



THE BEST LEADERS are continually learning. They see all experiences as learning opportunities. But there's one condition. Rich insights only come from reflection and analysis. Unexamined experiences yield no lessons. If you want to become a better leader, you need to study your own performance and become more conscious about the choices that you are making and how you are acting on your intentions.

The purpose of *The Leadership Challenge Workbook* is to help you become a better leader by applying The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® to a project of your choice. As with the learning of any new discipline, we will ask you to do some exercises that isolate specific skills. This may seem a bit artificial at first, but it's no different from any form of practice—you are not actually in the game, but you know you are improving your capacity to play the game.

HOW THE WORKBOOK IS ORGANIZED

In Chapter 2 we've provided a summary of The Five Practices model that resulted from our thirty-plus years of research. If you've read *The Leadership Challenge* or have used the *Leadership Practices Inventory*, you may not need to review the model, but it's here if you need a reminder. If you are not already familiar with The Five Practices, read this chapter carefully—it provides the foundation for the work that you will be doing.

Chapter 3 offers some guidelines for choosing the right leadership project. To enable you to focus your work, it's essential that you select a real project to serve as the target of your reflections, applications, and actions. In Chapters 4 through 8, you'll apply The Five Practices to that project. And in Chapter 9, which you'll complete after your project is finished (or well underway), you will find questions that will help you reflect on the project's highs and lows and on what you learned—lessons you can then apply to your next Personal Best Leadership Project.

As you progress through the activities, the workbook supports your success in three ways:

1. *Reflection.* We want you to think about how you approach leadership. The questions we pose are designed to challenge your thinking and help you become more conscious about how well you engage in each of The Five Practices. Contrary to myths about leadership that assume you either have it or you don't, we know from our research that the very best leaders spend time examining what they have done as well as what they are planning to do. Call it the “mental game of leadership.” The exercises in this workbook ask you to be more reflective about what your experience can teach you about leadership.
2. *Application.* We want you to apply the leadership practices and commitments to your project. To do that, we provide exercises that help put The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® to work. In some cases you will do this application alone. In other cases, you will go out to talk to your team members and engage them in an activity.
3. *Implications.* As a result of your reflections and applications, you will learn about yourself, your team, your organization, and your project. At the end of each chapter, we ask you to jot down the implications of what you have learned about leadership.

GUIDELINES FOR COMPLETING THE WORKBOOK

It would be ideal if you could complete the entire workbook as a way of preparing everyone for the project—somewhat like a series of warm-up exercises before playing the game. On a practical level, that may not be possible. The way you use the workbook depends on the nature of your project and your situation. Here are some suggestions:

- If you're just starting, we recommend that you begin with Chapter 4 on Model the Way and work your way through Chapter 8 on Encourage the Heart.
- If your project has been underway for some time, we recommend that you first read through this workbook quickly, without completing all the activities. Then go back and start with those worksheets that address immediate concerns. For example, your team may have been working long hours and has not taken a break. You believe that they need some recognition and celebration. In that case, start with Chapter 8, Encourage the Heart. Or you may feel that conflicts have arisen because there is insufficient consensus around shared values. In that instance, begin with Chapter 4 on Model the Way. However, make sure you address all of The Five Practices and complete all the activities as soon as you can. They are designed to improve the way you lead.
- You may find that you have already completed some of the activities that are in this workbook. For instance, you and your team may have spent a lot of time identifying and agreeing upon your shared values. If you have already done something equivalent to what's in this workbook, then just pause long enough to make sure you are comfortable with what you have done and do not need to revisit it. Then move on to the next activity.
- You may decide that you want to start with a particular chapter—say Chapter 7 instead of Chapter 4—because you think the activities in that chapter are more important to your team right now. Or you may find that some questions are richer and more useful to you than others. That's okay with us. Start with the practice that most needs your attention. We encourage you to proceed through this book in whatever way resonates for you.
- No matter how you use the workbook, however, we urge you not to skip over any of the leadership practices.

At times you may find yourself saying, “I don’t know.” For example, we are going to ask, “Who’s on your project team?” Your answer today may be, “I don’t know. The team members haven’t been selected yet.” That’s a perfectly acceptable response. If you are not ready to answer a question or complete an activity, set the workbook aside and do what you need to do so that you can respond or engage in action, or simply move on to the next question or activity and come back when you are ready. What’s important is that you come back to everything that you skip.

Becoming a better leader requires learning and doing something in each of The Five Practices. You may be better at some than others, but you still have to develop your capacity to execute in all of them. It’s like participating in a pentathlon. You can’t opt out of any of the five events if you want to enter. You may feel that you are better prepared for some of the events than for others, but you must still participate in all five.

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