

Awakening

— THE —

Leader Within

A Story of Transformation

KEVIN CASHMAN

with Jack Forem



JOHN WILEY & SONS, INC.

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— THE —
Leader Within

What People Are Saying About *Awakening the Leader Within . . .*

Awakening the Leader Within is definitely a major breakthrough. Each chapter creates an engaging opportunity for personal introspection and professional breakthrough. The potential power to authentically link your personal values and beliefs to your leadership style is at your fingertips in this book.

—Chuck Feltz, *President, Deluxe Financial Services, Inc.*

Awakening the Leader Within's lessons on authenticity and leadership are outstanding. Cashman's pragmatic approach to helping leaders align with the principles of openness, honesty and integrity are worth the price of the book alone.

—Rob Hawthorne, *former President and CEO, OceanSpray; former President, The Pillsbury Company*

Awakening the Leader Within goes way beyond the typical business book focused on theory and concepts. It draws you into real-life situations and real-life business challenges and reveals the pathways to more authentic leadership.

—Janet Fiola, *Senior Vice President—Human Resources, Medtronic*

Awakening the Leader Within makes the critical connection between business conduct and personal authenticity. It also gives you great daily strategies you can use to immediately impact performance.

—Gregg Vandesteeg, *Executive Director—Research and Development, 3M Company*

Awakening the Leader Within is an exceptional and quite remarkable leadership book. It reads like a novel but has a practical power to change deeply those who have the courage to reassess their lives.

—Norman Walker, *Global Human Resources Head, Novartis*

Some of the world's great myths—the Grail King, Sleeping Beauty—teach that when the king or queen sleeps, those around them also sleep and the kingdom sleeps, but when they awaken, those around them also awaken and the kingdom flowers. Kevin Cashman's compelling and powerfully perceptive new book tells the story of how we as kings and queens can come to awaken, in the deepest sense, and by doing so can help the kingdom to flower. I recommend this book wholeheartedly.

—Gregg Levoy, *author of Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*

Awakening the Leader Within will help you break free from being a captive of your own success. If you want to grow as a person and awaken deeper levels of authenticity and purpose, then this is the book!

—James Behnke, *former Chief Technology Officer, The Pillsbury Company,
and President, International Life Sciences Institute*

Awakening the Leader Within is engaging and thought-provoking. It's the type of book I read with a highlighter in hand, marking sections and dog-eared pages as I go along.

—Marti Morfitt, President and CEO, CNS, Inc., *The Breathe Right® Company*

Awakening the Leader Within is an exceptional and rare business book! I was surprised how much I was drawn into the characters and equally shocked at how deeply it moved me. Once you take the transformative journey with Bensen and Kenji, you may awaken more than you expect.

—Jack Covert, President/Founder, 1-800-CEO-READ

Far from the typical business book that is boring while it is informing, *Awakening the Leader Within* is engaging while it is inspiring. How Cashman leverages the power of a story to create a learning experience around enduring business and life principles is outstanding.

—William Scheurer, Director, Carlson School of Management, Executive Development Center

Today's leaders are searching for a new sense of ethical consciousness. *Awakening the Leader Within* instills hope by showing us a way to live and lead that integrates authenticity with great business results. It does a great job sorting through the confusion about what is required for real leadership in these times of turmoil.

—Jim Secord, former CEO of Lakewood Publications, Publishers of Training Magazine

Experiencing this book is equivalent to stepping into a clearing and seeing your shadows—your dark shadows and golden shadows—in a more enlightened perspective and then continuing your journey to authentic leadership.

—Cliff Eslinger, Senior Vice President, Spherion—Human Capital Consulting Group

Awakening the Leader Within is an imaginative, soul-enriching book. It invites busy, successful people to connect with their own deepest purpose, enriching their work and every aspect of their life with the authentic, creative power at the core of their being. This book helps cultivate the habits and skills we all need in order to live good and decent lives in this time of great global change.

—Br. Dietrich Reinhart, OSB, President, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota

After Enron and WorldCom, business leaders are challenged as never before to measure up. If you don't want to fall short, read *Awakening the Leader Within*, an essential, innovative guide to leading with responsibility and gaining authenticity, integrity and reassuring purpose in life.

—Stephen B. Young, Global Executive Director, The Caux Round Table

Awakening the Leader Within is a real wake-up call to leaders at all levels. Whether you are a young, emerging leader or a more mature leader, use this book to find your purpose—it will transform how you lead and how you live.

—Kurt Mueller, President, Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation

Leading from the soul—read the story of Bensen and Kenji and you will never forget their lessons.

—Judith S. Corson, Co-Founder and former President, Custom Research, Inc.,
Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award Winner

In this gripping story of an executive in crisis, Kevin Cashman uncovers and illustrates essential principles for long-lived effectiveness of leaders. Our world is in great need of leaders who lead from depth of character. *Awakening the Leader Within* will inform and encourage many.

—David Wessner, President and CEO, Park Nicollet Health Services

Whether you're a seasoned or an emerging leader, this book will speak to your soul. I guarantee you will be inspired!

—Richard J. Leider, Founding Principal, The Inventure Group, and
bestselling author of *Repacking Your Bags* and *Whistle While You Work*

Our professional work with executive coaching and employee engagement has taught us that coaching is indeed one of the most powerful ways to develop leaders. *Awakening the Leader Within's* captivating story creates a living example of the transformational power of coaching and makes this book an essential tool for any business leader.

—Cindy Rodahl, Vice President of Human Resources, Carlson Marketing Group

Awakening the Leader Within is an engaging, riveting, impactful experience. It will take you on a personal journey to reconnect with what is really important in your work and in your life.

—Scott Peterson, Senior Vice President, Life Time Fitness, Inc.

Awakening the Leader Within put me in the most reflective place I've been in years! As Cashman weaves the story of Bensen Quinn, you will experience deeper levels of yourself and broader ways to contribute value. Whether you are an experienced executive or an up-and-coming manager, listen to the many "wake-up calls" in this book!

—Richard Hynes, Senior Vice President, Alberto Personal Care Worldwide, Alberto-Culver

Awakening the Leader Within is unlike typical business books, which engage the head, but miss the heart. It seeks deeper change, engaging you on an emotional level and making it impossible to ignore the personal implications of leadership.

—Linda Sorrell, Senior Vice President, Talent Strategy, Diageo

In today's pressure-charged, ever-changing world, the need to locate something deeper and more enduring has never been greater. *Awakening the Leader Within* will help you to navigate through this whitewater of change by applying principles that will guide your personal and professional journey.

—Stephen Shank, CEO and Founder, Capella Education Company,
and former Chairman and CEO, Tonka Corporation

Kevin Cashman is recognized as a leading authority on leadership. This book confirms why. *Awakening the Leader Within* is engaging and intriguing, but most importantly, it helps us to understand the significant contribution that each of us can make to the world.

—David McNally, bestselling author of *Even Eagles Need A Push* and coauthor of *Be Your Own Brand*

In *Awakening the Leader Within*, Kevin Cashman doesn't just point us down a path to authentic leadership; he expertly navigates new and verdant terrain, while enticing us to do the same.

—Linda J. Page, President, Adler School of Professional Coaching, Inc.

Awakening the Leader Within is a powerful and compelling story that forces readers to reevaluate their own personal and professional goals and priorities. Through the main character's search for authenticity and purpose and his eventual awakening, Kevin Cashman shares a simple yet complete blueprint for creating value in every facet of our lives.

—David Shadovitz, Editor in Chief, Human Resource Executive magazine

In *Awakening the Leader Within*, Cashman challenges us to take an honest look into our hand mirror by reflecting on life's deepest questions. His book inspires authenticity as it integrates our hearts and heads as leaders.

—James Ehlen, M.D., Chief, Clinical Leadership, Humana

Cultivating authentic leadership may be the most important component to create thriving, growing, sustainable organizations. *Awakening the Leader Within* gives you the practical tools to foster more genuine, purposeful leadership in your organization.

—Michael Howe, Executive Vice President and Chief Talent Officer, Allina Hospitals & Clinics

Awakening the Leader Within is a powerful, spellbinding story that will inspire you to change your life as you read it. The few hours you spend reading it will be some of the best time you've ever spent. It offers you a path to a rich exploration of your own values in action and a way to make needed adjustments that will enable you to make a bigger difference to your family, your company and your world.

—Kate Ludeman, Ph.D., CEO, Worth Ethic Corporation, and coauthor of *Corporate Mystic*

Awakening the Leader Within is an exceptional guide for exploring the essence of who you are and where you're going in life. It's especially valuable when you are navigating the truly challenging times.

—Dean Buresh, Executive Vice President, Bozell New York, an Interpublic Company

Awakening the Leader Within is the highly anticipated follow-up to *Leadership from the Inside Out*. Cashman's masterful storytelling takes you on another journey to further deepen your authenticity and contributions in the world.

—Craig Neal, Co-Founder, Heartland Institute

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

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ISBN 0-471-27319-8

Printed in the United States of America
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*Dedicated to the Awakened Leader
Who views leadership as a sacred calling
To make a life-enriching difference in the world.*



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The Journey to Awakening Starts Here . . .

For this is the journey that men make: to find themselves. If they fail to do this, it doesn't matter much what else they find.

—James Michener

Awakening the Leader Within chronicles a transformative journey to a new way of leading and a new way of living. It tells the story of the challenging odyssey we all travel as we attempt to bring together all the separate parts of our lives into a more meaningful whole. It is the hero's journey, an exploration into the wilderness of what is missing in our lives, followed by the triumphant return to all our life roles renewed with authenticity and purpose, prepared to make a genuine difference as a person, as a family member, and as a leader.

While the hero of our story, Bensen Quinn, is not a real person, *Awakening the Leader Within* is a true story. The journey Bensen makes is the journey all of us must make if we want to live a more meaningful life, a life that both is fulfilling to us and makes a substantial contribution to the wider communities in which we live.

The Crisis of Authenticity and Purpose

Many of the business, political, spiritual, and ethical dilemmas that we face today, in our personal and professional lives and as a nation, are symptomatic of a larger issue: a crisis of authenticity and purpose. The conspicuous absence of these qualities or principles leaves many of us craving more integrity, more substance, and more inspiration in our leaders . . . and in our own lives. In my 20-plus years of coaching senior executives, I have witnessed firsthand that being genuine, purposeful, and principled is the absolute bedrock on which character development, great leadership, and effective living rest.

Our main character, Bensen Quinn, painfully experiences the consequences of not authentically bringing forward all of who he is, and not fully living his values either at home or at work. Splitting off his behavior from what is important to him inevitably brings him down the road to career stagnation, disharmony and lack of fulfillment in his relationships, and a loss of meaningful contribution. Along with Bensen, you will take a new path, on the journey to awakening deeper dimensions of yourself and what you are passionate about.

Awakening the Leader Within closely examines the principles of authenticity and purpose, how they manifest themselves in the context of personal growth and leadership development, and why there is such a critical social need for more of these vital qualities. Bensen Quinn may be a fictitious character, but the experiences that he has on his journey to wholeness are drawn from countless similar experiences that I have seen real men and women undergo during personal coaching. When difficult and painful crises in his family and at work force him to look at his life—as we all must do in these challenging times—he finds himself facing his crisis of authenticity and purpose.

Like many people today, he is shocked to find that he cannot answer some of life's biggest and most important questions: Does my life have meaning? Am I truly making a difference? Is this the life I really want to live? Responding to his challenges and growing as a person, he also grows as a leader, becoming more authentic, more purposeful, more determined to add value to his community and to create a meaningful legacy.

Bensen is Everyman. His story is an inspiring portrayal of the great potential that so-called “ordinary” men and women have, to go way beyond what is, beyond “this is how we always do things,” beyond “it’s not our concern,” to create entirely new possibilities for themselves, for their families, and for humankind.

Leadership from the Inside Out

For the past two decades, since I founded the leadership development and executive coaching consultancy LeaderSource, I have had the privilege of working with hundreds of Chief Executive Officers and other top leaders throughout the world as their executive coach. Unlike that of many other consultancies in the field, LeaderSource’s work is not simply about skill building. It is about

personal growth and transformation. As the title of my last book expressed, I have witnessed the power of *Leadership from the Inside Out*. I have found that to become a more effective leader—in every area of life, whether business or government, coaching Little League, guiding a family, teaching a class, or simply leading our own lives in the direction we want to go—the key is to grow: to become a more real, complete person.

In my own work, relationships, athletic endeavors, or spiritual development, a commitment to personal growth is first and foremost, and it's what I aim for when I am coaching. You might find this a bit strange. After all, the people I work with every day are already the cream of the crop: highly successful and effective individuals. Yet, like all of us, they face plenty of tests and challenges, both at work and at home. My task is to help them grow so they can master new responsibilities, communicate more honestly and effectively, infuse warmth and trust into their relationships, or transition comfortably to new career and life options—and, in the process, find their own answers to those critical, hard-to-answer questions about life's meaning.

Wrestling with these life questions puts us all on an equal footing. Whether we happen to be a CEO or a stock clerk, the fundamentals of life are virtually the same for all of us: daily triumphs and heartaches, the frustration of succeeding magnificently in one area while falling on our face in another, health concerns, problematic relationships, the necessity of coping with tragedy and loss, the desire to make sense of our life, to be a good person, to leave the world a little better by virtue of our work and our interactions than we found it. Like Bensen Quinn, we can avoid these questions and concerns only so long before life demands some answers. Our response, if we rise to the challenge, is our pathway to growth and transformation.

In our coaching at LeaderSource, I've noticed that exceptionally difficult or traumatic events tend more to reveal character than to build it. It is precisely this process of rising to the occasion that allows us to access the depths of who we are. As we do so, new potentialities, new energies, new passions are activated for us in all parts of our lives.

Fortunately, trauma is not the only pathway to this kind of growth. Skilled guidance and coaching can lead us to our deepest potentialities without our having to pass through painful difficulties to get there. *Awakening the Leader Within* is specifically designed as an interactive coaching experience to help awaken our latent capabilities, *before* life attempts to teach us these lessons in a much harsher manner.

Your Personal Coach

You are probably aware that coaching is an extremely fast-growing field. The benefits of working one on one with a qualified coach have become so apparent to leaders that it seems everyone who can afford it has a coach from time to time, or even a team of coaches: an athletic or physical trainer, a yoga teacher, a presentation or speaking consultant, and so on. Coaches help the excellent continue to excel. The top athletes in the world retain coaches to help them stay at the top of their game or pull out of a slump. Politicians and business leaders employ a bevy of consultants who advise them on everything, from policy to polls, from how to stand and move to the art of making eye contact, how to dress, and how to “hone their message.” In a rapidly changing business climate, CEOs and other top executives routinely call upon coaches to help them fine-tune their interpersonal effectiveness, enhance their communication style, and become more effective, authentic leaders.

It’s important to note that true leadership doesn’t reside merely in techniques, or in manipulating the circumstances in order to persuade people. It’s about showing up with our life story, with whatever the triumphs, sorrows, and joys in our lives have taught us is important, and integrating those experiences into our voice to serve others. When we speak from that authentic place in us, we will automatically touch the hearts and minds of people, remind them of what’s important, and catalyze them toward enriched vision and action.

This book is not about buffing up our image to look like a leader, nor does it tout career techniques for ascending to leadership roles: ***It’s about truly being a leader, by becoming a person of vision, integrity, effectiveness, compassion, and courage capable of acting wisely and well in all circumstances.*** As Ron James, CEO of the Center for Ethical Business Cultures and a former CEO at two major companies, put it, “Don’t read *Awakening the Leader Within* if you are only concerned with your personal success. Read it if you are ready to begin the journey to a higher calling and really make a difference in the world.”

New Leadership for a New World

In today’s world, leaders are being pressed to answer deeper and more demanding questions than ever before. Instead of simply focusing on questions of

profit and performance, we are now also being challenged to respond to questions of meaning and purpose, and not only for ourselves, but for our organizations. How can I bring my entire self into my work to make a bigger difference? Am I creating the legacy I want to be remembered for? Am I *really* living my values and purpose? What are the connections between personal growth and professional effectiveness? What is the purpose of business and its role in society? Are ethics just a nice thing to have if you can afford it, or are ethical behaviors essential for sustainable business performance?

Every day we see the devastating consequences of sacrificing character and principles on the altar of profit and results. They need to be brought together, and the point of intersection is the soul of the leader. Who is the *principal* in *principled* business leadership, anyway? This book will place you at the crossroads of business effectiveness, ethical dilemmas, and personal transformation, which all of us travel through each day. How well each of us navigates through that intersection will not only determine our quality of life, but it will eventually determine the quality of our organizations, our communities, and our world. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, “We must be the change we wish to see in the world.” In order to solve the array of problems facing us today, we must be the ones to change, to grow, to develop. *We must be the leaders of character we wish to see in the world.*

Enter the Awakened Leader

The most awakened leaders that I have met—those who have, through heightened self-awareness, gained mastery over themselves and, therefore, over their behavior and actions—invariably function less in terms of narrow self interest and more in terms of serving the greater good. This is a natural and spontaneous by-product of personal growth. One’s identity or sense of self expands to include a more intimate and sacred kinship with everyone and everything around.

When this quality emerges in powerful or influential leaders, the results can be phenomenal. Fired by their courage, capabilities, and principles, they aspire to produce more beneficial and evolutionary effects for the whole. They create new worlds. They do not live split lives, separating their personal life and their deepest values, desires, and beliefs from their professional or social lives, a

split that will create painful dilemmas for themselves and for the people in their lives. Instead, they bring their whole, integrated selves forward in the service of others.

Truly visionary leaders, who at one swoop can change the destiny of humankind, are not common. Nor are the “born leaders” who seem able to guide and influence other people almost effortlessly. But not falling into either of these rather exceptional categories is not a reason to refrain from taking action to become a better leader in your own sphere or assuming more of a leadership role in some area of your work or social life. *Awakening the Leader Within* opens the door for *all* people, in all positions or walks in life, to begin to make a much greater contribution to society.

The Power of Stories

While my last book, *Leadership From the Inside Out*, influenced many people, I wanted my next book to have an even greater impact, even more closely simulating the transformation that can occur during an authentic coaching experience. As I searched for a way to do this, a faint but persistent voice within me kept whispering, “Write a story . . . write a story. . . .” At first, I just didn’t listen. Then I dismissed the notion, saying to myself, “I’ve never written a story before.” Later, in a self-coaching moment, I asked myself, “Well, if you did write a story, what would it be?” Responding to the challenge, I sequestered myself with my dear friend and collaborator Jack Forem for four solid days. What rolled out of us over these intense, inspiring days was the outline of the story you are about to read.

Leaders and teachers have always used stories to capture our interest and attention. Stories have been the principal communication and teaching tool in every culture throughout the ages. From small bands of tribal peoples sitting around their evening fire telling and retelling stories about how the world came to be, to the Greeks and Romans spinning myths about the gods and goddesses, to Jesus teaching with parables, stories have had a central role in human life.

Stories get us out of our heads and into our hearts. We let down our guard and relax—and in that quiet, receptive mode, we are able to listen and become

open to insight. Stories plow the ground in preparation for the seed. They generate a wide range of emotions, and they inform and instruct us, often passing on dearly held values. Sometimes we tell stories to inspire others and to offer role models: “This is the way to live! Like the hero and heroine of this story: with courage, integrity, vision.” Stories may leave us awed by the vast, unfathomable mystery of life; paradoxically, they often help us grasp, in direct, nonanalytic, nonconceptual ways, what life—particularly our own life—is all about.

We all know how deadly a presentation can be without stories to bring it alive. I remember one executive who stood up in front of a large group of managers and rolled out “The Five Key Values of Our Organization” in a deadpan, unexpressive manner, his voice as flat and unemotional as if he were reading a shopping list: “One, two, three, four, five . . .” When he saw the managers looking back at him with glazed eyes, he figured they were not getting the message. “I guess I need to go over this again,” he said, and there was a nearly audible groan from the group. I could almost hear everyone’s thoughts: “We’ve heard all this before!” “This is such a waste of time!”

Another kind of leader will stand up to go over the same points, but he or she will say, with passion and feeling, “Let me tell you about Value One. This is something that’s become really important to me, but I didn’t understand it until one day when I was . . .” Suddenly the entire room wakes up. The audience is alert, listening, wanting to hear, and as the leader speaks, they’re projecting their own stories onto Value One, breathing more life into it.

Stories are the language of leadership. They touch the heart and help authentic leaders do what they do best: open up new possibilities, new visions and vistas, to help us go beyond what is. A good story, a compelling vision, awakens us to the possibility of being more of the person we know we can be and doing what we’ve never done before.

As stories are the language of leadership, *questions are the language of coaching.* By creating a pause—making us stop and think—questions require us to take a deeper look at ourselves and our lives. They help us to gain insights, make new commitments, and apply what we learn to our life and work. With stories and inquiry, both mind and heart are fully engaged, and transformation can begin. As the Irish poet and novelist James Stephens wrote, “I have learned that the head does not hear anything until the heart has listened, and what the heart knows today the head will understand tomorrow.”

Don't Read—Interact

Using the power of stories to open the heart and the power of questions to deepen understanding and commitment, *Awakening the Leader Within* is unique. The main body of the book is a story, to which I've added components to make it interactive. First, I've woven in powerful coaching questions at particularly poignant moments, to help you look at your life and learn from it, as Bensen Quinn is learning from his.

Then there is the Growth Guide at the end of the book. As engaging as you might find reading the story and responding to the coaching questions, I strongly encourage you to continue on to the Growth Guide. This is a workbook that you can use to structure a personalized plan based on the "Six Seeds of Growth," the name I have given to the main principles revealed in the story. Spending a little time with these exercises will solidify the gains you achieve from reading the book in a reflective way and will accelerate and sustain your progress. This completes the coaching experience.

The result: *This book is as close as you can get to a comprehensive personal coaching experience.* When I asked an executive coaching client of mine to read a draft of the manuscript and comment on it, he said, "It was less like a book and more like watching a film. I would get pulled into the story and then, at just the precise moment, you would come into the scene and ask me the perfect question to get me to make it real and relevant to my life."

We all have the noblest of intentions whenever we buy a book seeking to hone our skills or enhance our life in some way. But it usually requires tremendous motivation and self-discipline—and an abundance of time—to study and absorb the principles and, most importantly, to apply them all to our daily lives. The problem for most of us, most of the time, is that whatever inspired us to buy the book doesn't last; the energy to take our life to a higher level isn't sustained.

Awakening the Leader Within is different. By utilizing the interactive process—combining a meaningful and inspirational story with questions, reflections, and brief exercises—the book offers a chance to sustain the enthusiasm *and* do the work of applying it, in one easy and enjoyable flow.

Author Your Own Story

As you begin your journey through this book and beyond, I want to make clear that the story of Bensen Quinn is *one example* of the growth to greater authenticity and purpose. The last thing I want to do is to convey the message “This is the only way to do it” or “You should make the same decisions or follow the same path as Bensen in *your* life.” Bensen could have made other choices and found other ways to add value to his life, and still have aligned with his deeper truth.

Deeper than the story, then, the real message of this book is this: Take your own journey to authenticity and purpose, consistent with your values, principles, and life circumstances.

CEO for Life

Often when I speak, coach, or write about leadership, people assume that what I have to say is only directed at or applicable to the obvious leaders of the pack, the key or most senior players, the “bosses.” And yet many less senior employees often come up to me and say how much my book or my presentation spoke to them about their own need for greater authenticity and purpose in their private lives, their careers, or both. My response: “Regardless of your particular career role, you are the CEO of your life.”

Every decision or choice we make, as our own personal Chief Executive Officer, builds and creates our life and our legacy. At any moment, our life is the sum total of all the choices we’ve made. The joy and challenge of being the CEO of your life is that right now, at this moment, you have the power to make a choice that could change your life, and possibly the lives of many others, from this point forward. Of course, that choice would be different for each person. It might be about a relationship, your career, or self care. It might be a spiritual choice. But if you come from a place of greater authenticity, your choice will have a deeper, more positive, and perhaps even far-reaching impact.

Ashleigh Brilliant once wrote, “At any moment I could choose to be a better person—but which moment should I choose?” *Awakening the Leader Within* will give you many moments to choose a new way and forge a new path, to

bring your whole self into your work and into your life. Choose well as you take your journey to a more authentic, purposeful life.

If you would like to receive a *free* Awakening the Leader Within Discussion Group Guide to facilitate team building or general discussion groups, you can access it at www.leadersource.com. Just click on “books” and go to “Awakening the Leader Within” to download this helpful guide.

Executive Suite



At a quarter past four on Friday, Bensen Quinn, chairman and CEO of High-Quest, finally breaks free from putting out fires long enough to hold his twice-rescheduled Monday morning meeting with his top executives. Talk among the officers assembled in the boardroom ceases as Bensen steps through the double oak doors and takes his place at the head of the conference table.

“Gentlemen, Anne,” Bensen says matter-of-factly, greeting them all with a quick glance. “Shall we start by watching the video segment? I haven’t seen it yet.”

“I’ve got it queued up,” says Joe Northrup, VP for marketing.

“Roll it,” Bensen directs. “When did it run?” he asks as they all shift in their chairs to view the large screen.

“Yesterday morning. The stock price, as you probably know, is up about fourteen percent since then.”

“All right!” one of the execs calls out as they all applaud.

The lights dim and in a moment one of afternoon television’s leading financial pundits appears, with stock market tickers running along the bottom of the screen.

“Today’s edition of Corporate Profiles spotlights HighQuest,” says the talking head, with a quick cut to the HighQuest logo followed by a pan of the buildings at corporate headquarters. “The Connecticut-based sports apparel company has shown remarkable growth even through the recent sluggish economy and the epidemic of corporate accounting scandals. CEO Bensen Quinn:

“When I came to HighQuest about eighteen years ago as a young executive,” says the TV Bensen, “it was a small, specialty, niche company that made outdoor apparel for hikers and campers. I felt we had a shot at a much broader market, and I pushed hard to expand the product line to include clothing with wide market appeal at a reasonable price. At the same time, through R&D, we perfected our high-end products.”

Amused at watching himself on screen, Bensen stretches his six-foot frame and relaxes into the big chair. “Do I look that old?” he wonders aloud, speaking over his own voice. The others laugh.

“Quinn’s double-barreled approach vastly increased the company’s visibility and market reach,” the commentator continues. “The high-end garments soon became known worldwide as *the* products for serious hikers and climbers. The company’s popular lines are displayed in sporting goods chains and apparel retailers, and last year’s models fill the racks at the big discount stores.”

As the broadcaster speaks, the onscreen visuals show several athletes, models, and a popular female entertainer dressed in HighQuest clothing and outdoor gear.

“Capitalizing on endorsements by high-profile athletes and projecting an image of clean living,” the voice continues, “HighQuest products have gained increasing favor with young consumers as well as health-conscious boomers. The innovative young executive quickly moved to the presidency, and four years ago, at the age of forty-six, was also named CEO. Now let’s take a look at the company’s numbers. . . .”

Bensen smiles with pride as the company’s success story flashes on the screen. When the segment concludes, another round of applause fills the room as the lights come back up.

“Great, that’s great,” Bensen says. “Can we get some more light in here now?” Another exec stands and works the control panel, sliding back the louvered vertical blinds. Bensen takes a moment to look out across the wooded corporate campus to the gently rolling hills.

“They did a good job on that,” Bensen remarks. “And I’m glad it encouraged investors to check us out. But what we need is increased growth. We’ve got to keep producing the numbers.” He glances around the table. No one is looking at him.

“All right, let’s hear your reports.”

It’s an important meeting, to go over preliminary second-quarter results. One by one the executives read key numbers from their reports, and then summarize. “Sales volume in our U.S. market is up three percent over second quarter last year,” says the VP for sales. “We’re hitting our top-line revenue goals. Actually, we’ve exceeded them by almost one percent. And Latin America is really exploding for us. Up seventeen percent in sales, and our market share is growing every month.”

Bensen breaks in. “Phil, I thought you said last month that we could ex-

pect a four percent increase in sales volume. Or am I not remembering correctly?"

A little flustered, Phil drops his eyes, then replies, "No, you're right, that's what I said. And it may still come in at four, these are preliminary numbers. But it looks like three."

"All right," Bensen says. "Let's move on. Joe?"

"Product development on the new Sierra line is moving ahead well," the marketing VP reports. "Market tests and focus groups for Sierra are coming up very positive; people like the design and the comfort. It looks like a winner, and I'd like to get the new ad firm we've been trying out to come in for a meeting to show some ideas."

"Just schedule it," Bensen says.

Next the vice president for operations reports that, thanks to the closing of another North American factory and the continuing shift of production to Asian and Latin American facilities, costs have come down for the sixth straight quarter.

Summarizing, COO Bob Barnett tells Bensen, "We're on plan. We hit our profit goals for the quarter, and then some. And we're on target to continue. Our Six Sigma process improvements are kicking into gear and producing some great returns."

The executives are feeling good about their results, but they're also a little nervous and fidgety. They know that despite their having modestly surpassed their goals, Bensen will not be content. Even as they go through the motions of making their reports, they know that at the end, the CEO will raise the bar and press them to jump higher.

True to form, when the reports are finished Bensen says, "I know you're all satisfied with your achievements, but let me tell you, I'm not satisfied. In today's world of business, you can't be satisfied; that would be the end of us.

"Okay," he continues. "Fine, we're meeting our profit goals. But we've got to push harder. The upcoming quarter is crucial. There's tremendous volatility in the market; no one knows how it's going to shake out. Consumer confidence is down, so we need to work a little harder and a little smarter to get our message across. We need to grow sales, expand the top line, and in case the economic uncertainty makes people slow their buying, we've got to maximize production efficiency and keep costs controlled.

"I'm counting on the Sierra line to make a big impact; I want you to do everything possible to get those products in the stores well before Christmas.

Let's build on our success. I want to see profits four points better than what we've planned for the next quarter."

As he speaks, the joyful air produced by the upbeat video report and their success at beating their own goals is quickly smothered by the force of Bensen's demands. Privately, though the execs may grumble a little behind the CEO's back, they all acknowledge that it's his job to set the goals and drive their performance, and they respect him; they know it's because of his relentless achievement drive that the company is doing so well at a tough time. But they would appreciate a little recognition from their boss. A heavy silence fills the room as Bensen continues to speak, and then suddenly Joe Northrup interrupts him in midsentence:

"I hesitate to say this, Bensen, but we're on target, and in this marketplace, to be on target is practically a miracle. Give us a little credit! The results I heard in here today are pretty damn good. It's Friday, we're tired, we've worked hard this week as we always do, and we're exceeding our goals. 'Congratulations, gentlemen, well done' would mean a lot to us."

"*Well done?*" Bensen explodes. "We don't have time for 'well done.' We only have time to get to the next level. We're all grownups here, we don't need that kind of reinforcement. We need to excel. In the marketplace our competitors aren't going to pat us on the back, they're going to kick us in the butt."

As usual, Bensen does little to foster a spirit of partnership beyond the quest for results. He maintains the distance between himself and the others. It's clear: He's the boss, and they are the employees. He calls the tune; they dance. He is in control, and they are not. For them, a moment's pause to appreciate themselves and be appreciated is important. For Bensen, what is important is profit and achievement.



The silence in the room lasts a long time. Finally Bensen asks, "Okay, what else? I know it's getting late. Anything else that can't wait till Monday?"

"There *is* something," one of the VPs says.

"What?"

"What do you want to do about the call regarding Jim Morris?"

"What call?" Bensen asks.

"I left a memo for you. Maybe you didn't see it yet. A reporter called looking for a comment from you. There was a story in Mexico City. They claim Jim's been giving bribes to develop business."

Bensen laughs. “That’s how business is done down there, isn’t it?”

“Bensen, you can’t say that. ‘Down there’—that’s pretty judgmental.”

“Well, it’s true, isn’t it?”

“It may be true for some companies there, but we have Arthur Andersen and Enron and WorldCom—does that mean we sit here and cook our books and say, ‘That’s how business is done around here?’”

“True. So . . . ?”

“So you can’t just brush it off,” the executive insists.

“What does Jim say?” Bensen asks.

“We haven’t talked to him yet. We thought maybe . . .”

“Maybe I’d want to handle it.”

“Right.”

“So what exactly did the reporter want to know?”

“If there’s any truth to the allegations. We told him we’re looking into it. But if it comes out in the New York media . . .”

“. . . it will not look good for HighQuest.” Bensen completes the sentence.

“It won’t exactly be a great follow-up to the story we just saw.”

“Okay. I’ll give him a call. I’m gonna be really pissed if he’s done something to put us in jeopardy.”

“It’s more than that, I think,” says Joe Northup. “If it’s true, and it breaks in the media, you’re probably going to have to let him go.”

Bensen pauses, holds back. “Well, we know he’s your good friend,” Northup says. “And we know how successful the division has been. But bribery is illegal. Not to speak of being strictly against company policy.”

“Well, this is a great finale to a great week,” Bensen says, beginning to gather his papers. “At least we got a little good press on the tube.”

Then the lone woman in the room, Anne Holmes—HighQuest’s Chief Financial Officer, someone Bensen has been mentoring for several years as his potential successor—speaks up. “Wait a minute, Bensen, gentlemen. We don’t know who or what is behind this accusation.”

“Are you talking corporate sabotage?” Bensen asks quickly.

“I don’t know. I’ve only met Jim a couple of times, briefly, but he doesn’t seem to me like the kind of guy who would do something really wrong.”

But nobody supports her. Instead, Bob Barnett says, “Well, suppose it is illegal. Is it really *wrong*, if it’s standard business practice?”

“I don’t know,” Anne replies. “I’d say it merits some thought, and some discussion. I wouldn’t jump to the conclusion that you need to fire him, without

looking more deeply.” After a moment she adds, “And I wouldn’t be so quick to fire him just to protect the HighQuest image, either. He’s been doing a great job.”

“I’ll go for that,” Bensen says. “And I’ll call him. Then we’ll see.” He stands up. “Okay everyone, have a good weekend.” Then, with a little grin, he adds, “But come in here Monday morning with your guns blazing: I want those four more points of profit!”

As he’s about to go out the door he turns and says, “I *am* going to call Jim, but I’d like somebody here to take charge of investigating from our side. Put somebody on it; find out what happened. Anyone?”

“I’ll take care of it,” says Northrup.

“Thanks, Joe. Keep me posted.”

Bensen feels uncharacteristically eager to get out of the building, but he knows he’s got to call Jim and deal with it, and he’s not happy about the prospect.

“Mr. Quinn, can you sign those letters now?” his assistant calls out as he swings past the door of her office.

“Not now, Marie. I’m busy.”

“If you sign them, I can drop them at the post office on my way home.”

“If they’re that urgent, why didn’t you sign for me and get them out with the office mail?”

“But you . . . um . . . well . . .”

“Never mind,” Bensen snaps. “Where are they?”

“On your desk. Center left. Where I always leave them.”

The letters signed, Bensen takes a deep breath and thinks for a moment before calling Jim’s direct line. He had brought Jim into the company just over five years ago and named him Director of Operations for Latin America. Hiring an old friend for a key position is always risky, and some eyebrows were raised. But it had been a good decision. A go-getter, Jim opened an office in Mexico City and promptly put the new division on the map, steadily and substantially generating new business and overseeing production at the factories there.

They had never talked about *how* the new business was generated. Bribery? That was too strong a word for what was probably just some well-placed gift-giving.