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**A DEEPLY PERSONAL ACT**  
Yetunde Hofmann

**THE POWER OF  
STORYTELLING**





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**25<sup>th</sup> June – 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2023  
Silicon Valley, USA**



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**Solomon Darwin**

Executive Director, Garwood Center Corporate Innovation, Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley

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- Respond and adapt to the challenges in the changing landscape due to rapid global economic trends.
- Examine the latest concepts, ideas and tools to help them align their business practices with global economic developments and conditions.
- Learn to build sustainable and innovative business models.

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**THIS ISSUE**



12

**COVER STORY**

**A DEEPLY PERSONAL ACT**

Share your story.

12

- YETUNDE HOFMANN

**MYTH BUSTER**

**REACHING THE NEXT LEVEL**

Myths about 'making the leap'.

16

- ALEX BRUECKMANN

**LEADERSHIP**

**A NEW BREED OF LEADERS**

How to lead in today's business environment?

20

- DR WANDA T WALLACE

**LEADERSHIP**

**WITH ALL DUE RESPECT**

Is your leadership worthy of respect?

26

- GREGG WARD

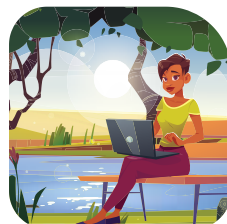
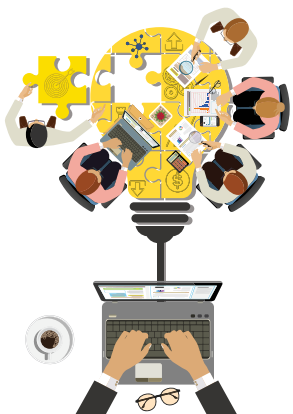
**STRATEGY**

**BUSINESS 2030**

Eye-opening behavioural trends that could shape tomorrow's business.

30

- DR HELEN EDWARDS





# Champions of change

## Inspiring, Creating and Innovating

With a vision to be a leader in Management Development AIMA facilitates individuals and organisations to realise their potential. And in its endeavour to shape the management destiny of the new age India, AIMA has constituted **YOUNG LEADERS COUNCIL** for young leaders. A non-lobbying platform to mentor and nurture young leaders for the next wave transformation.



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Leadership



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development



Best Practice  
Sharing



# The power of storytelling

**Shrinivas Dempo** is President, AIMA & Chairman, Dempo Group of Companies.

**A company's tale is a collective expression that has to be loud, clear, and authentic to the core. There should be consistency too, ensuring which is largely the leader's responsibility. Those working at the edges of the organisation and dealing with customers face to face should have excellent fluency in it.**

**D**iligent businesses have long employed storytelling as a strategic tool to achieve clear objectives. And the perks have been many- better credibility and trust, a strong connect with the various stakeholders, and a robust brand image. The volatile times we live in only accentuate the need for compelling narratives that can build competitive advantage, the cycles of which are shrinking by the day.

Storytelling, in a sense, is nothing but strategic messaging. It is a great opportunity to create a common lexicon around the company's core, culture, and values that is shared across silos as well as communicated to external audiences. In an organisational context, it demands much beyond a delineation of things past and present. What it entails is an interplay between the past, the present, and the future. So while being rooted in the most viable lessons of the past, an impactful narrative should portray the present reality as well as hold enough inspiration for the future.

Structure is highly crucial here since we are stringing together a set of intangibles, mostly facts and figures. This abstractness makes it all the more important to first identify an overarching theme that binds the various

elements and then package and structure it in an engaging way. And this cannot be a one-time exercise. In keeping pace with the constant flux around, its contours need to be revisited, redrawn, and made more contextual. Companies that understand these imperatives invest in it a lot, in terms of brainstorming, identifying crucial moments in their growth journey, and even seeking the advice of experts.

It is one thing to have something interesting to tell, it is another to articulate it with clarity. As it is the case with many other corporate responsibilities, much onus lies with leaders in this respect too. By virtue of their role, they have a huge audience to influence and they are also the ones who have to ensure buy-in on crucial decisions and endeavours. Stories would come in particularly handy for them while driving business transformations when they need to be take everybody along. However, those at the helm are not and cannot be the sole storytellers.

A company's tale is a collective expression that has to be loud, clear, and authentic to the core. There should be consistency too, ensuring which is largely the leader's responsibility. Those working at the edges of the organisation and dealing with customers face to face should have excellent fluency in it. It will do companies good to train sales and marketing professionals in the nuances.

Irrespective of who tells the story, it is crucial to appeal to emotions as much to the intellect. The best way to do this is to weave in strands of personal experiences. We

**Advances in digital technology and proliferation of social media have added much to the scope of storytelling. There are more channels than ever before to tell tales, impress audiences, and even to gauge the impact. And storytelling is fast becoming an integral part of digital campaigns aimed at both external and internal audiences.**

saw many firms doing this quite skilfully during the pandemic and it helped in keeping workforce morale quite high. Adopting such an inclusive approach--finding the space for people's emotions in particular--makes immense business sense especially in the 21st century work context wherein collaboration and team effectiveness are key to business growth. This can go a long way towards creating a feeling of shared commitment and a deep sense of belonging, which in turn can spark better team effectiveness. Dr Susie Wise, founder of the K12 Lab at Stanford d. school, touches upon this aspect in her book Design for Belonging. She talks about the incredible opportunities to

send belonging cues through visual stories. For instance, a hallway of monitors that tell the founding story and how people can join work or even large posters of the clients and community members being served. She even suggests inviting employees to contribute by leaving some evidence of their work, thinking, or personality behind, such as a photo or tag or symbolic object. Such gestures will only add to deeper employee engagement, especially in an increasingly digital work environment.

Advances in digital technology and proliferation of social media have added much to the scope of storytelling. There are

more channels than ever before to tell tales, impress audiences, and even to gauge the impact. And storytelling is fast becoming an integral part of digital campaigns aimed at both external and internal audiences.

With such shifts marking the business landscape, old ways of storytelling would hardly offer any edge. Purpose-driven companies have to sharpen their creative intelligence so as to craft narratives that can meaningfully change their script. **IM**

*The opinion expressed is personal.*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Storytelling in organisations is about sharing an experience related to the organisation through an interesting narrative. It helps in transfer of knowledge, forming perception, nurturing trust, and mostly importantly, developing emotional connections. Stories about important and fascinating events in the organisation which influence existing and potential stakeholders and clients and inspire employees and management, become a part of the organisation's 'brand image'.

Though, generally seen as part of marketing, there are many examples of organisational stories that go beyond just the marketing strategy. They touch the lives of people—even those who aren't potential customers—and motivate them to follow a similar path (to success) in their own fields of interest.

One, among the countless examples of storytelling, is that of the iconic car brand Mercedes-Benz. The story goes like this- In 1902, Emil Jellinek collaborated with Karl Benz, widely regarded as 'the father of the car' and the 'father of the automobile industry', to create the ultimate race-ready motorised carriage, which we today call the automobile. He named the car Mercedes, after his daughter, and entered it into races. The car won every race it entered. Soon, people, who would otherwise not even feel the need to own a car, wanted 'the car named Mercedes'. Thus, a brand was born, and it continues to be the pinnacle of automobile excellence, even today. Throughout its history, this and many such stories about Mercedes-Benz continue to inspire people...even those who cannot afford it.

Yetunde Hofmann, founder, SOLARIS, and author, *Beyond Engagement*, writes in the cover story of this issue, "Having leaders speak about their experiences in a way that truly connects with their audience and helps them to understand the path ahead is incredibly powerful as a means of inspiring and driving positive change." With this thought mind, we can make our story heard, drive that 'positive change', and pave our path to greatness.

Do write in with your views to [imeditorial@spentamultimedia.com](mailto:imeditorial@spentamultimedia.com)

*Maneck Davar*  
Maneck Davar

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# COMPELLING NARRATIVES





# A deeply personal act

*Why leaders need to be more authentic in the workplace.*

---

◆ YETUNDE HOFMANN, AUTHOR, *BEYOND ENGAGEMENT*

can take stakeholders on a journey which sets them into action. However, this cannot be done without leaders embracing their authenticity and telling stories that truly resonate with their people and their own realities. So, how can leaders bring their true selves to work and tell their story in a way that inspires and advances change?

Let us start with the basics of a good story. At school, it is likely that you were taught about fairy-tales and fables, and the necessary components which go into writing and reciting these famous stories. These elements are the same as those required in storytelling for a business context. Whether it is a verbal presentation or a written report, you must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, with a clear lesson that is relevant to your audience. Too much detail, or too little of it, should be avoided. However, what is different—and often overlooked—in the world of business is the importance of authenticity and bringing the personal elements into your communication style.

Being your authentic self at work is the ability to express yourself from a place of who you are, not what you do or have. It enables you to speak up without the fear of judgement and to contribute an idea without the fear of ridicule. Yet, authenticity requires a great deal of courage from individuals and is not something that many of us feel comfortable showing at work, choosing instead to ramp up a professional persona because we have the desire and need to relate, belong, and feel valued by others. This can be especially prevalent for those from under-represented demographics in the workplace who can often find themselves changing their behaviours or personalities to fit in with the majority.

Stepping forward as your true self and embracing authenticity requires a willingness to accept yourself and the confidence to be seen for everything that truly you are. It is an act of love for yourself, which also empowers you to have the strength and courage to accept other humans as they truly are. For business leaders, leading in this way and ensuring love is at the centre of the organisation is key to building this level of inclusion and instilling a culture of openness and acceptance. In such a scenario, members of the staff

**S**torytelling is a key part of our shared human experience. It has long connected people across cultures and brought together groups who may seem like they have nothing in common, through tales of success and learnings. But what is often forgotten is the power of storytelling, especially in business. The ability to connect a personal story to a real situation in the world of work and communicate the teachings



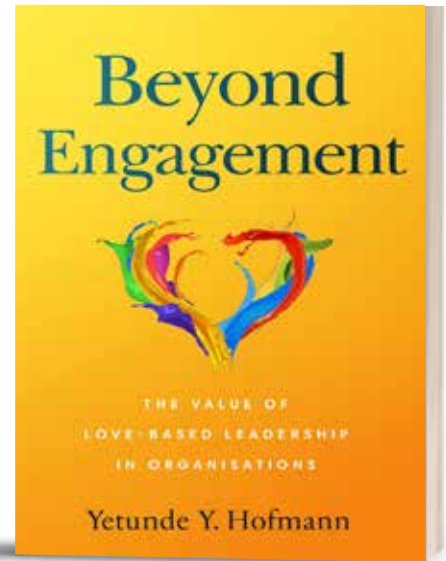
**Engaging stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and interests—such as governments, clients, staff, and even divisions within your company—requires you to paint a picture that goes beyond the strategy points and numerical details of a standard corporate presentation.**

feel like they belong, can be their authentic selves, and are valued and respected in the workplace.

It is worth remembering, though, that even if your organisation has built a culture of openness and you as a leader have many opportunities to speak, being authentic in your storytelling can take practice. It is not something that comes naturally to many people in and out of the workplace, so it is vital that you identify opportunities where you can introduce authenticity into your storytelling and communication style. Work meetings or team events where you feel comfortable with speaking up and contributing

your ideas can help you kick off your journey towards more authentic storytelling. Finding a group of people with who you feel safe sharing stories regularly and from who you learn, can also inspire and empower you to become more confident in these situations and find a familiar rhythm to talking about your lived experiences.

Engaging stakeholders with diverse backgrounds and interests—such as governments, clients, staff, and even divisions



within your company—requires you to paint a picture that goes beyond the strategy points and numerical details of a standard corporate presentation. Instead, it requires a storyteller to engage with their audience's emotions and understanding of themselves and the world around them. Whether it is a presentation for a customer or a speech for your team, taking



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**Having leaders speak about their experiences in a way that truly connects with their audience and helps them to understand the path ahead is incredibly powerful as a means of inspiring and driving positive change.**

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Yetunde Hofmann** is founder, SOLARIS. Yetunde is also author, *Beyond Engagement*.

your audience with you on the emotional journey and learnings that you gained as a leader enables them to be back in that moment with you, thinking about how they would react in a similar situation. Telling a story about your lived experience as a leader also shows your vulnerability and your personality behind your corporate title, thus generating real emotions that connect with the listeners on a deeper, more personal level. People might not remember the margin growth figures in your presentation,

but they will remember their desire to achieve them if they felt inspired, encouraged, and supported whilst being told them.

In addition, starting a conversation around the moral of your story also ensures that stakeholders are engaged and feel like they are part of the solution and process. ‘So, what’ is a powerful statement and question to elicit discussion amongst your team. So, what if you win a new customer? So, what if you achieve a certain level of profitability or growth? So,

what if you develop a new skill as a team, and use this to identify new opportunities in your market and industry? Learning from the stories of others is an effective and inspiring way to see a different perspective and encourage change but it is important not leave it to assumption. Instead, talk about what your audience should take away from your story and put into action in their own day-to-day activities and strategies.

Storytelling is a deeply personal act with a universal impact. Having leaders speak about their experiences in a way that truly connects with their audience and helps them to understand the path ahead is incredibly powerful as a means of inspiring and driving positive change. It helps to humanise problems and shows the true impact of experiences and situations that others may not have considered, acting as a reminder that regardless of our rank, history, or background, we are all human and we can all learn from each other. In doing so, the use of stories in any situation—business meetings, stakeholder presentations, or driving large scale change management projects—can be one of the most effective tools a leader can employ. **IM**



Alex Brueckmann, founder and CEO, Brueckmann Executive Consulting, and author, *Secrets of Next-Level Entrepreneurs* and *The Strategy Legacy*, debunks the idea that work-life balance is the key to happiness, the belief that sustainable businesses cannot exist at scale, the assumption that the customer is always right, the notion that strategic pricing is complex, and the misconception that failure is always bad.

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**MYTH  
BUSTER**

# Reaching the next level

## **MYTH 1: WORK-LIFE BALANCE IS KEY**

Many people chase work-life balance. It is the idea that they can find a happy medium between their professional and personal lives. However, work-life balance is a myth that has been perpetuated for decades. In reality, the two are not separate, and it is delusive to see them as counterparts that need to be balanced.

Rather than trying to balance work and life, it is more effective to integrate them and see work as a part of life. Forget work-life balance and aim to find life balance instead.

Achieving life balance is not only about the time you allocate to any aspect of your life but also about mental health. Prioritising self-care, hobbies, and time with loved ones can help individuals perform better at work and ultimately achieve their goals. The key is to find a blend that works for you, whether it's taking breaks during the workday, working from home, or setting clear boundaries regarding your availability.

If work is sucking the life out of you, and as a result, you spend non-work time

with recharging, only to have your energy depleted again the next day, something is fundamentally wrong. Work should be a contributor to your life balance, not something that needs to be counter-balanced.

## **MYTH 2: SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES CANNOT EXIST AT SCALE.**

For a long time, there was this notion that sustainable businesses were only possible on a small scale. The idea was that if you wanted to be environmentally conscious, you had to make sacrifices in terms of profit and growth. However, this is not the case.

In fact, sustainable practices can lead to cost savings and increased efficiency, which can result in greater profitability. Furthermore, consumers are increasingly prioritising sustainability in their purchasing decisions, which can lead to increased demand for sustainable products and services.

Patagonia, the billion-dollar apparel and gear company, for instance, is a poster



child for sustainability in business. The company has not only achieved financial success but also made significant strides in environmental and social sustainability, by constantly challenging themselves to find new solutions to old problems.

Sustainability can take many forms, from reducing waste and emissions to promoting social responsibility. Regardless of the specific practices, sustainable business

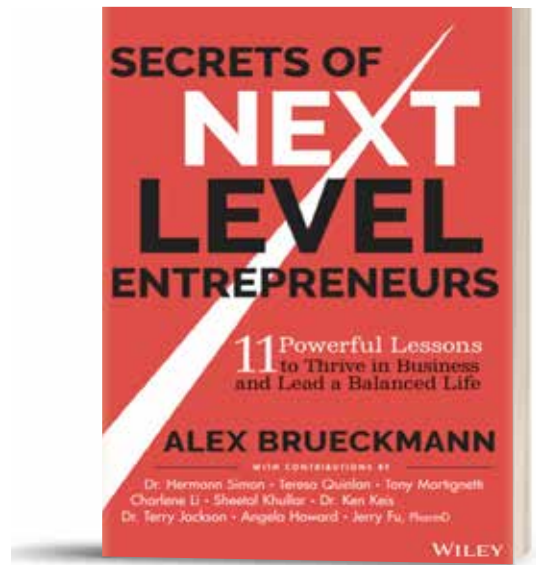
models can be profitable and successful on a large scale.

**Many successful business leaders have experienced failure at some point in their career, some of them extensively... the key is to learn from mistakes and use them as an opportunity to grow and improve.**

### **MYTH 3: THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS RIGHT.**

The notion that customer focus is all that matters has been around for over a century, and it is a common belief that the customer should always come first. While it is important to prioritise customer satisfaction, it is not the only factor that matters in business.

Listening to customer feedback and addressing their needs can lead to loyal customers, but businesses should also consider their own needs. For example,



businesses also need to focus on employee satisfaction, financial performance, and their own identity.

A few years back, we took the decision to walk away from a lucrative client contract. While working with the customer, we became aware of questionable ethical standards in their business. This customer was exploiting vulnerable groups for financial gain. The customer is always right? Certainly not. For us, it was more important to protect and maintain our own integrity and live up to our values than to continue to service that client.

### **MYTH 4: STRATEGIC PRICING IS COMPLEX.**

One common myth in business is that finding the right price for your offering is highly complex. As a result, many businesses do not even try to find the optimal price point. Instead, they simply base their pricing either on their own cost structure or the pricing of the competition—and as a result leave huge





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parts of their profit potential untouched.

While it is important to be aware of the competition, businesses should follow a more strategic, value-based pricing approach. This can maximize their profit potential in smarter ways, than trying to sell more and more products at a certain price point.

Big businesses, for example car manufacturers, use elaborate pricing methods like conjoint measurement to determine ideal price points and bundles. The core of these methods is about understanding which aspects of your offering clients value the most, related to the price of your product or service.

Once you understand what customers truly value about buying from you, you can differentiate your offering in ways that it reflects their willingness to pay. This allows you to move away from cost or competition focused pricing.

Every business can do that on a small scale, for example by surveying their customers, or by asking them while you work with them. Figure out what the true value is you

bring, and how it relates to your pricing. It's as easy as that.

**MYTH 5: FAILURE IS ALWAYS BAD.**

Nobody likes failure, and we typically see it as a setback to success. We try to avoid making mistakes, sometimes at all cost, because we fear the consequences. However, failure can be a valuable learning experience that ultimately leads to larger future success.

In fact, many successful business leaders have experienced failure at some point in their career, some of them extensively. Take Virgin founder Richard Branson, for example. Over a dozen of his businesses went bust, including his attempts to sell Virgin Cola, lingerie, wedding dresses, and cosmetics. Branson kept going and turned Virgin into the success it is today. The key is to learn from mistakes and use them as an opportunity to grow and improve. By reframing failure as a learning experience, businesses can take more risks and innovate without fear of failure. This can lead to breakthroughs and new ideas that ultimately lead to success. ■



*Organisations are looking for leaders who are experts in their area while also possessing knowledge across domains.*

**LEADERSHIP**

♦ DR WANDA T WALLACE, AUTHOR, *YOU CAN'T KNOW IT ALL*

# A new breed of leaders

Claire has been in her role for five years. She is an expert executor who is highly valued by her manager and many others in the organisation who rely on her expertise. Yet, Claire is frustrated that she is not getting promoted. She would like to step up to the next level and does not understand what she is missing. She knows her area. She delivers great results. She feels she deserves that promotion. Claire came to me to ask what was missing as well as whether it was time for her to leave the company for a place that would promote her.

What Claire is missing is an understanding that executing is not only what the next step in rank is about. Instead, upper management is looking for someone who understands their area as well as someone who is not always stuck in the details, who can create leverage and who can gain the confidence of senior stakeholders. Claire needs a new understanding of her role as a leader.

## **The demise of the generalist**

The proliferation of high-ranking experts in the corporate landscape is a relatively recent

phenomenon, the outcome of growth in a knowledge economy, leading companies to provide increasingly technical solutions and advice. As a result, companies no longer want their rising leaders to be generalists. 'Generalist' implies that as you move upward, you need to become a jack-of-all-trades, a manager who knows a little of this and a little of that. The promise of generalism was that companies would grow cadres of managers with 'fungible' skills who could lead anything and could be dropped into any business as needed. The assumption was that a given business's specific context was either easily learned by these generalists or irrelevant to the task of leading people.

## **A new breed of leaders**

Today, most employees in a knowledge driven business resent a new leader who knows nothing about their technical specialty. HR executives in many companies will tell you that it is no longer even feasible to create career paths to groom generalists for top leadership, since many managerial slots are simply not suitable for people who bring mere management skills. Deep technical knowledge is needed and valued. Consequently, leaders,

**When E-leaders develop strong teams with depth, they are then asked to increase their leverage. Trouble often ensues because E-leaders have not learned to delegate, step away from the executional details and let others make decisions independently.**

today, must learn to lead at times as the expert and at times as a non-expert—i.e., as a leader who spans across knowledge domains.

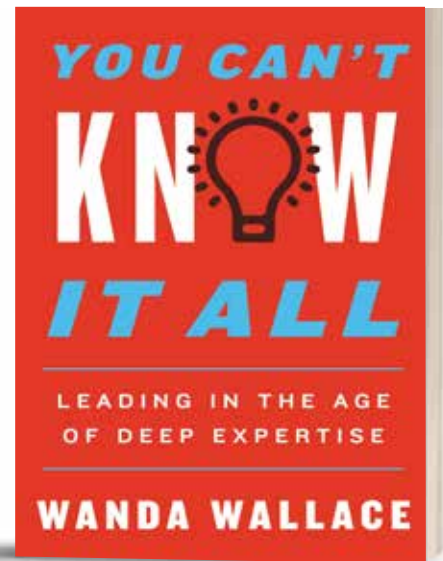
In its ideal form, ‘Expert’ or E-leadership is a potent combination of thorough knowledge in a given field and a clear concept of how that knowledge can and should be applied to improve team performance. Teams value coming to an E-leader for help solving very deep problems, and managers love knowing that E-leaders thoroughly understand the details in their area. This knowledge is essential for controlling quality and risk.

However, these are not first-time leaders – they often lead managers of teams.

However, when E-leaders develop strong teams with depth, they are then asked to increase their leverage. Trouble often ensues because E-leaders have not learned to delegate, step away from the executional details and let others make decisions independently. The solution isn’t about abandoning expertise, instead it requires learning to span across domains without expertise. This solution calls for a new question: How much time should the leader spend leading as an expert and how much time as a spanning leader?



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### **Developing a new mindset to move out of the comfort zone**

E-leaders are comfortable in the value they bring to the team and the organisation, their confidence is usually strong because they know their content thoroughly. Their networks are usually defined by people who tap their knowledge and experience. And they tend to avoid most organisational politics by sticking to their knowledge base, letting their work speak for itself, and delving into the details to resolve disagreements.

When E-leaders move to a broader role, they need to gain basic competence in dozens of areas without having to become expert in every aspect. It takes a new mindset about how to lead and a different approach to understanding how you are adding value to an ever-growing set of responsibilities over which you have little detailed knowledge.

Contrary to popular belief, deep technical leaders, what many call ‘Hi Professionals’, can learn to become effective spanning leaders if they are shown the nature of the transition being asked and given support in shifting their approach.



### What the best leaders bring to the job

Every leader needs to understand how to add value to the job, how to get the right work done, and how to interact with people. What sets superb leaders apart is their mindset about what each of these elements mean—in other words, the mental model about what great leaders do.

### Adding value

Expert leaders add value to the company and the team through their knowledge, wisdom, and sense of responsibility for protecting the company. Their work is detailed, accurate, and focused on solving deep problems. Their interactions across the organisation are based on the credibility of their expertise and the information they possess. Superiors, peers, subordinates, and outside observers of the company expect the E-leader's decisions to be within a well-defined scope and to be based

on a thorough assimilation of the details, extensive content knowledge and experience, and strict application of logic. An E-leader's tangible contributions often include an ability to cut through the bureaucracy and get to the heart of an issue that solves a customer problem, a talent that can be extremely valuable to the company.

When leading beyond their expertise, i.e., as S-Leaders, managers need to understand enough to see how the pieces fit together, rather than trying to know everything the technical experts know. Value comes from the breadth of knowledge, not the depth, and from the network which the S-leader can tap to help the team access information, raise their profile, and resolve conflicts. As one seasoned S-leader put it: "As I became more of a spanning leader, I retained my understanding of how things work but I lost the need to dip into the day-day detail of the work."



## Getting (the right) work done

Within the getting-the-work-done rubric, there are five elements that are characteristic of E-leaders: controlling from the center, relying on professional skills and contacts, drilling deeply, deep focus and concentration, and getting the right decision. In other words, setting clear, unambiguous targets, and staying focused on them without worrying about other aspects of the business or spending time with people outside their area.

When leading beyond their expertise, managers lead more by influence than by telling people what to do. Team members need to see the S-leader as an assimilator, synthesiser, and integrator of information. They want to take part in that integration process and to see it working. They expect the S-leader to get buy-in for initiatives through a process of consultation and discussion, and for decisions to happen at the end of a well-understood, participative process.

S-leaders have to find people who can do the work, and then trust them. S-leaders are not generalists—they must know some essential things about the work being done by their team, just not all of the details. They use their wisdom and network to verify that their team is on track.

## How you interact

Fundamentally, as an E-leader, you trust yourself, or someone just like you, to do a good job. For E-leaders, conversations most often rely on rational arguments and facts, quirky personalities are accepted, and people follow you because of your specific knowledge.

S-leaders must be comfortable working with and leading people who know more than they do and who have a broad range of personalities and styles. Their work is enabling the team, not doing the work. As a result, S-leaders must become skilled at influencing others with

more than logic. Their relationships, not their depth of knowledge, become how they get work done and achieve goals.

## Stepping out of your comfort zone

Now that we have assessed both forms of leadership, you can probably see that few managerial positions are strictly one or the other. Your current position is no doubt some sort of mix, as are any positions you may aspire to.

Given the differences between E- and S-leadership, how do you build up the nuanced, complex leadership capacities that are necessary for a move from leading as the expert into S-leadership?

Here are a few important questions to look at:

- What is your value as a leader?
- How much of that leadership value is based on expertise and how much on the intangibles of S-leadership?
- Should you seek to change the proportion of the two types in your present position?
- If you are currently in an E-leader position and are hoping to shift the balance to more S-leadership, are your team members ready, or can they get ready, to be the experts?
- If you are looking at a new job that is more heavily S-leadership, what capabilities do you need to acquire to succeed? What changes will you need to make in how you think about your role?
- Are you ready for the challenges of getting out of your comfort zone?
- Who will help you?

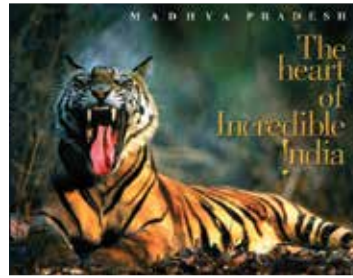
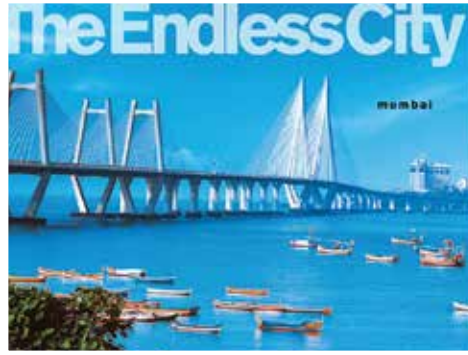
Answering these questions will help you think about the next step in your career and it will help you define where to put your energy along with the area you most need to develop. Talk with your mentors. Get advice from people around you. Do not expect to figure it out all by yourself. **IM**



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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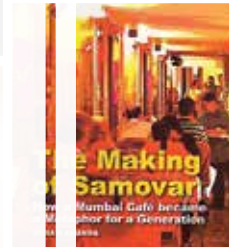
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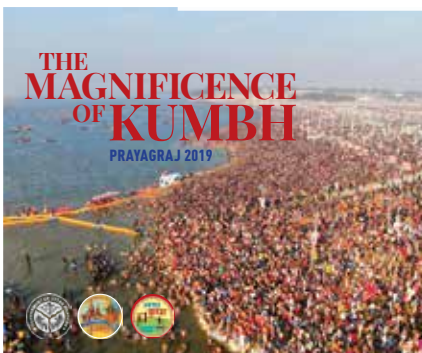
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◆ GREGG WARD, AUTHOR, *THE RESPECTFUL LEADER*

# With all due respect

**C**reating high-performing teams is a tough thing to do. Keeping them high performing is even tougher. To crack the mysteries of high performance, consider this wisdom: ‘Successful people consistently do what other people only do occasionally. Successful teams are packed with successful people. If we could get our people to do the right things consistently, everyday, our businesses would be more successful’.

Are your actions and behaviours as a leader worthy of respect? It is a simple—yet loaded—question.

While you may believe other people should treat you with respect because of your status, authority, or position, you cannot expect they automatically will. The ‘respectful leader’ will make an ongoing effort to be respect-worthy.

Today, many leaders fail to comport themselves in respectful ways. The signs may be subtle: Have you ever lied to a customer? Would you describe your leadership style as ‘command and control’? Have you ever blown up at your colleagues?

At other times, the signals are blatant. Some leaders are purposely disrespectful and refuse to take responsibility for their behaviour.

Others shut down, check out, or walk out of meetings abruptly. They use foul language to describe and denigrate others. Or they play favourites and overlook the disrespectful behaviour of rainmakers and internal VIPs.

How does your leadership compare? To determine if you are worthy of respect, ask these six questions:

■ **Are you honest?**

Obviously, lying to people is not respect-worthy. But plenty of leaders try to get away with it for various reasons. The problem is that most people have what we, at the Center for Respectful Leadership, call a ‘built-in B.S. detector’; they know when their boss is slinging them a line of baloney. People do not feel respected when they sense they are being lied to by their leaders.

You have probably heard the old saying that “honesty is the best policy.” There is a lot of wisdom in this, partly because when you are honest, most people can sense it and sincerely appreciate it, and they are more willing to help you solve problems as a result.

Even if the news you need to deliver is not particularly good, your people will appreciate and respect your transparency. We can tell you from experience, from

working with hundreds of companies, non-profits, and government agencies, that when leaders are as honest and open as they can be about what is going on, they are more respected and trusted.

■ **Do you follow through?**

Another part of being respect-worthy is simply doing what you say you are going to do and following through on your commitments. No one respects leaders who break their promises. In fact, it is more respect-worthy not to make a commitment in the first place than it is to commit and fail to honour it.

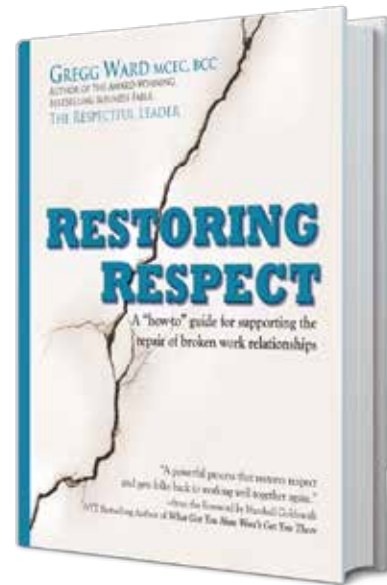
Most customers do not have patience for companies that do not follow through on their commitments. The same goes for employees and leaders. If an employee finds that their boss does not follow through, they will eventually go look to work for a leader who does.

■ **Are you fair?**

The respectful leader is consistently fair to everyone and avoids playing favourites. We have worked for managers who have played favourites—in fact, some of them made us their favourites!—and we did not respect them for it.

Do you have an employee who is critical to your company's success? Do you overlook or defend their disrespectful behaviour because of it? Unfortunately, this kind of favouritism is common in many organisations; rainmakers and purported geniuses are given a pass by leadership because they are considered invaluable. This kind of favouritism is not respect-worthy, to say the least. Eventually, it will undermine morale and cost your organisation money.

Respect-worthy leaders go out of their way to hold everyone to the same expectations and standards. Most employees respond well to a boss—even a firm, no-nonsense kind of boss—who treats everyone in a consistently fair manner.



■ **Are you prone to swearing or name-calling?**

When it comes to cursing and swearing, most people—even those who use foul language themselves—generally have little respect for leaders who swear often, especially if it is directed at others in the heat of anger. And they definitely do not respect senior executives who yell and call people ugly, disgusting names.

Even though you, and perhaps a few of your close colleagues, may be comfortable with these behaviours, please know that a significant number of people are not; they find them disrespectful. They do not consider them respect-worthy.

Now, of course, using a swear word when you stub your toe is usually understood and quickly forgiven by almost everyone. But cursing at someone or calling them a name is usually not. If you must swear, keep it about inanimate





things and lousy situations, not people. And keep it quiet and to a minimum.

#### ■ Are you clear?

Most employees appreciate clarity from their bosses. They want to know what the goals are, how success is measured, and when the work is due and then be allowed to get on with achieving this as best they know how.

Unfortunately, in the fog of busyness and multitasking, sometimes we are not as clear as we could be; we assume our employees know what we want. As we all know, assumptions can get us in trouble.

Or the reverse is true: We think our employees need to be told precisely what to do and how to do it. This is, of course, what micromanagers do.

The respectful leader offers clarity on expectations, but not too much, and opens the door for employees to ask questions without worrying that they will be perceived as ignorant or needy by their boss.

#### ■ Do you cultivate patience?

There is no doubt that in today's hyper-competitive business world, leaders everywhere are under enormous pressure to get things done quickly. Unfortunately, this pressure is pushed down into organisations to the point where everyone is harping on everyone else to work 'faster, faster, faster'! This approach can produce short-term results, but in the long run, it is exhausting and unsustainable.

The respectful leader understands that each person works best—and makes fewer mistakes—when they are allowed to work at their own pace. Sure, some people will try to take advantage of a patient boss. But, in a truly respectful culture, most people will willingly step up their pace when they see a genuine need to work fast.

Cultivate patience. Set reasonable time frame expectations. And trust your teams to deliver. They will.

The bottom line: The respectful leader consciously practices being respect-worthy. **IM**



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Gregg Ward** is founder and Executive Director, Center for Respectful Leadership. Greg is author, *The Respectful Leader: Seven Ways to Influence Without Intimidation and Restoring Respect*.



*Ways in which a glimpse into the margins can be a source of insight, revelation, and inspiration for mainstream marketers and business leaders.*

**STRATEGY**

◆ DR HELEN EDWARDS, AUTHOR, *FROM MARGINAL TO MAINSTREAM*

# Business 2030

**M**arginal behaviours, choices, and ways of life can be eye-openers in their own right, even where they are likely to remain at the fringes.

For mainstream marketers and business leaders, there are myriad ways in which a glimpse into the margins can be a source of insight, revelation, and inspiration.

Because one thing is for sure—meaningful growth is unlikely to be the outcome of plodding on with the same tired thinking within the same, me-too, ‘sideways’ innovation groove into which mainstream business seems to be ever more firmly stuck.

Here are four marginal behaviours and some entrepreneurs who have decided to pursue them.

Never mind that the behaviours are seemingly confined to the fringes; these founders believe there is scope for mainstream expansion and see growth where others see only issues, confusion or nothing much at all.

A few caveats, though, before we launch into the list. These are entrepreneurial start-ups we are talking about, and that is always a

fast-moving subset. Facts that were correct as this copy got published might have changed by the time you read it. Some businesses will have moved on, some pivoted, some joined with competitors, some sold, others run out of cash, or luck or time. And who knows, one might have punched that vaunted hole in the universe. There’s no way of knowing which is which, at the outset. That is just how it is.

## 1. Polyphasic sleeping

The COVID pandemic—with many more people working from home—gave the notion of adapting work and life schedules around personal sleep patterns a boost. Some interesting businesses were already seeking to help make that happen.

MetroNaps was founded in 2003 based on the then ‘crazy idea’, as co-founder Christopher Lindholst puts it, of ‘encouraging employees to sleep at work’. The need was clearly there. In their initial, empirical research, the founders noted that people would nod off at the office anyway, or on the train home, but did not want to be caught sleeping on the job. Some admitted that they would sneak off to the toilet, a parked car, or an unused

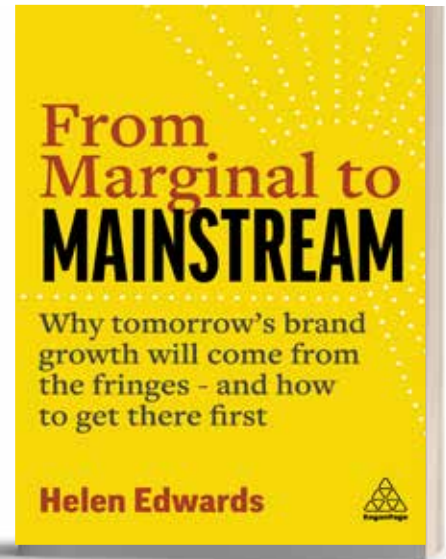
conference room for an afternoon nap. The remainder simply ‘caffeinated their circadian rhythm in an attempt to keep their focus’.

The business believes that helping people adapt to their natural sleep rhythms at work makes them both happier and more productive. Its lead product is the EnergyPod, an ergonomically designed recliner with a low-slung privacy hood, purpose built for sleeping at work, and costing upwards of \$15,000. Customers today include Google, HuffPost, Virgin, Accenture, and the NHS.

Apps are another obvious play in this space. One of the most downloaded is Polyphasic Sleep by Alexey Kuzokov, which offers seven different sleep schedules ranging from biphasic (five to seven hours at night and 20 minutes during the day) through to what it calls ‘Uberman’, which is the full-on polyphasic schedule of 20 minutes every four hours, round the clock.

## 2. Microdosing

Legality is the thorny issue here. Psychedelics (principally psilocybin, or ‘magic mushrooms’) are banned in most jurisdictions. But they are legal in the Netherlands, and in the US state



of Oregon<sup>1</sup>, while other parts of the United States and Canada have voted to decriminalise them in medical therapeutic settings. Entrepreneurs have come at the opportunity and the challenges in different ways on both sides of the Atlantic.

At the top of its homepage, Amsterdam-based Blisssed declares: ‘The psychedelic renaissance is underway!’ To help it along, the venture specialises in packing dried and magic ground truffles into a capsule format. Even a tiny amount, according to







the site, can ‘trigger the body’s serotonin receptors, releasing hormones essential for health, well-being and happiness’.

Mojo skirts round the legal issues by producing soft chews laced with a blend of ‘carefully selected bioactives’, which, it claims, will mimic the effects of a psilocybin microdose. Founder Peter Reitano, a serial entrepreneur, calls the product ‘the world’s first productivity gummy’<sup>2</sup>.

Other businesses are finding ways to blend product and service offers in interesting combinations. The Canada-based Field Trip Health aims to provide a ‘safe space’ to engage in ‘psychedelic assisted therapy’. The business, co-founded in 2019 by a group of five partners comprising bio-scientists, ‘visionaries’ and entrepreneurs, went public in a 2020, listing on the Canadian Stock Exchange

with a market capitalisation of 102 million Canadian dollars<sup>3</sup>.

In Jamaica, where psilocybin is legal, MycoMedications and Silo Wellness offer psychedelic retreats in beautiful island locations. In Holland, Synthesis aims to live up to its name by fusing experimentation with truffle mushrooms in both high and moderate doses with the relaxation of a three-day retreat.

### 3. New nomads

Motorhome living has enjoyed more prominence following the release of the films *Nomadland* and *Into the Wild*. It is beginning to feel more like a viable life choice for the adventurous, and businesses are popping up to support those wanting to take the plunge.

One of them is NomadCreations, founded in the UK by entrepreneurs who



self-identify as ‘nomads at heart’. The venture offers both pre-built campervans and a van conversion service that creates tailor-made, bespoke campervans ‘to get as many people as possible out on the open road’<sup>4</sup>.

Going at it more indirectly is the remote job platform Wanderbrief, founded in 2015 by the Dutch ‘Backpacker Intern’ Mark Van Der Heijden. The business offers a virtual home to remote professionals or, as Van Der Heijden prefers to call them, digital nomads<sup>5</sup>.

#### 4. Living off the sea

What is the next ‘veganism’? That is a question asked by entrepreneurs and established food manufacturers alike.

Living off the sea is a plausible candidate. This is not about plundering our already overfished oceans, but harvesting or farming kelp and other edible sea plants, which grow naturally at a phenomenal rate, are a good source of protein and are rich in iodine, calcium and vitamin C. Here are three pioneer ventures already exploring the commercial opportunities.

New York-based AKUA claims to be the maker of the world’s first kelp burger. The business was created in 2019 by entrepreneur Courtney Boyd Myers, who learned about regenerative ocean farming through her connections with charity Green Wave. She was inspired by the nutritional benefits and wanted to find a way to get more people eating sustainable sea greens. Customers buy directly from the website, choosing from products such as kelp ‘ground meat’ and kelp jerky – voted one of Time Magazine’s ‘best inventions of 2019’<sup>6</sup>.

The founders of Atlantic Sea Farms created the first commercially viable seaweed farm in the United States. But

this was a pivot from their prior focus as a traditional fishing business based in Maine, reliant on lobster and shrimp—both of which were increasingly under threat from climate change. Products include jarred Sea-Beet Kraut, Sea-Chi (a kimchi garnish), and frozen kelp cubes for smoothies.

The UK-based Notpla does something even more original. It makes edible and biodegradable packaging for drinks and sauces out of a seaweed and plant-based material. Its lead product, Ooho, biodegrades in a matter of weeks...or can just be eaten.

Working in new ways with new kinds of potential customers can feel challenging, even scary. The risks are real. But on the upside, this is where meaningful growth is to be found. So, if there is one axiom that we take from this article, let it be this: hope trumps fear. **IM**

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