

LEADING THE
EMPOWERED WORKFORCE



the
empathy
advantage

HEATHER E. MCGOWAN
CHRIS SHIPLEY

Foreword by Denise Williams, Chief People Officer, FIS

WILEY

Praise for *The Empathy Advantage*

“*The Empathy Advantage* is a must-read for corporate leaders looking to drive positive change in their organizations. It shares the sober message of why these changes are necessary, and provides a solid framework to successfully transform organizations for the future.”

—**Yogesh Gupta, CEO,**
Progress Software

“McGowan and Shipley’s work offers a compelling look into the future. *The Empathy Advantage* inspires us to rethink what work means in our lives, how leaders lead, and what organizations must do to respond with clarity and conviction to create the future.”

—**Seth Mattison,**
Author, *The War at Work: A Tale of Navigating the Unwritten Rules of the Hierarchy in a Half-Changed World*

“Leaders with a learning mindset don’t limit their curiosity to market conditions and business strategy; they bring this mindset to the people they work with and lead. Nothing creates a more powerful team and culture than a leader who understands what makes each and every one of her team tick, and then creates the environment that will bring out the best in them individually and collectively. *The Empathy Advantage* shows you how.”

—**Annalie Killian,**
Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, sparks & honey

“*The Empathy Advantage* is a must-read guide to help leaders listen to their hearts and tap into the powerful forces of empathy to inspire human performance. Workplace managers must never forget: It’s the heart and not the mind that influences human behavior and drives achievement.”

—**Mark C. Crowley,**
Author, *Lead from the Heart: Transformational Leadership for the 21st Century*

“Not since Gail Sheehy’s *Passages* have we been given such a powerful lens from past, present, and future to see how to engage the minds of our workforce and the intrinsic motivation that creates the commitment to have and execute a behavioral brand.”

—**Jennifer Sertl,**
Coauthor, *Strategy, Leadership and the Soul*; Founder, Agility3R

“No one can predict the future. Especially a future that is evolving, adapting, and changing at unprecedented rates. What we can predict with certainty is that there will be more change – a shift of priorities, an emergence of opportunities, and unfolding of experiences we can’t yet imagine. Heather McGowan and Chris Shipley’s book is an indispensable guide to helping you navigate these changes, and to understand how best to use empathy, compassion, and trust to lead change.”

—**Jen Buchanan,**
Author and Keynote Speaker

“We have emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally changed across every dimension of work, life, and society. It only follows, then, that business leaders need to change the way they organize and lead their companies in response. *The Empathy Advantage* describes the changed workforce with clarity and offers sage advice on how to lead from here. This is a must-read for C-Suite executives in every industry.”

—**Peter Sheahan**,
Founder of Karrikins Group

“*The Empathy Advantage* is a must-read for any manager or leader navigating the challenges and complexities of this new landscape. Its brilliant insights codify and simplify the changes we are experiencing in real time and offer very practical solutions to become a more influential and inspiring leader capable of leading this next-generation workforce effectively into the future. My recommendation is simple. If you are a leader, read this book!”

—**Ryan Estis**,
Author, Keynote Speaker, and Founding Partner,
Impact Eleven

“McGowan and Shipley have a long history of insightful and important futuristic thoughts. But *The Empathy Advantage* takes leaders and organizations to a new level of understanding. While the pandemic and post-pandemic possibilities frighten many of us, McGowan and Shipley describe the future of work and relationships as an intimately woven fabric. Read *The Empathy Advantage* and you feel empowered to design not just your career, but your life!”

—**Stephen Spinelli, Jr. Ph.D.**,
President of Babson College, Co-founder of Jiffy Lube,
Chairman of the Board, Planet Fitness.

“The *Empathy Advantage* superbly describes the challenges of leadership today. Successfully leading through today’s turmoil requires a deep understanding of your employees’ reality and a plan for how you will meet their changing needs. Should a people leader pick up this book and read it cover to cover, they would have no choice but to be a better leader as a result.”

—**Rhonda Hall**,
Vice President Human Resources &
Organizational Development, University Federal Credit Union

“Phenomenal...relevant and pragmatic! This book is foundational to leadership in an era that has blurred the lines among five generations of employees!”

—**Cynthia Bentzen-Mercer, Ph.D., MBA, SPHR**,
Executive Vice President/Chief Administrative Officer, Mercy

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For my mother, brother, and father. Their collective empathy while navigating each other with grace through Alzheimer's, terminal cancer, and aging is a rare act of love. —Heather

For those who, during the dark days of the Covid-19 pandemic, opted for empathy and compassion in the face of fear and uncertainty, and especially for Spencer Toder, who is perhaps the most empathic person I've ever known. —Chris

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FOREWORD: EMBRACE THE FOREVER- CHANGED WORKFORCE

Why, where, and how we work has changed forever. The world of work is almost unrecognizable. This is uncharted territory for many of us. Throw in five generations of people working together who have different backgrounds, different purposes, different expectations, different reasons for working; it's increasingly clear that work isn't returning to "the way it was." Leaders who resist this will struggle the most.

As Chief People Officer for a Fortune 500 fintech company with 65,000+ colleagues globally, it's my job to stay on top of people trends and labor markets and to guide the company with our workforce top of mind. It's my job to anticipate and deliver what we need to cultivate a culture of excellence, attract and develop top talent, and protect our employees' well-being at a time of unprecedented stresses. This is not an easy feat in a "normal" world of work, and we're experiencing anything but.

Like you, I live it every single day – the uncertainty, the rapid change, the disruption. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I'd see the day when our entire company would shift to remote work and then face the challenge of getting them to come back to the office. Never did I think the war for talent would be this extreme. Never did I think the meaning of leadership would change so drastically. Yet here we are.

When FIS hosted its annual in-person gathering of its top leaders after two years of virtual working, we needed a dynamic speaker who could give us an honest and

almost hard-to-believe view into the changing world of leadership and the future of work – and have the data to back it. Jaws dropped when Heather McGowan presented startling real-life examples of the world we work in today. She shared data that made our leaders sit up and take notice.

The pandemic has caused workplace and worker trends to accelerate. The balance of power has shifted right before our eyes. But you already know these things as leaders. You're operating under extreme circumstances. You're dodging the curve balls. You're planning for the next shoe to drop. You're ready to make a change and lead into the future.

Heather has teamed up again with Chris Shipley to document these seismic shifts and in this book connects so many dots about the new workforce that is evolved, empowered, and exhausted. *The Empathy Advantage: Leading the Empowered Workforce* is as close to a “leading in this new work era playbook” as you'll get. In it you will find real solutions for addressing what no leader has likely experienced before. And it all starts with one behavior: empathy.

People are coping with years' worth of grief, trauma, stress, anxiety, burnout, uncertainty, change fatigue, exhaustion. Mental acuity is harder to achieve when you're dealing with all these emotional roadblocks. Empathy is the new must-have leadership trait – and it doesn't come naturally for everyone.

Over four decades, I have learned that leadership is not a position or title. It's a way of thinking, acting, and behaving. We need to work harder to understand what it might be like to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. And then we have to be flexible enough to change and to make ourselves uncomfortable if that's what it takes to bring out the best in our people.

People have choices. Many, many choices. We're seeing droves of people call it quits just because they can. We're seeing people making drastic career changes because they can. We're seeing people taking pay cuts to work for companies with a higher purpose and aligned values because they can. Nothing is holding them back.

There's a reason as FIS's Chief People Officer, we talk about “The FIS People Strategy.” It's every bit as vital to business success as a product or operations strategy. Leaders need to double down on purpose and human-centric leadership. We need to develop new ways to put people first and keep them there, so they return the favor ten-fold in their performance. Building a high-performing team doesn't happen

overnight. It starts with a shared sense of purpose – teams want belonging and to feel connected to a unified purpose.

The most successful leaders will be those who embrace the forever-changed workforce and become the adopters of the new reality where talent demands empathy. Workers have broken out of the box. It's time leaders break out of the box too. We will never work again the way we did before. Embrace the change. Shift your mindset. Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Show your people you care – that you're human. The results will be exponentially better when it's a two-way street.

Organizations that do not make efforts to adapt to the changing workforce are at risk of losing talent, which is insanely hard to find and retain these days, and opportunities for growth. And you know what happens without growth.

I keep coming back to something Heather told our leaders. She said that even with all that's going on in the world, if we focus on the fundamentals, we'll be OK.

—Denise Williams
Chief People Officer, FIS

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It is Labor Day 2022, which seems an apt occasion to acknowledge the work of so many people that has gone into this book. Writing a book is usually a labor of love, but on some days it's just a heavy lift. We are eternally grateful to our wives, family, and friends who encouraged us on both the great days and the days that were a bit more of a slog. Pat Coryell, the Gulfport Gang, P-town Pals, her Roslindale Buddies, and her family were firmly in Heather's corner and have been extremely helpful in an extraordinary time. Nancy Latta, The Bubs, The Boyz, The Dees, The CKathys, The Sunderlanders, The Sonomans, and The Belmont Girls provided just enough goading to keep Chris pushing on. And, of course, Zippy and Koa kept watch over the entire process. We could not have done this without so much support.

We are both graced with amazing professional networks that serve as adjunct researchers and scouts as we do our work. Heather is grateful to her speaking agents and event managers, her Impact Eleven partners and community, the reliable and dogged researcher Kath Cote, and a special shout-out to Melissa Kang, "Manage-her" extraordinaire, who made sure Heather completed this book against the backdrop of considerable challenges. Chris has been quietly encouraged and cheered on by the writers and thinkers of Silicon Guild, especially Peter Eagle Sims and Leslie Blodgett. And she is especially grateful to her colleagues at Constituent Connection and C/R Strategy Partners for giving her the time and space to write away the summer.

We are grateful to the business leaders who gave us insights into their organizations and provide outstanding examples of leadership in this new era. Denise Williams provided beautiful context in her foreword. Manak Ahluwalia, Cynthia Bentzen-Mercer, Terry Young, Kristin Cohen, Annalie Killian, and Rob Anderson all pulled back the curtain on their businesses to reveal modern leadership.

We hope this book will also trigger your curiosity and encourage you to dig deeper into the work of Laura Spinney, Anthony Klotz, Margaret Heffernan, Michael Leiter, Mark Crowley, Roger Martin, Jamil Zaki, Roger Hurni, Peter Sheahan, Dave Gray, David Allison, Liz Weaver, Simon Wardley, Ocean Tomo, Laura Park, Joshua Acosta, Alison Levine, Cassandra Worthy, Peter Sheahan, and the many other business leaders who have shared their ideas, concerns, feedback, and encouragement as we developed this book. We learned so much from each of you and have so much gratitude for your generosity of knowledge, insight, and time.

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These pages are filled with concise and engaging graphics, in large measure the work of infographics designer Jericho Rivera at <https://craftyflux.com>

Finally, we are grateful for our writing partnership. The summer of 2022 was marked by many challenges, not the least of which was producing a manuscript in record time. This collaboration, rooted in friendship and – it must be said – *empathy*, is the rare partnership that could get it done.

INTRODUCTION: DISCOVER THE NEW NORMAL OF WORK

On a balmy early summer's evening in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 16 business leaders gathered for dinner to talk about their challenges attracting and retaining great workers. They represented every type and stage of business. Mid-career entrepreneurs to late-career executives. Advanced technology and financial services companies. Civil servants and academic researchers. No matter the specific work, they shared the same concern with Chris: their workforce is caught up in an eddy of change; how might they possibly lead it?

Halfway around the world in Hamburg, Germany, the executive ranks of a global maritime shipping company huddled in rapt attention to hear Heather explain how and why their post-pandemic workforce was so transformed. They, too, were wrestling with the seemingly overnight shifts that were affecting every aspect of their business and especially their leadership. How might they, too, adapt to remain effective leaders for their evolving and now empowered workforce?

In both rooms, the feeling of stress and uncertainty was palpable, as it is in boardrooms, executive suites, and management meetings across the globe. We know, because we have had a privileged seat at those tables, talking with, learning from, and hearing the very real concerns of leaders at every level who sense that the post-Covid world of work has changed dramatically from its pre-pandemic form. They are not sure what to do about it.

Well, here's the deal: that uncertainty is real. So, friend, breathe deeply, roll your shoulders, take another deep breath, and let yourself get comfortable being