

"A timely, actionable book on the virtues that every great leader needs to learn."

ADAM GRANT

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Think Again*
and host of the TED podcast *WorkLife*

HEAD & HEART

The Art of
Modern
Leadership

Kirstin Ferguson

Bestselling leadership expert

‘A timely, actionable book on the virtues that every great leader needs to learn. Drawing on her extensive experience and expertise, Kirstin Ferguson highlights the skills involved in developing curiosity, humility, empathy, and courage.’

Adam Grant – #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Think Again*, and host of the TED podcast *WorkLife*

‘*Head & Heart* is the indispensable companion for every leader seeking to lead effectively in this era. In it, Kirstin shares with us her wisdom as well as very practical approaches and tools to help us master the key attributes of modern, wholesome leadership.’

Hubert Joly – Former CEO, Best Buy and author of *The Heart of Business*

‘*Head & Heart* is a timely, inspirational book. Kirstin Ferguson generously shares her leadership knowhow revealing the essential qualities leaders must have to be effective in today’s complex business world.’

Ita Buttrose AC, OBE – Chair, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

‘*Head & Heart* is one of those books you just know is going to change the world. Through extraordinary storytelling and extensive research, Kirstin Ferguson has given us a gift; a book you can’t put down and which is destined to unleash the kind of leaders we desperately need around us both at work and at home. This is a book that perfectly combines learning through inspiration with a pathway to action, while also being a cracking read. I am confident you will devour *Head & Heart* just as I did, and, more than just a book, it will be your touchstone for leading.’

Kate Jenkins – Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner

‘A book for everyone who feels things can be better and wants to build a pathway to a stronger future. As Kirstin Ferguson demonstrates, through research and compelling case studies, leaders are made, not born. *Head & Heart* offers a welcome freshness in the humility of the storytelling, which I found a long way from the standard corporate leadership book. *Head & Heart* offers an important reminder that the best leaders can be found everywhere, with a cool, strategic head and a big, compassionate heart.’

Professor Mark Scott AO – Vice Chancellor, University of Sydney

‘*Head & Heart* has joined my favourite leadership books on my bedside table. Kirstin inspires us with real-life lessons from a diverse set of leaders, showing the power of integrating heads and hearts in leadership. This is the book we need right now, we are leading in white-water times, where relying on a one-size-fits-all model doesn’t allow for constant learning and adapting that allows for us to bring out the best in ourselves and our teams. Everyone can lead and everyone can learn from this amazing book.’

Pip Marlow – CEO, Salesforce Asia Pacific

‘Kirstin brilliantly brings out key leadership insights in the contemporary world – a juxtaposition of the head and heart and especially the magic that can happen when we strive to achieve the “and” and not the easier path of “or”.’

Vivek Bhatia – CEO and Managing Director, Link Group

‘*Head & Heart* is brilliant, as well as being validating and actionable, and I can’t wait to recommend it to others so we can all work together to modernise leadership. The very notion of modern leadership has never been more important in a world where the work, workforce, and workplace has forever changed – and may never stop changing. *Head & Heart* is an essential, contextual and timeless guide for leaders to inspire, influence and make an impact.’

Chris Havrilla – Vice President, Product Strategy, Oracle

‘In a world that is changing more rapidly and more profoundly than ever before, *Head & Heart* provides keen insights for leaders seeking to scale to these challenges. Kirstin does a terrific job of translating academic theory into actionable advice – a must read!’

Joe Whittinghill – Corporate Vice President, Talent, Learning and Insights, Microsoft

‘Kirstin Ferguson rips the bandaid off the leadership genre. From the arresting opening story of the inspiration for this book, to the treasure trove of stories shared, *Head & Heart* brings clarity to the character and potency of the leadership our times crave. With exceptional curation, and practical wisdom grounded in research, Kirstin engages her readers in the reimagining of leadership in us all.’

Sam Mostyn AO – Chair, Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce and Past President, Chief Executive Women

‘*Head & Heart* weaves wisdom, stories, and research to lay out one of the most compelling books on leadership I’ve read. In a time of unprecedented change in how we work, live, and interact, Kirstin’s *Head & Heart* is the call to action our world needs.’

Collis Ta’eed – Chair and Founder, Envato

‘*Head & Heart* is an accessible, illuminating, and practical guide to what exactly it is that develops and defines leadership in our modern world. Dr Ferguson deftly guides us through the head and heart qualities of great leadership; from what it means to lead, the challenges that thrust us into leadership and what we learn along the way. I have always said anyone can be a leader, and we all have experiences of leadership in our daily lives – and that’s just who this book is for. With this book, I’d bet a few of us would make one or two less mistakes along the way.’

The Honourable Ged Kearney – MP, Parliament of Australia

‘Kirstin Ferguson has produced a ground-breaking study of the intellectual and emotional elements of contemporary leadership, which should be mandatory reading for all executives, leaders, and managers. *Head & Heart* makes a significant contribution to the field of leadership theory and practice and is a fine resource for developing leaders, regardless of their field. The principles of ‘head and heart’ leadership described in this superb book, while explored through a modern lens, are timeless. *Head & Heart* is an outstanding achievement.’

Major General (retired) Mick Ryan AM

‘This book is an act of leadership itself. With clarity and purpose, Kirstin Ferguson demonstrates that leadership is not a lesson learned from a textbook or graduate program. Ferguson’s research and experience show us that leadership is a human quality invested in and exhibited by people who put their whole selves – their head and heart – into motivating, engaging, and enlarging the people around them.’

Clare Wright – Professor of History and Professor of Public Engagement, La Trobe University

‘As Kirstin reminds us, leadership is a series of moments, and reading this book is one of those critical moments. *Head & Heart* is an appeal to the leader in all of us. This is a deep exploration of modern leadership through well-considered research, wonderfully relayed stories, and thought-provoking questions that help turn tropes to truths. In this easy-to-read and highly practical book, Ferguson illuminates concepts that you always thought you knew, but adeptly shines light in the corners of those concepts that you might not have otherwise considered.’

Jenelle McMaster – Deputy CEO and Markets Leader, EY Oceania

‘My mantra for many years, freely offered to whoever was listening, was to keep your head and heart connected and remember that leadership is everybody’s business. Kirstin Ferguson’s reaffirming book provides scholarship and evidence that supports these views. I hope for all of us that it is the must-have new book on leadership.’

Wendy McCarthy AO Life Fellow FAICD – Social Activist, Company Advisor

‘Grounded in recognised theory and supported with data-driven evidence, Kirstin appeals to the leader in us all. Whether a parent, a customer-service operator, or a CEO of a global organisation, we all face leadership choices. Everyone will see something of themselves in this book. It’s packed with practical tips to lead responsibly and the pitfalls and traps to watch for and avoid – all guided by a modern approach to leadership, balancing our hearts and minds and being true to our authentic selves. Enjoy!’

Alison Kitchen – National Chairman, KPMG Australia

‘This ground-breaking book provides us with the practical tools to be modern leaders and is a must read for all. In today’s turbulent world, leadership has never been more vital. Yet, as Kirstin Ferguson explains in this important book, our understanding of leadership and the people we want and need as leaders have changed. Ferguson debunks the leadership superhero myth; what we need instead are honest and thoughtful women and men prepared to ask hard questions and lead with their heads and their hearts.’

Des Dearlove – Co-Founder, Thinkers50

‘A truly great read, which I could not put down. Everyone is a leader. What *Head & Heart* shows, in a very readable way, is how we can effectively develop our leadership skills to meet the demands of our complex world.’

Simon Mordant AO – Executive Co-Chair, Luminis Partners

'Head & Heart is an incredible book filled with real stories, a great reminder of the potential, opportunity and impact of leadership in everyday moments. It is a book I loved reading; an effortless read, I laughed and cried and was left feeling both hopeful and inspired with the opportunity we all have for leadership. Simply brilliant.'

Edweena Stratton – Chief People Officer, Culture Amp

'A must-read for all leaders, and those that aspire to be. Highly practical and easy to read, this book is rich in inspiring stories, case studies and gems of wisdom that will motivate even the most experienced leader to ensure they lead with their head and heart.'

Paul Zahra – CEO, Australian Retailers Association

'With *Head & Heart*, Kirstin shares a powerful playbook to guide aspiring leaders, reminding them to bring their whole self to their role – that the powerful combination of strengths of head and heart within a person makes them the best leader they can be.'

Kirstine Stewart – Former Vice President Media North America at Twitter, and author of *Our Turn*

'Head & Heart is brimming with leadership expertise and anecdotes, whilst bringing to life the essential attributes of modern leaders. Given our expectations of leadership in our changing world, this book is an essential reference guide for leaders everywhere.'

Julia Banks – Former Federal Member of Parliament, leadership consultant and author of *Power Play*

'Kirstin has written a leadership book for our times. Regardless of whether you are an established or emerging leader, this book redefines modern leadership for future leadership. The combination of research and clear, practical tips makes this a must read for any modern leader.'

Suzy Nicoletti – Vice President and General Manager JAPAC, Yotpo

'Head & Heart is an incredible achievement; through her own impressive career and first-hand experience, Kirstin revisits the history of leadership through the stories of incredible leaders of the past and present to build a case for the leader of the future. Your head will enjoy the data points used to support the theory, but the heart that jumps off each page is why you will enjoy reading *Head & Heart* as much I did. This is also a highly practical book; I found taking the Head & Heart Leader Scale allowed me to consider my leadership alongside the handy takeaways Kirstin provides at the end of each chapter.'

Marina Go – Chair, Adore Beauty

'Head & Heart is easily one of the best leadership books I have ever read. It's the sort of book you want to share immediately, and even read to your children. This is modern leadership of a type we desperately need more of in the world.'

Cyan Ta'eed – Founder of Milkshake.app, Envato and Hey Tiger

'Head & Heart is the sort of book that gives you permission to be your fullest potential, and to move your concept of leadership in a way that can now be balanced, with significance, in all your endeavours. This is a book full of insights and tips and new perspectives.'

Allan English AM – Founder, Silver Chef

'We are all leaders. Through a journey of inspirational leadership stories, Head & Heart gives readers the confidence to shake the shackles of "formal" leadership and activate the "art" of modern leadership through the powerful relationship between our head and heart. Readers can explore the attributes and superpowers of a modern leader, their practical application, and possibly for their whole lives.'

Sabina Sopov – Chief People Officer, PEXA Group

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HEAD & HEART

Dr Kirstin Ferguson is an author, columnist, and company director. Beginning her career as an officer in the Royal Australian Air Force, Kirstin has held roles that have included chief executive officer of an international consulting firm and acting chair and deputy chair of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Kirstin has a PhD in leadership and culture, as well as honours degrees in Law and History. She is an adjunct professor at the Queensland University of Technology Business School, where she was named Outstanding Alumnus of the Year in 2020 and is a Sir Winston Churchill Fellow. She was included on Thinkers50 Radar List in 2021 and shortlisted for the Thinkers50 Distinguished Achievement Award in Leadership. In 2023 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia for her significant service to business and gender equality.

Kirstin writes a weekly column on leadership and work in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*, and is also a contributor to the *Australian Financial Review* and *Forbes*.

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ALSO BY KIRSTIN FERGUSON

Women Kind: Unlocking the power of women supporting women
with Catherine Fox

HEAD & HEART

The Art of
Modern
Leadership

Kirstin Ferguson



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Head & Heart

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For Glen

Always leading with your head and your heart

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INTRODUCTION

There is a single touching moment in one of the defining battles of the Afghanistan War that, time and again, I think of when I am considering what it means to lead with the head and the heart. It is a moment which is easily missed; a mere second within a single battle that lasted seven hours.

This event would come to epitomise the leadership of then thirty-one-year-old United States Army captain Will Swenson. While the context of Swenson's leadership is unlike anything most of us are likely to experience, the way he conducted himself offers a lesson for us all. Captain Swenson demonstrated what it means to lead with both the head and the heart, even in the midst of battle.

After hearing Swenson's story mentioned in a 2014 TED talk by author Simon Sinek,¹ I devoured everything I could about Swenson's story. What follows is taken directly from the official narrative² and citation³ of the battle in question, an interview with Swenson after the war,⁴ and from the rare fortune of being able to observe footage of what happened.⁵

In 2009, while stationed in eastern Kunar Province in Afghanistan, Captain Swenson found himself a commander during what would

become known as the Battle of Ganjgal. Swenson had been embedded in the Afghan Border Police to help train their officers and was part of an operation to connect the Afghan government with native elders in the Ganjgal Valley near the border with Pakistan.

At 6 am one September day, Swenson and one hundred coalition forces found themselves ambushed by as many as sixty well-armed Taliban fighters who unleashed a barrage of rocket-propelled grenades and mortar and machine-gun fire. Almost immediately, Swenson and his men faced unrelenting enemy attacks from three sides making it difficult for them to find safety on the terraced ground.

Under persistent gunfire, Swenson called for overhead artillery support so that he and his men could move from where they had been pinned down. Multiple requests for fire support were refused, and continued to be refused, fearing civilian casualties.

Left to fend for themselves in a fierce battle lasting seven hours, five US troop members from Swenson's unit, along with ten Afghan troops and an Afghan interpreter, lost their lives. More than two dozen coalition troops were injured.

Rare helmet-cam footage from a medical evacuation team member on a United States Army helicopter captures what would otherwise never have been seen beyond the few men present that day. Amidst the shaky footage and the dust and chaos of a battlefield, we are witness to a leadership moment that is hard to forget.

At great risk to his life and while men lay wounded and dying and in need of rescue, Captain Swenson is seen repeatedly waving a bright-orange flag to guide a military rescue helicopter into a safe landing zone. Swenson continued to wave the bright flag that day, repeatedly making himself highly visible to enemy fighters, as he loaded injured and dying men onto the helicopter so they could receive medical attention.

At one point we see yet another injured man helped into the helicopter by Swenson and another soldier. The injured man is Sergeant Kenneth Westbrook. He had been shot in the neck and, by the time of

his rescue, was bleeding heavily. Westbrook, a father of three, also had four broken ribs, a punctured lung and a shattered left shoulder.

Captain Swenson is seen helping carry Westbrook onto the helicopter. Despite the valiant efforts of Swenson and other men present that day, Sergeant Westbrook succumbed to his injuries and tragically lost his life twenty-nine days later.

Captain Swenson survived the Battle of Ganjgal and managed to get most of his men to safety. On return to the United States, he was awarded that country's highest and most prestigious military decoration, the Medal of Honour, for his 'extraordinary heroism and selflessness'. President Obama called Swenson a 'servant to the men he commanded and to the dozens of Afghans lives he saved'. He became one of only thirty men to receive the Medal of Honour since the Vietnam War.⁶

What was not mentioned during Swenson's commendation, but which is the moment I come back to time and again when thinking about leading with the head and the heart, is a fleeting moment, easily missed. Swenson is seen leaning into the helicopter after he helps Sergeant Westbrook into the aircraft, just before the helicopter side door closes. We witness Swenson giving Sergeant Westbrook a kiss on the cheek. It is a brief and almost imperceptible moment amidst the maelstrom of battle; a moment never intended to be captured on film.

In this moment – and being a leader is simply a series of moments – we see someone who clearly leads with both his head and his heart.

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Swenson shows us that leadership is not simply a matter of physical acts of bravery, although he demonstrated that in spades. He also shows us that leadership is not simply a matter of command and control, although he led with authority too.

Through that kiss and, no doubt, through countless other words and actions which were never captured on camera, Swenson demonstrated that leadership is about leading with the heart as well. In a single moment, Swenson demonstrated humility, self-awareness, courage and, importantly, empathy for the impact we have on others, even in their darkest moments.

Four years after the Battle of Ganjgal, looking slightly uncomfortable while being interviewed on stage in a suit and tie, Swenson was asked about his experience that day.

Receiving the Medal of Honour was both a heavy burden and a heavy responsibility, said Swenson. As he looked out to the audience of fellow marines and soldiers, as well as Gold Star families – those who had lost their loved ones in battle, Swenson said he knew he was receiving the medal on their behalf.

As for the kiss, Swenson conceded that had it not been for the moment captured on camera, he would never have remembered it at all; if someone had told him he would not have believed them. The kiss was simply an instinctive act by someone who had clearly mastered the art of modern leadership.

Swenson's kiss on a battlefield was also a catalyst for me to write this book.

WHY THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU

As you open this book, wherever you happen to be right now, look around.

Can you see people on the other side of the café or park? Other people browsing in the bookstore? Family members who are sitting with you, or perhaps colleagues busily working nearby? Maybe you only see yourself, reflected in a nearby window?

Wherever you might be right now and whoever you can see, everyone is a leader. Including you.

Regardless of what we have been told our entire lives, regardless of the work we do, our formal title at our company or the way we spend

our days, we lead in the way we impact those around us through the words we use, the choices we make and the behaviours we role model to others.

Leadership comes in many forms and this book is intended for everyone. Whether you are impacting a handful of people, perhaps your family or a classroom of children, whether you are leading one of the largest companies in the world, or an entire country, we can still ensure the impact we have on those around us, and the legacy we leave as a leader, is a positive one.

While we may not operate in a war zone, around us every day are examples of leaders like Captain Will Swenson who inspire, motivate and propel us forward; leaders who help us to feel better about ourselves and the world around us and who are a shining light during times of despair. They help us to feel that anything is possible, and we trust them to guide us through any crisis we may face. We look to them for decisions and for advice on what to do next.

Too often, we think of those leaders as someone else.

Everyday leadership

During the coronavirus pandemic, I remember visiting a local grocery store. The young woman working at the cash register looked as if she'd had a long shift. Panic-buying crowds had streamed into the store and every checkout was packed with customers and their overloaded trolleys trying to judge how long they might be waiting before they could return to the relative safety of their homes. The unfamiliar fear and tension we all came to experience during the years of the pandemic was palpable.

In front of me in the queue was an older man who was becoming increasingly frustrated. There were all the tell-tale signs – loud sighs, looking at his watch, shuffling from side to side as he grew increasingly impatient to leave. Finally, he spoke. He told the young worker, who could not have been more than twenty years old, that the policy of mandating face masks to be worn while shopping in the store

was wrong. He stepped forward and moved closer to the young woman. He said, loudly, he would not be coming back to the store again. He wanted to shop somewhere that valued personal freedom.

Watching this unfold, I stepped forward – as did many others – feeling protective, ready to speak up on this young woman's behalf. We needn't have been concerned.

The young woman, summoning more patience and respect for this customer than I felt at the time, calmly explained she also didn't like wearing a mask. After a long shift it grew hot and rubbed on her skin. She explained she wore the mask because it kept everyone safe, including him. She explained that her grandmother lived at home with her, and she feared bringing COVID-19 home from work. She thanked the customer for helping keep her grandmother safe by wearing his mask as well.

In that moment this young woman was a leader. She exemplified what it means to leave a positive legacy through her words and actions. She didn't have a title or business card and she didn't have any followers to supervise. She was leading through the impact and influence she had on those around her. She influenced everyone who witnessed that exchange by role modelling patience and grace. In that moment – and, remember, leadership is a series of moments – she left a legacy.

Leadership turned on its head

We know leadership comes in all shapes and sizes, colours and ages. We find inspiring leaders where we least expect to and among the most junior employees in an organisation, just like the example of the young checkout operator. We know some leaders may study at university for years on end while others may have never set foot on a campus in their lives. Both will transform the lives of those around them.

Two-time Olympic gold medallist and FIFA World Cup champion Abby Wambach captured this notion in *Wolfpack*:

Leadership is volunteering at the local school, speaking encouraging words to a friend, and holding the hand of a dying parent. It's tying dirty shoelaces and going to therapy and saying to our families and friends: No. We don't do unkindness here. It's signing up to run for the school board and it's driving that single mom's kid home from practice and it's creating boundaries that prove to the world that you value yourself. Leadership is taking care of yourself and empowering others to do the same.⁷

This century, and even more recently over the past few years, our notion of leadership has been turned on its head. No longer do we expect or want our leaders to be wise, heroic figureheads with decades of experience and who may have inherited their place in the world. We understand we can, and should, learn from everyone. We don't want leaders who only seek to command others, but instead who draw on the strengths and collective leadership of those around them. We want leaders who understand their limitations and have the strength to be vulnerable. We want leaders who are humbled by the sheer complexity of the issues they need to resolve and the ambiguity of the problems they need to confront. We want leaders who value feedback and who know they will always need to work at being the best leaders they can be.

Our world needs leaders who understand they are continually learning and reshaping the best way they can lead in any given moment. Our world needs leaders who are eager to understand how they can have a positive impact on those around them.

Our world needs leaders like you.

We have witnessed leaders emerge from movements where people have taken to the streets and driven change around social issues such as #MeToo or Black Lives Matter. We have seen teenage leaders like Greta Thunberg challenge world leaders on the environmental crisis facing the world. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw leaders emerge within our neighbourhoods, school groups and among front-line health workers.

WHY ANOTHER BOOK ON LEADERSHIP?

I am acutely aware there are many thousands of leadership books available for you to read. On Amazon right now there are over 60,000 leadership books available for you to buy. Among that crowded market I am humbled you picked this one.

I know there is no shortage of theories for leaders to draw upon when looking for leadership advice. You can read books on emotional intelligence, social intelligence, cultural intelligence and conversational intelligence. You might want to read about your presence, your vulnerability or your ability to build trust. It is easy to be overwhelmed by the plethora of leadership advice available, which is why I plan to focus on the skills and attributes you likely already have. I am most interested in helping you integrate your ability to lead with your head and your heart to help you to be the modern leader the world needs you to be. This is not a matter of out with the old, in with the new. Everything you have learnt until now about leadership still has its place, but I am going to encourage you to rethink *how* you lead so that it best meets the needs of a modern world, today.

Founded on academic research

This book is deeply grounded in academic research from thinkers and experts in the field of leadership over many decades. I am incredibly grateful for their work.

In *Head & Heart: The Art of Modern Leadership* I have drawn from prominent leadership theories of the past as well as the powerful modern thinkers writing today to develop a way to think about your leadership in a way you can adapt for any leadership context you find yourself in.

I celebrate and stand on the shoulders of giants in the field including the work of scholars such as (in alphabetical order) Chris Argyris, Nicholas Bloom, Brene Brown, Jim Collins, Susan David, Carol Dweck, Amy Edmondson, Tasha Eurich, Daniel Goleman, Adam Grant, Hubert Joly, Douglas McGregor, Edgar Schein, Richard

Tedlow, Karl Weick and Liz Wiseman. Thank you for continuing to build the world's understanding of organisational culture, psychology, leadership and performance.

Writing this book has been a true balance of my head and heart. My head has verified through research much of what my heart has told me through practice.

Writing this book has been a true balance of my head and heart. My head has verified through research much of what my heart has told me through practice.

This book includes my academic research through the development of a new survey (or scale) which was designed in conjunction with Professor Lisa Bradley of Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Business School. I strongly encourage you to take the Head & Heart Leader Scale which will assess your current approach to head and heart leadership. You will receive a free, personalised report that enables you to compare your results to others and you can then use this book to really help you focus on those areas you wish to develop. Simply visit www.headheartleader.com to get started.

Be prepared to disagree

I know my personal leadership experience is only one perspective and my style of leading may be different to yours. Understanding that, I have sought to expand your exposure to different types of leadership with the stories of many others.

I have interviewed dozens of leaders from diverse backgrounds – teachers, activists, journalists, lawyers, business leaders and politicians. Their stories will inspire you and remind you of the importance of leading with your head and heart.

The unifying factor between all the leaders in this book is that they are modern leaders who are aware of, and care about, the impact their leadership – through their words, actions and behaviours – is having

on those around them. They put people at the centre of their decision-making.

But, be warned. There will be some leaders you learn from who you may not agree with. Leaders whose views are different to yours or whose choices and ways of leading bear little resemblance to the way you might choose to lead yourself. It is in those moments, as you read and disagree, where your greatest opportunity lies. Every story shared in this book has a lesson for modern leaders. It is the act of reflecting and thinking about your leadership and considering alternatives that will help you develop as a modern leader.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is designed to be highly practical and easy to digest. I want you to be able to pick it up and read it from beginning to end and be inspired by the stories you will read of leaders changing the world today. Alternatively, you can dive into areas that need your specific focus and come back to it time and again. This book is designed to help you develop as a leader, regardless of the context you may be leading in.

Head & Heart: The Art of Modern Leadership is divided into four parts to guide you through reflecting on your leadership.

Part I – Rethinking leadership contains three chapters and is where we will define what it means to be a modern leader and explore why, until now, we have only focused on leaders with a formal title and a position of authority. We will journey together through a brief history of leadership, and understand why ‘heroic’ leaders continue to shape our approach to leading today. We will look at why we already have more influence and impact as leaders than we think we might and consider why it is so important we recognise this. We will also take a high-level look at what it means to lead with the head and heart and how thinking about our heads and hearts is a core part of how we consider our place in the world.

Part 2 – Leading with our heads is divided into four chapters and is where we begin to consider in detail what it means to lead with the head and heart. We will unpack the four attributes of leading with the head – curiosity, wisdom, perspective and capability – and discuss the benefits of leading with each approach, what might prevent us from using each attribute and ways we can build these attributes in ourselves and others.

Part 3 – Leading with our hearts has four chapters and we will focus on the four attributes of leading with our hearts – humility, self-awareness, courage and empathy – and what each means in practice. We will consider in detail the benefits of these strengths and the likelihood you already have them but possibly keep them separate from your professional life. Integrating each of these attributes into your work is the essence of a modern leader.

Part 4 – Integrating our head and heart is where everything comes together and where we will look at how we integrate leading with both the head and heart. We will also consider how we demonstrate modern leadership in hybrid and remote workplaces and why we need to rethink how and why we lead to build trust and purpose-driven organisations.

Appendix I – Action plan has ideas for how you can put all these concepts into practice.

Appendix II – Head & Heart Leader Scale has information on the methodology and background to development of this research.

Leadership has been a central part of my adult life and I have been privileged to have had the opportunity to lead, and be led, in many different contexts. I consider it a unique privilege to have been able

to combine my leadership experience in the military and corporate sector with an academic and research-based perspective.

I have been leading others for as long as I can remember. I have led in formal positions as a board chair, company director, chief executive and military officer. I have led through influence and through the glare of the media spotlight during a very public crisis. I work with other leaders as an executive coach and feel humbled to help my clients become better leaders themselves.

I am fortunate to have also been led by extraordinary leaders throughout my career. I have been able to watch and observe how these leaders have inspired and engaged me and my colleagues through their words and actions. I have also been led by those who offer me an example of the kind of leader I never want to be: leaders who manage to disengage, demotivate and wear down those they lead or who see their teams as existing to serve them. Every leader I have worked with has offered me a unique opportunity to understand the power we have as leaders to leave a positive (or negative) legacy in our wake.

My husband and I have raised two wonderful daughters and we lead our family together. I am also grateful to experience leading through helping others during their time of need. I volunteer as a crisis support worker at Lifeline, answering calls on a national helpline from people experiencing crisis and often at the most desperate points in their lives. I have also been fortunate to lead a social-media movement which began with a simple tweet and became a movement of women supporting women around the world. It was called #CelebratingWomen and led to my first book, *Women Kind* written with Catherine Fox.

My passion for leadership has come from more than thirty years of direct leadership experience, but also from doggedly researching, writing and speaking about leadership for just as long. As a young woman at university, I spent my final year researching the women who led the Australian and British Women's Auxilliary Air Forces during World War Two. After returning to university once more to study law, I found myself a student again as I finished a PhD in the

field of leadership and culture. It is fair to say I always find my way back to thinking and writing about what it means to lead.

This book is the culmination of all my leadership and academic experiences so far. In *Head & Heart: The Art of Modern Leadership* I want to share with you everything I have learnt in a way that helps you recognise why everyone – including you – can be the modern leader we need in the world today.

There is no doubt I carry with me the scar tissue from mistakes I have made during my career; decisions I should have made but didn't; people I may have let down along the way. I am confident we all have experiences we would love to be able to do again if we could.

If you have moments like that in your life then you are precisely the leader the world needs. There is no perfect leader and the expectation leaders need to be superheroes with all the answers is shown to be demonstrably false every day. If you are someone who finds comfort in data and analysis and prefers to run a mile from a difficult conversation, this book is for you. If you are someone who wants to change the world and will worry about how you get there later, this book is also for you. If you are a parent struggling to balance work and child rearing; if you are a surgeon who needs to deliver difficult news to your patients; if you are a scientist, a bus driver, a business leader or a politician, this book is for you. If you are someone who wants to integrate your whole self as a leader – rather than having a version of you for work and a different version at home – this book is for you.

Dear reader, I wrote this book for you.

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PART 1

RETHINKING LEADERSHIP

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LEADERSHIP LEGACIES

MODERN LEADERSHIP ON THE WORLD STAGE

I have asked hundreds of people to name a modern leader and two names come up time and again. The first is a former disc jockey who became the youngest-ever leader of her country. The other is a former comedian who found himself leading from a bunker in the middle of a war.

Leading in the face of tragedy

Jacinda Ardern, once a disc jockey and now the Prime Minister of New Zealand, is a leader who consistently demonstrates what it means to lead with the head and heart. For Ardern, kindness and empathy are critical. ‘We need our leaders to be able to empathise with the circumstances of others; to empathise with the next generation that we’re making decisions on behalf of,’ says Ardern.⁸ ‘If we focus only on being seen to be the strongest, most powerful person in the room, then I think we lose what we’re meant to be here for. I’m proudly focused on empathy because you can be both empathetic and strong.’⁹

Ardern’s approach as a modern, head and heart leader came to the world’s attention in wake of the 2019 Christchurch terrorist attack

where a lone gunman entered two mosques, killing fifty-one people and injuring forty. In the days following the attack, Ardern gave a powerful speech to the New Zealand Parliament. She explained how she never anticipated having to voice the grief of a nation. Of the victims she said, 'Those loved ones were brothers, daughters, fathers and children. They were New Zealanders. They are us. And because they are us, we, as a nation, mourn them. We feel a huge duty of care to them, and we have so much we feel the need to say and to do.'

In just a few sentences Ardern managed to create a sense of belonging and embrace the pain the nation was feeling. She also signalled to the nation that inclusion and compassion in this moment was critical.

This wasn't a moment that was all heart. Ardern also captured the anger of the nation and set the tone for how the country, and the world, should treat the gunman.

'He sought many things from his act of terror,' said Ardern, 'but one was notoriety, and that is why you will never hear me mention his name. He is a terrorist, he is a criminal, he is an extremist, but he will, when I speak, be nameless, and to others I implore you: speak the names of those who were lost rather than the name of the man who took them. He may have sought notoriety but we in New Zealand will give him nothing – not even his name.'

The day after the attack, Ardern visited the traumatised, grief-stricken Muslim community most deeply impacted by the violence. She said later that she wanted to be 'face to face with their grief' and knew she needed to 'reach out and embrace them . . . It's just who we are as humans.'¹⁰

In a simple act of kindness and with deep insight into the context she was leading in, Ardern borrowed a scarf and wore it as a sign of respect to Muslim traditions. Images of Ardern embracing members of the Muslim community were reproduced around the world, including on the side of the tallest building in the world, the Burj Khalifa. A simple act with profound consequences.

Ardern later said she didn't remember thinking about how she was meant to react or how she was meant to be in that moment. 'The only thing I did remember thinking was that I knew I couldn't show every emotion that I was feeling; that wasn't what everyone needed . . . all I did at that time was just reflect what I was seeing, among this horrific human tragedy.'¹¹

Ardern demonstrated the power of leading with both wisdom and perspective while at the same time demonstrating self-awareness, empathy and humility. She was able to attend to the crisis not only intellectually but also emotionally.¹² Ardern perfectly captured the ability to perceive the context in which she was leading – perhaps not even consciously – and then balance that with the natural empathy and humility she could draw upon in the wake of such an unspeakable tragedy.

Leading from a bunker

Far from New Zealand, another modern leader captured the world's attention in 2022. The President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, had a public life before politics that has become well known. Zelensky was a comedian and successful television producer who played a role as the nation's president before undertaking the role in real life. In the television program, his character, a high school history teacher, is surreptitiously recorded by one of his students as he rants against corruption. The video goes viral and without campaigning or even wanting the job, he is elected president of Ukraine. The humble everyman, out of his depth in every respect, goes on to become a heroic leader of his country. It is hard to know where the fictional world ends and the real world begins. The popular television series was called *Servant of the People* and now Zelensky's political party is also called *Servant of the People*.

It would be easy to critique Zelensky as an entertainer, staging his performance as a wartime president. But to do so would be a disservice to the modern leadership he has consistently displayed and the loyalty

and combined sense of purpose he has built among Ukrainians in their darkest hour.

The title of Zelensky's television program, and now the name of his political party, is reflective of his leadership style. He knows his role is to serve the people of Ukraine and he reinforces his role through the way he dresses, the way he communicates and the way he demands action from the Western world. And it is not just in wartime. During his inaugural address in 2019, Zelensky told the government, 'I really do not want my picture in your offices: the president is not an icon, an idol, or a portrait. Hang your kids' photos instead, and look at them each time you are making a decision.'¹³

During the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Zelensky was only ever seen in his trademark military green t-shirt and fatigue pants. He sought to stand alongside the people of Ukraine both metaphorically and physically and wear what millions of other Ukrainians, all volunteering to defend their country, were wearing. He rejected offers to flee the country at the start of the war with his now infamous comment, 'The fight is here. I need ammunition, not a ride.' Instead, world leaders visited Zelensky in war-torn Kyiv, at great risk to their lives.

Zelensky, who has been described as 'Churchill with an iPhone'¹⁴ imbues his speeches with passion for the cause, empathy for his people and anger towards those he perceives are not helping Ukraine enough. He is masterful at 'reading the room', adapting his message to the greatest effect for his audience. When speaking to politicians in the House of Commons in the UK, Zelensky channelled Shakespeare. When he spoke to the US Senate, he reminded them the United States is the leader of the free world. When he addressed the European Council summit he invoked memories of the Second World War when Hungarian Jews were murdered on the shores of the Danube.¹⁵

Zelensky integrates his head and heart leadership seamlessly at every opportunity. He explains the tactical and strategic reasons he needs weapons to defend his country while also sharing stories of

tragic war crimes against his citizens to build empathy and reinforce his message.

Integrating our public and private lives

While Ardern and Zelensky exemplify the style of modern leadership needed in the world today, remarkably this kind of leadership is rare. The reason Ardern and Zelensky's actions are notable is because we don't see modern leaders behave in these ways nearly often enough, especially not on the world stage. What stands Ardern and Zelensky apart is their ability to seamlessly integrate their personal qualities and authenticity with the authority invested to them through their formal roles.

Jacinda Ardern was one of the earliest world leaders to use social media to invite people into her home and talk about serious issues in an informal way. In November 2021, Ardern addressed the nation via Facebook Live to update New Zealand citizens on the COVID-19 response. Mid-sentence, the Prime Minister was interrupted by her then three-year-old daughter who was supposed to be in bed. Ardern's reaction? Simply telling her daughter to pop back into bed and laughing about her bedtime parenting failure. What parent of a three-year-old hasn't had that experience?

These are the moments we love most from modern leaders. They are real.

Ardern and Zelensky stand apart from polished career politicians and corporate leaders who curate an image of themselves for public consumption, different to that they have in their private lives. Modern leaders like Ardern and Zelensky realise integrating how they show up as leaders in public with the leaders they are in private is what makes them effective.

Modern leaders like Ardern and Zelensky realise integrating how they show up as leaders in public with the leaders they are in private is what makes them effective.

As impressive as the leadership of Ardern and Zelensky might be, their experiences as leaders still feel far from ours. These are two world leaders in roles we are unlikely to ever find ourselves. But the opportunity leaders like Ardern and Zelensky offer us in a very public way is a reminder that this style of modern leadership is the type we need in our businesses, communities and families. It is also a style of leadership within all our abilities because unlike the traditional leaders of the past, the art of modern leadership which Ardern and Zelensky have mastered relies on attributes we can already draw on at any time.

The idea that you can be one kind of leader at work – perhaps head-based and analytical, logical, capable and unemotional – and then a different type of leader at home or with your community, is one that history has ingrained in us for centuries but which needs to be firmly debunked. A modern leader understands both reason and emotion, or the head and heart, are important. The key to mastering the art of being a modern leader is knowing what is needed when. Being human and making hard leadership decisions are not mutually exclusive, but do require both wisdom and empathy.

The technical ‘head’ skills we develop as leaders are critical. No leader can effectively lead without being able to do whatever is needed to propel a situation, conversation, business or country forward. However, for too long the emotions of leaders and the impacts of their leadership have been ignored. The impact of stigmatising ‘soft’ leadership traits over the centuries has meant being vulnerable, compassionate, or even kind, has been seen as a weakness. Global leaders like Jacinda Ardern and Volodymyr Zelensky are restoring humanity and showing you can be strong *and* lead with empathy and emotion.

THE PROBLEM WITH HEROIC LEADERS

So much of what we think, feel and believe about leadership has been crafted through centuries of thinking about leaders in a certain way. We have been educated, particularly in Western cultures, to think

of great leaders as someone other than ourselves. Understanding the legacy of where we have come from in our views of leadership in the Western world is important in helping us rethink leadership in a modern context.

Just as our personal histories – including our origin stories, educational background, gender, sexuality, disabilities – define us as leaders today, so too does the history of who we have celebrated as leaders in the past. We are going to explore why the influence of ideas from more than two centuries ago still drives our thinking of what it means to be a ‘great leader’ and why we have seen, even in relatively recent times, a resurgence of ‘great leaders’ who turned out to be anything but the kind of leaders we should revere. This history will help us understand Western ways of thinking about leadership which dominates the kind of leaders we find in the world today.

The question of who is classified as a leader and what leadership involves has stumped researchers, companies, institutions and others since leadership research began in the Western world. There are more than 200 different definitions and theories of leadership – it has become an industry of its own.

Why so many Great Men?

Before the academic field of leadership took hold, historians were already gathering the stories of men who conquered foreign lands, explored vast seas, commanded empires or made scientific discoveries. Mere mortals were educated to believe leaders needed to emulate grand historical figures of the past – men such as Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, Isaac Newton and Christopher Columbus. It is both fascinating and infuriating that well into the twenty-first century we are still living with this legacy.

The idea that only some men were entitled to lead has driven our views of leadership for the past two centuries. We have nineteenth-century Scottish historian, essayist and philosopher Thomas Carlyle to thank. In the eyes of men like Carlyle, leadership was only capable

of being demonstrated by men, and great ones at that. Carlyle argued that leaders (although he called them ‘heroes’) were born and not made and were certainly not capable of being trained. Only those men endowed with heroic potential could become leaders. It was these men who had superior intellect, heroic courage and extraordinary leadership abilities. Some, according to Carlyle, had even been inspired by God.

While Carlyle was prepared to accept even great men had flaws, he believed it was their ability to overcome these difficulties that made them such heroes. Heroic leaders ‘were naturally endowed with supreme intelligence, coming up with brilliant ideas and directives from the mountaintop that lower echelons were then expected to execute’.¹⁶ After all, according to Carlyle, the history of the world was but the biography of great men.¹⁷

Carlyle’s Great Man theory of the mid-nineteenth century rested on the assumption that all great leaders are born with certain traits that allow them to lead on instinct and wield authority and power. So unique were the traits these men were born with, and so strong their power to inspire, these men deserved to lead; the world needed great men at the helm.

There is little doubting that Carlyle’s work would have been a welcome philosophy at the time for men in positions of influence in business, academia, the military and the sciences. It was confirmation of their entitlement to lead. These were precisely the men Carlyle proposed were Great Men in possession of special, unique or extraordinary attributes (even physical characteristics) that others did not have.

Thinking of leaders as a small group of entitled, privileged men had a profound impact on how we viewed the leaders who shaped our world.

Some men, but not all men

There are clearly many issues with the Great Man theory when considering it from a twenty-first-century perspective. Not only were

women excluded, but the theory also excluded many men, not to mention that Carlyle considered the Anglo-Saxon race as superior to all others.¹⁸ It seemed not just anyone could assume the role of a leader.

When Harvard MBA programs officially began in 1908, courses focused on the ‘hard’ skills of management – such as accounting, finance and strategy – since it was assumed good leaders would have an innate ability to lead and would learn that on the job.¹⁹ Technical skills mattered because, according to the views of the time, leaders were born with a long list of lofty traits such as integrity, competence, intelligence, vision, decisiveness, self-confidence, trustworthiness and motivation.

This educational focus did not mean early business schools ignored the broader responsibilities of leaders altogether. In fact, the original aims of the Tuck School of Business, founded in 1900 at Dartmouth College, was to educate ‘the man first and the businessman afterwards’.²⁰ Unfortunately, this sense of social and public responsibility crumbled over the century, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s when the world witnessed corporate leaders who saw themselves as leading only to grow shareholder returns.

The search for the mystical traits of leaders dominated the twentieth century and left a powerful legacy in the way we think about leaders even today. Ironically, it was the idolisation of great men and the desire to replicate these traits that eventually opened the leadership door for anyone other than a great man to walk through. Sadly, it would take a world war and the desperate need for a replenishment of leaders to prompt the change.

AN UNLIKELY MOTHER-DAUGHTER DUO EMERGES

By the 1940s various lists of leadership qualities had been developed to try to capture what made some great men great leaders. The longer the list became, the more the search grew to try to predict who would be a good leader.

Katherine Cook Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers, lived a simple life in Pennsylvania, far from the boardrooms of power or battlefields of war. These women were not leaders or heroes in any sense of Carlyle's definition, yet we owe much to the influence of these two women in rethinking who was capable of being a leader at all.

Briggs was born in 1875 into a family who, somewhat unusually for the time, had promoted education for the girls in the family as well as the boys. Homeschooled until she was fourteen, Briggs earned a degree in agriculture, later becoming a teacher. When Briggs met her future son-in-law, Clarence, who was a lawyer, she noticed he had a different way of seeing the world to the rest of her family and she wanted to understand why.

Inspired by the work of Carl Jung, Briggs and her daughter Isabel Myers soon sought ways to turn Jung's theoretical positions into practice. Myers knew she needed to understand statistical methods, so she became an apprentice to a personnel manager in a large bank, where she learnt about statistical modelling and how to score and validate the results.

The onset of World War Two and the urgent requirement for jobs to be filled provided the opportunity for the mother-and-daughter team to test their work. Myers and Briggs believed understanding personality preferences would help women enter the industrial workforce for the first time by identifying the wartime jobs that would be most suited to them.²¹ From humble beginnings, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) became one of the most widely used leadership psychometric tests around the world. Still available today, millions of people have taken the test to find out their Myers-Briggs personality type.

The MBTI opened the door to a view that everyone had the potential to be a leader. The idea that you had to inherit leadership traits from your father, or you needed to have some special attribute like physical fitness to be a leader, desperately needed rethinking and

this unexpected mother–daughter combination prompted people around the world to do just that.

In recent years, the MBTI has received considerable justified criticism and been called a ‘fad that won’t die’.²² The MBTI was based on untested Jungian theories and ignored the fact most personality traits fall somewhere on a spectrum, rather than into sixteen neat pigeon-holes. Even more concerning, more than 50 per cent of people who take the test get a different result on a second attempt.

What *is* extraordinary about the work of Myers-Briggs, is that two women were able to influence thinking about leadership for more than half a century at a time when leaders were still widely considered to be great men. They did so largely without any relevant formal education and without any formal leadership experience themselves. There is no doubt they were both leaders – formal and informal – and their work has had a profound influence on the way we think today.

THE ORGANISATION MAN

In the wake of World War Two, leadership theories boomed alongside a strong focus on leadership behaviours. The idea that leaders were born and not made was being turned on its head. Employers understood leadership could be taught. Even more importantly, it was accepted that it was vital to understand the impact of a leader’s behaviour on those they led. It was this behaviour, rather than any traits they may have been born with, that would determine whether a leader was effective.

At the same time, layers of management were a hallmark of large corporations. Middle managers, often known as ‘organisation men’, were trained by their companies to rise through the ranks. The idea of a job for life, where employees moved from the mail room to the upstairs corner office, gained popularity as workers, primarily men, aspired to progress through the ranks to the most senior formal leadership roles. In 1952, two-thirds of senior executives in the United States had more than twenty years’ service with their employer.²³

The 1960s may have been all about the Vietnam War, landing on the moon and Woodstock for some, but for those attending university or working in the corporate world, there was a different kind of revolution underway. MBA programs were opening more widely and there was a hankering to understand what made one leader more successful than another.

Douglas McGregor, the head of the organisational studies department at the MIT Sloan School of Management, was one researcher interested in how employees were impacted by the management styles of their leaders. In his book *The Human Side of Enterprise* published in 1960, McGregor argued there were two ways managers could think about the people they led. He argued these thinking patterns, whether conscious or not, impacted decisions managers made.

Don't be a Theory X manager

Theory X managers were, according to McGregor, the most common type of manager of the time. They believed human nature to be fundamentally corrupt and that people hated to work. Theory X managers believed people were primarily motivated by fear and a desire to cut corners because they were inherently lazy. Armed with these beliefs, Theory X managers saw their role as needing to supervise worker performance because workers were only motivated by money. They believed workers wanted job security, not responsibility.²⁴

As extreme as these views sound, they were not uncommon, and you may know a traditional leader who shares some of these beliefs. Elements of Theory X thinking patterns remain in leaders today who use financial incentives to drive individual or cultural change, or feel they need to lead by showing they are the smartest person in the room.

Theory Y, the modern leader of the time

McGregor suggested managers could instead aspire to be Theory Y managers who saw work, in its most noble sense, built into human

nature. They understood that while some people might behave poorly on the job, including being disengaged or even selfish, this was simply a result of the way Theory X managers treated them.

McGregor argued people ‘can’t be goaded, cajoled, threatened, or even bribed with money into giving their hearts and souls to an enterprise’.²⁵ Instead, managers could create an environment where workers rose to the occasion and became committed to the cause. Theory Y managers believed that individuals craved responsibility and would readily accept it.

While this view is more common now, it was revolutionary thinking in 1960. McGregor’s Theory Y ideas contradicted the hierarchical structure and culture of virtually all organisations at the time, including the curriculum being taught in most business schools. In his work consulting to some of the largest American companies, McGregor had seen that the most effective leaders had led with Theory Y at the centre – those leaders believed in their hearts that people had the motivation, potential to develop and capacity to assume responsibility.

Courage to experiment

Businessman Bill Gore was one business leader heavily influenced by the emerging leadership ideas of McGregor. After an early career at DuPont, Bill Gore had branched out to build his business, W. L. Gore & Associates. The company, which began in 1958, now has US\$3.8 billion in revenue and more than 11,500 employees across twenty-five countries in the world.

While you may not know him by name, you most likely have worn or used something Gore developed. In 1969 Gore discovered a new polymer which we now know as Gore-Tex and is found in virtually all outdoor wear. From that discovery, the company known as Gore has developed more than 3400 unique inventions in a wide range of fields including electronics, medical devices and polymer processing.

In the 1960s, Bill Gore and his wife, Genevieve, who was the Gore company's first human resources manager, were heavily influenced by the Theory Y work of McGregor but were unaware of any new company built using these principles from the ground up. The Gores were intrigued by whether you could have a company with no hierarchy where employees felt free to talk with anyone else. At the time, this was unheard of.

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Gore set out to create a 'lattice' rather than a strict hierarchical structure. Even today at Gore, while there is a CEO and divisional leaders, there are no management layers and no organisational chart – a tool Gore called a façade of authoritarian hierarchy. Few people have titles at the company, and no one has a boss. These kinds of radical ideas in the 1960s, when men in grey suits in the corner office dominated the corporate landscape, were rare.

Bill Gore embraced the idea that everyone, not just those in formal positions, could lead. Due to a distributed leadership model, even today many employees at Gore refer to themselves as leaders, regardless of their formal title. As a result, the company has an entire workforce of leaders ready to step up and be called upon as the situation requires.

THE DARK SIDE OF LEADERSHIP

By the 1980s the business of teaching people how to become leaders had boomed. Our understanding of what makes a leader effective was being studied in universities and trained in workplaces around the world. There was a belief that someone who was successful, confident, wealthy and assertive was the kind of leader needed to run

big business. Think of the Gordon Gecko character in the movie *Wall Street* or the property mogul Donald Trump. Consequently, business leaders with charismatic personalities, flashy promises and autocratic methods emerged.

During the 1980s these leaders focused on the importance of charisma and saw a significant increase in social status, much like Hollywood stars or professional athletes. Prominent business leaders of the time were described as idols, heroes, saviours, warriors, magicians and demi-gods.²⁶ Socially elite CEOs became the focus of news stories, society pages and bestselling biographies, as we fixated on the personas and characteristics of the leaders themselves.²⁷ Whereas in the mid-twentieth century, the CEO of a typical large company may have been paid twenty times a line worker's salary, a CEO thirty years later soon began to make nearly 300 times as much.²⁸

Before author Michael Lewis's successful books *Moneyball*, *The Big Short* or *The Blind Side* were published, he had been a bond salesman with Salomon Brothers. His first book, *Liar's Poker*, was published in 1989 about his time on Wall Street. In it, Lewis recalls how, on his first day at Salomon Brothers, he and other new traders were told the trading floor was like a jungle and the guy you ended up working for would become your jungle leader. Surviving at Salomon Brothers depended on your ability to know how to survive in the jungle. Being a Salomon trainee, according to Lewis, was like being beaten up every day by the neighbourhood bully. Not surprisingly, within three years, three-quarters of all new graduates had moved on.

Speaking in 2022, Lewis said that in the 1980s Wall Street 'tolerated a range of human behaviour and a range of characters that corporations don't today. The corporate culture was almost anything goes.'²⁹

What mattered most to charismatic leaders during this period was power and making money. There was a popular prevailing belief that

leadership meant motivating employees to do what they otherwise would not do, possibly through inspiring, emotionally charged visions, which helped perpetuate the cult of such leaders.³⁰

Neutron Jack

Jack Welch, the only son of a homemaker and a railway conductor, rose through the ranks of the multinational corporation General Electric (GE) to become the company's youngest-ever CEO and chairman. It was a role he would hold for the next twenty years as he profoundly reshaped GE, increasing the market value of the company from \$12 billion in 1981 to \$410 billion when he retired. By 1999, Welch had been named 'Manager of the Century' by *Fortune* magazine. When he led GE throughout the 1980s and 1990s he epitomised the strong, decisive, charismatic leader of the period who was focused on increasing shareholders' returns.

Not surprisingly, there was a cost to all this business growth. In a period of four years, Welch cut 100,000 jobs and his critics questioned whether the short-term pressure he applied to employees may have led GE to cut corners and contribute to the many scandals and environmental issues that arose during his reign. In the early 1980s Welch received a nickname that stuck, but one he was known to dislike: Neutron Jack. He had become famous for 'vaporizing people but leaving buildings intact'.³¹

People who worked for Welch described it like being at war. 'A lot of people get shot up; the survivors go on to the next battle.'³² Welch was famous for his explosive temper and would argue his way from one decision to another, causing those he led to cower in fear. He fostered a cutthroat culture including a process of 'stack ranking' where managers were required to sort their workers into A, B and C employees – A workers were the top 20 per cent of performers, B workers were 70 per cent of workers who were average, and C workers were the bottom 10 per cent. Every year anyone graded as a C was fired. This edict was implemented across

GE regardless of how well the company was doing; tens of thousands of employees would be shown the door every year. It left most workers afraid for their jobs and colleagues in competition with one another.³³

The culture Welch led and created within GE was destructive and left a legacy the company never overcame. This legacy also extended beyond the confines of GE. For a time in the early part of the twenty-first century, five of the top thirty companies in the Dow Jones Industrial average were run by men who had worked for Neutron Jack.³⁴

The traditional-leader model Jack Welch represented is still evident in the corporate and political world today. His leadership has had a lasting influence on how workers are treated, how shareholders are prioritised and how CEOs see their role. Interestingly, Kenneth Lay was another business leader who enjoyed a rise to public fame during the 1980s as the CEO and chairman of Enron, a company which would later collapse in the face of significant financial crimes and fraud.

By the end of the twentieth century, our fascination with larger-than-life leaders gave way to feelings of frustration and anger. There was widespread recognition that a new type of leader was needed.

Hula skirts on Wall Street

While there has been much written about the 1980s as a period of leader worship and excess, it was not the case that all leaders during that time were in the mould of Jack Welch or Kenneth Lay. In 1984 the second wealthiest man in the United States, and the leader of one of the country's largest businesses, took to Wall Street in a hula skirt.

Samuel Moore Walton was a highly respected businessman and chairman of the Wal-Mart group of companies. He had bet his chief operating officer that Walmart could not achieve a pre-tax profit of 8 per cent on sales at a time when the industry average was 3 per cent. When the company went on to exceed the target, the question

on his leadership team's lips was whether Walton would follow through on his agreement. You can imagine a man as powerful as Walton, who had just battled a bout of leukaemia at the age of sixty-five, could have passed on his commitment. After all, Walton was said to be genuinely embarrassed by what he had agreed to do. Nevertheless, Walton followed through. He donned a bright-green Hawaiian shirt, grass hula skirt and headpiece in freezing temperatures on Wall Street. It wasn't a quiet, subtle event. A troupe of three Hawaiian dances and a two-piece Hawaiian band with ukulele and a xylophone joined him, along with a media pack of more than one hundred people including journalists from *Good Morning America*, CBS and CNN.

Professor Richard Tedlow from Harvard University has studied the great titans of industry and considered this event in detail. Walton had been preaching to his 65,000 employees for decades a belief in leadership that opposed the Great Man theory and excesses of the 1980s. He believed rank did not have its privileges and salespeople on the floor were just as important as top executives. Tedlow believes Walton's dance signalled he was a down-to-earth guy who didn't have any inflated view of himself.³⁵

Walton led with humility and had the self-awareness to know the impact such a moment of leadership could have on his wider employee group. And the response to the event reflected how his leadership was viewed by those who worked for him. 'He's a really great guy that carries through on his promises,' said one employee.³⁶

It is too simplistic to say that a leader as powerful as Walton could create a new wave of leaders in the 1980s simply by donning a hula skirt on Wall Street. While a token of humble leadership, centuries of thinking of leaders as heroic idols persisted. Leaders were still those with formal positions of power and titles with great authority and remained powerful, white, rich men.

It has only been since the start of the twenty-first century that we have ushered in a new era of leadership. Modern leaders like

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky represent a new style of leadership on the world stage. They also represent a new model of leadership for us all.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Understanding the legacy of where we have come from in our views of leadership in the Western world is important in helping us rethink leadership in a modern context.
- The people we think about and celebrate as leaders have been shaped by centuries of Western tradition which have largely excluded all but the most powerful and privileged of men.
- Modern leaders like Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and President Volodymyr Zelensky have demonstrated a new model of leadership on the world stage through successfully integrating their head and heart.

FURTHER READING

Susan David, *Emotional Agility: Get unstuck, embrace change and thrive in work and life* (2016).

David Gelles, *The Man who Broke Capitalism: How Jack Welch gutted the heartland and crushed the soul of corporate America – and how to undo his legacy* (2022).

Art Kleiner, *The Age of Heretics: Heroes, outlaws, and the forerunners of corporate change* (1996).

Michael Lewis, *Liar's Poker* (1989).

Richard S. Tedlow, *The Emergence of Charismatic Business Leadership* (2021).

2

USHERING IN A NEW ERA OF LEADERSHIP

A TECHNOLOGY COMPANY POWERED BY PEOPLE

The appointment of Satya Nadella as Microsoft CEO in 2014 marked a clear shift to modern leadership in the corporate world. Nadella placed care and a growth mindset at the cornerstone of his leadership style. Under Nadella, the culture at Microsoft would be rebuilt from the ground up.

Before his appointment, rigour and discipline had been a critical part of the corporate culture at Microsoft. Competitors had been seen as the enemy to be destroyed. It was a culture tough on mistakes and the phrase ‘the biggest room in the house is the room for improvement’ was frequently heard. It was also a culture experiencing declining sales growth and lost market share in mobile and operating systems to Apple and Google. A new way of leading was needed.

Under Nadella’s leadership, Microsoft ushered in a clear break from the past. The view was shared within the company that ‘value is not born through traditional leadership – it is born through leaders who are mentors more than bosses, coaches more than managers’.³⁷

Traditional leadership styles were to be a relic of the past at Microsoft under Nadella. During an interview with organisational

psychologist Adam Grant in 2022, Nadella said that as the first non-founder CEO of Microsoft he felt in some sense he needed to ‘refound’ the company. He explained what he meant by this in saying that it was a moment to reground himself and start with a sense of purpose in the mission of Microsoft – ‘why do we exist and if we disappeared, would anybody miss us?’ Nadella went on to say that anyone who works in a company needs such anchoring to make decisions and to do the work they do.³⁸

In 2019 Nadella announced Microsoft would be rolling out a new management framework for all 16,000 leaders across the company. Centred around having a growth mindset, Microsoft’s Model-Coach-Care framework represented a break from the past and embedded a leadership approach across the entire organisation focused on driving cultural change.

Drawing on the work of Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, having a growth mindset speaks to the underlying beliefs we have about failure and success. If we adopt a growth mindset, as opposed to a fixed mindset, we seek to understand why we might have failed at something and can respond quickly. If we have a fixed mindset, we see that failure as being linked to our individual identity, making it much harder to bounce back. By underpinning the Model-Coach-Care framework with the value of a growth mindset, Microsoft was signalling to their leaders the importance of self-awareness, humility and curiosity.

Model-Coach-Care represents how Microsoft views the role of leaders. Essentially, they deliver success through empowerment and accountability via role modelling, coaching and caring. Examples of the various ways leaders at Microsoft are expected to show these leadership behaviours are listed in Table 1.

Satya Nadella has said that ideas excite him while empathy grounds and centres him.³⁹ As CEO, Nadella openly shared his view that integrating the head and heart in his leadership would drive the change needed in Microsoft’s culture. Nadella argued that without

Model	Acting as role models of Microsoft’s culture and values Practising a growth mindset
Coach	Defining team objectives Helping teams adapt and learn Allowing people to learn from mistakes Emphasising the potential for individuals to grow and learn
Care	Attracting and retaining great people Understanding team members’ capabilities and aspirations Investing in the growth of others

Table 1: Microsoft’s Model-Coach-Care framework

valuing empathy, Microsoft would never understand the needs of their customers and especially those customers they did not already know. He embraced thinking through what others must be feeling and seeking to understand what their needs might be and how those needs could be met.

The success of his approach has been profound and Microsoft’s growth trajectory under Nadella has been well reported. Microsoft proudly promotes empathy as a bottom-line value leading to happier employees, increased customer satisfaction, greater profits and a stronger brand.

According to Satya Nadella, success comes from empathy.⁴⁰ He rewards individuals who can lead with both their heads and their hearts. When he was appointed Microsoft’s CEO, his executive team was chosen from people who had technical capability *and* could lead with empathy and humility. Nadella rewarded curiosity and the notion that every leader, no matter how senior they were, could learn from whoever was speaking. This promoted a culture where people felt free to push forward good ideas.

The recognition of a need for modern leaders in business had arrived.

**The recognition of a need for modern leaders
in business had arrived.**

MODERN LEADERS AMONG US

There is now widespread recognition that simply managing people to undertake tasks is not leadership. We seek leaders who set aside personal interest for the benefit of others, and who recognise humility is required to focus on the needs and aspirations of those they lead, rather than themselves. Authentic leaders are in demand; leaders with a growth mindset and the self-awareness to accurately assess their limitations and treat others with respect.

Satya Nadella is a leader who values leading with his head and heart. Yet, like Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and President Volodymyr Zelensky, Nadella is a leader with a formal title, authority and power. What is equally important to remember when we think of modern leaders is that they are among us every day. Modern leadership is not limited to a hierarchical position, as traditional leadership models of the past might have emphasised.

Even now, if I ask you to picture a leader, you will probably imagine someone well known – a world leader or a corporate titan; a leader made famous through their actions such as Nelson Mandela or Ghandi. We know from research that when asked to imagine a leader, children imagine a man.⁴¹ Whoever you have in mind, you are likely to have pictured a leader with authority and a formal title. Someone who can influence world economic markets with a single tweet or someone who has the power to impact millions of people's lives.

But head and heart leaders can lead irrespective of the context or situation they find themselves leading in. It may be different responsibilities and spheres of influence to those running global companies or entire countries, absolutely, but they are still leading.

The truth is, the leaders we spend the most time with look just like you. While the scope of our leadership may be less than someone with more power than ourselves, the people we do lead are still impacted by the quality of our leadership.

Modern leaders draw on qualities we all have, often in abundance, and which can develop even further as we become conscious of the impact we have on others. But, first, we need to accept that we are leaders too.

RECOGNISING MODERN LEADERS

Leading as parents

Clare Wright works at the interface of activism and academia as a Professor of History and Public Engagement at Latrobe University in Melbourne. She is an award-winning historian, author, documentary filmmaker, podcaster and broadcaster, and is passionate about democracy at the coal face.

But ask Clare if she is a leader and she has a firm answer: no.

For Clare, the notion of leadership is tied up in stereotypes of formal, corporate positions with power and authority; the legacy of leadership from theories like that of the Great Man. Clare tells me, 'I have never seen myself as a leader because I have not aspired to have formal leadership roles and we very often define leadership through a corporate logic of what leadership means.' She added, 'I've never read any books about leadership.'

Clare and I talked about whether she felt parents are leaders. She agreed they are. I asked whether she had ever read any parenting books. She hasn't.

Yet, I point out to Clare, she is still a parent.

'Yeah, true.' She laughs.

Clare is typical of many who do not see themselves as leaders. Our deeply entrenched notion of what leadership looks like has created preconceived notions and, for people like Clare, those stereotypes were not the kind of leader she was interested in being.

Clare's work as a historian has focused on women who are rebels and rule breakers, and women who throw caution to the wind. She could almost be writing about her mother.

Ruth Leonards was a woman who had always charted her own path. A single mother, in 1974 she moved from the United States with Clare as a small child, eager to start a new life in Australia, a world away from the life she had known. On settling in her new home, Ruth trained as a teacher and taught in a working-class boys technical school. Not simply a teacher, Ruth soon became the school's union representative, profoundly influencing Clare's understanding and view of collective action and what union leadership involved. Clare's perception of what female leadership looked like would eventually be galvanised by the Victorian nurses' strike of 1986, led by Irene Bolger, a paradigm-shifting industrial event that occurred when Clare was in her final year of high school.

In virtually every interview I conducted while researching this book, the role of parents as leadership role models – positive or not – was raised by those I spoke with. For some, parents taught them what not to do as leaders in their lives. For others, parents (and most commonly, mothers) were early role models of what was possible.

Professor Megan Davis is an Aboriginal Cobble Cobble woman from Queensland. She is a constitutional and human rights lawyer as well as Professor of Law and Pro-Vice-Chancellor Indigenous at the University of New South Wales. Megan and her four siblings grew up in single-parent household, living in government housing, unable to afford luxuries like a car. Megan's mother, Dawn, herself from a working poor family, understood education was key to her children's social mobility. Megan recalls her mother would spend the little money she had to buy second-hand books for her children even though the single-parent pension barely covered essential bills.

As Megan says now, she recognises many of her leadership skills came from her mother, whose leadership impact left a powerful legacy. Dawn's commitment to educating her five children and developing

in them a sense of public service meant each of the Davis children has made an extraordinary contribution to others' lives through their leadership. One of Megan's brothers is a social worker specialising in assisting children of the Stolen Generations, and he is also actively involved in youth detention and child protection. Another of Megan's brothers, a teacher, runs an Aboriginal economic development housing project, and Megan's sister works for the Salvation Army. For Megan, her mother Dawn demonstrated leadership as she raised her family throughout her life even though she had no formal title, privilege or authority.

In Western society we have not adequately recognised or valued Clare's mother, Ruth, or Megan's mother, Dawn, as leaders. These are women far from the idealised notions of Carlyle's Great Man; however, they are everyday leaders making a sizeable impact on our world.

It is not just in the home that we see unheralded leaders. In hospitals, government departments, sporting teams, retail stores, aged-care homes – in every industry – we witness leaders leaving a legacy for those who follow.

Lifelong lessons from a \$50 note

Mike Henry is the CEO of BHP, one of the largest companies in the world. Mike's mother is a third-generation Japanese Canadian nurse and his father, who moved to Canada from Scotland, had a career in the navy. Mike says it was his parents who instilled in him a strong sense of values during his childhood on Vancouver Island.

When he was ten years old, Mike remembers riding his bicycle with his younger brother to a beach near his home called The Spit, just outside Langford, British Columbia. Like many young children, Mike and his younger brother enjoyed adventures, walking along the beach searching for interesting pieces of wood or Japanese fishing balls that might have washed up on the sand. One day, nestled under a log, they found a black wallet. It had a \$50 note inside.

This was the 1970s so the boys thought \$50 would set them up for life. Mike put the wallet in his pocket, and he and his brother excitedly rode their bikes home and rushed to ask their parents' advice on what to do next.

Their answer would ground Mike in a set of values, and a sense of accountability, to help shape the leader he was to become.

His parents simply said, 'It is your decision.'

After wistfully imagining the many adventures they could have with more pocket money in their hands than they could ever hope to earn, the Henry brothers made the decision to return the wallet to its rightful owner.

The lesson Mike and his brother learnt would be a familiar one to many: offering children an opportunity to learn, not through instruction, but by being given the autonomy to decide themselves. Mike's parents were leading in that moment, and they helped shape the leader Mike is today.

It reminded me of the story of a British teenager who, with his father in 2022, found an unopened safe while out fishing.⁴² The pair had been magnet fishing in the River Witham when they came across the remarkable find at the bottom of the river. Magnet fishing is a pastime enjoyed by those in search of treasures nestled on riverbeds. A magnet, attached to a rope and often with a grappling hook in support, is used to bring heavy magnetic objects to the surface.

On this occasion, the teenager and his father discovered treasure in the form of an unopened safe. Using a crowbar to crack it once it reached the surface, they found cash and credit cards inside, allowing them to identify the owner and return the contents.

The safe had been stolen in a robbery more than twenty years earlier and after being impressed by the honesty and initiative of the teenager involved, the owner of the safe offered him a job in his wealth management company. A good lesson for all.

Leadership is simply a series of moments, and every moment leaves a legacy for those we lead.

Leadership is simply a series of moments, and every moment leaves a legacy for those we lead.

Leading through visibility

We are leaders through the way we conduct ourselves in the world, whether on the public stage or in private. Susan Carland is an academic, television presenter and author. She converted to Sunni Islam in her first year of university and specialises in researching women in Islam. Susan knows she is a role model to others. 'There is a certain responsibility I feel being a public Muslim woman,' says Susan.

'I am conscious as a Muslim woman, who wears the headscarf or hijab in public, that something comes with that. There is a weight of representation and leadership that young Muslim teenage girls might see me and think they could do that too – or do it even better than me,' says Susan.

Susan understands we are all role models to others. 'You get to choose whether you are a good role model or a bad one,' says Susan. 'People are always watching every aspect of our lives; how you behave in the car park when someone cuts you off or how you treat the wait staff in a local restaurant.'

'We make a choice about the influence we want to have on the people around us,' she says. 'What kind of person do you want to be? How do you want to be remembered?'

Frances Hesselbein was fifty-four years old before she accepted her first professional job. For twenty years before that she had volunteered as a troop leader with a local Girl Scouts group. She would eventually go on to become the CEO of the Girl Scouts of the USA, leading a three-million-member organisation and US\$300 million cookie business. When Frances retired at seventy-five years of age, highly respected management and strategy expert Peter Drucker described her as the best CEO in the country.

Without any formal qualifications and starting her career late

in life, Hesselbein became a visible role model for what is possible and how leaders are amongst us, every day. Hesselbein was eventually awarded twenty-three honorary doctorates as well as the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honour in the United States. She told author David Epstein, 'I did not intend to become a leader. I just learned by doing what was needed at the time.'⁴³

Leading from the margins

Yves Rees is an academic, writer and activist committed to helping advocate and lead for those in need. 'I'm very conscious,' Yves tells me, 'that I'm the rare trans person in Australia who is highly educated, has a public platform, economic privilege and racial privilege. I feel a strong responsibility to use that for the benefit of the trans community and to advocate for trans rights.'

Yves, who uses the pronouns they/them, is an academic who says they lead in several ways. 'I provide leadership to the students I teach, role modelling what it means to be a researcher, an academic, a thinker and a writer,' says Yves.

Yves believes you are a leader the moment you do something differently or question how things are done. They also don't think you need to wait to be handed leadership; it can be seized. For Yves, 'leadership is a practice, not a title'.

Yves was raised with a traditional sense of leadership. Their parents were both lawyers working in the public service and judiciary. 'My parents gave me a sense of leadership that was very closely tied to service; the idea that leadership is not for one's own ambitions, aggrandisement or wealth, but the ambition to serve the broader community,' says Yves.

Yves tells me traditional forms of leadership were unattractive from an early age. 'All through my schooling we were constantly encouraged to strive to be formal leaders and I always found that idea deeply repellent and dull,' they say. 'Reflecting on that now, I realise it

is because that model of leadership is really tired; it is deeply conservative. It is deeply tied to upholding the status quo, including upholding and protecting institutions, and not leading change.'

Yves has never shied away from being asked to lead. They were school captain of their primary school, and they were always being asked to join various committees because they fitted into the academically high-achieving model of what a leader is meant to look like.

Since coming out as trans in recent years, Yves has embraced a different model of leadership. Moving into queer activist spaces has been, for Yves, a turning point.

'Coming out as trans was a real experience in loss of privilege and enhanced marginality,' says Yves. 'I'd gone from being this rich white kid, to – still white – but now trans. It caused a grappling with power and privilege and hierarchies. I felt I had gone from the centre to the margins.'

It was only once Yves found themselves on the margins they realised 'it is at the margins where interesting things happen; where new ideas are forged and where actual, real leadership happens, because that is where the status quo is challenged and new ways of being and thinking about the world are modelled and discussed'.

Yves found this form of leadership exciting in a way traditional command and control models of leadership were not. 'Leadership at the margins is fundamentally invested in challenging the status quo instead of upholding it,' say Yves.

Once Yves found a new kind of leadership, they also noticed the qualities of those who led in this way were different to the traditional leaders they had always been taught to admire. 'These people were humble, incredibly kind, played with humour and humility, had a lot of personal integrity and were not afraid to admit when they were wrong,' says Yves. All attributes of a truly modern leader.

Leading through role models

Award-winning astronomer, author and the Australian Government's Women in STEM Ambassador Lisa Harvey-Smith has never been uncomfortable with calling herself a leader. 'I don't think it's a dirty word and I don't have any reticence around using it,' says Lisa. 'You are always a leader in your area of expertise. Even if you don't have a job and you are raising a family, you're a leader of your family. Everyone is a leader.'

Lisa names two young Indigenous astronomers, Karlie Noon and Kirsten Banks, as examples of modern leaders. The two women speak up for Indigenous community interests and promote knowledge in astronomy on social media while studying and researching in an academic setting. 'They are genuinely leading with no formal structures behind them,' says Lisa.

Mia Freedman is the co-founder of the women's media company Mamamia, which she co-founded with her husband, Jason Lavigne, in 2007. At the age of twenty-four she was the youngest editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine in Australia and in recent years she has created a media empire through her digital media company, Mamamia. Mia understands leadership is not about having a corner office and a business card. 'Leadership is something you see everywhere, all the time,' she tells me. 'I think sometimes women think you have to wait for some kind of invitation to lead, like Willie Wonka's Golden Ticket, whereas men will grab those leadership opportunities.'

Mia founded a group called Lady Startup to support business-women launch their micro and small businesses. Through online courses, Mia has brought together women leaders, many running their businesses from home, helping them feel less isolated and providing the means for them to learn together through the various obstacles thrown their way. Lady Startup has grown into a movement of more than 200,000 women who participate in the Lady Startup Academy and share their stories and support one another online. There is no doubt in Mia's mind these women are leaders. 'It is such a myth

that you need a team to lead,’ Mia says. ‘You don’t have to change the world or be disruptive to an entire industry. All the decisions you make around your business, you can lead. You can be a leader by being a role model.’

Leading on the sports field

Traditional definitions of leaders have simply not kept pace with the changing nature of who we celebrate as leaders.

Traditional definitions of leaders have simply not kept pace with the changing nature of who we celebrate as leaders.

Former Australian soccer captain and human rights advocate Craig Foster agrees role models are the true leaders. ‘In professional sport, reasonably often, the person with the title is not the person the team will migrate to and look to for support and guidance,’ Craig tells me. ‘The team will migrate to the person who they know has their best interests at heart. Sometimes, but not always, it will be the person who wears the captain’s arm band.’

‘Very frequently, when the game is not going well, when the team is being attacked in some way either by the media, officials or fans, the group will gather around those who have demonstrated care for them,’ says Craig. ‘These are the people who have shown they have their best interests at heart and who they know will stand up for them . . . To me, that’s what leadership is.’

Craig has led soccer teams, a union movement and a human rights campaign. He believes leadership is guiding others through the role modelling of behaviour.

Craig grew up in regional New South Wales where, he says, leaders were often identified by talent. As a skilled soccer player, Craig captained all his sporting teams from an early age. At the age of ten, when parents on an opposing team started abusing some of his team, he recalls marching over to the parents at the end of the

game to tell them what they were doing was wrong. He asked the adults why they were attacking his teammates. Craig remembers it as a heated exchange. 'I was always prepared to fight for the rights of others,' he tells me. 'I have always had a very strong pro-justice and anti-injustice streak.'

Craig's father held leadership roles in the community as a mechanic and woodworker and was an active volunteer. 'He was very community minded,' Craig says. 'He was everyone's friend and didn't like conflict.'

Craig's mother, Deanne, had been a homemaker for much of Craig's childhood. She entered the workforce for the first time in her thirties, when Craig was a teenager, to help support her three sons who all played sport. Deanne worked in the kitchen of the local workers' club – a frontline role traditionally not celebrated or recognised as that of a leader.

Craig recalls his mother transitioning from 'being a meek, not nervous, but introverted woman' to taking on management within a few years. Like Clare Wright's mother who became a union representative at the school where she taught, Deanne became a union representative for her work colleagues in the kitchen.

Women like Deanne, and so many others who do not have power and authority in the traditional sense, influenced and impacted the lives of those around them in critically important ways. They are examples of the leaders among us.

Re-defining leadership

We urgently need to rethink how we define leadership.

The concept of modern leadership is broader than simply thinking about our formal authority or positions of power. Just like the grocery-store worker who calmly led in response to an angry customer during the pandemic, we are all role models to someone else. If we are a teacher, we role model leadership to our students. If we drive a bus, we role model leadership in the way we conduct ourselves with fellow motorists and our passengers.

Not everyone aspires to own the grocery store, become the school principal, or run the bus company, but they can still be a modern leader.

Broadening the definition of leadership is not suggesting that everyone is a formal leader; I am not suggesting that we can all suddenly think of ourselves as the CEO. That would lead to chaos.

But what is needed is a shift from the way we have thought of leaders for centuries, where we have viewed them as a finite resource. Leadership is not a scarcity competition; everyone wins when we all lead well.

A leader is anyone who can influence and impact others through their words, actions and behaviours. A modern leader understands the most effective way to lead is by using their head and their heart.

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For Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, Mark Scott, leadership is about influencing others to move in a positive direction that is beneficial to all. He believes these behaviours and the ability to influence can be demonstrated and role modelled by anyone. Mark is fascinated by organisational culture and references the father of the field, Edgar Schein, as a reminder that real leadership sits at the core of an organisation. Schein, a former professor of MIT Sloan School of Management, developed much of our modern thinking about organisational culture and remains an influential voice, even today.

Daisy Turnbull is a teacher, student-wellbeing expert and author. She is also the daughter of former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and former Lord Mayor of Sydney Lucy Turnbull and so has been exposed to formal leadership role models throughout her life. While Daisy understands what it means to lead with power and

authority, she also understands the importance of leading in informal moments as well. 'Leadership can happen in smaller moments,' says Daisy. 'Sharing your experience, and being authentic and vulnerable, are all leadership.'

'Everyone is a leader to someone,' says Daisy. 'And that is a great thing. There are some people who don't want formal leadership titles; they may just want to teach and not get involved in the management of a school, and that is to be respected. It is still a form of leadership.'

Informal leaders are modern leaders

The view that having followers is a pre-requisite to being a leader has heavily influenced our notion of traditional leaders as being those who command armies, run large corporations or lead countries. If we believe leaders are only those with formal authority and positions of power, logic tells us followers are an essential ingredient for leadership.

The Cambridge dictionary is a case in point. In the British edition, a leader is narrowly defined as 'a person in control of a group, country or situation'. The American edition refines the definition slightly and makes an important addition. In it, a leader is 'a person who manages or controls other people, especially because of his or her ability or position'. In both cases, the definition relies on outdated notions of command and control, formal modes of leadership and an assumption of the need for followers.

If we continue to accept leaders are only those with formal titles and responsibilities who manage or control others, then we continue to exclude, rather than include, most people who are leading in their lives and workplaces. Such a definition means not accepting a nurse who acts with compassion in a dying patient's final moments as a leader; it means not accepting that teachers, parents or entrepreneurs starting their business on their kitchen benches are leaders.

Modern leadership does not depend on formal notions of followership. Such a narrow definition of leaders ignores the informal

leaders in our organisations who may not have formal authority but who are looked to by those they work with to guide the way. It ignores nurses who may not have direct reports, in the traditional sense, but who lead through the care and wellbeing they offer their patients. It ignores leaders of ideas like Greta Thunberg who do not start with followers and hold no position of authority, but demonstrate leadership the moment they have a cause to believe in and decide to act.

Traditional views of leadership also ignore leaders of movements and ideas such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter. The co-creators of Black Lives Matter include three Black women, two who identify as queer and one who is an immigrant; leaders who through history have been forced to lead at the margins as we focused on celebrating heroic, generally male, leaders of the past.

One of the co-creators of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza, is eager to reinforce she is a small part of a collective leadership model. 'This movement is not only so much bigger than Black Lives Matter,' she says. 'This movement is not only longer and older than me, it is longer and older than many people alive on this planet right now . . . I am feeling honoured to be the smallest piece of this incredible movement.'⁴⁴

Garza says she believes 'leadership can not only look different, but it can have a different substance where it is actually grounded in communities; communities that have been pushed to the margins, communities that have been pushed underground, communities who've been robbed of our rights and of our dignity – that the new paradigm is that those communities have leadership to offer, and we need to accept it'.⁴⁵ Garza continues, 'I feel really honoured to be part of a movement that has really pushed to change the way we lead so that we can change how power operates.'

Rethinking the leaders we value and recognise is not only critically important at a community level but in our institutions as well.

Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll believes 'everyone, whichever way you look at it, has some form of leadership

role in their life to do certain things'. She says that when she wants to implement cultural or widespread changes in her organisation of more than 12,000 police officers, she will seek out the informal leaders who, for Katarina, play a pivotal role in getting things right. 'When I look through my career, there are people who were in an informal leadership role who had such an important impact,' she says. 'They might have never pursued a formal leadership role and just go about their business, but they are insightful in what they say and how they deliver it. They are incredibly important.' Often Katarina will speak with an informal leader and realise they would have made a brilliant commissioner; they are smart and empathetic; they lead with their head and heart. 'Leaders are everywhere,' says Katarina.

The cost of thinking of leaders as being part of a narrow group in a formal, traditional way is that it limits our sense of whether we see ourselves as leaders too.

The cost of thinking of leaders as being part of a narrow group in a formal, traditional way is that it limits our sense of whether we see ourselves as leaders too.

Three-time Olympian and four-time gold medallist Libby Trickett believes we can all be leaders, whatever the context. 'I have no desire to be the CEO of BHP,' says Libby. 'Leadership looks different to different people. We just must find a way that works for us.'

LEADERSHIP AS A PRIVILEGE

Mike Henry, who *is* the CEO of BHP, believes most people don't realise the size of the impact they can have as leaders. As the CEO of a company with more than 80,000 employees and contractors working in ninety countries, he knows he has an enormous reserve of untapped leadership potential.

On a BHP leadership course for thirty emerging leaders, Mike remembers being one of the group feeling frustrated on the final day.

It had been an intensive course and they were given a group assignment as the last task. It had to be completed in two hours. Mike recalls most in the room declared it to be impossible.

One participant, a relatively junior member of the group, suddenly stood on a table. The room was silent. ‘No, we can do this,’ he confidently declared. Mike remembers the immediate impact within the group and the positive energy shift generated from a leader amid them with no formal authority but a growth mindset and the courage to step up.

‘Everyone has the capacity to lead, and leading doesn’t mean having people report to them,’ says Mike. ‘There are acts of leadership and there is the way people show up every day, what they are willing to take a stand for. Everyone has that capacity within them.’

‘When someone is willing to take a position on something and back themselves then that is the act of a leader,’ Mike tells me.

As leaders, and we are all leaders, we should never underestimate the impact we have on others through every action we take. We raise and educate children; we control decisions that impact the livelihoods of others; our words, actions and behaviours have power.

Leadership is a privilege and not an entitlement. We need to work hard to become the best version of a leader – a modern leader – that we can be.

Leadership is a privilege and not an entitlement.

Being a leader who runs a multinational technology behemoth like Satya Nadella, or being a mother like Megan Davis’ mother Dawn, raising five children with very little support, will have a different impact on the world. Yet in each moment these leaders are equally shaping the people they lead through the impact of their words, actions and behaviours. They are leaving a legacy in their wake.

Too often we think of leaders as someone else. Someone more senior than us; someone with a more important-sounding title; someone we aspire to be. We must rethink what we know about

leadership and understand why traditional leadership thinking is no longer fit for purpose. To lead with the head and the heart requires a recognition that any remnants of the stereotype of the heroic leader must be roundly debunked.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The narrow definition of leadership is no longer fit for purpose and excludes more leaders than it includes. We need a new mindset about the leaders we value and celebrate.
- Modern leadership is not a matter of everyone becoming a CEO but is about shifting our mindset of the impact and influence we have in the world.
- Everyone has the potential to have impact as leaders in the informal and formal roles they hold, irrespective of their formal title or responsibilities.

FURTHER READING

Carol Dweck, *Mindset: Changing the way you think to fulfil your potential* (2017).

Satya Nadella, *Hit Refresh: The quest to rediscover Microsoft's soul and imagine a better future for everyone* (2017).

Yves Rees, *All About Yves: Notes from a transition* (2021).

3

THE ART OF MODERN LEADERSHIP

HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Arne Sorenson was a leader likely to have been thought of by Thomas Carlyle as a great man. Originally a lawyer specialising in mergers and acquisitions, Sorenson joined the Marriott hotel group in 1996 as their general counsel and continued his rise through the ranks before being appointed the chief executive officer and the first executive outside of the Marriott family to lead the company. By 2019 he had been named CEO of the Year by *Chief Executive* magazine.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sorenson broadcast a video announcement for his staff. The video was published on 20 March 2020, just as the pandemic was unfolding in the United States and before many businesses had made any significant changes at all. Sorenson spoke candidly to his tens of thousands of employees; he was not afraid to show emotion and spoke humbly about their futures. ‘This is the most difficult video message we have ever pulled together,’ he said.⁴⁶

Sorenson explained COVID-19 was already having a bigger impact on Marriott than the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the 2009 global financial crisis combined. He said it was clear that because

of the challenges the business was facing, measures would need to be taken to reduce expenses, including the closure of hotels and a personal decision by him to not take any salary for the remainder of the year. He turned to the impact of these changes on his staff and grew visibly emotional. Sorenson said, 'There is simply nothing worse than telling highly valued associates, people who are the very heart of this company, that their roles are being impacted by events completely outside of their control. I have never been more determined to see us through than I am at this moment.'⁴⁷

Sorenson concluded with a sense of optimism for the future, even in the face of great uncertainty. He told them that 'together we can, and we will, overcome this and thrive again'. His speech epitomised a leader balancing his head and heart in the right way at the right time.

Sorenson looked gaunt in the video. It was the first time he had appeared in public while bald; a marked change from previous appearances. Sorenson was undergoing treatment for pancreatic cancer and, tragically, one year after the video was published, he died. Marriott's executive chairman and chairman of the board, J.W. Bill Marriott, Jr, said, 'Arne was an exceptional executive – but more than that – he was an exceptional human being.'⁴⁸

Sorenson's early pandemic announcement was a perfect example of leading with the head and heart. He had spoken with years of experience about the impact of the pandemic, including the company's strategic direction and the need to stem losses; he analysed what this might mean for the future of Marriott. He then blended the data and evidence with a deep level of humility, courage and empathy for those he was addressing. He was self-aware of the impact his words and actions would have on others. It is these qualities that made Sorenson a modern leader for the times.

Modern leaders are comfortable not having all the answers

Modern leaders recognise every moment offers the opportunity for us to leave a rough wake or smooth waters.

Modern leaders are not perfect. Far from it. Leading, like living, is a series of missteps and challenges, setbacks and lessons learnt. We will be invariably learning some of the same lessons our entire lives. The humility to know we don't have all the answers and the curiosity to search for a solution requires a modern leader who understands when to lead with their head, and when to lead with their heart.

The art of being a modern leader is knowing what balance of leadership attributes is needed, and when. In any given situation, context or conversation you will need to draw on skills from both the head and heart to be the most effective leader you can be. It is impossible to make a critical decision based on well-researched data without also considering the human cost of the decision.

There is no one way of leading well. Everyone will do it differently. The more attributes of a head and heart leader you can draw upon, the more effective you will be in the widest range of situations you might find yourself leading in.

There is no one way of leading well. Everyone will do it differently. The more attributes of a head and heart leader you can draw upon, the more effective you will be in the widest range of situations you might find yourself leading in.

In some situations, to get the best possible outcome in a conversation or a crisis, you will need to use different skills depending on the situation.

Knowing what leadership attributes to use, and when, is the art of modern leadership.

Journalist, playwright and producer Benjamin Law understands the need to get the balance right. As a leader in the creative sphere, Benjamin understands he has to back up creative decisions on an intellectual basis as well. 'If we are going to make head-based decisions, like how schedules work or who we should hire or fire, there

is a heart aspect to those decisions too,' Benjamin tells me. 'I think it's a folly to divorce the two things. It is a constant battle between them. Storytelling is about emotion and capturing emotional terrain, but at the same time it is an intellectually rigorous exercise,' says Benjamin.

Benjamin is conscious that in a writer's room he needs to lead with both his head and his heart. An emotional decision may have been made for a certain scene to be included on-screen, for example, but intellectual rigour needs to support the decision as well. Benjamin needs 'two halves of the same brain' working all the time.

For us to be successful modern leaders, we must be able to master leading with these two halves.

USING OUR HEADS AND HEARTS

Thinking about the head and heart as a metaphor is not new. Plato first suggested the head as the source of rational wisdom, and the heart as the source of passion. The simple term 'head and heart' has a long history and is a concept deeply embedded in Western culture.

Who hasn't said or heard the words 'my heart says yes, but my head says no'? We might also wear our heart on our sleeve, have a heart-to-heart talk with a friend, feel our heart in our mouth during moments of great tension, and we have probably all known someone we think has a heart of stone. When we tell someone to use their head, we want them to think rationally and logically about a problem. If we lose our head, we lose the capacity for clear thinking at all. When we use these terms in our everyday vernacular, we inherently understand their meaning.

One of the United States of America's founding fathers was not immune from struggling to balance head and heart. The third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, penned a 4000-word letter which he called 'The Dialogue of the Head vs. The Heart'⁴⁹ as he wrote of the tussle between his head and heart after meeting the married Maria Cosway.

In the nineteenth century, Swiss education reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi would refer to children learning by ‘head, hand and heart’. In Pestalozzi’s model, which would influence later academic theories of motivation, the ‘head’ referred to our rational intentions, the ‘heart’ to our emotional sphere, and our ‘hands’ to our skills and abilities.

Martin Luther King Jr believed people needed a tough mind and a tender heart. For King, to operate only from one’s head leaves one an ‘isolated island’ lacking genuine compassion, where individuals are not seen as people but as ‘mere objects or as impersonal cogs in an ever-turning wheel’.⁵⁰

Daniel Goleman, widely considered the father of the concept of emotional intelligence, wrote in his book *Primal Leadership*, ‘No creature can fly with just one wing. Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head – feeling and thought – meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar.’⁵¹

The metaphor of our head and heart is easily understood and allows us to think about the balance of attributes we need in a modern leader.

The metaphor of our head and heart is easily understood and allows us to think about the balance of attributes we need in a modern leader. Both types of qualities are equally important and will be called upon in different ways, at different times. What is important is having an ample supply of all the attributes, at any point in time.

LEARNING FAST

In 2006, Mark Scott had been brought in as the managing director of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to lead the organisation of 5000 employees. An outsider, he had only been in his role for a week when someone ran into his office in Sydney and said a woman from the Brisbane newsroom had developed breast cancer.

While clearly sad for the woman involved, he was confused about the urgency associated with passing him this news.

‘No, no, you don’t understand,’ Mark was told. ‘This is the fifteenth person from that newsroom who has developed breast cancer.’

The cases represented a risk rate six times that of the ordinary population. Mark immediately realised this was no ordinary situation and he needed to get up to speed, fast. He flew from Sydney to Brisbane and, despite being relatively unknown at the time, met with the Brisbane staff to understand their perspective.

Mark recalls seeing one woman who stood listening to him quietly, yet tearfully. He saw she was frightened to return to work, worried she too would be diagnosed with breast cancer. The assembled group challenged Mark about whether he would allow his daughters to work in that office. From that point Mark knew he had to lead his staff through this issue with both his head and heart.

Mark’s head told him he needed facts. Scientific investigations had already shown there was no cancer cluster; he had been told it was just ‘bad luck’. For Mark, and more importantly for the women working at the site, this was not a sufficient response. Mark committed to overseeing the composition of an eminent panel to investigate the data, including environmental factors that were of concern to employees, and provide advice on what to do next. Mark committed to those assembled they would get to see the panel’s report at the same time he did and that they would work out what they would do together.

The panel, after investigation, could not find conclusive evidence of a breast-cancer cluster. Regardless, Mark directed that the ABC abandon the site and move to a new location, even though the specific cause of the multiple cancer diagnoses was not clear.

What Mark reflects on now when he looks back at that time is how important leading with his heart – with empathy and self-awareness – was during such a fraught time for so many. He believes through visiting the Brisbane team immediately, he gained insight not just of

the women directly impacted by a breast cancer diagnosis but from other employees deeply traumatised by what they were witnessing. He could see first-hand their trepidation, uncertainty and fear.

For those who listened to Mark that day, they saw a leader who was prepared to show up and care. Through his words and actions, he demonstrated that their health and wellbeing was his top priority and he was prepared to do whatever it might take to rectify the situation.

The balancing of head and heart in this situation was made easier for Mark by him bringing into the workplace the normal instincts of empathy, care and responsibility he felt at home. He was able to integrate his leadership as a husband, father and son, and comfortably apply it to the workplace to the benefit of anxious and scared employees.

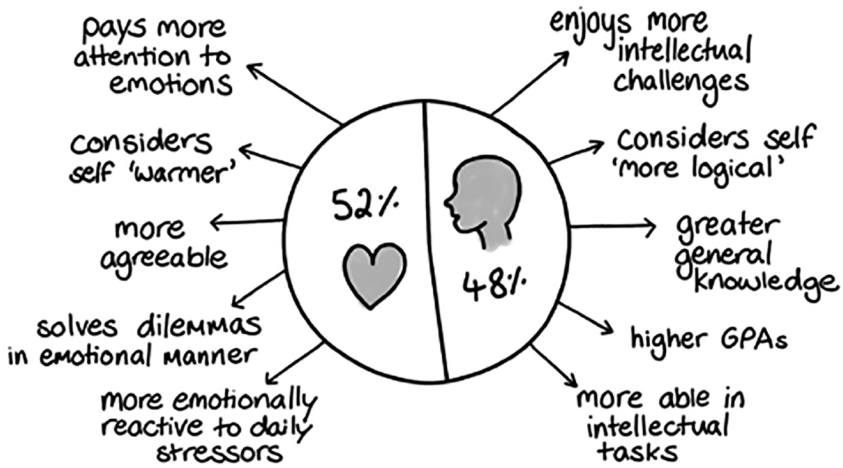
Heads and hearts in research

Thinking about the head and heart in a leadership context can't include the literal qualities or capacities metaphors ascribe them, but studies have shown that people don't just talk in metaphors but think in them too.

Researchers asked participants in a study to self-identify which body part they most closely associated with: their head or their heart. They found that those who primarily identified with the heart – 52 per cent of participants – paid greater attention to their emotions. They characterised themselves as warmer people, they scored higher on agreeableness, said they were more likely to solve dilemmas in an emotional manner, and they were more emotionally reactive to daily stressors.

The people who identified as primarily head-based – 48 per cent of participants – said they enjoyed intellectual challenges more than others, were more logical, had greater general knowledge, were better at intellectual tasks, and had higher grade point averages (GPAs) in their university results.⁵²

Those results intuitively made sense, but then the study got really interesting. Next, the researchers randomly selected the same



participants and asked them to answer general knowledge questions. As they were answering, the participants were instructed to either physically place their hand on their head (closest to their brain) or to hold their hand over their chest (closest to their heart).

Those who put their hands on their heads saw improved intellectual problem solving. The people who held their hands over the hearts while they answered the questions placed more emphasis on emotional factors in their decision-making.⁵³ The physical act of placing a hand near either the head or the heart played a role in how questions were answered.

Understanding the value of leading with the head and heart in theory is one thing. But what does this look like in practice? What leadership attributes do you use to lead with the head and heart?

LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES OF THE HEAD AND HEART

Using quantitative research and academic literature, I have identified eight leadership attributes that are the key ingredients for a modern leader.

I began by investigating the existing literature to identify those leadership concepts most frequently associated with leaders who are

seen as highly capable and emotionally intelligent. Before confirming the eight attributes, I wanted to empirically test their validity. In conjunction with Professor Lisa Bradley at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Business School, the Head & Heart Leader Scale was developed.

Using a sample group of more than 700 leaders, eight leadership attributes were identified and are explained in detail in Part 2 (head attributes) and Part 3 (heart attributes) of this book. Essentially, head-based attributes include curiosity, wisdom, perspective and capability. Heart-based attributes include humility, self-awareness, courage and empathy. Testing these attributes to develop the scale was able to confirm their validity.

You can read more about the Head & Heart Leader Scale in Appendix 2, including information on the sample group, methodology, means, reliabilities and correlations for the eight head and heart attributes. You can also complete the scale yourself and receive a free, personalised report by visiting www.headheartleader.com.

Four interesting findings of the research include:

1. **Leading with perspective has a special quality.** Being able to lead with perspective is highly correlated with a leader who has high levels of empathy, capability and self-awareness. Of all eight attributes, perspective has a special quality that, when utilised and developed, allows you to be an empathetic leader who is also capable and self-aware. Chapter 6 explores what it means to lead with perspective in much greater detail.
2. **Being aware of your limitations is key.** Being aware of your limitations is a key skill for modern leaders and strongly correlates with all eight head and heart attributes. This is because being aware of your limitations means you are more likely to be curious about other answers, humble about your inability to know everything and self-aware of your abilities.

3. **Modern leaders are prepared to challenge their assumptions.** Leaders who self-assess as being willing to challenge what they thought they knew are more likely to be leaders who self-assess as being courageous and having high levels of empathy. This is because they are willing to accept they don't know everything and are willing to seek out the views of others that may be quite different to theirs.
4. **Modern leaders are open to the ideas of others.** Our research shows that if you self-assess as being open to the ideas of others, you are likely to also have high levels of perspective, empathy and curiosity. This is because modern leaders value diverse points of view, are curious about things they may not understand, and they know that to make the best decision they must be able to 'read the room' and incorporate many different perspectives.

For all the leadership experiences we might have, the different teams we lead, the different ways we seek to lead in formal or informal ways – all of it comes down to knowing how and when to best lead with our heads and our hearts.

This is the art of modern leadership.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is no one way of leading with the head and heart, it will never be a one-size-fits-all practice.
- Throughout human history the metaphor of the head and heart has been used to explain ways of thinking about ourselves and the world.
- Understanding what attributes of our head and heart leadership are needed and when is the art of modern leadership.

FURTHER READING

Mark Scott, *On Us* (2020).

Arne Sorenson et al, *The Mind of the Leader: How to lead yourself, your people, and your organisation for extraordinary results* (2018).

PART 2

LEADING WITH OUR HEADS

When we think of leading with our ‘head’, it refers to the cognitive, rational, decision-making part of our brain. Doing so allows us to analyse complex data, weigh up risks and opportunities, create business strategies or write policies. Our head loves to focus on the tangible, find patterns and think about what can be measured and reviewed. It is a safe place for many of us because we can see, feel and touch the work we produce.

Our head, or our rational brain, helps us weigh up options and ensure bills are paid, and encourages us to keep studying for an exam even when we might want to be outside enjoying the sunshine. ‘Having our head screwed on right’ is exactly what we need when we are negotiating an important deal or when we are analysing a spreadsheet.

All leaders need intellect to grasp the tasks, roles and challenges they face. The output of our rational thinking allows us to learn the skills needed to become a surgeon or teach a class of kindergarten children. The technical skills we learn are often relied upon to see us promoted at work, receive a salary and achieve our goals. Results, strategies, budgets, competencies, systems, decisions and key

performance indicators are all valuable outputs from those who lead with their heads.

These tangible ways of thinking about the world are also reinforced during our education and working lives. We learn multiplication tables, facts, figures, formulas and historical dates during our primary and secondary education. After school we might learn a trade or attend university to learn the skills we will need to pursue our chosen careers. At work, we are rewarded for the work we produce, the technical prowess we bring to our tasks and the way we build and expand our knowledge. We are set up from childhood to believe intellect and clear decision-making is the key to the leadership door.

There is no doubt capability and technical proficiency are incredibly important. Without the skills our rational brain affords us, we would never be able to fulfil what is required of us as a leader. We need to be curious and seek to fill gaps in our knowledge. We need to be able to challenge assumptions and rethink what we think we know. We need to have the wisdom to understand what is known and unknown, weigh up risk and reward, and reflect on situations to make the best decisions we can. We also need to have the full perspective of the environment we are leading in and adjust our approach as required, trying to understand the implications of our decisions, a few steps ahead.

In Part 2 we will examine each of the head-based attributes of modern leadership in detail. These are:

- **Curiosity (Chapter 4).** For modern leaders, curiosity means having a genuine thirst for filling gaps in your knowledge. As curious leaders we acknowledge and accept that we do not know everything. We seek to learn, to challenge assumptions and rethink what we thought we knew.
- **Wisdom (Chapter 5).** A modern leader uses wisdom to assess what is known and unknown, weigh up risk and reward, search for data or evidence, and then assess the best possible path forward. Modern leaders use reason and logic to consider

the data or evidence we have before us, review what we observe and reflect on that information to best meet the needs of the situation or context we find ourselves in.

- **Perspective (Chapter 6).** As modern leaders we lead with perspective to understand the environment or context we are leading in and make decisions on the best path to take to enable the best possible outcome. We seek to see a few steps ahead and try to understand the implications of decisions before weighing up the best way forward.
- **Capability (Chapter 7).** Modern leaders build their capability through having a growth mindset towards whatever it is they do whether a profession, trade or hobby. Being capable is not only about continually learning a new endeavour but how we think about our capabilities as well. Leading with capability also allows us to develop others to have a growth mindset as they develop their own capability too.

Let's now look together, in detail, at what it means to lead with curiosity, wisdom, perspective and capability in practice, and also how we can develop these attributes of modern leaders in others.

CURIOSITY

MAGIC OF CURIOSITY

Lisa Harvey-Smith is an astronomer using her curiosity of the universe to open up a magical, childlike world to bring people together. 'I try and excite and thrill the world with the beauty of the universe,' says Lisa.

Lisa is an award-winning astrophysicist who also writes award-winning children's books. A true balance of head and heart. With titles like *Under the Stars: Astrophysics for Bedtime* and *Little Book, Big Universe*, Lisa hopes for children's curiosity to embrace the universe. 'My writing brings out a magical quality of curiosity,' Lisa tells me. 'And not only in the children, but also in the adults who read my books too.'

For Lisa, the true impact of astronomy on the world lies in the way discoveries are communicated. Engaging and communicating scientific concepts and research requires Lisa to lead with her heart through having the humility and courage to share science with others. Scientists need to be able to pique people's curiosity. 'If you want to share the beauty of the world and the impact of a discovery on choices around the environment, government decisions and policies, you need to be able to translate that discovery for an audience,' says Lisa.

Lisa values being curious as a leader. She sees her job as inspiring others by asking questions about a project someone might be working on or the motivations they might bring into a meeting. Lisa loves to ask, ‘What if we did it this way? What would happen?’

CURIOSITY AS A HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE

In our research to develop the Head & Heart Leader Scale, the questions relating to curiosity scored higher in the self-assessed scale than any others. This means participants identified the most strongly with curiosity as a leadership attribute. Those participants who did self-assess as curious, also self-assessed themselves more strongly on the heart-based attributes of courage and empathy. This is because being curious means you lead with an open mind and are willing to hear diverse points of view that may conflict with yours. It takes courage to be curious in this way, to ask questions, challenge ideas and overcome a fear of looking stupid. Curiosity is a superpower for leaders; always ready to be unleashed. Yet it is also a gift we often ignore as we race to a solution, often armed with assumptions.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As we consider what it means to lead with curiosity, reflect on your current leadership. Ask yourself:

- Are you someone who actively seeks answers to things you don't know?
- Do you believe there are still many things you can learn?
- Do you appreciate the opportunity to have your assumptions challenged?
- Are you usually willing to rethink what you thought you knew?
- Are you energised by learning something new?
- Do you view challenging situations as an opportunity to grow and learn?

I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to speak with management guru and leadership expert Jim Collins on a couple of occasions. Twice I have interviewed Jim in front of several thousand people, all of us eager to learn from him and to hear about the concepts made famous in his bestselling book, *Good to Great*. Once, after an event, Jim and I had a chance to talk alone. He was curious about my work, my time serving in the military and how I had prepared for the event. When I described this book, which I was working on at the time, I mentioned the importance of curiosity and his interest was piqued. Jim said he simply couldn't imagine not being curious, and it was evident to me that curiosity was simply part of his DNA.

When we think of the extraordinary contributions he has made to the fields of management and leadership, it is not surprising to learn he is a highly curious person. His entire body of work has been based on asking questions. Can a good company become a great company? What makes truly exceptional companies different from those that fail? Why do some companies thrive in uncertainty, even chaos, and others do not? Jim Collins has a level of intellectual curiosity that has served him throughout his career and from which he thrives.

We are born curious. Babies are constantly sticking things in their mouth and up their nose to see what happens, and to understand how something tastes and feels. Curiosity is innate to humans. To be curious about the world is to truly seek to understand and, importantly, not to understand only some things, but *any* thing.

To be curious about the world is to truly seek to understand and, importantly, not to understand only some things but *any* thing.

Who among us hasn't been down an internet rabbit hole chasing information sparked by an idea or an interest you may not have even

realised you had? Anyone who types a query into an online search engine is curious about something.

The inquisitive, curious adult is a wonderful thing. Intellectual curiosity is the pleasurable state of joyous exploration we feel as we are consumed with the wonders of the world and want to learn more about a topic and build our knowledge. It requires us to have the humility to know we don't know everything and admit others might know more than we do.

Being emotionally curious about other people and what makes them tick allows us to ask questions to build connection and trust. Emotional curiosity is listening to other people without assuming you know what they are going to say. It is not firing off questions and being insensitive to the feelings of others, but asking open questions without judgement in an effort to understand, rather than win, an argument. Absorbing what is being said by another and integrating it into our understanding of the conversation, circumstances or situation all involves emotional curiosity.

Throughout the history of the Western world, the perceived value of being curious has ebbed and flowed. Prometheus and Icarus are often thought of as mythological archetypes who were punished for their curiosity. During the Middle Ages curiosity became a vice and the extinguishment of curiosity became a central tenet of the Christian faith. By the late eighteenth century, Scottish philosopher, historian and economist David Hume had distinguished between curiosity for the sake of knowledge and snooping in your neighbours' affairs. But since the start of the twenty-first century there has been exponential growth in thinking about the application and approach of curiosity to what it means to be a leader.

Academy Award-winning film producer Brian Grazer, who is behind such films as *A Beautiful Mind*, *Parenthood* and *Splash*, believes curiosity has been the key to his success and his happiness. 'More than intelligence, persistence, or connections, curiosity has allowed me to live the life I have wanted to live,' says Grazer. 'Being curious infuses

everything with a sense of possibility' and gives energy and insight to everything else he does.⁵⁴

Curiosity exists on a spectrum. We might be curious about inconsequential things like whether the mail has been delivered or big issues like how to tackle climate change. We might be curious to know how eel tastes, or we may want to know how the people we work with feel about a particular issue. Curiosity can extend to snooping, eavesdropping or gossiping to find out more about what happened next.

Curiosity can also be experienced as a feeling of pleasure, or as a sense of deprivation. Think of the curiosity we experience when we have been deprived of information. When we watch a movie and cannot remember the name of the actor, we may need to search the internet until we find out, because the not remembering, or needing to know, can feel insatiable. The information gap must be corrected to feel comfortable again.

Harnessing citizen-led curiosity

Manu Prakash is a Professor at Stanford University where he runs the Prakash Lab which is focused on developing tools to democratise access to curiosity-driven science. His invention, the Foldscope, is a low-cost microscope assembled through paper and origami techniques. Printed with botanical illustrations, the Foldscope is roughly the size of a bookmark, provides 140 times magnification through a small plastic lens and can be attached to a mobile phone camera to enhance and record discoveries. Prakash's original aim was for the microscope to reach 50,000 children. By 2020, the Foldscope had been provided to one million children across 150 countries.

Prakash's curiosity emerged as a child growing up in India. He built his first microscope at the age of seven using his brother's glasses. 'We are all born curious,' says Prakash. 'Science is satisfying your curiosity in ways where logic and inference get used, but also your humanity.'⁵⁵

Prakash believes curiosity is essential to address significant global challenges such as climate change or universal healthcare. In an interview with National Public Radio (NPR), Prakash said he meets many teenagers who care deeply about these issues but has found their curiosity suppressed because they believe in an ‘either/or state’ – either you can be curious about the world, or you can be focused on solving problems. Prakash was adamant that to address global challenges we need both curiosity and a focus on finding solutions to the problems we face.⁵⁶

HOW WE BENEFIT FROM CURIOSITY

We fuel humility

Being a curious leader means acknowledging and accepting we do not know everything. Curious leaders seek to learn, to challenge assumptions and, then, start all over again. A curious leader will constantly rethink what they thought they knew.

Being a curious leader means acknowledging and accepting we do not know everything.

We know from research studies people with high levels of curiosity also have greater levels of wellbeing and find enhanced meaning in life.⁵⁷

Lawyer and human rights advocate Nyadol Nyuon says she enjoys looking at problems like a puzzle, putting different parts together to see what fits until she gets a clear picture. ‘Curiosity is such an important underrated attribute to have,’ she says.

Nyadol says curiosity keeps her humble because she is always left with a little bit of doubt as to whether her final decision is the right one or whether there might be another perspective to look at it from. ‘I think when you fail enough in life and you’ve made terrible decisions, you become humble by experience. You just know you don’t know everything,’ says Nyadol.

We are open to endless possibilities

As leaders, what we think we know one week may change a week later with further information and with more time to ponder the issue. Being curious means having an open mind to what others are suggesting, and seeking to understand a different point of view. Being curious doesn't mean you necessarily will change your mind, but it does mean being willing to do so if the facts present themselves to you in a way different to what you expected.

In a scene in the first season of the popular television series *Ted Lasso*, the main character, Ted, is about to win a game of darts against Rupert, the former owner of the football team where Ted is the coach. As Ted is about to throw the final dart to secure victory, he quotes Walt Whitman to the shock of his soon-to-be defeated opponent.

‘Be curious, not judgemental.’

Ted reminds Rupert that the people who have belittled and underestimated him throughout his life have not been curious enough. Ted points out if Rupert had been more curious and asked a few questions, he may have learnt Ted grew up playing darts every week. It is hardly a spoiler to say the scene ends with Ted throwing the winning dart.

Three-time Olympian and four-time gold medallist Libby Trickett loves the Whitman quote. ‘I think it applies not only to people external to you, but also to understanding yourself,’ Libby tells me. ‘It is about being curious about what interests us, what we are passionate about, what we connect with and what fills us up and nourishes us in different ways.’

Curiosity enables endless possibilities for us to learn, explore, challenge and rethink.

We allow creativity to flourish

When we are curious, we are more adaptable and make more creative decisions. Curiosity helps us become flexible leaders able to meet the dynamic nature of a fast-moving world. When we are curious, we can approach tough situations more creatively and perform better.

In a study conducted by researchers at the international business school INSEAD, increases in creativity were measured through a group of t-shirt designers selling their designs online.⁵⁸ The t-shirt designers who were prompted by researchers in the study to think curiously about their work, created and listed 34 per cent more t-shirts over a two-week period, than those asked to engage in reflection. Curiosity works.

We improve relationships

Curious leaders gain more respect from colleagues as well as inspire more trust and build collaborative relationships. Curiosity helps decrease group conflict as you reflect more on notions such as: 'I wonder why this person is disagreeing with me. Maybe there's a reason I am not seeing.' Being a curious leader means adopting a growth mindset that allows you to ask, 'What if?'

Researchers have also found when curiosity is triggered, we are less likely to show confirmation bias and look for information to support our existing point of view. We are also less likely to stereotype others and use broad judgements about entire groups of people.⁵⁹ This means we reduce interpersonal conflict because we are interested in the ideas of others resulting in better group performance. Curiosity enables us to share information more openly and listen more carefully.

We enable better business outcomes

Researchers have found being curious creates leaders who are more focused on outcomes, more strategic, more collaborative and more influential. Curious leaders are also more focused on team leadership, have better organisational capabilities and are better at leading change.⁶⁰ Curious leaders tend to make fewer errors when making decisions because we consider alternatives to what we already know and think. When our curiosity is activated, we think more deeply and rationally about decisions.

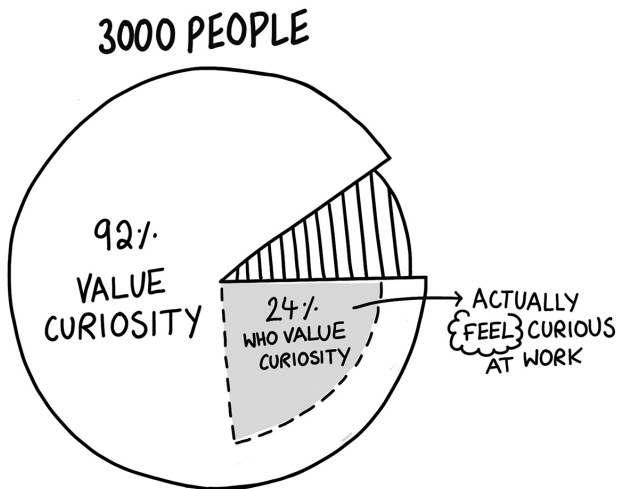
WHAT STOPS US FROM BEING CURIOUS?

We stifle curiosity

Many organisations and their leaders claim to value curiosity, but some workplace practices can suppress or limit the ability for employees to be truly curious.

A study of 3000 employees found 92 per cent of people interviewed valued curiosity. They credited curious people with bringing new ideas into teams and saw curiosity as a catalyst for job satisfaction, motivation, innovation and high performance.

However, only 24 per cent of those same employees felt curious in their jobs on a regular basis. Worse, 70 per cent felt they faced barriers to asking more questions at work.⁶¹



Henry Ford revolutionised automobile manufacturing through becoming singularly focused on the mass production of the Model T. First shipped to a customer in 1908, the Model T was so popular Henry Ford said, ‘There’s no use trying to pass a Ford, because there’s always another one just ahead.’ Choice of colour was not an option. If you wanted to buy a Model T between 1914 and 1925, efficiency and

uniformity had won the battle against customer choice.⁶² Henry Ford famously said of the Model T, 'Any customer can have a car painted any colour that he wants – so long as it's black.'

His approach worked and Ford outsold their competitors at a rate of roughly six to one. By the early 1920s, more than half of the registered automobiles in the world were Fords. So why was it that just a few short years later, General Motors had surpassed Ford in total sales for the first time and would continue to do so for more than sixty years?

While the Ford Motor Company was focused on efficiency and making a single product as competitively priced as possible, Ford stopped experimenting and innovating. The company fell behind in the market they dominated. Ford stifled curiosity and stopped imagining what might be possible. Eventually the company had to shut down their production facilities for six months to produce a new vehicle, the Model A. Ford had learnt their lesson. The new Model A took the market by storm. It also now came in four colours.

We become set in our ways

Curiosity can be lost as actions and tasks become familiar and we rely on the answers we already have within reach. One study showed that after only six months, 250 people who recently started working for a new company had, on average, declining levels of curiosity of more than 20 per cent.⁶³

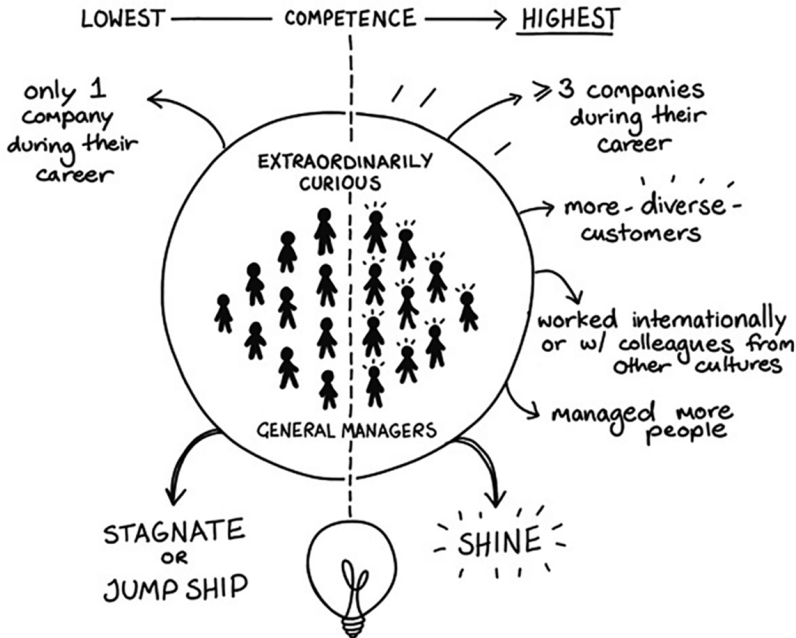
As we age, we might have done something so many times before we have not only become habituated to the way we do it but to even thinking about why it is done. The longer we do the same thing, the less likely we are to be curious about it.

Researchers set out to test the impact of curiosity on leadership by studying twenty experienced general managers who had all been assessed as being extraordinarily curious. However, while they were all curious, not all of them were competent. Half the group were assessed as highly curious and highly competent, and the other half were

highly curious with low competency. The results of the study helped explain why.

The highly curious and highly competent leaders had worked for more than three companies during their career, whereas the less competent but still highly curious leaders had only worked for one. The highly curious and highly competent leaders had also worked with more diverse customers, worked internationally or with colleagues from other cultures, and had managed more people. Researchers found that ‘when curious people are given these experiences, they shine. When they aren’t – they either stagnate or jump ship.’⁶⁴

The study showed that you can be a highly curious leader but unless you are able to express that curiosity through career opportunities or variety in the way you work, the benefits of curiosity will be lost.



We fear looking stupid

We are often afraid to ask a question because we fear how we may be judged. Early in our careers we are keen to establish our credibility through our capability or technical expertise, and being seen to know the answer is important to our success. Many leaders fear asking questions or inviting other perspectives for fear it will diminish their perceived credibility as a leader.

Julie Reilly is leading a movement to increase philanthropic investment in gender equality. She is the CEO of Australians Investing in Women and works with high-net-worth individuals and charitable foundations to direct their financial giving towards initiatives for women and girls.

Julie tells me that she has trained herself to be more openly curious. ‘I’ve always been curious internally, but I have not always expressed curiosity externally,’ she says. ‘It takes a certain confidence to ask questions and challenge. Sometimes the questions themselves can be exposing.’

Julie is not alone. Researchers have discovered that children as young as five years old don’t seek help in school, even when they need it, for fear of being embarrassed; children at this age will even cheat at simple games to look smart. By the age of seven, we begin to connect asking for help with looking incompetent in front of others.⁶⁵

‘Time after time,’ says Julie, ‘I have sat there nervously thinking “I can’t ask that; I am going to look stupid or potentially embarrass someone else” before finding a way to ask anyway.’

‘Almost always I am left gobsmacked by what I think is so obviously a question everyone will know the answer to, and the response is, “Oh wow, we hadn’t thought of that,”’ Julie says. ‘Curiosity is so powerful, and so is being brave enough to show that you don’t know.’

We suffer from ‘Mum’s disease’

We can all fall into the trap of making assumptions about where a situation, conversation or a problem might be heading, before asking

questions or listening to learn. We base this on our past experiences, our expertise, or even a lack of patience to hear the full story. Either way, curiosity loses way to assuming you know what is coming next.

Nothing kills curiosity more than assumptions. My family have a saying called ‘Mum’s disease’. No, I don’t have an illness, but I do have a tendency at times when listening to my daughters or husband to hear the first part of a sentence and then assume what they are about to say. Before they have even finished speaking, I may have raced to a solution in my mind, or even worse, verbalised it. ‘Mum’s disease’ is kryptonite for curiosity.

We fail to think like a scientist

In his book *Think Again*, organisational psychologist Adam Grant recommends we approach problems by thinking like a scientist, because in science rethinking is fundamental. Grant recommends we treat any emerging view or hunch as a hypothesis and test it with data.⁶⁶

We are all natural problem solvers and too often we think we can act to fix any challenges, even when all we have heard is a few words. Curiosity, on the other hand, would see us approach this a little differently.

Curiosity and the art of rethinking is a way of approaching the world that will see us listen to learn and seek to understand rather than fill the space with answers. We become curious about where the conversation is going and fully expect to rethink any assumptions we might have made before starting to think about solutions.

Politician and former union leader Ged Kearney values curiosity to help her understand the context she will be leading in but finds being curious most helpful in allowing her to rethink what she thought she knew. Ged holds the federal parliament seat for Cooper, an electorate that has a large First Nations population. She recalls when she was first elected she felt she knew a lot about First Nations people and their struggles, but in the years since, Ged realised she had to rethink everything she thought she knew after spending time

listening, meeting and working with First Nations people in her community.

‘I’m constantly having to rethink age-old, embedded views in this job,’ Ged tells me. ‘This is one of the biggest challenges for me because you are settled at fifty-eight years of age and think you know everything and that is how it is going to be. It’s not and that means you must rethink things.’

HOW DO WE LEAD WITH CURIOSITY?

We build curious cultures

A curious leader can be a multiplier of curiosity by asking those they lead, ‘What if?’ This will increase collaboration and help drive a culture to be curious. Formally incorporating curiosity into the values of an organisation, into the culture of the way we do things, can allow curiosity to be reinforced.

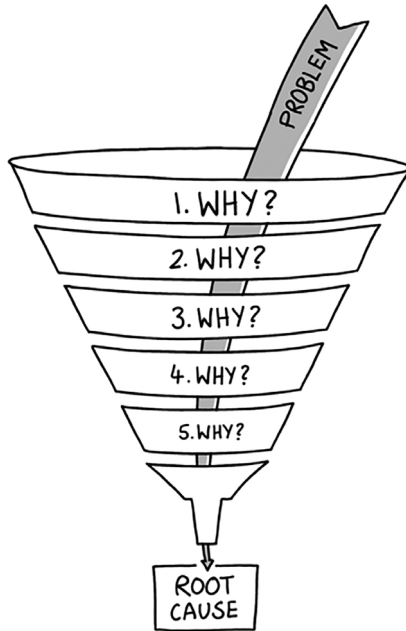
We can also encourage curiosity in others by demonstrating curiosity ourselves.

Sakichi Toyoda was a Japanese inventor and industrialist who founded the Toyoda textile weaving company in 1926. His son, Kiichiro Toyoda, would later transform the company into Japan’s largest automobile manufacturer, Toyota.

Toyoda developed an approach to business that reminds me of the insatiable curiosity of young children. It is the method that has become known as the 5 Whys. The investigation of problems is tackled by asking ‘why?’ again and again. The process challenges existing assumptions and helps develop creative and innovative solutions.

Practising asking why, without judgement, is a critical tool to help leaders remain curious and to encourage curiosity in others as well.

Mark Scott, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, believes curiosity is an essential skill for leaders. ‘Leadership is about asking questions and listening in a way that provides real value,’ says Mark. Questions Mark suggests can help others think about curiosity



include asking, ‘How open are you to acknowledging the expertise of others?’ and ‘Are you creating an environment where your people are doing great work they love and can feel they are at the absolute top of their game?’

We think big

Curiosity can be demonstrated by leaders through looking at what is happening in their workplace or community, as well as other organisations or industries, and thinking about where the world is going to be and how the world is changing. Mark Scott likens it to his daily commute across one of Australia’s most well-known landmarks. ‘It is far easier to change lanes on the Sydney Harbour Bridge if you are moving at pace than if you have ground to a halt.’ As a leader, Mark adds, ‘If we are moving and new ideas and opportunities come up, then it is easier to take advantage of that.’

Mark often thinks about curiosity in the sense of strategy development and believes the first question a leader needs to ask their

team is ‘Where are we today?’. Invariably there will be a range of divergent views so he will then ask everyone, ‘How did we get here?’ and ‘Why are we still here?’ Mark is curious to understand what it is about the way they work, the way they act, the way they allocate resources, the way they prioritise and the way they develop their staff that means they are where they are.

We hire curious people

To hire people who are extraordinarily curious, we need to understand the extent to which they explore things they don’t already know. We want to know if they are willing to analyse data to uncover new ideas and have read widely beyond their field. We want to recruit people to work with us who have diverse interests outside their work and who explore learning opportunities or seek to answer questions, just for the sake of it.

Google actively hires for curiosity. To work at Google, interviewees answer questions like, ‘Have you ever found yourself unable to stop learning about something you’ve never encountered before? Why? What kept you persisting?’ With questions such as this, Google is trying to uncover whether the potential recruit was only curious because it was their job to find the answer, or whether they had a level of genuine intellectual curiosity they needed to satiate.⁶⁷

When you do hire curious people, encourage them to think outside the box. This might include supporting outside interests like further study, learning a new hobby, volunteering, or approving travel to new locations to build and broaden their networks. The more you encourage others to be curious the more you will foster a culture where curiosity is valued.

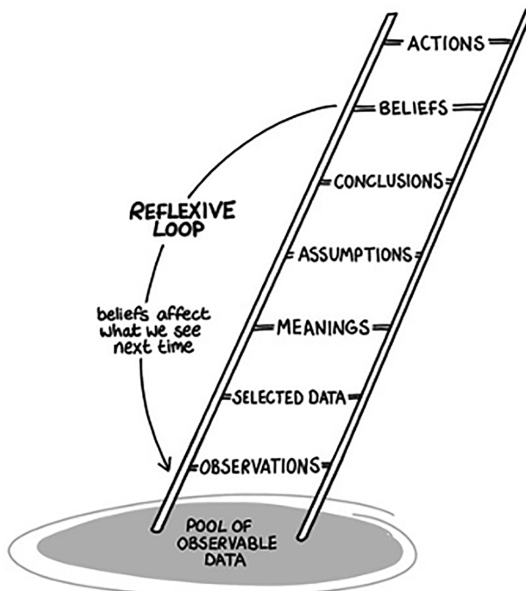
Mark Scott is a believer in a notion first advocated by former UK Chancellor Denis Healey that leaders need good ‘hinterlands’, which includes everything else in their lives, outside of work. It may be books, concerts, charities or even travel. For Mark, it is these ‘hinterland’ activities that make leaders richer in experience, resilient, more

diverse and more curious. They also offer a balance through which to explore and reference your own leadership.

We avoid stepping up the ladder of assumptions

Harvard Business School professor Chris Argyris, widely considered one of the founders of organisational development theory, developed the Ladder of Inference in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁸ It is a concept that has become a core idea in the field of organisational behaviour and is essential to help leaders recognise the need to remain curious and not fall victim to the power of assumptions. Stepping up the ladder can stop us from being curious and so modern leaders need to develop an awareness of when they are on the way up so they can come back down and become curious once more.

During our interactions with others, as well as through our broad life experiences, we observe what is happening around us. The problem is, we don't see everything and tend to only observe data we judge as important to us based on our previous experience. If we are not curious, we can jump to conclusions which can be damaging for



relationships and workplace situations. When we jump to conclusions and make assumptions about other people without being curious to understand the facts, we break down trust and the ability to communicate openly. This can lead to making incorrect decisions by acting on false information.

How many times have you been in a situation where you are convinced what you are observing is one thing but then facts confirm you were wrong? Chances are you were up the ladder of inference, and your curiosity was stifled.

We embrace the power of questions

Modern leaders understand asking questions is not a sign you do not understand something or that you are less competent than someone else. Modern leaders appreciate asking questions and listening to the answers will lead others to trust and respect you even more. Questions are a powerful way to build trust through acknowledging when we don't know the answer ourselves. And, let's face it, we frequently don't.

The simple act of asking questions is a powerful sign of a leader who leads with both their head and their heart through being curious, humble and self-aware. When we demonstrate curiosity by asking questions, research shows people view us as *more* competent. By asking questions we promote more meaningful connections and creative outcomes.⁶⁹ We also open opportunities to learn something new about a topic we may already think we have mastered.

Asking questions is not a way to probe and interrogate those you lead but an opportunity to build engagement through your expertise, support and guidance. Modern leaders know when open-ended questions can offer someone an opportunity to expand on a viewpoint or to actively problem-solve. For example, rather than asking, 'Do you need anything in your new role?' consider asking, 'What do you need in your new role that would help you grow and shine?'. Being skilled at asking powerful questions doesn't depend on the number of

questions asked but rather the type of questions, the tone you use to ask them, the sequence of questions asked and the way those questions are framed.⁷⁰

MIT Sloan School of Management professor Edgar Schein has made a significant mark on the field of organisational culture. He believes asking questions temporarily empowers the person you are speaking with; it puts them in the driver's seat, which helps improve communication and build relationships. You are offering your attention and saying to that person they know something about a situation or problem you are interested to understand. Trust is built because you have made yourself vulnerable and have shown an interest in, and paid attention to, what you are being told.⁷¹

Those you lead and work with will respect you for taking the time to ask questions. They will trust you when you use their answers to inform your thinking about the changes needing to be made. By asking open questions and role modelling curiosity, you are also showing others that when you are working to solve a problem, you listen more than you talk. You understand listening helps fill gaps in your knowledge and helps identify other questions that may need to be investigated.

Even if you know the answer to a question, a modern leader will use the opportunity to ask someone they lead a question related to the issue at hand and then listen to learn. The benefit of not being the first to jump in with a solution is others will get a chance to develop a solution themselves. A skilled leader will use insightful, curious questions to guide the people they lead to consider alternatives and brainstorm ideas. They will be the last to speak and use the time as others express views to demonstrate their curiosity.

We master the art of listening

As leaders, we can role model what it means to be curious by listening well. Although as organisational psychologist Adam Grant has explained, listening well is more than a matter of talking less. It is a

set of skills in asking and responding.⁷² Active listening is the process of understanding what another person is saying – both explicitly and implicitly – while showing the other person you are engaged and interested.⁷³

Listening more than talking is, like many aspects of being a leader, easier said than done. In a study undertaken with 230 senior leaders, when asked what they would do if confronted with an organisational crisis, most replied they would take action to stem any financial challenges and introduce initiatives to help address the cultural issues.

In other words, their first response would be to jump into action.

Only a handful of leaders said they would take the time to ask questions and listen first, before introducing their ideas on what they felt was most needed.⁷⁴

Entrepreneur and philanthropist Allan English believes it is important for leaders to make sure that when they are listening, they are not also jumping to conclusions. ‘Going into anything with a preconceived idea and judgement, or judging others’ commentary as they are explaining, means you are not actually hearing what is going on,’ says Allan.

‘We get so many unspoken signals in our communications we need to hear. If we miss them, we will miss opportunities to make the right decision,’ he says. ‘This is also about leading with empathy because you need to hear and feel what is happening in the moment.’

Allan gives the example of a conversation where you might check with the other person to validate what you think you have heard and they respond, ‘Yes, but . . .’. The word ‘but’ becomes the key to discovering what is really going on. It may not have been verbalised before and you will only get to that point by being prepared to truly listen to what follows.

It is the listener who sets the tone for a conversation. High-quality listeners show empathy, are attentive and non-judgemental, reducing any social anxiety and increasing self-awareness of speakers.⁷⁵ For us to become better listeners we must be able to listen without distraction or

judgement. We must listen without interrupting and listen to learn and to understand. We also need to listen to what is not said. This requires us to block out the noise and hear what is most important.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Curiosity is a superpower for leaders; always ready to be unleashed.
- Curiosity is easily lost in cultures where it is stifled, when we fear looking stupid, if we make assumptions, become set in our ways and fail to rethink ideas.
- We can lead with curiosity through building curious cultures, hiring for curiosity, asking questions and listening to learn.

FURTHER READING

Adam Grant, *Think Again: The power of knowing what you don't know* (2021).

Brian Grazer & Charles Fishman, *A Curious Mind: The secret to a bigger life* (2015).

Kate Murphy, *You're Not Listening: What you're missing and why it matters* (2020).

Edgar H. Schein *Humble Inquiry: The gentle art of asking instead of telling* (2013).

5

WISDOM

WISDOM TO ASK WHY

For a young boy growing up in the West Australian wheat and sheep belt, Allan English never could have imagined becoming an entrepreneur who would create a publicly listed company and establish a foundation helping bring women out of poverty in the developing world. As a child, life was much simpler.

Allan remembers his grandfather waking early each day on their remote property to start a fire to make his wife a cup of tea. His grandfather offered Allan the advice to 'Always start your day with a gift of love'. Allan has taken that advice to heart and has been making his wife, Tessa, a cup of tea every day for more than four decades.

Far from life on a sheep farm, everything really kicked off with a bang for Allan's business career during the mid-1980s when he visited the United States and saw something that would change the course of his life – a Lincoln Impinger. This was a new line of forced hot-air conveyor ovens able to cook food twice as fast as a standard oven and up to four times as fast as a conventional deck oven. If you have eaten a pizza at any point in the past forty years, chances are it has been cooked in a Lincoln Impinger.

In 1985, Allan immediately recognised the potential of the new technology, and he knew there were no Lincoln Impingers in the Australian market. Always an entrepreneur, Allan mortgaged his family home to fund the cost of his new venture. He ordered fourteen shiny new Lincoln Impinger ovens which were promptly delivered to Australia. After a significant order to supply the new ovens to a large national pizza chain fell through, Allan grew deeply concerned. Try as he might, the ovens were just too expensive for most small, family-owned pizza restaurants. Allan knew the demand was there – Australian restaurant owners were keen to get their hands on a Lincoln Impinger – but his customers struggled to find the capital to buy them.

Just two weeks before the banks were due to call in the loan, Allan had the idea to offer the pizza ovens for rent so his customers could try them before committing to buy. It also meant there would be some cash coming in to keep the banks at bay. The plan worked and the Lincoln Impinger pizza oven quickly became the first ‘rent-try-buy’ hospitality equipment Allan offered his customers through his new company, Silver Chef. Within a decade, Silver Chef was a publicly listed company on the Australian Stock Exchange.

The success of Silver Chef brought Allan considerable material wealth. He remembers asking himself one day why he would want to make more money as he knew he already had more than he needed. This question started Allan on a journey of giving back; he needed to find a purpose to make money if he were to continue his business. ‘Purpose is what drove me to accomplish and achieve. If I didn’t have a purpose, I would not have taken the journey,’ he tells me.

Allan is the first to admit he had not always been committed to making money for the benefit of others. Allan was a driven young man, goal-oriented and relying on typical corporate speak to rally his team to chase down sales and hit targets to reach KPIs.

‘I was a highly ambitious, competitive young man. Stress became an issue; I took on too much,’ Allan tells me. ‘I was working long

hours and would get home and have a scotch and dry each night. After a while I thought this is not what I want to be doing.'

After attending a philosophy school and gaining insight into what it means to have a happy life, meditation became an important part of Allan's daily routine and continues to be today. Allan became a follower of Stoicism and found the courage to make changes both personally and within his organisation.

'I wanted to know how I could shape a life of benefit to others into my working life,' Allan says. 'I wanted to understand how my work could become aligned to my philosophical world view.'

The first step was to create a common purpose among those he worked with at Silver Chef. The company's purpose became helping people achieve their dreams. For customers, that meant helping start or grow businesses. For staff, it meant creating one of the world's best workplaces. For the world, Silver Chef's purpose was to fund one million people out of poverty through partnering with the charitable organisation Opportunity International and providing small loans to the poorest women entrepreneurs in the developing world.

Allan noticed how quickly talented purpose-driven people gravitated to work in the company once the broader purpose for Silver Chef had been articulated. In turn, this meant these employees attracted better-quality customers. The business thrived and, within a year, Silver Chef had become listed as one of the leading places to work in Australia. Within a decade the company had funded 1.5 million people around the world to rise out of poverty, and Silver Chef had become a certified B Corp business, a certification that verifies among other things a business has met high standards of social and environmental performance. For Allan, the reason for all this happening was simple. 'We had a purpose built into our business model which benefited everybody,' he said.

Allan understood making his business thrive was only one dimension of his personal leadership. He wanted to demonstrate a more tangible, personal commitment to giving back to show he

truly walked the talk. In 2010, Allan established the English Family Foundation and transferred more than half his shareholding in Silver Chef to it, making the charitable foundation the largest shareholder in the business. Allan had entrenched a charitable purpose into the governance of the company and it was a public demonstration of his commitment to the purpose of the business for his staff, shareholders and investors. He wanted to show he was putting his money where his heart was. For Allan, he had found the purpose for making money he had always sought. He had also found the wisdom to integrate his leadership of his head and heart.

WISDOM AS A HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE

When we talk about wisdom, we might visualise a wise sage or oracle who is able to calmly predict the best course of action on the path ahead. Others may think of a friend who offers valuable advice, or perhaps even someone like the Dalai Lama. Wisdom has been studied since the time of Aristotle and all cultures and faiths have adopted different interpretations for what it means.

For modern leaders, leading with wisdom is the way we think about the world and the challenges we face. For a modern leader, wisdom involves wise, pragmatic reasoning combined with knowledge and experience. Leading with wisdom is more than the accumulation of information and instead is about using information in a way that allows us to listen to others, to evaluate what they say and decide on the best way forward.

Leading with wisdom is more than the accumulation of information and instead is about using information in a way that allows us to listen to others, to evaluate what they say and decide on the best way forward.

Wisdom for modern leaders is the ability to assess what is known and unknown, weigh up risk and reward, assess best possible paths,

and search for data or evidence. Modern leaders are not reckless but make responsible decisions and actions in the face of risks.

It requires courage to step forward from behind the data and make the decision anyway. In the face of uncertainty, leaders are often asked to make a call without all the necessary information and need the humility to appreciate they can only make the best decision they can in the circumstances with the information they have at hand.

Leading with wisdom encourages wisdom in others. By watching and observing how leaders make decisions, those we lead can be inspired to do the same. We empower others to think autonomously and engage in wise decision-making themselves.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As we consider what it means to lead with wisdom, reflect on your leadership. Ask yourself:

- Do you find you always need to gather data and evidence to help you make the best decision you can?
- Are you confident to weigh up different possible courses of action before making a decision?
- Do you defer primarily to using reason and logic when making decisions?
- Do you assess new information as it comes to hand to help you make the best decisions?
- Do you make decisions by assessing what is known, accepting what is unknown, and moving forward anyway?

HOW WE BENEFIT FROM WISDOM

We increase our levels of wellbeing

Leading with wisdom has been shown to have much greater benefits than simply being able to make wise decisions. A wiser outlook on life has been found to positively impact our wellbeing and levels of happiness including regulating our emotions and lowering the intensity of

our negative emotions.⁷⁶ Allan English's ability to integrate meditation into his life is one such example.

A wise outlook on life has been shown to benefit people over the long term too. Researchers who studied more than 3000 participants over a decade found being flexible, having an open mind to diverse perspectives and being aware of our limitations predicts a greater sense of wellbeing and life satisfaction in later years.⁷⁷

Wisdom helps us tackle the challenges we face in our lives. Having a wiser outlook on life comes through recognising the limitations in our knowledge, acknowledging uncertainties and rapid changes, and welcoming diverse perspectives.

WHAT STOPS US FROM BEING WISE LEADERS?

We fail to understand our limitations

One key feature of wisdom, or wise reasoning, is to be able to step away from our ego or viewpoint and be aware of alternative viewpoints. Doing so requires recognition and acceptance of the limits of our knowledge. We need to recognise our biases and engage with diverse points of view.

Pip Marlow, CEO of Salesforce Asia Pacific, believes wisdom involves understanding and believing that multiple things can be true, even if you have not seen them in your personal experience. If you have this mindset as you weigh up risk and reward you allow for more possibilities. For Pip, wisdom is not just harnessing individual wisdom but harnessing the wisdom of your organisation to allow for better choices after weighing up all the risk–reward possibilities.

We experience the Solomon Paradox

King Solomon, a wealthy monarch of the Jewish Kingdom between 970–931 BCE, is renowned for having wisdom said to have been personally granted by God. During his forty-year reign, people would travel long distances to seek his advice.

As wise a counsel as Solomon may have been for others, his personal life was far more complicated. Solomon married more than

700 women, had 300 concubines and frequently boasted of his love of money and riches, surrounding himself in luxury and grandeur. Solomon also neglected to instruct his successor, his son, whose reign led to the demise of the kingdom.

The Solomon Paradox explains the common phenomenon where we have wiser advice for someone else than we do for ourselves.⁷⁸

Researchers have tested the Solomon Paradox and in one study asked half the participants to imagine a scenario where their spouse or romantic partner had admitted being unfaithful with a close friend. The other half of the participants were asked to imagine a similar scenario, but in this case it did not involve them directly but related to someone they knew who was recounting the same situation. In each case, participants were asked to vividly ponder the event unfolding in their imagination and spend a few minutes thinking about how their relationship, or in the latter case their friend's relationship, would develop in the future. They were then asked a series of questions to assess their levels of wise reasoning.

Researchers found that, like King Solomon, participants were much wiser when reflecting on their friend's relationship as compared to their own. In the scenario where participants needed to imagine it having happened to them, those that were able to self-distance by thinking about themselves in the third person reasoned more wisely than those who placed themselves in the centre.⁷⁹

We fear rejection

Researchers have found a clear relationship between being fearful of rejection and applying wise reasoning to an issue. People who are more sensitive to feelings of rejection score lower on qualities of wise reasoning. This may be because if we are fearful of failing or being rejected, we have a decreased tendency to consider others' perspectives, to seek compromise or to resolve conflicts.⁸⁰ The need to protect our ego can prevent us from accepting our mistakes and seeing others' points of view.

Entrepreneur and philanthropist Allan English knows he has made plenty of mistakes in his decision-making. 'The times that I have most got into trouble,' Allan tells me, 'are those moments where I have stepped out of empathy or where I have not fully considered others. It is also where my ego or the sense of opportunity has got involved.'

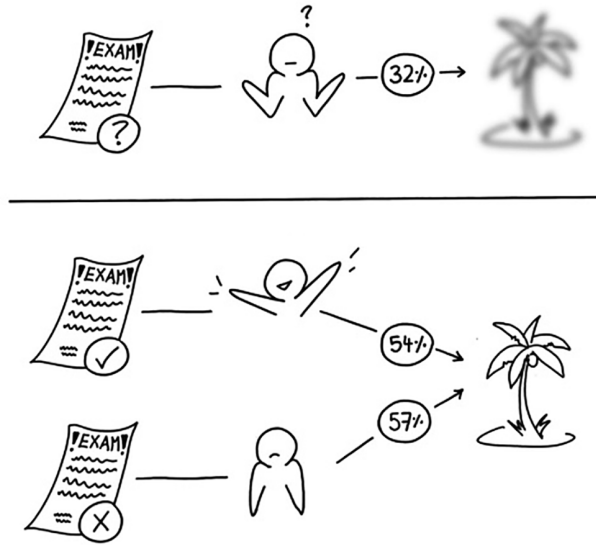
We search endlessly for data

In 1998 two researchers from Stanford and Princeton universities published the aptly named study 'On the Pursuit and Misuse of Useless Information'.⁸¹ They found when we make decisions, we pursue information that might seem relevant but is ultimately not instrumental to our decision. Information that, even if we had it, would not impact the outcome. Then, once we find information that appears relevant, we give it more weight than it deserves. Even though we are pursuing information we don't need, we convince ourselves the information is relevant and make our decision based on whatever we have learnt.

One study tested this hypothesis. Sixty-six undergraduates at Stanford University were asked to imagine they had just taken a tough exam. In the first scenario, they were told they didn't know if they had passed or failed, they just knew they were tired and rundown and had an opportunity to book a holiday in Hawaii at a low price. They were told the special deal ended the following day, and they would not know if they had passed or failed their exam until a day later. Each student was asked if they would book the holiday immediately or wait to see how they went in the exam. Only 32 per cent of students indicated they would buy the vacation package straight away, without waiting to learn about their exam results.

In the second scenario, students *were* told if they had passed or failed the exam. This time, 54 per cent of students who were told they had passed the exam said they would book the holiday, and 57 per cent of the students who had been told they failed, still booked their trip. The relevance of passing or failing the exam made little difference to the decision to book the holiday.

UNCERTAINTY MAKES DECISIONS HARDER



If we compare the two scenarios, only 32 per cent of students wanted to book a holiday when they did not know the outcome of the exam. The presence of uncertainty can blur the picture and make it harder to think through the implications of each outcome.⁸² Once the outcome was known, their exam results made virtually no difference to the decision with roughly the same percentage of students booking the trip regardless of whether they had passed or failed.

We are all susceptible to being caught in the search for more data. Our rational brain can become so immersed in the search we are unable to step back and have awareness of the impact of what we are looking for. The endless loop of information seeking can feel safer, especially in workplace cultures where jobs are easily lost if one misstep is made.

We fall victim to mistaken beliefs

If we are tied to a single, fixed way of thinking about issues and situations, it constrains our ability to consider all potential paths and find the best possible decision or strategy. We become hamstrung from thinking of all the alternatives to a complex issue because we become

fixed on a single solution. In the end, that limitation forces us to make poor decisions.

Our unconscious thoughts have a direct impact on our ability to lead with wisdom. We all have cognitive biases ingrained in us from past experiences and our upbringing, and these can have a limiting impact on our ability to think wisely. We may choose to stick with what we already know or ignore something new altogether. We might review risks as not being worthy of our time and effort, even though they might offer us better outcomes. We can also become resistant to change and gravitate to ideas, concepts and people that are familiar to us. This means we can end up paying more attention to information that confirms our existing beliefs and inhibit our ability to consider alternatives.

In his book *Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid*,⁸³ Professor Robert Sternberg argues intelligent, well-educated people are particularly susceptible to four fallacies, or mistaken beliefs, that inhibit wise choices and actions. Having the self-awareness to recognise when these fallacies may be triggered is an important skill for modern, self-aware leaders. Each of these conditions is a sure-fire barrier to leading with wisdom.

Having a singular focus on ourselves rather than the environment we live and work in will always leave us with less capacity for wisdom.

Egocentrism Fallacy	We believe the world revolves around us, or at least it should. We act in ways that benefit ourselves regardless of how that behaviour might impact others.
Omniscience Fallacy	We believe we already know everything there is to know and therefore don't need to listen to the advice or counsel of others.
Omnipotence Fallacy	We believe we are so intelligent and educated we think we possess gifted power that surpasses all others.
Invulnerability Fallacy	We believe we can do whatever we want, and no one will ever be able to hurt or expose us. We believe we have no vulnerabilities.

Table 2: Four fallacies that inhibit wise choices and actions

HOW DO WE LEAD WITH WISDOM?

We can be mindful of our decision-making process

Entrepreneur and philanthropist Allan English is a leader who is calm and reflective, and eager to understand all points of view before making decisions. This is something he has worked on for the past forty years of his career and admits he continues to need to develop. Even so, Allan uses a decision-making template every day to help him make the wisest decisions he can. He believes we often get confused by a problem which may have multiple dimensions and as a result, our minds become full of alternatives too early. He tries to counter this tendency by defining exactly what needs to be solved for any decision and then asking himself a series of questions.

Step	Focus	Questions to ask
1	Purpose	What is the purpose of the decision I need to make? What am I trying to do? What is the actual decision I need to make?
2	Interpretation	What judgements am I making too early? What assumptions am I making? Are my assumptions justified by the evidence?
3	Implications	What are the consequences if this decision goes well? What are the consequences if this decision goes poorly? What are the implications if I assume something but have not checked the evidence to validate the assumption is correct? How will I mitigate these consequences if I follow this decision?
4	Validation	Who else is impacted by this decision and what is their perspective? What can another point of view on this decision tell me that I might have missed? What other information do I need to gather to validate the perspective I am taking?

Table 3: Four steps to help make wise decisions

We can reflect on past mistakes

Modern leaders role model the ability to learn from past mistakes. This means taking the time ourselves, and encouraging others to do the same, to reflect on decisions we have made to think about how a better decision could be made in the future. It means looking at what might have gone wrong with a sense of curiosity and inquiry to avoid it happening again.

For leaders, it may mean actively rewarding those in your team who try something new, even when the outcome doesn't work out as planned. It means creating a culture where inquiry is valued, where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities, and looking at the root causes of any ideas that haven't worked to understand why.

We can find a purpose beyond ourselves

We can encourage wisdom in those we lead by actively supporting them to balance the interests of others in their decision-making. This means finding a purpose beyond that of making money for the company, for example, that benefits a wider group of stakeholders. The sheer act of asking for a decision that considers long- and short-term goals and balances self-interest with the interests of others will help build wisdom.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Wisdom for modern leaders relates to the way we think about the world and the challenges we face.
- Leading with wisdom allows us to accumulate information, evaluate paths forward and incorporate diverse viewpoints.
- Mistaken beliefs and cognitive distortions impact our ability to lead with wisdom.

FURTHER READING

Ryan Holiday, *Ego is the Enemy: The fight to master our great opponent* (2017).

Robert J. Sternberg, *Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid* (2002).

Kate Murphy, *You're not listening: What you're missing and why it matters* (2021).

6

PERSPECTIVE

LEARNING TO READ THE ROOM

The first time Ged Kearney attended a union meeting she was six years old. The second youngest of nine siblings, Ged's parents ran the Lord Raglan Hotel in Melbourne for thirty-five years. All the Kearney children in the family were expected to work in the pub, before and after school, as well as during the school lunch break on particularly busy days. It was tough work. As a six-year-old girl Ged would 'run trays' delivering counter meals to the pub patrons.

The children were not paid for working in the family business. 'No, son,' Ged's father told her older brother. 'That's not how it works.'

The Kearney children, led by Ged's fifteen-year-old brother, Russel, had issues with the working conditions their parents put in place. Russel had even tried to join the Federated Liquor and Allied Industry Employees Union but was refused for being too young. So, the Kearney Family Union was formed, and the nine Kearney children delivered a log of claims to their parents. Ged's father thought it was fantastic and asked the children to explain their demands.

During Kearney Family Union meetings, each child, regardless of age, was given the opportunity to speak. Ged's brother Russel 'ran

the meetings with an iron fist', recalls Ged, and notes were kept of what was said. The children put together a workplace agreement with their parents including the demand that if you had a school exam in the morning, you should not have to work a shift in the pub the night before.

Ged is a firm believer in the notion that everyone is a leader. When she speaks in her community, she reminds people that 'by virtue of what you do and the people that rely on you, you have a ripple effect, you have an impact'. Ged believes 'you are leading and setting an example to others through your actions'.

Collective bargaining and working together with others to drive change has been the hallmark of Ged Kearney's career. As a member of the Australian Labor Party and a member of federal parliament, her early years paid dividends to how she says she approaches difficult negotiations.

Ged watched and learnt from her siblings as a young child and often found herself a follower; as the eighth of nine children, most decisions were made for her. 'As a child I was never forced to make a decision about anything,' Ged tells me. 'What I wore, what I ate, where I went for holidays. I was just one of the crowd.'

By the end of her schooling, Ged had found her voice. She became school captain at her Catholic high school and knew she was looked on by others as a leader, often hearing 'You do it, Ged. You go and tell them, Ged.' Ged says she has always been seen as an advocate for others and so thinks, 'If I don't speak up, I will be letting a lot of people down'.

An early career in nursing before a long career as a union leader allowed Ged to develop her skill of leading with perspective. She says she has 'a brilliant radar for walking into a room and immediately feeling the pulse'. When she was President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), Ged was often brought in to negotiate a difficult round of bargaining agreements between unions and employers. Ged recalls she would walk into a room and immediately feel if

there was tension between the parties. ‘You could just pick it up,’ she says. ‘I could feel if there was frustration or I could feel if it was going to be quite easy and one side was willing to give in, they just needed someone to help do it for them.’

For Ged, it was the same as being a nurse and walking into a room of patients. ‘You can see who needs you the most. You can almost pick it up as soon as you walk in.’

PERSPECTIVE AS A HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE

In our research to develop the Head & Heart Leader Scale, leading with perspective was found to have a truly special quality. Of all eight attributes, perspective had the most correlations with other attributes of head and heart leadership.

Being someone who can lead with perspective is highly correlated with being a leader who has high levels of empathy, self-awareness and capability. Perspective was most strongly related to empathy because having it suggests you are a leader who values inclusion and ensuring all voices are heard. You understand the best decisions are made when the experiences of everyone are included. When we are skilled at assessing how other people might view a situation, we become much more aware of their unique experiences. We are eager to understand how other people’s experiences shape the context we are leading in.

Perspective is also strongly correlated with self-awareness because the way you view the world may vary significantly from those you lead. You know your limitations and seek to bridge your knowledge gap with the knowledge of others. Finally, perspective has a strong correlation with capability because you have a growth mindset. You know there is always more to be learnt from any challenge.

The process of making sense of a situation, or gaining perspective, is ongoing; we are always shaping and reacting to the environments we find ourselves in. We take cues from the context we are leading in to

help decide what information is relevant and what explanations make sense. We continually test, refine and abandon our understanding of what we are seeing based on new data we receive. It is a skill that allows us to understand the world we live in and often helps us make sense of something that has become confusing or unintelligible.⁸⁴

Perspective is a leadership skill that helps us find a unifying order even when one does not exist. It provides us with an ability to perceive the nature of what is happening as it unfolds.

Leading with perspective is how we interpret or assign meaning to the events, stimulus, data and situations we encounter every day. It enables us to navigate life and face complexity and uncertainty, something we encounter frequently. By being able to perceive the context you are leading in, you are better able to appreciate the challenge you might be facing and see the big picture. Mike Henry, CEO of BHP, likens leading with perspective to the military term *coup d'oeil* which is a leader's ability to, with a single glance, see things clearly.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As we consider what it means to lead with perspective, reflect on your leadership. Ask yourself:

- Are you able to 'read the room', whether a literal room, your organisation, your industry or another setting entirely?
- Are you good at assessing how different people experience a given situation?
- Are you good at understanding the complexities of any situation you might find yourself in?
- Do you try to always see a few steps ahead of where and when a decision needs to be made?
- Before you make a decision, do you weigh up the possible implications for all involved?
- Do you understand the ways you need to adapt how you lead depending on the context you find yourself in?

Anticipating an unknown future

While the skills of assessing existing situations and contexts make up much of leading with perspective, it is not the entire picture. Seeking to anticipate an unknown future is also key.

The Commissioner of the National Basketball Association (NBA), Adam Silver, found himself in an unprecedented situation in March 2020 when professional basketball player, Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz, tested positive to coronavirus. He was the first American professional basketballer known to have contracted the virus. A decision was needed immediately about the future of the national basketball season.

In what would have been an unthinkable decision, even days earlier, Silver immediately suspended the rest of the 2019–20 basketball season. He made the right decision at the right time – within a week a further four players would test positive to the virus.

Silver's decision created a domino effect, with other sports in the United States soon doing the same. As soon as the NBA suspended their season, the National Hockey League (NHL) and Major League Baseball (MLB) followed.

It is important to remember that March 2020 was a period of considerable uncertainty and mixed messaging about COVID-19 in the United States. The pandemic was in its relative infancy and the then president, Donald Trump, told the American people he was 'not concerned at all' about coronavirus and to 'just stay calm. It will go away.'⁸⁵

In making such a quick and profound decision to end the NBA season, Silver demonstrated an ability to assess the environment he was working in, to try to predict a few steps ahead, and decide on a course of action in the face of very little information. According to anonymous reporting at the time, Silver relied on a small circle of experts to help him make this momentous decision.

Colleagues of Silver say he is a leader who constantly seeks to learn and is data-driven in his decision-making. He balances his head and heart.

Ultimately Silver's decision was critically important in shaping public understanding of the pandemic and signalling that COVID-19 was a serious threat to public health. By suspending the season, Silver prevented millions of people from gathering at sporting events and potentially contracting the virus.

Chess masters excel at perspective

Being able to master anticipatory thinking, or thinking a few steps ahead, is the mark of expertise in many domains.⁸⁶ Frustrated Dutch amateur chess player and psychologist Adrian de Groot wanted to know why he kept being beaten at chess by better players; he was determined to learn whatever skill he was missing. He assumed the grandmasters of chess had photographic memories, allowing them to remember many moves and defeat their opponents. De Groot wanted to understand what made grandmasters so different.⁸⁷

In his first experiment, de Groot placed twenty pieces on a chessboard, imitating the layout of a possible game. He then asked a variety of chess players – experienced and inexperienced – to quickly glance at the board to memorise the location of each piece. As de Groot had expected, the amateur, inexperienced players were unable to recall the location of the pieces while the grandmasters, the most experienced players, easily reproduced the exact layout of the game. As de Groot hypothesised, the grandmasters had incredible powers of memory. Or did they?

De Groot tested his theory again, but this time, instead of setting up the chess pieces in a pattern that might represent an actual game, he placed them randomly on the board. He assumed if the grandmasters had photographic memories, the location of the pieces was irrelevant. To de Groot's surprise, the grandmasters could not remember where the pieces had been placed any more than the amateurs.

It wasn't memory that gave the experienced chess players the edge, it was perception. They 'read the board' better than amateurs and were able to turn pieces into meaningful patterns. Grandmasters were

grouping pieces into larger strategies or structures such as the Sicilian Defence or the Queen's Gambit rather than remembering the precise location of the pieces.

Leading with perspective allows us to understand that context matters. We know we need to adapt our leadership for any given situation and the way we assess and find patterns will help us understand what attributes of leading with the head and heart will be most beneficial. Perspective is gained when we look at a situation with an open mind and a fresh set of eyes. We can learn from the environment we are leading in by paying attention to what is unique.

The process of leading with perspective is one that never ends and is easily taken for granted. It is not about truth and getting to the 'right' answer but about continually rethinking the story or pattern about what is happening. It is bringing order to chaos so something new becomes more comprehensible, incorporating the data you receive from multiple sources. Leading with perspective means seeking to understand the context we are leading in, testing our understanding of that context by talking with others, and gathering data to coordinate the best possible actions required.

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HOW WE BENEFIT FROM PERSPECTIVE

We can 'read the room'

Modern leaders who lead with perspective can collect and interpret signals. They are leaders skilled at gauging what is happening around them and where they fit in. Leaders who lead with perspective can read silences and recognise non-verbal cues in ways others may not. They can sense the mood and understand whether relationships are

working. Modern leaders understand this is a continuous process that never ends.

The common term ‘reading the room’ encapsulates this idea. We all know what it is like to walk into a room of people and, in a moment, be able to assess who is present and who is missing, think about who we need to speak with or who we want to avoid, and check what we are wearing and hope it was the right choice. We will make sense of the reactions from people and the cues we receive about the impact we are having on others. Making this assessment will help us find the best way to communicate with people and help ensure we have the most impact or influence in our leadership, whatever the context might be.

Tanya Monro is Australia’s Chief Defence Scientist and uses her ability to ‘read the room’ to successfully translate science to non-scientists including politicians, public servants and defence officials in pursuit of technological innovations and investments. ‘You might have a point in time where there is no government appetite for a particular project or there are too many competing priorities,’ says Tanya. ‘You have to be able to have the perspective to be able to pick the right opportunity at the right time and decide when to push hard.’

To do this, Tanya says she has become an acute observer of people and she uses those observations to guide the kind of leader she does, and does not, want to become. ‘I always try to adapt my energy so that I can be constructive and avoid getting frustrated,’ says Tanya. ‘For me to stay constructive, I need to be always scanning and monitoring to try and create a narrative that is constructive for the people I lead.’

At our workplace or in our community, we seek to understand the culture, dynamics, political machinations and networks of an environment we need to lead in. We need to lead with perspective to understand why a team may not be functioning well or why company performance may be slipping. If we start a new job or move to a new city, we will rapidly come up to speed to perceive what we need to know.

Australia's most senior union leader, Secretary of the ACTU, Sally McManus, says she has had a lot of experiences where she has needed to lead with perspective. Being a union official is something Sally says has developed her skill of being able to read a room. 'We are usually the people without power – it is usually workers against employers – and not always, but usually, we start with less,' says Sally. 'We need to constantly think about the other side's weaknesses, how to make ourselves stronger and how to play to our strengths.'

Modern leaders who lead with perspective also understand they need to keep an eye on what is happening outside the room. We need to constantly scan our industries for emerging trends or the ramifications of changes to our environment. We need to lead with perspective to understand why customers may be leaving or why we are unable to keep up with our competitors.

We can develop a sense for leading through unsafe situations

Perspective allows us to understand the wider system in which we are located, and this can also be in environments where we are in the minority. Leading with perspective helps us create a map of the system which we can operate and learn from.

Academic and trans activist Yves Rees believes one of their greatest leadership skills is leading with perspective. 'I think it has a lot to do with being trans,' Yves tells me. 'As young trans or queer kids, we're taught at a very young age we are not right. We must repress our true selves and perform differently to meet the perceived needs of the people around us. We become really, really good at putting on different masks for different social situations. I have been doing it my whole life,' says Yves.

People in unsafe environments rely on their ability to lead with perspective to judge how they need to respond and survive in any context. As a result, says Yves, trans people have 'a natural ability to switch communication style to a different context, to pick up nuances, body language and interpersonal dynamics and shape their response around it. It has always come naturally to me.'

Yves explains the reason why this skill comes so naturally to them has a dark side. 'It comes from a place of hyper vigilance. In a way, it is a trauma response, a sense of feeling fundamentally unsafe in my body and having to really monitor what is going on around me,' they say.

Leaders who have experienced domestic violence or other traumas in their childhood tell me they have a similar skill of being able to walk into a room and immediately gauge whether there is tension or if someone might be about to erupt. Those leaders tell me they become highly attuned to feeling a need to influence a room, including diffusing tension or trying to control things so tension does not arise. Their ability to lead with perspective has been amplified as a result of their traumatic childhoods.

We are more effective leaders

The skills of sensemaking and perspective-gaining have been highly correlated with leadership effectiveness.⁸⁸ When we have a clearer sense of the environment in which we are leading, our plans and visions for the future improve. When we understand the people we are working with, as well as the dynamics at play, we are able to work more collaboratively together.

Leaders who are strong at connection are typically strong at being able to perceive and understand the environment or context they are leading in. That is because they are constantly assessing and connecting with other people and can see what is happening within their sphere of influence, and outside of it. They can see opportunities to create value and will find ways to connect people with others who may be able to assist them.

We can simplify complexity and challenges

Researchers have discovered sensemaking allows us to quickly capture the complexities of an environment we are in and then help explain it to others in simpler words. This helps ensure everyone is on the same page, making it easier to plan the way forward, together.⁸⁹ As important

as it is for leaders to be able to ‘read the room’, it is also important to understand that the people in the room can read you as well.

As important as it is for leaders to be able to ‘read the room’, it is also important to understand that the people in the room can read you as well.

‘Say seen, if seen.’ These words are part of a vivid memory I have of leading a small group of peers when I was twenty years old. Too young and inexperienced to have ever truly understood what it meant to lead in a crisis or to make decisions quickly, I used those four words repeatedly on one of the most physically demanding days I can recall.

The year was 1992 and I was a second-year air force cadet at the Australian Defence Force Academy. I had a heavy pack on my back, as did the other six or so cadet colleagues who formed part of my small unit for an exercise known as ‘Cryptic Challenge’. The exercise was designed to test a cadet’s leadership skills while under pressure and during a period of immense physical challenge.

On this day we had to march with our packs through the mountain range in the Tallamanda State Forest outside Australia’s capital city, Canberra. We were exhausted and I was tasked to lead our unit on a mission to successfully get myself, my colleagues and all our equipment to the top of the mountain. Easier said than done when we were all feeling physically and mentally drained.

As we moved our way up the hill, I remember wondering how I might keep everyone together and motivate us to continue. The mountain seemed almost too big to conquer; it was steep and our packs were heavy. We had survived on very little food for the few days prior and keeping up morale was just as challenging as the physical activity.

There is a saying in the military that assists with communication to confirm we are all talking about the same thing in a field briefing. Someone might say, ‘There is artillery on the next embankment.



Say seen, if seen.’ A simple statement and when the response is ‘Seen’ it means the communication is clear – it is an audible response to a command.

I decided to see if I could motivate my small group as we tackled our mountain with something similar. I started to point out features in the terrain a small distance up the hill, a large rock or the stump of a tree, and followed with, ‘Say seen, if seen.’ The whole unit would say ‘Seen’ in unison and we would continue to that point in the terrain before I started with the next target for our walk.

Ultimately those few simple words provided a means of distracting us all (me included) from the task we were undertaking. We began to see how quickly people could answer ‘Seen’ or how creative I could become in locating different, obscure parts of the landscape. Eventually, the mountain had been conquered.

Sensemaking, or leading with perspective, involves simplifying complex environments for others to help them see, think and equip themselves for uncertain times.

WHAT STOPS US FROM HAVING PERSPECTIVE?

We have rigid thinking

If we are rigid in our thinking, it can be hard for us to interpret the information available to us to draw upon to make decisions. We

become blinkered, with a tunnel vision towards what is known and familiar. Rigidity comes from threats and fears, which can lead us to protecting the status quo and relying on tried-and-true modes of operating.⁹⁰

If we feel strongly we are usually right and everyone else is wrong, or if we feel resentful when things change, there is a good chance we are being rigid in our thinking. If we feel we are describing reality correctly and everyone else is wrong,⁹¹ again, it is likely we need to look at our thinking.

Leading with perspective requires us to remember that even if we think we can ‘read a room’, we are doing so through our lived experiences and state of mind. Our projection of how we interpret and read the room can interfere with the truth.⁹² It is imperative leaders are able to test the reality of their experience. This means finding a trusted mentor or adviser to let you know if what you are sensing accords with their experience as well.

We jump between solutions before testing if they work

Jumping from one decision to another in a frantic search to find a solution that works also stops us from leading with perspective. It is very difficult to ‘read the room’ in a rapidly changing room, which can be the case if we do not allow things to settle to see whether a solution we have put in place might work or if we have uncovered a successful outcome already.

In one study, thirty-nine advanced anaesthesia medical residents faced a simulated acute-care crisis exercise. In the simulation, trainee anaesthetists were called in to assist during an urgent appendectomy of a twenty-nine-year-old woman who was having difficulty breathing. There were seven plausible explanations for what was happening and only one was correct. All the cues to diagnose the patient were available to the trainees through monitoring her vital signs, the sounds of her breathing, and standard operating procedure for treatment and diagnosis of a patient who was experiencing these specific symptoms.

Researchers found the trainees fell into four modes of problem solving. Their responses are relevant for all leaders as we rapidly perceive a problem and seek to develop a solution.

- **Adaptive.** Nine trainees were able to generate different plausible diagnoses. This allowed them to rule out some potential causes as they methodically worked through each potential problem before discovering the correct diagnosis.
- **Stalled.** Two trainees stalled in solving the problem at all. They had difficulty generating any diagnoses and pursued few treatments.
- **Fixated.** Eleven trainees fixated on a single cause and had tunnel vision after establishing a plausible (but incorrect) diagnosis to which they stuck, regardless of evidence or cues to the contrary.
- **Vagabonds.** Seventeen trainees were involved in what researchers called ‘vagabonding’. The trainees generated a wide range of plausible diagnoses and then jumped from one to another without fully treating and ruling out each diagnosis. They were erratic in their problem solving and, as a result, were less effective in solving the problem.⁹³

We are often put in positions where we need to make sense of a rich, complex and confusing amount of information. We may need to use several tools to make sense of the information before deciding on a path forward. Instead of succumbing to the temptation for a quick resolution, modern leaders balance their need for action with a disciplined approach to understanding not just the problem to be solved but also the thinking processes driving their search for a solution.

HOW DO WE LEAD WITH PERSPECTIVE?

We manage the process to ensure all views are heard

Megan Davis is a Cobble Cobble woman, constitutional lawyer and Pro-Vice-Chancellor Indigenous at the University of New

South Wales. As co-chair alongside Aboriginal Elder and Alyawarre woman Pat Anderson AO, Megan led a series of twelve regional gatherings called the Uluru Dialogues. The Dialogues were the most proportionally significant consultation process of First Nations peoples Australia has ever seen. In May 2017, the Dialogues culminated in 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates gathering in Mutitjulu, in the shadow of Uluru, to sign a historic statement inviting Australia to create a better future through key political reforms.

Megan is humble about the work she did, all of which required her to lead with perspective throughout the process. 'I feel like a lot of the work was done by the mob, not me. I just provided the framework, and they did an exceptional job,' she tells me.

Megan undertook significant research to set up the Dialogues so they could be an informed process enabling everyone involved to quietly walk through the information and form their opinion. 'We were asking people to truly engage on the substance of reform and change and were asking what they thought was really best for their people.'

During the Dialogues, Megan was constantly observing body language and keeping an eye on everything that was happening in the room. She needed to 'read the room in order not to lose the room'.

To keep things on track, Megan would instruct people to help that person, change this word, set up that table for these people. 'You had to continually be putting out fires and then settle things down for the next Dialogue a few days later,' said Megan. After every Dialogue, a debrief would be held to talk about what would be done differently next time. 'Everyone had to feel they were in control and that there was no puppeteering,' said Megan.

At the Brisbane Dialogue, Megan recalls several politicians and dignitaries attended. She knew they could not sit at the front of the room, as if they were being presented to. Megan 'knew the ways in which grassroots communities don't like their conversations to be disrupted by people who are know-it-alls, or who think they know better'. Megan chose to seat the dignitaries at the back of the room.

We zoom out and seek broad input

One way to build your levels of perspective is to actively seek data from a range of sources. Leading with perspective means zooming out and taking a broader look at issues by looking for patterns and interdependencies we may only discover through speaking to a diverse range of sources. Decisions cannot be made in a vacuum but need to incorporate a range of possibilities and futures.

To help develop thinking with perspective in others, we can expose the people we lead to roles and responsibilities requiring a person to synthesise a range of data from broad sources. We can encourage them to be curious and gather experiences that will allow them to connect the dots in new and interesting ways. Job rotations and secondments can be helpful to boost the process of learning to lead with perspective.

We need to tailor our leadership for different individuals

Leading with perspective requires us to look around and understand what people are telling us through their positions, postures, gestures and movements. We need to listen to not just the words, but how people might be saying them. Doing so helps us to build our sensory skills over time and will help us remain open to diverse points of view.

We need to listen to not just the words, but how people might be saying them.

Julie Reilly, CEO of Australians Investing in Women, says she spends much of her time working with high-net-worth individuals and their foundations to try to encourage their philanthropic efforts towards initiatives that will benefit gender equality. Julie knows she is competing with other giving priorities as she engages with potential donors, so she needs to target her messaging to find areas of mutual interest likely to spark deep engagement.

‘Many of the donors and trustees I work with are from quite privileged, conservative and masculine worlds of finance and equity,’ says Julie. ‘I need to find things that are going to ramp up the person’s interest and their understanding of gender inequality, and both the needs and potential of women.’

Julie recalls one instance where she gave the daughter of one potential donor a copy of Caroline Criado Perez’s book *Invisible Women*. The daughter was so motivated after reading it she became key to helping encourage her father’s philanthropic giving for initiatives supporting women and girls.

‘There is a step before you can expect empathy, and it is understanding,’ says Julie. ‘I can see a lot of men wanting to understand unconscious bias and I work hard to try and find that light-bulb moment for them . . . I use leading with perspective to find something this person passionately cares about, or who they might be influenced by, and then think about how to bring all those forces to bear.’

Leading with perspective requires a leader to find common ground with those impacted by the decision. This may mean working on your communication, building trust and frequently engaging with people who may have different views and agendas. To develop this skill, identify key internal and external stakeholders early in the process and understand where their interests may not align with yours.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Leading with perspective has a special quality for modern leaders and is highly correlated with leaders who identify with leading with empathy, self-awareness and capability.
- Leading with perspective means seeking to understand the context we are leading in, testing our understanding of that context by talking with others, and gathering data to coordinate the best possible actions required.
- We need to not just ‘read the room’ but recognise who is missing from the room and what is going on outside as well.

FURTHER READING

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Adrian de Groot, *Thought and Choice in Chess* (2016).

Karl Weick, *Sensemaking in Organisations* (1995).

CAPABILITY

CREATING ENVIRONMENTS WHERE PEOPLE THRIVE

If you were to tell a teenage Tanya Monro she would grow up to become one of Australia's most senior leaders in the scientific community, she would have been horrified. Leadership was not something she aspired to.

Tanya now realises she was projecting her leadership at the time into music. As a teenager, Tanya learnt to play the cello and piano to diploma level and continues to play in community orchestras. Tanya, the mother of three sons who are also exceptionally talented musicians, has maintained her passion for music throughout her adult life. 'Music is very much the religious, founding principle of my family,' she says. 'Music gives us the ability to set goals, chase goals and work in teams. Music allows us to challenge ourselves and challenge others to ever higher levels.'

Tanya says she mostly plays the piano these days. 'It is an instrument that better lends itself to total immersion when you are by yourself,' says Tanya. 'When you play music, you can't think about anything else. It buys you mental space which can sometimes be so hard to find in leadership roles.'

‘When you are leading you never quite have the peace that comes with being totally absorbed in a task,’ says Tanya. ‘Whether listening to a concert or playing music with myself or others, music gives me the chance to get into a state of flow where nothing else can penetrate.’

It is easy to understand why Tanya may need to immerse herself in her music. As well as being an accomplished musician, Tanya is one of Australia’s most respected scientists. She is currently Australia’s Chief Defence Scientist, which means she is working at the cutting edge of science and technology with the Australian military.

Tanya has always excelled. Her PhD thesis, completed when she was twenty-five years old, was awarded the Bragg Gold Medal as the best physics PhD in Australia. Two years later, Tanya received the Royal Society University Research Fellowship to study at the Optoelectronics Research Centre at the University of Southampton. It was this experience, Tanya tells me, where her having confidence in her leadership needed to develop. Fast.

Tanya was in the United Kingdom to develop new kinds of optical fibres. ‘I was essentially peppering cross-sections of optical fibre with air holes,’ she tells me. ‘We were working in an interdisciplinary way to introduce new characteristics to optical fibres when I had an “aha” moment.’

She was able to convince a range of people from different fields to come together to explore something new – whether it was possible to adapt extrusion technologies (which to that point had only been used to make solid optical fibres) to allow air holes to be incorporated within the fibre cross-section. The idea worked.

Tanya says she was ‘listening to lots of talks by people from completely different fields who were developing new kinds of glass and other materials. I realised that by putting holes in the fibre we could make an optical fibre out of any material.’

She saw the huge potential of this realisation, but also knew it would be difficult to pursue because once the idea had been demonstrated, everyone involved in the multi-disciplinary group had to

return to their existing priorities in their individual fields of research. She knew it was going to take enormous courage to do anything other than enjoy this brief 'aha' moment.

Tanya summoned the courage to speak with her boss at the time, Professor Sir David Payne, who was head of the Research Centre. Tanya showed him the exciting initial results but explained there was little way to pursue the possibilities. Payne agreed it was a problem. His solution was to ask Tanya to build and lead a new, multi-disciplinary team. The stakes were high and the certainty of success unknown.

'The best science is about asking the best questions,' Tanya tells me. 'It comes back to having the courage to be vulnerable to say to someone you don't understand something. It also means being creative and looking at things from a different perspective. Science is the art of the possible.'

Tanya's 'aha' moment and having the courage to pursue the possibilities revolutionised the world's understanding of optical fibre. 'Our research basically unlocked the periodic table,' says Tanya, 'and opened a range of applications that wasn't possible before. That was exciting.'

Tanya's leadership was tested in these early days. She was a young woman in her mid-twenties who was leading men often twice her age who made it clear they were not interested in having her as their leader. 'It was extremely difficult,' Tanya says, 'but I learnt not to take it personally and tried to work out what constructive things could come from it. It was a good lesson for me.'

Tanya tells me she is 'really driven by delivering outcomes and by having science enable someone to do something that wasn't previously possible'. She discovered her gift as a leader is being able to interpret what someone might want to do with science and then turning that into a question a researcher could ask. 'I love the "doing" of science, but I discovered I could have a bigger impact being the translator,' she says.

Building the capability of the teams she leads is an essential element of Tanya's leadership. 'What I really care about is leading an organisation where people can thrive,' says Tanya. 'I can't imagine anything more frustrating for an organisation of scientists and technologists than someone else telling them what to do. They get the same thrill I do when they come up with a crazy new idea that solves a problem; that is what gives them energy. I must consciously create that environment for them to thrive in.'

Many believe scientists are primarily analytical leaders operating on data and evidence. Tanya assures me that is a myth. 'If I was a leader that only led with my head and was focused on analysis, I would not be as engaged, invested in my work or as good at leading,' she says. 'If I only led with my heart, I would be missing the intellectual thrill that comes with spotting connections in science.'

Tanya says she loves 'dwelling in that murky space' between where she has enough opportunity to use her analytical skills to spot opportunities and make connections while also creating enough space for good people in her organisation to thrive.

'Whenever leadership can lean on data and evidence, that makes it really powerful,' says Tanya, 'but it does not diminish the need for heart.'

CAPABILITY AS A HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE

In our research to develop the Head & Heart Leader Scale, a high score for capability was strongly reflected in a high score for virtually all other head and heart leadership attributes, other than empathy. We can hypothesise this is because the qualities of leading with capability, and having a growth mindset, means leaders are much more likely to embrace being curious, leading with wisdom, and leading with perspective, humility and self-awareness.

Leading with capability is quite different to having the capability to do something – a job, task or hobby. It reflects your ability to wield the

knowledge, expertise and mastery you have developed to ensure you are developing a new generation of capable leaders as well. Leading with capability means being committed to developing a growth mindset in others to help them aspire to new challenges and achievements.

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‘I have developed many leaders,’ Allan English tells me, ‘who I could see the leadership qualities within that they were not seeing themselves. When you can open the eyes of someone to show them their potential and demonstrate absolute belief in them, when you watch them flourish, it is a beautiful thing. They become so powerful.’

Allan remembers a particular young woman, Sylvia, who worked in his company and who he encouraged to take on a leadership role. She initially said no, believing she did not have the right skills, so someone else was appointed to the role. They did not work out. Allan returned to Sylvia and asked her to reconsider accepting the position. Sylvia was successful and ended up progressing to become a general manager leading 120 people in her division five years later.

‘Sylvia got to the point of believing in herself and her own capabilities,’ says Allan. ‘She was able to trust her own intuition, tap into that and have the courage to follow through.’

Leading with capability is evident in all endeavours, according to Allan. ‘It can be in sporting clubs, in community organisations, the local kids’ football teams,’ says Allan. ‘It is often just about having the courage to step up to the moment when asked.’

Leading with capability requires us to have a growth mindset towards any endeavour we pursue whether a profession, trade or hobby. As modern leaders, not only must we be capable of doing the job, but we must also *believe* we can do it too. This belief in our ability becomes a key determinant in how we think, feel and behave in any situation.

If we have a strong sense of self-efficacy or, in other words, a strong sense of feeling we are capable at what we set our minds to, we will find a much deeper interest in our work and lives. We will also form a stronger sense of commitment to those interests, recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments, and we will view the next challenging problem as another task to be mastered.

Think back to a time when you felt invigorated by work or a hobby; when everything clicked, and you perhaps experienced a sense of flow. When this happens, you feel you can overcome whatever the next challenge might be. This mindset is an important aspect to leading with capability and just as important as being able to do the task itself.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As we consider what it means to lead with capability, reflect on your leadership. Ask yourself:

- When you are facing a difficult task, do you feel certain you will accomplish it?
- Do you believe you can succeed at almost any endeavour you set your mind to?
- Do you feel you will be able to achieve most of the goals you have set for yourself?
- Do you believe you can obtain goals important to you?
- Are you able to successfully overcome challenges?
- Do you feel confident you can perform effectively at many different tasks?
- Compared to other people, do you feel you can do most tasks you attempt quite well?
- Even when things are tough, can you perform to the standard expected of you?
- When you start a new job or hobby, do you work hard to succeed?

HOW WE BENEFIT FROM LEADING WITH CAPABILITY

We have a growth mindset

Capability is not just about mastering the technical component of whatever it is we do. It is also about having a growth mindset. Shifting our mindsets from knowing to learning will motivate us to become more capable. Capability is not just knowing what to do but also believing we can do it.

Having a growth mindset is critical for modern leaders. The work of Stanford professor Carol Dweck on developing growth mindsets has helped individual leaders and organisations build a corporate culture around the key principles.⁹⁴ Microsoft has embedded a growth mindset into their corporate culture through the Model-Coach-Care framework introduced by CEO Satya Nadella. Salesforce Chair and CEO Marc Benioff also believes a growth mindset is critical for every entrepreneur and CEO. They need what he calls a ‘beginner’s mind’.⁹⁵

Leaders who believe their talents can be continually improved whether through hard work, feedback or personal development, have a growth mindset. These leaders put more effort into learning and understanding than needing to have all the answers. They know intelligence can be developed. Leaders with a growth mindset embrace challenges and persist, even when things get tough. These leaders see feedback as a chance to learn and understand every failure is an opportunity to grow.

By contrast, leaders with a fixed mindset believe their talents are innate gifts, carved in stone. If you have a fixed mindset, you feel a need to constantly prove how intelligent you are as well as the kind of person you are and the moral character you have. It is challenging for someone with a fixed mindset to be seen as a learner; they will often ignore negative constructive feedback. A leader with a fixed mindset will see others’ success as a threat and will most likely give up early, at the first sight of a challenge.

We are all a mixture of fixed and growth mindsets, and the mix continually evolves with experience.⁹⁶ Modern leaders have a

growth mindset but realise they can be easily triggered – through stress, criticism or challenges – to fall into a fixed mindset that inhibits growth.

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Having a growth mindset also means we can build our self-efficacy. When we have achieved something, we can integrate the belief we had in ourselves in that moment into what we believe about ourselves overall. We believe we can do great things. We allow ourselves the feeling of satisfaction and sense of accomplishment in achieving a goal, small or large, we set out to achieve. We believe we will be capable of doing it again.

We are a more engaging leader

In a business context, research tells us that when employees are led by leaders who lead with and encourage capability, daily tasks become more engaging and interactive because they are given more learning opportunities and support. This helps avoid a sense of routine and encourages people to reinvent the way they work, leading to increased levels of personal satisfaction and meaning.⁹⁷

Modern leaders know personal development involves creating opportunities for new capabilities and competencies to be acquired. The constant nourishing of others is at the core of effective leadership. A successful leader needs to set up their team in a way that allows them to flourish. We might do that through providing support, guardrails and positive feedback.

The conductor of the orchestra will not necessarily need to play every instrument; they lead with capability by getting the best from their musicians and by bringing that effort together. Our sense of achievement comes through the success and achievements of others.

We grow family trees of leaders

Leaders with high levels of self-efficacy positively influence those they lead to work independently and emerge as more effective leaders themselves.⁹⁸ If you are a leader who has developed your capabilities and mastery of the task at hand and if you believe yourself to be capable, you will be confident to develop leaders of your own. When we realise our capabilities and project confidence in what we do, the people we lead will notice and be encouraged to do the same in their roles.

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Mark Scott comes from a long line of leaders. Watching his grandfather, Sir Walter Scott, on television in 1966 introducing decimal currency to Australia was one of his earliest memories. Creating a positive legacy of leadership is important to Mark. Before starting as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney he had already served as Secretary of the New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education and before that was the managing director of Australia's public broadcaster, the ABC. Mark began his career as a journalist and was the editor-in-chief and editorial director at Fairfax, publishers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age*.

Mark thinks of leadership as the ability to influence others and to move them in a positive direction. He calls this building great family trees of leadership and impact.

As the most senior leader in the largest education sector in Australia, when Mark was running the NSW Department of Education, he would meet school principals and wonder how many other principals that principal had helped create. For Mark, if the people around you are growing, it is natural they will want to step up to lead more widely and have a greater impact.

WHAT STOPS US LEADING WITH CAPABILITY?

Fear of discomfort

It can feel uncomfortable to learn something new. It is hard to disrupt the way we think about the world, the way we have always tackled problems and perhaps the way we have always led others. Having a fixed mindset will ultimately limit our capabilities as a leader.

Being a leader who is prepared to stretch their capabilities, even when things are not going well, are leaders with a growth mindset. It is this mindset that allows us to thrive during the most challenging times in our lives.⁹⁹

Structural barriers

The systems and structures of our modern working environments can often focus so much on efficiency that individualism, creativity and capability-building is diminished.

One study found 84 per cent of workers who felt ready to use their capabilities were prevented from doing so due to workplace cultures more focused on speed, standardised routines and procedures. In other words, innovation and using individual capability to its highest use was discouraged. There was a sense of urgency to complete tasks based on time- and efficiency-based metrics. People were less likely to use their capabilities to seek new solutions to opportunities and to find new opportunities where they could apply what they knew.¹⁰⁰

Mark Scott learnt early that what may make you capable in your role, including your technical abilities, does not make you a great leader. He recalls one newsroom editor he worked with who had been incredibly successful as a journalist but as an editor continually second-guessed the decisions of the people they led. They spent their time telling photographers how to take photos and sub-editors how to write headlines. As a result, the newspaper staff spent their time focused on guessing what was on the editor's mind rather than doing the best job they could.

Smartest person in the room syndrome

People who struggle with the need to be the smartest person in the room have been described as ‘diminishers’ in Liz Wiseman’s book, *Multipliers*.¹⁰¹ These are people who operate as a know-it-all, assuming their job is to know the most. Rather than using their intelligence to enable people to stretch towards a future opportunity, they give directions in a way that showcases their superior knowledge.

‘Diminishers consider themselves thought leaders and readily share their knowledge; however they rarely share it in a way that invites contribution,’ says Wiseman. They are so busy taking up oxygen in the room there is no space for anyone else.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, the same people who overestimate their knowledge or competence generally don’t recognise it. Two researchers, David Dunning and Jason Kruger, found people with limited knowledge or competence greatly overestimate their knowledge or competence relative to objective criteria, or to the performance of their peers, or to people in general. They called this cognitive bias the Dunning-Kruger Effect.¹⁰³

It is not always the case that a know-it-all has limited knowledge or competence. They may, in fact, be the smartest person in the room. However, a modern leader, while potentially aware they may be the smartest person in the room, is humble and curious enough to control their urge to prove it. Their focus is, instead, on their interactions with others and developing others to achieve this knowledge as well.

The need to appear to have all the answers betrays the reality that no one person can possibly stay on top of everything. But the myth of the heroic leader (and the attendant fear of appearing incompetent) causes many leaders to try to be just that, exhausting themselves and damaging their organisations in the process.¹⁰⁴

Not only will this style of leader push people away and cause those they lead to become disengaged, but it will also see others become

highly critical, finding all the flaws in a project, company or individual leader. If you are a leader who feels the need to prove how smart you are, you are headed for trouble.

In my executive coaching work, the unrealistic need to have all the answers – resulting in leaders dominating meetings and stifling discussion – is a recurring issue. Leaders mistakenly believe having all the answers and being ready to provide a solution to any problem that emerges is what leadership is all about. They generally come to coaching either through the suggestion of someone else or by understanding themselves that in order to progress they will need to focus on their ability to lead with the heart just as much as they may have previously focused on leading with their head.

Unless someone points out this blind spot, or unless you are someone others feel safe to speak up to, you may never realise. Some hallmark signs that you think you are the smartest in the room are:

- you tend to talk more than you listen;
- you share opinions on a topic even when it is not your area of expertise (and you do so especially when there are others present who have greater expertise than you);
- you have a need to be right and see discussions as a chance to win;
- you listen to other points of view only to find flaws or holes in the information others are presenting – you can't wait to hit them with a 'gotcha' moment to win;
- you share opinions even when they are not sought; and
- you are uninterested in diverse points of view because you already have the answer.

I have worked with many people who believe they are the smartest person in the room. They may have the highest IQ if it were tested, but they are certainly not intelligent leaders. Their individual brands and reputations are damaged through this behaviour even though they are often too blind to see it.

Many leaders who lead this way find, especially in modern workplace cultures, they hit a ceiling in their ability to progress as a leader. While their intellect and technical capability may, at the start of their career, enable them to progress through their chosen profession, their inability to recognise the impact their behaviour is having on others means they often do not progress to the most senior leadership levels.

The impact of any leader feeling they need to be the smartest person in the room can be devastating, especially for the most junior members of a team who revere the older, wiser leaders they work with. Astronomer Lisa Harvey-Smith says in academic meetings, 'It can be absolutely gut-wrenching. You can be leapt on like you've entered a cage of lions.'

'The environment is stifling,' Lisa says. 'It promotes a lack of communication and a reticence to put your neck out there with your ideas. It stifles innovation and it stifles the free flow and sharing of ideas as well.'

Lisa finds that in many research and academic environments, the culture is entrenched in people thinking they are – or need to be – the smartest in the room. 'They think they know everything because they are the most senior or the most experienced,' says Lisa. 'This is not leadership. It is domineering and very difficult.'

Sally McManus, Australia's most senior union leader, relishes negotiating with someone who thinks they are the smartest in the room. She sees it as a weakness she can exploit.

'I pick it up really quickly because it is so obvious,' Sally tells me. 'I use it in negotiations against an opponent because it is clear it is a weakness they have not had the self-awareness to address.'

Sally knows someone who thinks they are the smartest in the room will underestimate her. 'I am happy when I see it if it is in an opponent. They are so blind to the fact that other people might be as smart as them – or even smarter. It used to drive me crazy but now you just know you are dealing with someone who has big flaws.'

HOW DO WE LEAD WITH CAPABILITY?

We champion autonomy

One way to encourage capability in others is to champion autonomy at every opportunity. The notion of leading through command and control is outdated and unhelpful in building a culture where people can feel capable. Modern leaders understand they need to coach those they lead and spend time asking the right questions to help them develop a belief in what they might be able to achieve themselves. We need to enable those we lead to just get on with it.

Toshifumi Suzuki, former CEO and president of 7-Eleven Japan, was once quoted as saying, ‘I have only two eyes and one mind. There are several thousand part-time workers in our stores. If everyone can make a judgement on his or her own, we will have quite a few more eyes and minds.’

To encourage autonomy, you can make certain you are redesigning the way you and your team work to ensure everyone is able to do what they need to do without requiring approvals or sign-offs every step of the way. Nothing stifles a sense of autonomy, and therefore capability, more than bureaucracy. Modern leaders seek to champion the ability for people to feel free to apply what they know and ask if they need more.

Pip Marlow, CEO Salesforce Asia Pacific, agrees. She believes sustainable leadership is creating the environment for people to do their best work, whatever the context, without you watching over their shoulders. This is created when the people you lead believe in what they do so they don’t need to be told to do it.

This is the kind of culture *The Heart of Business* author and former CEO of Best Buy, Hubert Joly, calls ‘human magic’, an environment where every individual can connect with the purpose of the company. It is a culture where everyone feels they belong, and everyone knows they matter. People are at the centre. This is what creates extraordinary outcomes.¹⁰⁵

Joly argues autonomy is an essential ingredient because we are intrinsically motivated by being able to control what we do, when we do

it and who we do it with. Modern leaders appreciate the importance of pushing decision-making as far down the organisation as possible and allowing people to participate in strategic decisions wherever feasible. Developing autonomous cultures allows people to think creatively and develop innovative ideas. This builds capability and self-efficacy in employees, as well as positive outcomes for organisations.

Mike Henry, CEO of BHP, is a modern leader who, like millions of leaders around the world, found himself leading through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The only difference was Mike was leading one of the largest companies in the world (BHP is the world's largest mining and resources conglomerate) and he had only just started in his role.

In mid-February 2020, just six weeks after starting as CEO, Mike recalls being at a conference in Miami. Between conference sessions, he tried to make sense of the disconnect between the relatively calm reassurances from many governments around the world to their citizens that COVID-19 was nothing to be alarmed about, when, at the same time, he was devouring statistics from the World Health Organization which painted a very different picture.

In this type of situation, leaders are caught between a rock and hard place. If they act quickly, they can be accused of exaggerating the threat. Take too long to respond, they will be accused of complacency and inaction.

Mike approached BHP's chief medical officer to try to appreciate the potential scale of the challenge that lay before them. It was clear to Mike COVID-19 was a very big deal. To the bemusement of some at the time, he immediately stopped shaking hands at the conference and adopted the 'elbow bump'.

Mike returned from Miami to his home in Melbourne. Within eighteen months, Mike's home city would eventually come out of the longest lockdown in the world – 5 million people, including Mike and his family, were locked down for 245 days. But in February 2020, no one understood the scale of what was to come.

Like leaders all over the world at the time, the challenges Mike and his leadership team needed to grapple with in early 2020 were unprecedented; the answers impossible to know. ‘We didn’t know how big the impacts were going to be, we didn’t know what government policy was going to be, we didn’t know what it might do to the global economy or how it might disrupt our operations,’ Mike tells me. He and his team were going to need to make many decisions quickly in the face of little to no information.

Mike understood the consequences of his decisions would not just impact the business of BHP or the 80,000 people he employed in ninety countries. He and his team also needed to confront how they would protect the people and communities they operated in.

Ethical dilemmas arose. ‘How do we balance protecting our own people with the need to ensure the world continues to receive the resources it needs to function? What signals would we send the world by the confidence we show to continue operating, or not?’ Mike recalls.

Mike and his team were making decisions that may have taken months to work through previously – searching for data and weighing up risks – in a matter of hours. On reflection, Mike says, they turned out to be good decisions and gave 90 per cent of the solutions required. He believes those decisions were made well because they were a balance of head and heart, with a particular focus on empathy. As Mike and his team were grappling with decisions about the impact on the world resources market of closing operations, they were acutely aware of the human impact of every decision they made.

Despite this period of great uncertainty and upheaval, the giant wheels of the bus at BHP did not come off. The company had its best performing period ever, since beginning operations in 1885, during COVID-19. People were able to make decisions and stopped asking permission to act on issues they might have felt they needed to previously. The team at BHP was given the autonomy to make decisions

and do things differently. Employees later acknowledged they felt better about the way they worked during the pandemic.

Mike has tried to capture some of that autonomy and bottle it in a post-COVID world. He has asked everyone at BHP to take time to reflect on ways they have been working differently. He reminds people that no company policies changed to make what they did possible, they just did it. 'I ask them how that made them feel and what can they do now to make sure we don't revert to old ways of doing things,' he says.

The uncertainty at the outset of the pandemic was a familiar situation for everyone. So too was the need to make rapid decisions in the face of little to no information. What stands BHP apart is Mike Henry's willingness to champion autonomy and empower tens of thousands of employees to make their own decisions.

We encourage the people we lead to think big

A modern leader challenges those they lead to stretch themselves to realise their true potential; perhaps in areas of potential they may not have even realised they had. There is no doubt that in pivotal points in our careers, leaders can raise our aspirations and beliefs in what we can achieve by suggesting we do something even more ambitious than what we may have had in mind.

Corporate business leader Miriam Silva has been the first to do many things. Always a gifted child, Miriam began university at sixteen years of age. Miriam, who was born in England, is an Islamic woman whose family is from Guyana. They emigrated to Australia when she was six years old.

'My parents worked hard for every cent they had,' says Miriam. 'Dad was a radiographer and Mum was a medical secretary at the hospital. The Muslim community was our family in Australia.' At school, Miriam was good at maths and languages and her school principal was one of the first influential leadership role models in her life. 'She told me, "You can achieve anything. You don't have to be a certain

type and you don't have to look or dress a certain way. You can just be you, and be what you want.”

Miriam was never a typical student. While studying mathematics at university, Miriam continued to excel despite being the youngest in her class by many years. In her second and third years of mathematics studies, Miriam was tutoring the other students and during her university breaks had a scholarship to work with a foundation researching cancer treatments.

‘Everyone else was working at McDonald’s and I would go and work at the hospital with these amazing scientists doing cancer research,’ says Miriam. ‘This work made me love that you can use mathematics to help create drugs that would give people a better quality of life.’

After university Miriam entered the pharmaceutical industry where she worked with the research and development team on experimental design. ‘I was loving it and was doing all this really cool experimental design work to try and help scientists build neural network models to target drugs,’ says Miriam.

Her boss at the time recognised potential in Miriam she did not see herself. ‘He said to me, “I think you have more potential than just research work. Let’s get you into other areas,”’ she says. ‘I trusted him so when he said, “You can do this” I thought, okay, if he thinks I can, then I will just go and do it.’ Miriam went through finance and information technology training and was soon teaching the training courses to others. ‘It was the making of my career,’ says Miriam, who would go on to senior leadership roles in the banking and finance sector including leading the ANZ Bank in Hong Kong.

We monitor our word-to-wisdom ratio

I first started thinking about what I have coined a word-to-wisdom ratio more than a decade ago as I embarked on a career as a professional company director. In its simplest form, the word-to-wisdom ratio is the number of words it takes us to add something of value to a conversation.

The word-to-wisdom ratio is the number of words it takes us to add something of value to a conversation.

When I was starting my board career, I knew I was inexperienced in a boardroom and felt I needed to contribute something to virtually every topic we discussed, even when I had nothing of real value to add. I would use far more words than were necessary to get to the point of what I wanted to say. In short my word-to-wisdom ratio was low. At the same time, I noticed more experienced board members might say very little, allowing conversations to develop and listening to the contributions of others. They would wait to speak towards the end of a discussion and, though they might say very little, every word was of value. Their word-to-wisdom ratio was very high.

I like to think my word-to-wisdom ratio has improved over the years and I am conscious of my word-to-wisdom ratio, even now, when I am engaged in discussions. I also watch and learn from the many colleagues I admire who always seem to get their ratio just right.

To lead with capability, we can all seek to improve our word-to-wisdom ratio. This means allowing others to speak first and ensuring that when we do speak, our words are being used to guide discussion in a way that may generate ideas from others. If you walk out of a meeting and reflect on the fact you did most of the talking, your word-to-wisdom ratio may be low or perhaps you are rambling for longer than needed when a concise answer is called for. If this has ever happened for you, make it a practice to reflect on whether you spoke over people or dominated the discussion. If you are a rambler, plan your discussion points for meetings and think of your key ideas as short, concise concepts. Be your own editor before the meeting rather than having post-meeting regrets.

One executive coaching client I worked with knew she spoke more than anyone else. She told me that in her meetings, team members were quiet and often did not speak up at all. She explained how her team looked to her for answers to issues they were working on and

were happy to be guided by her about what they needed to do next. She was not a loudmouthed know-it-all by any means, but she was a leader who had always been rewarded for her technical expertise, knowledge and intellect.

As my client explained the team dynamics, it was clear others were not speaking up because they didn't need to. This leader was coming with all the answers already, filling the silence with data and tangible action points, allocating responsibilities, setting deadlines and timeframes, and working through key performance indicators. All very important, but the consequence of being the 'smartest in the room' was disengaging for her team and preventing them from needing to think at all. She was not leading with capability.

We brainstormed experimenting with a new approach. At her next team meeting, she focused on asking open-ended questions instead of offering solutions. She thought about her word-to-wisdom ratio and the impact her words, tone and questions would have on others. She was mindful of showing mutual respect for the solutions that were suggested and trusted that by letting go of control and allowing autonomy, a better outcome would result.

At our next coaching session, this leader told me the meeting had been one of the best her team had ever held. Once she started to ask open questions, the answers and solutions followed, and it was clear her team felt ownership of the outcomes. Not only that, but she was feeling more confident in her leadership. She had been courageous enough to let go of control and the comfort she found in data analysis, logic and outcomes, and was able to trust a better solution would follow.

We give others internal reasons why they are capable

Triple Olympian and four-time gold medallist Libby Trickett wasn't always sure a swimming career was for her. It was a conversation with her coach, Stephan Widmar, that gave her a vision for what might be possible. It was a vision Libby had not dared consider.

Soon after they started working together, Libby swam at the 2002 World Cup in Melbourne. Just before the final of the 100-metre free-style, Libby's coach told her she would not recognise her swimming career within eighteen months. He was right. Within six months, Libby had qualified for the Australian swim team for the first time. Within twelve months, she had broken a world record.

'My coach really cemented the power of leadership and the role he could play in my career and my life,' Libby tells me. 'It also cemented what I had always known about myself, which is that I wanted to be a leader too.'

As leaders with a growth mindset, it is important to encourage people to take on new capabilities or opportunities, even those they may not feel ready for. We can give reasons to let people know why they are well suited, and these may be reasons someone has not even recognised themselves. To create an even more powerful outcome, we can help attribute internal reasons for why someone is capable, to help them feel they can and should stretch themselves to reach the next level.

As modern leaders we can help answer questions someone may be asking about themselves. Researchers have shown that if we can help people find an internal reason for their actions, we are helping them to change their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and their abilities.

In one study, three groups of children received different messages from their teachers on their ability to do mathematics. During the experiment, two mathematics tests were administered two weeks apart, to see which messaging had the most impact on the children's results. The mathematics tests were scored out of 20. A control group of children who were not involved in the study provided a baseline result of 15 out of 20 for the test.¹⁰⁶

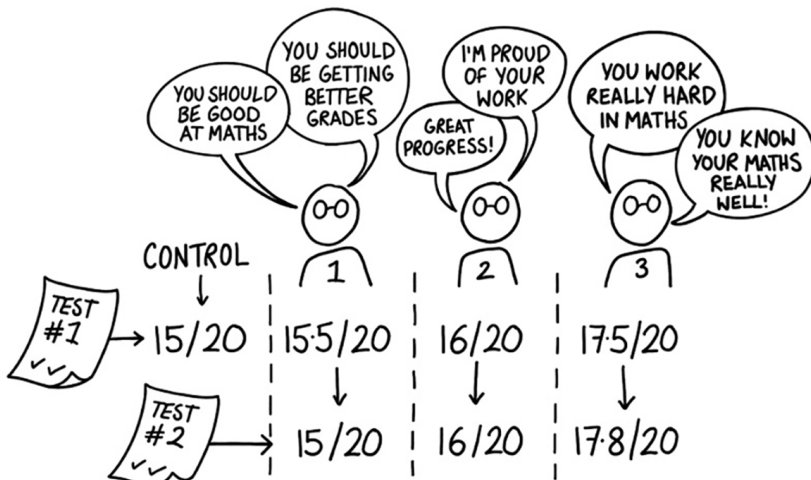
In the first class, the children received comments like: 'You should be good at maths', 'You should be getting better grades in maths' and 'You should be doing well in maths'. The teachers were trying to persuade the

children to perform better. There was little change in the results of the two maths tests. In the first test, the average score was 15.5 out of 20 and in the second test the average score had dropped to 15.

In the second class in the study, teachers made comments such as: 'I'm proud of your work', 'I'm pleased with your progress' and 'Excellent progress'. The teachers were encouraging the students and acknowledging their achievements. There was no change in the results across the two maths tests. The average score was 16 in both tests.

In the third class, teachers would say to the child or write comments on their mathematics assignments like: 'You seem to know your maths very well', 'You really work hard in maths' and 'You're trying more, keep at it'. Internal reasons were attributed to the children for their results; they were told the results were due to their abilities and actions whether through trying hard, working hard or understanding the content. These children saw the most significant change in their mathematics results. The average score on the first test was 17.5 and increased to 17.8 on the second test.

Modern leaders understand that persuading or encouraging someone to do better at a chosen job, task or hobby is unlikely to lead to long-term, sustained improvement. Much more effective is



explaining to the person why their actions – working hard, applying themselves to new skills, researching their solutions – will help them succeed. The key difference is an internal attribution which we, as leaders, can help others identify for themselves.

We value self-awareness and feedback

As leaders we are all susceptible to feeling as if we need to have all the answers, speaking too much and failing to listen enough. As leaders we need to remember to remain a ‘learn-it-all’ throughout our careers, even when we believe we do know-it-all. Organisational psychologist Adam Grant has said, ‘Jumping in to assert a confident opinion can make you sound like the smartest person in the room. Taking time to hear different views is more likely to help you become the wisest person in the room.’

Megan Davis, Professor of Law and Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of New South Wales, knows she has a tendency to fall into the trap of being the smartest person in the room. ‘I am super conscious of not domineering too much and trying to listen better,’ she tells me. ‘Sometimes I know I’m doing it and I will say to myself, “Just stop, stop now.” But then I am torn thinking, “No, I just need to get this point across!”’

Megan knows that if she dominates discussions too much, everyone falls silent. ‘There’s a lot of waiting, waiting and then you realise, actually no one is going to step up. And then you step back up yourself.’ The cycle then continues.

Media owner Mia Freedman admits she gets worried if she finds herself the smartest in the room. ‘I don’t want to be in that room,’ Mia tells me. ‘It makes me panic and feel like I’ve got all the responsibility. Nothing makes me more excited than having an idea and someone else builds on the idea and makes it even better.’

By being self-aware of what triggers us to have to assert opinions or have a point of view, we are more likely to master listening to learn. ‘If you take two kids at school, one of them has more innate capability

but is a know-it-all. The other person has less innate capability but is a learn-it-all. The learn-it-all does better than the know-it-all,' says Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck.¹⁰⁷

Valuable insights gained from 360-degree reviews are an important part of any executive coaching work as they help us uncover blind spots and reveal areas of focus. If we adopt a growth mindset, 360-degree tools help us continually improve and adapt how we lead.

Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll says she has done many 360-degree reviews during her career. She admits sometimes the feedback can be difficult to hear but 'if you don't get that feedback, you won't know. It will remain a blind spot.'

Katarina remembers when she was in her mid-twenties being, she says, 'a young brash detective who thought she was pretty cool'. She had progressed quickly through the Police Service, moving into plain-clothes work at the age of twenty-three, and she thought she was doing a pretty good job. Katarina received some critical feedback from colleagues at the time and says she remembers how hurt she felt when she heard it. She then started to reflect that maybe she did need to start learning and become mindful of how and why she made decisions. Katarina acknowledges how fortunate she was to receive that feedback early in her career.

We develop other leaders early in their career

If you think about the first time you were offered serious leadership development, it was probably too late. It is likely you had already been leading people for some time and already had made plenty of mistakes along the way.

Inexplicably, most organisations wait far too long to invest in developing the leaders in their businesses. They reserve the most powerful leadership training and coaching for the most senior, formal leaders in the organisation who are already well into their careers. In one study of 87,000 leaders, the average age leaders first

participated in leadership development programs was 40.2 years old when, on average, they started leading in formal roles thirteen years earlier – at 27 years old.¹⁰⁸ It makes no sense. These thirteen years are a lost opportunity to develop the capabilities of leaders and opens the door to poor leadership behaviours being ingrained and becoming bad habits that are difficult to unlearn.

When leading with capability we can recognise that developing other leaders needs to start early. This means building the self-efficacy of those you lead by developing others' capability early in their career.

Sally McManus, Secretary of the ACTU, tells me that developing the capability of future leaders is ingrained in the union movement. 'There is an obligation on a union leader to pass on what we have learned to the next generation,' she says. 'This is a movement, not about an individual, and people have invested in you and your knowledge, so it is your job to pass that on.'

'I know previous leaders did that for me and it is my job to do it for others,' Sally tells me. 'Being a leader is a massive privilege.'

In my executive coaching, I often work with the most senior leaders of an organisation. Their leadership role is critical, however in many cases the biggest return could have been gained from coaching them as new leaders when they were starting to form their ideas of what it meant to lead. For many people I work with, they are unlearning traditional leadership habits developed decades ago.

Corporate business leader Miriam Silva remembers being confident early in her career and feeling cocky about her 360-degree review. She had, in some areas, received a perfect score. She thought there was nothing more she needed to do. She soon learned that was far from true.

'My executive coach asked me what happens when the people you lead don't do something the right way,' Miriam remembers. 'I responded how I apologise to them for not explaining something well enough and I try to work through the issue with them.'

Her executive coach challenged her about whether her words reflected what she really meant. Was she truly sorry, he asked? Miriam had to agree no, she wasn't. Instead, she was thinking, 'Why don't they understand what I was telling them? Now they are just wasting my time.'

Miriam realised her intention was quite different to her words. Her 360-degree review had borne this out through comments that suggested she could do better in coaching her staff. Miriam learnt, the hard way, that intention comes across irrespective of the words spoken. Like Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll, Miriam was grateful the opportunity to gain this feedback came early in her career.

Miriam said this revelation also helped her understand the connection between head and heart. 'It was a turning point in my career and my life,' says Miriam. 'I realised I did not need to be one or the other. I can be both and I am comfortable being both. From that point on, my leadership career took off.'

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Capability is more than the ability to do our jobs. It is about having the mindset to believe we can do what we need to do and being focused on developing the same mindset in others.
- Modern, capable leaders have a growth mindset and are looking for opportunities to learn. They are also keenly aware of the need to instil a growth mindset in those they lead.
- We need to be self-aware and monitor our word-to-wisdom ratio and seek external feedback from others to avoid trying to be the smartest person in the room.

FURTHER READING

Carol Dweck, *Mindset: Changing the way you think to fulfil your potential* (2017).

Hubert Joly, *The Heart of Business: Leadership principles for the next era of capitalism* (2021).

Liz Wiseman, *Multipliers: How the best leaders make everyone smarter* (2010).

PART 3

LEADING WITH OUR HEARTS

Emotions have always influenced and impacted our decisions. Humans are not and never have been, automatons. Leading with the heart is just as important for a modern leader as leading with our heads. The way we engage with others, the way we present our ideas, the way we encourage others to work harder and for longer all requires us to lead with our heart through humility, empathy, self-awareness and courage.

Leading with our heart refers to how we view and are viewed by the world. Our heart, in a metaphorical sense, is where we process our emotions, feel a connection with others and develop our values. Leading with our heart may be difficult to see and measure but is equally important and what it produces impacts the way we interact and relate to others.

Heart-based leaders understand leadership requires a high level of self-awareness of our character, abilities and limitations. It means having a high level of insight into the impact we have on those around us.

The four key attributes of leading with our heart are:

- **Humility (Chapter 8).** Modern leaders are willing to seek out the contributions of others and accept their limitations.

We understand some things are beyond our control, are open and grateful for new ideas, and are willing and eager to receive the contributions of those around us without seeing it as a weakness.

- **Self-Awareness (Chapter 9).** For a modern leader, being self-aware means having a high level of insight into our character, abilities and limitations. It means being aware of the impact we have on those around us and then having the willingness and ability to challenge or change what doesn't feel right.
- **Courage (Chapter 10).** A modern leader has the courage to speak up for what they believe in. Modern leaders can make decisions they believe are the right thing to do, even in the face of pressure from others not to do so. Leading with courage means we create cultures where others feel able to speak up as well.
- **Empathy (Chapter 11).** Modern leaders who lead with empathy can put themselves in the shoes of others and comprehend their feelings, without taking on those feelings themselves. They can willingly, authentically and respectfully listen and engage with diverse points of view and appreciate not everyone has the same experience or perspective as they do. Modern leaders recognise it is in those differences where value can be gained and incorporated into our decision-making to drive better outcomes for all.

HUMILITY

LEADING WITH OTHERS IN MIND

Entrepreneur and designer Collis Ta'eed is an unusually humble man. In a Sydney garage, alongside his wife, Cyan, and business partner Jun Rung, Collis built an online marketplace. Fast forward more than fifteen years and their company, Envato, has quietly become one of the creative world's most influential companies.

With a community of almost one million users, more than US\$1 billion paid in earnings to community members and with more than 700 employees, Envato is a technology unicorn. It is a textbook example of how to build a business. Literally. The story of Envato's success is used as a case study for high school students.

Collis and Cyan have never let their commercial success define them. They are heavily focused on giving back and ensuring their wealth is put to good use. The Ta'eed Family Foundation donates money to charities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other impact investments including those combatting climate change and juvenile justice. Through their business, the Envato Foundation donates money to organisations supporting First Nations communities, children and youth, and creating pathways into STEM through education or employment.

Collis moved to Papua New Guinea with his family when he was three years old. He remembers his school principal, Mr Harding, instilling a leadership lesson in him at Korobosea Primary School in Port Moresby when, at the start of every school assembly, Harding would tell the students, 'If it is to be, it is up to me.' For Collis, this message of personal responsibility and personal accountability is a fundamental leadership trait he still adheres to.

The Ta'eed family moved to Papua New Guinea to commit themselves to helping build the then fledgling Baha'i community. Collis and his family would fly into remote jungles in Papua New Guinea, landing in a plane on the side of a mountain before trekking through the jungle to meet with Baha'i communities. These experiences taught Collis what it means to be part of something bigger than himself and about doing things for others beyond any personal comfort or personal interest. Humility, generosity and kindness form important foundations of Collis' view of leadership.

The Baha'i faith has also had an important influence on Collis' view of what it means to be a leader. Baha'i place significant emphasis on traits such as consensus building, consultation and inclusivity – all strong examples of leading with the head and heart.

For Collis, integrating this philosophy into his business was essential. Collis recalls when he and Cyan met, their small, fledgling design agency was already thinking about how to overlay social good to all they did. While some entrepreneurs spend every waking hour getting their start-ups off the ground, the Ta'eads made a commitment to put a quarter of all their time into non-profit work. This saw them designing flyers for community organisations as diverse as the local Buddhist association through to a homeless choir.

Collis, who tells me he experiences constant self-doubt, admits he made many mistakes in his leadership as he experimented with what might work best as Envato grew. At one point, when Envato had roughly 150 employees, he thought he would experiment with the notion of everyone leading themselves. He put people into groups and

assumed they would just figure things out. Unfortunately, as Collis describes it, the experiment created a ‘diabolical mess’. Collis leads with a growth mindset so even failures such as this have been useful ways to test and calibrate what might work through a process of trial and error.

Today, Envato is a successful company with employees based around the world and Collis finds himself regularly appearing on lists of Australia’s richest people. Being on lists that celebrate wealth is a sharp reminder to Collis that there is always more he can be doing, more people in need he can assist. He is singularly focused on using his wealth in productive ways for the betterment of society. I chuckle when Collis tells me that being on those lists also reminds him of his responsibility ‘not to be a dick about being on the list – if I met someone on the list and they were a dick about it, I’d be like, “Ugh, great.”’

Collis understands he is a leader who leads with his heart. ‘The essence of leadership is the human decisions, not just straight up technical questions,’ says Collis. ‘I believe you can be leading with all the head-based skills in the world, but if you are not leading with empathy, some courage to stand for what you believe in and humility to bring in other perspectives, how do you get outside your head and think about the people you are leading?’ he says.

HUMILITY AS A HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE

In our research to develop the Head & Heart Leader Scale, there was a strong correlation between humility and curiosity. This is because it takes humility to understand we may not have all the answers and to believe we all have limitations.

The research showed if you self-assessed as someone with the humility to be open to the ideas of others, this predicted you were also a leader likely to self-assess as someone who leads with perspective and empathy. You are skilled at ‘reading the room’ to gauge diverse views and you value the importance of other people’s experiences that may be different to yours.

Leading with humility involves a leader's willingness to seek out the contributions of others as an acceptance of our limitations. It means understanding some things are beyond our control, being open and grateful for new ideas, and being willing and eager to receive the contributions of those around us without it being seen as a weakness.

A leader who demonstrates humility role models how others can develop themselves through being honest about mistakes and lessons learnt. A humble leader encourages learning from others by drawing attention to the strengths of those around them, and puts effort and attention into listening, observing and learning through doing. It takes a humble leader to be quick to learn from their mistakes and support others when they make their own.

A leader who demonstrates humility role models how others can develop themselves through being honest about mistakes and lessons learnt.

The virtue of humility has been part of Western culture since the Greek Stoic philosophers. They considered humility the starting point for a virtuous life, and not an end in itself. The Stoics also believed that happiness and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle: some things are within our control, and some things are not. Humility is a positive human trait that is stable and enduring. It is an awareness of all that we are and all that we are not.¹⁰⁹

In his book *Think Again*, organisational psychologist Adam Grant refers to our tendency to become stranded on the summit of Mount Stupid, surely a hike we have all done more than once in our lives. Grant suggests learning requires the humility to admit what you don't know.¹¹⁰ Humility in this sense refers to intellectual humility, and the extent to which we are willing to at least entertain the possibility that we may be wrong about something.

People who are intellectually humble are comfortable to live in the 'grey' and know that it is rare for any problem to have a single,

definitive answer. They are likely to be more curious, willing to tolerate ambiguity and less dogmatic in their ideas. People who score high in intellectual humility are also more likely to rethink their positions on issues after considering persuasive arguments. This willingness to rethink ideas also extends to judgements of others – for example, people with high levels of intellectual humility are less inclined to think politicians who change their minds are ‘flip-flopping’.¹¹¹

Investigative journalist Jess Hill, an expert in researching and writing about domestic abuse and coercive control, approaches her work with intellectual humility. She says she is agnostic when she starts a new piece of research. ‘I am always open to my mind being changed, and for me to be wrong,’ she says. ‘I am excited by what I don’t know.’

Confident humility

In his seminal work, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins introduced the idea of a Level 5 Leader who ‘builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will’. It is the *and* in that sentence that catches my attention. Personal humility *and* professional will. The focus is on balance.

Humble leaders are confident with what they don’t know. They are able to operate in what organisational psychologist Adam Grant calls the ‘sweet spot’ of faith in our capability while also appreciating we might not have the right solution or have even addressed the right problem. If we overshoot and miss this sweet spot, we can feel debilitating doubt in our abilities or, at the other end of the spectrum, blind arrogance.¹¹²

Entrepreneur and designer Collis Ta’eed agrees you can have too much humility. ‘I’ve definitely had situations where I was a crappier leader in the name of not wanting to self-aggrandise,’ he admits.

Julie Reilly, CEO of Australians Investing in Women, agrees. ‘I certainly hope I am humble,’ says Julie, ‘but there is a fine line between humility and Imposter Syndrome. Humility sits at the razor’s

edge alongside unworthiness or not feeling good enough. You need to be on the right side of it – you need to have confident humility.’

Being humble does not mean you can’t be confident or ambitious; humility does not have to reflect a low opinion of ourselves. Some of the major world faiths have conceptualised humility as submission before and to God, which has greatly influenced how humility has been conceived in Western culture. Unhelpfully, this notion can suggest a state of humbleness as either having, or demonstrating, a low estimation of your own importance, influencing leadership practices of the past.

Instead, confident humility¹³ implies highly capable and successful leaders who are aware of the danger from being too confident. Humility helps modern leaders recognise our limitations and be able to admit when we are wrong. There is true strength in humility.

Writer and producer Benjamin Law says the leaders he trusts the most are honest about finding leadership difficult. ‘If they find leadership easy, they are probably dangerous people,’ he tells me. Despite his many successes on screen and off, Benjamin says he ‘finds it very easy to be the dumbest person in the room’. ‘If you are not wrestling with those high-stakes conversations, if you are not doubting yourself constantly then the people you are working with should be terrified. You need to absorb a bit of that terror yourself. I think that is the responsibility of leadership,’ he says.

Lawyer and human rights advocate Nyadol Nyuon leads with what she calls rational humility. ‘I think when you fail enough in life and you have made terrible decisions, you become humble by experience,’ Nyadol tells me. ‘You just know that you don’t know everything.’ Her personal humility is strong.

Nyadol adds, ‘However, when someone attacks, belittles or is really dismissive of me in a way I think is unfair then there is definitely a side of me that is not humble, and I want to punch back just as hard.’

Nyadol has experienced torrents of racism and online abuse due to her advocacy work for refugees and migrants. After one appearance

on a national television program, Nyadol was sent abusive, racist messages online which were found to have come from a serving police officer. He was stood down from his duties. 'When I get racist abuse, or someone calls me dumb, I point out I have done two degrees in a second language,' says Nyadol. She has found the sweet spot of confident humility and she is ready to pounce.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As we consider what it means to lead with humility, reflect on your leadership. Even better, ask others for feedback on how they think you are going. Ask:

- Do you actively seek feedback from others, even if you suspect it may be challenging to hear?
- Do you readily admit when you don't know how to do something?
- Are you confident to acknowledge when others have more skills or capability than you do?
- Do you often compliment others on their strengths?
- Do you frequently show appreciation for the unique contributions of others?
- Are you willing to learn from others?
- Are you open to the ideas and advice of others?

HOW WE BENEFIT FROM HUMILITY

We are comfortable acknowledging when things go wrong

Humble leaders fundamentally understand what they are good at, and when they are likely to be the least experienced in the room. Humble leaders publicly own their mistakes and acknowledge their limitations. They are comfortable to admit when they have messed up and need to totally rethink a course of action. They are willing to share publicly they have made a mistake and understand making mistakes is

an important part of learning. Humble leaders have high levels of self-awareness because they are open to receiving feedback.

Humble leaders fundamentally understand what they are good at, and when they are likely to be the least experienced in the room.

Media owner Mia Freedman loves to be wrong. ‘It makes me feel safe,’ Mia tells me. ‘It makes me feel like there are people around me who are smarter than me.’

Academic and trans activist Yves Rees understands the importance of acknowledging and apologising when making a mistake as a leader. Yves came out as trans in recent years and found themselves catapulted into a public profile quite quickly. ‘I feel like I’ve been learning on the job in a very public way, and I’ve screwed up a lot of the time,’ says Yves.

The year before publishing their memoir, *All About Yves: Notes from a Transition*, Yves had co-founded a trans writing collective called Spilling the T to lift other trans voices in literature. Yves said it was in editing an anthology of trans writers with another white editor when one of their biggest leadership lessons was learnt. They felt deeply ashamed when trans people of colour called them out publicly for reproducing what Yves called ‘the white dominance of editing and publishing’.

‘It was, in retrospect, one of the most meaningful experiences in my life. I’d engaged in a behaviour which, unthinkingly, caused harm and I was getting feedback about that,’ Yves says. ‘This was data I could learn from and was not a judgement on the goodness (or not) of my soul.’

Yves said it was a powerful moment to learn to get comfortable with critical feedback and not see it as the end of the world but as a useful learning experience. It also comes hand in hand with humble leadership, according to Yves.

‘If I want to do any meaningful work and lead, feedback and learning must be part of the process and I need to be okay with that. I need to get comfortable with admitting when I have made a mistake, welcome feedback, and learn from it,’ they say.

We appreciate the fleeting nature of life

Stoic philosophers, for whom humility is a central value, remind us that no one lives forever. We could die at any moment. Thinking about our lives in this context helps bring perspective to the things you spend your time doing, saying and thinking about. Knowing life is fleeting, regardless of our position or title, or the work we do, helps prioritise what is important.

For the Stoics, the recipe for a good life is being realistic and objective in the moment, taking part in unselfish action for others, and not living out of greed or selfishness but with a common good and a common purpose. Life is a gift and, according to the Stoics, if you can get one day right you have a shot at getting your life right.

Humble leaders understand they are part of something bigger than themselves. Humble leaders tend to pursue things beyond themselves, helping insulate them from excessive ego or materialism. Humble leaders embrace a vision of leadership directed towards the greater good rather than personal glory.

Entrepreneur Allan English agrees his curiosity continues to reinforce how little he knows and how small a part he plays in the world. ‘We are so limited in our expertise and our experience – there is so much we don’t know,’ says Allan. ‘I think that is a good way of keeping arrogance at bay.’

We are open to new ideas

Humble leaders are willing to listen to others before they speak, and they are receptive to feedback; they recognise there may be many ways to accomplish different things. Modern leaders are willing and

interested to learn from others and seek input from those they lead to create solutions and outcomes together.

Even when a modern leader may know the answer or the best course of action, they seek input and contributions from others first and do not feel the need to be right or seen as the smartest person in the room. It takes humility to actively consider information that contradicts your personally held opinions.

Megan Davis, Co-Chair of the Uluru Dialogues, believes being humble about the way she held intellectual positions on key issues during the regional gatherings of First Nations leaders was critically important. Megan went into the Uluru Dialogues with an open mind as to the potential outcome. ‘Whatever they decided would have been the appropriate way to go,’ says Megan. She was open and flexible to others’ ideas.

We don’t seek perfection

Modern leaders encourage environments and cultures where you are open to experimentation and learning and where you are encouraged to adapt through small continuous changes. These leaders are open to new information and will create solutions that are ‘good enough for now’ rather than permanent or perfect. A humble leader helps create a humble team, which leads to the creation of a learning environment as well as a psychologically safe team able to speak up with an increased sense of hope, resilience and optimism.

A modern, humble leader understands aiming for perfection is futile. They aim for progress, expect mistakes and recognise they can course-correct if needed.¹¹⁴

WHAT STOPS US FROM BEING HUMBLE?

We have equated leadership with being powerful and all-knowing

Since the time of the Great Man theory, there has been language around leaders being all-knowing. Leaders have been encouraged to be confident, powerful and assertive. Traditionally in Western

culture, leaders were trusted only if they appeared confident and knew the answers to everything. Corporate leaders were known for motivating people to do what they might otherwise be reluctant to do through inspiring, emotionally charged speeches. Think of Jack Welch at GE or Kenneth Lay at Enron. Power and prestige, fame and fortune, followed.

The cult of the all-powerful leader prevents leaders from being able to lead with humility. Leaders who prefer personal power are much more likely to use that power for themselves. They see leadership in the context of being dominant over others and see every relationship as a win-lose proposition. They achieve personal satisfaction from winning and beating others. These leaders, focused on power, status and winning, can start to think of the people they lead as a means to an end, rather than the reason they lead at all.

Power, and the perceived benefits of being powerful, has long been thought to cause leaders to become overly obsessed with outcomes, productivity and financial results. At various times in recent history, different leaders have achieved widespread fame and charismatic appeal with a cult of celebrity following them. These trappings of power and focus on ego make it much more difficult for humility to emerge.

We fail to appreciate our limitations

Unfortunately, our self-awareness into whether we have the knowledge we think we do is limited. People tend to feel they understand complex issues with far greater precision, coherence and depth than they really do. This is called the illusion of explanatory depth.¹¹⁵

In a series of experiments to test the theory, researchers at Yale University asked students to rate their knowledge of how everyday objects work, including television and toilets. The students were confident in their knowledge, that is until they were asked to write out their explanations step-by-step. As they struggled to articulate how a speedometer works, how a zipper secures a piece of clothing,

how a toilet flushes or how a helicopter flies, their confidence melted away. They suddenly realised how little they understood and nearly all participants showed drops in what they thought they knew when confronted with having to provide a real explanation.¹¹⁶

We also think we are right more often than we are. In a series of experiments at Duke University, people were asked the following question: 'Think about all the disagreements you have had in the last six months. What percentage of the time do you think that you were right?' Researchers found that the average response was 66 per cent and it was rare for someone to report being correct less than 50 per cent of the time.¹¹⁷ A classic example of everyone thinking they are right most of the time.

We confuse false humility with the real thing

We are unable to judge our humility. We know from research the more someone thinks they are a humble leader, the more likely it is that they are not. The best way to get a sense of whether you are allowing space for others to shine and leading with humility is to ask for honest feedback. This might be done informally with people you trust or else you can use a formal 360-degree review in the workplace. The very act of asking for feedback will help build trust and demonstrate your ability to be a humble leader.

When I spoke with entrepreneur and designer Collis Ta'eed about his leadership at Envato, he bristled at my suggestion he was an example of a humble leader. As you would expect of someone with genuine humility, he questioned how any leader can say they are humble. 'Doesn't that totally wipe away your humility?' Collis asks.

Tanya Monro, Australia's Chief Defence Scientist, agrees. 'I don't think anyone can judge their own humility,' she says. 'I think it is up to others to do that. I never think leadership outcomes are because of me. I might be the right person in the right place at the right time to give other people the opportunity to shine and thrive, but it is not about me.'

Research shows for the impact of leading with humility on team performance to be truly effective, we can't rely on our views of how we are going. We must pay attention instead to the views of those we lead.

In one study, researchers wanted to test the differences between a leader's view of their humility to what their team experienced. Most leaders in the study – 73 per cent – had inflated views of their humility relative to what those in their team thought. Leaders who were rated by their teams as the least humble, scored themselves highest on personal humility.

Among the same group of leaders, those who were rated by their team members as the humblest, scored themselves the most harshly on personal humility – that is, they did not perceive themselves nearly as humble as their teams did.¹¹⁸ They were, in fact, being humble.

HOW DO WE LEAD WITH HUMILITY?

We understand leadership is about service to others

Modern leaders ask the people they lead how they can best help them develop in their roles and how to help them fulfil their goals. Modern leaders are not afraid to roll up their sleeves and sit alongside the people they lead to understand their roles and the challenges they might face undertaking their tasks each day.

Earlier in her career, Salesforce CEO Asia Pacific Pip Marlow led a digital transformation for a major bank. She says she 'loves to walk a mile in someone else's shoes' and would frequently go into a bank branch and spend a day shadowing the team to see what was working and what was not. Pip recalls a particularly challenging loan entry task was receiving a lot of feedback and she knew she needed to understand how the process worked, first-hand; reading a report would not let her appreciate the size and scope of the challenge. Pip arranged to sit with a loan lender while she entered a loan. With a huge stack of paper piled in front of her, Pip watched the manual process unfold

over three-and-a-half hours. Pip knows that had she not sat alongside the person doing the task she could not have appreciated the enormity of the issue to be fixed, nor could she have shown how much she cared, or that she was committed to finding a solution.

We have the courage to be vulnerable

There has been much written about vulnerability in recent years, particularly through the work of researcher and academic Brené Brown. When you are prepared to be vulnerable you show those you lead that you are not perfect; you do not even aspire to perfection. While as leaders we may know we are not perfect, unconsciously we still put on a mask of perfection, fearful of showing our true selves in case the people we lead feel less confident in our abilities or lose respect for us.

Paradoxically, it is through exposing our weaknesses and flaws that we can best establish trust with those we lead. Being vulnerable helps build strong, meaningful relationships with the people around us. Sharing our imperfections, the things we don't know and the mistakes we have made will help to build solidarity and connection with the people we lead. It shows we are authentic and not an all-powerful, heroic leader of the past.

I recall one of my executive coaching clients sharing with me stories of her life as a child growing up in a violent and unstable home. These experiences had shaped her life and while she had gone on to become a successful leader, she never felt able to integrate the leader she wanted to be with the vulnerable person who had experienced childhood trauma. She constantly felt the need to strive for perfection, not necessarily in others but always in herself. She worked long hours and was always wanting to prove, even if only to herself, she was good enough. My client knew not being able to integrate her whole self at work was impacting her leadership through only allowing her colleagues to see the mask of perfection she put on in public.

In one of our coaching sessions, I asked whether she had ever shared her personal story at work. She had not. I asked what it might be like to share with her colleagues her inspirational story of resilience and optimism in the face of such a challenging childhood. She said she feared being rejected by those she worked with, especially in the male-dominated environment where she was the most-senior leader and the only woman. She also feared she might cry – something she had consciously never done at work during her career.

At our next session I noticed a visible difference in my client. She was upbeat, relaxed and lighter in mind and spirit. She told me her team had recently had an offsite strategy day. As always, she was the most senior person present and the only woman. To get things started, the facilitator had asked everyone to go around the room and share something about themselves others might not know. My client was the last in the circle to be asked. While waiting to answer, feeling nervous and unsure of what she might say, my client noticed her colleagues were all sharing stories of vulnerability and parts of their lives she had not known. The room was silent yet supportive, and everyone in the team was actively listening and compassionate towards the person who spoke.

As it came time for my client to speak, she told me her hands were sweating, and she was shaking at this unplanned opportunity to share her story. And share she did. She also cried. She shared the story of her childhood and the impact it had had on her life.

In response to her willingness to be humble and vulnerable, my client's colleagues readily embraced her. She had allowed them the privilege of an insight into a leader they had only ever been able to connect with on the surface. She recounted to me the deep conversations that followed with members of her team, many of whom could relate personally to her story and opened up about their own experiences. She said that since that day her team had grown considerably closer and felt a stronger sense of loyalty to one another. As I listened, I could see my client was beaming at the consequence of being prepared

to be vulnerable. She now felt able to integrate her leadership of head and heart.

In this case, it was her team who created the psychological safety for whoever in that circle chose to be vulnerable. I don't know what might have happened if my client had been asked to speak first – would she have been able to share her story? We will never know. In this example, it was her colleagues initially making the courageous decision to be vulnerable that created a safe environment and in doing so supported my client to do the same. However, as I reminded my client, it was through her leadership to begin with that the first person who spoke in that circle felt safe to speak up at all.

Having the humility and courage to be vulnerable means you can lead with greater authenticity. You will bring a wider appreciation of different perspectives, celebrate others' uniqueness, avoid fixed ways of doing things and weigh up alternatives beyond what personal interest may dictate.

We are honest about our limitations

Modern leaders build credibility and trust by saying when they don't know the answer. Those we lead will gain confidence in us when we admit we don't know something.

Not knowing every answer, and willingly asking for others' input, will make a relationship stronger, not weaker, as it creates space for others to have their voice and opinions heard. By practising humility through not needing to provide all the answers, we improve the quality of team contributions, improve job satisfaction, retention, engagement and openness to learning.¹¹⁹ We make it okay, and even reward saying, 'I don't know.'

If we continue to maintain a sense everything is perfect as leaders, there is no need for anyone to help at all. We are, even unconsciously, signalling we can do everything ourselves and the people we lead are simply there to make up the numbers. This is the hallmark of a traditional know-it-all leader and not the modern leader we need.

We shine a light on others

Modern leaders willingly recognise, appreciate and praise those they lead. They attribute good ideas to wherever and whoever they have come from and give genuine praise for the contribution. Modern leaders are continually shifting attention for positive events to others and seek to fully realise everyone's unique potential.

One caveat of this is the humility of those leaders who shine a spotlight on others is impacted by the perceived sincerity of the praise – it must be honest, substantive praise to be well received. Flattery will, literally, get you nowhere. Expressions of humility must be genuine.

In interviews with leaders of great companies in *Good to Great*, Jim Collins was struck by the fact the leaders did not talk about themselves and would deflect discussion of their contributions. He identified these Level 5 Leaders with high levels of personal humility through four tell-tale qualities:

- They demonstrated a compelling modesty, shunning public adulation and never being boastful.
- They acted with quiet, calm determination and relied principally on inspired standards and not inspiring charisma to motivate.
- They channelled ambition into the company and not themselves and set up successors for even more greatness in the next generation.
- They looked in the mirror, not out the window, to apportion responsibility for poor results as well as never blaming others, external factors or bad luck.¹²⁰

Level 5 Leaders hold many of the same attributes as modern leaders able to lead with their head and heart. The leadership qualities Jim Collins first identified in 2001 hold true today and are needed more than ever.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Humility helps us recognise our limitations and understand when we are wrong.
- Confident humility is the sweet spot between humility and arrogance every modern leader needs to master.
- We can build trust and connection with others by leading with humility, vulnerability and understanding.
- Not knowing every answer will make a relationship stronger, not weaker.

FURTHER READING

Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave work. Tough conversations. Whole hearts.* (2018).

Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap . . . and others don't* (2001).

Epictetus, *The Art of Living: The classical manual on virtue, happiness and effectiveness* (translated by Sharon Lebell, 1995).

Adam Grant, *Think Again: The power of knowing what you don't know* (2021).

SELF-AWARENESS

LEADING WITH OUR EMOTIONS UP FRONT

When investigative journalist Jess Hill was reporting on the Arab uprisings, she knew she needed to hear from people living through the experience so they could tell their stories. Throughout the Arab spring, Jess (together with colleague Connie Agius) worked 18-hour days speaking with people across the Middle East via a network of connections and country contacts. Jess hoped the ABC radio audience would gain a better sense of what was driving the uprisings – and be educated about the Middle East in the process – if they heard directly from people on the ground, instead of just ‘experts’. Jess hoped to facilitate empathy and a shared humanity through her work.

Jess has the self-awareness to understand she has, like everyone, been unknowingly directed by emotion. She is aware of how her personal history, lived experiences and emotions impact her decision-making. ‘I bring in research and data and whatever is needed to balance this side of me and prevent myself from making decisions or pursuing things that are driven, in a negative sense, by emotions I am unaware of, or am being overpowered by.’

Jess is aware of what may trigger her emotions. Understanding and responding to those triggers are essential in her ability to successfully lead change through her research and reporting.

Jess has received numerous public accolades for her journalism, including two prestigious Walkley Awards, an Amnesty International Award and three Our Watch Awards. Jess' book, *See What You Made Me Do*, won the highly acclaimed Stella Prize, and was adapted into a television documentary for SBS. Jess is leading a movement for change as well as the development of new ideas around these issues of control. Jess' research and writing on these issues has been so impactful it has seen her transcend from an investigative journalist to using her research to inform her social justice advocacy work.

Being an expert in coercive control has, by its very nature, helped Jess understand the importance of self-awareness for leaders. 'I was drawn to the idea that you can be a totally consenting adult with full agency who considers themselves a powerful, strong person and yet there can be an invisible force working on you that you are not even aware of,' she says.

Jess believes many men and some women are attached to what they believe is a logical position on an issue. They may start to believe they are not influenced by emotion at all, leading only with their heads. Leaders who do this, Jess argues, have not thought deeply or had the self-awareness to understand they need to consider the range of emotions that inform their everyday life. She lists greed, shame, fear and the need to save face as driving our emotions in ways many do not truly appreciate or seek to understand. 'Shame is the most hidden emotion,' Jess tells me. 'It is very difficult to identify when we are feeling it, and why, let alone understand that our choices are often driven by the need to avoid that feeling.'

SELF-AWARENESS AS A HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE

Of the twenty-four questions in our research to develop the Head & Heart Leader Scale, one question offered the strongest predictor for all other head and heart leadership attributes, and it related to self-awareness.

If you are a leader who self-assesses as being aware of your limitations, you are much more likely to self-assess strongly in the other head and heart leadership attributes as well. This is because leaders who are aware of their limitations are more likely to be humble leaders who seek the contributions of others. They are also likely to lead with empathy, value diverse contributions, be curious leaders, lead with capability and have a growth mindset.

Emotional self-awareness is the ability to read and understand our emotions as well as recognise their impact on our work performance, relationships and beyond.¹²¹ Modern leaders recognise how our feelings impact our decisions, behaviours and ability to do our jobs, as well as how our words, attitudes and choices impact other people. Modern leaders are comfortable talking about our strengths and are prepared to share stories of failings or limitations with self-deprecating humour.

Modern leaders know when we are triggered and feel fearful, defensive, angry, judgemental or seek to blame. A self-aware modern leader recognises when harsh self-criticism has taken over our thinking when we might otherwise have been able to observe any fear as it rose in us. A modern leader understands the impact our emotions and triggers have on our ability to lead and the impact it has on those around us.

A modern leader understands the impact our emotions and triggers have on our ability to lead and the impact it has on those around us.

No one can manage their emotions all the time. A key quality of being a modern leader is being able to accept and own this human

limitation. By owning and sometimes even sharing these limitations we are likely to feel less defensive, build trust with those we lead and lead more authentically.

To be an effective modern leader requires us to develop an accurate view of our self and our relationships with others. It is complex, thoughtful and challenging work. Modern leaders do the hard work of examining the influence that their biases, assumptions and stories have on their decisions and relationships. Self-reflection is a critical component of being a self-aware leader, but it can be tricky to master. We are more likely to think we are self-aware, but less likely to have others think the same. Building self-awareness requires humility, courage and empathy – all the attributes of a modern head and heart leader. People with strong self-awareness are neither overly critical nor unrealistically hopeful. They are just honest – with themselves and others.¹²²

Becoming more self-aware requires us to be open to feedback and to keep an antenna up for social cues and internal feelings that suggest we may be avoiding or struggling in some areas of our leadership.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Before we consider what it means to lead with self-awareness, reflect on your leadership. Even better, seek feedback from others. Ask:

- Are you aware of your strengths?
- Are you aware of your limitations?
- Do you understand the impact your behaviour has on those around you?
- Do you often spend time thinking about and gaining insight into what drives you?
- Do you feel you know and understand yourself well?

An amygdala hijacks the Oscars

Understanding how our brain works is helpful to gain self-awareness into the impact we have on others and how we might react when triggered.

The amygdala is a cluster of nuclei located deep within our brain's temporal lobe. It can trigger our fight or flight response and be set off not just by a physical threat but by emotional and social threats as well. The amygdala regulates our responses to feelings of fear, anxiety and aggression. When our amygdala is triggered, it disrupts our prefrontal cortex so our emotions dominate our thinking and we lose our ability to self-regulate our behaviour. This has been coined an 'amygdala hijack' by the father of emotional intelligence Daniel Goleman. During an amygdala hijack, our brain stops planning, comprehending, deciding or learning.

At the 2022 Oscars ceremony the world witnessed a public example of an amygdala hijack the moment actor Will Smith took to the stage and slapped comedian and host Chris Rock. Smith reacted angrily and aggressively to a joke Rock had made about Smith's wife. After slapping Rock, Smith returned to his front-row seat and continued to scream loud obscenities at the host.

These were not the actions of a man who was thinking calmly and rationally about the best course of action in front of a live audience of many millions around the world. Within twenty-four hours, Smith acknowledged his behaviour had been unacceptable and inexcusable, and he said he was embarrassed by his actions. 'Jokes at my expense are part of the job, but a joke about Jada's medical condition was too much for me to bear and I reacted emotionally,' Smith said. His amygdala had been hijacked in a very public way.

Neuroscientists have been able to establish that our emotional responses to psychological pain, like being accepted or rejected, being treated fairly or unfairly, or being rewarded or punished, rely on the same neural circuits in our brain as a physical injury. Experiencing envy at the success of someone else activates the same pain-related neural circuitry as breaking our leg. Having a good reputation, being

treated fairly and being cooperative all activate the same reward network as if we are eating something delicious.¹²³ Essentially, the brain treats abstract social experiences – jealousy, pride, justice – in the same way as physical experiences – pain, hunger, pleasure.

One research study tried to recreate the nastiness of the school playground. Participants played a computer game called ‘Cyberball’ while their brains were scanned by a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) machine. Participants were told they were playing a ball-tossing game over the internet with two others. They could see their avatar, and that of the other two people. Halfway through the game, the two other players stopped playing with the participant and start playing only with one another. The participants who felt snubbed or excluded showed brain activity activated in the region that involved distressing pain, just as if they were in physical pain.¹²⁴

HOW WE BENEFIT FROM BEING SELF-AWARE

We make better decisions

The more we practice understanding ourselves and gaining awareness into what motivates us, what triggers us and where our biases lie, the more effective a leader we will be. If we recognise being micromanaged threatens our sense of autonomy, we will be less likely to resist any impulse to micromanage every detail of the work we ask others to do. We make sounder decisions when we are self-aware because when we know ourselves, we can reduce the blind spots we know exist.¹²⁵

The more we practice understanding ourselves and gaining awareness into what motivates us, what triggers us and where our biases lie, the more effective a leader we will be.

Self-aware leaders are responsible for better strategic and financial results for companies as well. This is because when we know our strengths and limitations, we are far more willing to ask others for help and accept ideas from other people.¹²⁶ A Korn Ferry self-awareness

study analysed 7000 individuals' self-assessment results from employees working across 500 public companies. Korn Ferry also tracked the share-price performance of the same public companies. The study found companies with a higher percentage of self-aware employees consistently outperformed others, while poorly performing companies' employees were 79 per cent more likely to have low overall self-awareness.¹²⁷

Leaders who are viewed as not being self-aware will halve a team's chances of success, lead to increased stress and decreased motivation for team members, and a greater likelihood that someone will want to leave their job.¹²⁸

We promote psychological safety

When a leader is self-aware, it can give others a feeling of safety because a self-aware leader will manage their emotions and behaviour to reduce stress. They will seek to encourage a sense of flourishing for those they work with.

Research shows teams led by self-aware leaders are less likely to experience internal politics, backbiting and toxic cultures. This is because self-aware leaders can role model what not to do. Self-aware leaders tend not to dominate conversations or ignore the contributions of others. They can develop an environment where all members of a team feel able to address their concerns in an open and calm way, ultimately increasing individual performance.¹²⁹

Modern leaders are much more likely to build inclusive teams where people feel able to show up as themselves. This is because self-aware leaders create environments of authenticity where limitations are openly shared, vulnerabilities are embraced, and diverse viewpoints are sought.

We have better relationships

Organisational psychologist, researcher and bestselling author of *Insight*, Dr Tasha Eurich found in large-scale research that people who are self-aware have stronger interpersonal relationships, are more

confident and creative, and are better at communication. Self-aware people also feel more fulfilled in life.¹³⁰ By being self-aware we can develop higher-quality relationships with others because we allow them to feel seen and valued. Understanding ourselves leads to a much more powerful understanding of others.

Australia's Chief Defence Scientist Tanya Monro sees the link between self-awareness and empathy. 'Being self-aware lets me constantly calculate and calibrate the environment we are working in,' says Tanya. 'Empathy then lets me consider the toll it is taking on the people I lead within that environment.'

We lean into discomfort

Writer and producer Benjamin Law knows he has a learning opportunity when a situation makes him feel uncomfortable. 'Discomfort tells you something. It says you might be wrong or that there is something to learn. Discomfort tells you that you don't have all the information,' he says. 'To be vulnerable, to acknowledge you might be on the back foot and you might be wrong or might have made a mistake is a horrible feeling.'

Benjamin experienced this discomfort during a controversial time for the Sydney Festival when he sat on the board. In December 2021, calls were made by a group called the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) for artists and arts organisations to boycott the Sydney Festival in response to a \$20,000 sponsorship arrangement with the Israeli Embassy in Canberra. Word spread on social media and soon the Palestinian militant organisation Hamas announced their support for BDS. A range of artists, including Israeli-American frontman of the band Kiss, Gene Simmons, then petitioned against the boycott. Some artists already scheduled to appear at the festival withdrew; others found themselves being forced to decide whether they needed to withdraw too. Australian politicians became involved, labelling the boycott a form of censorship and threatened future funding losses to any arts organisations that took part.

Battle lines were drawn. It is fair to say there was anger on all sides.

In mid-January, the chair of the Sydney Festival Board, David Kirk, apologised for the difficult position the festival had put artists in. The following day, Benjamin resigned from the board.

As Benjamin reflects on the situation, he says when he joined the board he felt a keen sense of responsibility to represent artists. 'I thought it was important to have artists at the table,' he says. 'I wanted to hopefully facilitate conversations with artists.'

'A lot of people thought that BDS were – at worst – terrorism adjacent, and – at best – troublemakers. I saw it quite differently. I thought they presented a cogent, lucid and compelling argument as to why the sponsorship was deeply, deeply hurtful and problematic,' says Benjamin. 'I wanted to bring them to the table. You can't divorce activists from artists.'

'I think rather than turning your back on any community or any conversation, you have to sit in the discomfort of what people are going to say and be okay with being uncomfortable as well,' says Benjamin.

When I suggest to Benjamin it took courage to resign, he disagrees. He saw it more as a combination of curiosity to learn more and humility to understand if a mistake had been made. 'I tell myself it should be possible to come to a place of humility without feeling humiliated,' he tells me.

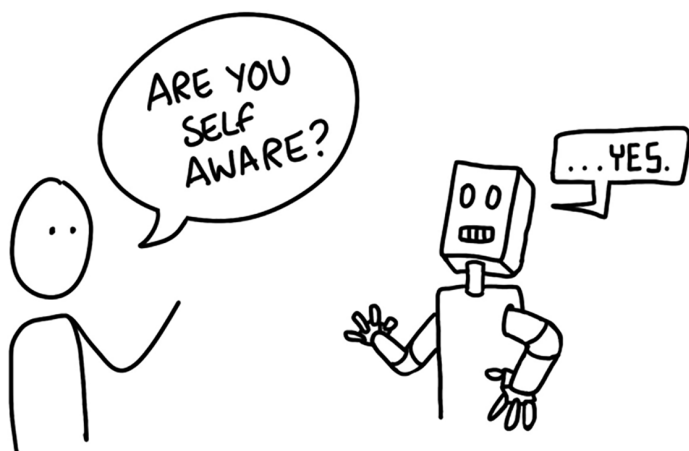
WHAT STOPS US FROM BEING SELF-AWARE?

We have distorted views of our self-awareness

People who lack self-awareness typically will not listen to feedback or accept feedback they find critical. Leaders who lack self-awareness may have an inflated opinion of their contributions or performance and often also take credit for other people's successes and blame others for any failures.

Ask someone if they are self-aware and chances are they will say yes. Research tells us that even though 95 per cent of people think

they are self-aware, only 10 to 15 per cent of others perceive that we are.¹³¹ This means most of us think we are self-aware about the impact we are having on others but have a long way to go. Worryingly, all of us can probably think of someone we work with or know who is totally unaware of the impact they are having on others.



Despite most of us thinking we are self-aware; it is clear our colleagues don't agree. In one survey of almost 500 working adults in the United States, 99 per cent of people could name someone who lacked self-awareness and nearly half of those surveyed could name four. Peers were most frequently cited as lacking self-awareness, with 73 per cent of those surveyed reporting at least one unaware peer.¹³²

We rely on high levels of intelligence

If you are incredibly intelligent and spend a lot of time on cognitive tasks, you face an increased risk of being less self-aware. Your ability to have empathy for others is reduced simply because that part of your brain's circuitry doesn't get as much use.¹³³

Tanya Monro, Australia's Chief Defence Scientist, agrees. 'In the academic world you have a lot of very bright people who are used to judging the intellectual capacity of someone to be able to engage

in certain topics,' she says. 'It is a real wake-up call for leadership teams in those environments to understand that their intellectual capacity, or pure IQ, is utterly de-correlated from their maturity as a leader.'

We are in positions of power

Being in positions of power can limit our ability to be self-aware. Title, status and authority can encourage leaders to overestimate their abilities because of their position in a formal hierarchy. Over time, someone who may have once been quite humble can convince themselves they are the only person with all the answers.

For Mark Scott, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Sydney, self-awareness means understanding as a leader you 'can change the weather in a room by your very presence'. In Mark's experience, there is a real trap for leaders in conflating all the trimmings and attention of being a leader with an unfounded sense of brilliance and expertise.

Sally McManus, Secretary of the ACTU, agrees. 'Self-awareness requires you to realise people may be listening to you not because you are brilliant, but because you hold a position of power,' she says. 'It can give you a distorted view about yourself and your abilities. If people don't tell you that you are coming across in a certain way or that you have blind spots, it will continue to reinforce and get worse.'

We fail to recognise cognitive biases

A cognitive bias is an error in how we process or interpret information which can impact our decision-making ability and levels of judgement. There are many cognitive biases we encounter and recognising them is critically important for modern leaders. Thinking about ourselves is not the same as *knowing* ourselves.¹³⁴ Each of these cognitive biases can lead to distorted thinking and prevent us from being self-aware.

Actor-Observer bias	Where we explain situations that happen to us as being outside of our control but when it happens to someone else, we believe it is their fault.
Anchoring bias	When we rely heavily on the first piece of information we learn and use this information to set the baseline against which future information is compared.
Confirmation bias	When we seek out information to support our existing beliefs and reject any information that may contradict the views we hold.
False consensus effect	When we overestimate how much others agree with us by assuming our beliefs are widespread.
Halo effect	When a positive impression of someone in one area, including physical attractiveness, influences our opinion or feeling for them in another area of their character.
Loss aversion bias	When we react more strongly to not losing something rather than to what may be gained.
Misinformation effect	Where our memory of an event is influenced by what we hear about the event from others.
Negativity bias	When we dwell on issues of a more negative nature that have a greater impact on us than something neutral or more positive.
Optimism bias	When we believe we are less likely to suffer from misfortune and more likely to be successful than others.
Positivity bias	When things go well, we attribute success to internal reasons (I worked hard and so deserved the promotion) whereas if things don't go well, we look for an external reason (my boss doesn't like me).
Self-serving bias	When we blame external factors for when things go wrong, and we give ourselves credit when things go well.

Table 4: Common cognitive biases that prevent self-awareness

HOW DO WE LEAD WITH SELF-AWARENESS?

We notice our triggers

Self-awareness requires us to become familiar with the signs that our body is under stress. It may be a physical response – a shortening of breath, rapid thinking or the need to respond instantly to something that might have happened – or it might be negative self-talk that we are ‘less than’ or someone else is ‘better than’ us. This is a sign we are feeling fearful, frustrated, stressed or angry and need to listen to the message our body is sending before acting. When we do feel this way, we need to slow down and self-regulate before we experience an amygdala hijack.

Self-aware leaders are better placed to recognise when an amygdala hijack is underway and can label the emotions they might be feeling. This helps to move our brain from focusing on an unnamed emotion seeking to control our behaviour to one that can be objectively observed. We can acknowledge the emotion and accept that while we are feeling this way now, it is not all of who we are, all the time. We can live with the discomfort. We accept our limitations and emotions when they challenge us as simply part of our journey to becoming a self-aware, modern leader.

Self-aware leaders are better placed to recognise when an amygdala hijack is underway and can label the emotions they might be feeling.

Once we identify the deeply held beliefs that trigger us, we are in a better position to work with and recognise them again in future. Next time you are triggered in a positive or negative way, try noting down what was happening for you. Be as specific as you can.

- What was the trigger – was it an event? A situation?
A particular person?
- What did you feel in your body?

- What thoughts or feelings did you have about the event, situation or person?
- How did you respond to the event, situation, or person?

In many cases we might be aware of the trigger and how we might react, but we don't spend enough time thinking about the underlying thoughts or feelings that arise in response. This is key to developing greater levels of self-awareness.

Pip Marlow, Salesforce CEO Asia Pacific, can physically feel an amygdala hijack. Her heart races, her chest tightens and her shoulders tense. In that moment, Pip recognises the signs and asks herself what is triggering the response she is having – is it an emotional response, a data-driven response, or even a moral or ethical response? Pip knows certain things will trigger her in a particular way which is why she believes the strongest attribute of the best leaders she has worked with, in any context, has been self-awareness. 'To be self-aware you have to be vulnerable and seek a lot of feedback,' says Pip.

Barrister Jane Needham also understands how essential it is to be aware of her triggers given the area of law she works in. When Jane was first asked to represent the Catholic Church in the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, one of the first people Jane spoke to was her doctor. She knew she was going to be reading detailed accounts of child sexual abuse for many years and, at the time, she had three children at home under the age of ten. Everything about this case would be traumatic.

'I went to my doctor and said, "It's going to be confronting. What can I do?"'

Jane's doctor referred her to a psychologist with the advice to, 'Go and see her now.' Jane was told, 'When you are in a hole, it is very hard to climb out and find help. But if you have an established relationship with someone already, that will help.' Jane said the advice saved her.

Jane would later experience the trauma of leading her profession through the aftermath of the Lindt café siege in Sydney when a fellow barrister, Katrina Dawson, was killed. 'I did not so much sail through those experiences,' Jane tells me, 'but muscled through with a lot of help.'

Academic, author and television presenter Susan Carland also understands the importance of managing her emotions and the impact it can have on her leadership. 'I always try to be aware of the impact my mood can have on the people around me. I'm very aware that I am always at one hundred,' says Susan. 'I am either happy at one hundred or tired and grumpy at one hundred. It's always a lot.'

'I am conscious I wear my emotions on my sleeve, and it is something I battle with all the time,' says Susan. 'I battle with the way it impacts other people and I don't know that I ever get that right.'

Three-time Olympian and four-time gold medallist Libby Trickett understands first-hand the impact on her performance of letting her emotions overtake her. When she feels disappointment, says Libby, she feels it in her body and soul.

'I had wild emotions when I was swimming,' Libby tells me. 'Which could mean I failed to be in the moment.'

At the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Libby swam in the freestyle relay team when Australia won bronze. On the second day of competition, Libby won gold in the 100-metre butterfly race. 'All my life dreams were coming true in a moment, everything I had worked for over years and years had happened,' said Libby. 'I thought this was going to be the beginning of a gold rush.'

As a multi-event swimmer, Libby needed to try to conserve energy wherever she could in her heats and semi-finals. In the semi-final of the 100-metre freestyle, Libby says she conserved too much energy and placed ninth overall, narrowly missing out.

'Instead of being calm and collected about the outcome, I spiralled into the depths of my shame and embarrassment,' says Libby.

Making it worse, Libby had been through an identical situation at the previous Olympics in Athens. 'I had come ninth by 0.09 of a second even though I was a world-record holder going into the event.' After another competitor's false start, Libby was able to race in the final in Beijing, but the damage had already been done. 'I just wasn't able to get out of the spiral,' Libby says.

We ask different questions

Organisational psychologist Tasha Eurich recommends leaders build self-awareness by asking 'what' happened instead of 'why' something happened.¹³⁵ Because of the many cognitive biases we all confront, our brain is susceptible to making up answers that are simply not true. By asking 'what' instead of 'why' we are more likely to receive an objective answer that considers all factors. Instead of asking, 'Why am I feeling so distressed after hearing that feedback?' ask, 'What was my body experiencing as I heard that feedback?' It is a small shift but has a powerful influence on the way our brain reflects on situations and can help us build self-awareness.

We take stock

Being self-aware involves being conscious of the impact we are having in our work and lives. It involves thinking about the level of satisfaction we gain from what we do, the extent to which we feel we are flourishing in our lives and our sense of feeling valued for what we contribute.

Every quarter, Dominic Price, Work Futurist at Atlassian, says he looks in the leadership mirror.

'Every ninety days is a reflection backwards on what I can do forwards,' Dominic tells me. 'It is very focused on me as a leader. Not the organisation, not the team. Me. That is important to call out since many people rationalise this process by making it about others.'

He undertakes a personal self-assessment he calls the Four L's by asking himself questions to help determine how he can be the best version of himself as a leader.

Love	What did I do in the last quarter that I loved?
Long for	What do I wish I had done?
Loathe	What didn't I like doing?
Learn	What did I learn and experiment with that I can take with me into the next quarter?

Table 5: Four L's quarterly self-assessment

Using these four questions, Dominic carves out time and space to reflect on how he is doing as a leader and how he can do more of what he is doing well and rethink or unlearn what he loathed.

'The outcome is that you become the best evolving version of you, and role model evolution and change. Authenticity for the win!' says Dominic.

We gather trusted advisers around us

As self-aware leaders who value feedback, we don't just go to sources who are likely to tell us what we want to hear, and we don't ask people who might couch negative feedback for us in a way that avoids the crux of the issue. We find those who are prepared to be candid in a compassionate way and who have our best interests at heart.

Organisational psychologist Adam Grant calls a group of trusted advisers his challenge network. 'My challenge network is my sh*t detector,' Grant writes in his book *Think Again*. His challenge network is made up of people he trusts to point out his blind spots and help him overcome weaknesses. For Grant, the ideal members of a challenge network are also disagreeable because they are fearless about questioning the way things have always been done and will hold us accountable to think again. As Grant says, 'They give critical feedback we might not want to hear but need to hear.'¹³⁶

Mark Scott laughs that some of the friends that keep him most grounded in his role as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney, are his oldest friends who all attended the same university with him when they were young undergraduate students. Mark's friends are

particularly amused he is now running their old stomping ground and he says they succeed at keeping any risk of hubris in check.

Julie Reilly, CEO of Australians Investing in Women, agrees. She says she has had good friends around her who are not afraid to hold up a mirror to some of her less helpful behaviours. 'I think good friends really do help you be your best self,' says Julie. 'The lesson is to have a tribe around you who really believe in you and cause you to reflect.'

Union leader Sally McManus is also grateful to the people close to her both within and outside the union movement who offer her feedback. 'Allowing yourself to have people who can be brutally honest with you has made me a much better leader, even if I have not liked it at the time,' she says.

We help build self-awareness in others through offering feedback

For many, the phrase 'Can I offer you some feedback?' is the brain's equivalent of footsteps in the night. Our flight or fight response is activated, and an amygdala hijack might lurk nearby. One survey of more than 7000 leaders found 44 per cent of participants found giving feedback stressful or difficult.¹³⁷

Unfortunately, we are unreliable narrators of the impact of our leadership. Our sense of self-awareness is much higher than others



might observe so gathering feedback is a crucial component for a modern leader to gain insight about how others experience us and test any assumptions we may have of ourselves.

Overcoming a fear of giving and receiving feedback is essential for building self-awareness. Feedback allows us to verify whether the way we might perceive or understand a situation is accurate and allows us to test our assumptions of the impact we are having on others.

Modern leaders offer feedback on the great things being done and don't just focus on areas needing improvement. To encourage others to be self-aware we fuel a growth mindset and create a safe space for continual improvement.

Building self-awareness through an effective feedback conversation with people you lead becomes a joint process where you can help build self-awareness in others through giving and being open to ongoing feedback yourself. Instead of giving feedback in a formal session once a year, find opportunities to give and receive feedback on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

CEO Salesforce Asia Pacific Pip Marlow agrees. 'If your experience with feedback is really sporadic, it can feel hard because it is such an occasional thing.' For Pip, once you give and receive feedback more frequently it builds a natural capability. That said, it doesn't mean feedback is always pleasant.

'I now understand this is just someone's perspective of me which is valuable,' she says. 'Whether I agree with the feedback or not, knowing someone else's perspective of how I might be coming across as a leader is important,' says Pip.

Media owner Mia Freedman can't get enough feedback. 'I'm a freak in how much I crave and love feedback,' Mia tells me. 'I am just very motivated by learning what I can do better.'

Modern leaders prepare for any feedback conversation in detail, ahead of time. As a leader needing to offer feedback to someone you lead, the following steps will assist in helping even the most challenging conversation go well.

STEPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL FEEDBACK CONVERSATION

Before the meeting

- Reflect on what is going on for the other person.
 - What challenges are they facing? What is going well?
 - What might the person be feeling anxious about ahead of this conversation?
 - What support could they need to overcome any challenges they are having?
 - What blind spots do you perceive they have?
- Reflect on what is going on for you.
 - What do I have happening now that might impact this conversation? Am I feeling distracted? Stressed? Angry? Should I reschedule the feedback conversation?
 - What might trigger me in this conversation? What do I know about my relationship with this person I should look out for?
 - What is the key message I want to communicate? What questions can I ask to help guide the person towards uncovering a solution themselves?
- Think about the logistics of how and where the meeting will take place.
 - How do you plan to meet? Will it be in person or virtual? Where possible, avoid email; providing feedback by email has been shown to be far less successful than meeting in person.¹³⁸
 - Have you scheduled a time for the feedback conversation? Have you allowed enough time for the other person to prepare?

During the meeting

- When you first meet, set the tone for the conversation.
 - let the other person know you care about them and their success,
 - tell the other person about the work they do that you value; reassuring them you have confidence in them and you believe in their abilities; and

- reinforcing the purpose of feedback is to help them develop and grow.
- Listen attentively and with care to any issues the person tells you they are dealing with and let them know you appreciate how frustrating or challenging that issue must be for them. If you can, link the feelings they express to the specific feedback you want to discuss.
- Watch for any triggers or potential amygdala hijacks – in the other person and yourself.
- Ask whether they would be willing to work with you on how to best address the situation. Something like, ‘That sounds difficult. While I know you are doing what you can to manage the issue, would you like to think through this together?’
- Ask the person for their vision of success.
 - What outcome do they think will be the most successful?
 - Help them articulate a vision of success that is positive, clear and meaningful to them.
- If the person becomes upset or defensive, put their care and wellbeing at the centre. Ask, ‘What can I do right now that would be most helpful?’
- Finish the conversation by reaffirming your support and asking them what you can do to further help them with this in the future. Take the opportunity to ask the person for any feedback on how they felt the conversation went. Listen attentively and thank them for any feedback offered.

After the meeting

- Follow up and acknowledge any positive changes you have noticed or ways in which you may be implementing any feedback suggestions they have made.
- Thank the other person for their openness, and invite them to contact you any time in the future with further ideas or feedback.

We help build self-awareness in ourselves by seeking feedback

As we progress as leaders, receiving constructive feedback can become more difficult. Media owner Mia Freedman says the more senior she has become, the harder she finds it to receive the feedback she craves. 'I find it really frustrating,' Mia tells me. 'The people I like working with and respect the most are the people who can say no to me and who can give me feedback. They are the people who are invaluable to me.'

Mia consciously tries to create a culture where people understand it is safe to speak up. 'A trust develops over time,' says Mia, 'when someone gives you feedback you have asked for and realises there is no price to pay for that. They see you have taken on the feedback and maybe even implemented it. This gives them the confidence to give you more feedback next time, and so it goes. These are the most valuable relationships I have.'

Sally McManus, Secretary of the ACTU, is specific with people she completely trusts. 'I consciously seek out a critic or two and let them know it is their job to give me feedback.'

Pip Marlow, Salesforce CEO Asia Pacific, will always ask at the end of a meeting with someone in her team whether they have any feedback for her. She says virtually every time a more junior member of her team will say, 'Oh no, you were great.' The feedback is always positive.

Pip recognises her title of CEO makes it harder for people to give her the feedback she wants – and needs – to hear. Pip's strategy is to try to build psychological safety for that person by saying, in response to the positive words, 'Thank you for that, it means a lot to me you think that. The next customer call we have, I am going to ask you the same question and would really value you letting me know one thing you think I can do better to help you or our customer. I do appreciate the great feedback and next time would love to learn what I can do better as well.'

Pip knows that just asking for the feedback won't necessarily mean it comes easily to people, but she finds after a few requests, the

team members she works with understand she is genuinely seeking feedback on how to improve. 'Good, bad and ugly feedback,' she tells me. 'I want people to know it is safe to give it.'

Just telling your colleagues you are open to negative feedback is not going to be enough. Most people are going to be incredibly reluctant to say anything negative to you. The cost is too high on a social, professional and reputational level. It is going to take serious effort on your part to create a psychologically safe environment where people feel able to tell you what they observe about you.

If you are a modern leader eager to receive feedback, you need to create a psychologically safe culture for people to be able to speak openly. Even with every reassurance, we need to have the self-awareness and empathy to understand giving feedback is difficult for people to do. If you have had a history of having become angry at feedback in the past, you will need to acknowledge and address that past behaviour before you can hope to be given feedback again in the future.

Where you make a commitment to hear and listen to all feedback professionally and without retribution, follow through. Nothing will stifle an opportunity for more feedback in the future than defensiveness and arguments about the views being offered.

We are self-aware that leadership contexts may change

Pip Marlow is an expert at developing technology strategies for organisations and working with teams to create a digital vision for the future. She had been working in the technology industry as the Managing Director of Microsoft Australia when she moved to lead a digital transformation at one of the largest banks in Australia. Financial services was a completely new industry for her. She followed strategies she knew had worked at Microsoft but this time she found the approach didn't work.

'I didn't honour the past enough to create the future,' Pip tells me. 'All these people I was working with were like, who is she to tell us?'

She doesn't understand financial services or the history of the company. She is trying to tell us there is a new flag on the hill.'

Pip understands she didn't spend enough time understanding that the context she was leading in within the bank was very different to where she had successfully led before. Pip wonders now if she had spent more time upfront, being more curious, rethinking what she thought would work, she could have seen the different context earlier and done a better job.

Pip values the feedback she received at the time and learnt important lessons. She now spends considerable time thinking about the situation and context she is leading in. She also uses feedback and self-awareness to think about which part of her leadership she needs to bring forward at any point in time.

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sydney Mark Scott is in his third role of being brought in from outside to lead an organisation. The most important skill for leaders who find themselves in this position is, Mark believes, recognising the expertise of the people already around the table. He sees his role as then helping existing leaders be the best they can be and build the best leadership team together to shape the future of the organisation.

Coming into an organisation as an outsider requires Mark to have high levels of self-awareness to ensure he is critically engaging with existing teams and listening to understand how the organisation operates. It is, according to Mark, essential to avoid leading the organisation through your lens. When Mark joins a new organisation, he is curious and asks lots of questions. He retains an open mind, looking for patterns he might recognise or things he has seen before, but this is all supplemented with a self-awareness and intellectual humility to recognise he does not know much at all. Only once he has listened and asked questions can he work with others to develop a plan for moving forward.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Understanding and recognising the way our body responds when being triggered can help prevent an amygdala hijack.
- We are our own worst judge of whether we are self-aware, so we need a group of trusted advisers to assist us.
- Valuing feedback is essential for a modern leader to understand our blind spots and to help others build their self-awareness too.

FURTHER READING

Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: Changing the way you think to fulfil your potential* (2017).

Amy Edmondson, *The Fearless Organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth* (2019).

Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ* (2006).

Adam Grant, *Think Again: The power of knowing what you don't know* (2021).

Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2012).

Douglas Stone and Sheila Heen, *Thanks for the Feedback: The science and art of receiving feedback well* (2014).

COURAGE

FINDING COURAGE THROUGH WORDS AND ACTIONS

Nyadol Nyuon is uncomfortable with being viewed as a leader.

‘I’ve never considered myself a leader. I’ve just done stuff,’ Nyadol tells me. ‘What I do comes from a personal space, from my own personal experiences and wanting my children to live in a safe environment. That’s why it doesn’t feel like leading. It’s personal.’

In 2022, Nyadol was nominated for the Australian of the Year Awards in Victoria for her human rights and refugee advocacy work. She is also a corporate lawyer, writer and sits on several charitable boards.

Nyadol has a legacy of strong leaders in her family. Her father, Commander William Nyuon Bany, was a South Sudanese politician and founder of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army. He led the military movement to liberate South Sudan before being assassinated by opposition forces in 1996, when Nyadol was nine years old. Raised by her mother in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, Nyadol grew up with stories of her father’s sacrifice and bravery.

‘Everybody is a leader,’ Nyadol says. ‘Members of my family have literally been the foundation on which the rest of us have

been able to build a different life. Leadership involves self-sacrifice and that is something mothers and parents caring for children do every day.'

Nyadol completed her schooling at Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya – home to 90,000 displaced Africans – where she lived in a one-room mud house with a grass roof with her mother and six siblings. It was at Kakuma where Nyadol became inspired by the work of UN Human Rights Commission lawyers and decided that she also wanted to study law.

Nyadol's mother was often called on in the refugee camp to settle community disputes and to stand up for what she believed was right. Nyadol recalls one occasion when she was a teenager where she watched her mother speak up.

Another woman in the refugee camp, who Nyadol describes as beautiful and joyous, had been accused of witchcraft after her husband had suddenly died from a heart attack. The woman's in-laws brutally beat her to death as punishment. Nyadol's mother was one of the few people who protested this action. 'She was really mad and angry about what had happened and made it known, especially to the men.' Standing up for the murdered woman came at great personal cost and physical risk to her mother.

Nyadol says because of experiences like these 'I find it easy to speak up even though I suppose women, especially women in my culture, are not supposed to be outspoken,' she tells me.

While Nyadol's personal experiences have made speaking up a natural response, she knows the childhood trauma and emotional and physical abuse she suffered left her with reduced confidence and the sense of self that comes from growing up in a safe environment. In Nyadol's life, those early childhood experiences were compounded by war, conflict and displacement as well as migrating to a new country and needing to find a new sense of place.

Speaking up has always felt normal to Nyadol, even if it seems courageous to others. 'I just assumed everyone could speak up,'

she says. 'I don't go into something wanting to be courageous. Speaking up has just been normalised as a response for me.'

'What courage allows you to do is not to overthink how bad things could get and not be afraid of how things could go wrong,' says Nyadol. 'I think my family, my parents and my history has normalised courage not as a form of leadership but as a way of living life.'

Nyadol is an example of a formal and informal leader who serves others through speaking up for what she believes in and encouraging others to do the same.

COURAGE AS A HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE

Leading with courage is our ability to maintain authenticity and integrity in the face of fears or dangers that arise from standing up for what we believe in. It means acting with integrity despite obstacles being placed in our path. Leading with courage means we commit to our principles while also being aware of the danger they might bring. We then take appropriate action for a purpose beyond our self-interest.¹³⁹

Leading with courage also means ensuring others feel able to speak up. We create psychologically safe environments when we encourage those we lead to see mistakes as opportunities to learn. We support those we lead to be willing to take risks and openly share their limitations and challenges.

Courage allows us to speak up about something we believe is wrong, to question the way things have always been done, and to rethink what we think we know. Being courageous helps us to confront uncertain and unknown situations and believe speaking up may bring a beneficial outcome. Courage allows people to persevere in the face of fear and stress, when all hope seems lost and helps us to recover quickly after facing stressful situations while drawing on our resilience when those stresses and dangers return. Without courage we remain stuck in existing patterns and immobilised by fear.¹⁴⁰

Sally McManus is a woman leading in a traditionally male world. As Secretary of the ACTU, Sally is the first woman to hold the

influential union post in the organisation's ninety-year history. Sally tells me she doesn't generally get nervous but within a week of her appointment to the role, she was. Very nervous. Sally was scheduled to appear on the ABC's flagship news and current affairs program *7.30* to be interviewed by host Leigh Sales. 'It was my first big interview,' says Sally.

'There's a lot of pressure on you,' Sally says. 'Because it is a movement, people within the unions want you to succeed. There is an expectation on you as a leader and suddenly it is not about you but about the millions of people you are representing. You want to do a good job for them.'

When Sally began leading the ACTU, she was not experienced in the media. 'I had some experience, but not in a tough interview. *7.30* was to be the first tough interview I'd ever done so I was nervous.'

Sally's interview with Leigh Sales was to dominate news headlines for weeks afterwards. It was also to set the tone for the kind of leadership Sally would demonstrate in her new role.

A few minutes into the interview, Sally answered a question by saying, 'I believe in the rule of law where the law is fair and right, but where the law is unjust, I don't think there is a problem with breaking it.' The host, Leigh Sales, gave no response, and the interview moved on. Sally finished the interview that night unaware of the furore her comment would quickly unleash.

'There was a lot of pressure on me to back away from my comments,' Sally tells me. 'The Murdoch press had me on the front page of the newspaper for a week raking through my personal history and printing lies.'

Sally remained resolute in her decision. 'I just knew what the right thing to do was and I wasn't going to waver from it. I was not going to be a leader that hides.'

'It wasn't like the comment I made in the interview was something I made up, then and there. It is something that I strongly believe in and that is not something I am going to walk away from,' says Sally.

‘I did not have a question about what I was going to do, I said it because it was the right thing, and I wasn’t going to walk it back.’

You may not agree with the comments Sally made that night and, to many, they were considered highly controversial. Whether you agree or not is not the point. The moment Sally answered the question, she was leading through the courage of her convictions. As the most senior member of the union movement in Australia, Sally represented millions of others who believed the same.

Reflecting on what she calls a ‘baptism of fire’, Sally is glad the furore happened. ‘I look at decisions now and think what is the right thing to do, what is the right call? If it is right now, it will be right tomorrow,’ says Sally. ‘It is a decision that is anchored in principles.’

While Sally led with courage in the glare of the national media, courageous acts are more likely to be small, everyday events in our homes, workplaces and communities that might come with little or no fanfare. We frequently read stories in the media of whistle blowers who bravely speak up, often at great cost to themselves. It is far more likely that as modern leaders we will have the opportunity to engage in subtle, courageous actions. All courageous actions are important.

Tanya Monro, one of Australia’s most senior leaders in the scientific community, says taking courageous action doesn’t get easier the older or more experienced you get.

‘When I was younger, I would think, “Oh, when I am more senior or more experienced, it will be easier,” but the requirement for courage never goes away,’ says Tanya. ‘Many of the battles I have now are internal – “Do I have the courage to push this issue? Here is an opportunity but is speaking up going to cause problems?” These internal debates are there all the time, regardless of how senior you become.’

Tanya is proud to be able to have the difficult conversations when needed. ‘One of the trademarks of my leadership is having the conversations others won’t have,’ Tanya tells me. ‘I make the implicit,

explicit. I want to really unpack why we do things a particular way or what we might be frightened of which is preventing us change.’

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As we consider what it means to lead with courage, reflect on your leadership. Ask yourself:

- Do you always speak up for what you believe in, even when it is not a popular belief?
- Are you confident about stating views different to the majority view?
- When asked to do something you have concerns about, do you feel able to challenge that request?
- Do you encourage others to speak up about what might be concerning them?
- Are you grateful when people speak up or question something they feel may be wrong?
- Do you always support other people who speak up or challenge something they feel may be wrong?

HOW WE BENEFIT FROM LEADING WITH COURAGE

We strengthen corporate culture

Researchers have shown when individuals speak truth to power, a company’s learning cycle is strengthened. It leads to greater reflection at all levels and increases the flow of new ideas about how the organisation can operate and perform.¹⁴¹

In 2022, as Russia invaded the Ukraine, Atlassian founders, billionaires Scott Farquhar and Mike Cannon-Brookes, found themselves learning tough lessons about the power of a corporate culture where employees are encouraged to speak up. The men have built what is, by all accounts, an outstanding, purpose-driven culture with corporate values that promise ‘no bullshit’.

Atlassian has made a brand out of taking strong positions on a range of social issues including climate change, marriage equality and the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet on the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Atlassian initially appeared to hope to remain firmly on the fence.

Atlassian's first statement, an internal all-staff memo, was filled with platitudes about how complex the situation in Ukraine was and the need to speak with 'kindness and heart'. Within days, demands followed internal protests from employees and contractors that Atlassian's message needed to be unequivocal in condemning the Russian invasion. In response, the company's founders reissued a statement and vowed to 'stand with Ukraine and its people in their fight to maintain their freedom and sovereignty'.

For years leaders have been asking their employees to have the courage to speak up and to develop psychologically safe workplaces where people feel able to raise issues. Atlassian's employees spoke loudly and demanded total support for Ukraine. It was clear by the second statement that the leaders of Atlassian had listened.

This case study provides a useful example of what it means to lead with courage as a modern leader. First, the employees and contractors of Atlassian demonstrated courage to speak up on an issue important to them; they loudly and publicly spoke of their need to see strength and leadership from Atlassian in condemning Russia. Second, it took courage for Farquhar and Cannon-Brookes to not only reverse their original position – quickly and publicly – but to take a stand at all. Most leaders are uncomfortable with leading publicly on contentious issues. Farquhar and Cannon-Brookes were prepared to listen and rethink their position.

We flourish as individuals when we feel able to speak up. As modern leaders, we need to not only flourish ourselves but ensure the cultures we create allow others to flourish too. Someone's willingness to voice their concerns to their leader will depend on how approachable and responsive they perceive their leader to be.

We find meaning and alignment

Being courageous brings benefits, including finding meaning at work. Researchers have established that when we are able to be courageous and speak up safely, we feel in alignment with our full selves and feel more connected to others with greater purpose in our lives.¹⁴²

Academic and activist Yves Rees said it took enormous courage for them to come out as trans, but it was also the most meaningful and rewarding experience of their life and a choice that has led to greater happiness as an individual and a deeper connection with others.

‘Coming out as trans taught me the power of courage. It can be a superpower; lean into it. I get messages every day from trans people who have read my memoir telling me it has changed their life. Courage can be an emotional gift to others,’ says Yves.

We build trust and respect

Leading with courage allows us to role model an ability to move out of our comfort zone, which develops trust and respect with the people we lead. By leading with courage, we can build relationships by responding with action and commitment to violations of the rights of others or by showing a willingness to take the risks necessary to help facilitate a positive outcome. When we lead with courage, we show we are prepared to make bold decisions and will inspire others to do so as well.

By leading with courage, we can build relationships by responding with action and commitment to violations of the rights of others or by showing a willingness to take the risks necessary to help facilitate a positive outcome.

‘Crazy brave’ is often a term of grudging respect given to someone whose actions may have been unlike anything we would do ourselves, but which may potentially transform an existing situation for the

better. At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Navy's Captain Brett Crozier, some might argue, was 'crazy brave'. He was a leader who demonstrated courage on behalf of others, at great personal risk to himself, and generated enormous respect among those he led as a result.

Crozier was in command of the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS *Theodore Roosevelt* when he sent a four-page letter to his navy superiors on 30 March 2020 asking for help to stop the spread of the coronavirus onboard his ship. He requested all but 10 per cent of his crew move on shore into isolation to stop the virus. 'We are not at war,' Crozier wrote. 'Sailors do not need to die. If we do not act now, we are failing to properly take care of our most trusted asset: our sailors.'¹⁴³

Crozier would have been acutely aware of what had happened weeks earlier when the *Diamond Princess* cruise ship, moored off the coast of Japan with 2600 passengers onboard, had seen 700 people infected and eight people die. The USS *Theodore Roosevelt* had 5000 crew onboard and, unlike a cruise ship, his crew were sleeping in shared berths often three high. Eight of his crew already had severe symptoms.

After sending his request, Crozier's letter was leaked to the media.

Crozier, a thirty-year veteran in the navy, knew that writing the letter would most likely end his career, but he sent it anyway. In his witness statement to a navy investigation held after the events unfolded, Crozier said, 'My intent in sending the email . . . was to bring a sense of urgency to a rapidly deteriorating and potentially deadly situation onboard [USS *Theodore Roosevelt*] and avoid a larger catastrophe and loss of life.'¹⁴⁴ Crozier said, 'Despite possible long-term repercussions to my career, I acted in what I believed was in the best interests of the sailors aboard [USS *Theodore Roosevelt*].'

Once the letter was leaked, Thomas Modly, US Navy Secretary at the time, immediately removed Crozier from his post and placed him under investigation for exercising poor judgement. President Trump agreed. 'I thought it was terrible what he did to write a letter. I mean, this isn't a class on literature,' he said. 'This is the captain of a massive

ship that is nuclear powered, and he shouldn't be talking that way in a letter.¹⁴⁵

On orders from Modly, Captain Crozier disembarked the ship in Guam. As he did so, thousands of his sailors cheered him to thunderous applause and hailed him as a hero who had defended his crew at the cost of his career. The video of the cheering sailors soon went viral. This only infuriated his superiors even more.

Modly, based in Washington DC, immediately commissioned a private jet on a 35-hour round trip to Guam. He boarded the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* only days after Crozier's sacking and spent fifteen minutes on the loudspeaker of the ship berating the crew. Over the loudspeaker, Modly called Crozier 'too naïve' and 'too stupid' to command an aircraft carrier if he thought the letter wouldn't leak. The video of Modly also went viral.

Within days, Modly had caught coronavirus himself after boarding the ship in Guam. He was then forced to offer his resignation over the whole debacle. Crozier never returned to his command of the USS *Theodore Roosevelt* and announced his retirement from the US Navy in 2022. The legacy left from these events in the minds of most will remain the courage of Crozier to stand up for his men even in the likely face of negative repercussions for himself.

WHAT STOPS US FROM BEING COURAGEOUS?

We are fearful of the consequences

When something bothers us about a decision, a policy or perhaps an action towards someone else, we might go home and worry about how wrong it is. We will worry about how to raise the issue and whether it is safe to do so. Leading with courage may require us to participate in a high-stake conversation or course of action, where a positive outcome is not guaranteed, where reputations – including ours – might be on the line and where our personal wellbeing might be negatively impacted. For many, like Captain Crozier, being courageous can have career-threatening implications.

There is a consistently negative correlation between how courageous people think a behaviour is, and how frequently that action happens.¹⁴⁶ The more courage needed, the less we are likely to see it.

Chances are, if you work in an environment where you do not feel safe to speak up, you will stay quiet. For example, in one study 85 per cent of employees reported they felt unable to raise a concern with their bosses about something they felt was not right.¹⁴⁷

The most frequently cited reasons for remaining silent are a fear of being viewed or labelled negatively, or damaging existing and valued relationships.¹⁴⁸ Staying silent makes a lot of sense when we think speaking up will lead to negative personal consequences like being told you are not a 'team player', or worse. If labels like being courageous were attached to people who spoke up, instead of labels like 'troublemakers', the incentive for people speaking up would be very different. When we consider the risk and reward of speaking up, it is easy to see why people may stay quiet, especially if your boss is a leader who is unwilling to hear feedback or can become angry at bad news.

If labels like being courageous were attached to people who spoke up, instead of labels like 'troublemakers', the incentive for people speaking up would be very different.

Humans are finely attuned to risk. And that is a good thing, especially if we are talking about the work we might do where having strong risk awareness is essential. The challenge we have is that we are also highly attuned to interpersonal risk. We unconsciously overvalue the need to maintain a sense of comfort, security and belonging.

If someone stays silent, it is because it benefits them individually, the benefit occurs immediately, and the certainty of that benefit is high. They will balance that against the risk of speaking up which generally benefits organisations, the benefit (may) occur after some delay, and the certainty of that benefit can be low.¹⁴⁹



We lack psychological safety

If you live or work in an environment where it is not safe to speak up, even the most courageous among us is going to find it challenging to do so. These are cultures where mistakes are seen as fatal to your promotion prospects, where people are unwilling to rock the boat, where you are more likely to keep your ideas to yourself than risk speaking up. These are cultures where you only talk about your strengths and are unlikely to freely share your limitations. Unfortunately, many leaders continue to, even inadvertently, encourage, reward and model behaviours that dampen opportunities for courage rather than promote it.

I was a young air force cadet at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) through the early 1990s. This period has been the subject of many independent reviews and investigations, as well as broad condemnation from government, media and the military themselves, for their treatment of cadets at the time, particularly female cadets. Less than 10 per cent of the cadets were female, and sexism and misogyny were deeply ingrained.

I was fortunate that on a personal level, the four years I spent at ADFA were largely positive and I ended up graduating as dux of my air force class – of men and women – and look back with a real sense of achievement at having done well in such a challenging environment. However, being at ADFA at that time also taught me the cultural signs and leadership red flags of a culture where you are not encouraged to speak up.

Among the 1000 cadets at ADFA at the time, there was a pervasive culture of silence. The term ‘crossing the road’ meant reporting

something to the military officers who ran the academy. As new cadets we were taught – from the very first hour of arrival while being yelled and screamed at by older cadets – you never took something across the road. Everything – whether minor infringements or criminal offences – stayed within the Corps of Officer Cadets. The culture was so strong that cadets who did dare to report serious offences, including crimes like rape, were soon excommunicated from the group and would generally end up resigning. Loyalty to the Corps of Officer Cadets was seen as far more important than doing the right thing. There was a distrust of outsiders, an intolerance towards anyone who didn't fit the unrealistic ideal of a cadet, and an extreme emphasis on position and symbols of authority. It was a culture of silence which discouraged and punished those who spoke up. This kind of culture is the anti-thesis of one where psychological safety is fostered and encouraged by a modern leader.

We prefer familiarity when under threat

We retreat to our comfort zone when the prospect of needing to be courageous can be confronting. Familiarity of safety and certainty can blind us to the opportunities and potential that may follow from taking even the smallest of courageous actions. Finding the courage to be vulnerable and speak up about our limitations can also be challenging.

Researcher and bestselling author Brené Brown believes what stops us from being courageous is the armour we put on when we feel 'less than'. Brown identifies three common types of armour we put on when under threat:

1. We become a 'knower', which stops us asking the right questions to understand a situation better and instead focuses us on the need to be right rather than getting it right.
2. We avoid hard conversations when we feel uncomfortable, which prevents us from getting (and giving) honest feedback to be better at whatever it is we do.

3. We use shame and blame to manage ourselves and others, ultimately preventing us from taking healthy risks, trying new things, and embracing mistakes and learning from them.¹⁵⁰

There are pivotal moments during my career I look back on now and wish I had spoken up, or spoken up more loudly, about an issue I did not think was right. I know I have avoided hard conversations where I feared the consequences of saying something both for myself and for others. In retrospect it is clear I retreated to a comfort zone when the need to be courageous felt too confronting, and that was particularly the case in matters where it was unsafe to speak up.

We prefer to share good news than bad

It is uncomfortable to be the conveyor of bad news so we will avoid it where we can. The saying ‘Don’t shoot the messenger’ exists for a reason – we don’t want to be associated with bad news and we may even feel guilty about what has been heard.

Researchers recruited participants for a study to investigate this phenomenon and told them it was marketing research for a brand of deodorant. It wasn’t. While the participant was assessing the deodorant, the room was set up so they could overhear a message intended for someone else taking part in the study. What they overheard was a message that another person needed to phone home urgently. Half the participants heard the urgent phone call was because of good news, the other half heard it was due to really bad news. Researchers were interested to see what the participant who had heard the message would do when the person needing to call home arrived.

Almost all the participants told the other person they needed to call home. Those who had overheard it was good news were happy to pass on that extra piece of information. Those who had heard there

was really bad news coming, were not as eager to add this detail. The researchers hypothesised this was because the participant felt guilty, even though they had nothing to do with causing the unfortunate event. They felt guilty about being fortunate enough not to be experiencing this bad news themselves.¹⁵¹

Similarly, we communicate with our bosses in a way to minimise negative information. If we do not trust our boss or if we are ambitious and want to progress, we are even more likely to filter the information we share upwards for fear of ‘rocking the boat’ or creating conflict.¹⁵²

Modern leaders understand a hierarchical relationship intensifies this phenomenon and take measures to counteract it through building psychologically safe workplaces. A modern leader will be on the hunt for negative information, understanding good news is much more likely to have reached them quickly than the bad.

A modern leader will be on the hunt for negative information, understanding good news is much more likely to have reached them quickly than the bad.

Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll knows how difficult it can be for people to speak up in a hierarchical organisation where people depend on positions of authority. She says it is a difficult environment for police to deliver bad news when they are having to do so through multiple levels of bureaucracy. ‘A lot gets sifted by the time it comes up to me,’ she tells me. ‘I always say people manage up beautifully.’

Given her early career as a detective, Katarina has always been a curious person. ‘Our job is to get to the truth. I ask a lot of questions and try and create an environment where people can tell me the bad news.’ Katarina says to her teams, ‘I don’t care if it’s bad news. I want to know at the beginning when we can change things, not at the end when it is too late.’

HOW DO WE LEAD WITH COURAGE?

We embrace vulnerability

Modern leaders can build courage by being vulnerable. Through establishing open and transparent communication with the people you lead, we are role modelling how to encourage others to become more courageous as well.

Harvard professor Amy Edmondson, author of *The Fearless Organisation* explains we might fear looking ignorant, so we don't ask questions. Or we might fear looking incompetent, so we don't admit mistakes. Perhaps we fear looking stupid, so we keep ideas to ourselves. Or we fear looking negative, so we don't question the status quo.¹⁵³

To find courage in the future, we can reframe any failures or perceived failures as simply part of the process of leading and break through that fear anyway.

Three-time Olympian and four-time gold medallist Libby Trickett has co-founded a business called Unlocking Her Potential, which is grounded in leading through vulnerability. Libby has had plenty of personal challenges, including an experience of miscarriage and post-natal depression, and hopes she can lead and influence others through being vulnerable about her experiences.

'I think I am able to articulate things in a way that normalises this experience for people,' says Libby. 'I hope I am also able to acknowledge other people's experiences and how they may have felt at certain times. If that means they talk to someone or get the help they need, then I feel I am doing something worthwhile.'

'Authenticity, vulnerability and honesty can be bandied around,' says Libby, 'but it is only through the experiences we go through where we can break down the facades people create and the walls we build around ourselves.'

'I am passionate about showing people the good, the bad and the ugly and that life can be hard but also beautiful at the same time. We often forget there is beauty in the chaos,' says Libby.

We sniff out the bad news

Pip Marlow, CEO Salesforce Asia Pacific, dislikes the saying, ‘Don’t bring me problems, bring me solutions.’ She knows there will be people in her team who have a problem they are dealing with and if you ask them to wait for a solution before coming to talk to you about it, then as a leader, you have a problem.

‘Bad news should travel faster than good news. Bring it out. Bring out your bad,’ she tells me.

Pip loves to sniff out the nasty stuff. She feels one of the biggest opportunities for innovation, growth and improvement is in finding the nastiest stuff happening in an organisation and really leaning in to fix it. ‘Most people know how to fix things that are easy,’ Pip tells me. ‘But it is the tough stuff that is going to get us into trouble if we don’t figure out how to do it better. It is not so much about sniffing the roses but finding the rotten one.’

Early in her career, Pip recalls asking her team to provide her with their most unhappy customer; she wanted to know what their concerns were. As Pip read their file, she recalls feeling sick as she learnt about their experiences. The customer was vulnerable and had made numerous complaints about how poorly he had been treated. Pip knew she needed more than a report to truly appreciate his perspective; she wanted to meet the customer in person. Pip was nervous but met with him and they talked for more than four hours about his experiences. The exchange prompted Pip to not only help improve this customer’s experience, but also to consider how the broader system might change too. This could not have happened unless she had sought out the worst news she could from her team.

We ask questions

Speaking up on an issue, whatever the context, requires a lot of courage. But once you do it, you are much more likely to have the confidence to do it again. Sometimes a well-phrased question can

make the first step much easier. Some conversation starters Harvard professor Amy Edmondson recommends¹⁵⁴ include:

- Something has been troubling me. Do you have a few minutes to talk about it?
- I have made a mistake and I wanted to let you know right away.
- Our project didn't go as hoped.
- I will need your help figuring this out.
- How much detail do you like to hear?
- I don't feel right about this. Can we please pause and take a closer look?

We seek out all voices

When we create an environment that embraces inclusion, celebrates diversity, accepts differences and challenges the status quo, we encourage others to become courageous. When others feel a sense of belonging, they display the psychological safety to be authentic, confident, and brave enough to stand up for their values and beliefs.¹⁵⁵

We need to recognise it may be harder for some we lead to feel able to speak up. Modern leaders seek diverse voices to genuinely understand whether the people we lead feel accepted for being different and whether they feel the ideas they do offer are welcome and given appropriate time and attention.

Modern leaders play an important role in ensuring we create a space for all voices, not just the loudest ones. We would have all been in meetings where the loudest voices dominate the discussion and talk over others to make sure their point is made. Like an orchestra conductor ensures every instrument is heard, not just the loud bassoon, as a modern leader, we need to make sure all voices are heard – loud and quiet, supportive and dissenting, at the margins or from the centre.

Modern leaders play an important role in ensuring we create a space for all voices, not just the loudest ones.

We role model courageous actions

We can't just ask people to show more courage. For any meaningful change, we need to display courageous behaviours ourselves. Researchers have found setting courageous goals at a personal and team level can help drive courageous behaviours.¹⁵⁶

Julie Reilly, CEO of Australians Investing in Women, remembers her mother, Val, showing her the power of speaking up for your beliefs. Val left a violent marriage, with four children under five years old, at a time when there was virtually no government financial support. Val had originally wanted to become a nun because it was the only way she could get an education as the eldest of eight children from a poor farming community. While very smart, she failed noviciate training because she was 'unsuited to a life of obedience'.

'Mum was always questioning, challenging and curious to learn,' says Julie. 'We grew up listening to a lot of Irish music, which were really songs of rebellion against oppression. The subtlety was always there from Mum about not being afraid to challenge authority.'

Julie remembers being in church with her mother and siblings in the 1970s as the priest gave a sermon that was, as she recalls, decidedly anti-feminist. 'I remember Mum standing up, grabbing us kids and saying, "I will not sit and listen to this." Mum taught at the local Catholic school and, as we left, I thought our life was over. Of course, it wasn't.'

Julie has no doubt her mother was leading in that moment. 'She was giving licence to people who would never have felt they could say that and never have been confident to publicly challenge someone in authority,' says Julie. 'So many people came up to her afterwards and thanked her.'

As a leader, you can develop a personal list of courageous actions you commit to doing – start with the easiest and work your way up – and then share them with those you lead. Make visible commitments to your team about what you plan to do differently. The examples might include things like moving forward with a project you do not feel fully

capable to execute, through to speaking up about a policy that has been implemented which is having a negative impact on the team.

You can then decide on courageous actions you will do as a team. Be vulnerable and honest about the behaviours people may be feeling too afraid to do, but which they know are critical to the success and ongoing growth of individuals or the organisation. Collectively agree on a range of actions everyone can pursue.

We understand acts of corporate courage can be small but meaningful

Often courageous actions may go unnoticed and unheralded; however, they form an important part of the fabric of leading and participating in modern workplaces. This might include standing up to authority figures about a new policy that will have damaging repercussions, challenging colleagues who are disrespectful, or pursuing a promotion.

Astronomer Lisa Harvey-Smith remembers needing to lead with courage on one occasion in a workplace. Serious allegations of misconduct and harassment of staff had been made against a male colleague and it appeared nothing was being done to address the behaviour. Lisa knew she needed to speak up for what she believed in, despite the risks that might follow. She went right to the top.

Lisa spoke to her CEO and asked, ‘Could I have a conversation with you about something that is happening that is really important?’ Lisa says she was basically saying to the CEO, ‘This isn’t good enough. This is happening on your watch, and you need to do something about it. This is the impact it is having.’

Academic, television presenter and author Susan Carland knows she can be fierce when she is standing up for other people. When she was appointed to a new position at her university, it was her first formal leadership role. She says when she met her new team, she knew immediately something wasn’t right. ‘They were lovely people,’ says Susan, ‘but they were absolutely broken.’

Susan set about trying to understand what was wrong. For the past couple of years, each person in her new team had been expected to do the work of more than two people. The extreme workload had become so normalised the team wasn't even aware that what was being asked of them was unreasonable. 'I committed to fixing the problem and told them I would not allow this to happen to them again. This was not okay,' says Susan. 'I stood up to management on my team's behalf in a way that I would never have done for myself. When I left the position the team said, "We saw you as the lioness protecting us."'

Outlined opposite are several ways we can display courage at work as identified by researcher Jim Detert in his book *Choosing Courage*.¹⁵⁷

We understand the personal risks and speak up anyway

Leading with courage means we can recognise when we are in our comfort zone, and we speak up anyway. We act and recognise the need to do so for the benefit of ourselves and others.

When former Australian soccer captain Craig Foster spoke up on behalf of Bahraini footballer Hakeem al-Araibi, he knew the risks it would bring to him on a personal level. Hakeem had been granted protection as a political refugee by Australia in 2014 before being detained in Thailand on his honeymoon. A refugee of Bahrain, the country had issued a red notice against him via Interpol.

'Courage to me is doing what is right,' Craig tells me. 'Whether it is refugees, Hakeem as an individual, Indigenous Australians, it is putting their wellbeing ahead of your own commercial or political ambitions.'

Craig saw it as his job to speak up for the human rights of Hakeem and to advocate for his right to be returned. 'Leading with courage is acting to that end 100 per cent,' says Craig. 'I knew the risk to me personally and professionally was extremely high, but I made a conscious choice to accept that risk.' Craig expected he would lose his job as a sports broadcaster at the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Australia's multicultural broadcaster funded by the federal government.

Courageous action	Examples
Standing up to authority figures	Refusing to comply with illegal, immoral or unethical decisions from above. Pushing back on policies that don't serve an organisation well. Speaking up when a leader engages in unethical, hurtful, inappropriate behaviour.
Confronting peers	Expressing concern about a colleague's work which is having a negative impact on the organisation. Sharing a different point of view. Speaking about disrespectful, unprofessional or illegal behaviour.
Correcting subordinates	Providing informal or formal negative feedback. Taking disciplinary action against a colleague. Speaking up when a subordinate engages in unprofessional, inappropriate, illegal or unethical behaviour.
Pursuing professional growth	Taking on a stretch assignment (such as a challenging project or additional responsibilities in a role). Trying out a new leadership behaviour. Owning or steering a bold change from existing organisational or industry norms. Creating a new business.
Sacrificing personal security or advancement for the greater good	Quitting a job as a principled stand. Taking a reduction in pay or refusing to take an increase in pay because of your principles. Being prepared to be vulnerable to improve group performance or wellbeing.

Table 6: Examples of courageous actions at work

Ultimately, Craig successfully campaigned for the release of Hakeem. He did not lose his job at SBS but says there were ongoing discussions about his advocacy work. 'Ultimately, I ended up leaving,' he says. 'There are always costs to advocating for others, but the costs were far outweighed by the benefits.'

Craig eventually received the Medal of the Order of Australia for refugee advocacy and services to multiculturalism, but he feels awkward with the accolades.

‘People said “Congratulations” but to me the truth is it very likely means I am not doing social advocacy well enough. Refugees are still being incarcerated,’ says Craig. ‘There is always a guilt because I could be doing more.’

Craig says he has made a choice about how he speaks up for human rights. ‘I have maintained a public position through my broadcasting platforms, which provides the visibility and political social leverage to try and make a greater contribution,’ he says. ‘I recognise there are different levels of speaking up and all involve courage.’

‘Courage is the ability to let other people speak,’ says Craig. ‘Courage is the willingness to lift other people up and give credit to others, not oneself.’

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Courageous actions are often small and subtle but are as important as the high-profile examples.
- We create environments where courageous action can flourish through building psychologically safe workplaces.
- We can role model courageous actions to others by understanding the personal risks and speaking up anyway.

FURTHER READING

Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave work. Tough conversations. Whole hearts* (2018).

Amy Edmondson, *The Fearless Organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth* (2019).

Kim Scott, *Radical Candor: How to get what you want by saying what you mean* (2017).

EMPATHY

SERVING OTHERS WITH EMPATHY

Katarina Carroll is the commissioner of the Queensland Police Service and responsible for more than 17,000 serving police officers and civilian employees who help protect and serve the state of Queensland. Katarina is the first woman to hold the role and she has no doubt her gender impacts how she meets her responsibilities. Katarina also served as the operations commander for the G20 Summit in Brisbane, the largest ever peacetime operation in Australia.

‘I bring a different skill set, completely, to the men who came before me,’ she says. Katarina doesn’t just mean being the first mother in the role or the experience she has juggling motherhood and full-time work. Katarina is the child of immigrants who came to Australia from Croatia without any money and unable to speak English. Katarina’s father finished his schooling in grade four and her mother in grade eight. On arriving in Australia by boat in the 1960s, Katarina’s parents, Ivan and Antonija, moved to a rural property near the small town of Innot Hot Springs on the Atherton Tablelands where they started a tobacco farm. It must have felt like another planet to their

Croatian homeland. Even for those who have lived in Australia for generations, Innot Hot Springs is far from anywhere.

Katarina grew up on the farm sleeping in the bathtub as a bed while her parents worked hard to support their family. They suffered regular racism with taunts from some locals telling the family they had no right to be there. Through that adversity, Katarina learnt the value of empathy and compassion. Her parents created a community around them, including First Nations, Italian, Indian and fellow Croatian people. Together they all worked on the farm, being paid equally for the same day's work.

Katarina remembers, even as a child, that what her parents had achieved was special. 'We had two people on the farm who came from India on a boat. They were so poor, like the rest of us, and would send money home to their family in India,' Katarina says. 'At one point there was an amnesty for illegal arrivals. My father took them to the local police station so they could be recognised as residents of Australia.' In a recent visit to an Indian community, Katarina was reminded of the legacy her parents have left in so many people's lives.

Katarina is full of admiration for the work ethic her parents provided. Both worked well into their seventies and Katarina says they were law abiding, hardworking and principled. 'Their culture was very inclusive,' says Katarina. 'It didn't matter what colour your skin was, your religion or culture.'

Inclusion also extended to women being treated equally alongside men. 'My mother drove tractors as much as my father and ploughed as many fields. I was raised by a strong woman.'

Leadership came naturally to Katarina and it wasn't a deliberate action. 'It was me being me,' she says. 'I was hardworking and liked showing people how to do things they couldn't. I did not mind doing the heavy lifting.'

Katarina believes we are only good leaders because of the people we have around us. She knows it is impossible to have all the skills herself.

‘No leader knows everything,’ she says. ‘I surround myself with people who complement my strengths and compensate my weaknesses.’

For many years, the Queensland Police Service was focused on traditional leadership models of command and control – which many leaders depended on for their authority – formal leaders who were brilliant strategists and who were operationally and technically excellent, but found it more challenging to lead with their hearts. Contrary to misconceptions of the role of police, Katarina believes only a small component is about command leadership, with the remainder focusing on relationship influence and adaptive leadership.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw policing under Katarina’s leadership refocus towards a strategy of compassion, communication and then compliance. ‘We went out publicly and spoke about being compassionate to people, about educating and communicating. Compliance was only enforced if there was a blatant disregard of the law,’ says Katarina. ‘We wanted to engage with the public and get that right.’

For Katarina, this involved dramatically shifting the way policing work was done. ‘At the end of the day we serve people. Most of our interactions are with good people and is not adversarial,’ says Katarina. ‘There is clear evidence you get much more support from the public if you can establish a relationship. They trust you.’

Empathy is vital to how the police build trust with the community. Katarina believes it is critical at every point for policing to be understanding and empathetic. ‘The research tells us that an extra 10–15 seconds of being empathetic and kind when communicating, rather than being directive, has extraordinary benefits over an extended period of time,’ says Katarina.

Police need to lead with their head and their heart. ‘At the point of crisis there may be a lot of questions depending on the kind of investigation underway,’ she says. ‘But a lot of policing is with the heart.’

Katarina feels the weight of responsibility that comes with her role. ‘Because you are the leader, you have an extraordinary ability to

influence, to change policies for the better, to get more resources, to make your community safer. A person on the front line can't do that. That is why it is important to remember you are there to serve. We have an incredibly important role to use our leadership position for our people and the community we serve.'

EMPATHY AS A HEAD AND HEART LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTE

In our research to develop the Head & Heart Leader Scale, participants who self-assessed with high levels of empathy were also more likely to associate very strongly with leading with perspective and moderately strongly with humility, self-awareness and curiosity. This is because all eight leadership attributes are concerned with understanding ourselves and others, and then using this understanding to engage with those we lead and influence. With better understanding of what it is like for others, we can be better leaders.

It is important to clarify what empathy is and isn't, since it often means different things to different people.

For a modern leader, using the right kind of empathy in the right way at the right time can make the difference as to whether you can ever lead with people at the centre or, instead, remain disconnected from the people around you.

For a modern leader, using the right kind of empathy in the right way at the right time can make the difference as to whether you can ever lead with people at the centre or, instead, remain disconnected from the people around you.

Cognitive empathy is the capacity to comprehend what another person is experiencing from within their frame of reference – it is the ability to understand how a person feels and what they are thinking. It means that, for example, even if we have never experienced what it is like to be precisely in the same situation as someone else, we can seek to comprehend what a situation must be like for them. Empathy

allows us to look beyond our narrow and privileged positions and value diverse viewpoints.

I have deliberately added a dimension of diversity when thinking about the attribute of empathy for modern leaders. Seeking to understand and include the views of those different to us requires an ability to lead with cognitive empathy. Modern leaders will willingly, authentically and respectfully listen and engage with diverse points of view and appreciate that not everyone has the same experience or perspective as they do. Modern leaders recognise it is in those differences where value can be gained and incorporated into our decision-making to drive better outcomes for all.

Having high levels of cognitive empathy as leaders helps us to communicate and listen deeply to others to understand what another person is experiencing. We take on a different perspective and imagine what it must be like to be in their shoes. We seek to understand how someone is feeling without taking on those feelings ourselves.

Entrepreneur and designer Collis Ta'eed believes having the ability to put himself in the shoes of others takes both empathy and self-awareness. Collis does not believe anyone is born with empathy, but through lived experience you can begin to empathise with others. 'Empathy is important in leadership – how else do you get outside of your head? How else do you think about others if you are not understanding the people you are hoping to lead or trying to influence?' asks Collis.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

As we consider what it means to lead with empathy, think about your leadership. Ask yourself:

- Do you actively seek to incorporate different perspectives into your decision-making?
- Do you value diversity of experience and perspectives?
- Do you always try to understand the feelings of others?
- Are you always good at understanding the needs of others to connect with them?

Not all types of empathy are equal

Emotional empathy is different to cognitive empathy. It involves identifying with the feelings another person is experiencing. When we speak to someone we are close to who may be distressed or upset, we can start to feel upset ourselves. We feel with the other person and literally take on their emotions and make them ours. This is an example of the social brain in action – we feel what the other person is feeling because we are in sync with their emotions.

According to Stanford psychology professor Jamil Zaki, Director of the Social Neuroscience Laboratory, you can unpack different types of empathy by imagining you are having lunch with a friend who starts to cry. You might see your friend crying and start to feel down yourself – this is emotional empathy; you are sharing what the other person is feeling. Alternatively, you might try to understand *why* your friend is feeling sad – this is cognitive empathy.

For modern leaders, it is important to understand the difference.

It is also important to understand what empathy is *not*. And empathy is not, though it is often confused for, compassion, sympathy or even pity. While they all share similarities – a willingness to support others and an ability to understand their experience – they have different traits.

When we feel pity for someone, we feel sorry for them. But we may not truly understand their experience or understand how we can assist. It is an unhelpful position for a leader because feeling pity without action is of limited value.

Sympathy is a slightly amplified sense of feeling sorry for someone but is still relatively unhelpful as a leader. You may pity a work colleague's predicament after they are fired from their job but there is little you can or will do to change the predicament. You may also feel sympathy for them and ask if they have any support, but, again, it is of limited long-term value.

Compassion is where we can appreciate what someone is experiencing, and we are willing to act. It is taking a step beyond empathy

and asking what can be done to support the person in need.¹⁵⁸ This is a helpful form of long-term action, especially when used in conjunction with empathy.

HOW WE BENEFIT FROM LEADING WITH EMPATHY

We improve wellbeing and increase job satisfaction

People who experience empathy from others tend to be less stressed and less depressed, more satisfied with their lives, happier in their relationships and more successful at work.¹⁵⁹ A study of almost 200 nurses who worked in COVID-19 clinics during the pandemic found the nurses who felt more resilient were being led by someone who showed empathy.¹⁶⁰ This is because leaders who demonstrate empathy are able to stimulate trust and confidence in those they lead. Leading with empathy allows us to improve our listening skills and use appropriate voice intonation, gestures and observation skills to elicit responses from the other person in a conversation.

Leading with empathy is positively associated with authentic emotions, resulting in greater job satisfaction, performance, psychological wellbeing and overall work performance.¹⁶¹ Empathy is not a ‘nice to have’ skill for leaders but essential for a modern leader. When we lead with empathy, we are less likely to be aggressive, engage in anti-social behaviours or physically abuse others.¹⁶²

Clare Wright, who is a professor of history and public engagement at Latrobe University, supervises PhD students and leads with empathy through seeking to develop the whole person while they complete their studies. Clare likes to understand the context in which her students are undertaking their research – their family situation or the level of support they may be receiving – because, in her experience, there are deep psychological points where a student’s background and the academic process mix.

In one study, roughly 250 employees working for a large American private bus company were asked questions about the empathy shown through the leadership of their supervisor. The study

found a direct link between leading with empathy and employee job satisfaction. Empathetic leadership placed supporting the psychological and other needs of employees at the forefront, which helped leaders better understand the emotional needs of their employees.¹⁶³

We create better outcomes

Leading with empathy is critical for innovation, positive customer experiences and business success. Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, has said, ‘Having empathy for your team is perhaps the best way for you to progress in your career. If you have empathy for your people, they will do their best work, your team will do their best.’¹⁶⁴

Empathy and business strategy can be integrated to significant success. The more a company is prepared to reward and lead with empathy, the more individual leaders are likely to identify new opportunities more quickly than competitors, adapt to change more easily and create workplaces that offer employees a greater sense of purpose in their jobs.¹⁶⁵ Research has shown empathy to be the strongest predictor of ethical leadership behaviour and one of the three strongest predictors of leadership effectiveness.¹⁶⁶

Jane Needham is one of the most senior women in the legal fraternity in New South Wales. A barrister since 1990, Jane reached the highest appointment – Senior Counsel – in 2004. Jane was a mother of a two-year-old daughter at the time and not working full time. ‘I’m quite proud of the fact I was the first person I know to be appointed silk from a part-time practice,’ Jane tells me.

Jane often finds herself leading or co-leading teams of junior barristers, solicitors and paralegals as they work to successfully represent their clients in court. She has noticed a shift in the law around the role of empathy during her thirty years as a barrister.

Jane represented the Catholic Church in the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. She says she is aware of the criticisms of taking on such a high-profile

client around such challenging issues, especially as it involved the re-traumatisation of victims having to tell their story repeatedly, but she believes, as all barristers do, that everyone deserves representation.

Jane believes the reason she has been sought out by clients to appear in inquiries relating to child sexual abuse is because she is able to deal with witnesses in an empathetic way. 'In these kinds of cases, my clients do not want someone to go in hard during cross-examination. These are survivors giving evidence.'

In Jane's view 'the empathy needed to get the answers from witnesses without breaking someone down has become a tangible skill needed by barristers'. There has been a shift, Jane believes, from cross-examination being about breaking people to a focus on not damaging someone further.

'There is enormous privilege in being able to ask someone almost anything, and then present them with evidence showing they are not telling the truth,' Jane says. 'That privilege must be balanced with an understanding you are dealing with someone's life, ego, sense of self and that there are ways of doing your job without needless abusive or aggressive cross-examination. It can be done in a much more empathetic way.'

'Being able to balance leading with both my head and heart has been key,' says Jane.

We champion diversity and inclusion

An empathetic leader can willingly, authentically and respectfully listen or engage with diverse points of view and appreciate that not everyone has the same experience or perspective as they do. Leaders who put people at the centre recognise that it is in those differences where value can be gained and incorporated into their decision-making. When we lead with empathy, we role model to others how to value these differences.

An empathetic leader can willingly, authentically and respectfully listen or engage with diverse points of view and appreciate that not everyone has the same experience or perspective as they do.

Journalist, playwright and producer Benjamin Law is aware of the under-representation of certain demographics across the television and creative industries, including among First Nations people, migrants, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ and women. For much of his career Benjamin, an Asian–Australian gay man, has himself been part of under-represented minorities. Benjamin says when you say the word leader he thinks of a ‘white, heterosexual able-bodied man in power’.

‘There is no place in the world where I am not the odd one out. I am either the only Asian person at the table or the only gay person,’ Benjamin tells me. ‘As a result, I am keenly aware of who is the only – fill in the blank – in the room. For example, the only woman in the room, the only person with a disability.’

He is aware that as his career has progressed, he finds himself increasingly in positions of leadership and power. Benjamin knows, especially as he leads conversations, how important it is to make sure all voices are included.

‘Usually, I am outnumbered at the table in every single way and, at the same time, I have responsibilities and power. I don’t think either of those things cancel each other out,’ says Benjamin.

In the writers’ room, Benjamin will ask whether they have looked to see who is missing from the room and sometimes it is a matter of including the voices in the room who might not otherwise be heard. He comes from a place of empathy, understanding how often minorities are excluded.

Benjamin tells me in a writers’ room for a television program there is a clear hierarchy – the producer who provides the money being the most senior, head writers with the most experience next in line, other

writers and, then, the notetaker. The person with the notetaker role is generally expected to sit in the room quietly and diligently take notes. It is, Benjamin assures me, a terribly hierarchical idea for what is in every respect a vital, professional role.

Benjamin understands that without including the voices of all, you don't understand their potential superpowers.

'Often the notetaker has been listening and might have a personal experience of something being discussed that no one else in the room has,' says Benjamin. 'They are usually the notetaker because they come from a background where they might be more disadvantaged or marginalised.' These are often the voices Benjamin will seek out and include. Doing so requires him to lead with empathy and perspective.

WHAT STOPS US FROM BEING EMPATHETIC?

We can be overcome by the pain of others

It seems counterintuitive to think of empathy being anything other than a benefit to those we lead. How is it possible to have too much empathy? How can it negatively impact our leadership?

Julie Reilly, CEO of Australians Investing in Women, says she almost wishes she didn't have as much empathy as she does. 'I think I have always been naturally able to see other people's pain, discomfort or struggles,' says Julie. 'I think I learned very quickly it could be unhealthy to be too empathetic. It can blur the lines of what is a healthy and helpful relationship.'

'I can easily get overwhelmed by other people's pain,' says Julie. 'It has been an evolution in understanding the way I can be most helpful is to not get lost in that pain but to actually understand it, acknowledge it, and be strong.'

We can use empathy to fuel blind spots

As modern leaders we need to have the self-awareness that too much empathy can set up biases and amplify blind spots.

The NPR program *Invisibilia* aired an episode in 2019 called ‘The End of Empathy’. The program challenged the notion that through understanding others, we can understand ourselves, and caused a team of journalists to rethink empathy and ask whether seeking to see ourselves in others is always a good thing.

To work at NPR as a producer, applicants in job interviews are asked to rework a previous interview into a story. Lina Misitzis, hoping to work at NPR, listened to an interview journalist Hanna Rosin had recorded four years earlier with a man named Jack Peterson. Peterson was a reformed incel; a member of an online community of young men who consider themselves unable to attract women sexually. During the original interview, Peterson had spoken about an ill-fated attempt to win back an ex-girlfriend in the middle of the night, only to have her attempt to strangle him. The original journalists portrayed Peterson as someone who had turned his back on hate after discovering some women are kind. In hallmark fashion for the program, he was shown in an empathetic light as someone who had escaped the clutches of a movement of hateful men and rehabilitated himself.

Four years later, aspiring NPR producer Lina Misitzis listened to the original interview and heard something completely different. She heard the story from the perspective of Peterson’s ex-girlfriend and many other women who are victims of controlling ex-partners. She saw Peterson as an abusive man who was not remorseful for his actions. Misitzis felt that empathy had been offered where none was deserving, and Jack had been ‘reborn out of the ashes of a fabricated narrative’.¹⁶⁷

The original journalist, Hanna Rosin, and Lina decided to interview Peterson again to settle the debate. In the second interview Peterson confirms Misitzis’ suspicions. ‘It’s not really a redemption story for me. I mean, it’s more – all I’m thinking about – what can I do to make my life not horrible?’

There is a fine line between having the right amount of empathy and having too much. If we have too much empathy, we can fall

victim to confirmation bias – precisely what happened at NPR when Jack Peterson was first interviewed. In the original interview, journalists had empathised with Peterson and failed to see the cost of their empathy, setting up a harassed ex-girlfriend as a villain. As Misitzis explained, ‘You’re inviting your listeners to empathise with someone whose logic is not just offensive, but it’s literally flawed . . . you’re creating more turmoil.’

For head and heart leaders, we need to recognise the potential blind spots empathy can bring, not just at an individual level but a societal level as well.

We can make decisions that are unfair

An interview with Paul Polman, former CEO of Unilever, captured why leading with empathy can be a risk to fairness. ‘I would never be able to make a single decision,’ he said. ‘Why? Because with empathy, I mirror the emotions of others, which makes it impossible to consider the greater good.’¹⁶⁸

In a classic research experiment, participants were told about a young 10-year-old girl called Sheri Summers who had a fatal muscle-paralysing disease called myasthenia gravis. The experiment played an interview with Sheri who spoke about how much she missed playing with her friends at school and her hope that if she could get a particular type of medicine, it could help. The subjects in the experiment were told Sheri’s family were unable to afford the medicine in question and were on a waiting list for a treatment to relieve her pain. The treatment might even save her life.

After hearing her story, the experiment asked subjects whether, if given the option of moving Sheri up the list for the treatment, even at the expense of another child, would they do so? The majority said no.

The researchers then switched up the experiment with an empathy prompt. They asked participants, before making their decision, to try to feel what Sheri was feeling. Most participants now chose to move her up the list, even at the expense of other children in need.¹⁶⁹

Other experiments have found a similar phenomenon. People who are shown the name and picture of one child in need of a life-saving drug will donate more money than people who are merely told that there are eight children in need.¹⁷⁰ When shown videos of people suffering from AIDS infected through intravenous drug use, participants in research studies show less empathy than when told the patient had been infected by blood transfusion.¹⁷¹

We might have great empathy for the victim of a crime committed by someone who receives early release from prison, but we don't have empathy for the fact that such an early release program might have a positive impact on the likelihood of re-offending and therefore lead to an overall reduction in the number of people being assaulted.¹⁷²

We can lose empathy when we see difference as 'others'

Empathy can be lost when we see someone in a different uniform – perhaps from another sporting team or competitor business, or serving military personnel from another country. When we have any kind of conflict between groups, empathy can be lost.

Loss of empathy can extend to those who hold different political views, have different ethnic backgrounds to us and those with a different social status. For leaders, these losses of empathy are far more problematic and mean we fail to appreciate diverse perspectives and incorporate them into our decision-making.

Former Australian soccer captain and human rights advocate Craig Foster has seen the impact on people when there is a lack of empathy among leaders.

'I have been in many environments where the leaders disregard and disrespect the people they lead,' says Craig. 'The people working in those environments feel disengaged and only go to work because they need to be there, or they have been there so long they can't leave.'

Leaders who lead without empathy only care about themselves,

says Craig. ‘They care about their own career, the politics of the organisation – they don’t care about the personal fulfillment, wellbeing and expressions of talent of every person they lead.’

In one research study, male soccer fans received a small electric shock on the back of the hand and watched as someone else appeared to receive the same shock. When the other person was described as a supporter of the same soccer team, there was more empathy than when the other person was said to be a fan of an opposing soccer team.¹⁷³

These studies help remind us of our blind spots and cognitive biases.

We lose empathy when we are triggered by negative emotions

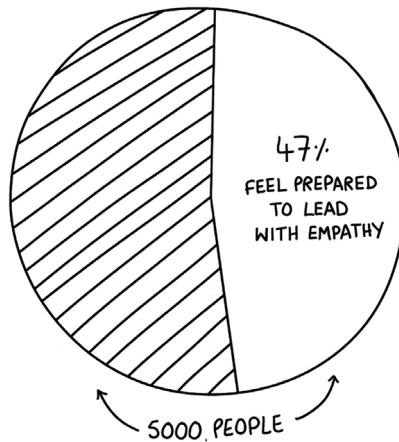
When we are angry or fearful, we tend to protect ourselves and focus on our needs rather than the needs of others. Burnout caused by working in a stressful or toxic workplace or having a heavy workload has also been shown to reduce our ability to lead with empathy. This is because burnout leads to a general loss of interest in work, a loss of interest in caring for others, a tendency to focus on ourselves and overall fatigue.¹⁷⁴

The presence of alcohol or drugs can also mean we lose our ability to identify with or be sensitive to, the emotional cues of others who may be in distress. We will also be inhibited in our ability to see a situation from someone else’s perspective.

We fear leading with empathy

In one survey of almost 5000 people, only 47 per cent of managers surveyed felt prepared to lead with empathy.¹⁷⁵

While we may broadly understand the concept of empathy there is a lack of confidence in how to put into practice leading with empathy, at work: Can I talk about someone’s life outside of work? Am I being too personal? What if I say the wrong thing? What if someone starts crying?



We don't believe empathy is important

A study was conducted over three years among students completing a business degree. Each year students were asked to rate the qualities most essential to being an effective leader on a scale of one to ten. The qualities included intelligence, charisma, responsibility and commitment, empathy, vision, authenticity and integrity, drive and passion, courage, competence and service. Year after year, empathy scored the lowest average score in the scale.¹⁷⁶

Researchers then asked a group of MBA students why they thought empathy had scored so low each year. The primary reason given was a perception that empathy is inappropriate in work settings and a suspicion that people lack familiarity with empathy.

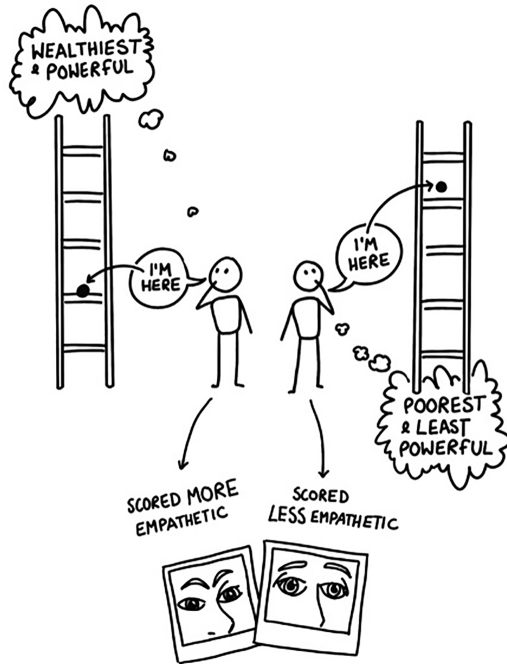
We lose empathy the more powerful we become

The more senior you become, the greater your inability to sense the emotions of the people you lead. Empathy is a critical skill to overcome the self-focus that can occur as we progress through our careers.

Researchers in one study asked one group of participants to think about those with the most wealth and prestige in the United States and then mark their own position on a ladder. Participants tended to feel relatively powerless as compared to this group and placed themselves low on the ladder.

A second group of participants was asked to think about those with the *least* wealth and prestige in the United States and mark their position on a ladder. This time participants felt more powerful against this group and placed themselves higher on the ladder.

Both groups were then asked to discern strangers' emotional states from a series of photos. Those who thought of themselves as more powerful were significantly less accurate – the feeling of power had made them less attentive to others' emotions.¹⁷⁷



We believe empathy takes too much effort or use it as an excuse to avoid meaningful action

People avoid empathy because it is perceived to require too much mental effort, even if it involves feeling positive (and not just distressing) emotions. Researchers conducted several empathy experiments with more than 1200 participants. They wanted to test the extent to which people avoid empathy because they perceive it takes more effort than doing something more objective.¹⁷⁸

In one study, participants were shown a photo of child refugees and were then required to choose between two decks of cards. They were given instructions on how to give a response depending on the deck of cards they had chosen. If they chose the 'describe' deck, they were asked to notice details about the child including their features, appearance, age and gender. If they chose the 'feel' deck, they were asked to try to feel what the child was feeling and focus on the child's internal experience.

Participants avoided choosing to rely on empathy, with a clear preference for the 'describe' deck of cards. On average, participants only chose the empathy deck 35.5 per cent of the time. The studies were repeated where photos of people who were happy were shown and where hypothetical payments were made if the participant selected the empathy deck. The consistent results confirmed people avoid empathy. When given the opportunity to empathise with strangers, most chose to turn away.

The other risk with empathy is that it can be used as an excuse for meaningful action. Professor Megan Davis, Co-Chair of the Uluru Dialogues, tells me First Nations' people do not need empathy since empathy can become a blocker. 'Law reform is a really hard-headed issue that needs a really hard-headed solution,' says Megan. 'Empathy is the wrong track in which to galvanise the Australian people's support.'

HOW DO WE LEAD WITH EMPATHY?

We seek to understand the lived experiences of others

The pandemic brought to the forefront the need for leaders to lead with empathy. While we were all in the same ocean during the pandemic, not all of us were in the same-sized boat – some people were in supersized yachts, able to continue working and to keep their family safe and healthy. Others were on leaky rafts, facing challenges to find affordable housing after losing their jobs, struggling to keep food on the table, or having difficulty maintaining their family's health. Since the pandemic, 85 per cent of human resources leaders

agree it is more important for leaders to demonstrate empathy now than it was before the pandemic.¹⁷⁹

The pandemic brought to the forefront the need for leaders to lead with empathy. While we were all in the same ocean during the pandemic, not all of us were in the same-sized boat.

Reflecting the need for those with privilege to understand experiences different to theirs, President Barack Obama was the first United States president to openly call for judges to use empathy when they decide cases. His comments ignited fierce debate.¹⁸⁰

On selecting a new justice for the US Supreme Court, President Obama said, ‘We need somebody who’s got the heart, the empathy, to recognize what it is like to be a young teenage mom. The empathy to understand what it is like to be poor, or African–American, or gay, or disabled, or old. And that is the criteria by which I’m going to be selecting my judges.’

The case of Savana Redding, a 13-year-old schoolgirl, was one case heard by the US Supreme Court where judicial empathy appeared to play a role. Redding had been accused by another student of distributing prescription pain medication. She denied the accusation. A search of her belongings did not reveal any pills, so school officials decided to conduct a strip search. Redding was asked to remove all her clothes and pull out her bra and underpants. Her breasts were momentarily exposed to the adults present.

Redding’s mother sued, arguing school officials and the school district had violated the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution prohibiting unreasonable searches and seizures. The matter was eventually heard by the US Supreme Court. A key argument was the level of humiliation, shame and emotional distress a 13-year-old girl might feel during such a search. One of the judges, Justice Stephen Breyer, could not understand why this event might have been traumatic or why the girl might claim she had been violated.

Breyer said, ‘I’m trying to work out why is this a major thing to, say, strip down to your underclothes, which children do when they change for gym. How bad is this?’

Only one woman sat on the US Supreme Court bench to hear the case: Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. A judge with empathy.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said of course the experience of Savana Redding had been traumatic. Ginsburg later told reporters her male colleague had never been a 13-year-old girl and did not understand it is a very sensitive age for a girl. She added, ‘Maybe a 13-year-old boy in a locker room doesn’t have that same feeling about his body. But a girl who’s just at the age where she is developing, whether she has developed a lot . . . or . . . has not developed at all [might be] embarrassed about that.’¹⁸¹

The US Supreme Court found that the search of young Savana Redding failed to meet the standard of ‘reasonable suspicion’ for searches of students at school. As shown by Ginsburg in this matter, empathy for others was key.

We encourage others how to learn to lead with empathy

There is a regular debate about whether people can be taught empathy. Daisy Turnbull, teacher, expert in student wellbeing and author, firmly believes empathy is a skill and experience that can be learnt. ‘Empathy is something we can have a conversation with little kids about because we don’t wake up as an adult empathetic,’ says Daisy. ‘It is something we need to learn.’

One senior leader at Microsoft, Jussi Tolvanen, agrees. In a guide on empathy published by Microsoft, Tolvanen wrote, ‘It is important to understand that empathy can be learned. For us, who might not have the strongest natural empathy skills, learning happens through life experiences and pain – and it’s worth the journey.’¹⁸²

Research has shown empathy can be improved through practice and through asking questions. This enhances understanding to build connection between people and help them to perceive the emotions

of others.¹⁸³ We can develop our empathy by valuing and appreciating the welfare of others who share dissimilar goals when they are in need. Exposing ourselves to situations we know will require empathy can also enhance our ability to lead with it.

Listening to other people's stories helps build empathy and create opportunities for people to share their life experiences, which in turn, helps build personal and professional bonds. This may mean stepping outside your organisation and understanding the communities you might impact whose lived experiences are very different from yours.

In 1963, the telephones were first switched on at Lifeline, a charitable organisation founded in Sydney to help answer the calls of those in distress and crisis. Reverend Dr Alan Walker (later Sir Alan Walker), who started Lifeline, stood in the telephone room as the phones were scheduled to be switched on, tense and anxious, wondering if anyone would ring.¹⁸⁴ His concerns were soon allayed and within a minute the first Lifeline call from someone in crisis was answered. 'Hello, this is Lifeline. May we help you?'

Today, Lifeline receives more than 1 million calls per year from Australians. One of more than 4500 crisis support workers will answer a call from someone in need every 30 seconds.¹⁸⁵ Crisis support workers are trained over a twelve-month period during which connecting with callers in crisis and listening with empathy is crucial. Crisis support workers are taught to listen with empathy to every help seeker, regardless of their circumstance or story.

I find it an enormous privilege to volunteer as an accredited crisis support worker at Lifeline where I listen to help seekers and work hard to connect and attend to their needs. During a shift, our focus is only on the voice on the other end of the phone. We exercise our ability to lead with empathy in every call and it is a skill that can translate into most areas of life.

Salesforce is an organisation actively providing employees with the ability to volunteer, through the provision of seven days volunteering time away from work. 'We want to hire people who want to give back.

This is a completely different model to saying you can volunteer if you want to,' says Pip Marlow, CEO Salesforce Asia Pacific.

Volunteering time is tracked and measured at Salesforce. The first hour of volunteering is completed during the onboarding process. Throughout their employment, people are celebrated for achieving their volunteering targets and if someone isn't managing to meet their volunteering days, the relevant manager will be asked why. Pip says, 'I will say to the manager, "Hey, I noticed you guys haven't done any volunteering this year. Is there something that is stopping that which I can help with?" I will speak to the manager to understand.'

Volunteering is a key capability at Salesforce which extends to their relationships with customers. If one customer volunteers with a particular charity, Salesforce will assist through partnering to raise donations or actively working with not-for-profit agencies. Salesforce founder Marc Benioff writes in his book *Trail Blazer* that the effort made towards volunteering is to 'show our employees that our values aren't just some abstract, aspirational notion, or worse, merely words on a corporate slide or plaque. We want to give them an idea about how our values are living values, and how giving back is the heart of our culture.'¹⁸⁶

And it is not just the physical act of volunteering where empathy can be built. Researchers have found watching documentaries or news items exposes us to stories of people in need, and watching television news bulletins can powerfully influence which problems viewers regard as the most serious.¹⁸⁷ Reading can build political and social awareness, insights about how others are feeling and an understanding of how others experience dilemmas. Watching documentaries about the plight of people less fortunate than ourselves can prompt people to want to learn more about the steps they can take to ease the burden.¹⁸⁸

Listening with care and compassion to the stories and experiences of other people that are very different to our lived experience, expands our world view and helps us develop an appreciation and

understanding of the diversity of experiences in, and alternative ways of, thinking about the world. This way of thinking about the contributions of others is valuable for every modern leader.

We can show empathy for others in simple ways

Building empathy for others is something we can do in very simple ways, like sending a message of support to someone when you know they might be having a tough time. Research shows that when we are stressed ourselves, we tend to turn inwards to conserve our energy when in fact small acts of empathy for others is what can be most energising and needed in that moment.¹⁸⁹

Entrepreneur and designer Collis Ta'eed knows that small things can make a big difference. 'If I think about when I was CEO, I imagined what it might be like working for me. I would think if I worked for me, what would I want my CEO to be doing? I know I would care if they remembered my name in the hallway or not, for example, and that guides what I try to do too,' Collis tells me.

Former Best Buy CEO Hubert Joly recalls the impact of something as simple as remembering an employee's name. Joly spoke to a young Best Buy employee who had been hired when he was eighteen years old, and Joly asked him about any meaningful experiences he'd had while working for the company. The employee was quick to recount when a district manager he had only met once remembered his name on a later visit. 'That one small moment of connection left a lasting impression,' says Joly. 'He was an individual who was known and who mattered.'¹⁹⁰

Former Australian soccer captain Craig Foster says simply playing soccer, the global game, helped him build empathy and learn about other religions and ethnicities. Craig learnt to play soccer in a monocultural regional area before he turned professional and played with a Croatian, a Serbian, an Italian and a Maltese football club.

'What happens is you inherently start to understand, not just believe, we are all equal,' Craig tells me. 'It doesn't matter what your

religion is, what your nationality might be, or your ethnicity. That builds empathy.’

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Not all types of empathy are equal and too much empathy can be unhelpful as a leader.
- We need to understand the nuances of empathy to be sure we do not fall victim to our cognitive biases and blind spots.
- It is possible to learn to be more empathetic and exposing ourselves to situations where we can practice these skills is useful to build our ability to lead with empathy.

FURTHER READING

Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The case for rational compassion* (2016).

Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave work. Tough conversations. Whole hearts* (2018).

Hubert Joly, *The Heart of Business: Leadership principles for the next era of capitalism* (2021).

Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence: The revolutionary new science of human relationships* (2006).

PART 4

INTEGRATING OUR HEAD AND HEART

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MODERN LEADERS FOR MODERN TIMES

FAILING TO SET SAIL

King Gustavus Adolphus may well have benefited from learning to lead with his head and his heart as he pushed shipbuilders to launch the *Vasa*, the most spectacular warship ever built. Thinking about the leadership of seventeenth-century Swedish monarch King Gustavus Adolphus may be a strange place to consider modern leadership but his legacy is a hard one to forget. He is also an example of a leader who, had he led with his head and his heart, may have had a different legacy to share.

In 1628, the *Vasa* set sail for its maiden voyage from Stockholm Harbour in full view of King Adolphus and a cheering Swedish public. Built with elegance and firepower in mind, the ship proudly displayed sixty-four bronze cannons on the gun deck as well as sculptures and ornaments for all to see. It was reportedly one of the most spectacular warships ever built.

But what had not been prioritised by King Adolphus was the ship's ability to stay afloat. The *Vasa* sank to the bottom of Stockholm Harbour within twenty minutes of first taking to the sea. Fifty sailors lost their lives.

King Adolphus had been determined to build his prized warship in record time, given he was then involved in naval battles with Denmark, Russia and Poland. A few years before the *Vasa* was launched, ten Swedish naval ships had been run aground. Time was of the essence.

The king, clearly prone to micromanaging in areas beyond his expertise, demanded the shipbuilders double the number of cannons originally planned. He also wanted a second gun deck. As confident as he might have been in demanding these changes, he was less capable when it came to ensuring the shipbuilders working for him had the knowledge, procedures or mathematical methods to calculate stability for his unprecedented requests. No one around King Adolphus had the courage to speak up and suggest his plan might not work; everyone involved, from his admiral through to the assistant shipbuilder, feared losing their job if they said a word.

When testing showed there were issues ahead, this news was not passed up the chain. Bad news was clearly not welcomed by King Adolphus. For all his dreams of dominating the seas with spectacular warships, the king had failed to engage a group of trusted advisers around him who felt safe to help him make his vision a reality. The story of King Adolphus and the sinking of the *Vasa* is an example, centuries on, of a leader who ultimately failed to lead with his head and his heart.

Of course, it is unfair of me to critique poor King Adolphus against the criteria of a modern leader. He led during a period when leaders were expected to be heroic, decisive, all-knowing men. King Adolphus was an example of a leader described by the Great Man theory, which continues to have a legacy even in modern times. While King Adolphus may be long dead, his style of leadership has continued. Even now I am sure you can think of a leader who shares some of the same leadership attributes.

Given there are plenty of King Adolphus' types in the modern workplace, let's continue to consider his leadership from a twenty-first-century

lens and look at where he failed as a modern, head and heart leader, and the opportunities he missed.

Clearly thinking himself the smartest man in the room, ultimately the king had failed to lead with his head. He was not curious enough to acknowledge that as fine a monarch as he may have been, he was not an expert boat builder. He could not accept that he did not know everything about Archimedes' principle of buoyancy and was not curious enough to rethink the demands he'd made.

King Adolphus had also failed to lead with wisdom in his quest to build the *Vasa*. He did not search for data or evidence about his ideas and then bring in others to assess the best way forward. He failed to observe and reflect on the information before him, all the while assessing what is known and unknown and weighing up risk and reward. Had he done so he would have realised that the technical specifications for a second gun deck and doubling the number of cannons meant the ship would prove to be unseaworthy.

If King Adolphus had led with perspective, he may have better been able to appreciate the context in which his leadership and demands might impact the ability for the people around him to speak up. He failed to 'read the room' and make decisions with others to establish the best path forward. He was focused only on a singular goal – launching the largest, most ornate and lethal ship he could – without thinking through the implications of how to achieve that goal within the limits of expertise and knowledge he was working with.

Finally, King Adolphus had failed to lead with capability. He did not have a growth mindset that would have enabled him to believe, both for himself and others, that there was more to learn when embarking on such a bold and ambitious project. With a growth mindset, King Adolphus would have recognised he needed to think like a beginner and seek feedback from experts about his ideas. If he had led with capability, King Adolphus would have been focused on developing the skills of others and helped to ensure they had the competencies needed to successfully launch the *Vasa* into the world.

King Adolphus had also failed to lead with his heart. Had he led with humility, he would have sought out the contributions of others and accepted his limitations. He would have been eager and willing to trust those around him without seeing it as a weakness of his leadership.

Self-awareness was clearly not a strength King Adolphus could draw upon when it was most needed. Had he been more self-aware, he would have sought to understand the impact his leadership was having on those around him, including the inability for some of his most senior leaders to speak up about their concerns. King Adolphus failed to create an environment where others felt able to speak up – a key component of leading with courage.

Finally, King Adolphus had not led with empathy. Had he been able to put himself in the shoes of others he may have stood a better chance of understanding why the trappings of power, privilege and position might prevent people from speaking up on matters which could have potentially saved the *Vasa*. He also failed to seek out and respectfully listen to diverse points of view, appreciating that while not everyone had the same perspective as him, hearing those differences and incorporating them into his decision-making would lead to a better outcome for all. Had King Adolphus led with his head and heart it is highly likely the *Vasa* might have at least successfully made it out of its home harbour.

Modern leaders reject the kind of approach King Adolphus and so many other traditional leaders adopt. Modern leaders recognise no one leader has all the answers and there is a need to respect those who may have diverse points of view. They integrate their leadership regardless of the context in which they find themselves.

INTEGRATING OUR HEAD AND HEART

Now that we understand what each attribute of leading with our head and hearts entails, we need to think about how we bring it all together. What does it mean to be a modern leader, in practice?

Until only very recently, we have been taught that our personal and professional worlds should be kept separate. It was only in 2017 that Professor Robert Kelly was famously interrupted by his two children and wife during a live interview with the BBC from his home. The intersection of our private lives on the public stage was still a novelty at the time and the footage went viral. Kelly assumed it was the end of his career. 'I thought I'd blown it in front of the whole world.'¹⁹¹ Fast forward three years to the COVID-19 pandemic and interruptions of this kind became a daily occurrence. It is now unthinkable to expect anyone could worry about the impact of such an event on their careers.

Unrealistic expectations of leaders to have a professional persona, quite separate from how they may conduct themselves privately, have pervaded our working lives for centuries. This way of thinking about leaders comes at the cost of leaders being able to successfully integrate their leadership across all contexts in which they influence and impact others.

Modern leaders are no longer the heroic leaders of the past like King Adolphus, Jack Welch and so many others. They are no longer managers focusing on themselves, the task at hand and a static environment. Leaders are not expected to have all the answers or solutions. Modern leaders serve the people they lead and focus on how to coach others to be successful, rather than being driven by their individual success. Modern leaders understand that when they focus on helping others achieve success, they too are more successful, more trusted and more effective.

Where once managers may have delegated people-related tasks to specialists in human resources teams, modern leaders understand that to be a successful leader they need to consider themselves a people leader, or what executive coach Hortense le Gentil called in the *Harvard Business Review*, 'human leaders'.¹⁹² Le Gentil suggests the most effective leadership, at all levels, is about 'being human, showing vulnerability, connecting with people, and being able to unleash their potential'.¹⁹³

Modern leaders embrace the idea that they can integrate the leader they are at work, with the leaders they are outside of work. They understand empathy or curiosity they may show their children at home draws on the same skills and qualities leaders in the workplace need as well. Modern leaders appreciate the self-awareness they have of their impact on others in meetings and in workshops with colleagues, is the same self-awareness that will be beneficial as a volunteer in the community or when engaging with family and friends.

Modern leaders embrace the idea that they can integrate the leader they are at work, with the leaders they are outside of work.

Modern leaders are required to lead in fluid, rapidly changing environments that require us to adapt to new, often radically uncertain, circumstances. The teams we lead may be in the same building or they may be people we never meet in person. The challenges for leaders today are immense, which is why modern leaders, who can lead with their head and their heart, are the leaders we need for modern times.

The role of intuition

‘When you have the head and heart integrated, people can feel it. They may not be able to define it, but they want it in their leaders,’ says corporate leader Miriam Silva.

Einstein reportedly observed that, ‘Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted.’¹⁹⁴ This is an apt way to think about head and heart leaders in practice. Much of it comes down to intuition.

When I spoke with the CEO of BHP, Mike Henry, we both began to laugh after I asked Mike whether he considered himself to be more a head-based leader or a heart-based leader. He immediately started to rank the eight head and heart leadership attributes in order of

weighting. I joked with him that this is very much something a head-based leader would do.

Union leader Sally McManus took a similar approach and gave me a definitive answer to the same question. 'I think I am 60 per cent head and 40 per cent heart,' says Sally. 'I am more inclined to the head, but I have worked to get better at the heart. I know what my blind spots are.'

Ask yourself: Do you consider yourself to be more of a head-based leader or a heart-based leader? There is no correct answer to this question. You might answer it precisely as Mike and Sally have done. Or you might remember a meeting this morning when you were more head-based but a conversation last week that required you to bring all your heart-based skills to the fore.

Learning the 'art' of modern leadership

The art of modern leadership is understanding both head and heart are important at different times and in different ways. Knowing what is needed, and when, is key. This will take all your skills of intuition to learn and develop over time. Our experience and maturity as leaders will mean our confidence and ability to integrate our leadership to lead with the head and the heart will change as we expand our experiences.

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Mike Henry says that as he has matured in his career and in age as a leader, he has felt freer to be able to lead with his heart. Early in his career he prioritised looking at logic and data without necessarily incorporating empathy. Now, he believes incorporating empathy into his leadership and the decisions he makes is essential.

Empathy is, for Mike, the most important aspect of his leadership and, in particular, the power of inclusion of other perspectives. 'Being willing to listen to the perspectives of others means you can create something way bigger than you ever could through logic,' says Mike. 'There is a much deeper appreciation, and understanding, through leveraging and drawing on the perspectives of others.'

The art of modern leadership for Mike is understanding that sometimes it is not about the logically correct answer a spreadsheet may provide, since that may not offer a positive long-term solution. 'Being willing to understand the needs of, and views of, a larger population and tapping into that can unlock much better performance in the near term but can also build a level of energy and momentum that will give rise to bigger and better things you can't even envision today,' says Mike.

In her role as leader of the Australian union movement, Sally McManus says she knows leading with her head and heart are important and both can come into play at different times. 'While I am naturally more analytical,' says Sally, 'humility and empathy are really important and often underrated.'

Learning the art of being a modern leader has come with time and experience for business leader Miriam Silva. 'You can go through the hard work to integrate your head and heart leadership but there is no shortcut,' she says. 'You must work through the pain of learning about yourself and understand there are things you will need to change.'

Academic and trans activist Yves Rees is excited by the new model of modern leadership which they have seen is possible. 'It is the capacity to switch between modes which is really the mark of a leader – knowing when to be playful, when to be humble and when to be fierce – and not being afraid to show all those different sides rather than only seeking to be dominant all the time.'

For Yves, the key to their leadership in the last few years has been balancing head-based skills with the heart. 'Without the heart, nothing meaningful would have happened. It is the ability to jump between the two that I think is effective in any leader's work,' says

Yves. 'Writing my memoir, *All About Yves*, was the most conscious, active leadership I have done. I felt that I was handing on the baton of leadership; my coming out had been enabled by reading trans stories. I felt it was my turn to do that and do so in active service and leadership for others.'

Both head and heart leadership are important to bring together all types of people we lead. As CEO Salesforce Asia Pacific Pip Marlow explains, her stakeholders are exceptionally diverse and she doesn't just mean in the sense of age, race and religion but also in terms of their neurodiversity. 'Some people won't move forward if there is not enough data or process, others won't care about data but need to believe in what we are trying to do,' says Pip. When I ask Pip about whether she is a leader who leads more with her head or heart, she concedes she prefers to lead slightly more with her heart than her head but 'if you only lead with one, you won't always bring everything through. Bringing both together is key.'

Julie Reilly, CEO of Australians Investing in Women, says she made a conscious choice to shift the perception of her organisation from heart to head. After undertaking research with key stakeholders, the clear message Julie and her organisation received was that they were passionate, but leading only with the heart wasn't effective. 'We needed to find more balance,' says Julie. 'I have always been very heart dominant, passionate about personal stories and I think, perhaps naively, I thought that would be enough to persuade people.' Julie and her organisation undertook to develop evidence-based research to support and strengthen their work. They wanted to find a way to dispassionately make the case for investing in women and girls which, combined with the heart of storytelling and empathy, would lead to greater success. This saw the organisation embark on a research agenda which has had a profound effect. 'We have had people thank us for the research and become more proactive about areas for their investment with greater confidence of its impact,' says Julie. 'Finding that sweet spot combining head and heart is so empowering.'

DEVELOPING THE MODERN LEADERS OF THE FUTURE

If we want to influence the modern leaders of tomorrow, we need to role model modern leadership to all children today. It is teachers who lead and teach with their head and heart who hold the most powerful influence over the adults of the future.

The multi-award-winning singer Adele described her English teacher, Ms McDonald, as helping develop her love of literature which, in turn, inspired her obsession with language and writing lyrics. But McDonald influenced the singer through more than simply following the curriculum. Adele said her teacher was, 'So bloody cool, so engaging and she really made us care, and we all knew that she cared about us.'¹⁹⁵

Journalist and producer Benjamin Law remembers a teacher in high school who taught him religion. As one of very few Asian students in a Catholic school, and as a young gay man, he remembers his teacher framing homosexuality in a way that felt, for young Benjamin, humane and non-judgemental.

Research tells us that children as young as five years old already possess concepts of what it means to be a leader, and by the age of eight they have developed ideas of what it means to be an effective leader.¹⁹⁶ There is no doubt early relationships and experiences with leaders like teachers are fundamental for the establishment and development of leadership stereotypes in children.

Kiriana White is a teacher in a remote Aboriginal community in Cape York teaching girls aged between three and six years old how to be ballerinas. White told the ABC that the school's ballet program, Barefoot Ballerinas, teaches far more than just dance moves. Not only are the girls expected to show up for class at a specific time each week, helping them prepare for school, but 'it has been teaching them how to work as a team and to have confidence in themselves, doing something outside of their comfort zone, and hopefully a little bit of a ballet as well'.¹⁹⁷

Australian schoolteacher Lynden White was the first of her family to attend university and says she never considered herself a leader.

Like many, she thought of a leader as someone who had more power than she ever felt she had; someone who was purposefully leading at the top of the triangle, as she described it, such as a school principal, filtering their leadership down to others.

Despite not being at the 'top of the triangle', Lynden was very much a leader to the children she taught. 'I always looked at the whole child, not just teaching a child to read or do their maths but the whole child; and then the whole family too,' says Lynden. 'I think it's important they learn when they're young to be able to make mistakes.'

At the end of each school year, Lynden would ask her kindergarten students to write themselves a letter about what they wanted to be when they grew up, what they had learnt during the year or what they might like to improve. Some children painted or drew a work of art. Lynden thought it might be nice for the students to remember their five-year-old self and see how far they had come. Holding on to the letters for more than a decade, Lynden delivered the letters to the students as they were about to sit their final high school exams. Some students had remained in the local area and some were tracked down through other students or social media. The letters were the gift of a time capsule from the past.

In an interview with journalist Jenna Price, Lynden said, 'I want them to be content with whatever happens . . . the [exams] are not going to be the be all and end all. And I want them to be happy.'¹⁹⁸ For Lynden, teaching was always about integrating the whole child. 'Children need to know how to get on with each other, how to cooperate, to collaborate,' says Lynden. 'Academic learning needs to happen along with learning positive social skills. Young students can develop a love of learning, and of course have fun along the way.'

Later in life, Lynden continued to help children and she believes some of her best work as a leader happened after she retired and returned to the classroom to help students struggling to read. She says it was during this period of her career that she felt she had the

greatest influence because she was able to help younger teaching staff by drawing on all her learnt experience and sharing her knowledge as the older, wiser teacher and mentor. Lynden is a teacher and a leader who led with her head and her heart, and she believed in teaching children to lead with their heads and hearts as well.

MODERN LEADERS IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Just as heroic leaders are a relic of the past, so too are traditional workplaces where we can expect to see the people we lead, or are led by, every day. There is much talk about the loss of human contact many leaders now feel in a remote working environment. A survey of almost 11,000 employees across sixteen countries found that 78 per cent of leaders are concerned about the ability of remote employees to build solid interpersonal relationships with colleagues, and 72 per cent are concerned with a potential deterioration in organisational culture.¹⁹⁹

The quality of leadership impacted human connection and a sense of belonging well before the pandemic saw many of us work from home. Anyone who has worked in a toxic workplace culture knows simply being in the same location as the people you work with is no guarantee of a sense of belonging. Human connection happens when leaders make deliberate and thoughtful choices about how to lead with their head and hearts, whatever the context. Whether the people you lead live in the same home or are people you may never meet in person, the same mindset and approach to modern leadership applies.

Anyone who has worked in a toxic workplace culture knows simply being in the same location as the people you work with is no guarantee of a sense of belonging.

Much of the debate about remote work erroneously reduces the discussion to a binary decision – work at home or work in an office.

This approach simplifies a complex issue to a transaction of thinking about where you physically sit to complete your work. Clearly, not all roles can be performed at home; teachers, nurses, bus drivers, butchers and so many other essential roles need to still be done in a workplace. However, increasingly a large proportion of the professional, white-collar workforce can complete their roles at home and the pandemic demonstrated they could do so effectively.

Having a workforce you do not physically see is not a new idea. For decades multinational companies have worked across borders, time zones and cultures with company leaders rarely physically seeing all those they lead. Some leaders seem to wistfully remember the good old days, when everyone arrived at the office on time in the morning, shared laughs and impromptu moments over morning coffee and attended the same meetings at the same time. And there were plenty of positive times in those days. Bonding with colleagues happened easily, opportunities to be mentored and learn from more experienced colleagues abounded.

But those days were not everyone's experience. It was never the case that serendipitous interactions necessarily happened for whom, and when, they may have been most needed. For those working in dysfunctional workplace cultures, having to go into the office every day caused challenges for physical and mental wellbeing. If you were unfortunate enough to be led by a narcissistic boss, having to deal with that person every day was confronting. If you were disabled or had caring responsibilities, the juggle of a daily commute was a challenge that would soon wear you down. And if you were not earning a salary sufficient to be able to afford a home near to your office, forget it.

Just like everyone's experience of working in an office and from home is different, the debate about working remotely is not one that has a uniform answer. What might work in one company may not suit another. The way one individual might be most productive and effective may be vastly different to their colleague performing the same role elsewhere. A solution that might work within one team in a

company, might not be conducive to the performance or outcomes of another team. The critical component in any consideration of remote work is flexibility and this requires modern leaders who lead with their head and heart to solve the issue.

If we are not able to embrace flexibility – both in mindset and in practice – we run the risk of being a traditional leader of the past. Leading with the head and heart is not about the physical location of the people you lead but about how you embrace flexibility in your thinking about how the work you need completed, is done. Modern leaders put people at the centre of that decision-making, understanding that without an engaged, motivated and purpose-led workforce, any business goals are likely to fail.

If we are not able to embrace flexibility – both in mindset and in practice – we run the risk of being a traditional leader of the past.

If leaders want to successfully transition to leading with their heads and hearts with people they lead remotely, they need to design hybrid working arrangements with people at the centre. Modern leaders need to radiate energy and purpose to the people they lead wherever they may be working from.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach

Hybrid working is sure to lead to unhappy leaders and employees if traditional ways of leading remain. The relevance of how many days someone works in an office or at home, or anywhere else they might choose to work, is also rapidly losing importance. Edicts from companies like Tesla, which demanded employees return to the office for a minimum of 40 hours per week or lose their job²⁰⁰, is likely to see employees for whom flexibility is critically important, move on. Technology company Atlassian reported that after Tesla founder Elon Musk demanded employees return to the office in an email with the

subject heading 'Remote work is no longer acceptable'²⁰¹, Atlassian saw a 500 per cent increase in employment enquiries via its careers website.²⁰² Scott Farquhar, co-founder of Atlassian, believes 'anyone that says we still need to be in an office to get stuff done is living in a 1950s version of reality'.²⁰³

Atlassian is going all in on working from home. In 2021 the company announced a 'Team Anywhere' policy for their 5700 employees around the world. This means if you work for Atlassian you can work from any location in a country where Atlassian has a corporate entity, where the individual has the legal right to work, and where the time zone they are in is broadly aligned with that of their team members.

'Requiring office attendance is outdated,' Atlassian's Head of Team Anywhere, Annie Dean, told *The Australian* in an interview. 'Work is not a place, it can happen anywhere. Companies are sinking an enormous amount of resources and spinning wheels trying to figure out an effective return-to-office strategy instead of putting their time and energy into building for the future.'²⁰⁴

Atlassian recognises talent doesn't just exist within 50 kilometres of one of their offices. Pay is based on the labour costs in the region where the person will work from, and employees will only be expected to visit their nearest office four times a year.

CEO and co-founder of Slack Stewart Butterfield has also gone all in on virtual work and argues asking people to return to the office is 'a doomed approach'. Butterfield believes 'work is no longer a place you go. It is something you do.'²⁰⁵ The location of workers has become, at Slack, inconsequential.

Slack has a permanent remote work policy, which they say is helping to attract top talent and stay competitive. One of the benefits Butterfield has found is that the world 'had prematurely narrowed our view of what works at work'. He says, 'There's a lot of opportunity to rethink and reimagine.'²⁰⁶

While Atlassian and Slack may be championing remote work for their employees, it does not mean this approach will necessarily

work everywhere. Different companies will adapt their approach to what will work in their industry or context. There is no right or wrong answer but, for modern leaders, there needs to be a curiosity about what is possible and a focus on putting the people you lead at the centre of your decision-making on the issue.

Irrespective of the position you take on remote work, there are some fundamental ways modern leaders need to think about their head and heart leadership in the context of the changing world in which we work.

We need to understand how to connect through technology

Nothing shouts traditional leader more than someone who doesn't know how to use a virtual meeting platform or who can't light their office or room so the people they are engaging with can see them clearly. Taking steps to learn and understand how to lead with technology means putting as much importance on the logistics of meeting online as you may have once put into buying a new suit for a meeting. Ensuring you are a 'tech-savvy humanist'²⁰⁷ is one small way to demonstrate respect for those you meet with online. This means we need to understand how the technology we use impacts people's lives and can enhance and enable their sense of purpose and engagement in all they do.

It astonishes me how many leaders still don't think about the experience for someone on the other end of the virtual meeting. If the person you lead is only ever seeing you with a view up your nostril, or with a screen showing you blurred or out of focus, it is going to impact your ability to connect. If you are unsure, ask a nearby teenager to help – having grown up online, they are experts at finding your best light. Ultimately, while it may seem unimportant to you, these are important signals you send as a modern leader in terms of thinking about those you plan to build a relationship with, learn from or lead. Just as we might have once made sure we looked professional before walking into a physical meeting, so too

modern leaders need to care about appearing professional through their skilful use of technology.

This extends to being active on any chat or collaboration platforms being used by those you lead. If people connect and collaborate in your workplace through Microsoft Teams, Slack, Trello boards or Google docs – whatever is used – you need to understand how to use them as well. This is the culture of the organisation you lead, and your presence is essential.

The benefit for leaders who use these tools well and embrace technology is that you are likely to find those you lead are more willing to share ideas in their infancy and welcome feedback. The pressure to present fully formed, polished proposals will be reduced, allowing for collaboration at an early stage in the process.

We need to create new norms of interaction

The technology company Atlassian has clear expectations for online meeting etiquette. The basic rule is if one person is attending the meeting virtually, everyone attends the meeting virtually. This helps prevent those online (when others are together in an office) feeling excluded. It also prevents the sub-optimal experience when we don't feel we are part of the same meeting in the same way. However, only 27 per cent of organisations have established hybrid meeting etiquette principles.²⁰⁸

Modern leaders know they need to quit trying to outsmart time zones. They embrace working asynchronously and autonomously. This can be uncomfortable for leaders, and I count myself initially one, who have spent decades using synchronous meetings and emails as the primary working tools.

Modern leaders understand these traditional ways of meeting and tools we have always used have a place, but they are no longer the default for remote workplaces. More important is finding ways to ensure everyone is on the same page rather than talking at the same time.²⁰⁹ This means developing a regular documented feedback loop instead of locking in times to talk every day or week.

A modern leader is focused on understanding the tasks of those they lead and identifying the optimal way for the work to be completed. Even better, they are empowering those they lead to make those decisions autonomously.

WHAT KIND OF MEETING DO YOU NEED?

As a team, decide whether something to be done needs to be in person or could be held online or asynchronously. These questions might assist in the decision-making.²¹⁰

- Do you actually need a meeting? If the purpose is simply to provide an update or listen primarily to one person speaking, are you simply following old habits by holding a meeting?
- Is the goal of the meeting based around building relationships or focusing on a task? If it is an update on a task, can it be done virtually? If the goal of the meeting is relationship building or repairing connections, an in-person meeting may be beneficial.
- How complex are the objectives of the meeting in terms of emotional complexity or interdependence of certain decisions or outcomes?
- Can the meeting take an entirely different form? Would an announcement to the entire company be more effective with a pre-recorded video people can watch in their own time with an option for Q&A by a dedicated chat channel?
- What type of meeting is likely to be the most inclusive? Will the format chosen mean the most people can attend and receive a similar experience?
- If you are having a hybrid meeting, does the chair or facilitator of the meeting have the skills to make sure people attending virtually have the same experience as those in the room?

We find ways to create ‘watercooler’ moments

Research shows that what people miss most about hybrid working are those ‘watercooler’ moments such as walking by a colleague’s desk to say hello, chatting about the latest must-watch television program over lunch or dropping by a mentor’s office to ask for advice.²¹¹ These small moments assist in building a sense of belonging and trust in those we work with. Watercooler moments are often when we can show vulnerability and be open with colleagues about how we may be feeling about an issue. The more we have these moments, the easier it is to speak up on other issues in the future.

CEO and co-founder of Slack Stewart Butterfield agrees these small moments are one of the biggest hurdles, particularly in developing relationships within the business but outside of the people you deal with most regularly.²¹²

Some organisations have established quick, ten-minute all-hands meetings where time is spent in randomly allocated breakout rooms to chat about anything at all. In some cases, these have become virtual coffee catch ups across time zones. Simply being a leader who is aware that these are moments you need to think about recreating will go a long way. Ask those you lead what will work best for them.

We need to communicate in the moment

It is no longer possible to remember to tell someone something when you next pass them on the way to the lunchroom; we need to communicate in the moment. Communicating as a leader of a remote team takes both head and heart – the perspective to know what is needed and the empathy and self-awareness to understand the best way to do it. For some, a message on Slack or some other technology platform will work. For others, a phone call or finding time to talk online, without the distraction of a long to-do list, may be needed.

Communicating as a leader of a remote team takes both head and heart – the perspective to know what is needed and the empathy and self-awareness to understand the best way to do it.

Having a flexible mindset as a modern leader in thinking about how other people best work requires you to be flexible in the ways you communicate. This may mean for newer or more junior employees, checking in more frequently to see how they are travelling. Ask those you lead how often they like you to be in touch – too frequently can be just as disconcerting as never at all. Putting people at the centre of how they choose to work means also putting individuals at the centre of deciding how they will each best be led by you.

Remote work environments also require modern leaders to be mindful and deliberate in how they celebrate successes. There are many ways to consider rewarding colleagues in a fun, immediate way. Some organisations offer a monthly allotment of reward points that colleagues can give one another to express their appreciation. Points are then redeemable by the employee for gift cards and other perks. Other companies have dedicated public channels on platforms like Slack where people can share praise and compliment their co-workers.²¹³

We need to role model being online doesn't mean 'always on'

Modern leaders understand always being online signals that there is an expectation other people should be online as well. Microsoft has identified through their research what has been called the 'third peak' which has seen Microsoft Team chats outside the typical workday increase, especially between 6 pm to 8 pm. The average Microsoft Teams user now sends 42 per cent more chats per person after hours.²¹⁴

Having a flexible mindset about how we work means, as modern leaders, we need to appreciate that not everyone will be working at

the same time we are. And that needs to be okay. You might like to consider putting a note at the bottom of your email signature reminding people you don't expect an immediate response. For some people, especially those with caring responsibilities, working after dinner once the kids are in bed might be a perfect time for the day's tasks to be reviewed and completed. However, for others, piles of emails received from people working at night might feel stressful as they log on for the first time the following day. If you work with team members in different time zones, this is already an issue you would have learnt to confront. Flexible work is no different.

The key for modern leaders is to set cultural ground rules and expectations with those you lead. Make it clear you do not expect an immediate answer. Clarify with your team whether they need to attend all online meetings or can watch recordings of any they miss. Discuss how you schedule time in your online calendars including when you are happy to be interrupted online as opposed to time when you need to focus on deeper-level work. Be mindful of how you ask for things to be done and the way in which an email you send late at night may be received the following day. Ask people what will work best for them – how would they best like to work with you and what do they need from you for flexible work to be sustainable?

We need to use physical office space as a cultural touchstone

There is a close relationship between purpose and place – people draw meaning and ownership, energy and commitment because of a strong sense of alignment with the place in which they live and work.²¹⁵ This has never been more evident than during the pandemic as different styles of personality and preferences for working came to the fore.

As most people recognise work can be done from anywhere, the question of the role of the office or workplace becomes critical. It is all very well to encourage people back to work, but have you considered why? Are you making their commute worthwhile or just causing them to wonder why they spent two hours of their day on public transport

when they could have been working from home? In a virtual or hybrid environment, have you thought about whether you want your office to be a social anchor, a schoolhouse or collaboration hub?²¹⁶

The new hybrid office needs to be a cultural touchstone where you can reconnect and reinvigorate those you lead with a shared common purpose. If you want people to come into your work space, what kind of feeling are you hoping they are being injected with by the time they leave? If the office is full of workstations and meeting rooms, you may as well inject your valued employees with a sedative. They will be wondering why they came in at all. Instead, if you make your workplace somewhere they can collaborate with colleagues in a way that is unique, fun and valuable, you will be injecting them with a dose of energy they simply can't replicate at home or online. Meeting rooms can become brainstorming rooms for sharing ideas and working together on strategies and projects in a way that online tools can't replicate.

Researchers understand human cognition depends not only on how the brain processes signals, but also on the environment in which those signals are received. Being physically co-located, even for short periods of time, can help people interpret others' moods and personalities, making it easier to build and reinforce relationships.²¹⁷ This needs to be at the forefront of planning how workplaces are used by modern leaders and their teams.

We need to search out (and smash) opportunities for inequity to flourish

Research has demonstrated people who work from home are often left behind when it comes to internal promotions. One research study showed people at home were promoted at roughly half the rate of those working in the office more frequently.²¹⁸ We also understand some employee groups, such as women with young children, will almost certainly end up doing more work at home than others in addition to their professional responsibilities.

Researchers have shown those who spend the most time in the physical proximity of their leaders are likely to be promoted over those who work from home. This suggests that leaders themselves are in the office most of the time which, not surprisingly, sees people gravitating to be in closer proximity to them. Stanford economics professor Nicholas Bloom's research on presenteeism, or proximity, bias has found that the ideal hybrid situation is one that standardises remote and in-office days across team members so that no one loses out if they are not working in their boss's line of sight.²¹⁹

As modern leaders committed to ending inequity in the workplace, we first need to recognise we may fall victim to a bias that rewards those we see most often. Second, we need to look in the mirror about why it is we are only seeing some people and not others. Everyone we lead deserves an equal opportunity to excel whether they physically work in the office next to yours or work on the other side of the world in their home. Understanding our role in allowing proximity bias to perpetuate promotions and opportunities is essential.

We need to trust those we lead

There is a lovely analogy of trust in a conversation between organisational psychologist Adam Grant and psychotherapist Esther Perel on Grant's podcast, *WorkLife*.²²⁰ Perel reminds us of the game of peekaboo where babies laugh with delight as adults hide behind their hands, say 'peekaboo' and reappear before a baby's eyes once again. The game is, according to Perel, a foundation for trust. It tells young children and babies, that even when you can't see me, I am still there. As adults, we learn people still exist inside of us even when we can't physically see them. As leaders, Perel extrapolates, this means I don't need to check on you. I trust you and know you will be there even when I can't see you.

I suspect some who resist having a flexible mindset when it comes to remote work might need to consider how much they trust those they lead. Traditional leaders worry productivity levels will be lower

if they cannot physically see the people they lead. In one study, 60 per cent of bosses doubted or were unsure their remote workers performed well or were as motivated as those in the office.²²¹ This is a staggeringly high number of leaders who believe that physically working within the four walls of a specific geographic location means employees are more motivated or engaged than someone working elsewhere.

If we trust those we lead, which modern leaders do, we know they will be responsible for the outcomes and outputs we require of them regardless of where they may physically sit. In other words, ‘Trust is to capitalism what alcohol is to wedding receptions: a social lubricant.’²²²

Modern leaders evaluate the success of those they lead remotely through the quality of their work, the level and quality of their online interactions and engagements, and feedback from others. These criteria are far more likely to be an indicator of success in a role than the number of hours someone spends in any one physical location.

Modern leaders evaluate the success of those they lead remotely through the quality of their work, the level and quality of their online interactions and engagements, and feedback from others.

By obsessing over productivity as somehow being directly correlated with where someone physically sits to complete their work, we miss the wood for the trees. If we trust others, they will in turn trust us to lead them. Productivity will be enhanced, not reduced. And as modern leaders we know we can have challenging conversations if we need to so we can get performance issues back on track.

LEADING FOR A HIGHER PURPOSE

Modern leaders understand leading solely for power, prestige, financial reward, influence or even notoriety are relics of the past. Recent history tells us these motivations can be disastrous – for the leader themselves but also for the wellbeing, motivation and engagement of

those around them. It is through rethinking *why* we lead at all we can best meet the needs of those we serve – the people we lead.

The question of why we work and lead has been championed by some of the largest companies in the world as they seek to make sense of how to integrate modern leadership into a capitalist world which too often has rewarded leaders who focused solely on shareholder returns. In his book *The Heart of Business*, former Best Buy CEO Hubert Joly speaks of the tyranny of shareholder value and the way success has been determined by profit as a measure of economic performance. Joly calls for a rethinking of business, with heart at the centre, so human magic can be unleashed within. Joly argues a noble purpose is not just a statement you put on your website, but is the intersection of what the world needs, what you are passionate about, what you are uniquely capable of doing and how you create economic value. Joly has said, ‘We must use not only our head but also our heart and our soul. Our ears, our eyes, and our guts. We must be human.’²²³

Marc Benioff, the founder of technology company Salesforce, is one leader driving conversations about the need to rethink stakeholder capitalism. Rejecting traditional notions of stakeholder supremacy, Benioff argues stakeholders for Salesforce, which employs 77,000 people around the world, are the planet, the community, their customers and their people. For Benioff, while the growth of Salesforce is important, how that growth happens is just as important as whether it happens at all.

For many decades leaders have focused on outcomes rather than how those outcomes are achieved. Modern leaders reject this notion and understand that how something is achieved is just as – if not more – important than whether something is achieved at all.

For Pip Marlow, who reports to Marc Benioff at Salesforce, rethinking the how and why of leadership is critically important. Salesforce aims to inspire and enable; they want to inspire other companies to think about what is possible and then help enable it. ‘Most employees I know do not get out of bed to make the company

they work for any richer,' says Pip. 'They won't do discretionary effort for that. What gets people excited is when you create a sense of purpose about what we are here to do.' Lighting up a bigger opportunity that is meaningful and impactful is key.

This sense of working for something greater than a shareholder return and harnessing the power of those you lead to a greater, noble purpose is what Hubert Joly calls 'human magic'.²²⁴ For Joly there are six essential ingredients of human magic and these are ingredients modern leaders will focus on harnessing for the greater good in order to unleash the full potential of those they lead. For Joly, the first ingredient includes helping those you lead find meaning in their work linked to a broader, noble purpose. Other ingredients of human magic include fostering authentic human connection, building psychological safety, embracing autonomy, building environments to encourage lifelong learning, and having a growth mindset.

Modern leaders understand we do not lead in a vacuum – every world event, societal crisis or social change impacts the way we must lead. Leaders who capture and harness these events to the benefit of all stakeholders are those who appreciate the opportunity to serve society at large.

LEADING WHEN BEING HUMAN AND WORK COLLIDE

Hubert Joly, former CEO of Best Buy and author of *The Heart of Business*, writes 'work is a fundamental element of what makes us human'.²²⁵ Understanding that work is an innate part of being human is critically important for modern leaders and explains why some of the most challenging experiences for modern leaders are found when humanity and work collide.

In his book *Trailblazer*, Salesforce founder Marc Benioff recounts being called upon in 2015 by his employees to take a public stand when legislation called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act was to be signed in Indiana. The legislation would enable people of faith to resist unwelcome infringements on their principles. For Benioff,

this legislation was ‘designed to give the state’s business owners legal cover to discriminate against LGBTQ customers if their religious views compelled them to do so’.²²⁶ Despite initial misgivings and nervousness about becoming involved in a national controversy, Benioff publicly announced Salesforce would be reducing their investment in Indiana based on their employees’ and customers’ outrage over the planned legislation. Ultimately, the efforts succeeded, and the legislation was amended.

For Benioff, the event was a reminder of what matters as a leader. ‘What Indiana ultimately showed me is that no one person is in charge of the moral compass of a business,’ says Benioff.²²⁷

For Benioff, everyone has a leadership role to play. ‘In the coming era of business for good, everyone who taps their alarm button in the morning and heads to work can play a role. This isn’t just a matter of what the C-suite does. It’s about what happens on the shop floor or in the rows of office cubicles.’ Modern leaders are those willing to channel ‘radical openness to co-create a connectedness among their employees, along with a cooperative culture that cares for the wellbeing of humanity’.²²⁸

Entrepreneur and designer Collis Ta’eed also understands the challenges of being a leader who needs to speak up on difficult issues and especially those where the situation is not particularly clear – where there is no black-and-white answer. Collis cites an example of a time at his company, Envato, when there was what he called a ‘cultural division’ in the company and a difference of opinion about the right to freedom of expression and inclusivity. Some people felt they should have the right to share articles and ideas at work that Collis calls ‘right in the middle of social discourse’. Others felt that if Envato was a truly inclusive environment, these articles and ideas would not be shared in case they caused offence, even just to one person. For Collis to successfully solve this issue he said he needed to use both his head and heart – he needed to have the wisdom to think about the issue intellectually, but the final decision also needed to be grounded in empathy.

Reflecting perhaps Collis' Baha'i faith where inclusivity and consensus is deeply valued, Collis set about first understanding and listening before acting. He spoke to as many people in the company as he could to understand their viewpoint. He felt empathy was important to understand the situation, but he also understood he needed to make a decision that clarified what was acceptable. Collis emphasised to employees that he was not saying that the whole of humanity needs to be like this but that in this office, at this time, this is how the decision he is making will be applied. There will be space for everybody. Collis received a lot of feedback from those directly impacted, even those who disagreed with the outcome, about how effectively he had handled the situation. 'Empathy was important to understand the situation, but at the end of the day it also needed a solution made with my head. You could not have one without the other,' Collis tells me.

Astronomer Lisa Harvey-Smith also understands that in her world, her leadership impact lies in how science is communicated. If you make a discovery and don't tell anyone about it, there will be zero impact on the world. But if a researcher engages others through communicating with their head and heart, the opportunity to make a broad impact is much more possible.

'If you write a scientific paper, you need to learn to write in such a way that makes it open and understandable to people outside your field,' says Lisa. The art of modern leadership and being able to lead with head and heart is, for Lisa, being open to sharing scientific discoveries with others in the broadest way possible. 'If you are an astronomer who discovers a new star but doesn't tell anyone about it, then you are operating in a vacuum,' says Lisa. 'But if you want to share the beauty of the world and the impact this discovery has on the choices we make for our environment, including government policies, then you need to be able to translate that discovery for an audience.'

When she looks back at her career, the area of her work that has brought Lisa the most joy is leading with her heart through looking at the

way science is impacting the world. ‘Whether it’s stuff you are inventing, product services, vaccines or new discoveries that help us to make the world a better place, leadership lies in communicating it,’ says Lisa.

Dear reader, my sincere hope is you now realise you too are a leader, regardless of whether you lead a multinational company, your family or a small community group. Everyone is a leader. Too often we think of leaders as someone else but modern leaders understand the leader best able to inspire, motivate and propel others forward is you.

In 2015, Michelle Obama gave the Tuskegee University commencement address. In her speech she reminded the students listening that everyone is a leader, and we all have a role to play in building the next generation of leaders that follow.

*You don't have to be President of the United States to start addressing things like poverty, and education, and lack of opportunity. Graduates, today you can mentor a young person and make sure he or she takes the right path. Today, you can volunteer at an after-school program or food pantry. Today, you can help your younger cousin fill out her college financial aid form so that she could be sitting in those chairs one day.*²²⁹

We are all leaders already. We already have the skills and attributes we need to be modern leaders. The art of modern leadership is simply knowing what attributes you need, and when. Three-time Olympian and four-time gold medallist Libby Trickett says, ‘I think that is what is so powerful about leading with our heads and hearts. We can lead in our own ways in our own lives. We can find a way that works for us.’

Our world needs modern leaders. We need leaders like Jacinda Ardern, Volodymyr Zelensky, Satya Nadella and Captain Brett Crozier. We need modern leaders like you.

It is modern leaders who will most effectively lead our countries, run our businesses, make new discoveries, raise young families. Modern leaders can lead in a way to truly make a difference in the world, in the community and to those you love. You leave a legacy as a leader in every action you take, every decision you make and every behaviour you demonstrate. Just as Captain Will Swenson showed us on a battlefield in Afghanistan, a tender kiss on the cheek of a dying man can leave a powerful legacy as a modern leader. What legacy do you plan to leave today?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Modern leaders are those who understand integrating their head and heart leadership in all aspects of their lives will help them to be the most effective leaders they can be.
- Leading remotely requires head and heart leaders to embrace a flexible mindset and trust those they lead to work autonomously.
- Modern leaders understand they lead for a higher purpose beyond shareholder returns and seek to ensure employees understand they have a voice and are champions for living a company's values.

FURTHER READING

Marc Benioff, *Trail Blazer: The power of business as the greatest platform for change* (2019).

Stephen M. R. Covey, *Trust and Inspire: How truly great leaders unleash greatness in others* (2022).

Brian Elliott, Sheela Subramanian and Helen Kupp, *How the Future Works: Leading flexible teams to do the best work of their lives* (2022).

Hubert Joly, *The Heart of Business: Leadership principles for the next era of capitalism* (2021).

APPENDIX 1

ACTION PLAN

Whether you consider you are already a modern leader and are eager to continue to lead with your head and heart, or a traditional leader at the start of your journey to integrate your head and heart at work and home, there are a few steps you might like to consider to develop a personal action plan.

REFLECT ON YOUR LEADERSHIP

With trusted mentors and colleagues, or even with those you lead, prompt a discussion around what you have learnt through reading this book and what this will mean for your leadership impact in the future. You could ask yourself or others:

- Do you consider you are primarily a head-based leader or a heart-based leader? How does that show up for you in different situations?
- After completing the Head & Heart Leader Scale (headheartleader.com), what scores surprised you? What insights did you gain from seeing how you scored compared to others?

- What attributes of your head and heart leadership are you planning to focus on? What do you plan to do differently in the future?
- Which areas of your leadership do you feel are a work in progress? Who have you identified to provide you with feedback on how you are doing?
- What does modern leadership mean to you? What will you need to do differently in terms of the kind of leadership you value and reward?
- How comfortable are you to integrate your leadership at home with your leadership at work? What qualities of leadership do you think you can bring into both areas that you might not already?

COMPLETE THE HEAD & HEART LEADER SCALE

You can complete the Head & Heart Leader Scale by visiting headheartleader.com where you will receive personalised results to help guide you through this book. You can read more about the scale and how it was developed in Appendix 2.

If you would like information on how to organise a team or organisation-wide assessment, visit headheartleader.com or email contact@headheartleader.com.

CONNECT WITH LIKE-MINDED LEADERS ONLINE

As a curious modern leader, using social media and connecting with other likeminded leaders is an important way to develop our leadership. I find social media incredibly valuable for understanding the world we live, work and lead in.

To find and follow discussions on leading with your head and heart, use the hashtag [#headheartleader](#) and tag me using [@kirstinferguson](#) so we can all contribute and share ideas together. You will find me on LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. I look forward to connecting.

RECEIVE LEADERSHIP IDEAS STRAIGHT TO YOUR INBOX

You can sign up for my regular newsletter where I share new leadership thinking, personal challenges, and research as well as links to my latest columns and opinion pieces. You can sign up by visiting www.kirstinferguson.com.

GET IN TOUCH

None of this work happens in isolation. We are all leaders – learning and benefiting from one another’s experiences, triumphs and setbacks. Our individual leadership journey is unique to our context, so we all benefit from sharing what we have learnt.

I would love to hear from you and understand what you have taken from this book and the ways in which you might introduce some of its ideas into your leadership. You can reach me by visiting kirstinferguson.com or emailing me using contact@kirstinferguson.com.

If you are part of an organisation and are thinking about ways to share these concepts more broadly or would like to organise a Head & Heart workshop or event, please visit www.kirstinferguson.com or email contact@kirstinferguson.com.

APPENDIX 2

HEAD & HEART LEADER SCALE

BACKGROUND

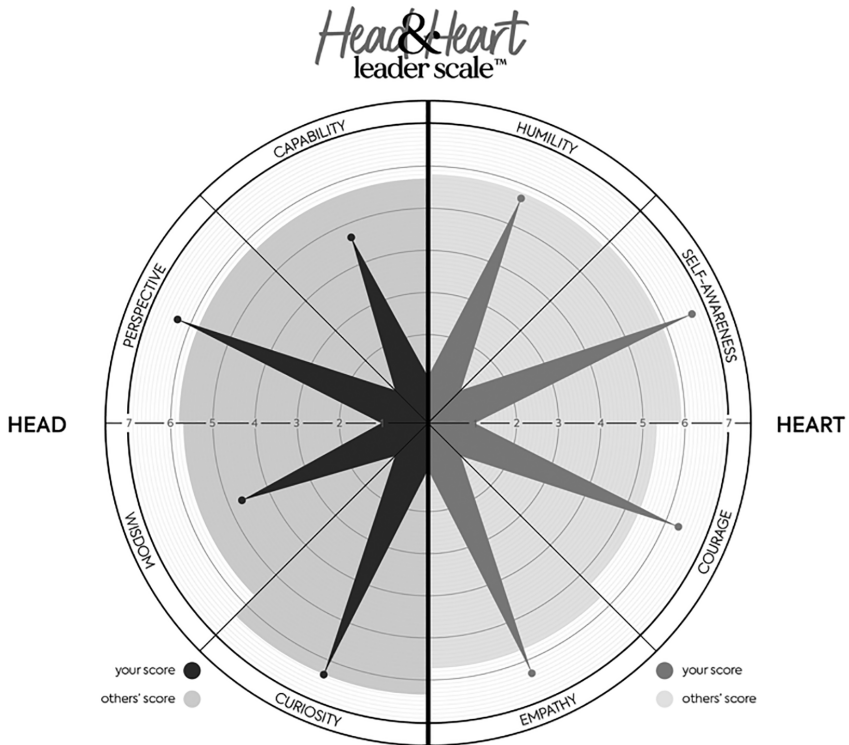
Together with Professor Lisa Bradley at the QUT Business School, I developed the Head & Heart Leader Scale to help you self-assess your current perceptions of how you lead with your head and your heart.

The scale is a set of twenty-four questions which have been empirically tested across each of the eight attributes that make up a modern leader. The full set of question are outlined in the table below.

To take the free survey, simply visit www.headheartleader.com. It will take 5–10 minutes to complete and you will receive a personalised report, like the example below, to understand how your scores compare to others.

If you would like information on how to organise a team or organisation-wide assessment, visit www.headheartleader.com or email contact@headheartleader.com.

There is no perfect score; for those wanting to excel and top the class, this is not the test for you. Everyone will have different areas of strength so you can take the self-assessment tool to understand your balance of head and heart leadership in more detail.



SAMPLE GROUP

In developing the scale, our sample group was a total of 637 participants. Of these 450 identified as female, 181 male, three other and three who did not disclose their gender. Most participants (64 per cent) were aged between thirty-five and fifty-four years old, with a range of ages from eighteen to over seventy-five years old. Just over 63 per cent had a postgraduate degree, almost 25 per cent had a bachelor degree, and all others (except for four participants) had high school or trade school qualifications.

Almost three-quarters of the sample group (464 participants) were in full-time employment, with the rest of the sample spread across part-time employment, homemakers, students, retirees, unemployed or unable to work, or in another type of employment. A fifth (20 per cent) of the sample worked in professional services,

14 per cent in education and training, 11.5 per cent in health care and social assistance, with the rest of the sample spread across other industries.

The vast majority of the sample group – 88 per cent – reported they felt they currently were a leader while only twenty-one participants indicated they were not currently, nor had ever been, in a leadership position. Household incomes for 46 per cent of the sample were higher than AUD\$200,000, while only 5 per cent of the sample earned less than AUD\$50,000.

DATA ANALYSIS

To develop the scale, we started with fifty-four items in total. Based on factor analysis, reliability (Cronbach Alpha coefficient) and the meaning of the dimensions, we chose the best three items to reflect each dimension. The table below provides the means, reliabilities and correlations for all eight dimensions.

	Cronbachs Alpha	Mean	Curiosity	Wisdom	Perspective	Capability	Humility	Self-Awareness	Courage	Empathy
Curiosity	.595	6.34								
Wisdom	.625	5.67	.351							
Perspective	.728	5.79	.327	.345						
Capability	.743	5.71	.382	.399	.407					
Humility	.597	5.95	.452	.366	.377	.292				
Self-Awareness	.673	5.98	.317	.356	.466	.469	.346			
Courage	.835	5.74	.311	.267	.281	.346	.269	.323		
Empathy	.809	5.72	.299	.263	.633	.232	.318	.411	.159	



Leadership can be demonstrated in many ways including in formal situations (like at work or in a community group) or informally (including within your family and social group). You do not need to have a formal leadership position to complete this survey – it is relevant to everyone.

Please answer based upon how you believe you have or would react, not how you think you should react. It may help to think about potential leadership situations you have been in recently and how you felt and behaved.

Please think about your own leadership, at work or at home or social group, and respond to each statement by selecting how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am always good at understanding the needs of others to connect with them							
When asked to do something I have concerns about, I feel able to challenge that request							
Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well							
I understand the ways I need to adapt how I lead depending on the situation I find myself in							
I know and understand myself well							
I am open to the ideas of others							
I always successfully reflect on the information I have on hand to find the best answer in a situation							
I view challenging situations as an opportunity to grow and learn							
I appreciate the opportunity to challenge my own assumptions							
I always make decisions by assessing what is known, accepting what is unknown, and moving forward anyway							
I readily admit when I don't know how to do something							
I am very aware of my limitations							
I am good at assessing how different people experience a given situation							
I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks							
I am confident about stating views that are different to the majority view							
I always find myself able to understand and share the feelings of others							
I know there are many things I can still learn							
I always use reason and logic when making decisions							
I am good at being able to 'read the room' and always seek to understand situations with other people							
I believe I can succeed at almost any endeavour I set my mind to							
I actively seek feedback from others, even if I suspect it may be challenging to hear							
I am very aware of my strengths							
I always speak up for what I believe in, even when it is not a popular belief							
I always try to understand the feelings of others							

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NOTES

Throughout *Head & Heart: The Art of Modern Leadership* you will find extensive references to the academic literature in this field as well as interviews and internet resources.

I know I have barely touched the surface of the body of work on leadership generations of scholars have undertaken before me. Hopefully the list of further reading for each chapter will point you in the right direction if you would like to know more.

Most quotes in this book have come from individual leaders who have graciously given their time to be interviewed for this book. Where any quotes have been used from another publicly available source, I have endeavoured to reference them as such.

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