

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

JAMES M. **KOUZES** | BARRY Z. **POSNER**

THE
**LEADERSHIP
CHALLENGE**

SEVENTH EDITION

HOW TO MAKE
EXTRAORDINARY THINGS HAPPEN
IN ORGANIZATIONS

The Leadership
Challenge 
A Wiley Brand

Kouzes and Posner have quite literally written the book on leadership. Not only that, but they're also generous and thorough enough to keep updating it, as our tumultuous times demand. This seventh edition of *The Leadership Challenge* is a masterpiece—informative, practical, and engaging. If you take these ideas to heart and apply the book's Five Practices assiduously, you will be well on your way to becoming a better leader. You will be well on your way to enriching the lives of others and making the organizations you care about better.

—**Amy C. Edmondson**, Professor, Harvard Business School; Author of *The Fearless Organization*

Did we really need a seventh edition of *The Leadership Challenge*? The answer is a resounding *yes*. This seminal book-series is more important than ever, far more important. The world is a mess. And the best way out, as I see it, is to better our organizations and the lives of their employees. The Five Practices that are the keystone of the book can without doubt trigger an internal revolution of organizational excellence—which can, collectively, give one hope, on a global scale, for a brighter future. Bravo, Jim and Barry.

—**Tom Peters**, bestselling business author and speaker

For years, the US Coast Guard Academy has relied upon the foundational principles set forth in *The Leadership Challenge* to develop the next generation of leaders of character who will serve the people of the United States. This exciting seventh edition draws upon conclusive research and is bursting with compelling, real-life examples to learn from and lead by; it's an indispensable resource for leaders at all levels who desire to make extraordinary things happen . . . in the workplace, at home, and in society. Jim Kouzes's and Barry Posner's 40-year collaboration in studying leaders, researching leadership, and leading brings us a masterful work designed to help people become the best leaders they can be. If you want to learn how to earn trust and respect as a leader others yearn to follow, let this book serve as your proven field guide.

—**Sandra Stosz**, Vice Admiral, USCG (ret.), trustee for the US Coast Guard Academy James M. Loy Institute for Leadership; Author of *Breaking Ice and Breaking Glass: Leading in Uncharted Waters*

This is a classic—one of the few books on leadership that's actually worth reading. *The Leadership Challenge* is more relevant than ever: a practical, evidence-based resource on how to mobilize people around a common goal.

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

I've been a student of leadership derived from my time in the military and a practitioner of the five practices of *The Leadership Challenge* for nearly 30 years. I have found that *The Leadership Challenge* is a call to action for any individual who wants to lead through inspiration and accomplish only what others dream of achieving. It's required reading for my leadership team and has been a foundational training platform for my management teams over the years. If you are looking for an X factor in results for yourself, your team, or your company, look no further and devour and apply the principles in this book!

—**Mark Leposky**, Executive Vice President, Global Operations,
Callaway Golf

Jim and Barry's work has transformed our understanding of what constitutes leadership excellence over the last three-plus decades. This updated edition provides essential insights into what it takes to identify and develop stellar leaders now.

—**Sally Helgesen**, lead author, *How Women Rise*, author,
The Web of Inclusion

I've been a fan—and follower—of *The Leadership Challenge* for almost 25 years, and the principles are as relevant today as they have ever been. In this leadership classic, Kouzes and Posner have identified and brought to life invaluable practices that are as insightful as they are practical.

—**Patrick Lencioni**, President, The Table Group; bestselling author of
The Five Dysfunctions of a Team and *The Advantage*

I'm a raving fan of Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner. There are few, if any, folks in the leadership field better than the two of them. If you don't believe me, read the seventh edition of their classic book, *The Leadership Challenge*. With every edition they upgrade the content with new research and observations. It continues to be a must-read!

—**Ken Blanchard**, Co-Author of *The One Minute Manager* and *Simple Truths of Leadership*

It has been my experience that many companies underestimate the importance of leadership. In my opinion, leadership is the common ingredient in America's great companies. *The Leadership Challenge* and the Leadership Practices Inventory create a common language with which leaders can discuss both strategic and everyday issues in leading organizations and people. The characteristics of admired leaders alone set a standard for all executives to follow. *The Leadership Challenge's* teachings played a strong role in our success.

—**Jim Kerr**, Executive Chairman, D.A. Davidson Companies

Kouzes and Posner boil down the concepts of excellent leadership into easy-to-apply principles. I share this book with my entire team of young professionals. It is my “go-to” resource and truly helps people grow in their careers.

—**Jacquelyn McCormick**, Chief of Staff to Berkeley Mayor
Jesse Arreguin

Jim and Barry have done it again! An established classic in its field, *The Leadership Challenge* continues to provide valuable knowledge for today’s fast-changing leadership dynamics. Filled with engaging case studies and updated research, this book is a must-read for anyone looking to improve their leadership, team, organization, or career.

—**Marshall Goldsmith**, Thinkers50 #1 Executive Coach; *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Earned Life*, *Triggers*, and *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*.

The five practices of exemplary leadership have stood the test of time, and this revised and updated edition shows why. In these volatile and uncertain times, the world needs more leaders to rise to the leadership challenge.

—**David Burkus**, Author of *Leading from Anywhere*

Leadership is everyone’s business. *The Leadership Challenge* is essential reading for anyone who wants to be an exceptional leader. Jim and Barry believe that every challenge is an opportunity and provide actions you can take to ensure that you reach leadership success. They demonstrate how you can rise to every occasion to be the best leader you can be.

—**Elaine Biech**, 2022 ISA Thought Leader, Author, *Skills for Career Success*, *The New Business of Consulting*

In 2020 the working world leaped from in-person interaction to virtual meetings. The change confronted leaders with new challenges, yet leadership basics remained the same. Kouzes and Posner hit it head-on in their seventh edition of *The Leadership Challenge* by building on the foundation of their earlier editions with evidence-based guidance for navigating the new normal.

—**Jim Hancock**, President and Founder, San Francisco Sailing Science Center

Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have once again provided leaders a great gift in the seventh edition of *The Leadership Challenge*. Truly tested over time, the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership continue to guide leaders at all levels in making positive contributions around the world. This book is not only filled with

captivating stories about what great leaders do but shares how they may go about developing themselves to make positive and remarkable differences with the individuals and organizations they encounter.

—**Brent Kondritz**, Executive Director, University of Dayton Center for Leadership

The Five Practices operating system is not some random set of rules but rather a well-researched framework. I experienced firsthand during these tough times how it made me a better leader.

—**Mainak Pal**, Senior Project Manager, Global Development, AGTEK Development Company, Inc.

The Five Practices are a timeless and all-encompassing operational leadership system. It is relevant during uncertain times like today and during settled times. It is practical, learnable, measurable, and effective. When put into practice, these skills have proven to be effective leadership tools and can bring out better leaders in all of us.

—**Maria Hirotsuka**, Senior Manager, Xilinx

When these practices are understood, adopted, and put into practice, anyone can become a better leader. This is not just a system but also a leadership guide. This guide serves as a resource for users to consult when faced with leadership challenges, turning difficulties into opportunities.

—**Rusty Stevenson**, Senior Contracting Officer, US Department of Veteran Affairs

The pandemic has added new variables and challenges to being a leader, but I have found that when I returned to The Five Practices for guidance and leadership, it helped me go a long way.

—**William Yuen**, Director, Western Digital

Applying The Five Practices has been a game-changer in the many challenges I have faced in the workplace. I encourage leaders at all levels to learn these practices to deal with any situation that calls for leadership.

—**Prashnath Thandavamuthy**, Director Portfolio Management & Strategy, Juniper Networks

By applying these five practices, we can all become better leaders in our workplaces, our homes, and our communities.

—**Jennifer Lee**, Senior Vice President, Provident Credit Union

Speaking from personal experience, The Five Practices is a very practical framework that focuses on developing and enhancing proven attributes that make leaders extraordinary. I have systematically executed this “operating system” during the last ~20 months in my organization and have seen a significant and continuing increase in team members’ overall engagement, enthusiasm, ownership, and accountability.

—**Edwin Haghazari**, Director, The Jackson Laboratory

Everyone can become a better leader by adopting The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership model. This model is an operating system guiding rail to develop future leaders with promising results.

—**Hong Lu**, Manager, Cisco

That is what I love most about The Five Practices. It is not about here are steps to follow, once you do those steps you are done. It is about here are steps to follow, keep doing them over and over again and adapt and change as you find ways to do better and move forward.

—**David Mahal**, Senior Global Sales Director, Flex

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

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SEVENTH EDITION

**How to Make
Extraordinary Things
Happen in Organizations**

JAMES M. KOUZES

BARRY Z. POSNER



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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Kouzes, James M., author. | Posner, Barry Z., author.

Title: The leadership challenge : how to make extraordinary things happen in organizations / James M. Kouzes, Barry Z. Posner.

Description: Seventh edition. | Hoboken, New Jersey : Jossey-Bass, [2023] | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022029443 (print) | LCCN 2022029444 (ebook) | ISBN 9781119736127 (hardback) | ISBN 9781119736165 (adobe pdf) | ISBN 9781119736158 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Leadership. | Executive ability. | Management.

Classification: LCC HD57.7 .K68 2022 (print) | LCC HD57.7 (ebook) | DDC 658.4/092—dc23/eng/20220711

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022029443>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022029444>

Cover Design: Wiley

Cover Image: Lake Bachalpsee © aCZhou / Getty Images

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INTRODUCTION

Making Extraordinary Things Happen

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE has always been about how people go about mobilizing others to want to make extraordinary things happen. It's about the behavioral practices used to transform values into actions, visions into realities, obstacles into innovations, separateness into solidarity, and risks into rewards. It's about leadership that creates the climate in which challenging opportunities open the door to remarkable successes.

The fundamental purpose of *The Leadership Challenge* is to assist people in furthering their abilities to lead others to greatness. Whether you're in the private sector or public, an employee or a volunteer, a manager or an individual contributor, a student, teacher, or parent, we have written this book to help you further develop your capacity to guide others to places they have never been before.

What's New?

We've been researching the practices of exemplary leadership for over four decades, and every time we sit down to write a new edition of this

book, people ask us, “What’s new and what’s different? How has leadership changed since you started your studies?” These are understandable questions, and there certainly have been some significant changes in the world since the previous edition.

The COVID-19 pandemic tops the list. It was nowhere on anyone’s radar in 2017, but by 2020 it had effectively disrupted every person’s everyday life. It has been a crisis like none other in our lifetime. COVID-19 immediately impacted how we lived, cared for our sick and elderly, shopped, ate, learned, worked, worshipped, and were entertained. Everyone became more and more anxious as the sick and dying overwhelmed hospitals, and healthcare workers labored to exhaustion. All but essential businesses and services shut down worldwide for months, then opened up and shut down again. All organizations, at the very least, had to alter the way they conducted their operations. Millions were out of work, and individuals and businesses had to be protected with government loans and payments. Adults stayed home to go to work, and kids stayed home to go to school. People’s sense of belonging declined, and many felt the pain of isolation. People put on masks and stood socially distanced in lines outside stores with fingers crossed, hoping to find toilet paper on the shelves when they entered. Ships backed up in ports, and supply chains broke down. Politicians publicly squabbled about how best to respond, and misinformation spread virally. Civic discourse became quite uncivil.

Then in the middle of all this, the world watched in horror when in the United States a black man, George Floyd, was murdered at the hands of a policeman. “I can’t breathe” became a rallying cry for those who had felt strangled for decades by injustice. Protests erupted, not just in the United States but in many cities around the world. Thousands of frustrated citizens filled the streets. Longstanding grievances grew in intensity, and the cultural and political divide expanded. Ideological differences became more intense. Trust and confidence in institutional leaders hit an all-time low, and they’ve not yet turned much around.

Moreover, in the United States, what had historically been a peaceful transition of power from one presidential administration to the next was disrupted by a violent demonstration. Thousands stormed the halls of Congress, hundreds fought with police, and many even threatened to abduct and kill elected officials. A contentious debate ensued over the presidential election outcome. The political divide expanded, and trust in institutions fell even more.

After years of mask-wearing, social distancing, and staying at home, vaccines helped ease restrictions, and people began to venture out and return to work. But then something else unheard of happened. Fueled by disillusionment, discontent, and disaffection, a sizeable number of people voluntarily decided not to go back to work, at least with their same employer. What became known as the “Great Resignation” (or the Great Reshuffle, Great Exploration, or Great Imagination) emerged as another variance in economic recovery and organizational commitment.

And just as it seemed the world was emerging from the pandemic, a global conflict erupted in Ukraine, threatening the peace and security of Europe and perhaps the entire world. Refugees in the millions fled their homes with little more than a suitcase of belongings to their names. Economic inflation, already emerging as a concern, expanded to a major worry as fuel prices skyrocketed.

Concerns over climate change intensified, especially among the younger generations. With out-of-control wildfires, hurricanes, flooding, and other natural disasters devastating communities across the globe, they expressed pessimism about the world they are inheriting and its impact on their future lives and livelihoods. The beginning of the third decade of this century seems to be defined by a pervasive uncertainty that challenges individuals, institutions, communities, and nations. It was becoming the zeitgeist of the period.¹

Yet among the tragedy and hardships, discord and discontent, people and organizations pivoted. Delivery trucks filled the otherwise empty streets as people turned to online shopping. Homebound workers adapted to remote Zoom meetings, and kids adapted to virtual schooling.

Government and businesses, often competitors, collaborated to develop vaccines in record time. Restaurants found ways to meet the demand for takeout meals and outdoor dining. Streaming services filled the pipeline with on-demand content. Families learned to connect through video chats. Organizations brought diversity, equity, and inclusion to the forefront of their agendas and addressed inequities. Physical and mental health became priorities. At-home workouts became commonplace. People began to reassess the meaning of work. Some decided that they'd change the career path they had been traveling, and others demanded more flexibility from the workplace they'd chosen. People started to reimagine the way they worked and the way they lived.

We'll return to many of these issues, and others, in the chapters to come. We'll do it through stories that people have told us about their experiences, research from scholars who've studied this period, and data we've collected on how leaders behaved and the impact their actions have had on engagement and work performance.

Before we do, however, let's take a step back and reflect on something else we observed because *there's an even more important lesson* that has emerged in these last few years.

Challenge Is the Opportunity for Greatness

The Leadership Challenge has its origins in a research project we began over forty years ago. We wanted to know what people did when they were at their "personal best" in leading others. These personal bests were experiences in which people set their individual leadership standards of excellence. They were, so to speak, their Olympic gold-medal-winning performances.

When we reviewed the Personal-Best Leadership Experience questionnaires we had received, it became evident that every single case involved some kind of challenge. The challenge might have been a natural disaster, a health crisis, a cutting-edge service, a groundbreaking piece

of legislation, an invigorating campaign to get adolescents to join an environmental program, a revolutionary turnaround of a bureaucratic government program, a heartbreaking injury to a child, an initiative to become the first female team to ascend one of the world's tallest peaks, a local emergency project to feed first responders and frontline workers, the startup of a new plant, the launch of a new product, the creation of a new market, or the turnaround of a failing business. Whatever the situation, all the cases involved overcoming great adversity. When people talked about making extraordinary things happen, they spoke about encountering obstacles, resistance, naysayers, hardened attitudes, seemingly impossible odds, uncertainty, hardship, setbacks, or other adversities. In other words, *challenge was the common denominator*. It was the context in which people said they did their best.

Keep in mind that we didn't ask people to tell us about their challenges. We asked them to tell us about their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences. They could have written about more stable, predictable, or conventional situations. But they didn't. Easy, undemanding endeavors simply aren't associated with award-winning performances. What people chose to discuss were challenging times. We continue to this day to ask people around the world about their Personal-Best Leadership Experiences, and we continue to find the same thing. Challenge defines the context in which people perform at their best.

That is *the* critical lesson from reviewing thousands of Personal-Best Leadership Experiences over forty years. *Challenge is the crucible for leadership and the opportunity for greatness*. Challenge shapes us, and challenge opens doors.

Leaders absolutely must address the current issues they, their organizations, and their communities face today. That was true in the past, and it is true today, and it will be true into the future. Contemporary dilemmas, such as those with which we began this introduction, must be on the agenda. Equally true is that there will be other challenges ahead, perhaps even more daunting than those we face in these moments.

Leadership challenges never cease, and leadership opportunities will always be there for those who choose to greet them. That is precisely why, from the beginning, we titled this book *The Leadership Challenge*.

The study of leadership is how people guide others through adversity, uncertainty, and turbulence; triumph against overwhelming odds; take initiative when there is inertia; and activate individuals and institutions in the face of stiff resistance. This book describes what leaders did under challenging circumstances and what you can do to put their leadership behaviors into practice and make a difference.

An Evidence-Based, Best Practices Operating System

We persist in asking today the same fundamental question we asked in 1982 when we started our investigative journey into understanding exemplary leadership: What did you do when you were at your personal best as a leader? We've talked to people of all ages, spanning across educational levels and ethnicity, representing just about every type of organization there is, at all levels, in all functions, and from many different places around the world. Their stories, and the behaviors and actions they described, resulted in the discovery of The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership® framework, an operating system for leadership. When leaders do their best, they engage in The Five Practices—they Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. In the following chapters, we go into depth about each of these leadership practices, both conceptually and practically.

The Leadership Challenge is evidence-based. We derived The Five Practices from rigorous research, and we illustrate them with examples from real people doing real things. With each new edition, we continue to update the stories, cases, and examples of exactly what real people do when they are at their best. Their names are real, as are their experiences and quotations. However, for two reasons, we do not mention their organizations. First, most people are not still connected with that organization or in the same position. Second, the cases and our focus are about what *individuals* do, and not about their organizations, functions, or positions.

With each edition of the book, we update the quantitative research—both our findings and those from other scholars around the globe. In this regard, the *Leadership Practices Inventory* (LPI)—the instrument we designed to measure how often people use The Five Practices and how their frequency makes a difference with their teams and organization—provides ongoing empirical data that supports the validity of this leadership operating system. The LPI assesses the frequency with which leaders demonstrate the behaviors associated with The Five Practices—from the individual leader’s perspective and from the observations of their manager, direct reports, colleagues, and others. There are over five million respondents in the normative LPI database. Respondents answer additional questions regarding how they feel about their workplace and their leader. For example, they respond to questions about their commitment and motivational levels, how proud they are to tell others they work for this organization, and whether they would favorably recommend their current leader to others. They also provide demographic data about age, education, gender, ethnicity, tenure, function, industry, hierarchical position, organizational size, and nationality. This robust database allows us to produce statistical analyses that support our claim that leadership makes a difference.

Furthermore, with each new edition we get the chance to reiterate what’s still essential, discard what’s not, and add what’s new. We also take the opportunity to contemporize the framework and freshen up the language and point of view so that the book is highly relevant to current circumstances and conditions. With experience, and more cases and data, we can also be more prescriptive about the best practices of leaders. The empirical analyses show that personal and professional outcomes are directly related to how frequently you engage in these leadership practices. It’s not about your title, position, function, age, gender, educational level, country of origin, or any other demographic variable. It’s about how you behave. We firmly believe that exemplary leadership is within the grasp of everyone and that the opportunities for leadership are boundless and boundary-less.

We expect that all of you reading this book face vexing issues that not only make leadership more urgent but also require you to be more

conscious and conscientious about employing exemplary leadership practices and behaviors. Others are looking to you to help them figure out what they should be doing and how they can develop themselves to be leaders. You don't just owe it to yourself to become the best leader you can possibly be. You're even more responsible to others. You may not know it, but they're expecting you to do your best.

A Field Guide for Leaders

Think of *The Leadership Challenge* as a field guide to take along on your leadership journey. Think of it as a manual you can consult when you want advice and counsel on how to make extraordinary things happen with your team or organization. We have designed the book to describe what leaders do, explain the fundamental principles that support these leadership practices, provide actual case examples of real people who demonstrate each practice, and offer specific recommendations on what you can do to make these practices your own and to continue your development as a leader.

In Chapter 1 we establish our point of view about leadership. Leadership is a set of skills and abilities that are learnable by anyone with the desire to learn and the persistence to practice them. We provide an overview of The Five Practices, summarize the findings from decades of empirical studies about what leaders do when they are at their best, and show that these leadership practices make a difference. We also remind you that a complete picture of leadership requires understanding that leadership is fundamentally a relationship, and hence it is important to understand and appreciate what people look for in an individual they would be *willing* to follow.

The ten chapters that follow describe the Ten Commitments of Leadership that people employ to make extraordinary things happen, and there are two chapters associated with each of The Five Practices. There are two essential behaviors associated with each of the Commitments.

Making Extraordinary Things Happen

We provide actual case examples of people who demonstrate each of the leadership practices, commitments, and essential behaviors. We also offer evidence from our research, and that of others, to support the concepts and how they are applied and prescribe specific recommendations on what you can do to make each practice your own, becoming the best leader you can be.

Each of these chapters ends with a set of actionable suggestions about what you need to do to make these leadership behaviors and practices an ongoing and natural part of your behavioral and attitudinal repertoire. Whether the focus is your own learning or the development of your constituents, you can take immediate action on every recommendation. They don't require a budget or approval from top management—or anyone else. They just require your personal commitment and discipline. Select at least one that you will do as soon as possible, if not immediately, to make the transition between learning and doing. In addition, we offer several suggestions to converse with the people around you about leadership. These conversations are opportunities to build and reinforce a culture of leadership and underscore how important it is to act and think like a leader.

In Chapter 12, we call on everyone to accept personal responsibility to be a role model for leadership. We continue to champion the view that leadership is everyone's business. The first place to look for leadership is within yourself. Accepting the leadership challenge requires reflection, practice, humility, and taking advantage of every opportunity to make a difference. We close, as we have in every edition, with this conclusion: Leadership is not an affair of the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart.

* * *

We recommend that you read Chapter 1 first, but after that, there is no sacred order to proceeding through the rest of this book. Go wherever your interests are. We wrote this material to support you in your leadership development. Just remember that each practice and commitment of leadership is essential. Although you might skip around in the book, you can't skip any of the fundamentals of leadership.

The Leadership Challenge

Challenge is the opportunity for greatness, and the most significant contribution leaders make is not to today's bottom line; it is to the long-term development of people and institutions so they can adapt, change, prosper, and grow. Our ongoing aspiration is that this book contributes to the revitalization of organizations, the creation of new enterprises, the renewal of healthy communities, and greater respect and understanding in the world. We fervently hope that it enriches your life and that of your community and your family.

Leadership is important, not just in your career and within your organization, but in every sector, community, and country. We need more exemplary leaders, and we need them more than ever. So much extraordinary work needs to be done. We need leaders who can unite us and ignite us.

Meeting the leadership challenge is a personal—and a daily—opportunity available to everyone. We know that if you have the will and the way to lead, you can make extraordinary things happen. You supply the will. We'll do our best to supply the way.

James M. Kouzes
Orinda, California

Barry Z. Posner
Berkeley, California

CHAPTER 1

When Leaders Are at Their Best

*Leadership is ultimately about creating a way
for people to contribute to making something
extraordinary happen.¹*

Alan Keith

WITH LEADERSHIP, as with most things in life, experience is often the teacher. We learn what to do by trying it ourselves or by watching others. The problem is that not all of what's done or observed is effective or appropriate behavior. When recommending to leaders what they should and should not do, it's imperative to base leadership practices on the best of what people do and observe—the actions that represent the highest standards of excellence.

That was our objective when we first began our leadership research in 1983. We wanted to answer a simple question: What do people do when they are at their personal best as leaders?

To answer this question, we developed the *Personal-Best Leadership Experience* questionnaire and started collecting case studies. These were stories about times when, in their perception, leaders set their individual

The Leadership Challenge

standard of excellence. They could select a recent experience or one from their past. They could have been the official person-in-charge or have emerged as the informal leader. They could have held a paid position or been a volunteer, either in a workplace or nonwork setting. They could have been part of a corporation, agency, community group, professional association, sports team, or school. The timing and context were up to them; it just needed to be an experience they felt represented their best leadership performance.

The *Personal-Best Leadership Experience* questionnaire is 12 pages long, consisting of 38 open-ended questions, and generally requires one to two hours for reflection and expression. More than 550 of these *surveys* were collected initially, and that number today is well over 5,000. In addition, we have conducted hundreds of in-depth interviews on the same themes.

In those interviews and case studies, we asked questions such as: Where did your personal-best leadership experience occur? When did it take place? How long was it from start to finish? What kind of project or undertaking was it? What was your specific role in this project? What external or internal challenges did you face? What words best describe how you felt at the beginning of this experience? How would you describe your feelings during this experience? Who initiated this experience? What did you aspire to accomplish? Who was involved in this experience? What actions did you take to get people moving in the right direction? How did you overcome setbacks? What did you do to keep people motivated? What did you learn from this experience? What key lessons about leadership would you share with another person from this experience?

Wherever we look, we find examples of exemplary leadership. We have found them in for-profit firms and nonprofits, agriculture and mining, manufacturing and utilities, technology and financial services, education and healthcare, government and military, and arts and community services. These leaders have been in hierarchical positions, as well as nonmanagers, individual contributors, and volunteers. They have been young and old, women and men, and represent a broad range of organizations and functions as well as racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups.

Leaders reside in every city, country, and nation. And we find this diversity to be true to this day.

The inescapable conclusion from analyzing thousands of personal-best leadership experiences is that (a) *everyone has a personal-best leadership story to tell*, and (b) *leadership is an identifiable set of skills and abilities available to anyone*. These findings challenge the myths that leadership is something that you find only at the highest levels of organizations and society, that it's something reserved for only a handful of charismatic men and women, and that it's something that ordinary people can't learn.² The notion that only a few great people can lead others to greatness is just plain wrong.

From the stories we gathered in interviews and written cases, a pattern of leadership behavior emerged. There were common themes in what leaders did when performing at their best, which led us to formulate a behavioral framework of exemplary leadership. We subjected our qualitative findings to a series of empirical tests. In our initial quantitative study, we asked over 3,000 managers to assess the extent to which they used these leadership behaviors. Their direct reports were asked how often they had observed their leaders utilizing these leadership behaviors, and we also asked them questions about their level of motivation, team spirit, commitment, productivity, and other standard engagement measures. This research has continued over the years, with the creation and development of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), amassing a database that currently includes over 4.6 million people from more than 120 different countries.

The consistent results over five decades validate the model and yield another inescapable conclusion: Leadership matters. The frequency with which people engage in these leadership behaviors directly relates to assessments of workgroup performance and leadership effectiveness. There is a direct, positive correlation between the answer from direct reports of how effective their leader is and their perception of how often that leader engages in the leadership behavior—and this correlation actually increased over the two years of unprecedented volatility, ambiguity, and uncertainty experienced during the pandemic. In other words, exemplary leadership matters even more during times of extreme challenge.

The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership

Being a good leader is not something that casually occurs. It takes great thought, care, insight, commitment, and energy.

Mary Godwin

The critical lesson we've learned from carefully reviewing thousands of personal-best leadership cases is that the actions people take to make extraordinary things happen are much more alike than they are different, regardless of context. We continue to find that individuals who guide others along pioneering journeys follow surprisingly similar paths irrespective of the times or settings. Though each experience was unique in its expression, there were identifiable behaviors and actions that made a difference. When making extraordinary things happen in organizations, leaders engage in what we call The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership®:

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

These practices are not the private property of the people we studied. Nor do they belong to a few select shining stars. Leadership is not about personality; it's about behavior. The Five Practices are available to anyone who accepts the leadership challenge—the challenge of guiding people and organizations to places they have never been before. It is the challenge of moving beyond the ordinary to the extraordinary.