

The Essentials of Leadership

*Reflection in Practice: A Practical Guide
for Transformational Leaders*



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Introduction

When I reflect on my own leadership journey, I realize how much it has been shaped not by titles, metrics, or external recognition, but by the quiet lessons that come from accountability, authenticity, and human connection. Over the years in healthcare leadership, I have been immersed in the pressures of patient care, organizational growth, and the constant drive for results. I thought I understood leadership. But experience has taught me that true leadership is not defined by outcomes alone – it is revealed in the way we show up for others, the choices we make in difficult moments, and the integrity we carry into every interaction.

None of us arrive at our leadership philosophy alone. The ideas in this book are my own – forged through experience, refined through mistakes, and strengthened through relationships – but they were also shaped by those who were with me along the way. Throughout my career, the work of Mark Sasscer, Scott Kashman, Dan Moen, and other leadership thinkers challenged me to reimagine what leadership could and should look like. Their influence lit a spark that has guided my growth ever since. What you'll read in these pages is not a restatement of their work but an evolution of it – a personal take shaped by the realities of leading people and organizations in complex, human-centered environments.

Along the way, I've learned to slow down, to listen more deeply, and to lead with presence. These practices have shown me that transformational leadership doesn't begin with systems or strategies; it begins within us as individuals. It takes root in how we respect others, how we foster trust, and how we commit to growth – not for ourselves alone, but for those we serve.

What has become clear to me is that sustainable change in healthcare isn't driven by policies or structures alone. It emerges when leaders cultivate environments where trust and accountability are woven into the culture, and where people feel empowered to contribute at their highest level.

This e-book grows out of that conviction. Each perspective and experience shared here reflects lessons I have lived, tested, and integrated into my work as a leader and coach. They are not abstract theories; they are the practical tools and mindsets that have guided me through both challenges and successes.

My hope is that these pages encourage you to see leadership not as a position of authority, but as a calling to empower others, to build connection, and to create conditions where people can thrive. These lessons are offered not as prescriptions, but as an invitation: to reflect, to act, and to continue your own journey of transformation.

Effective healthcare leadership goes beyond managing teams and meeting operational goals – it drives innovation, enhances collaboration, and improves patient care. Leaders who cultivate an environment where employees feel valued and engaged lay the foundation for long-term success, stronger teams, and better healthcare outcomes.

What is Transformational Leadership?

At its core, transformational leadership is about creating meaningful change. Healthcare organizations don't thrive on policies and procedures alone—they depend on the engagement, motivation, and resilience of their people. Leaders who foster open communication, recognize individual contributions, and empower their teams to innovate see higher levels of commitment, improved efficiency, and better patient outcomes.

For healthcare executives and physician leaders, the challenge is balancing the business of medicine with the human experience of care. Financial pressures, regulatory requirements, and evolving patient expectations add complexity to decision-making. Leading effectively in this environment requires more than technical expertise—it demands presence, adaptability, and a commitment to building a culture where people feel supported and inspired to do their best work.

If you want to refine your leadership approach and build an organization that thrives in today's healthcare landscape, these foundational perspectives will help you move beyond maintaining the present and start shaping the future.

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Part I: Foundation - Leading Self

Chapter 1, Start with Yourself

Leadership begins with self-awareness. Before influencing others, leaders must cultivate the discipline to reflect on their own values, assumptions, and behaviors. This chapter explores the inner work that creates the foundation for authentic leadership.

Chapter 2, Leadership Begins with Presence

Presence is about more than showing up physically, it's about bringing focus, attention, and energy to the moment. Leaders who are fully present create trust, reduce noise, and model what it means to prioritize people over distractions.

Once we've grounded ourselves in awareness and presence, the next step is to extend that foundation outward, building trust and connection with others.

Chapter 1

Start with Yourself

Accountability is the Cornerstone

The most impactful leaders begin by looking inward. Before asking others to improve, the most effective leaders examine their own decisions, actions, and the results they produce. This willingness to evaluate oneself is the foundation of transformational leadership.

Accountability in leadership means honoring commitments, taking responsibility for outcomes, and demonstrating integrity even when the outcome is disappointing.



Leaders who embrace this mindset create an environment where people feel safe to learn and contribute. By owning both successes and failures, they send a powerful message: transparency matters, mistakes are part of the journey, and growth is always possible.

Titles and positions may open doors, but credibility is built through consistent behavior. When leaders are open about their own shortcomings and the lessons they draw from them, they set the tone for a culture that values honesty and continuous improvement.

Building Trust Through Ownership

When challenges arise, it is easy to point to outside factors. Transformational leaders instead begin by asking themselves hard questions:

- What role did I play in this situation?
- What could I have done differently?
- What am I willing to do now to make it right?

This approach, often called the “ownership mindset,” is contagious. When leaders model it consistently, they give their teams permission to do the same.

Think about a leader who admits when they've made the wrong call, apologizes when their communication misses the mark, and shares lessons learned, not just wins. Far from eroding confidence, this builds it.

I once attended a leadership retreat where a hospital executive opened with a personal story about an initiative they had led that failed to deliver. Rather than shifting responsibility or hiding behind metrics, they spoke candidly about their blind spots and how they planned to approach similar projects in the future. That vulnerability set the tone for the entire retreat. People felt free to share their own challenges without fear of judgment, which led to more honest dialogue and better collaboration.

The Link Between Accountability and Inclusion



Accountability also has a direct connection to inclusion. When leaders model openness about their own mistakes, they create psychological safety for others to say, "*I made a mistake.*" In this environment, team members are more willing to share concerns, challenge ideas, and offer alternative perspectives when they know they will be respected even if their input reveals flaws in a plan.

Inclusive cultures thrive when people believe they can take risks, challenge the status quo and still be valued.

Leaders who regularly say, "*I don't have all the answers*" or "*Help me see what I'm missing*" invite others to step forward and share their perspectives. This transforms accountability from a top-down directive into a shared commitment.

Choosing to Lead as an Owner Not a Bystander

Being accountable means claiming responsibility for your performance, culture, results, and the lasting effects of your leadership.

True ownership goes beyond achieving perfect results. It involves showing up fully, recognizing the impact of your decisions, and making thoughtful changes when a strategy falls short. Leaders who approach their work in this manner build credibility because their behavior consistently reflects their values.

Practical Ways to Strengthen Accountability

Leaders can strengthen accountability through deliberate habits. Below are a few practices leaders can set expectations for themselves and their teams:

- **Before offering criticism or coaching, pause to examine your role in the situation.** Were your expectations clear? Did you provide the resources and guidance needed for success? Reflecting first ensures that any feedback you give is constructive and fair.
- **Acknowledge mistakes openly and share lessons learned.** When a leader admits a mistake and explains the insight gained from it, they remove the stigma around failure. This makes it easier for others to be transparent about their own challenges, which accelerates collective learning.
- **Let your peers and team members know that you want them to speak up if they see you falling short on commitments or values.** This signals humility and reinforces the idea that accountability works in every direction, not just from the top down.
- **If you expect high performance from your team, match it in your own follow-through.** Meeting deadlines, showing up prepared, and following through on promises demonstrate that you value reliability as much for yourself as for others.
- **When someone steps forward to take responsibility, acknowledge it, even if the result was less than ideal.** Recognition reinforces the behavior you want to see repeated and builds a stronger team culture.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 How can I take ownership of my actions to inspire accountability and growth in others?
- 2 When something doesn't go as planned, is my instinct to look outward or inward?
- 3 When was the last time I publicly acknowledged a mistake and shared what I learned?
- 4 What voices or perspectives are missing from my decision-making table?
- 5 Do my team members feel safe admitting when they've fallen short?
- 6 Where might I be unintentionally modeling avoidance rather than ownership?
- 7 What behaviors do I reward? Do they reinforce personal accountability?

The Long-Term Value of Leading with Accountability

Over time, a leader's example becomes a powerful teaching tool. Teams begin to adopt the same mindset, approaching problems with a focus on solutions instead of blame. This shift improves collaboration, strengthens resilience, and drives sustainable performance.

Accountability is a sustained commitment to integrity, self-awareness, and improvement. Leaders who commit to this path inspire trust and loyalty, laying the groundwork for meaningful and lasting impact.

Final Thoughts

Leadership credibility grows when words and actions align. When you consistently "look in the mirror" before pointing a finger, you model the ownership mindset that fuels trust, inclusion, and high performance. In doing so, you don't just lead—you lead by example.

Chapter 1 Start with Yourself Reflection

When I review a recent decision that didn't go as planned, how willing was I to acknowledge my own role in the outcome?

If my team described how I handle accountability, what words would they use? Would those words match the leader I aspire to be?

Chapter 2

Leadership Begins with Presence

The journey to effective leadership is about far more than holding a role or title. It is the art of inspiring and engaging every individual within an organization so that no voice goes unheard. True leaders move beyond maintaining the status quo to boldly shaping a better future—one built on courage, vision, and a deep commitment to uplifting others and driving meaningful, lasting change.

Transformational leadership begins with personal accountability, presence, purpose, and unwavering respect for those you serve. It calls you to step out of “maintenance mode,” where the goal is simply to sustain, and into a space where you grow, inspire, and ignite positive change. Leaders who show up with presence signal that their work, and the work of others, truly matters. They listen before reacting, observe before judging, and bring calm focus even in moments of uncertainty.

Every day, every conversation, and every decision offer an opportunity to lead with greater purpose. Each challenge can be reframed as a doorway to growth not just for you, but for the people you guide. Over time, this presence builds trust and psychological safety. People begin to speak honestly, take initiative, and collaborate more freely when they know they are seen and valued.

Being present is an act of profound respect. It means showing up fully, with authenticity and intention, and bringing the best version of yourself to every interaction. It requires quiet confidence, patience, and the discipline to set aside distractions so you can truly engage with the person or situation in front of you.

***“Presence builds trust. Trust creates safety.
Safety unlocks growth, innovation, and lasting change.”***

This presence also inspires better performance and creates a culture of belonging. People begin to feel seen, heard and valued not just for their outputs, but for who they are. They know that their contributions are meaningful and this sense of significance fuels commitment, creativity and innovation.

Transformational change starts in the seemingly small moments of true attention and engagement.

When leaders consistently model presence, it ripples throughout the organization, from the senior leadership team to the front lines of care. It signals that each role, each perspective, each interaction matters and that together, every member of the organization is part of something larger and more meaningful.

As I reflect on what it means to lead with presence, I am inspired by the work of wellness coach and former healthcare executive Christin Collins. In her book *be.love.*, Christin shows how the simple act of pausing—taking a breath, listening fully, and grounding in the moment—can shift us from reacting to leading with intention. Her journey illustrates that presence is a deliberate choice to slow down, create space for clarity, and connect deeply with those we serve.

Presence also fosters mindfulness, helping leaders inspire trust, nurture accountability, and build resilient, adaptable teams prepared to face the future with strength and optimism.

Strategies for Being in the Present

- **Clear the space before engagement.** Take an intentional breath or pause before stepping into a meeting, a huddle, or a difficult conversation. Release distractions and mentally commit to being “all in.”
- **Practice single-tasking.** Resist the temptation to check email, scroll your phone, or multitask during conversations. By giving undivided attention, you demonstrate respect and fully vested in the moment.
- **Set boundaries around time.** Protect sacred time for reflection, team connection, and self development. When your schedule honors presence, others follow your lead.
- **Listen to understand, not respond.** Presence in conversation means listening with curiosity. Ask clarifying questions before offering opinions. This slows the pace but deepens the impact.



- **Model mindful pauses.** In high-stakes settings, don't rush to fill silence. An intentional pause allows space for deeper thought, signals respect for others' voices, and improves decision quality.
- **Anchor with rituals.** Small rituals such as opening meetings with a mindful moment, or ending with appreciation, remind teams to value presence as a shared practice.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 How can I use the power of presence to better connect with my team and inspire them to fully engage in their work for optimal performance?
- 2 What small daily habits could I develop to ensure that I remain grounded and mindful, even in the busiest moments?
- 3 How might my leadership culture shift if I prioritized authentic presence over constant multitasking or urgency?

Final Thoughts

When leaders embrace the power of presence, they lay the foundation for trust, collaboration, and breakthrough performance. They move from maintaining the organization as it is to shaping it into what it could be.

Transformation starts now—in this moment, with you.

Chapter 2 Reflection

Leadership Begins with Presence

In my daily leadership, where do I most often drift out of the present? What impact does that have on those around me?

When was the last time someone truly had my full attention? How did that moment affect that relationship or interaction?

Part II: Building Trust and Connection

Chapter 3, Move at the Speed of Trust

Trust accelerates everything. Without it, progress stalls. With it, people take risks, innovate, and align quickly. This chapter shows how leaders create credibility through consistency and transparency.

Chapter 4, Connect to Purpose: Turn Compliance into Commitment

True engagement doesn't come from rules or policies, it comes from purpose. Leaders who connect people to "why" transform compliance into genuine ownership and commitment.

With trust established and purpose clarified, leaders can now focus on shaping the environment where people feel safe, heard, and inspired to contribute fully.

Chapter 3

Move at the Speed of Trust

Trust fuels effective leadership. It sets the pace for how quickly teams communicate, solve problems, and adapt to change. When trust runs high, ideas move openly, collaboration strengthens, and decisions gain momentum. When it's low, even the smartest strategy stalls as people hesitate, self-protect, or question intent. Wise leaders know trust can't be commanded – it must be earned, safeguarded, and demonstrated in every action.

There is no better example of this than with Dr. Robert "Navy Bob" Roncska. In his book [Beyond the Sea: Leading with Love from the Nuclear Navy to the White House and Healthcare](#), he shares a simple yet powerful exercise that transformed his submarine's culture.



"Prioritizing empathy, understanding, and compassion in leadership creates a positive work environment that boosts team morale and cooperation." Navy Bob

Navy Bob told his crew, "I love you. I care for you," and handed each sailor a sheet to list their top three concerns. In just an hour, he uncovered issues—from a shortage of computers wasting precious time to other operational challenges—that had gone unnoticed. By immediately addressing these concerns, he rebuilt trust, empowered his team, and ignited a cultural shift that led to outstanding performance and retention.

Healthcare leaders can adopt this "Crew Top Three" approach by encouraging staff to share their top challenges. When leaders respond with empathy and swift action, they create an environment where every team member feels valued and heard, leading to improved morale and better patient care. Ultimately, this simple act of listening and acting can pave the way for legendary leadership and a truly good life.

To be a compassionate and principled leader means showing up with integrity and compassion. It means having the courage to align your actions with your values, even when it's inconvenient. It recognizes that people don't follow titles, they follow people. People they believe in. People they know are real.

Trust Moves at the Speed of Authenticity

I learned a truth long ago from Stephen Covey that has stayed with me, “Move at the speed of trust.”

This kind of trust can’t be manufactured, it must be earned through consistency, openness, and humility. Authentic leaders don’t pretend to have all the answers. Instead, they invite others into the conversation. They listen intently, own their mistakes, and show up not as a persona, but as a person.

This kind of human-centered leadership creates bolder workplaces; a setting where people are empowered to speak up, challenge norms, and contribute ideas without fear of judgment. In that environment, innovation flows more freely when people feel seen, heard, and respected. I call that the “Funnel of Innovation” and once created, the limits are endless.

A Humanistic Lens

Being a humanistic leader is more than being kind, although kindness is a good place to start. It’s about honoring the whole person in every interaction. It’s knowing that behind every title is a story, behind every performance metric is a person whose selfless efforts and firsthand experience can drive performance to even greater outcomes.

This kind of leadership approach is especially critical in high-stakes environments, where the pressures of performance can overshadow the needs of people. When leaders take the time to connect on a personal level through empathy, grace, and genuine care, they build cultures of loyalty, resilience, and purpose.

Strategies for Being Authentic and Humanistic

- **Align words and actions.** Consistency is foundational to being authentic. Say what you mean, do what you say, and acknowledge when reality falls short. Integrity builds trust.
- **Model vulnerability.** Share your own shortfalls, learnings, or mistakes openly. When leaders show, they are human, they give permission for others to be human too, without fear of judgment. Practice judgment free zones.
- **Prioritize listening over speaking.** Invite others’ voices before offering your own solutions. Ask open-ended questions that draw out perspective and encourage shared ownership of decisions.

- **Practice empathy daily.** Go beyond transactional interactions. Take a genuine interest in the people you lead, their aspirations, challenges, and well-being. A colleague of mine knew what his employees favorite candy was and used that knowledge to offer gratitude with a personal touch. Empathy fosters loyalty, belonging and trust.
- **Recognize the whole person.** Celebrate achievements, but also acknowledge effort, resilience, and character. Recognizing people as more than their output deepens engagement and trust.
- **Create safe spaces for dialogue.** Establish environments where honesty is welcomed, not punished. When people feel safe to bring their full selves, creativity and collaboration thrive.
- **Lead with grace under pressure.** High-stakes moments are authenticity's proving ground. Maintain composure, respect, and care even in crisis, as your behavior in those moments becomes the culture's standard.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 What does it look like to express leadership vulnerability in a way that strengthens my team rather than weakening my authority?
- 2 How often do I share my own learning curve or missteps in a way that models growth and builds connection?
- 3 How can I use my authentic leadership voice to create space for others to show up more fully as themselves?

Final Thoughts

To be compassionate and principled is to lead from the inside out. It's not a tactic. It's a commitment to:

- Show up with integrity;
- Make space for others to do the same; and,
- Lead, not from behind a title, but from a place of truth.

When leaders embrace their full, human selves—flaws, feelings, and all—they invite others to do the same. In that invitation lies the power to transform not just outcomes, but entire organizational cultures.

Transformation begins with authenticity, and it begins with you.

Chapter 3 Reflection Move at the Speed of Trust

How do I balance showing vulnerability with maintaining confidence as a leader?

Where in my leadership do I feel pressure to perform a role instead of showing up as my authentic self?

Chapter 4

Connect to Purpose: Turn Compliance into Commitment

In every organization, there's a difference between what people are *required* to do and what they *choose* to do. That space, between obligation and ownership, is where discretionary effort lives. It's what people give when they believe in the mission, feel valued, and trust their leadership. In that space, true transformation becomes possible.

I've worked in healthcare for more than 25 years. I've seen highly-skilled teams operate in environments where they felt micromanaged, un-recognized, or burned out. I've also seen what happens when, instead, they're treated with trust and purpose. You can feel it in the energy of a morning huddle, the collaboration on a care plan and in the initiative someone takes to fix a problem no one asked them to fix.

Leadership for me has always been about creating the conditions where people can bring their very best, not by demand, but by trust, respect, and inspiration. I've learned over the years that you can't force excellence out of someone; you can only shape the environment where they choose to give it freely.

“You can’t force excellence; you can only create the conditions where people choose to give their best.”

The mindset of “do it well or don’t do it at all” has been a constant guide in my journey. It reflects the pride I’ve felt in giving my all and the deep satisfaction that comes when others do the same. True commitment can’t be mandated, it’s something that must be earned, nurtured, and shared.

From Transactional to Transformational

Organizations often default to transactional leadership (i.e., checklists, policies or metrics). While structure matters, it will only get you so far. When people are operating on compliance, they may meet expectations but they rarely exceed them. When they're operating on commitment, however, they innovate, anticipate needs, and they uplift the team around them.

Discretionary effort shows up in moments you can't script:

- A nurse who stays late to comfort a patient's family.
- A department head who advocates for a colleague's promotion, even though it means more work in the short term.
- A technician who sees a broken process and takes the initiative to suggest a better one.

These aren't part of the job description but they are what makes an organization exceptional.

Creating the Conditions for Connecting with Purpose

You can't flip a switch and expect a culture of engagement. It has to be built intentionally. Here are a few places to start:

- **Elevate purpose.** It's not enough to state a mission on the wall. The mission must live in how people talk about their work, how decisions are made, and how success is measured. When individuals understand how their role contributes to something meaningful, they lean in.
- **Model engagement.** Leadership presence is more than walking the halls. It is showing up with attention, humility, and consistency. When people see that you're fully engaged, they're more likely to follow suit.
- **Invite voice.** Most people don't need to be convinced to care; they need to be heard. One of the fastest ways to spark effort is to create space for people to share their ideas and to act on them when possible. This doesn't mean agreeing with every suggestion, simply valuing input enough to consider it seriously.
- **Recognize effort.** Many acts of personal investment are invisible unless you're looking for them. Leaders who notice these moments and recognize them publicly (or privately) reinforce that going above and beyond is seen and appreciated.
- **Encourage ownership.** Empowering people to think and act like owners builds resilience and adaptability. When people are trusted to make decisions, they become more invested in the outcome. That's how cultures of accountability and innovation take root. Failure cannot be a fear factor, rather an impetus for learning. It's not "succeed or fail," it's "succeed or learn!" When employees are treated like owners, they act like owners.

The ROI of Purpose-Driven Work

When people feel connected to a clear and meaningful purpose, the impact is undeniable. Innovation accelerates. Collaboration deepens. Patient or customer satisfaction rises. Turnover drops. People no longer simply “do their jobs”—they advance the organization with energy and conviction.

In short, leading with purpose means inspiring people to work with heart.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 What can I do to create a culture where discretionary effort is the norm, not the exception?
- 2 How often do I create opportunities for people to feel seen, heard, and valued beyond their basic job descriptions?
- 3 What systems or habits might be stifling initiative, and how can I evolve them to foster more ownership and engagement?

Final Thoughts

The best work emerges when people choose to give more, not because they’re told to, but because they believe in what they’re doing. This is the heart of transformational leadership: creating an environment where commitment is contagious, creativity thrives, and individuals feel empowered to rise beyond the status quo.

As leaders, our job is not to motivate with pressure but to lead in ways that spark purpose. When people believe, they give more. That gift—their energy, heart and effort—is what transforms organizations from functional to extraordinary.

Purpose begins with how we lead. When leaders live and communicate a clear sense of why, others are inspired to connect with it too — and that shared purpose is where true transformation begins.

An ownership mindset begins with how we lead. Its impact multiplies when others are inspired to do the same and that’s when true transformation begins.

Chapter 4 Reflection Connect to Purpose

How do I know if my team is truly connected to our purpose or simply meeting the minimum expectations? What signals am I sending about the meaning and impact of their work?

1. *What is the primary purpose of the U.S. Constitution?*

When have I felt inspired to give more than was required? What conditions made me want to contribute that extra energy?

Part III: Creating the Right Environment

Chapter 5, Create a Judgment-Free Zone

Innovation and openness thrive in psychological safety. Leaders who suspend judgment create space for diverse perspectives, honest dialogue, and crucial contributions.

Chapter 6, Balance Candor with Care: Listen Actively and Empathetically

Feedback is only effective when delivered with both clarity and compassion. Leaders who balance honesty with empathy strengthen relationships while driving improvement.

Chapter 7, Embrace Diversity

Different experiences and perspectives are not obstacles—they are the raw material of stronger solutions. Leaders who embrace diversity unlock creativity and resilience within their teams.

Once the environment is safe, open, and inclusive, leaders can channel that energy toward performance and excellence.

Chapter 5

Create a Judgment-Free Zone

One of the most pivotal choices a leader makes is how they respond when someone sees things differently. Do they lean in with curiosity or retreat into judgment? Do they create space for dialogue or shut it down with conclusions?

Few decisions shape culture more than the choice to challenge ego and approach others with humility. Doing so requires strength, self-awareness, and a willingness to lead not only with intelligence but with humanity.

Curiosity Builds Bridges

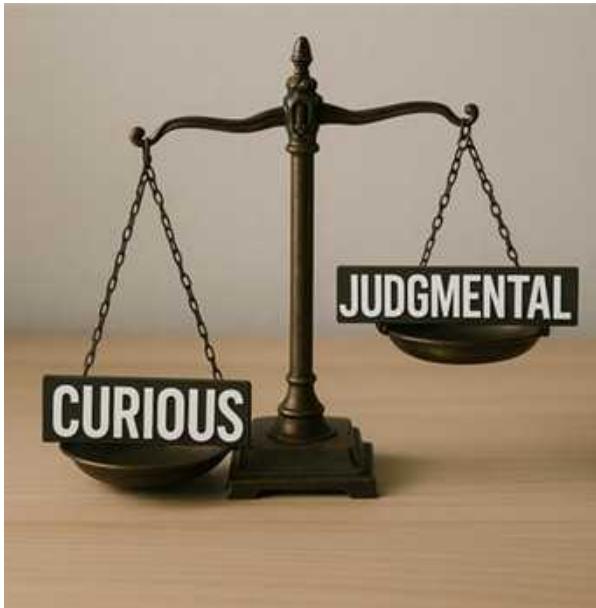
When we approach others with genuine interest rather than judgment, we create psychological safety. We communicate:

“You matter. Your story matters.” Trust is born not through authority, but through authentic connection.

When curiosity is absent, leadership can quietly erode an organization. Leaders who assume their perspective is the only valid one often create environments where people hold back ideas or stay silent. Over time, trust fades, communication grows guarded, and the organization loses momentum.

Curious leaders choose a different path. They remain confident in their own perspective yet intentionally make space for others. They treat differences as vital ingredients for stronger decisions and more resilient teams. This willingness to listen, explore, and learn from diverse experiences strengthens connection and creates an environment where people feel safe to contribute their best thinking.





I've witnessed teams shift dynamics simply because one leader chose to be curious in a difficult conversation. It changed the temperature in the room and opened space. Suddenly, progress became possible.

That kind of leadership does more than build consensus. It builds cultures where people feel seen, valued, and safe enough to contribute fully.

Judgment Closes, Curiosity Opens

Over time, I've learned that leadership isn't just about what you do—it's about who you are, especially in the moments that test you.

Judgment can quickly close the door, but inquiry has the power to unlock it.

When I approach others with genuine inquiry, I bring humility to the conversation. I acknowledge that I don't have all the answers, and that I don't need to. This creates the conditions for learning, growth, and innovation. Inquiry signals respect: it shows that I value the perspectives of others, even (and especially) when they differ from my own.

What Humanistic Leadership Looks Like in Action

In practice, I've found that some of the most powerful leadership moments come down to asking the right question in the right spirit. When I encounter someone who sees a problem or solution differently, I'll often say: "*Walk me through your thinking on this.*"

That simple phrase, delivered with sincerity and without defensiveness, has transformed disagreements into dialogue. It turns potential tension into shared problem-solving and often opens the door to breakthrough thinking.

That phrase "*tell me more*" reflects the essence of this approach. It signals openness and invites the other person into the conversation. It quiets defensiveness and activates curiosity. Most importantly, it gives the other person the psychological space to speak honestly.

I've seen this play out in boardrooms, hospital units, and one-on-one conversations. When a leader chooses to be curious in a tense moment, the tone of the room changes. People sit up straighter. They speak more freely. They begin to believe that their perspective matters, and when people feel heard, they contribute more, not because they have to, but because they want to.

Building a Curious Culture Starts at the Top

Organizational culture is shaped by the behaviors that leaders model. When curiosity is modeled consistently, it becomes a shared value. People begin asking better questions and engaging in more thoughtful dialogue. Below are a few practices leaders can adopt to embed this practice into their leadership:

- **Begin meetings with a sincere question, not a directive.** Instead of starting with, *“Here’s what we need to accomplish,”* try beginning with a thoughtful question such as, *“What’s one opportunity we’re not seeing yet?”* or *“What are you learning from the front lines that should shape our priorities?”* Questions open the door for contribution.
- **Pause before responding, especially in emotionally charged situations.** When emotions run high, leaders are often tempted to jump in with answers or correction. An intentional pause, signals patience, calms the room, and creates space for more intentional words.
- **Replace “Why did you do that?” with “Can you walk me through your thought process?”** The first question often triggers defensiveness, it feels accusatory. The second communicates curiosity and respect. It assumes there is logic behind the decision and seeks to understand it. This small language shift transforms feedback conversations from blame to growth.
- **Invite perspectives from quieter team members.** Not everyone processes out loud. Some reflect before speaking, and their insights may go unheard unless they are intentionally invited. Leaders can say, *“I’d love to hear your perspective.”* Drawing out quieter voices not only balances the room but also demonstrates that every contribution matters.
- **Reflect on what you heard before offering your opinion.** Reflective listening sounds like, *“What I’m hearing is...”* or *“It sounds like your main concern is...”* This step slows down the exchange, ensures accuracy, and shows respect for the speaker.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 How can I replace judgment with curiosity to create a more open and inclusive environment?
- 2 How often do I pause to ask, “Tell me more,” instead of making assumptions?
- 3 What changes can I make to show genuine interest in others’ views?
- 4 What’s the impact of my behavior when I lead with curiosity and when I don’t?

Final Thoughts

Chapter #6 reaches beyond leadership. It reflects how we relate to others on a human level. Choosing curiosity means showing respect, even when views differ. It means approaching others with care instead of criticism.

When leaders make that choice consistently, the result is a more honest and connected culture, one where people feel valued and are more willing to contribute.

Chapter 5 Create a Judgment Free Zone

Reflection

What patterns do I notice in myself when I slip into judgment? How might I replace those instincts with curiosity?

How could adopting “*Tell me more*” as a practice reshape the way my team communicates with me?

1. *What is the primary purpose of the study?*

Chapter 6

Balance Candor with Care: Listen Actively and Empathetically

The Heart of Crucial Conversations

Every organization claims to value communication but few *consistently* model the kind of dialogue that actually moves people forward. Transformational leaders understand that true progress happens when we lean into discomfort with honesty, respect, and courage.

Having crucial conversations means creating space for understanding, building trust, and resolving conflict in a way that strengthens relationships rather than weakens them.



Silence isn't neutral, it leaves room for assumptions that erode trust.

Leaders who avoid difficult conversations often do so with the intention of maintaining peace. But silence is rarely neutral. In the absence of clarity, people make assumptions, and those assumptions can erode trust faster than any direct feedback ever could.

On the other hand, when leaders choose to address challenges directly, they set the tone for a culture where transparency and continuous improvement become the norm. These moments of dialogue may feel challenging, but they are also opportunities to build stronger connections, clear mis-understandings, and create alignment around shared goals.

What Courage Really Looks Like in Leadership

The essence of a crucial conversation is trust. By stepping into dialogue with openness and respect, leaders signal that honesty is welcome and that silence or avoidance will not be the default. Over time, this builds a culture of psychological safety where people feel empowered to speak their truth without fear of retaliation.

Think about an organization that encourages its people to “stop the line” when they see a problem. That is courage in practice. At one of my previous organizations, a surgical technician recognized a problem with a tag on the sterilization trays about to be used in a case. He immediately called it out, stopped the line, and prevented a potential complication. The case was delayed, but it didn’t matter. He felt a responsibility to the patient and his team to speak up. His courage, combined with the culture of safety we had cultivated, prevented potential patient harm. Later that week, he was recognized at our daily safety huddle.

Instead of staying silent and hoping someone else would notice, he took ownership of the situation. That one moment not only prevented harm, it reinforced that patient safety comes before ego or hierarchy. These small but powerful actions build trust and lay the foundation for high reliability.

*Inclusivity thrives when people believe
their contribution matters.*

The Connection Between Courage and Inclusion

Creating space for crucial conversations is also an act of inclusion. When we create space for open and honest dialogue, every voice has the opportunity to be heard. This ensures that perspectives across the spectrum, background, role, or experience, are valued and respected.

Inclusive leadership isn’t limited to diversity statements or committee meetings. Leaders who make time for crucial conversations foster an environment where ideas surface more freely, risks can be discussed openly, and the team becomes stronger together.

From Conflict to Connection

It’s easy to see conflict as something to avoid. However, transformational leaders reframe conflict as an opportunity to deepen connection and alignment. By leaning into tough conversations with empathy and clarity, they prevent minor issues from developing into potential divides.

As an executive coach, I've seen this pattern often, especially among healthcare professionals. Many physicians in leadership roles feel responsible for keeping their teams happy. That impulse, while understandable, can become a barrier. Growth doesn't happen in constant comfort. It happens in tension that is respectful, purposeful, and grounded in trust.

Crucial conversations shift the focus from avoiding conflict to working through it. The goal is not to win. The goal is to reconnect, clarify, and move forward together.

Honesty over comfort builds trust.

Strategies to Strengthen Crucial Conversations

- **Prepare with clarity.** Before stepping into a difficult conversation, take time to understand why it matters. What's the core issue? What outcome are you hoping to reach? When leaders approach a conversation with clarity, it reduces ambiguity, minimizes emotional reactivity, and helps focus the discussion on facts and shared goals.
- **Lead with curiosity rather than judgment.** Approach the other person with an open mind, especially if the topic is emotionally charged. Ask questions to understand, not to trap or challenge. Begin with, *"Help me understand what happened from your perspective,"* or *"What do you need to feel successful here?"* Curiosity invites conversation. Judgment shuts it down. When you lead with curiosity, you create space for the other person to participate in finding a solution, rather than defending their position.
- **Listen actively, not defensively.** It's natural to want to explain or correct when something feels unfair or inaccurate. But real leadership shows up in the listening. Active listening means staying present, resisting the urge to interrupt, and reflecting back what you've heard before responding. It builds credibility and demonstrates that the goal isn't to win a debate—it's to understand the whole picture.
- **Use honesty balanced with respect.** Crucial conversations call for truth, but truth alone isn't enough. Delivery matters. Speak directly, but never with contempt. Share observations instead of accusations. Say what you mean, but choose words that reflect care, not control. Respect is what allows honesty to be heard, even when the message is hard. When done well, this balance strengthens relationships instead of damaging them.

- **Follow up with action.** A crucial conversation doesn't end when the meeting does. What happens afterward is just as important. Clarify next steps. Document any agreements. Check in to ensure the discussion leads to visible progress. Without follow-up, even the most thoughtful dialogue can lose its impact. Following through sends a clear message: this conversation wasn't performative—it was a step toward real change.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 How can I create a safe space for crucial conversations that lead to growth and transformation?
- 2 Do my team members feel empowered to “stop the line” when something doesn't feel right?
- 3 Where am I avoiding a hard conversation? What might be possible if I had it?
- 4 How often do I listen for understanding rather than listening to respond?
- 5 What's one crucial conversation I could have this week that would strengthen trust in my team?

Final Thoughts

Transformational leadership is rarely comfortable. It asks us to challenge the status quo, speak up when it's easier to stay silent, and create space for others to do the same.

Silence comes at a cost. Unaddressed challenges drain time, weaken trust, and stall productivity. When leaders choose candor instead of comfort, they cultivate workplaces where communication propels growth and change.

The ability to have crucial conversations doesn't come from a title. It comes from character. It's also one of the most evident signs of a leader who is committed to doing what's right—even when it's hard.

Chapter 6 Balance Candor with Care Reflection

What important conversation have I been avoiding? How might having it strengthen trust, clarity, or alignment within my team?

When I enter a difficult dialogue, do I lead with honesty and respect in equal measure? How do others experience my approach?

Chapter 7

Embrace Diversity

No two people see the world the same way. These differences are not flaws in the system. They are signs that we are working with people who bring real life, real thought, and real experience into the room.

Leaders who want their teams to grow, adapt, and perform at a higher level must first learn to navigate this complexity with care. It begins by understanding that every seat at the table offers a different perspective.

My ideal table in a leadership boardroom is round, leaving titles at the door and everyone at the table has equal value. When leaders respect and leverage these distinct realities, they foster stronger relationships, minimize confusion, and create an environment for more informed decisions.

*Progress depends not on sameness,
but on awareness.*

Why Assumptions Create Distance

Each person filters the world through a personal lens. Childhood, education, workplace norms, generational context, cultural background, and prior leadership exposure shape that lens. It determines how they interpret a question, react to feedback, respond to pressure, and define success.

Many leaders do not pause long enough to consider these factors. They assume others share their definitions, priorities, and sense of urgency. This gap becomes visible in meetings where people talk past each other. It shows up in how performance is measured and shapes the tone of conflict when it arises. If not addressed, it leaves people feeling misunderstood or dismissed.

Transformational leaders begin by asking, “How is this person experiencing this moment?” They do not assume they already know. They create time and space for an honest answer, and they listen to what is said.

Reflection over Reaction

Respecting diversity requires intention. It calls for a slower pace in moments that feel fast and out of control. When something goes sideways, it is easy to jump in, give direction or explain what someone should have seen. That reaction closes the door on understanding.

When we choose to reflect instead of react, we move from defensiveness to clarity. That shift does not require agreement; it simply requires curiosity. When we ask better questions, we notice more and see where expectations may have been unclear or where assumptions got in the way.

Two people can walk out of the same conversation with very different interpretations. Both may be true from where they sit. That is not an error, it is information.

When Tension Builds Trust

Some leaders worry that allowing too much space for differences will slow things down or introduce conflict. In truth, tension handled with respect often leads to better outcomes...the old adage, “measure twice, cut once.”

When teams are aligned in silence it may not be because everything is working as it should. It may be because no one feels comfortable bringing up what is not. If feedback always sounds agreeable and safe, leaders should be asking what has been left unsaid.

Respectful tension is a sign that people are engaged and paying attention. It is how new ideas are tested and how challenges are raised before they become problems. Simply stated, it is how real trust begins to take root.



Leaders who work well in this space often:

- Ask questions that leave room for a different answer;
- Show appreciation when someone sees things another way; and,
- Stay in the moment long enough to learn something new.

Teams that learn this rhythm begin to show up differently. People become more thoughtful in how they contribute. They

become more willing to challenge what feels unclear. They start focusing less on approval and more on impact.

Inclusion Lives in the Small Decisions

Inclusion is not a headline nor something to announce. It is a way of working. And it is measured in the details: who is brought into the conversation, whose input shapes the outcome, and how disagreements are handled when they surface.

People notice when they are not asked for input. They notice when their ideas are explained away. They notice when the space is safe for some, but not for all.

These patterns are not always loud, but they are always present. They affect on whether people decide to engage, pull back, or look elsewhere. Respecting separate realities means noticing these patterns early and adjusting with care.

Inclusion only works when it is practiced consistently, especially when the conversation becomes uncomfortable.

When leaders create environments where others feel safe to speak up, participation becomes stronger. People begin to trust that they can contribute without being dismissed or corrected. That is when real momentum builds.

Strategies for Practicing Respect and Embracing Diversity

How can leaders intentionally practice respect and embrace diversity? Below are practical strategies to embed this practice in daily leadership:

- **Ask before assuming.** Replace “*I thought we were aligned*” with “*Can you share how you’re seeing this?*” Curiosity avoids costly missteps.
- **Value dissent publicly.** When someone offers a different view, thank them even if you disagree. Public appreciation reinforces that difference is welcome.
- **Practice perspective-taking.** In decision-making, pause to consider: “*How might this be perceived by someone with a different role, generation, or cultural lens?*”
- **Slow down in moments of tension.** When conflict surfaces, resist the urge to react. Ask clarifying questions, restate what you heard, and ensure understanding before moving forward.
- **Audit who’s at the table.** Notice which voices are shaping decisions. If perspectives are missing, actively invite them in. Inclusion must be deliberate, not accidental.
- **Model reflective listening.** Summarize others’ points before responding. This demonstrates respect and often reveals insights that would otherwise be missed.
- **Turn friction into fuel.** Reframe disagreement as an opportunity for better solutions. Remind the team *respectful* tension make us stronger.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 Where might I be assuming alignment instead of seeking understanding?
- 2 How do I respond when someone sees the world differently than I do?
- 3 Am I creating space for *respectful* tension or quietly rewarding conformity?
- 4 What voices or perspectives are missing from my decision-making table?

Final Thoughts

Leading with humility and intentionality means doing the harder work of seeing difference not as disruption, but as opportunity.

Transformational leadership doesn't mean eliminating friction—it means channeling it with empathy, structure, and a mindset that sees difference not as a barrier but as a starting block.

Let's lead in a way that honors nuance and build teams that lean into *respectful* tension as a source of strength.

Let's model the kind of inclusive presence that turns diverse perspectives into shared breakthroughs. Because when every voice is valued and every lens is welcomed the collective becomes far greater than the sum of its parts.

Chapter 7 Embrace Diversity Reflection

When was the last time a perspective different from mine helped me make a better decision? How did I respond in that moment?

the first time in the history of the world that the people of the United States have been called upon to make a choice between a revolution and a civil war. The choice is made. The people of the United States have chosen to have a civil war. The people of the United States have chosen to have a civil war. The people of the United States have chosen to have a civil war.

How do I currently handle respectful tension on my team – as an obstacle to manage or as an opportunity to learn?

Part IV: Driving Performance and Excellence

Chapter 8, Be Exceptional, Expect Greatness

High performance starts with leaders who model excellence and set clear expectations. This chapter explores how to raise standards without breaking spirits.

Chapter 9, Use Precision to Drive Improvement

Great leaders know that vague goals yield vague results. Precision in communication, feedback, and measurement sharpens performance and builds accountability.

High standards alone aren't enough, leaders must also ensure that progress is sustainable over the long run.

Chapter 8

Be Exceptional, Expect Greatness

In leadership, actions matter more than directives. It's one thing to outline expectations but far more powerful to embody them.

Modeling high performance means demonstrating the behaviors, mindset, and focus to support long-term success. Leadership rooted in personal example carries weight. It creates a standard people can trust. When excellence is anchored in *purpose*, not performance alone, it sends a clear message: this work matters.

Leadership Begins with Presence, Not Position



Effective transformational leadership comes from how you show up. Every conversation, every decision, and every response becomes a signal. People notice what you emphasize, how you handle setbacks, how you treat your colleagues, and whether your words match your actions.

Over the past 25+ years in healthcare leadership, I've seen firsthand how culture evolves when high standards are modeled consistently. It's not through perfection but through steady, values-driven leadership especially in the hard moments and especially when no one's watching.

The Example We Set Becomes the Culture We Build

When leaders act with purpose, they influence more than productivity, they shape norms. The example you set becomes the unspoken rule book. If you prepare thoroughly, others will too. If you lead with fairness, you give others permission to do the same. If you admit missteps, you create a space where growth is possible.

This concept challenges us to lead from alignment. When your behavior reflects your personal values and your organization's mission, you establish trust and foster a culture of shared accountability.

From Silent Expectations to Visible Standards

People rarely follow words alone; they follow what you demonstrate. Your habits become permission for theirs.

- Show up prepared? You reinforce preparation.
- Ask thoughtful questions? You encourage curiosity.
- Admit mistakes? You make growth safe.
- Uphold standards even when it's hard? You show that integrity matters, even when it's inconvenient.

These behaviors aren't part of a job description but they do define culture. And it is culture that drives sustainable results.

Excellence Is a Team Sport

Modeling high performance means creating the conditions for others to thrive. Strong leadership lifts the entire system. Below are a few suggestions you can implement to start building that environment:

- **Lead with clarity.** Make expectations visible. Define success in specific terms so your team can align their actions and decisions with what matters.
- **Prioritize purpose.** Tie daily tasks to the “why” and help people understand how their work supports the broader mission. When people find meaning in their role, they shift from obligation to ownership.
- **Encourage collaboration.** High performance should never be exclusive. Encourage collective problem-solving and shared wins. A culture of “we” outperforms a culture of “me.”
- **Demonstrate accountability.** Show others that accountability starts at the top. When leaders own outcomes, especially the tough ones, it builds credibility and resilience.
- **Honor substance over optics.** Doing the right thing quietly is more powerful than talking about it loudly. Leaders who act with authenticity earn trust that lasts.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 What behaviors do I model on my best days? What do they signal to my team?
- 2 Am I demonstrating the values I expect from others or just talking about them?
- 3 How does my leadership make it easier or harder for others to perform at their best?
- 4 In moments of stress, do I model grace under pressure or pressure without grace?
- 5 Is excellence something people pursue because of how I lead or in spite of it?

Final Thoughts

Modeling excellence means aligning intention with action. It doesn't require perfection, but it does call for consistency, presence, and purpose.

In the end, people remember what you *do*, not just what you *say*. When your actions reinforce your values, your leadership becomes more than a role. It becomes an example others can build on.



Leadership is earned not in a single moment, but in how we show up day after day. The good news? Every day is another chance to model what matters most. This is transformational leadership: performance rooted in purpose, driven by values, and multiplied through example.

Chapter 8 Be Exceptional, Expect Greatness

Reflection

What specific behaviors of mine are being mirrored by my team? Do those habits reflect the culture I want to create?

How do I respond when I fall short of the standards I expect from others? What message does that send to my team?

1. **What is the primary purpose of the study?** (1 point)

2. **What is the study's hypothesis or research question?** (1 point)

3. **What is the study's design?** (1 point)

4. **What are the study's independent and dependent variables?** (1 point)

5. **What are the study's key findings?** (1 point)

6. **What are the study's conclusions?** (1 point)

7. **What are the study's limitations?** (1 point)

8. **What are the study's implications?** (1 point)

Chapter 9

Use Precision to Drive Improvement



Feedback is a Gift

Every person has the desire to grow, yet growth rarely happens in isolation. We all need perspective, encouragement, and sometimes correction to help us reach our fullest potential. Every leader knows that feedback is important, yet few consistently deliver it in a way that drives growth.

Transformational leaders understand that feedback is more than evaluation, it's a catalyst for growth.

When feedback is offered with clarity, timeliness, and respect, it empowers individuals to own their development. This approach strengthens trust between leaders and their teams. Transformational leaders understand this truth and embrace feedback not as a burden, but as a gift.

The timing of feedback is also critical. Feedback delayed is feedback denied. A vague comment like *“Good job”* may feel encouraging in the moment, but it rarely provides direction. On the other hand, clear and timely feedback communicates exactly what worked, what didn’t, and how someone can move forward. It transforms interaction into a steppingstone for progress. It communicates to others: *“I believe in you enough to invest in your growth.”* It’s also an investment in your team and organization.

Why Timing and Clarity Matter

Feedback is most powerful when it is timely. A word of encouragement or guidance offered close to the moment allows someone to immediately learn, adjust or lean into a strength. Delay often diminishes impact.

Think about the difference between course correcting mid-flight versus after landing. In aviation, feedback comes instantly—altitude adjustments, speed corrections, and navigation cues. Without that real-time input, small errors could compound into a catastrophe. The same is true in leadership. If we wait weeks or months to share feedback, the opportunity for meaningful impact is lost.

Equally important is clarity. Vague feedback like “You’re doing fine” rarely helps someone understand what they’re doing well or how they might improve. But specific words “The way you explained treatment options to the patient today brought calm to a difficult moment. That’s a strength and it is commendable” offer both direction and affirmation.

Feedback loses power the longer we wait to give it.



Feedback as Empowerment

Effective feedback focuses on equipping others with the insight and tools they need to succeed, rather than controlling them. When leaders frame feedback as an investment in someone’s growth, it changes everything. People stop dreading it and begin to crave it.

Equally important is tailoring feedback to the individual. Some people need direct, concise direction. Others thrive with context and encouragement.

Leaders who know their people well enough to deliver feedback in the right “language” ensure that their words are received as constructive rather than critical.

Open, honest and transparent dialogue encourages individuals to stretch, to take ownership of their development, and to know they are a valued member of the team.

Strategies to Strengthen Feedback Culture

- **Deliver feedback close to the moment.** Don’t wait for a performance review—use the present as a teaching moment. When feedback is delayed until a quarterly or annual review, it often feels like judgment rather than development.

- **Be specific.** Replace “*Great job today*” with “*Your clear communication in that family meeting helped reduce tension and ensured alignment.*” Clear, targeted language makes improvement possible.
- **Balance candor with care.** Honesty is essential, but delivery matters. Speak with respect, not reproach. When feedback comes from a place of belief in the other person’s potential, it is heard as encouragement, even when the message is tough. For example, “*Your note documentation is often incomplete*” lands much differently than “*Your note documentation is sometimes missing key elements. I know you’re capable of excellence here—let’s work together to make sure your notes consistently reflect that.*”
- **Focus on behaviors, not character.** Feedback should highlight what someone does, not who they are. When feedback feels like a judgment of character, it closes people down. When it addresses behaviors, it invites change. For example, “*You’re disorganized*” feels like a personal attack. But “*The chart wasn’t completed on time, which delayed the care team’s planning*” isolates the behavior and its impact. Behavior can be adjusted; character feels fixed.
- **Invite dialogue.** Feedback should be a two-way street. The best feedback isn’t a lecture, it’s a conversation. When leaders invite input, they transform feedback from a one-sided critique into a collaborative path forward. Ask, “*How did that feel for you?*” or “*What support would help you improve?*”

Questions to Ponder

- 1 How can I use feedback as a tool to empower and uplift others while driving organizational success?
- 2 Do I take the time to celebrate specific strengths in others or do I default to generalities?
- 3 How can I ensure my feedback helps someone move forward with confidence rather than hesitation?

Final Thoughts

Feedback, given well, is a profound act of leadership. It provides clarity, fosters confidence, and inspires growth. It is one of the simplest yet most powerful ways leaders can show belief in the people they serve.

Chapter 9 Use Precision to Drive Improvement

Reflection

When I think about the feedback I've given recently, how often have I truly invested the time to make it specific, timely, and actionable? What impact did that have on the individual?

How comfortable am I in receiving feedback myself? What does my response model for my team about the role feedback plays in growth?

Part V: Sustaining the Journey

Chapter 10, It's a Marathon, Not a Sprint

Leadership is not about quick wins—it's about resilience, consistency, and playing the long game. This chapter closes the journey by reminding us that sustainable leadership requires endurance and perspective.

Chapter 10

It's a Marathon not a Sprint



Leadership's Greatest Legacy

True leadership is defined not by titles or authority, but by influence. Transformational leaders know their legacy will not be measured solely by what they accomplish, but by what they inspire others to achieve. Teaching, coaching, and mentoring are powerful pathways to extend that influence. Each act of development multiplies a leader's impact, shaping the next generation of thinkers, decision-makers, and caregivers.

Leaders who commit to teaching, coaching, and mentoring ensure their influence multiplies. They don't just build programs or systems; they build people. When people are empowered, they carry the mission forward far beyond the leader's tenure.

Every interaction is an opportunity to teach, coach or mentor.

A Story of Growth in Action

At its heart, this philosophy is about stewardship. Leaders are entrusted not just with results, but with people. Every interaction is an opportunity to teach a skill, coach toward improvement, or mentor toward long-term success.

I once worked alongside a physician leader who embodied this practice. Instead of solving problems for her residents, she asked guiding questions: "What options do you see? What's the risk of each? What would you do differently next time?" By challenging them to think critically, she developed confident, capable physicians who later credited her coaching for their growth. Her influence lived on not only in the patients she treated but in the countless others cared for by those she had mentored.

That's the ripple effect of leadership. One leader's choice to coach instead of control can influence not just one individual, but every patient, family, and colleague that individual touches in the years ahead.

The Three Pathways of Growth

Transformational leaders recognize that people need different forms of support at different stages of their journey. There are three primary ways leaders develop others:

- **Teaching provides knowledge and skills.** It is structured, instructional, and answers the “what” and “how.” For example, an experienced nurse showing a new colleague how to use life-saving equipment.
- **Coaching draws out potential.** It focuses on asking questions, reframing perspectives, and guiding reflection to help individuals discover their own solutions. For example, a healthcare executive coaching a physician leader through a tough staffing decision may do this by asking reflective questions instead of prescribing a script.
- **Mentoring is a long-term investment.** It addresses character, purpose, and vision. A mentor may stay connected for years, guiding someone through career transitions, professional setbacks or moments of opportunity.

Great leaders know which hat to wear. At times, people need to be taught. Other times, they need to be coached. And sometimes, they simply need a mentor to believe in them until they believe in themselves.

Inclusion Through Development

Teaching, coaching, and mentoring also serve as acts of inclusion. To intentionally invest in another person is to say: “*I see you. I believe in you. I’m willing to invest time and energy in you.*”

In one organization, I watched a senior surgical technician intentionally mentor new staff who felt overwhelmed and unsure of their place. By taking time to teach them skills, coaching them through challenges, and offering encouragement in the break room, he built their confidence. Over time, those employees gained confidence, and the department's culture shifted from one of intimidation to one of collaboration.

Inclusivity in leadership thrives in everyday choices to invest in others' development. When every person feels their growth matters, organizational trust and engagement naturally deepen.

Why Leaders Hold Back

If teaching, coaching, and mentoring are so powerful, why don't more leaders do it? Often it comes down to busyness, perfectionism or fear. It feels faster to "do it yourself" than to slow down and teach. It feels easier to provide answers than to coach. It feels safer to focus on your own performance than to mentor someone who may eventually surpass you.

Transformational leaders see it differently. They recognize that their ultimate success is measured not in what they personally achieve, but in what they equip others to succeed. That's the mark of true transformational leadership. "A" leaders recruit "A" individuals. They thrive on creating a culture of excellence and fostering success in others. "B" leaders recruit "C" individuals because of fear and insecurity of the success of others. Lead with "A" leadership!!

Building a Legacy of Leaders

Practical ways to apply this include:

- **Be intentional.** Mentoring and coaching don't happen by accident. Leaders who want to develop others must treat it as a priority, not an afterthought. Blocking time on your calendar communicates that growth is just as important as performance. Without that intentional commitment, the urgency of daily tasks will always win. Protecting space for mentoring ensures your influence extends beyond immediate results.
- **Ask before you answer.** Giving answers may feel efficient in the moment, but it limits growth. By asking guiding questions such as "What options do you see? What would you try first?" you invite people to think critically and build confidence in their own judgment. This approach develops leaders who can solve future challenges independently, rather than relying on you for every decision.
- **Recognize hidden potential.** It's easy to invest in the most visible high performers, but transformational leadership means looking deeper. Some of the strongest leaders begin quietly, waiting for someone to see their potential. By noticing untapped ability and offering encouragement, you unlock talent that might otherwise remain hidden. These investments often yield surprising, long-term dividends for both the individual and the organization.
- **Model vulnerability.** People grow in environments where honesty is valued. Sharing your own missteps and lessons learned shows that mistakes are part of the process. When leaders admit challenges and reveal how they overcame them, they create a culture of authenticity. This openness not only builds trust but also gives others the courage to take risks and grow.
- **Celebrate progress.** True leadership is about progress, not perfection. Recognizing resilience, effort, and improvement—even when results aren't immediate—reinforces that growth matters. Celebrating small wins keeps people motivated and engaged, and it demonstrates that leadership values the journey as much as the destination.

Questions to Ponder

- 1 Am I investing more in projects or in people who can carry the mission forward?
- 2 Do I intentionally set aside time to teach, coach, or mentor or do I default to completing tasks myself?
- 3 Who in my sphere of influence needs encouragement to step into the potential I already see in them?

Final Thoughts

Leadership is stewardship. By teaching, coaching, and mentoring, leaders extend their influence far beyond their own careers. These practices build future leaders, strengthen organizations, and create cultures of trust and growth. The most enduring measure of leadership is not what we accomplish on our own, but what we empower others to achieve.

Chapter 10 It's a Marathon not a Sprint

Reflection

Who has most influenced my own growth as a leader? How can I intentionally pass forward that same gift of teaching, coaching, or mentoring?

What fears, habits, or pressures keep me from slowing down to develop others? How might I reframe those barriers as opportunities for impact?

What's Next?

Carrying the Work Forward

Leadership is not static – it's lived daily in the choices we make, the conversations we hold, and the cultures we shape. The ideas explored here offer a roadmap for transformational leadership in healthcare and beyond.

But a roadmap only matters if it's followed. The real opportunity for every leader is to put these insights into practice: reflect on them, journal about the questions they raise, share them with your teams, and most importantly, let them guide how you lead.

True leadership is measured by the lives we touch and the people we help grow. When we lead with accountability, curiosity, courage, and purpose, we create systems where both individuals and organizations thrive.

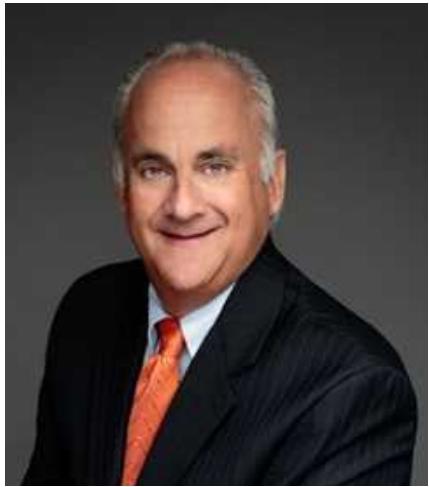
Leading with Purpose: Leaving a Legacy of Transformation

Leadership is not about titles or short-term achievements; it's about the legacy you leave. By embodying these ideas, you can lead with purpose, inspire meaningful change, and create a culture where every person feels valued and empowered. Transformation requires courage – the willingness to challenge the status quo, embrace diversity, and lead with authenticity and vision. Progress, not perfection, defines great leadership. The real impact is lasting: on your organization, your people, and the health and well-being of those you serve.

Question to Ponder

- 1 What legacy will you leave through your leadership?

About the Author



Dr. Scott Wolf, D.O. is a results-driven physician executive with over 25 years of experience in senior leadership roles, including President, Chief Medical Officer (CMO), and Chief Operating Officer (COO). His work spans hospital operations, system integration, provider network development, and patient experience transformation.

Dr. Wolf is known for building high-performing teams, aligning organizations around strategic growth, and mentoring the next generation of leaders. He is also an executive coach, guiding healthcare professionals and C-suite leaders through the complexities of modern leadership with clarity, accountability, and authenticity.

Beyond his executive roles, Dr. Wolf advises health systems, Fortune 100 companies, and physician leaders, bringing cross-industry insight to some of healthcare's most pressing challenges. His work consistently delivers measurable results in operational performance, engagement, and cultural transformation.

Invite Dr. Wolf to Speak or Coach

If you or your organization would like to explore these leadership practices in depth, Dr. Wolf offers:

- Keynote presentations on transformational leadership and healthcare culture;
- Executive coaching for healthcare leaders and teams; and,
- Workshops and retreats to put leadership practices into action.

To inquire about speaking, coaching or consulting, contact Dr. Wolf at scott@drscottwolf.com or visit www.drscottwolf.com to learn more.

