

A LEADERSHIP FABLE



THE

# Stargazer

UNLEASHING THE  
BRILLIANCE  
OF BUILDING  
BRIGHTER TEAMS

Katie P. Desiderio *and* Michael G. Frino

Bestselling Authors of *The Beekeeper*

WILEY



## Praise for *The Stargazer*



“Once in a great while, an author captures your heart and head with poignant lessons about life and leadership. Michael and Katie have scored twice! In their new book *The Stargazer*, the reader travels through the magic and wonders of the universe while exploring life lessons and reflections on the implications of how vast our potential is for interconnectedness. For educators, the implications for transfer to instructional leadership are significant. A must read for all who wander and wonder.”

—**Kari Montgomery,**

*Executive Director of Teaching and Learning*

“A captivating read that inspires and serves as a guiding hand for leaders on their journey toward success. Through compelling anecdotes and ‘Be mindsets,’ *The Stargazer* encourages readers to reframe their thinking while identifying both areas of strength and areas of potential growth. Most of all, *The Stargazer* provides leaders with an understanding of how to build their own ‘star systems’ and lead with a strong network and support system surrounding them. *The Stargazer* is a must-read for anyone

looking to sharpen their leadership skills and build brilliant, shining star teams.”

—**Liz Elting,**  
Wall Street Journal *Bestselling Author, CEO,*  
*and Philanthropist*

“*The Stargazer* is a beacon for leaders aspiring to cultivate radiant, high-performing teams. It offers invaluable insights into harnessing the collective brilliance of individuals to achieve extraordinary results. Most importantly, it reminds us that as leaders we must always focus on storytelling and encouraging our teams to also share in these stories because ultimately it is always about the power of We.”

—**Geoffrey M. Roche,**  
*North America Director, Workforce Development,*  
*Siemens Healthineers*

“*The Stargazer* weaves together everything we know about leadership and team development: self-reflection, learning, curiosity, clarity, shared purpose, and more. Nuggets of wisdom and learning are as brilliant and plentiful as the stars themselves.”

—**Marci Lesko,**  
*CEO, United Way*

“Enticing, informing, and motivating. . . educational but also heartwarming. Introspection, understanding one’s own motivations translated into purpose comes alive with a main character who is easy to identify with quickly. *The Stargazer* translates well known effective principles into digestible and memorable models that help everyone

become more effective in his or her professional and personal lives. Enjoy!”

—**Dr. Allen Weiss,**  
*Chief Medical Officer, Blue Zones Project*

“*The Stargazer* brilliantly illuminates the path to building brighter, more resilient teams. Through its captivating fable, the book demonstrates how leaders can cultivate an environment of growth, collaboration, and shared purpose. It’s a must-read for anyone committed to unleashing the full potential of their team and leading with intentionality and heart.”

—**Tony Martignetti,**  
*Chief Inspiration Officer, Inspired Purpose Partners,*  
*and Author of*  
*Campfire Lessons for Leaders*

“*The Stargazer* is a quick but powerful read that will make you stop, reflect, and think. Katie and Michael pull you into a story filled with valuable lessons and insights to help you unite your team. This book is a must-read if you aspire to be a better leader or more supportive teammate.”

—**Aaron Burton,**  
*CEO, Sciton*

“Incorporating stargazing and outdoor experiential learning is brilliant. It’s amazing what we can learn about ourselves and others when we disconnect in the outdoors and put ourselves in the present moment, but even more amazing how it positively impacts our personal and professional lives. The COMPASS framework is brilliant

and a tool all leaders can leverage to navigate their teams up the trail to their summit of growth and development.”

—**Dan Carusi,**

*President, Red Paint Consulting*

“There is brilliance in these pages. Desiderio’s and Frino’s message is profound: As individuals, the lens we choose determines what we see. When we choose to demonstrate care, competence, consistency, and commitment to ourselves and those around us, we build a star system that enables each individual to shine brighter. With the proper mindset, we can achieve personal and organizational growth.”

—**David Robinson,**

*EVP, Human Resources and General Counsel, ArtSkills Inc.*

“The beauty of nature and the universe holds deep meaning in our lives. In this compelling fable, Katie and Michael gently reveal valuable lessons for every leader. As they guide us on a journey of reconnection with timeless truths, they help us align not only ourselves but also our teams and organizations, like stars in a brilliant constellation. This book is a warm and inspiring guide, lighting the way to more thoughtful, impactful leadership.”

—**Ximena Duran,**

*Business Relationship Manager, Grupo GOCA*

“Stargazer is not just a beautiful story about the importance of self-discovery; it is about how we can help others shine, appreciate those who help us too, and understand ourselves as a community that can grow and create. It is about building something much bigger by seeing ourselves as a

team. Thank you for this fable that teaches us to learn and unlearn. By looking through the stars, we discover how great and bright we can be, and understand the value of the elements that always enrich and nurture us.”

—**Luis Fernando,**

*Director of Strategy, Grupo GOCA*

“Stargazer could simply be an engaging read. Or, more likely, it subtly layers lesson after lesson for the reader, where the reader can choose to reconsider what it means to grow, to change, to succeed with and through others, and perhaps most importantly, what it means to experience a personal transformation.”

—**Dr. Bill Schaninger,**

*Partner, Modern Executive Solutions;*

*Speaker and Author*

“*The Stargazer* is an inspiring leadership fable that beautifully intertwines the wonders of the night sky with the journey of personal and professional growth. Grayce’s transformation, guided by her mentor Catherine, is a testament to the power of choosing your lens each day and the importance of having a supportive ‘star system’ in one’s life. The narrative is both engaging and thought-provoking, offering practical lessons on how to cultivate curiosity, resilience, and connectedness. This book is a must-read for anyone looking to ignite their inner brilliance and lead with empathy and innovation.”

—**Thomas C Murray,**

*Director of Innovation, Future Ready Schools,*

*ASCD Bestselling Author*

“In *The Stargazer*, Katie Desiderio and Michael Frino, the bestselling authors of *The Beekeeper*, once again craft a compelling fable that delves into the dynamics of high-functioning teams and the critical roles of key individuals in driving success. Written in a style reminiscent of Patrick Lencioni, Desiderio and Frino narrate the powerful story of Jack, who embarks on a quest for meaning in both his personal life and business endeavors. Through Jack’s journey, the authors illustrate how the insights he gains can be applied to corporate team-building retreats. This book is essential reading for any CEO aiming to cultivate a high-performing team.”

—**Dr. Bryon Grigsby,**

*President and Professor of English, Moravian College*

“*The Stargazer* masterfully weaves celestial metaphors to illustrate the transformative power of curiosity and learning. Readers will soon find themselves inspired or ‘star-kissed,’ embracing their ‘star system’ of friends, colleagues, and mentors as they critically reflect on their own experiences to better navigate life’s challenges and uncover profound meaning in every opportunity that comes their way.”

—**Dr. David Kopp,**

*Author, Speaker CAMPUS.EDU*

“Grayce, a character from the bestselling *The Beekeeper*, has become a pollinator. She is successfully spreading growth and enlightenment; she is being proximal. Inspired by the ‘Be mindsets,’ this new fable from Katie and Mike details the leadership journey of a small business owner. Jack learns to embrace the lessons from the stars and the stones to dramatically alter the trajectory of his small winery.

An engaging story set in the vineyards and rugged terrain of northern California, this is a natural continuation of the shared leadership lessons that can be learned and adopted by anyone.”

—**Dr. Larry Ross,**

*Professor Emeritus, Barnett School of Business, Florida  
Southern College*

“Desiderio and Frino have done it again. Set this time on a corporate retreat, the story expertly exposes us to the secrets of building brilliance through harnessing collective strength. A must-read for all executives and managers who tend to their organization’s morale and efficacy. If you liked *The Beekeeper*, you will love *The Stargazer!*”

—**Michele Demsky,**

*President and CEO, ArtSkills Inc.*

“The use of narrative and fable makes *Stargazer’s* lessons accessible to a variety of audiences, from high school and college students to practicing business professionals. In its humanity—its encouragement to pursue learning and meaning through the mutual support required to achieve group goals—it strikes an implicit blow against the shareholder capitalism and profit maximization that has deformed our economy and society more generally.”

—**Galen Godbey,**

*Professor and Author*

“Yet again, Katie Desiderio and Michael Frino thread the needle for the perfect blend of storytelling and management science for an engaging read. *The Stargazer’s* principles through story show a unique perspective on how to magnify your

impact on your team and organization. This book allows you to read at your own pace, reflecting after each chapter to journal your key 'Be Brilliant' learnings. The authors show how Jack used what he learned with the COMPASS approach to apply these principles in a leadership retreat. This book would make for a great journal club with leaders in any organization."

—**Brian McGee,**

*Director of Sales, Boston Scientific*

"An enjoyable, educational, and thought-provoking story, with constant opportunities for reflection to benefit all aspects of our lives, not just for leaders but anyone who wants to be proximal. Be present, be vulnerable as you take in this motivating tale of personal reflection. May we all see challenges as opportunities for growth."

—**Karyn McClintick,**

*School Counselor, Central Dauphin Middle School*

"Desiderio and Frino did it again! *The Stargazer* is a thought-provoking read that can be used to encourage teams to embrace curiosity, build meaningful relationships, and strive for their own personal growth. It's a reminder that, like stars in the sky, we all have the ability to shine brightly when we step out of our comfort zone and reach out to connect with others. I highly recommend this book to anyone looking to embrace their sense of wonder, explore their purpose, or inspire those around them to do the same. I am so excited to use their newest fable to inspire our team!"

—**Tara Desiderio,**

*Public School Principal*

“*The Stargazer* captures its readers with charming characters that share profound leadership lessons in a relatable way. The story is compact but the lessons are vast. A must-read for all C-suite executives who care about organizational culture and staff development. I can’t wait to share this with my teams and watch the individual and collective learnings unfold.”

—**Dr. Nicole Loyd,**  
*EVP, COO and Dean of Students, Moravian University*

“Katie and Mike have done it again! Another *powerful* book that outlines the practical steps to take teams to new heights!”

—**Jon Alwinson,**  
*Sales Leader and Author of Relentless Sales*

“Being pollinated directly with *The Beekeeper* pushed the limits of my growth mindset. Now *The Stargazer* has aligned my COMPASS towards shining brighter with my own star network! May we all continue to be brilliant. Thank you, Katie and Michael!”

—**Dr. Dawn Sparks,**  
*Physician/Owner/Founder/Medical Director*

“*The Stargazer* is a must-read for any team wanting a transformative experience. The reflections in the story are ones that have the potential to take your team from ordinary to brilliant. The messages are meaningful, thought-provoking, and profound. After reading this book, you will feel compelled to create your very own star system: a system of people who light up your life, help you illuminate things you may not see, and create a picture of what is and what could be.”

—**Dr. Monica Law,**  
*Professor of Management*

“*The Stargazer* is an inspiring story, and a must-read for any leader who wants to captivate their team while taking them to the next level of productivity. As a CEO and founder of an employee benefits company I encourage everyone to read this book; there is not one person who would not relate and be inspired. Katie and Michael have outdone themselves.”

—**Tony DaRe,**  
*CEO, BSI Corporate Benefits*

“Another masterpiece by Katie Desiderio and Michael Frino, *The Stargazer* uses the power of storytelling to inspire readers to embark on their own journeys of personal growth. Katie and Mike’s work has not only inspired readers like myself to reevaluate my focus and approach as a leader but has also provided practical strategies to leverage the strengths and abilities of the teams I lead. *The Stargazer* is more than just a book—it is a guide for anyone looking to transform their leadership practices, foster team collaboration, and build a brighter future.”

—**Melanie Fike,**  
*Senior Director, Professional Learning and  
Instructional Resources*



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# Preface

When our first book, *The Beekeeper: Pollinating Your Organization for Transformative Growth*, became a *Wall Street Journal* Business Bestseller in 2023, we were amazed by its impact on people, teams, and organizations.

As first-time authors, the energy from our star system fueled the creation of this second book. From scribbled chapter names on a dinner menu to research at wolf sanctuaries, on trails, and with astronomers, a fable emerged about unleashing the brilliance of building brighter teams.

During a spring equinox visit to our publisher, we reviewed a contract for two more leadership fables. Fast forward, one year later, we celebrate this day of happiness with the launch of *The Stargazer: Unleashing the Brilliance of Building Brighter Teams*. Will you join us in shining brighter, together?



# Prologue

## **Starkissed**

Grayce had always been a stargazer, but only recently had she truly felt starkissed. Ever since she met her friend Catherine, her life was different. It was Catherine who had nurtured Grayce and helped her learn to be proximal – to place herself at the center of her own growth and that of the people around her. She taught Grayce how “Be mindsets” could change the way she looked at the world and also provide a roadmap for areas of personal growth.

Grayce knew she’d always had a tendency to be curious, but she hadn’t been enacting this as an actual mindset. Catherine helped Grayce understand what it meant to identify the mindsets that were her greatest strengths and also explore the mindsets that didn’t come naturally, where she might need a growth partner or someone to support her.

Grayce found such a growth partner in Catherine, who had a passion for beehives and how the lessons of pollinators could help people become more fulfilled in their lives. Catherine inspired Grayce to get out of her comfort zone and become a “Be Keeper” and really demonstrate what it meant to place herself at the core of learning and growth,

or in other words, how to Be Proximal. Grayce took this seriously and decided to own her Be mindsets and went on a journey to pollinate others, just as Catherine had pollinated her. Grayce wanted to share this message with others and show up with the Be mindsets that could help them grow. At the core she would have the Be mindset to Be Proximal, but her other strengths were to Be Curious, Be Bright, Be Reflective, and Be Connected.

A network of people helped her determine how she could be a pollinator. Her network included Catherine, who she felt was a growth partner for her; her father, who was always a source of wisdom; and her principal at the school where she'd worked for eight years. She also had her best friend, Karyn, who knew every last detail about her since they were kids, and her older sister, who could not be more supportive and encouraging. She called these five people in her life her star system. This group of individuals lit up her life, helped illuminate things she might not see, and created a picture of what was and what could be. Without Grayce's star system, she would not have experienced the fulfillment and happiness she felt today. Thanks to her star system, Grayce felt truly blessed and starkissed. Her focus would now be to place herself at the core of learning and growth both for herself and for others – in her full-time job as a teacher, her volunteer work at the state park, and her daily experiences with everyone she met.

CHAPTER

1



*Starstruck*