

CHRIS WESTFALL

LEADERSHIP
LANGUAGE

USING AUTHENTIC
COMMUNICATION TO
DRIVE RESULTS

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—**Dr. Brandon Sweeney, PhD**, co-founder of Essentium Technologies and
winner of the Rice Business Plan Competition

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For my mom, with love

Gone but not forgotten

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FOREWORD

I have a simple motto hanging in my office:

Success is not about what you work on. It's what you choose NOT to work on.

I've been running different businesses since I was 14 years old. Some have done well, some not so much. If you're anything like me, you're continually looking for a path to success that feels right. A fundamental transformation comes when you finally know you're on the right track. That transformation is what this book is really about.

When I made my first feature film, *Why I'm Not on Facebook*, I planned it out scene-by-scene as though I was on the set of one of my television shows. I spent hours of time (and mountains of money) sweating every shot, scripting every outcome, tweaking every payoff. I had a specific plan, and so that's the movie I set out to make.

When I screened the first cut of the film for my graphics team, my lead editor simply said, "*It's terrible.*"

He told me I had created a perfectly structured 90-minute piece of boring crap that nobody would watch. Or believe. He also told me there was only one scene that worked. "The scene with you and your son was the only piece of real filmmaking in the entire project. That's the story you should tell."

I had been telling talent I worked with to "follow the story" and "just be authentic" for so long that I think I forgot what that actually

meant. I had just tried to manufacture a story to fit what I wanted people to hear, not what I was authentically trying to say. That never works, and I knew better. It was just harder to see that fact when I was the subject.

So I redid the entire film, with one thing in mind: *authenticity*. I agreed to follow the story wherever it took me and to trust that the audience would understand my journey. I'm thankful every day that my editor was so blunt and honest.

My success with *Bar Rescue*, *Extreme Makeover*, *Why I'm Not on Facebook*, and whatever else I've done in this life has come from trusting that true leadership always starts with a leap of faith. Scripting out every angle and every response gets you a plan, but no real impact.

Leadership is as real as it gets. I've learned hard lessons over the years being a CEO and entrepreneur. I've had thousands of employees and made nearly every mistake you can make trying to force leadership on those around me. When I finally learned how to trust my own faults and rely on the people on my team, I allowed myself to be vulnerable and everything changed.

A good leader knows that you can't push, fake, or finesse your way to success. That may sound counterintuitive, coming from someone who works in Hollywood. "Hollywood show business" actually has very little *show* to it. It's a very sensitive and mature marketplace where there is no room for gamesmanship. If the executives and investors smell hype or hyperbole, you're dead in the water.

Authenticity is something you cannot fake and you cannot learn. From employees to customers, people can sense it if you're trying to be something you're not.

Back in the seventies, a common sales strategy was to use the name of the person you were talking to—the prospect—frequently; the thinking was that a person's name was the sweetest sound in the world, so you should use it often.

Now we see that as a HUGE turnoff. It's not special. Not the "sweetest sound." It now effectively has the exact opposite impact than when designed. It's now seen as a technique—a technique for manipulation. And it doesn't work.

Yet there is *science* behind that outdated idea. But when you try to force the outcome by manipulating your audience, the science gets lost. We all want to connect with others in a way that's easy to understand and easy to listen to, but it can never be manipulative.

I know that not every pitch is going to be the next *Bar Rescue* and that every show I make won't save lives like *Extreme Makeover: Weight Loss Edition*. But I go into every project and every challenge in my business with a story that's clear, concise, and real. What about you? How do you bring your story to life?

It's time to change the conversation. It's time to get real; to access a scientific approach to the way things work, so you never have to fake it.

Audiences today are more sophisticated than ever. That's true whether you're talking to a studio exec or to an executive within your company. This book is not about systems and tweaks. It's about taking a candid look at the cards you're holding and deciding how to play them so that you can persuade from a place of *reality*. Not technique.

What I've found is that authenticity, and a willingness to embrace weakness without fear, excuses, or spin, has allowed me to be happier and more emotionally stable. Television can be a fickle mistress, but wherever this journey continues to take me, I'm going there as myself.

And so are you. Chris has created a road map to help you find what's missing, and that journey starts on the inside. It's not about being scripted, it's about embracing the unknown—ignoring what doesn't matter, so you can capture what does.

I see the impact of true and authentic connection every day. Read this book, and you will, too.

Brant Pinvidic
CEO, Invelop Entertainment
Producer, Bar Rescue, Extreme Makeover, and
Why I'm Not on Facebook

INTRODUCTION

I've watched lots of leaders—and aspiring leaders—struggle with expressing their vision. The difference between struggle and success is your story. I wrote this book because I believe that you have a story to tell. A story that connects you to the people who matter most, and to the results you need.

But life isn't just a story you write. It's a conversation you live.

Wouldn't it be great if you could say to your team, your competition, or your board of directors, "Shhh now, I have a story to tell!"

That's not how life works.

Life (and leadership) is a dialogue.

If you are reading this book, you are going to get the real story on leadership. You're going to understand how to change the *conversation*—and change your results.

Sir Kenneth Branson said, "Communication is the greatest skill any leader can possess." I believe that, because I have seen it. In my work with tens of thousands of entrepreneurs, executives, and business leaders, I've seen how effective communication—or the lack of it—has driven results, sometimes into the stratosphere . . . sometimes into the ditch.

Note that for every mile of road, there are two miles of ditch. So choose your words (and your conversations) carefully.

Communication will create the results you need, or the consequences you don't. If you aspire to inspire, take time to consider carefully how you bring your story to life.

Over the last several years, I have been on a journey of personal and professional discovery. Searching for new avenues of peak performance, I turned to a variety of gurus and guidance as part of an exploration into the leadership mind-set. I wanted to know:

- What makes an effective leader?
- What makes *me* effective (and ineffective) as a leader?
- Are those factors the same for everyone, or is leadership a function of personality, perseverance, charisma, background . . . or something else?
- Can anyone be a leader?
- How can people access whatever leadership skills exist inside and bring those skills to life for the teams they care about?

At first, it looked like there was a hidden “leadership process” that I didn't quite understand, or that I hadn't quite implemented. But something didn't feel right.

In spite of my lack of knowledge, I had managed to build and lead teams around the world as a senior executive in technology and consumer brands. As a consultant, I had led entrepreneurs to find new results, access new funding, and deliver new ideas for dozens of ventures. I had helped my clients to create unprecedented results, transforming their careers and their lives in the process. I provided communications workshops to Fortune 100 companies, introduced insights to rocket scientists at Sandia National Laboratory, and worked with the U.S. Navy SEALs.

Yet that experience didn't seem to matter. Instead of confidence and new discovery, the gurus gave me self-doubt.

The hidden leadership process began with a fundamental premise: I lacked something.

Leadership was like baking a cake: you simply had to understand the recipe and the process. And, according to “expert sources,” I didn’t have the cookbook, or even the right ingredients. Leadership was something “out there”—something out of reach.

According to the experts, despite my results and my beliefs to the contrary, I was flawed. Something was missing.

Of course, the leadership books and gurus I turned to had the answer, and the recipe, for that missing ingredient. But something in the kitchen didn’t smell right.

I knew I wasn’t broken. And neither are you.

I didn’t need to be flawed in order to want to be more, achieve more, and see greater impact. I had seen Millennials, with minimal experience, lead others to maximize their results. I had been a part of transformations that cut across industry lines, age, gender, and other barriers to bring powerful stories to life.

I discovered that I didn’t need a six-step process, or 21 irrefutable laws, to be a leader. I simply needed a greater understanding of the place where leadership lives. I needed to look in the direction of real impact, if that was what I wanted to create for my business, my clients, and my life.

You may be expecting a recipe for leadership: “*Do these things and see these results.*” Let’s look at those expectations.

Have you ever followed a guru’s advice, and achieved different results? You said their words but obtained your own outcomes?

Why is that? Maybe leadership isn’t a recipe. Maybe it’s time to concentrate on where real results come from. When you *discover* new things, when you *understand* new things, you will see new results.

This book is a journey of personal discovery, not just tips and techniques, because tips and techniques will only take you so far.

Focusing on tips and techniques is like putting lightning-fast, highly efficient wheels on a stagecoach. No matter how well you engineer those wheels, that stagecoach isn’t going to get you on the