

When Leaders Are at Their Best

“FEARLESS.” That’s what it says in bold white letters on a black bracelet that Barby Siegel wears. She borrowed it from her teenage daughter to serve as a daily reminder of the spirit she likes to bring to her role as CEO of Zeno Group, an award-winning, multidisciplinary public relations firm. And it’s exactly that kind of spirit that fueled the extraordinary growth and willingness to take risks that *PRWeek* cited in 2011 when it awarded Zeno two of its top honors—Agency of the Year and Midsize Agency of the Year.

But Zeno wasn’t always at the head of its class. When Richard Edelman, president and CEO of Zeno’s parent company, Daniel J. Edelman, Inc., called Barby and asked her to lead Zeno to the next level, the agency was languishing. Barby, who had honed her craft over eleven years at Edelman and then for eight years at Ogilvy PR, where she restarted their global consumer marketing practice, was ready for a new opportunity and challenge.

Barby knew Zeno had a great team and a solid client base, but for them to grow to the next level, she believed that they had to get

some early game-changing wins. And to do that they'd need some of that fearlessness that she proudly advocates for with her bracelet. She would tell them, "We need to stand on our own two feet and not be afraid because we're Zeno that we can't go after this piece of business or that we're not going to be taken seriously." She talked about it as "playing ahead of the game—ahead of where we really were." It didn't take long for this focused determination and can-do spirit to spread.

One of Barby's early actions was to hold a day-and-a-half leadership team meeting with her direct reports. Together they talked about such basic questions as "Who are we? What are we focusing on?" The conversations and sharing of ideas were galvanizing, and during that meeting they came up with the words that they envisioned as describing themselves. These words—*fearless, collaborative, creative, decidedly different*, and *nimble*—are their values and their promise to their clients.

Zeno describes itself as providing "senior level strategy and day-to-day engagement" and as having "no silos," and you can see this in Barby's actions. For example, she has spent many a night in the conference room with team members preparing decks for client presentations. And if she's not working on a presentation, she might be at the local grocer buying snacks to take back to the room. She's present at client pitches. She also spends as much time as she can with staff. Barby takes this responsibility seriously. "I often say, 'I am privileged to lead this team.' I am. Without them we'd be nothing. I need all these people to bring their best game every day. I wake up every day and say, What can I do to make sure these people are happy and energetic, that they're going to stay and continue to give our clients their best work every day?"

These sentiments are reciprocated by her associates. Alison Walsh, account supervisor, affirms that "when you have a CEO who

is so ingrained in the agency, staff, and each and every one of the clients, you only want to push yourself further.” Because Barby is so transparent about her values and vision for the organization, “There’s no question,” according to Alison, “that people want to follow her.”

Barby describes the Zeno corporate culture as one that promotes hard work and continued success while also encouraging work-life balance and individualism. “I’m sure many companies describe themselves as a family,” says Barby. “We take it seriously.” For example, there are a lot of women in the firm, and Barby takes her role as a woman CEO very seriously. “I want them to see that it’s possible to have a really great career and have a family and do all the things that that entails.” She talks a lot about her own kids, her husband, her two older sisters, and her elderly parents. She’ll tell her staff when she goes out to have lunch with her parents. “I want them to know that it’s okay to get out of the office for a couple of hours and tend to their families.” She has a photo gallery in her office with lots of family pictures displayed along with photos of agency get-togethers and some of the staff and their babies. “I’m very mindful,” says Barby, “that the staff is like me. We all have mortgages to pay. Many have children to raise. When I make decisions about what the firm is going to do, I am mindful that at the end of the day there are hundreds of families depending on our doing right for our clients.”

Unlike traditional agencies, Zeno is an organization without walls, where everyone, regardless of level, routinely works together on all aspects of a client engagement. “Everyone is treated with great respect,” said Cheryl Pellegrino, senior vice president. “There is a strong sense of collaboration and teamwork. People genuinely like one another and work well together. It’s all for one and one for all.” Barby has structured the organization and assignments so that people

literally have to work with one another, learn from one another, and celebrate together. Marcie Kohenak, account supervisor, adds that whereas many agencies may say they're one team, "Zeno walks the walk. Never before have I worked in an office where colleagues are so collaborative, looking out for clients and the teams before themselves, and where individuals from different offices and fields are always working together. Not only does this attitude benefit our clients, who are always being served by a subject matter expert, but as employees we have the opportunity to constantly grow, working with and learning from colleagues across the country."

Zeno is also unique in the PR business in how it manages its books: all offices operate under one P&L. If a client in Chicago needs the expertise of someone in Los Angeles, New York, Toronto, or São Paulo, there's no conflict or conversation about it. Barby said that this means that "the staff can just do their best work, and don't need to feel pulled by one P&L or another. Everyone is focusing on our client's success."

Collaborating across offices to get the job done also facilitates innovation and experimentation. Creativity is hugely important to Barby. "We want to be creative in everything we do, even in the most mundane tasks," she said. This is what, in large part, keeps Jessica Vitale, vice president, with Zeno. "You get countless opportunities to work on exciting projects for clients who are leaders in their field, and the chance to work alongside incredibly smart, passionate people across multiple offices who provide great support and encourage, even push, you to grow," she said. This learning environment, Barby explained, "helps all of us to think differently, to be unafraid to experiment and try some things that have not been done before."

There are many celebrations over the year, such as the Friday after-work sing-alongs and other informal get-togethers and recogni-

tions. Barby established an annual New Year's Eve party every June 30, the end of Zeno's fiscal year. On that day, all the offices connect by teleconference. They pop champagne and raise a virtual toast. Barby reflects on what they've accomplished and talks about what's ahead in the future. Then all the offices continue with their own celebrations.

In an end-of-year email to her staff, Barby summed up Zeno's achievements and culture:

Each of you played a major role in the success of our firm, and each of you are key to the journey that continues. . . . [Words of praise] should be aimed squarely at you for the amazing work you and your teams have delivered and the ever-deepening client partnerships you are forging. . . . As we close out the year, I am more excited than ever for what's to come, and there isn't a group of professionals I would rather do it with day in and day out.

We have much to look forward to. Some days will be harder than others but we are on a mission to take this firm to greater heights on the shoulders of client trust and partnership, game-changing work and a talented and highly motivated staff. I think we have seen that when we band together we can really do it.

Barby is not one to rest on her laurels, though. The recognition Zeno has earned is just the beginning. "I can't just live in the present," she said. "I've got to always be thinking about the next thing we should be working on and where we're headed, whether geographically or with innovation or talent." No doubt that the next thing is likely to require more of that same fearlessness that got Barby and her colleagues to where they are today.

THE FIVE PRACTICES OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

In undertaking the transformation at Zeno, Barby Siegel seized the opportunity to change business as usual. And although Barby's story is exceptional, it is not singular. We've been conducting original global research for more than thirty years, and we've discovered that such achievements are actually commonplace. When we ask people to tell us about their personal-best leadership experiences—experiences that they believe are their individual standards of excellence—there are thousands of success stories just like Barby's.² We've found them in profit-based firms and nonprofits, agriculture and mining, manufacturing and utilities, banking and health care, government and education, the arts and community service, and many, many others. These leaders are employees and volunteers, young and old, women and men. Leadership knows no racial or religious bounds, no ethnic or cultural borders. Leaders reside in every city and every country, in every function and every organization. We find exemplary leadership everywhere we look.

And we've also found that in the best organizations, everyone, regardless of title or position, is encouraged to act like a leader. That's because in these places, people don't just believe that everyone can make a difference; they act in ways to develop and grow people's talents, including their leadership capabilities. Joon Chin Fum-Ko, director of people development and engagement at Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, underscores this thinking when she explains how they are "working to build an organization and culture where everyone feels that they are leaders, regardless of what they do, and appreciates that what each one of us does has an impact, even a legacy."

We first asked people in the early 1980s to tell us what they did when they were at their “personal best” in leading others, and we continue to ask this question of people around the world. After analyzing thousands of these leadership experiences, we discovered, and continue to find, that regardless of the times or setting, people who guide others along pioneering journeys follow surprisingly similar paths. Although each experience was unique in its individual expression, there were clearly identifiable behaviors and actions that made a difference. When making extraordinary things happen in organizations, leaders engage in what we call The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. They

- Model the Way
- Inspire a Shared Vision
- Challenge the Process
- Enable Others to Act
- Encourage the Heart

These leadership practices are not the private property of the people we studied. Nor do they belong to a few select shining stars. Leadership is not about who you are; it’s about what you do. The Five Practices are available to anyone who accepts the leadership challenge—the challenge of taking people and organizations to places they have never been before, of doing something that has never been done before, and of moving beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary.

Although the *context* of leadership has changed dramatically since we first began our research thirty years ago, the *content* of leadership has not changed much at all. The Five Practices framework has passed the test of time. Our research tells us that the fundamental behaviors and actions of leaders have remained

essentially the same and are as relevant today as they were when we first began our study of exemplary leadership.

You've already learned how one leader (Barby Siegel) used The Five Practices to lead her colleagues and organization to greatness, and how she and they are not ready to rest on their laurels. In the remainder of this chapter, we briefly introduce each of The Five Practices and provide short examples that demonstrate how leaders across a variety of circumstances use them to make the extraordinary happen. When you explore The Five Practices in depth in Chapters Two through Eleven, you'll find over a hundred more examples from the real-life experiences of people who have taken the leadership challenge.

Model the Way

Titles are granted, but it's your behavior that earns you respect. This sentiment was shared across all the cases we collected. David Kim, senior operations manager with Siemens Ultrasound, reflecting on his personal-best leadership experience, remarked that "Everybody is a leader whether you supervise a group of people or not. Even as an individual contributor when I transitioned into the corporate world from the army, I continued to display leadership and take initiative to get the job done. Titles don't make you a leader. It's how you behave that makes a difference." Exemplary leaders know that if they want to gain commitment and achieve the highest standards, they must be models of the behavior they expect of others.

To effectively Model the Way, you must first be clear about your own guiding principles. You must *clarify values by finding your voice*. Dave Halvorson, staff engineer with Intel, observed that "you do not need to be a manager with direct reports to be a leader, but you do have to know what your values and guiding principles are." Alan

Spiegelman, veteran wealth management adviser with Northwestern Mutual, reinforced Dave's point when he told us, "Before you can be a leader of others, you need to know clearly who you are and what your core values are. Once you know that, then you can give those values a voice and feel comfortable sharing them with others." But *your* values aren't the only values. On every team, and in every organization and community, others also feel strongly about matters of principle. As a leader, you also must *affirm the shared values* of the group.

Eloquent speeches about common values aren't nearly enough, however. Leaders' deeds are far more important than their words when constituents want to determine how serious leaders really are about what they say. Words and deeds must be consistent. Exemplary leaders *set the example by aligning actions with shared values*. Through their daily actions, they demonstrate their deep commitment to their beliefs and those of the organization. Dr. Jiangwan Majeti's experience as research project manager at Amgen underscores this observation: "Leading by example is more effective than leading by command. If people see that you work hard while preaching hard work, they are more likely to follow you." One of the best ways to prove that something is important is by doing it yourself and setting an example. Jiangwan's actions spoke volumes about how the team needed to "take ownership of things they believed in and valued," because there wasn't anything that she asked others to do that she wasn't willing to do herself.

Inspire a Shared Vision

People describe their personal-best leadership experiences as times when they imagined an exciting, highly attractive future for their organizations. They had visions and dreams of what *could* be. They

had absolute and total personal belief in those dreams, and they were confident in their abilities to make extraordinary things happen. Every organization, every social movement, begins with a dream. The dream, or vision, is the force that creates the future. For Taryn Walker, product manager at Kaiser Permanente, this meant “remaining focused on the long-term vision and constantly reminding others (often when they became discouraged) of the ultimate outcome and how important this was.”

Leaders *envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities*. You need to make something happen, to change the way things are, to create something that no one else has ever created before. Much as an architect draws a blueprint or an engineer builds a model, you need to have a clear vision of what the results should look like before starting any project. You also have to be able to connect it to the past, to the history that got you to where you are. In starting the “Thinker’s Club” at Juniper Networks, for example, Vittal Krishnamurthy imagined “that one day it would be a hub for innovative thinking, where people brainstorm on some of the most difficult issues and seek innovative solutions, and the go-to place where creative solutions emerge.” He wanted to improve the quality of people’s lives by making them creative thinkers, but he also realized that however noble this aspiration, visions seen only by leaders are insufficient to create an organized movement or a significant change in a company.

You can’t command commitment; you have to inspire it. You have to *enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations*. This means, as Rajan Prajapat, product manager at Google, pointed out, “that you have to have a vision in mind and be clear about why it’s important to you. And you need to be equally clear about why it should matter to those you’re sharing your vision

with.” Rupesh Roy, project manager at NetLogic Microsystems, realized in his personal-best leadership experience that people have to believe that you understand their needs and have their interests at heart. “You need to have clear goals and a vision to make a positive difference,” he said, “and you have to be able to share that vision with others and get them to believe in it.” Unity of purpose is forged when you show your constituents how the dream is a shared dream and how it fulfills the common good. When you express your enthusiasm and excitement for the vision, you ignite that passion in others.

Challenge the Process

Challenge is the crucible for greatness. Every single personal-best leadership case involved a change from the status quo. Not one person claimed to have achieved a personal best by keeping things the same. The challenge might have been an innovative new product, a cutting-edge service, a groundbreaking piece of legislation, an invigorating campaign to get adolescents to join an environmental program, a revolutionary turnaround of a bureaucratic military program, or the start-up of a new plant or business. It could also be dealing with unexpected economic downturns, personal betrayal, loss of physical ability, natural disasters, civil unrest, and technological disruptions. When Katherine Winkel, marketing operations manager at Seattle Genetics, reflected on her personal best and listened to those of her colleagues, she was struck by “how similar the stories were and how each person had to overcome uncertainty and fear in order to achieve his or her best.”

Leaders venture out; they don't sit idly by waiting for fate to smile on them. This was exactly what Rob Pearson, now R&D manager with Angiodynamics, experienced in his first job after

college at Medtronic Corporate Ventures: “Change was thrust upon me when I had to choose between being passive (guaranteed to fail) or seizing the initiative and bending the rules to suit my needs (increasing the possibility of success). I decided to rise up and meet the challenge head on.” By making something happen, Rob was able to move his project forward.

Leaders are pioneers, willing to step out into the unknown. But leaders aren't the only creators or originators of new products, services, or processes. In fact, it's more likely that they're not. Innovation comes more from listening than from telling. You have to constantly be looking outside yourself and your organization for new and innovative products, processes, and services. You need to *search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.*

Because innovation and change involve *experimenting and taking risks*, your major contribution will be to create a climate for experimentation in which there is recognition of good ideas, support of those ideas, and the willingness to challenge the system. Taking risks, says Ryan Diemer, business planner and purchasing analyst at Stryker Endoscopy, “is never easy and sometimes scary.” But what he learned from his personal-best leadership experience is “that taking risks is necessary because it requires you and those you are working with to challenge not only what you are working on but how you work. Sometimes the risks pay off and sometimes they do not, but what is always true is that if you do not take a risk, you won't get any gain.”

When you take risks, mistakes and failures are inevitable. Proceed anyway. One way of dealing with the potential failures of experimentation is *by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.* Pierfrancesco Ronzi, associate with McKinsey & Company in Italy, recalled how, in successfully turning around the credit

process for a banking client in North Africa, it was necessary to break the project down into parts so that people in the organization could find a place to start, to determine what would work and how they could learn from one another in the process of moving forward. “Showing them that we were able to make something happen,” he said, “was a great boost for their confidence in the project and their willingness to stay involved.” As Pierfrancesco suggests, leaders are constantly learning from their errors and failures as they experiment, try new things, and incrementally move projects forward. The best leaders are the simply the best learners, and life is their laboratory.³

Enable Others to Act

A grand dream doesn't become a significant reality through the actions of a single person. It requires a team effort. It requires solid trust and strong relationships. It requires deep competence and cool confidence. It requires group collaboration and individual accountability.⁴ Sushma Bhoje, program manager at Biomass NPL, appreciated how she had to “lead by empowering those around you.” In consolidating a customer relationship management system across a globally dispersed company, she realized clearly that “no one could have done this alone.” As other leaders have experienced, Sushma found that “it was essential to be open to all ideas and to give everyone a voice in the decision-making process. . . . The one guiding principle on the project was that the team was larger than any individual on the team.” Sushma clearly understands that no leader has ever gotten anything extraordinary done by working solo.

Leaders *foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships*. This sense of teamwork extends far beyond a few

direct reports or close confidants. You have to engage all who must make the project work—and, in some way, all who must live with the results. Early in her career, Lorena Compeán, founder of Co-Creating Hong Kong, discovered that she needed to trust that other people on the project team could and would do their jobs. As the project manager, she found herself, at the beginning, “checking every single analysis they did, but I noticed how they got angry with me because I didn’t let them conclude anything by themselves.” She discovered that she needed to “show my trust in others in order to build their trust in me.”

Constituents neither perform at their best nor stick around for very long if you make them feel weak, dependent, or alienated. Giving your power away and fostering their personal power and ownership will make them stronger and more capable. When you *strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence*, they are more likely to give it their all and exceed their own expectations. Heidi Winkler, attorney-at-law with Pihl, a privately held construction company in Denmark, learned from reflecting on her personal-best leadership experience “how much easier it is to achieve shared goals (or even make goals shared) when you involve people in the decisions to be made, trust them to handle the execution, and give them responsibilities and credit along the way.”

Focusing on serving the needs of others, and not one’s own, builds trust in a leader. And the more that people trust their leaders and each other, the more they take risks, make changes, and keep organizations and movements alive. Derek Rupnow, business development manager at Broadcom, points out that “you develop trust and respect by building personal relationships, as well as treating everyone with respect, and making sure to keep everyone up to speed on what is going on.” He seeks out the opinions of others and uses

the ensuing discussions not only to build up their capabilities but also to educate and update his own information and perspective. Derek realizes that when people are trusted and have more discretion, more authority, and more information, they're much more likely to use their energies to produce extraordinary results. Through that relationship, leaders turn their constituents into leaders themselves.

Encourage the Heart

The climb to the top is arduous and steep. People become exhausted, frustrated, and disenchanting, and are often tempted to give up. Genuine acts of caring draw people forward. "Recognition is the most powerful currency you have, and it costs you nothing," says Jessica Herrin, CEO and founder of Stella & Dot, who oversees ten thousand mostly part-time stylists who sell the jewelry line through private parties. She personally contacts at least ten stylists each day and makes it part of her regular to-do list to find and celebrate successes.⁵ Right after Mark Hassin's company won the MSN-Microsoft Israel's Interactive Agencies Creative Competition, he sent a picture of the award to everyone on his team along with a note that said, "This is YOUR prize. Go tell your family, your friends—that YOU did this."

Leaders like Jessica and Mark *recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence*. Such recognition can be one-to-one or with many people. It can come from dramatic gestures or simple actions. Jennifer Dirking, associate director at Foothill-De Anza Community Colleges Foundation, is always on the lookout for ways to create a climate in which, she says, "people feel cared about and genuinely appreciated." When her team gets together to debrief an event, they start by acknowledging the aspects that were

successful and giving positive feedback to the team members who deserved credit. Then, Jennifer explains, “as we evaluate those aspects that we want to improve, it is within this context of overall success. This approach improves morale and contributes to a more cooperative work environment.”

It’s part of your job as a leader to show appreciation for people’s contributions and to create a culture of *celebrating the values and victories by creating a spirit of community*. Recognition and celebration aren’t necessarily about fun and games, though there is a lot of fun and there are a lot of games when people encourage the hearts of their constituents. Neither are they about pretentious ceremonies designed to create some phony sense of camaraderie. Encouragement is, curiously, serious business because it’s how you visibly and behaviorally link rewards with performance. Make sure that people see the benefit of behavior that’s aligned with cherished values. Celebrations and rituals, when they are authentic and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinarily tough times.

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are the core leadership competencies that emerged from our analysis of thousands of Personal-Best Leadership Experience cases. When leaders are doing their best, they Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart.

These are the practices that people use when they are at their personal best as leaders. But what’s the evidence that they really matter? Do these practices truly make a difference in the engagement and performance of people and organizations? Over the years, we’ve been challenged to answer these questions and to test the assertion that The Five Practices explain how leaders get extraordinary things

done in organizations. The research and empirical evidence make the case that they do.

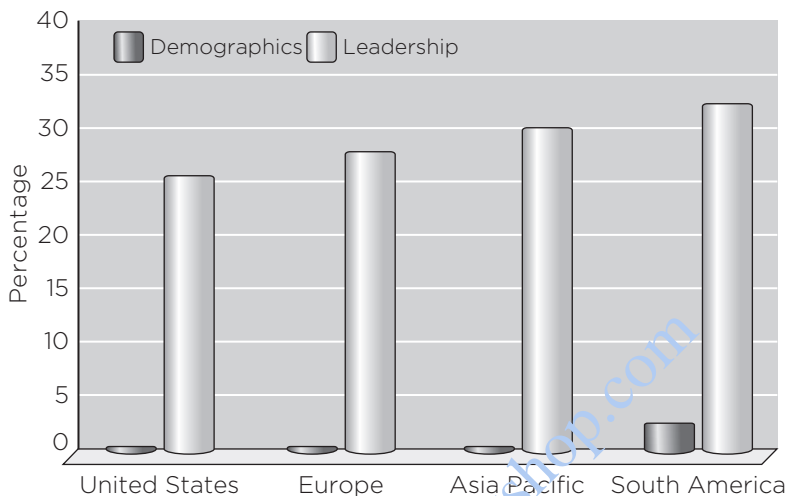
The Five Practices Make a Difference

The truth is that exemplary leader behavior makes a profoundly positive difference in people's commitment and performance at work. Those leaders who more frequently use The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are considerably more effective than their counterparts who use them infrequently.

That is the conclusion we draw after analyzing responses from nearly two million people around the world to the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), our 360-degree instrument assessing how frequently leaders engage in The Five Practices.⁶ In addition to completing the LPI, respondents answer ten demographic questions ranging from their age and gender to their functional field, industry, and organization size.⁷ They also respond to ten statements about how they feel about their leaders and their workplaces.⁸

The data show that workplace engagement and commitment are significantly explained by how the leader behaves and not at all by any particular characteristic of the constituents.

Statistical analyses revealed that a leader's behavior explains the vast majority of constituents' workplace engagement. A leader's actions contribute more to such factors as commitment, loyalty, motivation, pride, and productivity than does any other single variable.⁹ Personal and organizational characteristics of constituents, in contrast, explain less than 1 percent of constituents' engagement in, commitment to, and pride in their workplaces. Workplace engagement and commitment are independent of who the constituents are (as related to factors like age, gender, ethnicity, or education) or their

FIGURE 1.1 Explaining Workplace Engagement and Commitment

position, job, discipline, industry, or nationality or country of origin. Figure 1.1 illustrates our findings.

In other words, the more you engage in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership, the more likely you are to have a positive influence on others and on the organization. As Caroline Wang—at one time the highest-ranking Asian female executive at IBM globally—reflected on her experiences with the Five Practices framework, “It is really not about the leader’s personality; it is all about how that individual behaves as a leader.” That’s what all the data add up to: if you want to have a significant impact on people, on organizations, and on communities, you’d be wise to invest in learning the behaviors that enable you to become the very best leader you can.

Many other scholars have documented how leaders who engage in The Five Practices are more effective than those who don’t. It doesn’t matter whether the context is inside or outside the United

States, the public or private sector, or within schools, health care organizations, business firms, prisons, churches, and the like.¹⁰ Leaders who use The Five Practices more frequently than their counterparts, for example,

- Create higher-performing teams
- Generate increased sales and customer satisfaction levels
- Foster renewed loyalty and greater organizational commitment
- Enhance motivation and the willingness to work hard
- More successfully represent their units to upper management
- Facilitate high patient-satisfaction scores and more effectively meet family member needs
- Promote high degrees of involvement in schools
- Enlarge the size of their religious congregations
- Increase fundraising results and expand gift-giving levels
- Extend the range of their agency's services
- Increase retention, reducing absenteeism and turnover
- Positively influence recruitment rates

Over a five-year period, the financial performance of organizations where senior leaders were identified by their constituents as “strongly” engaged in using The Five Practices were compared with those organizations whose leadership was significantly less engaged in The Five Practices.¹¹ The bottom line? Net income growth was nearly eighteen times higher, and stock price growth nearly three times higher, than their counterparts for those publicly traded organizations whose leadership was highly engaged in The Five Practices.

Although The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership don't completely explain why leaders and their organizations are successful, it's very clear that engaging in them makes quite a difference no

matter who you are or where you are located. How you behave as a leader matters, and it matters a lot.

Embedded in The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are behaviors that can serve as the basis for learning to lead. We call these The Ten Commitments of Leadership (Table 1.1). They focus on actions that you need to apply to yourself and that you need to take with others. These Ten Commitments serve as the template for explaining, understanding, appreciating, and learning how leaders get extraordinary things done in organizations, and we discuss each of them in depth in Chapters Two through Eleven.

Before delving into The Five Practices and The Ten Commitments further, however, we'd be remiss if we didn't consider leadership from the standpoint of the constituent. So, what do people look for in a leader? What do people want from someone whose direction they'd be willing to follow?

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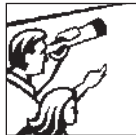
TABLE 1.1 THE FIVE PRACTICES AND TEN COMMITMENTS OF EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP

**Model
the Way**



1. Clarify values by finding your voice and affirming shared values.
2. Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

**Inspire a Shared
Vision**



3. Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
4. Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

**Challenge the
Process**



5. Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
6. Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.

**Enable Others
to Act**



7. Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
8. Strengthen others by increasing self-determination and developing competence.

**Encourage the
Heart**



9. Recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
10. Celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

LEADERSHIP IS A RELATIONSHIP

The inescapable conclusion from analyzing thousands of personal-best leadership experiences is that *everyone* has a story to tell. And these stories are much more similar in terms of actions, behaviors, and processes than they are different. The data clearly challenge the myths that leadership is something that you find only at the highest levels of organizations and society or that it's something reserved for only a handful of charismatic men and women. The notion that there are only a few great people who can lead others to greatness is just plain wrong. Likewise, it is plain wrong to believe that leaders come only from large or great or small or new organizations, or from established economies or from start-up companies. The truth is, leadership is an identifiable set of skills and abilities that are available to anyone. It is because there are so many leaders—not so few—that extraordinary things get done on a regular basis in organizations, especially in times of great uncertainty.

There was another crucial truth that wove itself throughout every situation and every action we've analyzed. Personal-best leadership experiences are never stories about solo performances. Leaders never get extraordinary things accomplished all by themselves. Leaders mobilize *others* to want to struggle for shared aspirations, and this means that, fundamentally, *leadership is a relationship*. Leadership is a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. It's the quality of this relationship that matters most when engaged in getting extraordinary things done. A leader-constituent relationship that's characterized by fear and distrust will never produce anything of lasting value. A relationship characterized by mutual respect and confidence will overcome the greatest adversities and leave a legacy of significance.¹²

That is precisely what Yamin Durrani told us about his relationship with Bobby Matinpour, marketing manager at National Semiconductor, who came aboard just after the company had gone through a massive reorganization followed by a huge layoff. According to Yamin, “Company-wide there was a general lack of motivation, a sense of mistrust, insecurity, and everyone was looking after their own interest. Our group in particular was suffering from low motivation as we didn’t trust each other. I dreaded going to the office, and there was too much internal competition leading to breakdowns in communication.”

Bobby realized that he was going to have to get people to trust one another. His very first initiative was to sit with individual team members to understand their desires, needs, and future plans. For the first month, he spent most of the time learning and trying to understand what each person aspired to and enjoyed doing. He held weekly one-on-one meetings with individual team members, asking questions and listening attentively to what they had to say. “His friendly style and honest, straightforward approach,” said Yamin, “led team members to open up and feel secure. He never acted as if he knew everything, and was open to learning new things from the team. Bobby understood that he couldn’t gain the respect of the team without respecting them and allowing them the freedom to take ownership of their projects. Bobby opened up lines of communication within the team, especially by encouraging greater face-to-face interactions.”

In management meetings when a question was asked, even though he could have provided the answer himself, Bobby typically referred it to one of his team members, stating, for example, “Yamin is an expert on this topic; I will let him answer this question.” During the annual sales conference, attended by hundreds of company employees, he let the most junior team member deliver the group

presentation, while the whole team stood behind the presenter to answer questions. Yamin observed,

Being new to the group, Bobby could have easily fallen into the trap of trying to prove himself by individually contributing in projects, or acting as a gatekeeper for information flow; however, he opted to trust his team members on projects and took advice from them about the approach to take on a particular project. He never forced his ideas. In other words, “my way or the highway” was not his style. He encouraged team members to take initiative and acted as an adviser on projects, and let the ownership remain with the individual team member.

The results of Bobby’s leadership were significant. The unit’s revenue increased by 25 percent, and the product pipeline overflowed with ideas. Team spirit soared, people felt engaged, and a general sense of collaboration and teamwork developed. Said Yamin, “I personally had not felt more empowered and trusted ever before. From this experience, I’ve realized that great leaders grow their followers into leaders themselves.”

In the way he focused on others and not on himself, Bobby demonstrated that success in leadership, success in work, and success in life are a function of how well people work and play together. Success in leading is wholly dependent on the capacity to build and sustain those relationships. Because leadership is a reciprocal process between leaders and their constituents, any discussion of leadership must attend to the dynamics of this relationship. Strategies, tactics, skills, and practices are empty without an understanding of the fundamental human aspirations that connect leaders and constituents. What are the ingredients for building such relationships?

What People Look For and Want from Their Leaders

To better understand leadership as a relationship, we investigated the expectations that constituents have of leaders. We asked people to tell us the personal traits, characteristics, and attributes they look for and admire in a person whom they would be *willing* to follow. The responses both affirm and enrich the picture that emerged from studies of personal leadership bests.

We began this research on what constituents expect of leaders more than thirty years ago by surveying thousands of business and government executives. Several hundred different values, traits, and characteristics were identified in response to the *open-ended* question about what they looked for in a person they would be willing to follow.¹³ Subsequent content analysis by several independent judges, followed by further empirical analyses, reduced these items to a list of twenty characteristics (each grouped with several synonyms for clarification and completeness).

From this list of twenty characteristics, we developed the Characteristics of Admired Leaders checklist. It has been administered to well over one hundred thousand people around the globe, and the results are continuously updated. This one-page survey asks respondents to select the seven qualities, out of twenty, that they “most look for and admire in a leader, someone whose direction they would willingly follow.” The key word in this statement is *willingly*. What do they expect from a leader they would follow, not because they have to, but because they want to?

The results have been striking in their regularity. Over the years, wherever this question is asked, it’s clear, as the data in Table 1.2 illustrate, that there are some essential “character tests” an individual must pass before others are willing to grant the designation *leader*.

TABLE 1.2 Characteristics of Admired Leaders

Characteristic	Percentage of Respondents Selecting Each Characteristic				
	1987	1995	2002	2007	2012
HONEST	83	88	88	89	89
FORWARD-LOOKING	62	75	71	71	71
COMPETENT	67	63	66	68	69
INSPIRING	58	68	65	69	69
Intelligent	43	40	47	43	45
Broad-minded	37	40	40	35	38
Fair-minded	40	49	42	39	37
Dependable	33	32	33	34	35
Supportive	32	41	35	35	35
Straightforward	34	33	34	36	32
Cooperative	25	28	28	25	27
Determined	17	17	23	25	26
Courageous	27	29	20	25	22
Ambitious	21	13	17	16	21
Caring	26	23	20	22	21
Loyal	11	11	14	18	19
Imaginative	34	28	23	17	16
Mature	23	13	21	5	14
Self-Controlled	13	5	8	10	11
Independent	10	5	6	4	5

Note: These percentages represent respondents from six continents: Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Europe, and Australia. The majority of respondents are from the United States. Because we asked people to select seven characteristics, the total adds up to more than 100 percent.

Although every characteristic receives some votes, meaning that each is important to some people, what is most evident and striking is that over time, four, and only four, have always received more than 60 percent of the votes (with the exception of Inspiring in 1987). And these same four have consistently been ranked at the top *across different countries*.¹⁴

What people most look for in a leader (a person whom they would be willing to follow) has been constant over time. And our research documents that this pattern does not vary across countries, cultures, ethnicities, organizational functions and hierarchies, genders, levels of education, and age groups. For people to follow someone willingly, the majority of constituents believe the leader must be

- Honest
- Forward-looking
- Competent
- Inspiring

These investigations of desired leader attributes demonstrate consistent and clear relationships with what people say and write about their personal-best leadership experiences. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership and the behaviors of people whom others think of as exemplary leaders are complementary perspectives on the same subject. When they're performing at their peak, leaders are doing more than just getting results. They're also responding to the expectations of their constituents.¹⁵

As the themes of being honest, forward-looking, competent, and inspiring, are woven into the subsequent chapters on The Five Practices, you'll see in more detail how exemplary leaders respond to the expectations of their constituents. For example, leaders cannot

Model the Way without being seen as honest. The leadership practice Inspire a Shared Vision involves being forward-looking and inspiring. When leaders Challenge the Process, they also enhance the perception that they're dynamic and competent. Trustworthiness, often a synonym for honesty, plays a major role in how leaders Enable Others to Act, as does the leader's own competency. Likewise, leaders who recognize and celebrate significant accomplishments—who Encourage the Heart—show inspiration and positive energy, which increases their constituents' understanding of the commitment to the vision and values. When leaders demonstrate capacity in all of The Five Practices, they show others they have the competence to make extraordinary things happen.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: CREDIBILITY IS THE FOUNDATION

The top four characteristics—honest, forward-looking, competent, and inspiring—have remained constant in the ever-changing and turbulent social, political, and economic environment of the past thirty years. The relative importance of each has varied somewhat over time, but there has been no change in the fact that these are the four qualities people want most in their leaders. Whether they believe that their leaders are true to these values is another matter, but what they would like from them has remained the same.

These four consistent characteristics are descriptively useful in and of themselves—but there's a more profound implication revealed by these data. Three of these four key characteristics make up what communications experts refer to as “source credibility.” In assessing the believability of sources of communication—whether news

reporters, salespeople, physicians, or priests; whether business managers, military officers, politicians, or civic leaders—researchers typically evaluate them on three criteria: their perceived *trustworthiness*, their *expertise*, and their *dynamism*. People who are rated more highly on these dimensions are considered by others to be more credible sources of information.¹⁶

Notice how remarkably similar these three characteristics are to the essential leader qualities of being honest, competent, and inspiring—three of the top four items continually selected in surveys. Link the theory to the data about admired leader qualities, and the striking conclusion is that people want to follow leaders who are, more than anything, credible. *Credibility is the foundation of leadership*. Constituents must be able, above all else, to believe in their leaders. For them to willingly follow someone else, they must believe that the leader's word can be trusted, that she is personally passionate and enthusiastic about the work, and that she has the knowledge and skill to lead.

Constituents also must believe that their leader knows where they're headed and has a vision for the future. An expectation that their leaders be *forward-looking* is what sets leaders apart from other credible individuals. Compared to other sources of information (for example, journalists and TV news anchors), leaders must do more than be reliable reporters of the news. Leaders make the news, interpret the news, and make sense of the news. Leaders are expected to have a point of view about the future and to articulate exciting possibilities. Constituents want to be confident that their leaders know where they're going.

Even so, although compelling visions are necessary for leadership, if you as a leader are not credible, the message rests on a weak and precarious foundation. You must therefore be ever diligent in guarding your credibility. Your ability to take strong stands,

challenge the status quo, and point to new directions depends on your being highly credible. You can never take your credibility for granted, regardless of the times or of your expertise or authority. If you ask others to follow you to some uncertain future—a future that may not be realized in their lifetime—and if the journey is going to require sacrifice, isn't it reasonable that constituents should believe in you?

The consistency and pervasiveness of these findings about the characteristics of admired leaders—people who would be willingly followed—are the rationale for **The Kouzes-Posner First Law of Leadership:**

If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't believe the message.

When we've surveyed people about the extent to which their immediate manager exhibited credibility-enhancing behaviors, the results strongly supported this "law."¹⁷ When people perceive their immediate manager to have high credibility, they're significantly more likely to feel proud about their organization, feel a high degree of team spirit, feel a strong sense of ownership and commitment to the organization, and be motivated by shared values and intrinsic factors. What happens when people don't feel that their immediate manager has much credibility is that they start looking for other jobs, they feel unsupported and underappreciated, and they express being motivated primarily by external factors like money and benefits (which are never enough). Clearly, credibility makes a difference, and leaders must take this personally. Loyalty, commitment, energy, and productivity depend on it. Consider for a moment what researchers studying soldiers serving in "hot-combat" zones discovered about what it takes to influence people to risk injury and even

death to achieve the organization's objectives. Soldiers' perceptions of their leader's credibility, the evidence shows, determines the actual extent of influence that leader can exercise.¹⁸

The data confirm that credibility is the foundation of leadership. But what is credibility behaviorally? In other words, how do you know it when you see it?

We've asked this question of tens of thousands of people around the globe, and the response is essentially the same, regardless of how it may be phrased in one company versus another or one country versus another. Here are some of the common phrases people use to describe credible leaders:

"They practice what they preach."

"They walk the talk."

"Their actions are consistent with their words."

"They put their money where their mouth is."

"They follow through on their promises."

"They do what they say they will do."

The last is the most frequent response. When it comes to deciding whether a leader is believable, people first listen to the words, then they watch the actions. They listen to the talk, then they watch the walk. They listen to the promises of resources to support change initiatives, then they wait to see if the money and materials follow. They hear the pledge to deliver, then they look for evidence that the commitments are met. A judgment of "credible" is handed down when words and deeds are consonant. If people don't see consistency, they conclude that the leader is, at best, not really serious or, at worst, an outright hypocrite. If leaders espouse one set of values but personally practice another, people find them to be duplicitous. If leaders

practice what they preach, people are more willing to entrust them with their livelihood and even their lives.

This realization leads to a straightforward prescription for the most significant way to establish credibility. We refer to it as **The Kouzes-Posner Second Law of Leadership**:

You build a credible foundation of leadership foundation when you DWYSYWD—Do What You Say You Will Do.

DWYSYWD has two essential parts: say and do. The practice of Model the Way links directly to these two dimensions of the behavioral definition of credibility. Modeling is about clarifying values and setting an example for others based on those values. The consistent living out of values is the way leaders demonstrate their honesty and trustworthiness. It's what gives them the moral authority to lead. And that's where we begin our discussion of The Five Practices. In the next two chapters, we examine the principles and behaviors that bring Model the Way to life.