

LEADING *through* LISTENING

How Professional Communicators Can Turn
Insecurity Into Quiet, Confident Leadership



M.J. CLARK, M.A., APR, Fellow PRSA

Words of praise for this book...

“If you are new to leadership, this book is an incredible road map for how to start strong with good habits, skills, and attributes. If you are an experienced leader, it is a perfect opportunity to re-evaluate your habits, skills, and attributes to ensure you are still being the most effective leader you can be. The tangible takeaways are priceless, and the experience sharing that M.J. Clark offers perfectly underscores and validates the advice she so generously provides page after page.”

- **Angela Krile**

President & CEO, Krile Communications, and Chair, Ohio Expositions Center Commission
and Ohio State Fair

“M.J. Clark’s genuine desire to help others succeed in being their best selves and becoming successful leaders comes through in every chapter of her latest book. She breaks down all the clutter and leaves us with easy-to-adopt nuggets of workplace wisdom about how to maximize relationships for the benefit of the organization and the fulfillment of the individual.”

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Partner, Bricker Graydon

“Leading Through Listening is very captivating. As a person who continually evaluates himself, I found reading Leading Through Listening enabled me to evaluate myself on an even deeper level. I have always kept my feelings to myself. Leading Through Listening has opened my eyes to a whole new level of ways to manage, mentor, and communicate with the individuals I am blessed to surround myself with daily. Not only will this book be a great tool to help build a stronger team at work but even more importantly it will help to build a stronger team in your home life.”

- **Bill Patton**

Director of Operations - Foundations, Thompson Concrete

Leading Through Listening

HOW PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATORS CAN TURN INSECURITY
INTO QUIET, CONFIDENT LEADERSHIP

M.J. Clark, M.A., APR, Fellow PRSA

Leading Through Listening: How Professional Communicators Can Turn Insecurity Into Quiet, Confident Leadership makes a great gift, teaching tool, and/or self-help guide. For more information (including information on bulk purchases for friends, family, employees, or members of your group or organization), contact the author at mj@mjclarkbooks.com.

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Leading Through Listening: A Foreword

by Bruce Cadwallader

I wish I had met someone like M.J. Clark 30 years ago when I first set my tennis shoes on the brick-laden streets at Ohio University. I was scared, naive, and wimpy. Instead of embracing my college years, I cried like a baby when my parents dropped me off outside Washington Hall.

Yet I grew to be a quiet leader anyway. I studied hard, drank hard, and learned a lot about my fellow man in those dormitories. I was going to become a news photographer.

Then I took my first art class or two and fell out of love with the genre.

Then I listened to a professor—experience is a wonderful teacher too—and pursued my hidden passion for writing instead. I found a job at the city desk of the student paper my sophomore year and applied for a position in residence life. All of a sudden, I was leading and not following. Eventually, I didn't want to leave those dormitories or that college. I still return, fondly.

In her book, *Leading Through Listening*, M.J. reminds us all that sometimes we are not the smartest in the room, or the one who best portrays his passion, but often the best communicators know when to listen more than they speak. I learned that message early in my career as a newspaper reporter at three other Ohio newspapers.

I would routinely return to the newsroom in my first year at The Columbus Dispatch without enough “quote” fodder to write a decent column, mostly because I thought I had to run an interview instead of hosting one. Finally, an editor told me once, as he tossed an empty notebook at my feet, “Fill these up. We'll buy you more!”

I began to listen more than I spoke. I began each interview with a more pleasant tone, a demeanor that said, “Yes, I'm interested in what you have to say!” even if I wasn't. I conquered spelling errors and errors in fact and omission. And I think I became a pretty good judge of a story, anyone's story.

Years later, I embraced public speaking and a run at the presidential ladder of a national journalism society. It was exposure to quiet leadership on a national scale. Even though I never became president of the Society of Professional Journalists, my failures helped reshape my character.

Back at The Dispatch, I wrote 5,500 bylined pieces before something tugging inside me said it was time to move on after a 27-year career. That's about the time I began working with M.J. Clark on a plan to set my feet on a different path.

My editor at the time, realizing it too, told me I was frequently “restless” about my future. My wife knew I was unhappy as well.

Ask yourself: What do other people see when they look into my mirror? More importantly, as M.J. points out, it's best to get to know yourself finally in those reflective moments and change the behavior or attitude that's getting in the way of your success.

Now, as senior director of a local public relations firm, I think I have overcome that fear of change, thanks to the concepts in this book and friends like M.J. who said, “Sure you can. You'd be good at that!” With a boost of ego and a tweak or two of a resume, you too can make a change in your life if you want to.

I'm glad she was there for me.

I pray you read on and become a better “you” for doing so.
— Bruce Cadwallader, BSJ (Ohio University 1983)

Dedication

To my family: Thank you, Bob, for loving me unconditionally. You are the most amazing man I know. Thank you, Carson and Connor, for challenging me to become more quiet, patient, loving, and forgiving. I thank God every day for choosing me to be your mom.

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Introduction

I can't believe that conversation, she thought to herself. I wanted so much to impress the owner of that company, but I couldn't stop talking. I think I said the same thing three times, in three different ways, right in a row. What does he think of me? I didn't let him speak. I didn't ask for his opinion. Why can't I control my mouth?!

I was in the meeting for an hour but didn't say a word. Why didn't I speak up? he asked himself. I had some ideas I thought were great, but I was too afraid to share them. I worried they would think my ideas were stupid or they might ask me follow-up questions I can't answer. I'll never move up in this company if I can't share my thoughts!

Does this self-talk sound familiar? Most people who would label themselves professional communicators (public relations professionals, executive coaches, advertising executives, project managers, marketing directors, human resources experts, lawyers, CEOs, college professors, administrators, and other communicators) talk too much or don't speak up enough. I know because I spent most of my adulthood as one of those people who talk too much, and I know a multitude of other communicators with the same challenge. I've also coached and worked with many people with the opposite problem, struggling to speak up when they have so much great information to share.

Talking too much or staying overly quiet is born of insecurity. We want to sound smart. We want to be heard. We want people to fully listen to and understand us. The problem is that when we talk too much or stay too quiet, we get the very opposite of what we seek.

When we talk too much, people start to expect us to go on and on, so they tune us out all the sooner. In fact, some may even avoid starting a conversation with us at all, knowing they will have to verbally wrestle for a chance to speak or realizing they don't have the time or energy to devote to what they presume will be a lengthy, one-sided discussion.

When we very rarely share our thoughts, people may assume we are disengaged, don't have worthwhile thoughts to share, or are too insecure to be a true leader in the organization. They may worry about our ability to navigate difficult conversations and keep others accountable, which are sought-after management skills.

Years ago, a mentor told me that what I had to say was all valuable—there was just too much of it. As I spent time in self-observation, I realized I was saying nearly everything I thought. I have worked very hard over the last decade to control my talking. I now give much more thought to what I share and when I share it, controlling the natural extrovert that I am. I spend much more time listening to others, focusing on further developing patience and nurturing my sincere interest in others.

These life experiences led me to write this book. I knew there were other people just like me out there, who simply talk too much, as well as those who don't speak up enough, don't understand why they can't communicate effectively in their leadership role, or have a difficult time figuring out how to manage their team. This book is for you – to help you understand some of the ways we remain in denial when we talk too much or not enough, how we may be negatively perceived by others, and how we can be more intentional about our listening and communicating to become more effective leaders.

I certainly still backslide from time to time, talk too much and occasionally interrupt others. Whether you are like me or are working to speak up more, it is something we will likely have to work on for years to come. I cling optimistically, though, to the progress I've made. I am confident that all of us can learn to become better listeners, leaders, and communicators if we practice with intentionality some of the techniques I'll share.

This book outlines the critical elements that I believe will take all communicators to the next stage in their careers and position communicators to be extremely influential in their organizations or in their own businesses. There is power in Quiet Leadership, and I want to share with you what I have learned the hard way over the years, personally and through my countless executive coaching interactions with clients, about how to overcome insecurity to lead effectively by listening well and communicating assertively.

In the following chapters, you'll find:

- Tips about how to overcome the insecurity embedded in our speaking dysfunctions and how we can learn to listen, delegate, and empower others to truly lead.
- How you can do things scared to build self-confidence and create trust with others.
- Tips for listening so others feel heard and deciding how much to share with others.
- How to have assertive conversations, manage conflict, and keep others accountable.
- Why failing is so important for our overall success and tips for overcoming procrastination.
- How to find your passion and influence others.

This book and the accompanying digital workbook will shepherd you through understanding yourself better so you can improve the areas you wish and work toward becoming a more effective communicator and leader. Download the workbook now at <https://bit.ly/3sbOacQ> and check out the workbook prompts after you read each chapter of the book. Let's dive in!

SECTION ONE

Authenticity and Vulnerability

CHAPTER ONE

Understanding Quiet Leadership

“Never try to be better than someone else. But never stop working to become your best self.”

—John Wooden

I navigated a bumpy road in my transition from the field of public relations to leadership development and found along the way that communicators and leaders have so much in common. During the journey, I’ve learned a bit about how to overcome our insecurities that often lead us to talk a bit too much or clam up completely. I’ll share those thoughts in this chapter about Quiet Leadership, which I define as leading through listening. We can learn to listen, delegate, and empower others to truly lead instead of letting our insecurities show. After briefly explaining what we go through cognitively and emotionally to arrive at our behavior, I will describe the best tool I know for processing our thoughts and emotions: journaling. I’ll reveal the great benefits of journaling, give you suggestions on how to journal, and encourage you to do so.

My career transition began with a desperate phone call.

“The president called. She has an emergency to deal with at the office and can’t be at today’s luncheon,” said the PRSA Programs Committee chair into the phone. “As president-elect, can you run the meeting?”

“Of course,” I said, not realizing that this important luncheon would be the catalyst to changing my life and career in a profound way, one that would bring me closer to my true passion and allow me to marry my two loves: communications and leadership.

The speaker at the Public Relations Society of America luncheon that day was Steven L. Anderson, Ph.D., MBA, author of *The Call to Authenticity*, *Embracing Rebellion*, *How to Create a World Class Company*, and *Success Strategies*. As Dr. Anderson discussed several leadership concepts framed by cognitive behavioral psychology, I was captivated by the material presented and knew immediately that this was what I wanted to do with my life.

When he finished his talk, I waited in line with others to say hello. When it was my turn, I stuck out my hand and enthusiastically said, “I’m M.J. Clark, and I want to be you when I grow up.” I was in my thirties at that time, so that elicited a chuckle from Steve. Our conversation was the start of the journey to who I am now, more my true self than ever before and happier and calmer than I ever imagined I could be.

When I met Steve, I believe I was finally ready to hear the message he had to give. Had I heard the same speech years earlier, I don’t know that I would have been so struck by his words. But I was in the middle of a two-year master’s degree program in organizational communication at The Ohio State University, and I was becoming keenly interested in neuroscience and the ways psychology influences our leadership and management abilities.

It was during the second year of this master’s program, while I was still engaged with Steve in discussions about how we might work together, when I found myself in a profound state of dysfunction.

While attending Ohio State's program full-time, which also included conducting research and teaching classes, I was running my public relations consulting business, was president of the Central Ohio Public Relations Society of America (a 400-member association) and was a wife and mother of two small boys. I was not dealing well with the added stress, and I believe I reached my ultimate capacity, the point at which I could no longer function effectively.

One day, while sitting alone entering data into a computer in an OSU research lab, tears began to flow down my face. I was truly shocked and had no idea why I was crying. But the tears continued, eventually to the point where I could no longer work. I called my advisor, the professor for whom I was entering the research data and told him what happened. I asked him if I could just go home because I wasn't getting anything done. He agreed and asked if I thought I should see one of the free counselors on campus. I said no and that I thought this was probably an isolated incident.

I was very wrong. These crying episodes began to come with more frequency, leaving me more and more confused. I finally took my advisor's advice and saw a campus counselor. It was there I learned that this was my body's way of letting me know it was under extreme stress. Although nothing precipitated the onset of tears, which originally confounded me, it became apparent to me that the tears came when I was alone with my thoughts. This was a big lesson for me. I spent so much time *doing*, that I spent little time *being*. And being is what helps people process emotions, embrace creativity, and assess situations. When I was alone, I felt the full load I was carrying, and I was truly overwhelmed, which created tears.

I spoke to Steve about these tears, and he suggested that I journal about what was going on. Although I was doing a lot of writing for school and was not very interested in doing more writing, I felt it was important to explore what was happening to me. This was the beginning of my lifelong journey toward greater emotional intelligence, balance, and self-knowledge. And it was my great desire to improve my life and help others do the same that led to my decision to work for Steve at Integrated Leadership Systems.

When I began meeting with Steve, he was calm, assertive, balanced, and authentic. He spoke very slowly and was very thoughtful and creative. He challenged me, but also supported me. The more time I spent with him, the more I wanted to be like him. He gently told me one day that I talked too much and that I was living life at too fast a pace. He was right on both counts, and I was, and still am, truly grateful for the feedback he was courageous enough to give me. He has trained me as an executive coach, and I feel more balanced and more powerful because of his time and attention.

I now practice what I call "Quiet Leadership," which I defined earlier as leading through listening. There is also a book called *Quiet Leadership* by David Rock, but he defines the concept differently.¹ My idea of Quiet Leadership is that to lead more effectively, you can't be the one talking all the time, and you also can't completely shut down. There's a healthy balance where you spend more time listening than talking, delegating than doing, and empowering than showing.

When you talk too much in a business setting, people don't listen because they are getting a lot of unimportant drivel along with valuable information. Instead, you must carefully choose what you share with others—the information that you think they may genuinely care about and not just all the things that *you* care about sharing.

When you clam up in meetings, people don't know what you are thinking, don't benefit from your ideas, and may eventually stop inviting you because you don't enhance the discussion.

My hope for each of my readers is that this book helps you become more of your true self. I want you to learn from my mistakes and move closer to becoming a person who makes you proud, balanced, and truly happy. As you may have guessed, I am still on the journey. I will never be done growing, but I know I have improved and am confident I will continue to do so.

I will dispense, and encourage you to take, the same advice Steve gave to me as you begin to change your life: start to journal. Journaling helps us become Quiet Leaders, because it allows us to understand the thoughts and insecurities we have that lead us to talk too much or clam up entirely. Through journaling, you can look for patterns in your behavior, become more emotionally intelligent, and assess your behavioral changes as they occur.

Journaling is a powerful tool for change, and it's something we encourage all our coaching clients to begin. Those who are especially reluctant to try it are the same clients who quickly grow to love the exercise and now journal more often than I do. Some people journal daily, usually as part of their morning routine. I typically journal weekly, on Saturday mornings. There are no parameters for how often, what time of day, and for what length of time journaling should take place. People work at different times, have energy peaks at different times of day, have unique ways of expressing themselves, and are able to sit and write for different lengths of time.

If you have never attempted to journal before, there are some simple ways to approach it. One way, for more structured thinkers, is to write about something that produced a negative emotion at work. An example might be that someone interrupted you several times when you tried to speak up in a meeting. Next, identify the precise word that describes how you felt in the moment and what thought you had that led you to feel that way. Following the same example, perhaps you felt dismissed or shunned because you thought the person who kept interrupting you didn't value your ideas. You would write this in your journal. How we think about and make sense of an external event in the moment is what leads to our emotional state.

Then, decide on what would be a more positive or useful replacement thought that would generate a better emotional state for yourself. For instance, instead of thinking that the person doesn't value your ideas, you could write in your journal that you will decide to assume instead that the person doesn't realize they are interrupting. If you replace your thought in this way the next time this occurs, it may lead you to feel curious or empathetic instead of dismissed or shunned.

Lastly, decide how you would behave differently in that same situation in the future, in a more productive way now that you've considered it more thoroughly, and commit to trying this new way the next time you encounter a similar situation. For example, you could journal, "In the future when I replace my thought with something more useful, I might be curious enough to go talk to the interrupter about what happened instead of sulking back to my office." Our feelings lead directly to our behaviors, so it's important to be able to name them and change them when we see they are unhelpful.

You can also journal by asking yourself a question, considering it, and then listing some possible answers. This is a productive way to address challenges, problems, or stressors and works well for those who like to think ahead or solve problems and also for those who are troubled by thoughts or worries they can't seem to shake. For example, you might write, "How will I navigate this board meeting with my colleague who is currently mad at me?" You can then list some possible approaches to having a discussion with him. Lastly, you can choose the action you plan to take and implement it at the appropriate time.²

Another simple way to approach journaling, if you are more free-spirited, would be to either

begin an entry with “Today I feel...” and then insert one word for the overarching feeling you are having (depressed, anxious, joyous, confused, etc.) or, if you are artistic, to draw a picture showing the emotion you feel. From either the word or picture, explore on paper why you feel that way. Is it the result of a recent event or experience in your life? Is it a lengthier mood in which you find yourself, or is it a more recent change? Is it a fear-based or passion-based emotion? If it is a negative emotion, what will you decide to feel instead, and how will you go about making that mental shift to something more positive or practical that will elicit the more productive feeling you desire?

I encourage you to journal by handwriting on paper, not entering your thoughts into an electronic device. The two activities access different parts of your brain, and handwriting journal entries seems to put people in a flow state that doesn’t appear to happen when making a journal entry electronically.

In the next chapter, I’ll discuss technology further and how it is negatively impacting our ability to truly connect with others. By becoming more self-aware and recognizing your insecurities, you will be better able to communicate your thoughts and feelings to others and combat the anti-social aspect of hiding behind technology. In that chapter, I will encourage you to build confidence by doing scary things, and I will share research about how to train your brain to learn new things quickly.

Chapter One - Key Points

- Quiet Leadership is leading through listening. It's the balance between talking too much and not sharing enough.
- Journaling is a powerful tool for change.
- Suggested ways to journal:
 - Write about something that produced a negative emotion. Identify one word to describe your feeling at that moment. Determine what thought led to that emotional state. Then, decide on a positive replacement thought that will generate a more positive emotional state. Lastly, determine how you might have handled that situation differently.
 - Ask yourself a question, consider it, then list some possible answers. For example, "How will I navigate this board meeting with my colleague who is currently mad at me?" Then list some possible approaches to having a discussion with him. Choose which one you will implement.
 - Begin an entry with "Today I feel..." and then insert one word or draw a picture of how you feel. Explore why you feel that way. Determine if you'd like to make a mental shift.

CHAPTER TWO

Evolving With Technology

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you would live forever.”

—*Gandhi*

While at a brown bag luncheon sponsored by a local business association, a discussion ensued about our changing communications field. I shared that although many communicators and leaders like to practice forecasting to help their organizations stay ahead in their industry, it’s incredibly challenging to do nowadays. The communications landscape continues to change, primarily because of new technology that continues to amaze, delight, and sometimes burden us.

Although it’s difficult to keep abreast of all the latest technological advancements, it’s critical to our careers. Creators continue to birth new tools that communicators can employ, further confusing our clients or companies and leaving many of us to wonder how we will most effectively incorporate the latest trends into our businesses. Many tools and services overlap, and some aren’t quite *exactly* what we need, so we continue to communicate with others in our industry to decide what best solves our problems without the pressure (and investment!) of trying everything that comes along.

Aside from the sheer amount of tools and an overwhelming number of choices, we must consider how the use of so much technology affects us as a community, as an organization, and as an individual. The most damaging element of so much new technology is the obvious sacrifice we are making to superior interpersonal communication. Our social skills can’t help but suffer when we spend much of our time linking, friending, tweeting, following, texting, emailing, and IM-ing one another. Videoconferencing and phone calling are one step up, but we still lose some of the rich information we get when we are sitting in a room together.

Those who are passive find it easier than ever to send someone an email or text instead of confronting a problem or communicating face-to-face. Even hand-written notes have become uncommon. My nephew recently told me that my advice to send a hand-written thank-you note following a job interview was what landed him the job. His new boss told him that his was the only note he received from the group of job candidates he recently interviewed. He didn’t feel genuinely thanked by those who spent less than a minute jotting him a quick email thank you. That may sound antiquated in today’s world, but putting time, effort, and thought into our interactions with others still matters.

As an executive coach, I find that more than ever I am asked to help executives improve their interpersonal communication skills. I can tell you with confidence that the best ways to improve communication skills are to 1) understand ourselves better, 2) own and address our insecurities, 3) communicate courageously, and 4) put ourselves in situations that scare and challenge us. I’ll take a moment to explain each one of these elements in more detail.

First, self-awareness is the cornerstone of emotional intelligence, or EQ, and that is something I’m a firm believer every single one of us could improve. To understand ourselves better, we need to self-observe and be honest with ourselves about our strengths and weaknesses and where

we may be in denial. In *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, authors Bradberry and Greaves give a simple definition of self-awareness: “to know yourself as you really are.”³ When we are fully aware of both our positive and negative feelings and where they originate, our ability to communicate what we need and want in relationships improves.

Second, to address our insecurities, it’s imperative that we see them and own them. A frequent complaint I hear from managers is that someone on their team has an overinflated idea of their skills and team contributions. One manager told me that one of her direct reports was asking for a raise and promotion because, he explained to her, he was a very high-performer and could take on more. “M.J.,” she said to me, “he’s very clearly an *underperformer*, and I’m not sure how to address this with him when he doesn’t see it himself.”

Third, we can begin to behave courageously by not only communicating our thoughts and feelings with others, but also by asking others for feedback so we have a better sense of where we stand. If you manage others, ask your own supervisor as well as those you supervise, “How can I be a better manager?” If you don’t have any direct reports, ask your supervisor how you can be more effective in your role. Don’t only ask once, because people need time to think about how to respond with clarity and some examples. Ask every month, until you start getting some concrete, actionable feedback.

Fourth, putting ourselves in situations that scare and challenge us helps us build confidence and grow professionally. Examples of things that fall into this category include agreeing to a challenging promotion in which everyone seems to be certain you’ll excel, accepting a board position that will require a good deal of initial learning, being tasked with growing your department or division, or moving to a new city for a promotion.

Not only do these learning opportunities build confidence when we find we can figure them out and excel, but they also train our brain to learn new things quickly. The books *The Brain That Changes Itself* and *Make It Stick* both discuss the concept that learning new things can improve our brain’s ability to learn. The books explore neuroplasticity and the brain’s response to new experiences. These authors contend that the continued exposure to new things and repeated practice to learn forms new neural pathways and strengthens existing ones. If we practice various kinds of learning techniques, our brain will be better able to retain and practically apply that new knowledge.⁴

It is only through repeated practice of those things with which we struggle that we improve and eventually master those skills. Author Neale Donald Walsch wrote in his bestselling series *Conversations with God* that “Life begins at the end of your comfort zone.” He is so right.

With the crutches of new technology, it’s easier than ever simply to avoid what we don’t do well. But avoidance is merely a Band-Aid on a wound. You will encounter the same challenging situation in the future, and you will realize you are just as unprepared as you were the last time unless you decide to challenge yourself to do something uncomfortable, such as having that difficult work conversation face-to-face instead of through an electronic medium. We must stop hiding behind technology. It’s slowly killing our relationships. It’s important to challenge ourselves to communicate in person or with video, when possible, or even over the phone instead of sending emails and text messages. Face-to-face, difficult conversations lead to trust. Avoidance leads to mistrust.

Now that we’ve covered how to utilize technology without allowing it to hamper our relationships, I will describe how to start with trust instead of mandating that people earn our trust in Chapter Three: Starting With Trust.

Chapter Two — Key Points

- One of the most damaging by-products of so much new technology is the sacrifice of superior interpersonal communication.
- People who are passive find it easier than ever to send someone an e-mail or text instead of confronting a problem or communicating face-to-face.
- Putting time, effort, and thought into a kind gesture still matters.
- The best ways to improve communication skills are to 1) understand ourselves better, 2) own and address our insecurities, 3) communicate courageously, and 4) put ourselves in situations that scare and challenge us.
- Learning new things regularly can improve our brain's ability to learn overall. The continued exposure to new things and repeated practice to learn forms new neural pathways and strengthens existing ones. If we practice various kinds of learning techniques, our brain will be better able to retain and practically apply that new knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE

Starting With Trust

Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships.

- Stephen R. Covey

As we explore the topic of trust in this chapter, I will outline the behaviors that researchers say diminish trust and how to stop yourself from damaging relationships by being defensive. I'll reveal why it's so important to admit your mistakes instead of covering them up, and I will explain how emotional intelligence, and specifically social awareness, can help us build trust with others.

"I don't trust anyone. *Anyone*," my client said.

I asked him, "Are *you* worthy of trust?"

He laughed loudly. "Of course not!"

"Why not?" I asked.

"I'm a major BSeer! I tell people what they want to hear so I get what I want."

I asked, "If you trusted others enough to be honest and open and fully yourself with them, what would happen?"

"They would hate me," he said.

This place of unworthiness that plagues so many people is why many people can't trust others. Feeling unlovable and hesitant at the thought of taking off your mask and exposing your true self can be very frightening. And yet, you can never be truly loved for your authentic self if the mask stays in place.

If I'm not trustworthy, it's very hard to imagine that others are. If I am selfish, manipulative, or have ulterior motives, what's to keep others from behaving with similar agendas? Our cynicism keeps our poor behavior firmly in place and leads us to not trust others. We convince ourselves into thinking that if everyone is just out for themselves, like us, then we are "normal." Making the decision to stop that childish thinking and create the adult definition of ourselves that will bring us the most happiness is sometimes daunting. We've lived with this damaging definition for so long, it feels real. If you are currently in relationships you don't want as a result of this faulty definition, you can choose to take back your life. It starts with trust.

There is a great book called *Trustology: The Art and Science of Leading High-Trust Teams*⁵ that encourages readers to *start* with trust. You heard me right. People always say you have to *earn* their trust. I like author Richard Fagerlin's approach much better. If we start by trusting the other person, we are essentially saying, "I think you are a good, discreet, reliable person, so I'm going to courageously put myself out there first to show you that I too am a good person who can be trusted."

I practice this on a regular basis, and I never get hurt. I'm kidding; of course I do! Not everyone is trustworthy. But my vulnerability and willingness to take a chance is worth it every time. It has often led to deep, long-term relationships that are built quickly on that foundation of trust. If I, instead, expected people to earn my trust and they expected me to earn theirs, it's a

much longer process. With the foundation of suspicion or cynicism, I'm watching for them to mess something up or betray me instead of expecting the best.

People often rise to the expectations we set, so expecting someone to be trustworthy and communicating that you expect it often begets that very behavior.

You may be thinking that trust is fine for personal relationships, but it doesn't work well at work. We are often hired onto teams of people we don't know yet, so you may think wanting these new colleagues to earn your trust first still makes more sense.

In the excellent book *The Leadership Challenge*, authors Kouzes and Posner suggest that you "be the first" to:

- Disclose information about who you are and what you believe.
- Admit mistakes.
- Acknowledge the need for personal improvement.
- Ask for feedback—positive and negative.
- Listen attentively to what others are saying.
- Invite interested parties to important meetings.
- Share information that's useful to others.
- Openly acknowledge the contributions of others.
- Show that you're willing to change your mind when someone else comes up with a good idea.
- Avoid talking negatively about others.
- Say, "We can trust them," and mean it.⁶

Some of the items on this list, when not done, are things I hear my coaching clients say will surely keep some of their direct reports from moving up in the company. One thing executives consistently say bothers them is when people don't admit mistakes and won't say they are sorry. These are two things that greatly damage trust.

I coach an executive in a construction company, and one day he noticed a piece of heavy equipment on a site was dented and was not operating properly. Repairs would be expensive. It appeared obvious that the driver backed into something very solid. When asked for an explanation, the driver continued to deny he did anything wrong. The executive called the owner of the site, and they happened to have cameras installed that showed the driver lied.

In our next coaching session, the executive said, "If he had told the truth, I would have been disappointed but would have respected that he owned up to his mistake. Instead, I worried about other times he may have lied and when he might lie in the future. I didn't want to fire him, but I knew then that I would never promote him because I just couldn't trust him anymore."

Those who won't admit mistakes are often the same people who don't think they need to improve and struggle with constructive feedback. They tend not to ask for feedback, and when they receive it unsolicited, they are often reactive or defensive. I believe most people don't know what these two words—reactive and defensive—mean. Defensiveness is the act of defending yourself, explaining why you did what you did. If someone tells you that they've noticed you interrupt people frequently in the staff meeting, defensiveness is saying something like, "Well, I can't get a word in because everyone else is talking too much, so I have to interrupt to be heard." You are defending your disrespectful behavior, giving a reason you think justifies it.

Reactive behavior is simply reacting negatively to what was said without regard to the person's perspective or the request that you adjust your behavior. In this same example, a reactive response might be, "You always pick on me! Other people interrupt too, and you say nothing. Stop attacking me!"

To avoid defensiveness or reactivity, I suggest that you respond to any type of negative feedback with these three things:

- 1) Thank them
- 2) Apologize
- 3) Find out more.

In this example, you could say, "Thank you so much for letting me know that I've been interrupting. I'm so sorry; I didn't realize I was doing that. Tell me more about this. When do I tend to interrupt the most? I'm absolutely going to try to catch myself and be more considerate from here on, and if you see me doing that in the meeting, please politely ask me to let them, or let you, finish. That will help. Thanks again for telling me."

Those who don't share their knowledge and won't give credit where it's due are also engaged in career-limiting behaviors. This selfishness and credit seeking is something that is generally known among peers, so the person engaging in the behavior is only lying to themselves. If we don't seek to train our replacements and encourage those around us by giving credit where it's due, we aren't displaying leadership qualities.

One public relations director whose supervisor I coached had trained people for years and was very well respected. After decades in the same company, this person started to coast. She no longer worked hard, she left for long periods without explanation, she took credit for things she didn't do when in the presence of executives, she made promises she didn't keep, and she told people to "figure it out" instead of coaching them to the answers. Her team members who used to trust and respect this company leader began to complain, and her supervisor eventually fired her. The knowledge she had was useless to the company if it wasn't going to be shared. She claimed to have no idea why she was being fired, and it had to be spelled out for her. She immediately responded defensively, but it was simply too late.

Our willingness to be vulnerable with trust, especially at work, requires emotional intelligence and particularly political awareness. None of us likes to acknowledge that politics are at play in every organization, but political awareness helps us make practical decisions about who to trust and when.

I started working as a marketing professional at a law firm many jobs ago, and the HR director got me settled and helped me learn the ropes. He always had a smile on his face, seemed to genuinely care, and I trusted him completely. As time went on, I started encountering roadblocks. I couldn't understand what was going on until a female lawyer pulled me aside one day and told me that the HR director was undermining me at every turn. She told me he was talking about me behind my back and torpedoing my efforts by boldly making cases against them in private meetings with stakeholders. I was flabbergasted!

Why would he do such a thing? I wondered. *I have been nothing but nice to him, and he has done so much to encourage me and help me get acclimated.*

I came to learn that he had applied for the marketing director job I got, and they did not even interview him. He was upset by this. In addition, I heard he was having difficulty in his marriage and was just a very unhappy person in general. He smiled, said all the right things, and appeared

helpful, but he was really a person who subtly undermined others, planting seeds of doubt in the minds of key executives behind the scenes.

In the book *Social Intelligence*, author Daniel Goleman discusses the components of social awareness that I think are truly key to honing your political awareness skills in the workplace. To decide if we can truly trust someone, even if we begin with trust and not make people earn it, requires that we try to understand the other person's thoughts and feelings fully and deeply. Goleman says social awareness includes:

1. Feeling what others feel and understanding nonverbal emotional signals.
2. Listening attentively and openly to fully understand them.
3. Understanding their thoughts, feelings, and intentions.
4. Knowing how the social world works.⁷

I've never been great at deciphering nonverbal cues, and there are times when I still don't listen attentively, so I continue to practice these skills regularly. All the skills that Goleman says lead to social awareness have a foundation in deep listening and respectful communication. That's why the next two chapters explore how to deeply listen to others and how to communicate more authentically and assertively to help us better understand and trust ourselves and others.

Chapter Three – Key Points

- Our feelings of unworthiness and cynicism lead us to not trust others.
- When you begin with trust, instead of expecting people to *earn* your trust, you risk getting hurt. But the alternative risk is giving up the opportunity for great, deep long-term relationships that are built quickly on that foundation of trust.
- *The Leadership Challenge* authors suggest that, as the leader, you “be the first” to disclose information about yourself, admit mistakes, ask for feedback, listen well, share information, acknowledge the contributions of others, and avoid negatively talking about others.
- The refusal to admit mistakes and apologize damages trust and can be career limiting.
- Many people respond to constructive feedback defensively or reactively. Defensiveness is the act of defending yourself, explaining why you did what you did. Reactive behavior is reacting negatively to what was said without regard to the person’s perspective or the request that you adjust your behavior.
- Instead of being reactive or defensive, respond to negative feedback by thanking them, apologizing, and asking for more information.
- Our willingness to be vulnerable with trust, especially at work, requires emotional intelligence, particularly social awareness. *Social Intelligence* author Daniel Goleman says social awareness includes:
 - Feeling what others feel and understanding nonverbal emotional signals.
 - Listening attentively and openly to fully understand them.
 - Understanding their thoughts, feelings, and intentions.
 - Knowing how the social world works.

CHAPTER FOUR

Controlling Your Thoughts

“I believe people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”

—Abraham Lincoln

In this chapter, we will explore in depth the key to benefiting from the cognitive behavioral model that researchers have used for decades in order to recognize and work to change what we think when our thoughts are not helpful to us. I will provide detailed instructions on how to utilize this model as a tool for changing any unhelpful behaviors you may notice in yourself. In this chapter, I will also explain how we can use affirmations to better control our thoughts, providing several examples.

People always tell you to “think positively.” It’s easier said than done when your life feels like it’s falling apart, you didn’t get the promotion, you got a life-threatening medical diagnosis, or your business partner just left the meeting in a huff. *How can I possibly think positively? you may wonder, when these negative thoughts just pop into my head because of what’s going on around me. I’m not in charge of them!*

What we think greatly impacts how we behave. It’s not enough just to think positively. You have to believe what you think. If you “try” to think positively, and yet your inner voice doesn’t truly believe that you are strong enough to overcome obstacles or that you deserve to succeed, you will never reach your goals.

I often tell clients to make affirmation cards, using 3x5 index cards, and I have used these cards myself, reading them several times throughout each day. You may also keep a list of affirmations on your phone or laptop, although I find writing them by hand really helps them sink in. Affirmations are a tool to help you think differently. They are written in the first person (using “I” statements) and written as if the ideal situation already exists.

Step one is pinpointing your consistent behaviors that are not useful to you, so you can write affirmations to help alleviate them. One way to do this is to ask others for feedback. For example, you might ask, “What do I do regularly that is problematic for you?” If the person you’re asking says, “You consistently miss deadlines,” then you know you need an affirmation to help with that. An affirmation for this might be, “I track my work diligently and use my calendar to ensure I never miss a deadline.”

Another way to pinpoint problematic behaviors is to observe yourself. For instance, I have coached individuals who tell me they struggle with anger management. An affirmation that someone who wants to overcome this might write would be, “I am the calm in the storm,” or “I take time throughout each day to breathe calmly,” or “I always respond in a calm manner in the workplace.”

For someone struggling with self-esteem issues, an affirmation might be, “I am lovable and capable.” It could be, “People love me just as I am,” or “I am caring, funny, and thoughtful.” If you want to lose weight, an affirmation might be, “I exercise every day because I love feeling fit,” or “I am thin, and I look incredible.”

Affirmations can be written for both your professional and personal life. Often the changes we

hope to make are the same or connected in both arenas. They are sometimes hard to detect without some reflection, but if you have a quick temper or low self-esteem, it usually affects you as a whole person, not just in one of the roles you play (a professional, a parent, or a friend). If you can write the affirmations specifically for your business and personal needs, you can focus more clearly on the precise behaviors you seek to change.

Reading affirmations many times daily will reprogram your thinking. After weeks or months of this exercise, depending on how often you read them, you will see that when a situation arises that reflects an affirmation you have written, the affirmation will come to mind without referring to the card. Affirmations become positive self-talk that, over time, develops into new healthy thinking habits.

Affirmations always feel like lies in the beginning. They are not your current reality, so it seems silly to tell yourself something that is just not so. To make it reality, though, you must think it into being. The more you reinforce with your thoughts that the negative behavior exists, the more solidly that behavior becomes ingrained. Conversely, the more you practice your new way of thinking about it, your behavior is likely to become aligned.

The theory behind affirmations is that if you read them every day or throughout each day, and they really are not your current situation, you will feel compelled to do something about it. It creates something called “cognitive dissonance.” When you believe one thing, but the reality is something else, it bothers your mind, so you attempt to make your belief and reality match. For instance, when you think you are smart enough to have a college degree, and yet every time someone asks you where you went to college you have to admit that you did not go to college, that will bother you. If you have to keep admitting that to people, and you assume they are judging you for not being smart when you feel that you are, you will eventually find a way to go to college.

Another way to control our thoughts is to consider the ABC (Activating event, Belief system, Consequences) cognitive behavioral model⁸ developed by one of the cognitive behavioral therapy founders, psychologist Albert Ellis, Ph.D. He found that when an activating event (A) that is a negative trigger for us occurs, our thoughts (B) are revealed in our feelings and behavior (C), including nonverbal behavior (body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures).

The A is the Activating event that triggers a negative emotion in us. B is how we internally process that external event, or how our brain helps us make sense of it (our Beliefs or thoughts). Our brain searches all our experiences to try to help us interpret what it means. This processing is completely unique to us, so things that bother us may not bother another person simply because they didn't have all the same experiences that we did.

Those thoughts (B) are revealed to others in our feelings and behavior (Consequences). These consequences are both internal (our feelings) and external (our behavior). They are one in the same, because our feelings and behavior will mirror each other, and they come from our thoughts. So even when we try to stuff our feelings down, they often still give us away in our nonverbal behavior (body language, tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures) or outward behavior (avoiding someone, not speaking to someone, talking badly about someone to everyone *but* that person).

The trick to benefiting from this ABC cognitive behavioral model is to change what we think. I typically back into this because feelings are so strong at times that I seem to recognize the feeling before I understand the thought that caused it. So if I'm feeling hurt, I have to ask myself, *What is the thought I'm having that creates this hurt I feel?* As an example, let's say my boss

jumped in and finished the project he initially delegated to me, and I'm thinking he doesn't trust me or think I'm good at my job. This thinking is my brain's way of making sense out of my boss's choice to finish the project. It's a negative assumption about why he did that.

If you start to really tune into your thoughts, you'll see that we make lots of negative assumptions all day long and then behave in accordance with them. We can just as easily make positive assumptions or decide to think more practically. So to benefit from the ABC model, we have to recognize the negative thought we're having (my boss doesn't trust me or think I'm good at my job) and change it to a positive assumption (my boss was under a deadline and had to finish this quickly). With this new thought in mind, I won't take my boss's decision personally and I'll behave with confidence, knowing that I'll have another chance in the future to show my boss what I can achieve. If you notice patterns in your negative thinking, I highly suggest writing affirmations to attack these harmful thoughts.

What if you have some proof that your negative thought is accurate? For instance, what if several people have told you that Stan in Accounting talks negatively about you behind your back. Instead of simply assuming something positive about Stan that you know would not be accurate, you can instead choose a more practical way to think about the situation. You might say to yourself, *I don't have to interact with Stan that much, so I'm not going to ruminate over his dislike of me. Several other people at work respect me, and I'm just going to be helpful to Stan when I'm around him and recognize that my own behavior is the only thing I can control in this situation. I have to let the rest of it go.*

So how does this relate to leadership as a communicator and how can we practice Quiet Leadership? It's important to understand that communication is not just verbal. How we behave and our nonverbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, body language) speak volumes about how we perceive situations and ourselves, because our behavior comes from our thoughts. Quiet Leadership is about understanding these elements so we can listen well and be a better role model at work. We don't have to do all the talking if we are outgoing. We can communicate nonverbally too. If we are more introverted, we can challenge ourselves to communicate more to ensure clear understanding but still know that our listening and nonverbal cues serve us well as leaders.

In the next chapter, we'll explore how to care for yourself in mind, body, and soul, which will help you take further control of your life in your effort to become a more effective communicator and leader.

Chapter Four — Key Points

- What we think greatly impacts how we behave.
- Affirmation cards are a tool to help you think differently. They are written in the first person (using “I” statements) and written as if the ideal situation already exists.
- Examples of affirmations:
 1. I am the calm in the storm.
 2. I take time throughout each day to breathe calmly.
 3. I am lovable and capable.
 4. I exercise every day because I love feeling fit.
 5. I am thin, and I look incredible.
- Affirmations are positive self-talk that, over time, become healthy thinking habits.
- “Cognitive dissonance” is when you believe one thing, but reality is something else, so it bothers your mind, and you attempt to make your belief and reality match.
- Our brain searches all our experiences to try to help us interpret what different things mean, and this processing is unique to us.
- The key to benefiting from the ABC cognitive behavioral model is to recognize and work to change what we think when our thoughts are not helpful to us.

CHAPTER FIVE

Caring for Yourself

“Saying ‘yes’ to more things than we can actually manage to be present for with integrity and ease of being is in effect saying ‘no’ to all those things and people and places we have already said ‘yes’ to, including, perhaps, our own well-being.”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn

Quiet Leadership begins with the ability to care for your “self” in mind, body, and soul. To lead or guide others, and to exercise control of your emotional states, it’s important to be fully self-aware and to deeply understand how caring for yourself greatly impacts those around you. When we become more physically and emotionally aware, we are best able to role model, instruct, and encourage others to live their best lives. In this chapter, I explain how to care for your mind through meditation and outline the benefits of this practice. I discuss how to care for your body through journaling and exercise. Lastly, I explore how to care for your soul by pursuing your dreams.

Caring for Your Mind

Do you have a best friend, or more than one? Do you have someone in your life to whom you could tell anything? Do you keep a journal, where you can record the thoughts you didn’t even know you had until the pen began to write? These are some of the ways we care for our minds and address outside stresses.

I started meditating about ten years ago. And at times when my life is very busy, it’s a challenge to continue this important activity. When I say, “meditate,” it may cause you to envision someone in a complicated yoga position, chanting, with thumbs and first fingers touching in an upside-down “okay” position. I don’t know about you, but I find yoga positions especially uncomfortable, and being in one does not generally make me feel calm. For my fellow not-very-flexible readers, I want you to open your mind to think of meditation as an activity that is comfortable to you and a process you can mostly control.

I want to share with you how I approach meditation. First, I don’t use music. As much as I love music, I find even music without words to be incredibly distracting during meditation. You may want to explore this with music and see how you respond. I get in a very comfortable position, usually sitting in a chair with an upright back with my feet flat on the floor. This may sound simple to you, but because I’m only 5’2”, finding a chair that is close enough to the floor so that my feet can be comfortably flat can be a challenge! (It’s helpful to think about these simple things that will help you relax.)

I close my eyes, and I work to clear my mind of thoughts. To do this, I envision a light. I like to think of my light as God. I usually think the word “one,” but you can choose any word that speaks to you, such as calm, peace, or love. To me, “one” represents my oneness with God and His universe. I sit in silence, seeing my God light, and I repeat the word “one” in my head for 10 to 20 minutes, depending on how much time I have available for the activity. I slow my

breathing a bit more with every breath in and out and try to empty my mind, so I'm not distracted.

When I first began to meditate, my to-do list would come to mind, over and over again. Each time, I had to gently push those thoughts to the side and again focus on my imagined light and my word. Meditation takes practice. You don't just sit down and do this activity for 20 minutes. The first time, you may be able to do it for only two or three minutes. It will seem to take much longer than it actually does. You must practice to work up to ten or 20 minutes.

So what does meditation do for us? Research suggests that meditation may be an effective intervention for cardiovascular disease;⁹ anxiety and panic disorder;¹⁰ chronic pain;¹¹ substance abuse;¹² reduction of psychological distress and symptoms of distress for cancer patients;¹³ and reduction of medical symptoms in both clinical and nonclinical populations.¹⁴

We inherited from our ancestors the fight or flight response to life-threatening situations. The upside is that this response allows us to act quickly and reflexively so we can survive threatening situations without having to think about it. We get an adrenaline dump that provides extra energy to run or fight. The downside is that adrenaline also quickens the pulse, raises blood pressure, and speeds breathing. This reflexive response lowers the ability to think clearly. It also slows decision-making and complex problem-solving skills.

If we were in great danger, as our ancestors often were daily, all the effects of an adrenaline surge would be very helpful. Unfortunately, this fight or flight response is now inappropriately triggered in our modern lives when our bosses confront us, when we get cut off in traffic, or when our teenagers disobey us.

If we are unsure as to how to deal with these situations, stress is prolonged, which can lead to serious health problems.

We don't normally think about breathing; we just do it. But breathing deeply can be very helpful in reducing stress when you don't have time for a meditation session. I suggest that you find time to breathe deeply throughout the day, and actually schedule it if necessary. Most people who are under a lot of stress or tension breathe shallowly, up in the chest or throat area. This is what causes hyperventilation during a severe anxiety attack.

It is often more helpful to focus on aerobic or diaphragmatic breathing, which involves your stomach. Place your hands on your abdomen (right over your belly button), and as you breathe in through your nose, you will see and feel your stomach expand out. When you release the breath slowly through your mouth, your stomach will deflate. When you breathe deeply in this way, you are naturally bringing in more oxygen and activating energy in your body. If your shoulders are moving up and down when you try this, then you are doing it wrong. Only your stomach should be moving in and out.

The more stressed we feel, the more hampered our cognitive function becomes. When we control and slow our breathing, we are calmer and our full cognitive ability to think, speak, and problem solve becomes available to us. We can communicate and lead more effectively when we feel emotionally composed.

Caring for Your Body

An interesting study was done by several researchers¹⁵ to test how stress affects the immune system. The researchers recorded the immunity levels of a group of students participating in the study. Then they divided the group into three smaller groups.

They asked students in the first group to go into separate, identical rooms and write on pieces of paper any random information that popped into their heads. They asked students in the second group to go into separate, identical rooms and write about painful personal episodes they had never shared with another person, and to record the hurt carried around because it was never resolved. The third group went into separate, identical rooms and received instructions similar to the second group, but instead of writing their episodes down on paper, they talked about them into a tape recorder.

The scientists then remeasured the immunity levels of all the students. The first group showed no change. The second group showed noticeable increases in the functioning of their immune systems.

The third group's levels outdid that of the second group, showing even more positive effects.

At Integrated Leadership Systems we ask all of our executive coaching clients to keep a journal to help them process some of the challenges in their lives, similar to what some in the second group may have been writing about.

The study suggests writing in a reflective way may be good for your overall health, but that speaking about personal pain is even more powerful in providing overall health benefits. There is power and health in the process of executive coaching, and incorporating journaling on a regular basis creates an added health benefit.

We often know we are under stress and still don't take steps—such as journaling or talking with friends, therapists, or business coaches—to address it. Small changes in behavior can lead to profound health effects. Just ignoring the stress can often lead to tragedy.

I bought the house I live in now from a real estate agent named John. He was an excellent agent, taking our calls at any time, showing houses on evenings or weekends, and generally trying to please us, his clients, in any way he could. Several months after he worked with us, he called me to ask for help.

“My doctor has told me for years that I need either to change the way I do my job or change careers entirely,” John said. “He said I am under way too much stress, and yet I find it impossible to change things about my current job. So I think maybe I should look for a job in another industry. Would you help me?”

For the next couple of months, I helped John revamp his resume for another industry. We did mock interviews and met regularly to discuss his progress. He began actively interviewing, and I thought he was well on the way to a new career.

A few months later, John died of a massive heart attack. He was in his fifties. We all talk about managing stress, but John's death had a profound impact on how I live my life and how I teach stress management to businesspeople.

How do you care for yourself—a deep-tissue massage, a walk on the beach, an hour of silence in a church pew, a chat with a dear friend?

We often feel selfish when we take time for ourselves.

How often do you put yourself at the very bottom of your to-do list? To be the best you can be for all the others in your life—your family, your friends, your clients or customers, your business partners—you need to take care of yourself first. The more you care for you, the happier you feel, the healthier you are, and the more positively you interact with all those you seek to serve in your life.

Many of us are truly surprised when we yell at our kids, cry unexpectedly, or continually feel like we are fighting illness. These are signs that we are not taking care of ourselves. When we

don't deal with stress, or don't confront people assertively, it builds up inside of us like a volcano. Eventually, most people erupt.

But what generally happens is we erupt on someone who doesn't deserve it, such as our kids, or spouses, or best friends, because those people are safe. We know they love us and will still be there for us after we get it all out. Alternatively, if a supervisor's unreasonable demands cause stress, and we erupt on him or her, we may not have a job at the end of the day.

However, if we assertively and gently confront both business and personal problems in our lives as they occur, the buildup goes away, and the volcano becomes dormant. If we can interact with others peacefully and professionally and take the time to process our emotions regularly, then we can forestall illness with a high immunity level that results from this emotional stability. In Chapter 7, I will provide details about how to have assertive conversations effectively.

Caring for Your Soul

Why are you on this earth? Is it to work nine to five, seven days a week, 365 days a year at a job you can't stand so you can collect a paycheck to feed your family or yourself? You were created with special talents for a purpose. Have you paid enough attention to discover your purpose, to live your purpose, and to best utilize your talents while you are alive? Your communication skills and your leadership ability become significantly more powerful when you are living your purpose, because you will be expressing yourself from your heart, from a place of joy and love. Your passion will shine through in your words and actions, and you will be more influential as a result.

There is no way to describe with words how incredible it feels to wake up every day and do what you know you were put on this earth to do. And yet, I have met hundreds of people who continue to work at jobs that don't feed their souls. One person comes to mind immediately.

Brad was a participant in a workshop I was facilitating. I asked participants to identify their passions: that one thing that spoke to them on the deepest level and made them feel most alive. When it was Brad's turn to share his thoughts, he said deep sea diving was his passion.

"When I'm under the water, I feel so alive," he said. "I love the ocean. I love underwater life and plants. I would absolutely *love* to wake up every day and know I could be in the ocean, to know that I could share my love of diving with others, first timers, who have no idea what they're missing. That would feel amazing."

I asked what he did for a living. "I'm an accountant," he answered. The room erupted in laughter.

"I'm good at accounting, but I don't absolutely love it," Brad said. "I'm just good with numbers, so I thought that made sense as a career."

"What would be the risk involved in pursuing deep sea diving as a career?" I asked.

Brad then began to identify all of the reasons he felt he could not pursue his dream.

"I would have to live on the coast. I would have to move my family. I might not be able to run such a business effectively. My family might think I'm crazy. I'd have to leave my friends."

"What would be the reward?" I asked.

"Oh my gosh," he said. "It would be everything! I would be so happy! What an amazing life that would be. I can't even imagine it."

Today, Brad is still an accountant—and that breaks my heart. When my parents told me I could be anything I wanted to be, I believed them. And I believe it for my clients. Anything can

be achieved, if you want it passionately enough.

How passionate are you about your goals? If you are not passionate about your current goals, perhaps it's time to create some new ones that truly speak to you.

When we spend energy making up a hundred excuses for why we can't do something, we are merely reacting, usually to fear. To lead effectively, we must spend time pursuing a goal or dream about which we are passionate, so that passion fuels action. Instead of passively letting circumstances in the world dictate our futures, passion fuels the desire to make positive change, and that causes action toward the goal. When your soul is fed by pursuing your passion, you become excited, happier, and more focused. In that pursuit, you are becoming not only who you are supposed to be but also a more effective role model and leader.

The next section of this book begins by exploring several ways we can listen more attentively, so others feel heard, including "listening" to the body language we see in others. I will discuss the surprising research finding that our brains don't fully develop until age twenty-five, at which point we can fully control our thoughts. I'll end that chapter with a bit about the importance of not talking too much and how we can think more productively about the amount of information we decide to share.

Chapter Five — Key Points

Caring for Your Mind

- Meditation may be an effective intervention for: cardiovascular disease, anxiety and panic disorder, chronic pain, substance abuse, reduction of psychological distress and symptoms of distress for cancer patients, and reduction of medical symptoms in both clinical and nonclinical populations.
- The fight or flight response we inherited from our ancestors is now inappropriately triggered in our modern lives when our bosses confront us, when we get cut off in traffic, or when our teenagers disobey us. If we are unsure how to deal with these situations, stress is prolonged and can lead to serious health problems.
- Breathing deeply can be very helpful in reducing stress when you don't have time to meditate. Find time to breathe deeply throughout the day.

Caring for Your Body

- A research study suggests writing in a reflective way may be good for your overall health, but that speaking about personal pain is even more powerful in providing overall health benefits.
- Small changes in behavior can lead to profound health effects.
- Just ignoring the stress can often lead to tragedy.
- To be the best you can be for all the others in your life—your family, your friends, your clients or customers, your business partners—you need to take care of yourself first.
- If we can interact with others in a peaceful, professional manner and take time to process our emotions regularly, then we can forestall illness with a high immunity level that results from this emotional stability.

Caring for Your Soul

- You were created with special talents for a purpose. Have you paid enough attention to discover your purpose?
- When we spend energy making up a hundred excuses for why we can't do something, we are merely reacting (usually to fear). When we, instead, spend time pursuing goals or dreams that we are passionate about, that passion fuels action.

SECTION TWO

Communication and Conflict

CHAPTER SIX

Listening to Others

“Better to have people think you are a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”
—**Mark Twain**

As a communicator and/or leader, you probably find that you spend much of your time talking. People expect us to know things, and we are in this position because we like to interact with others. So many communicators say, “I’m a ‘people person.’” As communicators, we usually enjoy helping people understand things, and we think we are skilled at explaining things. The downside is that we often spend much more time talking than we do listening.

Our behavior is how we teach those around us. We’ve heard parents say, and perhaps you have said, “Do what I say, not what I do.” That’s because people (especially children) pay much closer attention to what we do than what we say.

The results of a study in 1971 by Albert Mehrabian¹⁶ concluded that there are three elements that make up face-to-face communication: words, tone of voice, and body language. These three elements, according to Mehrabian, account for our “liking” of the person relaying the message. Words account for 7 percent, tone of voice accounts for 38 percent, and body language accounts for 55 percent of the fondness we feel toward the speaker.

Further, the study showed that nonverbal elements convey feelings and attitude, especially when they do not match the words spoken. That means if words and body language do not match, the recipient of the message tends to believe the body language.

Picture someone you know, a male acquaintance, who is usually lively. Now envision him quietly sulking around an event or a party, looking at the floor, arms folded, with a sad expression on his face.

You might approach him and ask, “Are you okay? What’s wrong?”

If he were to answer, “No, I’m fine. Just a little tired,” would you believe him?

Body language is a pretty powerful indicator that something is not fine. And a sad expression says a little more to us than “I’m tired.” We rely on body language to give us clues to what a person is *not* saying about his or her feelings.

I want to stress that nonverbal elements do not convey the content of a message, but rather the feelings and conviction the speaker has about the message. In fact, when people lecture, nearly the entire message is conveyed orally, but nonverbal elements show the speaker’s belief or passion about what he or she is saying. The more conviction the speaker has for a message, confirmed primarily through body language, the more we will like the person because he or she appears to be authentic.

Our behavior teaches others much more about us and how we think and feel at a given moment than our words. And yet communicators seem to worry little about their body language during interpersonal conversation. Of course, we all think a lot more about our body language when we are presenting something in front of an audience and all eyes are upon us. But think about how much more time we spend in one-on-one conversations as opposed to public speaking. All those

individual encounters tell people a great deal about how we think and feel, even if we don't speak a word.

I've had a few clients over the years say to me (usually in exasperation) things like:

- "I wear my heart on my sleeve, and I don't know how to stop it!"
- "People tell me my face always gives me away."
- "I say one thing, but my body language reveals what I really think."
- "I say I'm calm, but then realize I'm yelling it at them."

We can't correct the body language by simply trying to stop the behavior, because the behavior actually comes from our thoughts. We need to identify the thought we're having that creates the negative emotion that we sometimes try to mask with the "right" words. That negative emotion creates our behavior, including our body language. Whatever we think, our body language reflects. If I think you're an idiot, I might roll my eyes when you speak, even though I'm responding with (masked) patience.

Many people think external events cause our emotions (e.g., Your being late made me stop trusting you. Your outburst made me feel incompetent because I mentor you.), but it's actually our beliefs (B) and in particular, irrational beliefs, that cause negative emotions and, subsequently, unhelpful behavior. The nonverbal communication that often follows betrays our inner thoughts. The ABC model I mentioned in Chapter Four is leveraged by becoming skillful at recognizing our irrational thoughts and practicing over time the replacement of these thoughts with new, healthier beliefs that will more positively impact our feelings and behaviors.

We are fully in charge of how we think, feel, and behave. Let's stop telling others they "made" us feel or act one way or another. Nobody else controls our feelings and actions. They come from how we think, which is utterly unique because of our distinctive life experiences. The way we process external events leads to how we feel and behave. This processing is unique to us, built by our specific brain from all the life experiences we've had that taught us how the world works. Some of those lessons are faulty, based on abnormal situations we may have encountered, and our brain maps them as "normal" because they *are* normal to us.

In *The Brain: The Story of You*, author David Eagleman says that because our brain has mapped such unique experiences, we don't even perceive objects as they are.¹⁷ We each perceive them as we, uniquely, are. He gives the example of an arrangement of colors that happen to be arranged into a flag. The sight of my country's flag will have a certain meaning to me and a different meaning to someone else born in this same country, as well as different meanings to those born elsewhere. A Nazi flag would generate different perceptions among people all over the world too.

Although brain development can vary significantly from one individual to the next, most experts suggest that our brain is fully developed by age 25.¹⁸ The part of the brain behind our forehead, called the prefrontal cortex, is one of the last sections to mature. This area houses abilities such as planning, prioritizing, and decision-making. When this area is complete is when we can be fully objective about our own life, understanding the experiences we've had within the context of other people's lives, and deciding how to implement change to improve ourselves instead of blaming things outside of us for our challenges.

Let's own that, as adults, we can control our ultimate behavior by remapping our brain patterns when we see a faulty connection. Let's commit to learning new ways of controlling our thoughts,

so our emotions and behaviors improve our encounters instead of hurting us and others. I'll give you some tools to do just that.

I believe communicators are in a unique position in their organizations to affect great leadership change. When people don't know what to say, they turn to us. How we behave, which is primarily how we teach those around us, most certainly affects the organizations in which we work and impacts the leaders within them at every level.

Because people learn more from what we do than from what we say, it makes sense for us to listen intently to others so that:

1. We can understand them more thoroughly and act with their best interests in mind.
2. We can model this behavior so others will listen to us and others more attentively.
3. We have more credibility when we do speak because we have more information from them with which to draw conclusions and give appropriate suggestions.

I used to find that when I was nervous, I would say the same thing a few times in a variety of ways. I wanted to make sure the person understood, and I wanted to make sure he or she thought I was offering good information, so I would explain it to death. When I started to realize I was doing this, the knowledge of it alone didn't immediately solve the problem. I would observe myself doing it yet again and then would walk away thinking, *Why the heck did I do that again?!* The more I searched for patterns around this behavior, the more I realized it happened only when I was feeling insecure and really wanted to impress someone.

Think about what you just read. When I really wanted to impress someone, I would talk too much, which resulted in the opposite of my goal! Those who so desperately want to be heard and valued are those who, I find, engage in the most talking and interrupting, which results in the exact opposite of what they desire.

People are not generally impressed, of course, by how much you say. In fact, when you overexplain something, the listener may feel you are being condescending.

What you say and how you say it makes much more of an impact, which is the whole idea behind Quiet Leadership. By listening carefully to others, what you say will be much more thoughtful and knowledgeable. It can be well tailored to the listener, once you have a clear understanding of the person with whom you are talking. So, to *truly* impress others, we must listen well.

Many people think listening just comes naturally. It doesn't. Many women I know think their husbands don't listen well. These same women talk at their husbands all day long—not with them, but at them.

If someone constantly talks and doesn't practice listening skills, how can he or she expect the same measure of respect in return?

If you feel that someone is not listening to you, then practice not talking. The quieter you become, the more curiosity this raises in the person you want so desperately to listen to you. It is more likely that this person will listen to you respectfully when you begin choosing only the most important things to share instead of every little nugget that pops into your head. When the other person begins to learn that you are choosing what to share carefully, and that these bits of information truly are important, only then will you have his or her attention.

When we don't want to listen, we start using our brain for other things. Most people tell me they don't want to listen when:

- People talk too slowly or too quickly.
- We don't respect them.
- We "know what they're going to say."
- They are too young to know what they're talking about.
- *They* don't listen to *me*.
- They are too old to understand or embrace my fresh ideas.
- They talk too much or overshare.
- I already know what I want to do; I don't want their opinion.
- They are always negative or complaining.
- I am overwhelmed and don't have time to listen.

I could go on and on. We live in such a fast-paced world that we neglect one another in the process.

Have you ever been in a conversation with a person who is typing on a computer, retrieving a text message, or reading something while you are talking? Or perhaps you are the person who does these things while in a conversation, which is disrespectful and hurtful to the other person. We must strive to improve our ability to communicate authentically when we don't have time to listen instead of nonverbally trying to send the same message.

I remember when, early in my career, I was working with another female who would come into my office and talk for long periods. I didn't want to hurt her feelings, and I didn't want to listen to her either. So when she came in, I would type on my computer, answer the phone if it rang, read things on my desk, and act as though I was just barely listening to her. It was very passive-aggressive behavior, and I did so just hoping she would "take the hint." Well, she didn't. And I didn't have the guts to address her directly and tell her what I needed from her.

It would have been more respectful for me to say, "Susan, I just can't spend this amount of time talking during my workday. I have too much work to do. I appreciate that you have stopped by, but I'm going to have to get back to work now." And then I could stand up and walk her to my door. Our conversations always did end with me walking her to my door, but it was after torturous amounts of wasted time while I mustered the courage to stand up.

We can choose to tell others respectfully and assertively that we don't have the time to listen to them, but how do we listen when we really *do* want to hear someone?

Maintain Eye Contact

The most important thing is to face the speaker and maintain good eye contact. Our eye contact shows the other person that he or she has our attention. In addition, leaning in slightly helps him or her feel you are engaged. Job recruiters often coach prospective candidates to lean in slightly during interviews. It may feel awkward at first, but doing so gives the impression of engagement and interest in the conversation.

If you find it too uncomfortable to look others directly in the eyes, then practice looking at their nose instead. Others will not know you are looking at their noses; trust me. I have practiced this with others at close range and have been assured that it appears I'm looking them in the eyes. After you try this for a while, you can slowly work up to alternating looking at the nose, and then the eyes, and then the nose again. Eventually you may become more comfortable with looking just at a person's eyes.

Avoid Distractions

Avoid distractions when listening. If you become distracted by computer messages or a buzzing phone, step away from your desk so you can listen more attentively. If you get a call when you're in a noisy restaurant or at a work site, tell the person you'll call them back so you can get to a quieter area and give them your full attention.

Don't Think of What to Say Next

When I speak at conferences, I always ask people to tell me what they struggle with the most when trying to listen. Invariably, I hear that not thinking of what to say next when someone is talking is the most difficult. There are many reasons for this. We are nervous, want to sound smart, want them to like us, want to have time to think it out, or want to say it just right. Because we are thinking of what to say next, we miss some of what they are saying, so we are prone to ask questions they've already answered or bring up our point that has to do with something they said several minutes ago, leaving them to wonder if we heard anything after that. The price we pay for this is that the listener, who we're trying to impress, walks away thinking we don't care about them, have a terrible memory, or are disrespectful, rude, or self-absorbed.

Give Verbal Feedback

When listening, it's helpful to give verbal feedback that shows you hear the person. I used to get very frustrated when talking on the phone with my husband because he would not say a word. When I would say, "Hello, are you hearing me? You're not saying anything," he would respond, "I'm just listening." Finally, I said to him one day, "Please just grunt or something to let me know you're still out there!"

We need that human feedback. We need to know the person with whom we are taking the time to communicate is actively listening and understanding what we are sharing. Instead of grunting, I would recommend saying things like, "Mm-hmm," "Really?", "Wow!" Then, later in the conversation, you might refer back to comments they made earlier when you are making a point.

For example, you might say to your listener:

"As you said earlier, it would be good to get my certification, so I think I will take your advice and sign up for the class."

"I like the point you made about becoming certified."

"When you mentioned becoming certified earlier, it made me think of other things I need to do."

When you can repeat things the speaker has said because you are listening intently, your conversational partner will feel respected and understood. Active listening takes practice, and you must continue trying before you become efficient at listening and understanding others. Having the courage to try is the first step. When you are next listening, attempt to repeat things the other person has said in your own words, following the examples above.

Mirror or Validate the Speaker's Emotions

Something else to practice is to mirror the person's emotions. If a female speaker is talking about how she feels about something, try to come up with a word that you think sums up her feelings, even if she has not used that particular word. For example, if she is describing a situation where

she is just banging her head against the wall, and she feels she is getting nowhere and nobody wants to help her, you can say, “That sounds so frustrating.” Oftentimes, the speaker will say, “Yes! That’s exactly it! I’m so frustrated I could just scream.”

Letting someone know you understand the feeling he or she is experiencing is powerful. Essentially you are communicating that you are listening so intently, and with empathy for their situation, that you recognize the underlying feeling behind their words. Even if you can’t say you have had the very same experience, it’s the empathy that counts.

To validate someone’s emotions, according to author Michael Sorensen, who wrote a fabulous book called *I Hear You*, we still begin with naming the emotion we believe they’re having. Then, we tell them it’s okay to feel that way, even if we disagree or don’t feel the same way. An example would be, “It sounds like you don’t trust Joe because he’s done some things that you interpret as underhanded. I can see how you would feel that way. If I thought he was being sneaky and suspicious, I’d probably feel that way too.” That constitutes the validation. Then, if I want to share my contrary thoughts, I could say, “I guess I have a different relationship with Joe than you do. Joe has really saved me a couple of times in sticky work situations, so I tend to trust him.”¹⁹

Don’t Interrupt or Solve Problems

Another listening skill to practice is to not interrupt or give solutions. Let them speak. If they mention a problem, instead of trying to solve it, say, “Wow. That’s a really tough situation. How do you think you’ll handle it?” Unless they specifically ask you for advice, continue to throw it back to them. If they say, “I really don’t know. That’s why I thought I’d ask you.” You can say, “What options have you considered so far? What roadblocks might you encounter? What would others in your company do? What decision would you make if I were unreachable?” If they continue to say they don’t know, encourage them to go back to their desk and think about these things and then come back to see you after they’ve had time to consider these things.

Respond to Body Language

Lastly, try paying attention to their body language and responding as though it’s verbal communication. When someone shakes their head from left to right while I’m talking, I’ll often say, “It looks like you disagree with me.” If their face has a confused expression, I’ll say, “It looks like you’re a bit confused. Let me try to explain this more clearly.” If they keep looking at their watch or the door, I will say, “It looks like you may be in a rush to get somewhere.” Nonverbal communication is still communication. When we verbally address people’s nonverbal cues, they begin to understand how their thoughts are conveyed, which helps them develop self-awareness. While listening, it’s important to understand how your *own* nonverbals are speaking to others. We’ll explore this in the next chapter.

In Chapter Seven, we’ll also dive deeper into assertive communication techniques, which rely on the foundation of good listening habits. This next chapter explores how we can more effectively address conflict. I provide a three-step conversational tool that gives you the words to say when confronting someone and other tips to approach difficult conversations.

Chapter Six — Key Points

- These three elements account for our “liking” of the person relaying the message: Words are 7 percent, tone of voice is 38 percent, and body language is 55 percent of the fondness we feel toward the speaker. If words and body language do not match, the recipient of the message tends to believe the body language.
- We have to change the negative thoughts we’re having to change our body language.
- Many people think external events cause our emotions, but it’s actually our internal beliefs and in particular, irrational beliefs, that cause negative emotions and, subsequently, unhelpful behavior.
- We are fully in charge of how we think, feel, and behave. Others don’t “make” us feel or act one way or another.
- Most experts suggest that our brain is fully developed by age 25, and the planning, prioritizing, and decision-making abilities are the last to develop.
- It’s important to listen intently to others so (1) we can understand them more thoroughly, (2) we can model this behavior so others will listen to us more attentively, and (3) we have more information from them with which to draw conclusions and give appropriate suggestions.
- When you over explain something, to impress someone with your knowledge, the listener may feel you are being condescending.
- If you think that someone is not listening to you, then practice not talking as much.

- Keys to attentive listening:
 - Maintain eye contact.
 - Avoid distractions.
 - Don't think of what to say next.
 - Give verbal feedback.
 - Mirror or validate the speaker's emotions.
 - Don't interrupt or solve problems.
 - Respond to body language.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Communicating Assertively

“When you are content simply to be yourself and don’t compare or compete, everyone will respect you.”

—Lao-tzu

Aggressive people who seek to control others and passive people who let others control them do not make good leaders. Both of these behaviors are born of insecurity. This chapter explores how we can more effectively address conflict with assertive behavior, and I will provide a three-step conversational tool that gives you the words to say when confronting someone. Role modeling adult, assertive conversations as a leader will teach those who lean on the crutches of aggressive or passive approaches a more effective way to build trusting relationships.

To lead, we must learn to say what we think and feel and stand up for our rights, which is assertive behavior. Aggressive, bullying behavior comes from a place of fear and insecurity—the thought that I have to control you first, before you have a chance to control me. Quiet Leadership is not about sitting silently. It’s about calmly sticking up for ourselves, patiently seeking to understand others more thoroughly, and allowing others to understand and trust us. When we open up in this way, we model authentic communication and foster teamwork.

To communicate effectively in any leadership role, we must exhibit both confidence and vulnerability. We must strongly believe in our abilities, but we must also appear real and human and fallible to those who follow. We will make mistakes. And that’s okay; it’s necessary for our ultimate success.

There will be times when we feel negatively about something someone else is doing or saying. We are all triggered negatively by different things. Some people don’t like being interrupted when speaking, for instance, and that may not bother others in the least. In order to maintain honest, authentic relationships, it’s important to be able to confront others gently when they are behaving in ways that upset us. This is where assertive communication will help us most.

Assertive communication does not come naturally to most, so it’s important to practice. When we are not very assertive, but more passive, we should practice assertive conversations in safe places. We don’t want to walk up to our boss or an important client tomorrow and confront them in a new way. Important conversations with people who are critical to our success must wait for a fine-tuned approach.

When we feel the need to confront someone, we also don’t want to come at them aggressively, with anger or demands. If you tend to be more aggressive in communication, you’ll want to reign in the negative emotion by thinking about the confrontation as a way to build the relationship, not scold or put someone in their place.

So how do you initiate an assertive conversation? There are three simple steps you can use:²⁰

1. Describe their behavior.
2. Explain how you feel when it happens.

3. Explain the changes you would like to see.

Let's look at each one of these in turn.

First, you describe the behavior. We lead the conversation with a description of the behavior (and not a personal comment) because it's difficult to refute what you and the other person both see happening. To do this, you would say something such as, "I have noticed that when I speak up in the staff meetings, you roll your eyes, which causes our co-workers to laugh."

When you then explain how you feel, the second step, you might say something such as, "When you roll your eyes, I feel ridiculed and criticized." We use the construct, "When you do X, I feel Y," because the other person cannot argue with how you feel. Other people are not in charge of our emotions; we own our feelings. The person you are confronting may say in reply, "You shouldn't feel that way!" and you can respond with, "Well, I do." Others cannot dictate what we should or should not feel. We feel what we feel—end of story.

The last step, saying what you would like to see happen moving forward, is the step often missed, which only creates a situation where the same scenario may play out again a few months later. What you might say for this step is, "I really don't want this to happen again, because I don't like feeling this way. In the future, I would prefer that if you don't like a comment I make in the staff meeting, you bring it to me privately and refrain from rolling your eyes or indicating with other body language what you may be thinking in the moment. Will you agree to do this?"

I think it's helpful to end with a question to which the other person will have to answer yes or no. If the other person says no, then I would listen to what he or she says and continue to try to reach an agreement on what to do in the future. If the person says yes, and then you see the same infraction in the future, you can approach him or her and say, "I noticed in today's meeting that you rolled your eyes at one of my comments. I felt ridiculed again, and I asked you not to do this. You agreed to come to me directly when you didn't agree with a comment, but that didn't happen. Can we talk about this?"

When you confront someone, it's important not to sound accusatory or label the behavior as wrong. The person has a reason for what he or she is doing and may not even realize that it's hurtful to you. If it's become a habit, it may take longer for them to change the behavior. Don't call the person names or allow yourself to lose control. If you are gentle and go out of your way to not contribute to the person feeling defensive, the meeting has a better chance of going smoothly. In addition to listening intently to what he or she says to you, it is also critical to stay focused. You came with a message, and you must be strong and say what you planned to say so you don't end up acquiescing and simply allowing the behavior to continue.

There are also many small opportunities to practice your assertiveness. For instance, when you are in a line for coffee and someone cuts in front of you, in a very kind voice you can practice saying, "Excuse me, I think I was next." Or if that doesn't seem very challenging, perhaps you can confront someone you love who is hurting you in some way. For instance, feel free to steal what I recently said to my preteen son: "Please don't begin or end your sentences with the word 'Duh!' When you say that, I feel hurt and disrespected. I want us to talk to each other respectfully, so let's continue to practice having conversations without using that word. Will you practice this with me?"

If you are more on the aggressive side, try to practice asking questions such as, "What can we do together to solve this problem?" or "How can I be a better (boss, father, friend, wife) to you?" or "Tell me more about that."

Approaching others as equal partners and being more aware of when you are trying to control and direct will help you begin to chip away at the personal characteristics you wish to improve.

Most people are not perfectly assertive; they fall on the passive or aggressive ends of the scale. It's a very comfortable place to be on one end or the other of this scale. You generally know what to expect. Being assertive feels very unsteady, even though that's exactly where we are best served. When you decide to be more assertive, you will experience awkward moments, and things will not come out of your mouth perfectly at times. You will make mistakes. You will sometimes get responses you don't expect because you are approaching others in a new way. Just know this and do it anyway. It's the only way to improve.

Quiet Leadership begins with listening and carries through to our communication. It's about striking the right balance of assertiveness instead of being too pushy or a pushover. In the next chapter, you'll learn how to put those communication skills to work in de-escalating conflict that arises because of poor communication (unwillingness to have assertive conversations, lack of clarity, not keeping people accountable, and lack of emotional control), personality clashes, and differences in interests, goals, or values. I'll also share a great list from Brené Brown of statements you can use when you are in conflict to spark curiosity and connection.

Chapter Seven — Key Points

- Aggressive people who seek to control others and passive people who let others control them do not make good leaders.
- Quiet Leadership is about calmly sticking up for ourselves, patiently seeking to understand others more thoroughly, and allowing them to understand and trust us.
- To lead as a communicator, we must exhibit both confidence and vulnerability.
- There are three steps to use to initiate an assertive conversation:
 1. Describe the behavior.
 2. Explain how you feel when it happens.
 3. Explain the changes you would like to see.
- Examples of the three steps:
 1. “I have noticed that when I speak up in the staff meetings, you roll your eyes, which causes our co-workers to laugh.”
 2. “When you do this, I feel ridiculed and criticized.”
 3. “In the future, I would prefer that if you don’t like a comment I make in the staff meeting, you bring it to me privately and refrain from rolling your eyes or indicating with other body language what you may be thinking in the moment. Will you agree to do this?”
- Look for small, safe opportunities to practice your assertiveness.
- When you decide to be more assertive, you will experience awkward moments, and things will not come out of your mouth perfectly at times. It’s okay to make mistakes; it’s how we learn.

CHAPTER EIGHT

De-escalating Conflict

“To practice the process of conflict resolution, we must completely abandon the goal of getting people to do what we want.”

— **Marshall B. Rosenberg**

Despite your best efforts, there will be times when your communication unintentionally leads to conflict. Conflict management is something that we all have the opportunity to practice, but I find that many of us either seek to control others or give our power away in order to avoid this practice. That’s unfortunate. The more skilled we become in de-escalating conflict, the more satisfied we are with our relationships, both at work and home.

As an executive coach, I see that conflict often arises because of:

- Poor communication.
 - Unwillingness to have assertive conversations.
 - Lack of clarity.
 - Lack of emotional control.
- Not keeping others accountable.
 - Not modeling accountability.
 - Not managing expectations.
 - Not setting deadlines.
 - No follow-through with consequences.
- Personality clashes.
- Differences in interests, goals, or values.

I’d like to address each one of these roadblocks in turn.

Poor Communication

Unwillingness to have assertive conversations

I went over assertive conversations in the previous chapter, so I won’t say much more here. I would, though, like to share that authenticity goes a long way in creating great relationships. We must find gentle words to express our thoughts and feelings. If we do this with a loving heart and the objective of bettering the relationship, we won’t spend time worrying if we will offend or anger the other person. These worries only lead to fear, and that causes conflict avoidance. Some people are more sensitive than others, and that’s okay. Some people are more intense than others. I’m suggesting we not use their sensitivity or intensity as excuses to not address problematic situations.

Lack of clarity

We are often unclear when we ask others to do things. I’m confident that you think you are being crystal clear. It’s why you are so surprised when you don’t get what you expect.

If you've taken a college communications class, you may have learned that communication occurs in a loop. Just because you have communicated to another person does not mean they received or interpreted the message as you meant it to be. To ensure we get what we need, we must find ways to ascertain if the message was, indeed, received as we meant it and if the person truly understands the action we expect will be taken. This confirmation completes the communication loop. We communicate, they interpret our message, and they communicate back their understanding of our message.

The mistake I see most managers make is that after assigning a task they ask, "Do you understand?" When they get a "yes," they are satisfied that the message was received. When they don't get what they expect when the work is turned in, they often are angry because the person said they understood when they clearly did not. I assure you that at the time the task was assigned, the recipient most certainly thought they understood.

In order to ensure understanding, we can take the further step of saying to the person, "To make sure we're on the same page, tell me how you interpret what I'm asking you to do. What are the steps you are planning to take to get this done?" At that point, you can confirm their understanding is correct or clarify what you meant.

Clarifying takes patience and curiosity. You are essentially helping them help you by taking this time to be clear about your request. Check that your tone of voice is not condescending or showing frustration. Their lack of understanding is not because they are stupid; it's often because each person thinks in a unique way. Some thinkers are more aligned with us than others. Those who are more aligned are not smarter; they are simply less different than us. It can be enticing to favor those who "get" us, but favoritism usually results in further team conflict. Being open to all types of learners and interpretations will better serve you as you learn to utilize team member talents more effectively.

Lack of emotional control

The inability to control our emotions is another communication hurdle I often see. The best way I've found to deal with someone who is having a very emotional reaction (yelling or crying, for instance) is to:

- Listen well first. Let them get it all out and validate what they say along the way.
- Think of their anger or tears as a message, not a threat. What are they trying to communicate?
- When you talk, lower your volume and slow your rate of speech, so you sound calm and patient.

If these things don't calm the listener, start asking the person open-ended questions. Because an outburst occupies the emotional part of our brain, and the emotional and cognitive parts of our brain don't operate well simultaneously, we need to ignite the cognitive part of our brain to stop the emotional reaction. When we question someone, that causes their brain to switch from the emotional center to the cognitive to answer our question.

Not keeping others accountable

Accountability is another topic that often creates conflict for my coaching clients. Sometimes accountability problems arise from people-pleasing behavior, where leaders don't want to upset their direct reports. Instead, leaders give them multiple chances to get tasks done and move

deadlines while they seethe with resentment. I'd like to offer a few suggestions to combat the common problems I see leaders make with accountability:

Not modeling accountability

Model accountability yourself. If you keep your commitments, it eliminates the opportunity your subordinates have to say, "You don't meet deadlines, so why are you getting on me about it?"

Not managing expectations

Manage expectations by showing examples of what you expect (if possible), asking questions to ensure you are setting realistic goals with the person (e.g., How many hours do you think this will take to complete? What other projects may compete for your attention, and how will you prioritize these projects?), and discussing the importance of keeping commitments.

Not setting deadlines

Set deadlines that are a couple of days before you need it, so if your employee has a complication that won't allow for project completion, you have a few days to make alternate plans to get the work done. Tell your employee that if for any reason they think they cannot complete the work in time, they must tell you at least two days before the deadline. Nothing is worse than having someone show up when work is due and telling you they just couldn't get to it. We need to set deadlines that will keep us from last-minute scrambles to complete work.

No follow-through with consequences

If mistakes or miscommunications happen, be sure to talk about it with the person. Approach them with curiosity about what happened so you can get aligned, in the spirit of helping them overcome whatever roadblock they may have encountered.

If the person is simply not doing the assigned work in a timely manner or you suspect they may not be a good fit for the work they're doing, be honest with them about how you see the situation and ask for their interpretation. Do everything you can to help them eliminate roadblocks so they can be successful. As a last resort, outline the procedure for consequences (verbal warning, written warning, suspension, firing), and then follow through on the consequences if behaviors don't improve, documenting your steps along the way.

Personality clashes

Personality clashes are another problem coaching clients regularly discuss with me. There are simply some people who are so completely different than us that almost everything they do grates on our nerves. The ironic part is that the thing that generally bugs us the most about someone else is sometimes the same thing we don't like about ourselves. I've worked hard on assertiveness in my adulthood, for example, and when I see someone being a pushover, it upsets me. I have to remind myself that I had those same tendencies years ago and sometimes still do.

It's important to remember when you are dealing with difficult people that *they* probably think *you* are difficult too. Neither of you is right, and neither of you is wrong. Your thoughts and opinions are simply different based on your life experiences that have been mapped by your unique brains. Curiosity is generally a fruitful approach when you encounter someone vastly different. I'll say things like, "Wow! Tell me more about how you process this, because I am thinking about it in a completely different way," or "I'm curious to hear your opinion, because we think very differently, and that's helpful for problem-solving."

In Brené Brown's book *Dare to Lead*,²¹ she provides a list of statements you can use when you are in conflict to spark curiosity and connection. She suggests you say some of these things:

- “The story I make up is...” (what is the story you tell yourself that may be inaccurate?)
- “I’m curious about...”
- “Tell me more.”
- “That’s not my experience.” (instead of “You’re wrong about her/him/this.”)
- “I’m wondering...”
- “Help me understand...”
- “Walk me through...”
- “We’re both digging in our heels. Tell me about your intensity about this.”
- “Tell me why this doesn’t fit/work for you.”
- “I’m working from these assumptions—what about you?”
- “What problem are we trying to solve?”

If your personality clash is with someone who is still a pretty reasonable person, assertive and open conversations will usually work. If the other person makes it clear they don’t care about your needs and do not wish to discuss ways to work better together, I usually suggest you say to the person that if the two of you can’t work this out, your next step is to go to their supervisor. Invite them to come with you, so they know you are not going to say anything to their boss that you wouldn’t say in front of them.

If the supervisor refuses to do anything to help the situation, you can go to human resources. Again, I would invite the person with whom you’re not getting along to join you. If your HR person is unable or unwilling to help resolve the situation, the last resort is to have only a transactional relationship with that person. Sometimes we misinterpret behavior and act on our assumptions, so don’t resort to a transactional relationship unless they clearly say, “I don’t care about what you need,” or “I’m not going to change the way I do things.”

A transactional relationship means you are respectful and professional and give them what they need, as your job dictates. Ask for what you need from them, but do not continue trying to improve the relationship. You can still be a helpful, friendly professional as you attempt to find ways to work within the confines of the behaviors they refuse to change.

Differences in interests, goals, or values

Sometimes there are differences in interests, goals, or values that cause conflict. Individuals fighting for personal goals may lose focus on the overall project or the organization’s goals or mission. At times, gray ethical areas cause conflict because people on a team want to handle them differently, and they label their colleague as unethical if they choose a different approach.

As a leader, it’s important to tie individual goals to project or organizational goals, so reminding employees about those ties can be helpful. In addition, to avoid conflict over values, make it clear to your team who owns which decisions by saying something like, “Marketing is Joe’s area, so he’ll have the final call on this.” Many times, we value the opinion of others when we still intend to retain the decision-making ourselves. If this is your intent, say, “I appreciate all of your thoughts, and I’ll think hard about your suggestions before I make my final decision.” Make it clear you are retaining the decision-making authority. If you want something to be decided democratically, make that very clear by saying something like, “I’d like to hear from all of you, and then we’ll do whatever the majority of us thinks is best.”

The final thing to do when you are wrapping up a confrontation is to discuss solutions. If you've just argued with someone and you've concluded that you think differently, don't just "agree to disagree." You still need to move forward, so it's important to decide how the two of you will do that. It's time to negotiate for what you need and compromise, when necessary. Try to understand the situation from their point of view and let this empathy guide you. You might say something like, "It sounds like you want this and I want this different thing. I'd like to suggest that we compromise by..." If they do not want to compromise in that way, tell them you are open to what they might suggest and go from there.

We'll take the learning from this chapter about how to be more assertive and next focus on where our typical behaviors come from by exploring what drives us and how to get to a place of self-love so that we may more effectively serve others.

Chapter Eight – Key Points

- We must find gentle words to express our thoughts and feelings, but we don't need to worry if we will offend or anger others.
- Conflict often arises because of:
 - Poor Communication.
 - Personality clashes.
 - Differences in interests, goals, or values.
- Communication is not linear; it occurs in a loop. To complete the loop, we must ascertain if the message we sent was received as we meant it.
- Being open to all types of learners and interpretations will better serve you as you learn to utilize team member talents more effectively.
- To keep others accountable:
 - Model accountability yourself.
 - Manage expectations by showing examples of what you expect (if possible), asking questions to ensure the goals are realistic, and discussing the importance of keeping commitments.
 - Set deadlines that are a couple of days before you need it.
 - If mistakes or miscommunications happen, be sure to talk about it with the person.
 - If the person is not doing the assigned work in a timely manner or you suspect they may be a poor fit for their position, be honest with them and ask for their interpretation.

- When someone has an emotional reaction:
 - Listen well first. Let them get it all out and validate what they say.
 - Think of their anger or tears as a message, not a threat.
 - When you speak, lower your volume and slow your rate of speech.
- If your personality clashes with someone else, remember that they are probably completely different than you. The people we think are difficult probably think we are difficult too.
- Have open, assertive conversations with those who have different personalities than you before you escalate the conversation to their supervisor or HR.
- At the end of any confrontation, discuss potential solutions. What will each of you agree to do differently?

CHAPTER NINE

Focusing on Character

“That you may retain your self-respect, it is better to displease others by doing what you know is right, than to temporarily please them by doing what you know is wrong.”

—**William Boetcker**

Most people struggle with looking in the mirror and owning their true character. It’s easy to see our good characteristics and hard to admit our flaws. We all have them, though. I don’t see the point in spending years lying to ourselves about who we really are when we can do something about it.

To be an effective leader, we need to understand our true character now, no matter how dysfunctional, and take steps to continue to improve our character as we age. The sooner we own this responsibility, the sooner we advance in our leadership development and in our companies.

Many of the leaders I coach can identify those they do not intend to promote, but often they don’t give these people the honest feedback to understand what’s keeping them from advancing. The employee thinks they are good at their job, they dress well, they project a great image. What could possibly be wrong?

With an undergraduate degree and early professional background in public relations, I spent a good deal of my career focusing on the outside of people.

When I would prepare someone for a media interview, I would think about how he or she would appear. Is his hair combed? Will the suit look good on camera? Will she fidget? Will she be able to deliver the key messages? What facial expressions will work best?

After earning a master’s degree in organizational communication and spending the second half of my career as an executive coach and leadership development trainer, it became clearer to me that focusing on the outside is not what creates great leaders. In fact, it’s the easy way out. It’s relatively easy to control what others see.

I can look fantastic, but does it mean I’m balanced or composed? No. Does a fancy title in a company mean I’m a leader? No.

What helps us best understand Quiet Leadership is focusing on what’s on the inside, because self-awareness allows us to improve and role model for others. But it’s awfully messy in there, and it can be scary to look at. Many of us have avoided dealing with it for a long, long time so what’s there now is based on habits reinforced over decades, and we can’t simply flip a switch and make all those bad habits go away.

To be the best person we can be, we must focus on character. And the flaws we find when we look at ourselves with a critical eye must be addressed. We can’t attack all the problems at once. That would be overwhelming. But we can work on them over time, focusing initially on the ones that bother us the most or are the most counterproductive to the goals we wish to achieve. We will likely have setbacks along the way. It will not be easy.

To become the leader you most want to be takes work. You must challenge yourself to change and grow on the inside so you can become a more authentic you on the outside.

As an executive coach, I can tell you that loving yourself is very tough for some people. There

are parts of each of us that we would rather not own. We push them away, like sweeping dust under a rug. And when we finally lift up the rug to see all the yucky mess we have accumulated over the years, it's daunting and overwhelming to think about cleaning it all up. If we want to be a highly effective leader, it's critical to clean the mess—not all in one day, but in small pieces over time, with patience and love for ourselves. Many people are open to accepting God's (or whatever higher power's) grace, but are we willing to give ourselves grace? How can we effectively quell that harsh inner critic?

Don Miguel Ruiz, author of *The Four Agreements*, writes, "If I love myself, I will express that love in my interactions with you." I love that concept! We first have to love ourselves before we can open up, with whole hearts, to others. When we open ourselves up to others, it's much more likely someone will feel similarly about us. We are often simply too afraid to go first.

Many people think they just are who they are. They do not feel empowered to change who they have been for so many years. They reinforce the faulty messaging by thinking, *I'm just a* (fill in the blank) *person. I always have been and always will be.* Our brain does what we tell it to do. If we constantly tell ourselves we are lazy, our brain will help us find ways to procrastinate. If we tell ourselves we are never on time, our brain will come up with roadblocks so that we never seem to leave our house on time. But *you* are in charge of you! You show others who you are every moment of every day, with each decision you make, each word you speak, and each action you take. If you change your thoughts and your behaviors, you change you.

So who do you want to be? In order to be that person you envision, you have to make tough choices about how you talk to yourself, so your brain is filled with positive messages that will motivate you and propel you into taking action toward your dreams. You just read about how to effectively control your thoughts: you have to recognize unhealthy thoughts and change that messaging to something that will be helpful instead. If you recognize that you constantly label yourself as lazy, you'll have to stop the thoughts you hear and think instead, "I have dreams to pursue and have no time for procrastination."

Another piece of becoming who you want to be in pursuit of more effective leadership is to surround yourself with people who will motivate and encourage you. The next chapter will explore this important, intentional choice that I encourage you to consider.

Chapter Nine — Key Points

- Focusing on the outside is not what serves leaders best; it's the easy way out. It's easy to control what others see. What matters most and what helps us understand leadership is focusing on what's on the inside.
- What's inside of us now is based on habits reinforced over decades. We can't simply flip a light switch and make all those bad habits go away.
- The flaws we find when we look at ourselves with a critical eye must be addressed over time.
- We can improve who we are over time by changing our thoughts.
- You show others who you are every moment of every day, with each decision you make, each word you speak, and each action you take.

CHAPTER TEN

Choosing Associates Carefully

“I am not bound to win, but I am bound to be true. I am not bound to succeed, but I am bound to live by the light that I have. I must stand with anybody that stands right, stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong.”

—Abraham Lincoln

Have you heard the expression *birds of a feather flock together*? We tend to hang around with people who are like us. But how many of us have lifelong friends who were pretty good people when we were young but they have grown up to be people we would not choose to befriend today? When we continue to associate with people of poor character, we are often influenced by it. The Bible even alludes to this concept in 1 Corinthians 15:33, where it says, “Do not be deceived: bad company ruins good morals.”

As an adult, we have to make conscious choices about our associates, because research confirms that they do, in fact, impact us.

In a public relations job I had many years ago, one of my associates would come to my office regularly to complain about others and gossip. I considered her a friend, and we went to lunch together nearly every day. She always seemed to have a problem to share, and I truly wanted to support her.

After a couple of years, she left to take another job. I remember my first day at the office without her. The predominant emotion I felt was relief. Not listening to her negativity anymore really helped me be more cheerful. I didn’t realize how those many conversations negatively impacted me until I no longer participated in them. When I journaled about it, though, I had the opportunity to reflect on why I never set boundaries with her. I was not very aware of my emotional state when I was with her, and I vowed to get better at that.

In his book on social intelligence, Daniel Goleman describes a research study that concludes that emotions can be contagious. When we surround ourselves with upbeat people, we often are more so ourselves. And just the opposite is true—when we surround ourselves with sad people, it can affect our emotional states in a negative way.²²

We can’t always control who we work with, but we can certainly become more self-aware about their impact on us and set boundaries, when appropriate, to safeguard our own mental state.

Goleman also wrote about the work of the late John Cacioppo, a psychologist and the founder and director of the Center for Cognitive and Social Neuroscience at the University of Chicago. Cacioppo’s research “uncovered links between involvement in a distressing relationship and hikes in stress hormones to levels that damage certain genes that control virus-fighting cells.”²³ To summarize, being involved in a distressing relationship causes stress that diminishes our body’s ability to fight viruses. That’s not good, particularly considering the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic that left us all newly concerned about the efficacy of our own body’s immune system.

Life is too short to spend time with people who view the world through cynical eyes, sap the energy from you, think only of themselves, and can’t share meaningful conversation. How

invigorating would it be, instead, to spend your time with intelligent, good-humored, active, productive, insightful others who listen carefully and love you with all your warts, who motivate and inspire you? Of course, you must choose to be this type of person if you wish to attract others with these characteristics to you.

Many years ago, I realized I was spending a lot of time with people I really didn't like. I would make plans to see someone and then would dread the meetup. I had no idea how to tell people no. I didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings, and my politeness ushered in some misery in my life.

Although I truly have compassion for all human beings, and I'm sincerely grateful for each person with whom I come into contact, I am also very intentional now about surrounding myself with friends and business associates who challenge and support me, as I do them. I have learned that spending time with those who communicate authentically with us and challenge us to stretch ourselves is the key to our growth and confidence.

I did not know it back then, when I made the decision to limit my exposure to toxic people, but I know now that Cacioppo was correct. My choice to back away from certain friendships over time was a healthy one. More recent research corroborates his findings. Functional MRI machines, which used to be used only for clinical purposes, are now used by psychologists and neuroscientists to show us which parts of the brain are being used in social interactions.²⁴ Scientists have learned that our social brain is influenced by the internal state of those with whom we spend time.

Psychologists have also learned that we have a bias toward negativity. Negative bias means that “we tend to remember, learn from, and pay attention to negative information more readily than we do positive information. We tend to have a stronger reaction—behaviorally and biochemically—to negative interactions than positive interactions.”²⁵

If we are to live happy and healthy lives, it's imperative that we approach our relationships with intentionality. It's common knowledge that when a person goes through drug or alcohol rehabilitation, they are told to stop spending time with those who reinforce their harmful habits and find new friends who mirror who they want to be post-rehab. I've never been to rehab, but I certainly wonder why so many of us need such a huge wake-up call to simply be more discerning about our friendships, in our personal and business lives. We can examine our habits now and make choices that will continue to move us toward better lives. We only need a bit of courage to behave in accordance with those decisions we might make.

After setting boundaries in our professional lives, we may still find ourselves in situations that challenge our ability to trust that we can be our authentic selves. In the next chapter, I will explain what psychological safety is, why researchers say it's important to have, and how we can foster it on our teams.

Chapter Ten — Key Points

- Being involved in a distressing relationship causes stress that damages cells that fight viruses.
- Emotions can be contagious. When we surround ourselves with upbeat people, we often are more so ourselves. When we surround ourselves with negative people, it can affect our emotional states in a negative way.
- Friends and business partners are crucial to our success. Spending time with those who communicate authentically with us and challenge us to stretch ourselves are the key to our growth and confidence.
- Stop spending time with those who reinforce unhealthy habits or who tend to have a more negative than positive disposition.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Creating Psychological Safety

“Psychological safety isn’t about being nice. It’s about giving candid feedback, openly admitting mistakes, and learning from each other.”

—Dr. Amy C. Edmondson

Although the concept of team psychological safety (TPS) was first pioneered by Schein and Bennis in 1965,²⁶ there has been a resurgence of research about psychological safety in recent years. Psychological safety in the workplace is the belief that one can take risks (like admitting a mistake or asking a question) and openly share thoughts and feelings without being shamed, punished, or humiliated by other team members. If you were a member of a psychologically safe team, you would feel heard, validated, safe, and respected.

As an executive coach, I’m seeing more and more people take this concept of safety to a whole new level, whereby people claim that they feel “safe” to say what they think, and then they express their thoughts in a way that creates less safety for others. For example, if I offer an opposing view in a meeting, I’m willingly taking a risk because I feel safe. Although it may be uncomfortable, I’m challenging people to remain open-minded and trusting that they will, and that ultimately helps the team grow. On the other hand, if I dismiss, shut down, mock, or vigorously argue with someone who has a dissenting opinion in a meeting, I’m still taking a risk but probably causing others to feel small or unworthy. I’m now stifling dialogue, and that hurts the team. When it feels safe to be blunt, then it’s probably not safe for the recipients of that bluntness. With safety, we also need trust and professionalism.

Early in my career, before becoming a leadership consultant, I ran a law firm’s marketing department. In a meeting with several lawyers and some of my staff, I made the mistake of asking a pompous lawyer who would do the task he was proposing be completed. He outlined an imaginary sign on his forehead with his finger and said in a condescending tone, “What does this say? Lawyer.” Then he made the same outline of a sign at me, pointing at my forehead, and asked the same question, “What does this say?” “Staff,” was his answer this time, indicating that he expected me to do the task. When it happened, the whole room fell silent. People were shocked, and I was dumbstruck. I didn’t open my mouth again in that meeting. It was one of the most humiliating experiences of my early adult life.

In that one moment, he taught me that if I asked him what he considered a stupid question I accepted the risk of feeling belittled and humiliated in front of my superiors and peers. That incident took place over twenty years ago, and it was mentioned by one of my former colleagues in a conversation just weeks ago. That’s how shocking it was at the time. He showed people at that moment that it was not psychologically safe to ask him questions.

Google’s Project Aristotle, in which researchers explored more than 250 team-level variables in more than 100 work teams in the hopes of finding what elements would make up the perfect, high-performing team, found that successful problem-solving teams have five elements in common: psychological safety, dependability, structure and clarity, meaning, and impact of work.²⁷ Researchers found that psychological safety is not only the most essential factor of the

five, but it's also a necessary condition to enabling the other four elements. If a team doesn't have psychological safety as a base, it won't have dependability, structure and clarity, meaning, or impact of work.

Google researchers define the other four elements as:

- Dependability: We count on each other to do high-quality work on time.
- Structure and clarity: Goals, roles, and execution plans on our team are clear.
- Meaning of work: We are working on something that is personally important for each of us.
- Impact of work: We fundamentally believe that the work we're doing matters.

I'm fascinated by the concept of psychological safety, because humans have struggled with this throughout their lives, long before researchers gave it a name. I can think of countless times in my youth that I learned the environment was not psychologically safe, in my family, among friends, and in school. I've also witnessed many others learn this same lesson. As you read in my earlier example, I've also worked as an adult in psychologically unsafe environments. And yet we continue to take chances, make ourselves vulnerable, assume good intent, and trust people. Why?

Psychological safety is absolutely imperative for highly successful teams. I think that's why we continue to take risks, to seek it out, and to make overtures to show it is safe for others. When we can openly share ideas with our team and not worry about judgment, we are much more likely to do so. In an unsafe workplace, many ideas are not shared out of fear of reprisal, and this stifles innovation. If we can fully trust our teammates, work is incredibly more efficient. Nobody is talking behind others' backs or trying to figure out people's ulterior motives. There are less politics at play. We experience the potential speed of unencumbered work and the full power of human creativity if we can operate in an open, safe environment.

We think of bullying as something that happens on the middle school playground, but it takes place in offices every day. We think of hazing as a college fraternity activity, but it happens in professional organizations. We think our sarcastic remarks are hilarious. We think yelling at people is the only way to truly get through to them. We think sitting silently in a meeting is totally acceptable because we are shy. We think people should understand exactly what we feel when we roll our eyes, sigh deeply, or remain silent for days. Many adults are stuck in these childish behaviors that negatively affect our psychological safety and workplace productivity.

We reviewed how to have assertive conversations in Chapter Seven, and I think using the recommended three-step method is a perfect example of a way to speak your mind and still foster an environment of psychological safety in the conversation. When we tell others what we see, feel, and want, we are vulnerable and trusting, and we're also professional and caring. Assertive conversations have the very purpose of enhancing the relationship, even though most people's fear of hurting a relationship keeps them from having these important interactions.

Google's researchers found that we foster psychological safety through active listening and having emotional conversations. It's imperative that we continue to practice our listening skills and are willing to have assertive, authentic conversations so others will feel safe on our teams and in our personal lives.

So how do we, as Quiet Leaders, put this into action? We practice active listening and assertive conversations by using the tips provided in Chapter Six and Seven. I have found the

best way to have emotionally open conversations is by:

- Asking co-workers how they feel when they look unsettled in some way.
- Validating others' feelings with true empathy and understanding.
- Not telling others, "You shouldn't feel that way." We don't get to tell people how to feel.
- Sharing what we think and feel openly.
- Standing up for others when they are belittled in a group setting.
- Setting boundaries and ground rules for team meetings.

Now that we've covered how to ensure psychological safety on our team, in the next chapter we will explore how to identify, and then stretch ourselves to achieve, our own dreams. I'll also outline how to effectively deal with fear to increase our level of confidence.

Chapter Eleven – Key Points

- Psychological safety is the belief that one can take risks (like admitting a mistake or asking a question) and openly share thoughts and feelings without being shamed, punished, or humiliated by other team members.
- Google researchers found that most successful problem-solving teams had five things in common:
 1. Psychological safety (It's safe to take risks.)
 2. Dependability (We can count on one another.)
 3. Structure and clarity (Goals, roles, and plans are clear.)
 4. Meaning (Our work is personally important to us.)
 5. Impact of work (We believe the work we're doing matters.)
- If we can fully trust our teammates, work is incredibly more efficient.
- Assertive conversations are designed to enhance relationships, even though most people's fear of hurting a relationship keeps them from having these important interactions.

SECTION THREE

Passion and Planning

CHAPTER TWELVE

Challenging Yourself

“Whatever the mind can conceive and believe it can achieve.”

—Napoleon Hill

We’ve talked about ways to ensure you have an effective team, and now it’s time to look at your own professional dreams and how you might fulfill them with your team’s help. In the breakneck pace of everyday work, do you even take time to think about your dreams or your vision for your company, division, or team?

Years ago, I coached an impressive CEO who was committed to challenging himself. He shared with me a list he had created of several areas he wanted to make sure he focused on each year, such as health, spiritual, financial, and creative. At the beginning of each year, he created one goal per category that he would attempt to achieve. Although he admitted that this continuous improvement activity drove his wife nuts, he was invigorated each year by striving for his new goals, and he checked them off as the year progressed. He journaled regularly throughout the year about his progress toward these goals, and he had a great track record of achieving most or all of these goals by each year’s close.

We got on this subject in one of our coaching sessions because I mentioned the list of areas for dream consideration in the book *The Dream Manager* by Matthew Kelly.²⁸ In the book, Kelly suggests companies hire a Dream Manager (part life coach and part financial adviser) to solidify company loyalty by helping employees fulfill their dreams. Some of the areas in which the book suggests you may want to set goals are:

- Physical (run a marathon, quit smoking, lose weight, drink less).
- Emotional (buy a house, be in a great relationship, become a better listener).
- Intellectual (go back to school, learn a new language, join a professional association).
- Spiritual (study the scriptures, meditate, pray daily, start a gratitude journal).
- Psychological (overcome a long-held fear, face an addiction, develop emotional intelligence).
- Material (buy a new car, own a second home, develop a passive income stream).
- Professional (get a promotion, build a great work team, begin an exciting work project).
- Financial (pay off credit card debt, start saving for retirement, start a college fund for your kids).
- Creative (learn to play an instrument, write a book, take a painting class).
- Adventure (travel to another country, go skydiving, climb a mountain, go whitewater rafting).
- Legacy (donate to a favorite charity, start a foundation, give to your alma mater).
- Character (do what you say you will do, write personal mission, vision, and values statements, help your kids achieve their goals).

You may look at this list and think, “What does this have to do with leadership?” I would argue that many of these areas in which we could set goals directly impact our leadership ability: Intellectual, Psychological, Material, Professional, Financial, Creative, Legacy, Character. The others have an indirect impact, because if we are more physically, mentally and emotionally in shape, our wellness and happiness will impact those around us at work as well as in our personal lives.

Are you stretching yourself professionally? Only you can know this answer.

Sometimes we mindlessly coast, sometimes we challenge ourselves appropriately, and sometimes we overwhelm ourselves.

When you decide you want to get in shape, for instance, you can continue to sit on your couch and eat chips (coasting), you can begin walking a few miles each day (challenge), or you can run a marathon tomorrow (overwhelm).

Sitting on the couch eating chips is how many of us get through life. We find a job, we do it well, and we continue to do it well for as long as they will have us. There is fear attached to trying new things—fear of failure, fear of looking stupid, fear of being misunderstood. It is impossible to live without fear; it is part of all of us.

The key is choosing to face our fears and doing these things that scare us instead of avoiding them. When you challenge yourself in this way, in well-measured steps that are not overwhelming, you may make mistakes initially, but once you succeed, your confidence grows enormously.

We have to be realistic about what we can achieve and be strategic about how we will keep ourselves accountable to achieve our goals. We can set our own deadlines, track them on a calendar, and decide on rewards as we reach certain milestones. We can solicit help from our partners or friends.

Like many people, I used to be deathly afraid of public speaking. In ninth grade, my English teacher made us read one book every week, and on Fridays we would stand in front of the class, behind a lectern, and deliver our book report to our peers. Thank goodness for the lectern—my legs would shake like a bowl of jello in an earthquake! My condition improved throughout the year. After that, I focused on controlling my shortness of breath. According to friends, my nervousness never showed, but I certainly felt it on the inside because my heart always pounded like a jackhammer.

I will never forget one speech I gave in high school that had to be delivered on the stage of our theater. Although I remember delivering the speech, I must confess that I lost my place during the presentation, my mind went blank, I forgot several points I had rehearsed, and I believe I made the same few points I *did* remember multiple times before winging a wrap-up statement. I don’t remember seeing anyone in the audience—I was truly in a blurry fog, and I presume I had an acute case of stage fright that day. I’m only grateful I didn’t completely freeze and say nothing. My friends said I did well, and I did receive a good grade for the assignment, but I have no idea what actually came out of my mouth.

That experience scared me so profoundly that I vowed to do everything I could to ensure that would never happen again. One comfortable option would have been to avoid any speeches or any roles that might possibly necessitate that I speak in front of groups. That’s not what I did. Following that personal failure, I tried out for plays, signed up to be a lector at my church, taught Sunday school, and put myself in front of people as often as possible. I gave myself many chances to fail, so I could ultimately succeed.

To reduce fear, we must practice those things that scare us most. The key is to practice in small ways that push us more and more outside our comfort zone over time, so we don't overwhelm ourselves and give up entirely.

I still find it difficult to believe that I not only conduct workplace training and speak at national conferences on a regular basis, but I have actually taught public speaking skills to clients. I *love* public speaking! I'm so glad I had the opportunity to fail so many times.

A component of dealing with fear and doing things that scare us in order to gain confidence is the very common worry that we will fail, especially in a professional setting. In the next chapter we'll discuss why failing in our professional life is necessary and helpful, and how to fail in small ways as we pursue our dreams, so we don't completely destroy the organization where we work or our own reputation in the process.

Chapter Twelve — Key Points

- Challenging ourselves in different areas of our life, such as physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual, can help us fulfill our dreams and become more effective leaders.
- When you face your fears and do things that scare you, taking well-measured steps that are not overwhelming, your confidence will grow enormously.
- To reduce fear, we must face and practice those things that scare us most, in small ways that push us slightly outside our comfort zone, instead of avoiding them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Growing From Mistakes

“The leaders I met, whatever walk of life they were from, whatever institutions they were presiding over, always referred back to the same failure—something that happened to them that was personally difficult, even traumatic, something that made them feel that desperate sense of hitting bottom—as something they thought was almost a necessity. It’s as if at that moment the iron entered their soul; that moment created the resilience that leaders need.”

—Warren Bennis

Failure is not only inevitable, it can be very useful to Quiet Leaders as they seek to influence their teams. Modeling how to effectively deal with failure is a skill you will likely learn, and allowing yourself to fail in small ways creates more psychological safety on your team because team members will see that learning from the failure, not the failure itself, is the key.

You may have heard that the inventor Thomas Edison “failed” 10,000 times before he successfully found a proper filament to produce a working light bulb. When asked how he could find the courage to continue trying after failing so many times, Edison told a reporter, “These weren’t failures. I successfully found 10,000 ways that didn’t work.”²⁹

Abraham Lincoln, one of our most revered presidents, also failed many times. He failed in the grocery business and incurred a serious debt. He failed at a senatorial bid in 1856. In 1858, Lincoln was the Republican choice for the Senate seat held by Stephen Douglas. He lost that race, and Douglas kept the seat. Lincoln was not even a very experienced national politician in 1860, when he became president, but his good humor and willingness to take criticism earned him the trust and admiration of many political leaders of the time.³⁰

Lincoln personifies my concept of Quiet Leadership. In an age where politicians were prone to excessively long oratories, Lincoln spoke very simply and eloquently. He was not boisterous, as so many politicians are today, but quiet and thoughtful. He listened intently to others, and he made slow, strategic decisions. He spoke after much thought, not every chance he got. Unlike some politicians today who have big egos and pretend they know everything, Lincoln went to great lengths to surround himself with people he thought were smarter than him. He challenged himself to keep learning, and he knew he could only grow from listening to the masters of the day. His failures only motivated him to try harder and work smarter.

Orville and Wilbur Wright, credited with inventing and building the world’s first successful airplane, also failed many times. They took baby steps with their invention, focusing on successfully gliding, instead of developing a powerful engine as their competitors did. Wilbur incorrectly believed a tail was not necessary for a plane early in their experimentation, and their first two gliders did not have one. Later in their trials, they endured weeks of delays caused by broken propeller shafts during engine tests. Successive flight attempts also failed, causing minor damage to their flyer, before they recorded their first flight, which lasted a whopping twelve seconds. (You have to start somewhere!)³¹

So what can we learn from these tenacious leaders? First, we learn that if we want to achieve

greatness, we must fail. Failing is an integral part of the process of doing something amazing. Second, we must look at the success hidden in each failure. Like Edison's approach, we don't have to focus on the failure, but rather what we can learn from what did not work. When you look at it as Edison did, failure is truly a necessary step on the road to success. I think too many times we simply wallow in the failure, which of course gets us nowhere. Third, we learn that perseverance pays off. When we do something incorrectly many times, and yet we continue to learn and try new ways, we will eventually succeed. It depends, again, upon how badly we want it.

The way I approach new things—and this may work for you too—is to anticipate that I will make some mistakes. If I am trying something new, I tell myself, *I will make some mistakes, and that's okay. I will learn from them and will do better next time. The next time I will also make mistakes, but hopefully less of them. Again, I will learn from them.*

When you expect to make mistakes, and you accept them as necessary to achieving your ultimate goal, it relieves the self-imposed pressure. Yes, we all want to do our best, and we will still strive for excellence, but we will also approach situations with eyes wide open to the fact that we are only human and cannot be excellent at everything we try the first time we attempt it.

As leaders, we often think everyone is watching and waiting to see us fail. So what if they are? If we worry about this, the fear is likely to stunt our learning, because we will shy away from calculated risks that may yield big rewards. We can't control what others think about us, so my advice is to focus on your goals and take action to move them forward. Control the controllables.

In the next chapter, I will outline how fear often leads to procrastination, which further delays the accomplishment of your plans. I'll provide tips to help keep you on track to achieve your dreams.

Chapter Thirteen — Key Points

- If we want to achieve greatness, we must fail. Failing is an integral part of the process of doing something amazing.
- We must look at the successes hidden in each failure.
- Perseverance pays off. When we do something incorrectly many times, and yet we continue to learn and try new ways, we will eventually succeed.
- When you expect to make mistakes, and you accept them as necessary to achieving your ultimate goal, it relieves the self-imposed pressure.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Taking Action

“I do not promise you ease. I do not promise comfort. But I do promise you these: hardship, weariness, and suffering. And with them, I promise you victory.”

—Giuseppe Garibaldi

They say the difference between dreams and reality is a plan. You can dream all you want about how you want your professional or personal life to be, but until you make a specific plan and take the action steps necessary to implement it, your vision will still be just a dream. Now that we have covered topics surrounding self-awareness and how to communicate effectively with others, we’re ready to take action to complete tasks more consistently in order to achieve our dreams.

What keeps us from taking action? Most of the time, it’s fear.

Let’s use the goal of writing a strategic plan for your department, for example. We may say to a colleague, “I’ve been encouraged to write a strategic plan.” The friend is impressed, and responds, “That’s great! What goals do you want to pursue?” You say, “I’m not really sure, but I’m planning to give it some more thought.” And the conversation continues. Then, months later, you may mention to that same coworker, “Yeah, I’ve still been thinking about the strategic planning process. I have some good ideas; I just haven’t put them on paper yet. I’m not sure how or when to engage my staff or what they might think is most important, so those will be challenges I’ll have to overcome.” And similar conversations play out for months as the dream continues to germinate in your brain. As you worry about how to get started, anxiety escalates. You haven’t yet written a word or brought it up to your team, and you may never create this strategic plan. Why is that?

Most of the time when procrastination is involved, the culprit is fear.

I have a friend who says, “Get the ‘how’ out of there.” What he means by that is not to worry about *how* you will do something. Just focus on what you want to achieve and start taking the baby steps necessary to achieve the goal. Many of us crush our dreams before they even germinate fully; don’t you agree? We crush them by thinking about the “how,” and then all the roadblocks in front of that “how.” That’s our fear talking.

Ask yourself, “What am I afraid of?” Perhaps, in this example, you fear your team won’t buy into the plan. You may fear that when others review it, they will not understand it or appreciate it. Maybe you think your colleagues will think you are pompous because nobody else has written a plan for their department. Maybe they will think you are an idiot because the ideas you present in the plan are too simplistic. Perhaps you think you just can’t do it—it’s overwhelming to you to think of the time and energy involved throughout the process. Maybe you are not sure how to go about it. You know how to write goals, but you have no idea how to formulate a strategy around them.

We all have fears. They are different for each of us, of course, but we all have them. Dan Millman, former world-champion athlete, university coach, martial arts instructor, and college professor, once said, “Your fears are not walls, but hurdles. Courage is not the absence of fear,

but the conquering of it.” We must make a choice to face our fears, and because they scare us, we have to make plans to deal with these emotions in order to achieve our goals.

I wrote about passion earlier and will address it in the next chapter as well. Sometimes we are just curious about an idea, and if given time to think it through logically, we realize we aren’t passionate enough to make a plan to achieve it. It’s perfectly okay to change your mind.

If you have something big on your to-do list, and it keeps carrying over month to month without being addressed, I have three suggestions for taking action: recommit, delegate, or delete. If this procrastinated item is something that *does* have merit and you want to recommit to finishing it, here are some tips that might help you achieve it:

- Don’t think about the “how;” just begin with what you do know and work out the how as you approach each step of the process.
- Chunk any big, long-term goals into small, manageable tasks.
- Hold yourself accountable by setting deadlines and using tools like your calendar to remind yourself of these deadlines.
- Consider asking someone to be your accountability partner and regularly schedule meetings with them to check on your progress.
- Celebrate the small wins along the way to keep up your momentum. How will you reward yourself when you achieve some of these milestones?
- Recognize that mistakes are likely to happen and are necessary to your learning.

If the to-do item does not take your specific brain, then the option to delegate it is available. Even if you don’t have people reporting directly to you, you can get creative by finding someone at work who likes a challenge and has some time to devote to an interesting project. Lastly, there is the option to simply delete the task from your list. I personally find that something hanging out there that I continue to not do only causes me continued, self-induced stress. Once I admit to myself that it’s just not a priority and I remove it from my task list or delegate it, I feel immediate relief.

After we conquer our task list by committing to taking consistent action, we can free up our minds to dream a bit. The next chapter, *Living Your Passion*, is about our career choices and how we might get more satisfaction from our jobs. If you struggle to identify your passion, we’ll explore how your childhood dreams and play could give you some insight. I will provide tips for how to pursue your passion.

Chapter Fourteen — Key Points

- You can dream all you want about how you want your professional or personal life to be, but until you make a specific plan and take the action steps necessary to implement it, your vision will still be just a dream.
- Most of the time, fear keeps us from taking action to complete goals.
- Tips for goal achievement:
 - Don't worry about how you will do something. Just focus on what you want to achieve and start taking the baby steps necessary to achieve the goal.
 - Chunk long-term goals into small, manageable tasks.
 - Hold yourself accountable by setting deadlines.
 - Consider asking someone to be your accountability partner.
 - Celebrate the small wins.
 - Recognize that mistakes are likely to happen and are necessary for learning.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Living Your Passion

“I long to accomplish some great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.”

—Helen Keller

To be an exceptional leader who cares about the organization and the people you work with, it’s important to do what feeds your soul, not just something you happen to do well. This chapter will help you explore your career choices and how you might get more satisfaction from your job by adding in elements that speak to your greatest talents and give you joy. If you struggle to identify your passion, we’ll explore how your childhood dreams and play could give you some insight, and I will provide tips for how to pursue your passion.

What do you do for a living? Is it something that truly excites you? Something that feeds your soul? Something that allows you to use your very best talents? When you get up in the morning, are you thankful for the life you have and how you get to spend your days? Can you honestly say you “love” what you do?

If your answers are yes, you are sadly atypical, and you can skip right on to the next chapter of this book. If your answers are no, you are not alone—not by a long shot.

When I worked in the marketing department of a law firm, a colleague and I interviewed a woman for a summer intern position. We asked the candidate why she wanted to work in a law firm, and she told us that she thought she wanted to be a lawyer. When we asked why she wanted to be a lawyer, the candidate went into a diatribe about how her parents were divorced, and her estranged father told her she would never amount to anything.

She wanted to be a lawyer, she told us with vehemence, so she could say “In your face!” to her father. She wanted to show him she could be something great, and a lawyer seemed like a career that would impress him and make him feel bad about all the negative things he said to her. Not only did she not get the job, but I left the interview feeling sad for that candidate. To choose a career in order to hurt someone else is setting yourself up for misery.

Some people think what they would love to do every day is impractical. But if you love an activity, and you are good at it, you can make an occupation out of it, or at least fit certain aspects of what you love into your current job. I once watched a television program about a person who was a professional chocolate truffle taster. She traveled the world tasting chocolate truffles, and she made them herself too. I love chocolate, so that sounded like a fantastic job to me.

How many of us could be very happy being a PR or HR person working on a cruise ship, for instance? I once met someone who wanted to travel the world, and her job was a PR director for a cruise ship. She loved it! Sometimes we just don’t think creatively enough, even though many communicators think of ourselves as creative types. How can you marry your communication skills to something you really love—like chocolate, cruise ships, skydiving, roller coasters, or your religion?

If you live and work in a way that capitalizes on your passion, then what you will communicate to others involves something you absolutely love. How you say what you say harkens back to the research I shared from Albert Mehrabian. The more conviction, or passion, the person has toward a message, which he or she will convey through body language, the more we like that person. Essentially, if we attempt to deliver a message with the sincere passion we feel for the subject, we have a greater chance of becoming more likable. If people like you, they are more likely to listen to you.

I have heard many times, “Do what you love, and the money will follow.” But many people I have coached have told me they have no idea what their passion is. I can imagine that not everyone has one defining moment in which their passion presents itself in grand form, striking like a lightning bolt so it suddenly becomes very clear what a particular person’s purpose is in life. Many people live much of their lives in a job, any job, and don’t especially enjoy what they do every day. So how does one find his or her passion and incorporate aspects of it into what he or she does daily?

There are many great books on the subject, such as *What Color Is Your Parachute?* by Richard Nelson Bolles, *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How To Discover What You Really Want and How To Get It* by Barbara Sher and *Backing U!: A Business-Oriented Guide to Backing Your Passion and Achieving Career Success* by Vaughan Evans.

There are also online personality and behavioral assessments, such as DiSC, Predictive Index, StrengthsFinder, The Six Types of Working Genius, Enneagram, Big Five Assessment, and others that measure psychological preferences, how a person makes decisions, what personality traits they possess, and management strengths and weaknesses that can prove helpful in pointing to potential passions.

To begin to discover what you love, it can be useful to think back to your childhood and rediscover who you were as a child. When we are young, we are pure, real, and courageous. We do what we do because we love it, and we don’t care what anyone thinks about it (until we become teenagers, of course!).

When I was in fourth grade, I remember an assignment where we were to draw pictures about what we wanted to be when we grew up, and then cut out our class pictures of our faces and glue them onto our drawings. I drew a picture of a school and drew myself as a teacher. My two younger sisters and I often played school at home, and I was always the teacher who prepared lessons, created worksheets for them to complete, and administered tests.

Although I never became a full-time schoolteacher, I have spent much of my life teaching. I have taught Sunday school and facilitated Bible studies, I have served as president of many associations throughout much of my professional life, I have been a lector for many years in my church, I taught undergraduates when I was in graduate school, and I also taught public relations classes for two years at Ohio University after receiving my master’s degree. I currently conduct workplace training, facilitate strategic planning workshops, and speak at conferences throughout the country.

Because I dreamed of being a teacher long ago doesn’t mean that the occupation in a strict sense (e.g., high school teacher or college professor) was necessarily my destiny. Rather, I think it was clear that I enjoyed teaching others, which can take many forms, such as those I previously mentioned. Teaching is certainly a passion of mine, and the fact that it can be part of my career definitely helps me continue feeling passionate about what I do. I don’t spend every

day teaching, and I most certainly enjoy other things about what I do, but teaching is something that feeds my soul.

When we are kids, we also tend to gravitate to things at which we excel, or our natural talents. Teaching was one of mine. Many of these natural talents can develop into hobbies. That's another great place to look for your passion. Do you have any hobbies? What part of the hobby really makes you happy and why? If part of your leadership role can include something that brings you joy, you will bring that positive emotion to your team and workplace.

I remember a human resources class I took during my master's program at Ohio State where the professor drew a Venn diagram on the white board. A Venn diagram is a visual representation showing the similarities and differences between concepts. When you draw it, you overlap two or three circles so that any shared characteristics are represented in the overlapping portion of the circles. If memory serves, the diagram's three circles were labeled Talent, Passion, and Sales. The professor explained that if you can find what you are really good at (Talent), and what you really love to do (Passion), and what products or services you could sell to others (Sales), in the overlapping portion in the center of the diagram, that is the career that could be most satisfying and lucrative for you. He asked us if our current career fit into the center of the diagram, and many students laughed. He encouraged us to think about this Venn diagram and to pursue a career that would fit into the center so we could live our passion.

You may be wondering, *So how do I go about adding elements I'm passionate about into my current position?*

Because being a Christian is a prominent component of how I see myself, I have always thought of my career as being framed by my Christianity. I have tried to live my life to honor God by best using the talents He gave me. Part of my challenge along the way has been discovering what talents He gave me, accepting them humbly, and using them to serve others, so that I am living in a way that I think most honors God. This is not easy, and I have had to have great courage along the way. I have done many things scared, feeling certain I was honoring God by pursuing what I felt He had in mind for me. If you follow a deity, approaching your passion in a similar way—to honor the divine or supernatural being or concept you follow—can be very fulfilling and also valuable to those you serve.

If you do not follow a deity, I do not judge you. Rather, I encourage you to think about the pursuit of your passion in the practical way I described above—where do your talents, passions, and financial abilities overlap? I think most people who are drawn to leadership books, like this one, or who strive to be lifelong learners are exceptionally good people who desire to add to the world instead of taking from it. So how can we find the inspiration, wherever we may get it, to do just that?

Now that we've explored how to insert more passion in your work life, the next and final chapter will guide you to look inside, instead of out into the world, for the answers you seek. I'll outline how to make positive changes in yourself to influence change in the behavior of those with whom you interact. I'll also encourage you to use what you've learned in this book to apply Quiet Leadership to your own life.

Chapter Fifteen—Key Points

- If you love an activity, and you are good at it, you can make an occupation out of it or add elements of it into your current work.
- To begin to discover our passion, it can be useful to think back to our childhood and rediscover who we were as children. When we are kids, we tend to gravitate to our natural talents.
- If you can find what you are really good at (Talent), and what you really love to do (Passion), and what products or services you could sell to others (Sales), in the overlapping portion in the center of the Venn diagram is the career that could be most satisfying and lucrative for you.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Leading From the Inside Out

“If you want to (be a leader) in any kind of long-term, committed way, you will need a vision that is truly your own—one that is deep and tenacious and that lies close to the core of who you believe yourself to be, what you value in your life, and where you see yourself going. Only the strength of such a dynamic vision and the motivation from which it springs can possibly keep you on this path year in and year out.”

—Jon Kabat-Zinn

So many of us try to lead from the outside in. We dress for success, we try to say all the right things, we attempt to do our work perfectly, and we read a bunch of books so we have all the answers. Then we sit back and wonder why our professional lives are a mess. Sometimes we are just trying to look the part we are playing in life instead of vulnerably revealing who we truly are.

It’s a mess because we are leading from the outside, when all of the answers to success are actually on the inside. We can do anything for a while. We can meet all the deadlines; we can stop being sarcastic; we can be on time to meetings; we can think positively. But if we don’t truly own our actions and understand and accept our motivation to change, it’s all a big façade.

I find that many people don’t want to take responsibility for their actions. It’s so much easier to point a finger at someone else. The problem is that we can’t change others. We can’t make someone else behave in a certain way. We can only change our own behaviors and our responses to others.

The way we change both our behaviors and our responses is to know ourselves intimately—on the inside. The more we know about ourselves, the better we understand not only when someone is pushing our buttons, but the origin of those buttons.

Why do we feel what we feel in a certain moment, when nobody else in the room is feeling that same way?

It’s part of the beauty of being unique, and it’s part of the challenge in communicating with others who are not like us. We all have different buttons to be pushed. When we know ourselves well, can identify our buttons, and know where we got them, we tend to react less and to choose our words and actions more carefully when those buttons are pushed.

When people don’t get what they expect to get from us, they cannot possibly give us the same response they usually give in return. For example, let’s say I usually yell at my business partner when I’m frustrated with something he’s done, causing him to yell back at me. But one day I calmly explain why I’m frustrated with him instead of yelling. It’s very likely he won’t yell either.

I wrote earlier that we can’t change others. Although this is true, if we make positive changes in ourselves and then behave in more productive ways toward others, it’s probable that we can influence new behaviors in others as a result.

To succeed long term, we must lead from the inside out. To do this, we must know ourselves.

You learn about yourself by graciously accepting feedback from others, striving to become

more emotionally aware, associating with those who challenge and support you, listening intently to others, caring for yourself, and loving who you are at this moment with all your failings.

You are special and unique. There is only one you in the whole world, blessed with your distinctive talents as a communicator and leader. The more you understand and accept yourself with all your faults, the easier it is to love and accept others with all their faults. When we listen intently and begin to understand others, and we make an effort to speak honestly and openly with others, communication suddenly becomes incredibly easier.

Let's make a commitment now to practice authenticity and approach others with curiosity and open-mindedness.

Chapter Sixteen — Key Points

- We often lead from the outside, when all of the answers to our success are actually on the inside.
- We can't make someone else behave in a certain way. We can only change our own behaviors and our responses to others.
- We learn about ourselves by:
 - Graciously accepting feedback from others.
 - Striving to become more emotionally aware,
 - Associating with those who challenge and support us,
 - Listening intently to others
 - Caring for ourselves
 - Loving who we are with all our failings.
- The more you understand and accept yourself with all your faults, the easier it is to love and accept others with all their faults.

Conclusion

My hope is that this book led you to an even deeper definition of Quiet Leadership: leading with quiet confidence; the ability to encourage, engage, and empower others; the willingness to own your mistakes; and the confidence to welcome constructive feedback without defensiveness or reactivity.

So, how can you use Quiet Leadership to get results? If you haven't already, download the companion workbook by visiting bit.ly/3sbOacQ and work through the questions in each chapter for practical ways to leverage your learning. Change will not happen immediately but through continued practice over time. Journaling about and continuing to challenge yourself in the areas you want to address will bring about positive change and confidence.

If you want even faster results and are inspired to invest in yourself, sign up for a free introductory coaching session with me at www.calendly.com/mj-clark/45min. Those who have invested in coaching with me have found themselves beginning to think in new ways, leading to new behaviors that are more helpful to them in both their work and personal lives. Eventually, the client will tell me that people at home and work are commenting on how they are showing up differently - in a good way! To me, that's evidence of all the hard work the client has done to make positive changes in their lives. As you master the leadership concepts in this book, you will better manage your insecurities and become a more powerful role model in your organization or in your business.

If this book was helpful to you, please consider leaving a book review on Amazon. If you'd like to introduce these concepts to your company or department through executive coaching or training, please contact me at mj@integratedleader.com. I'd love to help you!

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Sincerely,

M.J. Clark, M.A., APR, Fellow PRSA

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