

PATRICK NELSON

FRONT★LINE

LEADERSHIP

HOW TO ELIMINATE COMPLACENCY
AND BUILD ALL-IN ENGAGEMENT

WILEY

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For Shanna and my four Hs—you are my everything.

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>		<i>xi</i>
Part I	Leading Yourself	1
Chapter 1	Discover and Ignite Your Purpose	3
	Purpose Is Your Journey, Not Your Job	6
	Proactively Pursuing Opportunities	6
	Committing to Your Path	9
	Changing Your Course	11
	Handling Adversity While Finding Your Purpose	15
	Your Challenge	18
Chapter 2	Embracing a Growth Mindset	19
	Understanding Your Own Expectations	22
	Managing Your Reactions	24
	Growing Through Who You Know	27
	Your Challenge	30
Chapter 3	Practicing Resilience	31
	Getting Bad News	33
	Holding Space and Emotional Intelligence	36
	Surrounding Yourself with the Right People	39
	Maintaining Perspective	42
	Your Challenge	46

Chapter 4	Continuous Improvement	47
	Learning While Working	50
	Seeking Out New Opportunities	53
	Transitioning Development Is an Ongoing Journey	55
	Being SMART About Setting Goals	58
	Your Challenge	60
Part II	Leading Teams	61
Chapter 5	Leading by Example	63
	Incoming!	66
	Setting the Example	71
	Putting It into Practice	75
	Your Challenge	77
Chapter 6	Service-Based Leadership	79
	Willingness to Learn	81
	Leading Alongside People	83
	Building Authentic Relationships	84
	Having Difficult Conversations	87
	Intimidating People Isn't Leading Them	90
	Your Challenge	91
Chapter 7	Motivating Others	93
	What Is Motivation?	95
	Meet Greg	96
	Getting Back in the Fight	98
	Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation	100
	Driven by Values	103
	How Motivation Works	108
	Your Challenge	109

Contents		ix
Chapter 8	The Art of Delegation	113
	Delegating to Grow	115
	Why Delegate?	117
	Challenges to Delegating	119
	How to Delegate Effectively	121
	Your Challenge	125
Part III	Leading the Culture	129
Chapter 9	Creating a Culture of Accountability	131
	Learning the Hard Way	134
	Forward-Looking Accountability	136
	Taking Accountability in the Heat of the Moment	138
	Guiding Principles of Accountability	142
	Rolling with a Culture of Accountability	145
	Your Challenge	148
Chapter 10	Building a Positive Workplace Culture	151
	Why a Positive Workplace Culture Matters	153
	When a Workplace Culture Has Problems	155
	When a Workplace Culture Works Well	156
	How to Make a Difference	158
	The Power of Respect and Recognition	160
	Your Challenge	166
Chapter 11	Engaging and Empowering Others to Lead Cultural Change	169
	Engage and Empower	171
	Iron Fist	173
	Turning the Culture Around	175
	Working Together	178
	Case Studies	181
	Shifting a Safety Culture	183
	Your Challenge	185

Chapter 12	Making a Difference	187
	Part I: Leading Yourself	189
	Part II: Leading the Team	190
	Part III: Leading the Culture	192
	Your Journey	193
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>195</i>
	<i>About the author</i>	<i>197</i>
	<i>Index</i>	<i>199</i>

Introduction

When I was growing up, most people did not look at me and think “Man, that kid is going places!” Except maybe to jail. Thankfully, some people saw potential in me and encouraged me to do better and to be better. They helped transform me from being one of the last people you would associate with the idea of leadership to someone who is now helping entire organizations successfully transform their leadership culture. In this book I want to share the lessons of how I grew my leadership skills and how you can grow yours, too. To take that journey together, let’s go back and start at the beginning.

I grew up in a small town in rural Minnesota. And when I say “small town,” I mean no stop lights, no movie theater, no McDonalds. If you were driving through and blinked, you might miss the town altogether. I certainly was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth. By the time I was 12 years old, I had lived in seven different trailers/apartments/houses, often having to share a small room with my three brothers. It wasn’t great, but it could have been worse. My mother and my stepfather both worked to provide for us, but they didn’t make much money, and we often went without.

I enlisted in the active Army soon after high school, and this is where I cultivated my core leadership skills and behaviors. I went on to serve for nearly 7 years (6 years, 10 months, and 22 days, but who's counting?) as a paratrooper in the historic 173rd Airborne Brigade based out of Vicenza, Italy. I deployed a total of three times between Iraq and Afghanistan for a total of 39 months in combat.

As I was finishing my military service, I went to college and earned two master's degrees while also embarking on a journey that ultimately led to my career as a leadership consultant and speaker.

I have been shaped into the leader that I am today by the sum of all of my experiences, my successes, and especially my failures—I'm a big believer in learning from your mistakes. In this book I will share with you the lessons that I have learned through my stories, many of which still feel like they happened yesterday. The sounds, the smells, the taste—they are as vivid now as they ever were.

I also would not be here today without those who believed in me. From a difficult childhood, to serving in the Army and being wounded in combat, to battling addiction and trying to find a purpose in life, many people have impacted me greatly. It is an honor to share their legacies with you.

Being a Leader

As someone who cut their teeth in one of the best leadership laboratories in the world, the United States Army, I firmly believe that you do not need to be the boss or be in charge of people to be a leader. The military is one of the most bureaucratic organizations

out there. We would wear our rank on our uniform every single day, and everyone knew exactly where they stood in the hierarchy of command. Yet you could still find leaders at even the lowest levels, and they were not in charge of anything. They embraced the military definition of a leader, which is not about your rank or title. It's someone who inspires others and influences outcomes, which is known as front-line leadership.

Now in the civilian world, I enjoy leading leadership development workshops, and one exercise I like to do is to have team members design a perfect leader (as if one ever existed). Take a minute to think about what qualities you want in a leader. I imagine it includes things such as being a good listener, having empathy, motivating people, holding themselves accountable, leading by example, being credible, and so on. I've yet to see someone describe their perfect leader as being the boss or being in charge of people. And the reason people don't name those things is because leadership is about the behaviors that a person demonstrates. You do not need to be the official boss to be a good listener, and you don't need to be in charge of people to lead by example. You could be a new employee at your first job and be one of the most empathetic people in your organization. I firmly believe anyone can develop leadership skills and behaviors with the right knowledge and experience.

Using This Book

This book is written for leaders at all levels, from the future leaders who feel a stirring inside of them to make things better but are not sure what to do, to those who have led teams and organizations for years and are looking for inspirational and practical ways to continue to engage their people.

In these pages, I will take you on a journey through some of my greatest failures, challenges, and ultimately successes in both the military and civilian worlds. These are augmented by lessons from working closely with a wide range of organizations in helping them shift their cultures. These experiences have helped me develop a leadership philosophy that is positive, practical, and actionable. Best of all, anyone can use it to become a better leader.

This book is organized in three main parts:

- Part I: Leading Yourself
- Part II: Leading the Team
- Part III: Leading the Culture

If you expect others to follow you, you obviously need to be able to lead yourself first. This first part of the book will give you practical tips that will help you increase your self-awareness, embrace a growth mindset, learn how to more effectively manage your emotions during times of stress and change, and how to persevere better through adversity.

The second part of the book will examine ways in which you can help better lead teams. You'll learn how to help meet the needs of others, lead by example, motivate your team, and delegate in a way that promotes trust and growth.

The third part of the book provides stories, tips, and techniques for shaping organizational culture. These chapters will focus on developing a culture of accountability, the importance and ways in which we recognize and reward people, and how we can take all of this to truly empower our people to do great things.

My hope is that you find inspiration in these pages through the challenges that I have faced and overcome. However, that inspiration cannot just live in the moment. Please take the practical tips that I share to help you navigate your own challenges. I would love to hear how they help you, so please don't hesitate to reach out to me at patrick@loyaltypointleadership.com.

PART

1

Leading Yourself

Leading yourself is a profound journey of self-awareness, discipline, and continuous growth. In this first part of the book, we're going to explore key topics that serve as building blocks for enhancing your leadership skills and propelling you to new levels of effectiveness. By delving into these foundational aspects, you'll gain valuable insights that contribute to your development as a more adept and impactful leader.

CHAPTER

1

**Discover and Ignite Your
Purpose**

Everyone's lives changed on the Tuesday morning of September 11, 2001. Whether you were getting ready for school, at the office, or not even born yet, the world was never going to be the same after that day. The innocence of years past was shattered as we watched the tragedy unfold live on television. This became a defining moment for many of us—a moment that helped me discover and ignite my purpose.

On September 11, 2001, I was in the third week of my first semester at a small community college in rural Minnesota. I didn't have the type of family that encouraged me to go to college. They didn't take me on college visits, help me fill out applications, or submit financial aid forms. I had to do it all myself. I had barely graduated high school, and with no real direction in life, I started skipping classes that very first week. As far as college was concerned, I wasn't on the fast track to success.

As I watched the events of 9/11 unfold on the television before me, I felt those same feelings that most of us felt—helplessness, sorrow, and anger. I knew I had to do something. I couldn't just sit idly by as our country was getting ready to go to war with those responsible.

I visited the Army recruiter's office the day after the attack, but they were closed. I came back the next day and told them that I wanted to enlist in the active Army. At that time I was a member of the Minnesota National Guard, but I knew the National Guard would not be the first ones called up, if at all. Little did I know that the prolonged Global War on Terror would see numerous National Guard units deploy multiple times to combat zones and many National Guard soldiers pay the ultimate sacrifice. The challenges that I faced as a child helped fuel my

desire to achieve more in life and I think even gave me a leg up on others as I began my active-duty military career.

Purpose Is Your Journey, Not Your Job

I was only 18 when that defining moment happened that set me on a journey driven by purpose. But that journey has been filled with many ups and downs, twists and turns—many times where I had to rediscover and shift my purpose as I grew older. Though the stories I share in this chapter will be different than your specific situation, the principles I outline still apply, and when put into practice they can help you discover and ignite your purpose.

When I think of purpose, I think of the sense of having meaning and fulfillment, the idea that what I do in life—whether it's my personal life or professional life—is bringing me joy and making a difference. That purpose is different for everyone. Does that mean that your day-to-day job is always going to define what your purpose is? Of course not. One of my best friends since I was a kid, Bruce Koepp, works full-time at the local soybean processing plant in our small town in rural Minnesota. He likes his job, but that doesn't mean it defines who he is and or what his bigger purpose is. He knows that it is part of the process. You see, Bruce's purpose is farming. He loves it. But farming is tough and his full-time job allows him the benefits he needs to support his family while also pursuing his passion.

Proactively Pursuing Opportunities

Do you ever feel stuck? Like you're just going through the motions day in and day out? You don't have to. You can