity to engage in personal interaction whenever possible. One of the tools I use a lot when I am not able to meet someone in person is videoconferencing. There are very inexpensive means today—including Skype and other technologies—that allow you to capture some of the elements of personal interaction that are missing in many types of digital communication. Videoconferencing allows you to directly observe the reactions of the person with whom you are conversing, both the obvious reactions and the subtle physical cues of face and gesture that are essential to understanding others' responses. Speaking face-to-face, even when you are miles apart, also helps you build stronger personal bonds than correspondence alone. Never forget the importance of human interaction; very few lasting achievements are accomplished by an individual. To succeed today, you must be part of a successful team.

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The New World Order and the IT Challenge

Becoming an effective leader today is more challenging than ever before. The expectations continue to change; however, the basic principles remain the same. In this book I will help you understand the challenges involved in becoming a leader and

suggest how you can develop a personal plan to help improve your leadership skills. There is no one-size-fits-all model when it comes to leadership. Your leadership style is an individual approach based on your personal beliefs, values, and desires. Becoming a leader is about developing your style such that you are comfortable with yourself and with the environment around you. Many people understand leadership too narrowly. Leadership requires more than supervising others; it is an approach to your day-to-day activities in all areas of your life. Leadership involves building relationships and learning to cope with situations throughout your life. In ways large and small, each of us practices the skills required of successful leaders every day; one of the goals of this book is to help you recognize this so you can practice those skills more meaningfully.

The leadership challenges facing an IT (information technology) organization today are different than those facing other areas of business. IT people, by nature, tend to be very analytical, very calculated, and very process-driven. In addition, many IT people tend to have an introverted personality. Much like engineers, IT people are more focused on the job at hand rather than worrying about the larger picture. This is a major hurdle that we need to overcome in order to develop effective leadership skills. Most other areas of business have much more daily interaction with multiple organizational departments. For example, finance personnel tend to work regularly with people from every department in a corporation. Although IT supports activities across the entire company, many IT personnel avoid having regular interaction with people outside the IT department. This restricts the interpersonal development necessary to success. Anyone hoping to rise to a leadership role must consider interaction with people across the company as an integral part of his or her daily routine.

The IT organization in most corporations today always seems troubled by the need to justify its existence; IT

leaders often struggle to be perceived as true business partners. I've heard complaints for decades now from executives who believe the IT organization is not aligned with the business. I also hear from many chief executive officers who understand that they need IT but don't understand why. There has been a value creation void in IT organizations for several decades and now is the time for us to close that gap. We need to break old habits of viewing IT as distinct from other areas of the business and work actively to integrate technology into the business in a way that provides obvious identifiable value to powerbrokers throughout the company. We need to shift our focus to identifying and measuring the business value created by IT efforts. We need to do a better job requiring up-front benefit identification for new projects. IT efforts need to be business-generated and business-owned. Clearly articulated benefit delivery is also a must. Benefits must have four clear requirements: (1) how much, (2) how delivered, (3) who is responsible for delivery, and (4) over what timeframe. The best way to become a trusted leader is to consistently create quantifiable value within the business. Having a defined delivery mechanism is the only way to achieve consistent success.

While IT leaders need to revisit their approach to working with other areas of the business, corporations also need to change their approach to IT in order to address the historical lack of understanding and support for IT efforts. Past generations of IT leaders have risen primarily through the technical ranks. They were thrust into leadership positions because they were unable to move beyond a particular salary limit working as a programmer, an analyst, or a computer operator. A desire to advance their careers forced them to move into management roles that demanded a type of leadership that was new to people used to technical work. Many of them were put into these roles with very little training and little background in the leadership skills necessary to success. Even today, many organizations

still fail to provide IT leaders the support necessary for them to develop their leadership skills.

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As IT leaders, we are entrusted with significant amounts of corporate money every year; however, business leaders in other areas of the corporation often fail to fully understand the business and technological hurdles IT must overcome to invest those funds effectively. Because business leaders never clearly understand IT as well as other areas of the company, such as manufacturing, accounting, and sales, they are less comfortable when things go wrong. Problems that seem manageable in other areas of the company are seen as major crises when they happen to assets managed by IT. This unease arises because business leaders must trust IT to make the right decisions when faced with questions most people do not understand. For decades now, corporations have had to trust us with their investments, but we need to change the game. We need to strike out and become the leaders corporations have always hoped we would be. We need to take charge of ourselves and our destinies.

In today's world, corporations have a whole new set of expectations for IT leaders. They now expect us to be visionaries, collaborators, and innovators. What companies today need are business leaders who understand technology rather than the technologists who understand something about the business who previously ran IT departments. One of the focuses of this book is the need for today's IT leaders to first develop an

intimate understanding of the corporations for which they work and, second, build the strongest possible personal relationships they can at all levels within the corporation. The only way we can overcome the failings of the past is to move boldly to the future. The objective of this book is to provide guidelines for becoming the IT leaders corporations have been expecting us to be for decades.

After you understand the expectations of today's corporations and the need to build the strong personal relationships, it becomes very easy for you and your organization to align with the business in a way that IT organizations have been unable to in the past. Alignment is about gaining the confidence of your peers, reassuring them that you have a full understanding of their needs and requirements, and building a trusting relationship with them so they know you can effectively translate business needs into technology solutions that vastly improve the corporation. This is how you overcome the hurdle presented by a lack of confidence and business alignment. I write at length about tools and aids that will help you develop your own personal leadership style to achieve these ends.

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Today's Cultures

There are also several cultural challenges to becoming a leader in today's environment. Like it or not, we all live in a global

community. We no longer have the luxury of planning our business and economic cycles in a vacuum. Business concerns of U.S. corporations are now intertwined with those of corporations from every other country in the world. This has caused a complete shift in the way decisions are made and in the way organizations are built and led. A whole new style needs to be developed to address the challenges presented by today's interconnected world.

It sometimes seems as though we are riding a treadmill and being forced to make decisions for increasingly shorter terms. In this environment, it becomes a challenge to build strong relationships; however, personal relationships are more necessary today than ever before. In order to become an effective leader in today's environment, we need to be able to embrace multiple cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. Leadership is no longer about leading a team in your specific geographical area whose members share a similar background and culture. Instead, you must adapt your leadership style to the multiple cultures of your team and find ways to use their backgrounds and experiences as assets rather than liabilities. The advent of the Internet and other associated technologies has made the world a smaller and smaller place. You can no longer isolate yourself from this phenomenon. The United States, indeed, the world, is moving toward a new cultural environment where a new world cultural order is emerging from the mixing and matching of various cultures we have been performing for two or three generations now. We need to recognize that in order to be effective as leaders and as individuals in this new multicultural society we have to be adept at modifying our thought processes and our behaviors so we can effectively coexist with these many cultures. Today's leaders have found ways to adjust their behavior and their thoughts and actions in order to accommodate this new reality. We now need to be much more

open-minded and receptive to change that we ever have been before and accept that this new world order means we are part of a larger community. This change cannot be ignored.

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Over the next few generations, we will be moving closer and closer to one common culture and one common language; we can see this shift already. I was riding a train to New York City a few years ago and a Hispanic woman and her daughter were sitting in the seat next to me. I listened to them converse and was surprised at what I heard. They were not speaking in Spanish or in English but in a combination of the two languages. That overheard conversation made it evident to me that language barriers will be less of an obstacle for future generations as technology and freedom of movement move us toward a common language and culture. You must be prepared for this type of shift in culture and language as you build your leadership style because this trend is likely to shape the cultural landscape for decades to come. We need to be cognizant of the changes in the way business is conducted throughout the world and adjust our behavior and actions such that we are continually in tune with the migration of ideas and practices among cultures. As you read this book and begin to develop your own personal leadership style, keep this point in mind as you think about the most effective ways you can adapt yourself and your day-to-day activities.

The differences between the cultural, philosophical, and idealistic visions of the multiple generations in today's workplace are more profound than ever before. In most corporations

today, we are dealing with three generations—each with a unique set of objectives, desires, and motivations. Each one of these generations is totally different from the others in these aspects. My generation was not introduced to computers until we were in our early to mid-20s. The generation behind me was introduced to computers at a slightly earlier age—maybe in their teens. The current generation grew up with computers from the time they were two years old. Two or three years ago I was sitting in a restaurant lounge waiting for a table and a woman sat down next to me with her young son. As they waited for a table, she gave him her iPhone and he immediately picked it up and began playing with it. After observing her for a while I walked over and asked how old her son was—he was two and a half years old. I was flabbergasted to think that a child that age was already computer literate. This generational shift is a major challenge for us as leaders in today's world. Faced with multiple generations that have been introduced to technology at various points in their lives, we must address their different needs when they come together in the workplace. In order to be an effective leader in today's world we must now bridge the gap between these generations and create a functional leadership style in our organizations that not only allows them to coexist, but to complement one another. Dealing with multiple generations can present challenges as difficult to overcome as those presented by the need to deal with multiple cultural backgrounds.

The world is now looking for visionaries rather than people who can execute well. Efficiency and execution have been the mandates for several decades, but it is now time for us to develop a new level of awareness and understanding about the corporations that employ us. It is all about people first and products second. Without strong leadership and organizational structures that foster creativity and vision, companies will struggle to succeed in the future.

Objective of This Book

This book was written to help you develop the knowledge and skills that will allow you to become an effective and trusted leader in today's environment. It will also teach you how to build better relationships and develop an environment of trust with your peers and those above and below you in your company's hierarchy. It is essential that you look at the creation of a leadership style as a journey rather than as a structured set of predetermined steps you need to follow in order to achieve success.

I reiterate many times throughout the coming chapters that leadership requires you to develop an individual style, and the ultimate goal of this style is to allow you to comfortably build trust and influence the behavior of those around you. The industrial era as we know it has ended, and we have now moved into more of a professional services environment. There are no set standard operating procedures or manufacturing operation manuals to help us navigate this new world. We must learn to develop a style of our own that allows us to make the migration. Throughout the book, I include passages about specific experiences I have had; based on these experiences, I offer specific recommendations about how to develop a unique leadership style. The most important skill you can learn, though, is how to build strong personal relationships and develop a single approach to relationships in all areas of your life rather than trying to create separate business and personal personas. You will learn that in today's world it is important to develop an ability to influence others' behavior because mandating actions is a failing leadership strategy. You will also learn how to create organizations that are closely focused to the objectives of the business rather than individual technological requirements.

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The easiest way to learn is through the experience of others. My hope is that the experiences and ideas I share with you throughout the book will help you develop your leadership style without having to suffer the failures and mistakes of those of us who have come before you. There is no replacement for experience, and I try here to share experiences with you in the hope that you will take them, modify them, and use them as a foundation for your individual leadership development process. There is no one-size-fits-all path to leadership, but many of the challenges you face are not unique, and learning from the experiences of others in similar situations can prepare you to succeed. With any book, presentation, or speech, the audience never fully grasps all the concepts presented the first time through. My objective is to provide you with a set of ideas, observations, and suggestions that you can refer to regularly to help you as you build your own personal foundation for leadership. It is not an informational manual, but I hope it can give you some useful guidance for your personal journey.

Becoming an invested and trusted leader in today's environment is all about matching your personal skills and behaviors to the expectations of today's society. The greatest thing we can achieve in our lives is an honorable and trusted reputation. This is the legacy we leave behind. Success in life is not about the money or material things we acquire—it's the impression we make on others and, equally as important, the success

others achieve through their relationships with us. Leadership is not a task be taken lightly. It needs to be a part of our daily lives and we need to understand the capabilities as well as the consequences of our actions. The objective of this book is, finally, to give you the tools to build that reputation for trustworthiness and take a leadership role in every area of your life.