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AIMA ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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CULTURE BY DESIGN



CREATE INTENTIONAL CULTURES

SALLY NETHERWOOD

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Global Advanced Management Programmes (GAMP)



Programme Background

The rapid pace of change in the global economy continues to redefine business leadership.Organisations are facing growing demands to align with digital transformation, sustainability goals, dynamic customer behaviours, and ever-evolving regulatory frameworks. Leaders are expected to drive innovation while balancing resilience, agility, and growth in increasingly competitive and interconnected markets.

AIMA's Global Advanced Management Programme (GAMP) is tailored to equip business leaders with insights into emerging trends and strategies to address these challenges effectively.

Programme Objectives

- Identify opportunities for profitable growth.
- 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.

Programme Framework

- Class Room Lectures and Interactions
- Keynotes by Silicon Valley Startups and CEOs
- Visits to and interaction with the top management teams of some of the iconic and innovative companies like Nvidia, Cisco, IBM Research, Wells Fargo Bank, Standard Chartered Bank, PayPal, Fujitsu Open Innovation Gateway, Chevron Corporation, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), Calpine Corporation, Dupont Innovation Centre, UC Berkeley Campus amongst others.

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Certificate Programme in
Contractual Dispute Resolution

With Technical Support from The World Bank

About the Programme

The Certificate in Contractual Dispute Resolution, a blended learning programme is designed to prepare participants with the foundational knowledge and skills to understand and effectively manage contractual agreements. The course helps develop skills to identify and prevent common problems in contracts that may lead to disputes, while also providing techniques for resolving any disputes that may arise, through various methods. With a focus on both theory and practice, the curriculum explores a range of topics, including the legal framework of contract management, dispute resolution and best practices. The The programme is designed in a manner to foster a managerial perspective on contract management and the dispute resolution process.

Key Features

- Certification from premier institute like AIMA with technical support from the World Bank
- Focused Course Structure to address specialised needs
- Blended Learning Environment
- Benefit from strong AIMA industry connect and network

Eligibility

Graduate in any discipline from a university recognised by UGC

Working experience of 2-3 years is desirable

Fee Structure

INR 30,000 plus GST as applicable.

AIMA GSTIN ID Number: 07AAATA1644A1ZH PAN no. of AIMA: AAATA 1644 A

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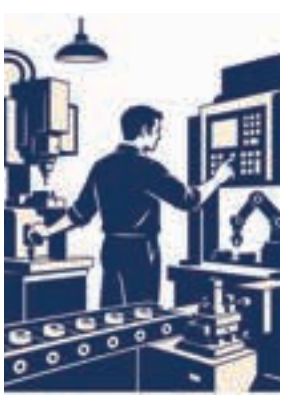
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ADVANCED CERTIFICATE PROGRAMME IN
BUSINESS CONSULTING



The Advanced Certificate Programme in Business Consulting is aimed at catering to the growing need for trained and skilled management consultants. This programme will help the participants in gaining knowledge and developing skills to act as a business/management consultant and further develop them as experts who can help the organisations to come out of the problematic situations they face.

Eligibility

- Post-Graduate or equivalent in any discipline from a recognised university
- Minimum work experience of 5 years is desirable

Duration

The duration of the programme is 6 months

Programme Fees

The programme fees for the course is ₹ 55,000
(including GST 18%) which include cost of Course Learning Material & Examination fees

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Fostering Intentional Workplaces

By T.V. Narendran, CEO & MD, Tata Steel and President, All India Management Association (AIMA)

Culture is one of the most talked about ideas in management, and one of the hardest to pin down. We can write down a strategy. We can measure performance. We can track outcomes quarter by quarter. Culture resists all of that. You see it in the choices people make when no one is watching, and in how they behave under pressure, when things are uncertain, when the plan has stopped working.

Culture, in the end, is the operating system of an organisation. It shapes how decisions get made, how people work together, how disagreements are handled, how opportunities are chased, far more powerfully than any policy document

Every organisation has a culture. The real question is whether it grew by design or by default.

I have come to think of culture less as something you build and more as something you grow. It is closer to sowing seeds than to issuing instructions. You plant something, you tend to it, and you wait. Change does not happen overnight. Some seeds never take. Some become saplings that still need support to stand. And a few, over many years, grow into trees that hold firm in a storm. In most organisations, all three may exist at once: values so deeply rooted that no one questions them, newer commitments still finding their feet, and fresh ideas only just sown. A leader has to know which is which, and resist treating a young seed as though it were already a tree.

Culture, in the end, is the operating system of an organisation. It shapes how decisions get made, how people work together, how disagreements are handled, how opportunities are chased, far more powerfully than any policy document.

That places a particular responsibility on those who lead. Culture takes its cues from leadership. People watch what leaders do much more closely than they listen to what leaders say, and the priorities a leader demonstrates quietly become the priorities of the organisation. A commitment to safety is proven when someone stops an operation because something does not feel right, even under pressure to keep going. Ethics is built in the moments when the easier option is not the right one. Innovation grows only when people feel safe enough to ask questions, challenge assumptions and be wrong without fear.

The small signals matter more than the big announcements. How meetings are run. Whether a different view is welcomed or quietly punished. Whether leaders make the time to listen. Whether a commitment, once made, is honoured. I have always believed the health of a culture can be judged by one

simple test: how quickly does bad news travel. Good news reaches you fast enough. It is the speed of the bad news that tells you whether people trust you with the truth.

All of this matters more than ever, because organisations themselves are changing. They are more diverse, more distributed, more dynamic than the ones many of us grew up in. Technology is reshaping how we work. A younger generation is arriving with different expectations and, frankly, with better questions. Expertise now sits everywhere, not only at the top. In such a world, authority by itself rarely inspires anyone. A title gives you positional power, but positional power is transient. It comes with the chair and it leaves with the chair. The influence that lasts comes from who you are, from your judgment, your relationships, your credibility, the way you conduct yourself.

Leadership today asks for a combination that does not always sit together easily: strength and humility, clarity and openness, conviction without rigidity, confidence without distance. I think of this as graceful power.

Graceful power is not about lowering the bar or ducking hard decisions. It is about exercising influence in a way that builds trust rather than fear. It is the ability to stay calm when things are uncertain, to take a decision when one is needed, and to treat people with dignity all the way through. It creates commitment, not mere compliance, and commitment is what carries an organisation through the difficult years.

And culture must belong to everyone. Lasting change is never simply mandated from the top. It happens when people across the organisation choose to own it, strengthen it and pass it on. That is the moment culture stops being an initiative and becomes a way of life. It is also how a sapling becomes a tree, not through one grand intervention but through countless people tending to it.

There is an old observation that stories outlive instructions. Every organisation carries stories that are retold long after the people in them have moved on, about a hard decision taken well, an act of courage, a moment of integrity, a leader who put people before the immediate result. These stories survive because they capture what the place actually stands for. They travel further than any policy and stay longer in the memory.

So culture is never finished. It keeps evolving, and it needs tending. Left alone, even a strong tree can weaken. As we prepare for a more complex and less predictable future, this is what will set the lasting institutions apart. Culture is what gives people a sense of purpose, what makes an organisation resilient when times are hard, and what allows it to change without losing its sense of itself.IM

The opinion expressed is personal.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Culture, in any organisations, isn't something that magically appears—it is created, nurtured, and reinforced through everyday actions. An the most influential force in shaping the culture of an organisation is the behaviour of its leaders.

Employees take their cues less from mission statements and more from what they see in practice. When leaders act with calmness, consistency, and deliberate intention, they cultivate an environment where trust, respect, and collaboration can flourish. Each interaction becomes an opportunity to model the values the organisation aspires to embody, shaping a culture that grows organically yet intentionally.

Intentional leadership is not about exerting control but about aligning energy, actions, and choices with the outcomes one seeks to create. It is the leaders who understand this, who lead with both purpose and humanity, that enable organisations to thrive—not just in results, but in spirit.

Sally Netherwood, author of *Graceful Power: Solving the Paradox of Modern Leadership*, writes in the cover story of this issue, "Every interaction is an opportunity to shape culture—or to leave it to chance. The leaders who build genuinely thriving organisations choose to lead on purpose, aligning their energy, intentions and actions with the outcomes they want to create."

As you read this issue, consider the subtle ways your own actions shape the environment around you—and how, with intention, you can help your workplace flourish.

Maneck Davar

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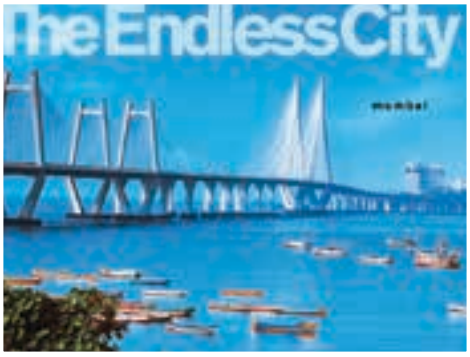
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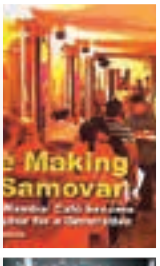






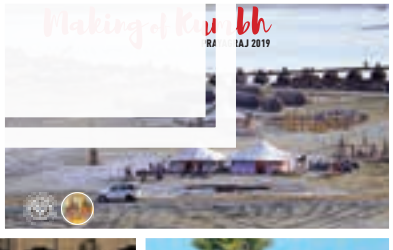
























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LEADERSHIP THAT RESONATES





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Create intentional cultures

Organisations flourish when leaders replace reactive habits with intentional, compassionate influence.

✦ SALLY NETHERWOOD, AUTHOR, *GRACEFUL POWER*



Some years ago, the four founders of a fast-growing business invited me to join their off-site meeting. The agenda: to solve the widespread problem of their employees repeatedly missing deadlines, disrupting meetings by arriving late and being unfocused. The source of this cultural problem quickly became clear: at 20 minutes past the start time, only one founder had shown up, and he had stepped out again to make a call. The others trickled in over the next half hour, pausing to finish messages, one declaring an emergency and leaving altogether.

This is the kind of accidental influence I've seen repeated across industries and continents in twenty-five years of coaching leaders: the gap between the culture a leadership team says it wants and the culture it unconsciously models every day. In high-growth environments—where pace is relentless, complexity is rising, and the pressure to deliver is intense—that gap can widen quickly. And when it does, it's rarely the team that needs fixing first. It's the leaders.

The culture you model is the culture you create

Leading today is hard. The pressure to deliver results at pace, navigate constant uncertainty and guide organisations through relentless change leaves little room for reflection. Under this sustained pressure, leaders rush from one interaction to the next, carrying the emotional residue of previous conversations with them. They become increasingly reactive—and over time, increasingly frustrated to find this behaviour reflected back at them from their teams. This is leadership by accident—and its impact on culture is profound.

The most effective leaders I work with have recognised something different. They understand that every team develops a shorthand: 'This is how we do things around here.' In truth, it almost always means: 'This is how our leaders do things around here.' As a leader, your impact on culture is never neutral. Whether you design it deliberately or allow it to occur accidentally, you are shaping it with every interaction.

Leading with Graceful Power

Graceful Power is a more elevated and expansive form of leadership—the ability to exert strong influence without relying on force, replacing reactivity with composure, unconscious habit with deliberate intention and pressure with shared purpose. Leaders with Graceful Power take responsibility for the signals they send, the energy they bring and the culture they are consciously creating.

At the heart of Graceful Power are three interwoven qualities: congruence, courage and compassion.

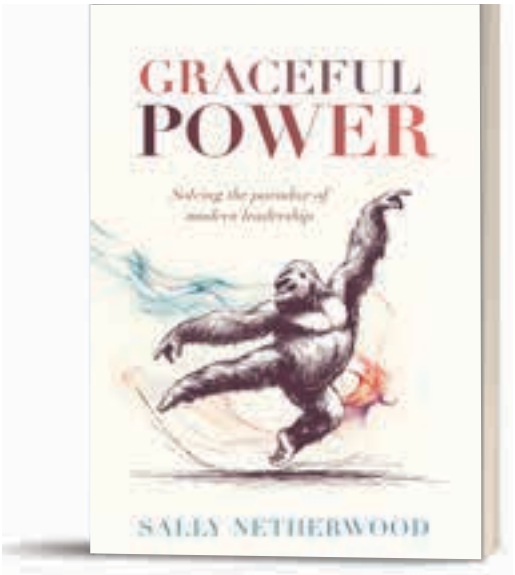
- **Congruence** is the alignment between a leader's values and their behaviour—between intention and impact, inner beliefs and outer actions. When leaders are reliably consistent and real, trust grows. And trust is the foundation on which every high-performing culture is built.
- **Courage** is not fearlessness. It is the willingness to act in spite of fear or discomfort—to hold the difficult conversation, to admit uncertainty, to resist the temptation to over-direct when patience is what's needed. Reactive leadership frequently disguises fear. Courage faces it openly.
- **Compassion** can sometimes be misunderstood as leniency, yet in practice it is one of the most performance-enhancing qualities a leader can develop. Compassionate leaders listen with genuine curiosity, separate the person from the problem and hold people accountable while expressing confidence in their potential.

None of these qualities stands alone. Compassion without courage can slide into avoidance. Courage without compassion can become abrasive. Congruence without either can turn rigid. Together, they form a leadership approach that is both firm and adaptable, both strong and deeply human.

From accidental influence to a climate of flourishing

When leaders consciously shape their culture through Graceful Power, they create what I call a climate of flourishing—an environment where motivation, wellbeing and performance are not competing priorities but interconnected outcomes.

The evidence supports this. Research into high-performing teams—including Google's well-known Project Aristotle—has consistently found that psychological safety is the single most important factor distinguishing effective teams from the rest. When people feel safe to share ideas, admit mistakes and challenge assumptions, collaboration deepens and innovation increases.



The most powerful environments are not those that push people to their limits, but those that help people expand their limits without burning out. Leaders with Graceful Power don't just react when people struggle; they design the conditions that help people thrive. These conditions do not emerge by accident. They are the direct result of leaders who consistently and intentionally show up in ways that make people feel valued, trusted and believed in.

Four questions that change everything

One of the most practical tools I share with the leaders I coach is a short pause before any important interaction—a meeting, a one-to-one conversation, a presentation, even a quick phone call. In that pause, you ask yourself four questions:

1. What do I want the other person or people to do as a result of this interaction?



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2. How do I want them to feel as they do it—so they give it their best?
3. How do I need to feel to influence their emotional state effectively?
4. What do I need to do to get myself into that state, so I can show up fully and have the desired impact?

Notice that the second question is about how people will feel, not what they will think. That distinction is critical. This is not about manipulating others—it is about managing yourself. By consciously preparing your energy, presence and intent, you create the conditions that make the outcome you seek far more likely.

A useful technique is to picture the moment after the interaction ends. Imagine the other person pushing back their chair or clicking 'Leave Meeting.' How do you want them to feel? Energised? Supported? Empowered? Too often, interactions begin before we have decided what we actually want from them, and our emotional presence shapes the outcome before we find our focus.

These four questions are where congruence, courage and compassion come alive in daily practice. Congruence—because you are aligning your intention with your impact. Courage—because choosing your state deliberately, rather than reacting to pressure, takes conscious effort. And compassion—because you are centring the other person's experience, not just your own agenda.

From accidental culture to intentional leadership

Remember those four founders? When they stopped focusing on what their team was doing wrong and started asking, "How are we modelling this?", the shift was tangible. They began showing up with more presence, more consistency and more accountability—pausing before interactions to consider not just the message, but the energy they wanted to bring into the room.

They didn't become perfect, but they became more conscious. More congruent. More impactful. Their business went from strength to strength—now with an intentional culture.

Leading on purpose

Every interaction is an opportunity to shape culture—or to leave it to chance. The leaders who build genuinely thriving organisations choose to lead on purpose, aligning their energy, intentions and actions with the outcomes they want to create.

The next meeting you walk into, the next conversation you have, the next decision you make—these are not just items on your to-do list. They are moments of influence. And they begin with a pause and four simple questions. When you lead with that kind of intention, you create the conditions in which people—and performance—flourish.

So, before your next interaction, pause. Ask the four questions. And notice what shifts—in you and in the room around you. IM



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sally Netherwood is author, *Graceful Power: Solving the Paradox of Modern Leadership.*


Armaan Hoyvoy

Your leaders create a system, but can they think inside it?

✦ SEAN BLAIR, AUTHOR, *THE SYSTEMS SYNERGY*

A system to lead with

I asked a managing director I spoke with recently what kept him awake at night. Without hesitation, he said, "Growth." The business needed to grow. That was the priority. That was the first thing that mattered.

Later, in the same conversation, he mentioned that motivation levels in his team were low. He made a passing reference to some toxic behaviour that had been surfacing. He did not connect the two observations. They were presented as separate problems requiring separate solutions. (reductionist thinking anyone?)

But what if they were not separate at all?

His belief that growth is the primary objective is not just a strategic position. It is a mental model, and mental models do not stay in the leader's head. They propagate through the system. They shape what gets rewarded and what gets ignored. They determine which conversations happen and which do not. They become, over time, the invisible operating system of the organisation.

When growth becomes the key organising principle without any deeper sense of purpose, something quietly happens to the people inside the system. Work loses the quality that makes effort feel worthwhile. The pursuit of a number does not answer the question every person in every organisation is implicitly asking: why does this matter? What are we actually for?

That question, when it goes unanswered, does not stay quiet for long. It shows up instead as disengagement, as toxic behaviour, as the kind of quiet withdrawal that leaders tend to diagnose as an attitude problem or a management failure. But these are not character flaws. They are intelligent responses to work that has lost coherence. And they are, in my experience, often generated by the very leadership priority that was meant to energise the organisation.

The meaning crisis does not appear in a strategy document. It does not show up in a risk register. But it shapes behaviour with a reliability that no incentive scheme overrides.

The managing director created that system. The question is whether he can see inside it.

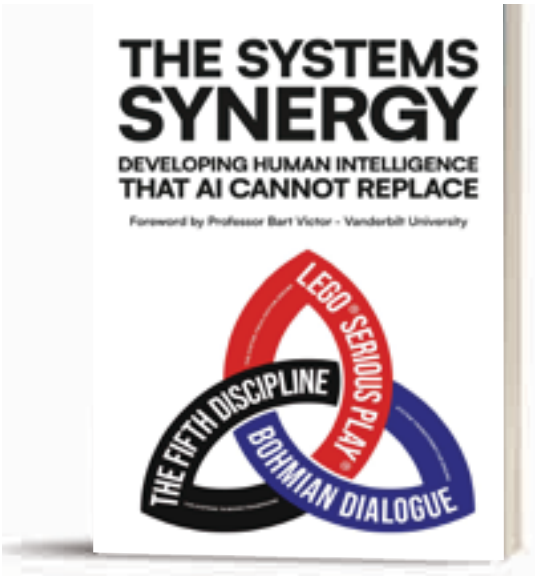
The system you built is not the system you think you built

Every leader who has overseen significant organisational growth has encountered some version of this. The values held at the beginning are not necessarily the values the organisation now enacts. The culture intended is not necessarily the culture that exists. The behaviours modelled in the early days have been interpreted, adapted, and sometimes distorted as they passed through layers of management and time.

This is not a failure of leadership. It is a predictable property of complex systems. Organisations are not machines that produce exactly what they are programmed to produce. They are living systems in which behaviour emerges from the interaction of forces, many of them invisible: the beliefs embedded in how decisions actually get made, the unspoken rules about what genuinely gets rewarded, the mental models that shape how people interpret and respond to leadership signals.

Peter Senge's insight, articulated in The Fifth Discipline, was that these mental models are particularly powerful and particularly difficult to surface. They operate beneath the formal structure, shaping every decision that follows, without ever being named. The leader's mental models are the most powerful of all. A leader who holds the belief 'our success comes from control' will create fundamentally different organisational dynamics from one who believes 'our success comes from releasing potential', regardless of what the other's strategy says. These beliefs propagate through the system invisibly, shaping how managers manage, how decisions get escalated or suppressed, what people feel safe to say.

The leaders designed the system. But the system runs on operating assumptions the leaders may never have consciously chosen, and may not be able to see.



What thinking inside the system requires

Consider a second example. A fast-growing engineering company expanded from several hundred to several thousand employees in under five years. Over the same period, it developed a troubling record of serious safety incidents. The strategy was sound. The growth was real. And yet the system produced outcomes nobody designed.

I found myself wondering about the relationship between those two facts. Not as an accusation, but as a genuine systems question. What happens to a culture when the pressure for growth becomes the dominant force shaping every decision? How does that hunger for expansion show up in how safety protocols are actually followed on the ground? How does it affect whether newer employees feel confident raising concerns, or whether a middle manager resolves a tension between speed and safety in favour of safety?

Nobody designed those failures. But the system produced them. And I would be

surprised if that invisible force, the leadership belief that growth was the primary measure of success, had ever been named and examined as the force it was.

This is the specific blindness that comes with being the people who built the system. The very intimacy of the leaders' knowledge makes certain things harder to see. The assumptions baked into every decision become invisible precisely because they are so foundational. The higher you rise in an organisation, the fewer people are willing to tell you when your mental model has drifted from reality. And the more powerful your position, the more completely your mental models shape the system everyone else inhabits.

Leaders who build without examining the system they are building tend to discover its unintended properties at the worst possible moment

Making the invisible visible

Developing the capacity to think clearly inside a system you have created requires something most leadership development does not provide: a reliable method for making your own assumptions visible to yourself and to your team.

This is genuinely difficult. Assumptions feel like facts. Mental models feel like reality. The beliefs that have driven success feel like truths rather than interpretations. Conventional leadership development, strategy sessions, executive coaching, leadership programmes, addresses skills and behaviours but rarely reaches the level of the system generating them.

The approach I describe in my book *The Systems Synergy: Developing Human Intelligence That AI Cannot Replace* integrates three methodologies specifically to make this practical. LEGO® Serious Play®, used at its most sophisticated level of system modelling, allows leadership teams to build physical representations of the forces actually shaping their organisation, including the forces generated by the leadership's own beliefs and priorities. When these forces sit on the table as physical objects, they become examinable without anyone feeling personally attacked. The managing director's belief about growth can become an agent in the model, connected to the motivation crisis and the toxic behaviour, visible and discussable in a way it never is in a strategy meeting.

Peter Senge's Fifth Discipline provides the conceptual framework for understanding what you are looking at. And Dialogue, in the tradition of physicist David Bohm, creates the conditions for the genuinely honest conversation that the presence of authority usually prevents. Together, they make it possible for a leadership team to see not just the system they intended to build, but the system they actually built, including the parts that differ from their intentions.

The question worth sitting with

The managing director I spoke with is not unusual. The pattern he described—growth as the primary organising principle, motivation in decline, toxic behaviour surfacing—is one I encounter regularly. What is unusual is a leader who makes the connection between those facts and asks what system they have created that produces all three simultaneously.

Leaders who build without examining the system they are building tend to discover its unintended properties at the worst possible moment. The more useful question to ask before that moment arrives is not, "Is our strategy right?" It is, "What is the system we have actually built, and are we able to see it clearly enough to lead it wisely?"

That question is harder than any strategy question. It requires a quality of honest collective inquiry that most organisations have not developed. But it is, in my experience, the question that matters most. IM



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean Blair is founder, SeriousWork and Serious Outcomes Limited. Sean is also author, *The Systems Synergy: Developing Human Intelligence That AI Cannot Replace.*


Armaan Hoyvoy

Organisations can achieve manufacturing excellence by changing the way they think about leadership, processes, waste, quality, and continuous improvement.

✦ SANJEEV BAITMANGALKAR, STRATMANN CONSULTING

STRATEGY

Think lean, perform better

Organisation want to be flexible adjusting quickly to changing market conditions, lean to beat every competitor, innovative to keep its products and services fresh, and dedicated to deliver maximum quality and customer service. While managements want companies that are lean, nimble, flexible, responsive, competitive, innovative, efficient, customer focused, and profitable, many businesses are bloated, clumsy, rigid, sluggish, non-competitive, uncreative, inefficient, disdainful of customer needs, and losing money. Even when companies make money, they do not know how much and where are they losing because of inbuilt wastes, excesses, inefficiencies that have formed as cultural habits. The results that companies achieve are often very different to their full potential. As Bob Nelson writes 'Companies don't succeed, people do', so let us explore the adaptation of good thinking in the mantra's for success.

Good thinking

Benjamin Disraeli once said: "Nurture great thoughts, for you will never go higher than your thoughts." The one thing that separates those who rise to the top and those who don't is - good thinking. Thinking changes feelings, and feelings can become actions. By changing ones actions—based on good thinking—one can change his or her life or the company's results.

I am not undermining the importance of good education. But the problem with most educational institutions is that they try to teach students 'what' to think, and not 'how' to think. Knowledge has value only in the hands of someone who has the ability to think well. We must learn how to think well and reach our potential. In the same way, organisations must learn how to think well and reach their potential. Becoming a better thinker is worth your effort because the way you think really impacts every aspect of your life. It doesn't matter who or what you are, good thinking will make you and your company better.

Here are a few reasons why good thinking is important:

- **Good thinking creates the foundation for good results:** You understand this in the natural world, but try to understand this in the mental and moral world, and cooperate with it. You know that poor thinking can produce only negative results, average thinking produces no result, and good thinking produces some progress but great thinking produces great progress. You cannot change your results



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without changing your thinking. Remember the proverb 'as you sow, so you reap'? If you need great results, you need to sow great thinking. Why do you think you fall short of achieving your complete dreams? It is because you are trying to change your results without changing your thinking.

"Where success is concerned, people are not measured in inches or pounds or college degrees or family background; they are measured by the size of their thinking"

– David Schwartz

- **Good thinking increases your potential**

Each of us is a leader in some way, be it to our family, to our business, in our community, in our social environment, in our profession, etc. For achieving excellence in manufacturing or any business process, you lead by the way you think, and, your thoughts will lead to actions. You will become as small as your controlling desire or as great as your dominant aspiration. You are that person as you think in your heart. Our leadership ability determines our level of effectiveness. The ceiling on one's leadership ability is low if one is a poor thinker and that ceiling is high if one is a great thinker.

- **Good thinking produces more good thinking if you make it a habit**

The problems we face today cannot be solved by thinking in the same way we thought while creating them. If you think about excellence, you are bound to produce more of that good thinking. Look around, the world keeps getting more complicated. Psychologists and brain researcher's tell us that by practicing routine change and being consistent one can create new neural pathways to form new and better daily habits creating pathways to success.

Success comes to those who habitually do things that unsuccessful people don't do. The more you engage in good thinking, the better your thoughts become. It is like creating an army of good ideas capable of achieving almost anything—example continuous improvement. Everyone has the potential to become a good thinker. Unsuccessful people focus their thinking on survival, average people focus their thinking on maintenance, and successful people focus their thinking on progress.

"Good thinking can never produce bad results; bad thoughts and actions can never produce good results"

– James Allen

What then can be good thinking in manufacturing?

What is the 'how to' think outline or 'Mantras for Manufacturing Excellence'? The disclaimer; through populated tool centric teachings and discourses organisations have been led to believe that a random selection of tools will make their business process 'lean'. It may give some productivity or qualitative improvements, but for the organisation to become lean the leadership must learn how to inculcate and build the practice of daily lean habits into theirs and everyone else's daily routine. This includes continuous improvements in every functional area.

Identifying the reasons why an organisation wants to become lean, using lean thinking to develop the future state vision, solving the problems in achieving those goals, sequentially using a network of techniques available in the Toyota Production System the way forward. There is no single template that can be used across various industry segments, the lean journey for each company has to be designed individually. Let me introduce a few broad steps in thinking the way towards excellence.

"Don't wish it was easier, wish you were better. Don't wish for less problems, wish for more skills. Don't wish for less challenges, wish for more wisdom"

– Jim Rohn

Know the customer

The dominant force in the seller customer relationship has changed since late last century. We are no longer in the seller's market. Sellers no longer have the upper hand; customers do. Customers tell suppliers what they want, when they want, how they want it, and what they will pay. This new situation is unsettling to companies that have known life only in either the mass market or protected environment. In reality, mass market never existed, but the idea provided manufacturers with useful fiction that their customers were more or less alike. Mass-market suppliers in India had few competitors; they offered very similar products and services. Customers were not dissatisfied. That changed with entry of competition and new offerings.

Now that they have choices, customers do not behave as if they are cast in the same mold. They demand products designed for their unique and particular needs. The notion of 'the' customer has been replaced by 'this' customer. The one with whom the seller is dealing at this moment is the person who now has the capacity to indulge in his personal tastes. The mass market has broken into pieces, some as small as a single customer. The balance of market power has shifted from the producer to the customer.

I have seen this across hundreds of companies that the cause of problems faced downstream have their origin in the functioning of their marketing department, usually caused because of bad planning, over commitment, or lack of lead time and value stream understanding in making commitments.

Eliminate production planning control (PPC) and inspection departments

It is in the experience of most companies having seen forecasted plans change quickly due to market behavior. Then why continue the practice expecting different results? Why not let the customer plan what to produce, in what order and how many quantities?

Lean thinking enables such a change as Mysore Kirloskar demonstrated using measurements, dynamic deep thinking, and simple algorithms. Their factory was a cycle of continuous order inflow from customer and produced to delivering each specific order using first in first out (FIFO) thinking which is an enabler. Inspection must be considered as a non-value adding activity. Not essential. Quality control must be handed over as responsibility to the operators and their jobs enabled by designing failure proofed processes. Initially a few process controllers can go around randomly auditing the quality for reassurance.

Reduce work in process (WIP)

The goal of Just-in-Time (JIT) is to 'add value, not cost'. Counting, recording, data entry, lifting, moving, transporting, storing, searching, accumulating, inspection and such other non-direct value adding activities employ people and resources because accounting may deem it necessary for financial reporting. The task of material movers, stock keepers, material clerks, expediters, and data entry and processing support staff is non-value adding. Their task of managing the waste, delays, and errors – instead of correcting them - in the system depends on failure to timely make what is needed. These activities add to costs, not value. The goal must be to receive input material, process it fast to completion, deliver to customer and collect money. That's achievable where the process thinking is one of flow and not of storing, batching or any form of stationery inventory.

The problem that many face in growth is because of their 'more-of-the-same' approach. Duplication is in the comfort of habits and culture of the organisations

Reduce lead times

There are five good zero goals in accidents, defects, lead time, inventory, and changeover times however inordinate they may be; they drive productivity and efficiency and give improved quality is a by-product. There are many believers in the zero defect goal who remain unruffled irrespective of whether or not it is achieved. The number of believers in zero lead time aligned thinking is small even if that is inordinate. Lead-time reduction is a true and reliable dominant measure of efficiency, because a plant can only reduce it by connected flow and solving problems that cause delays. Lead times drop fast when problems are solved fast.

As Albert Einstein said, "You can't solve a problem on the same level that it was created. You have to rise above it to the next level." When lead-times reduce, through put times reduce dramatically. From the Mysore Kirloskar case study; when they reduced all lead times to possible minimum their through put times reduced by over 95 per cent, and was one of the contributors that enabled cost reduction by over sixty per cent!

Reduce or eliminate set-up and changeover times:

How do you see set-up time? Does skill lie in the set-up or in simplifying it? Are set-up technicians and engineers needed, or operators who lead the projects, with technicians and engineers to help them? Should the operator watch the machine run or should operation be a well-timed routine while the operator is busy thinking about the next improvement? Are assembly jobs simplified so that unskilled labour can perform them or because assemblers can acquire multiple job skills, data collection duty, diagnosis and problem solving talents?

In manufacturing one of the most important type of work-study is change over and set-up time reduction. Product making companies can blend this with standardisation and rationalisation of designs as we saw in Mysore Kirloskar where many setup and changeover times were completely eliminated!

Reduce flow distance and space:

The problem that many face in growth is because of their 'more-of-the-same' approach. Duplication is in the comfort of habits and culture of the organisations. Reducing flow requires rethinking of the processes, that may lead to innovative design changes. Connected information and material flow, designed without waiting or stoppage can eliminate eighty to ninety percent of all wastes.

When the inventory (in store or WIP) space is made obsolete by efficient process execution, the space used for inventory diminishes or vanishes improving the productive space index. The Just-in-time (JIT) and Jidoka techniques are the best to use coupled with lean thinking to make this transformation possible.

Companies that transform from conventional and become lean, reduce floor space utilised by 30 to 50 per cent.

Reduce through-put time

One technique is to increase the make-delivery frequency for every item. Lean precept is to produce some of every type every day (or at smaller intervals) and in the quantities sold that day, can even be periodic or hourly rate. At Mysore Kirloskar where they strictly produced to orders, some machines had to be produced as one piece or one number only. They had developed the methodology to produce one as fast as they produced many by the use of JIT and standardisation techniques.

Even where they had continuous orders, their production was on an everyday mix of models to be delivered to customers. They achieved this by shortening the batch sizes and short make-delivery times. As William J Bennett has said, "Give yourself an even greater challenge than the one you are trying to master and you will develop the powers necessary to overcome the original difficulty".

Focus on a few good suppliers

Mysore Kirloskar reduced supplier numbers from 178 to 33. IBM TW Division had reduced suppliers from 640 to 32. Stories like these sure strike fear in the hearts of suppliers. This does not mean that a large number of supplier companies bite the dust. If supplier reduction runs its course then the results should be: a typical supplier plant sells in much larger variety and volume to much smaller number of customers than before. Long-term contracts replace short-term purchases. Supplier receives training, advance planning information, and sometimes even financial assistance and technical support.

Some of the contracts may provide for delivering to a daily or hourly rate rather than batch demands. Buyer takes over making the freight arrangement – like milk run. Supplier development means treating the supplier like a partner. The rationale for supplier development is quality goes up, lead-time and price goes down. Too many suppliers mean too little attention to each one of them; supplier development starts with supplier number reduction.

Standardise and rationalise

Product design owners are best equipped to reduce number of SKU's or parts. Perhaps the



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best-known example comes from the Mysore Kirloskar case study. They were battling with fifteen thousand SKU's or part numbers to configure five basic models. This was a huge challenge given the conventional machine shop and they had to produce one if only one was required.

Reengineering their business process they developed modular designs, applied standardisation and rationalisation thinking to eventually produce about two and a half dozen models (different specifications and configurations) with a basket of parts that now had eight hundred SKU's or components where half of them were bought-outs such as bearings, electricals, electronics, fasteners etc. They did this by changing from the silos type of departmental organisation structure to the concept of value stream putting together an effective marketing-design-process-procurement-manufacturing team working synchronously like a machine in the pull system. The buying company should not be motivated by benevolence, instead, contractual agreements should be tough so as to drive the supplier into a mode of continual improvement.

Make product manufacturing easy

The designs should enable the manufacturing to control the various processes with available equipment. There is always the argument of adding equipment for processes required. The organisation must take a balanced view on the cost effectiveness. Innovative design changes become necessary for gaining competitive advantage, and depending on the process needs equipment might change; however, lean practice encourages using the first option of modifying existing equipment if feasible before capital investment.

Eliminate search time

I am called to many factories for talk, teach or assist with implementing the Lean Manufacturing system. Quite often standing in the Ohno circle I have seen workmen going to fetch something or the other (tools, gauges, dies, drawings, sometimes material etc.) and in the process end up losing value adding time. Searching or fetching adds to time and cost.

Cross train and multi-skill the work force

The ideal way to plan man power requirement is taking the total quantity required to produce per day and divide it by available time. This will mean operators will have to be multiskilled to move from one process to another depending on need. Process design and layout should be made such that enable this. A cross trained operator grows in skills and talent, enabling him become

a better contributor in solving problems and continuous improvement.

Retain production and problem data

Retaining data and learning to use it aids in improving results. Sale data can assist in knowing sale rate and how it varies, allowing proper regulation of material (and information) flow to match demand. Lead time data helps in balancing flow and improving through put times. Order receipt data helps in understanding demand rate, the nature of its variations and aids strategising the execution process. Quality data enables corrections where required to improvements to be made. Attendance data enables correct absenteeism. Financial data will help cost reduction, debtor and creditor status. As in some companies, Mysore Kirloskar measured quality under three major headings – rejections, rework and acceptable deviations that would not harm the functioning of the product. Although their final product quality was excellent certified by TUV Germany and over ninety percent of what they produced was exported to first world countries; the summation of all three deviations totaled thirty three percent (33%), and two plus years late this had come down to zero point three percent (0.3%) through their lean transformation process.

Lean is a journey on the road to perfection beyond excellence. Every problem solved is a reminder that there are many more ahead, don't get complacent here

Solve the problem at its place of origin

'Nip it in the bud'; 'Get down to the grass root level'. A problem is best solved at the place it originates. In lean we say 'go to the Gemba (use your feet), see everything, collect relevant data, ask questions, analyse, brainstorm, hunt for the root cause, find solutions to implement that will eradicate the cause at the root. The data, information and feel are best available at the operator level. Data can be best collected at the functional level – on the Gemba from operators and line supervisors and that is where the problem must be analysed and solved by those very people. Don't try to do it elsewhere in the comfort of airconditioned cabins. Building quality circles and leaderships' participation in it is a good practice to achieve this. It motivates the workmen to contribute into making work simpler and environment better. Many times the reason or place where problem originates may be in processes upstream to where it is experienced. Example; the cause for disruptions in production or reason for unwanted inventory accumulation could lie in the way marketing department operates!

Remain dissatisfied with status-co

The idea of Toyota Production System (TPS) was to develop human capital to achieve continuous cost reductions. Lean is a journey on the road to perfection beyond excellence. Every problem solved is a reminder that there are many more ahead, don't get complacent here. Achievement here is not a destination but only a milestone on the journey to excellence, use it as a cue to set actions in motion for the next goal to be achieved. Keep repeating this step. Be in a hurry for any action that needs to be taken can be completed quickly. Spend time on deep thinking, do not hasten the thinking and brainstorming processes. Better the thinking, better will be the results. Be serious on the good zeros I have explained earlier.

Redesign the business process

Repeated routines create habits, habits establish comforts and blind sight the visibility of wastes. Habits create a culture of complacence. That's how wastes get hidden, giving rise inefficiencies and costs. Excellence requires great thinking and dynamic actions for qualitative and productive improvements. Using lean thinking, applying JIT and Jidoka techniques it is possible to reengineer the business process usually with existing infrastructure. Visual techniques can automate the processes in signaling further actions making the factory or business process work like a machine.

Visual signalling the operations can minimise the need for expensive unnecessary software investments, or keep such investments minimal. Quality improvement is a byproduct of productivity improvement. Give your best shot at improving your existing equipment using preventive or productive maintenance techniques, modify them to suit process needs rather than suiting the process with the machines. Multiskilling and imbibing problem solving abilities in the workforce should be a strategic objective of the management and not just a HR program.

Look for simple, movable equipment

Process is sacrosanct, therefore equipment layout should follow process needs and not the other way around. Thinking simple machines, single standing if necessary, easy to move when layout needs change and can be interconnected for value flow will be an advantage. Equipment should meet daily rate of requirement and not be based on periodic volumes and variability. Entrepreneurial zeal can sometime stump this thinking for long lead time capital items, but there are other risk factors to consider that play a role here. With every process improvement the value stream layout may need to change falling in line with flow principles. Small batch producers find the flexible and easy-to-set-up standalone machines a boon. Volume manufacturers find simple dedicated machines cost effective. The process of continuous improvement involves frequent layout changes. So having machines that can be easily moved around in case of layout changes is a huge advantage. At Mysore Kirloskar processes changed often with improvements, and they had developed the skills of making overnight layout changes irrespective of the machine size.

Have multiple workstations

During the late 1970s and 1980s Mysore Kirloskar considered building a moving assembly line for machines. Practicing 'group technology' as manufacturing strategy, was different to flow production. It involved balancing all the background work, and since they produced parts with conventional machines, it meant balancing a lot of cycle times. The strategy was a disabler. But when the company implemented lean manufacturing in the early 1990s, the question that emerged out of JIT and Kaizen learning was different - Is a moving



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line necessary or a faster workstation? What impact will both have on the floor space and cost? They worked to drastically cut down all lead times. They built demand driven number of workstations that would produce machines to match the daily required rate. It took about one-third of the space that the line would have taken. Balancing the cycle times, the workstation numbers moved up or down with demand. ANZ needed to ship variable number of deck hub assemblies every day, by setting up multiple work stations to balance a three-minute takt time. Factors that determine the station or transfer line are takt time to meet daily demand. In auto or such industries where takt times are low measuring in seconds or couple of minutes investing in a line and automation makes economic sense.

By implementing automation in small, staged phases rather than all at once, manufacturers can avoid major shutdowns and keep production running

Automate incrementally

At ANZ, they produced spindle bolts in over 15 operations. Eight types of problems confronted them, necessitating extra corrective operations and the pains of rejections, process variations, deviations, non-conformances, and delays. Using problem-solving techniques, they identified that by automating the process they would finish the part in just a few operations, and eliminate the process variability to clear the eight problems once and for all.

Instead of rushing into buying the most suited automated equipment, they have incrementally automated with available equipment to bring all variables under process control. So, automate incrementally to control process variability; and this way you will also keep costs under control. Incremental automation in lean manufacturing allows for gradual, cost-effective upgrades that reduce waste, enhance quality, and boost productivity without disrupting operations. It fosters continuous improvement (Kaizen) by empowering workers, improving safety, and ensuring that technology is applied specifically to bottlenecks, maximising return on investment while maintaining lean flexibility.

Key advantages of incremental automation in lean manufacturing include:

- **Minimised operational disruption:** By implementing automation in small, staged phases rather than all at once, manufacturers can avoid major shutdowns and keep production running, allowing for testing and adjustments to minimise risks.
- **Reduced initial investment & risk:** Instead of high capital expenditures for massive, factory-wide systems, incremental automation allows companies to invest in smaller, scalable solutions, reducing financial risk and accelerating ROI.
- **Enhanced quality and reduced defects:** Automated systems ensure consistent, precise, and accurate production, which helps identify bottlenecks, reduces mistakes, and minimises errors, improving overall quality control.
- **Support for continuous improvement (Kaizen):** Small automation projects allow for ongoing optimization, aligning with the philosophy of continuous improvement by automating tasks based on specific, identified inefficiencies or hazardous operations rather than replacing the whole process.
- **Improved employee engagement and safety:** By automating dull, dirty, or dangerous tasks first, worker safety is improved, and employees are empowered to focus on higher-value tasks, often leading to better job roles and motivation.
- **Scalability and flexibility:** Incremental systems are generally more adaptable to future changes in product design or production volume, enabling factories to stay flexible and responsive to market demands.
- **Waste elimination:** Targeted automation, such as using robots to eliminate unnecessary motion or automated material handling to reduce inventory, directly supports lean goals of waste reduction (Muda). IM



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Recommended reads



WHY IS SHE STILL HERE? MY UNGRACEFUL JOURNEY FROM THE PLAYGROUND TO THE BOARDROOM

Authors: Patty Azzarello
Publisher: Newton Park Press

This refreshingly frank and heartfelt book picks apart the preconceptions many people still have around what it takes to be a business leader, talking openly about the author's experiences of navigating sexism, introversion, imposter syndrome and fear. It shows how to climb the corporate ladder without the need to step on others. The author packs entertaining personal stories, and lays out 'secret passageways', or the steps that helped her to overcome all the obstacles she faced.



NAVIGATING YOUR NEXT: DISCOVER THE CAREER YOU WANT AND THE PATH TO GET THERE

Author: Julian Lighton
Publisher: Advantage Books

This book provides a practical framework that anyone can use to take control of their own career path. The author draws on the work he has done with some of the world's top leaders and academic institutions to show how you can define your value to pursue meaningful work and exciting career opportunities. The book is an interesting mix of pragmatic tools and illuminating personal stories that will help readers discover the focus, energy and skills to secure roles that reflect their personal goals.



THE PRICING SPRINT: 12 STEPS TO UNLOCK THE POWER OF PRICING

Authors: Jenny Millar and Ann Padley
Publisher: Bloomsbury Business

Pricing is potentially one of the most important and powerful levers available to almost all businesses, yet somehow it is often overlooked and driven by little more than guesswork. Many companies are leaving millions on the table, not because their product is wrong or their costs are too high, but because they've misjudged something far more complex: what customers value.

This book from helps make a potentially complex subject feel a lot less daunting, showing how you can use an evidence-driven process to achieve exceptional business results with confidence.



DISCIPLINE BEATS VISION: HOW TO BE THE LEADER YOUR COMPANY NEEDS—STARTING MONDAY

Author: Dane Hudson
Publisher: Wiley

Sometimes the skills and traits that have got you to a certain point in your career stop being what is required to succeed at the next level of leadership. It is something company founders often experience – suddenly vision, energy and drive stop being enough, and it causes leaders and their companies to stall.

This idea is explored in fascinating depth in this new book from leading CEO coach Dane Hudson. He argues that what you need is more structure in how you lead, not more effort, and lays out some practical, discipline-first tools that will set you up for sustainable success.

If you are a leader looking for practical tips that will help you earn respect, boost influence, master communication skills and navigate stakeholder management, this could become your go-to guidebook.



HER PLAY

Author: Karolina Pelc
Publisher: Simon Schuster

Her Play is the fascinating story of Karolina Pelc's journey from dealing cards in the casinos of Poland to building, scaling and successfully exiting a multi-million-Euro gaming software company. It is a story that features cruise ships and mafia bosses, but more importantly, it shows how luck is something you build through your decisions and behaviour, not just something you wait for.

This certainly isn't a book just for gambling industry, however. It plunges readers into lessons about the realities of entrepreneurship, power dynamics, personal pivots and bold decisions that shape the success of any business. It is raw and unfiltered in a way that makes it feel like an antidote to academic business playbooks, and an intriguing read for anyone building their own unconventional career path.



THE BILLION DOLLAR BLINDSPOT

Author: Maryann Selfe
Publisher: Blindspot Press

Entrepreneurs, investors and business leaders alike are always searching for the next big opportunity, but this new book argues there is a huge untapped potential in a market that serves half the world's population.

In The Billion Dollar Blindspot, global investment strategist Maryann Selfe draws upon dozens of conversations with founders, investors, clinicians and researchers to deep dive into women's health innovation. Her research and insights explore the reasons why companies in this space have historically struggled to attract capital, and shines a light on the new generation of brands leading the way as those dynamics begin to shift.

Whether you are working in the women's healthcare space or not, the book offers a fascinating insider view on the boardroom dynamics that cause exciting opportunities to get overlooked all too often.



Armaan Hoyvoy

The pressure you think drives your success may actually be the fear quietly controlling your leadership writes Erika Alessandrini, author, *Maybe It's Me: Looking Inward to Create Real Change Through Conscious Choices*.

MYTH BUSTER

The pressure myth

Most high-performing leaders I work with will tell you they thrive under pressure. They wear it like a badge. Pressure, they believe, is what sharpens them, what separates them from the rest, what has always driven their best work.

What they rarely see is what the pressure has become.

Over more than two decades in executive leadership and more than ten thousand hours of coaching leaders across industries, I have observed the same quiet transformation happen again and again. The pressure that once felt like fuel gradually converts into something else entirely: fear. Fear of failure. Fear of not being enough. Fear of losing control. Fear that if they let up, even slightly, everything they have built will unravel.

Leaders do not recognize this shift because fear does not announce itself. In high performers, it dresses up. It shows up as responsibility, as high standards, as caring deeply about outcomes. It looks like leadership. It feels like strength. But underneath, it is fear running the show.

And fear, left unexamined, does what fear always does: it reaches for control.

The pressure drives fear. The fear drives control. And control, over time, drives a cost that most leaders never stop long enough to calculate: eroded trust, diminished teams, relationships running on empty, and a chronic dissatisfaction that results cannot seem to fix.

At the centre of this cycle are five beliefs that high performers treat as self-evident truths. They are not. They are myths. And busting them is where real change begins.

MYTH: I know what's right
TRUTH: Certainty is costing you more than you think.

High performers develop strong instincts. They make fast, accurate decisions. Over time, that pattern hardens into a belief: I know what's right. And because they are often correct, this belief gets reinforced at every turn.

What it actually creates is a room full of people who have stopped contributing their best thinking. When you are always right, everyone else is perpetually wrong. And people who are made to feel wrong stop raising concerns, stop challenging assumptions, and stop bringing the ideas that could change the outcome. They give you what you asked for, not what the situation actually needs.

The fear underneath this belief is the fear of being wrong, of losing credibility, of not being seen as the most capable person in the room. Certainty feels like strength. But in practice, it silences the very people you need most.

MYTH: The ends justify the means
TRUTH: Your results are arriving with a hidden invoice.

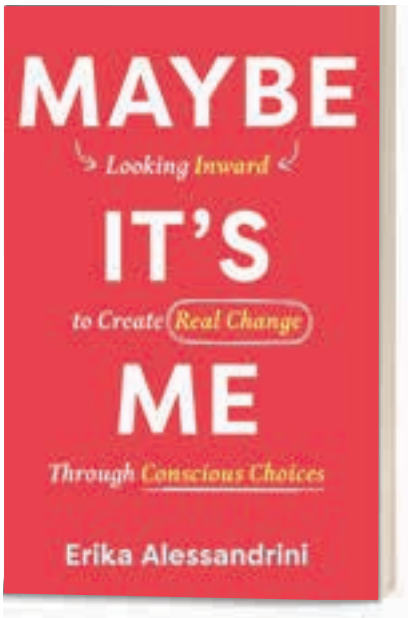
Goal-oriented leaders are exceptionally good at keeping their eyes on the outcome. The problem is that in service of the result, they often do and say things they know they should not. They take over. They steamroll. They compromise something they value in themselves. They justify the behavior afterward because the goal matters and the deadline is real and someone had to step up.

What this belief actually produces is a slow erosion of character. You find yourself cutting corners in how you treat people, rationalizing behavior that once would have troubled you, and gradually losing the respect of those who work closest to you. The integrity you compromised in the moment does not disappear, it accumulates.

The fear here is the fear of failure, of missing the mark, of being the person who did not deliver. But the cost of the means is rarely visible at checkout. It works like the low rate at a nice hotel: the number looks reasonable until the taxes, the service fees, and the resort charges arrive. The result is real. So is the bill underneath it.

MYTH: I can do it better than everyone else
TRUTH: Your talent on display is making everyone around you smaller.

This belief is usually true, which is what makes it so dangerous. High performers frequently can outperform the people around them. The problem is what happens when capability becomes identity.



When you consistently demonstrate that you can do it better, you create a team that has stopped trying to do it well. People who are constantly shown up stop taking initiative. They become dependent, disengaged, or they leave. You absorb a disproportionate share of the work, you feel like you are never doing enough, and the very talent you are showcasing is quietly dismantling the team you need to sustain it.

Underneath this belief is the fear of being outpaced, overlooked, or no longer needed. But the leaders who are most effective are not the ones who perform the best. They are the ones who make everyone around them better.

MYTH: I'm just trying to help
TRUTH: Your helping may be the problem.

This is the myth that surprises people most, because it lives inside the belief that feels most virtuous. Leaders who identify as helpers, mentors, and supporters rarely see themselves as part of the problem. But consider what the helping actually looks like in practice.


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You solve the problem before the other person has had a chance to work through it. You answer the question before it is fully asked. You carry what was never yours to carry because it is easier and faster and you know you can do it. What you are actually doing is removing the discomfort that produces growth, creating dependency instead of capability, and exhausting yourself in the process.

The fear underneath helping is often the fear of being unnecessary, of watching someone struggle, of losing the identity of being the person others rely on. Real support requires the discipline to stay out of the way long enough for others to step up. That is harder than helping. And it is far more effective.

MYTH: This is only temporary
TRUTH: Temporary has become a permanent condition.

Every leader I have ever coached has a version of this belief in their inventory. I will slow down after this quarter. I will invest in my relationships when this project is over. I will take care of myself once things settle down. The pressure is real right now, but it will not always be this intense.

It is always this intense. Because the belief is not about the circumstances, it is about the leader. The pressure does not come from the workload. It comes from self-sabotaging beliefs operating in the background, generating fear, driving control, and ensuring that no matter how much is accomplished, there is always more urgency waiting on the other side.

Temporary is the belief that allows a leader to avoid the most important question: What if the pressure is not coming from out there? What if it is coming from me?

The real source was never the pressure

Here is the truth that changes everything: pressure was never the source of your performance. Fear was. And fear is an unsustainable motivator.

Fear produces results, but only up to a point, and always at a cost. It narrows thinking. It accelerates reactivity. It erodes the relationships and the trust that high performance actually depends on. And it compounds quietly over time until the cost becomes impossible to ignore.

The leaders I have watched transform their results and their lives did not do it by working harder or tolerating the pressure longer. They did it by getting honest about the beliefs driving the fear in the first place. They interrupted the cycle at the source.

Peace and high performance are not opposites. In fact, the leaders who learn to operate from clarity rather than fear, from conscious choice rather than automatic reaction, consistently outperform the versions of themselves that were running on pressure. Not because they care less. Because they finally stopped getting in their own way. IM


Armaan Hoyvoy

When under pressure, great leadership begins not with control, but with clarity, presence and human connection.

✦ HELEN WADA, AUTHOR, *HUMAN-WISE*

A coaching mindset

When we talk about pressure in leadership, we tend to look first to external forces. The demands of the market, the expectations of stakeholders and the constant drive for growth all create a very real sense of intensity. But pressure does not just come from the outside. It is also something we create for ourselves. I see it in the leaders I work with, and I recognise it in myself. A quiet but persistent expectation to perform, to have the answers and to handle every situation well, particularly when the stakes are high.

The challenge with pressure is that it rarely brings out our best thinking. Instead, it can pull us in the opposite direction. We over-analyse, second guess ourselves and tie ourselves up in knots. Clarity gives way to noise, and the ability to think on our feet, something we rely on in high-stakes moments, begins to fade.

So, what actually helps us perform at our best when the pressure is on?

Some of the most effective ways to improve performance under pressure come from the world of coaching. These are not abstract concepts, but practical skills that enable leaders to remain clear, focused and effective across different scenarios, even when the stakes are high.

At their core, coaching skills are human skills, and it is these skills that shape how we perform when the pressure is on.

How you show up

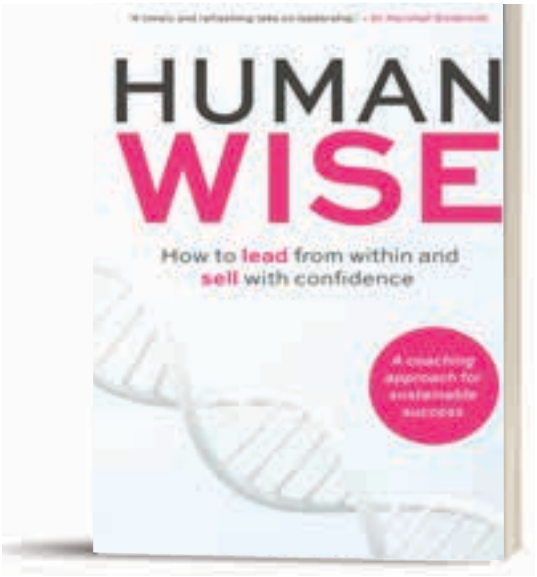
Fundamentally, performing well under pressure starts with how you show up. Before any technique or tool, it is about the mindset you bring and the intention you set as you enter the room. Too often, we arrive already caught in the pressure, focused on outcomes, expectations or what might go wrong. That internal noise shapes how we engage before the conversation has even begun.

The most effective leaders take a moment to reset. They are intentional about how they arrive. They focus on being calm and client centred, reminding themselves of the value

At its core, a coaching mindset is about centring on the other person. The most effective leaders stay curious. They listen not just to respond, but to understand. They notice what is being said and, just as importantly, what is not being said

they bring and why they are in the room. They focus on how they want to BE in the room, not just what they want to say. That shift alone can change the tone, the quality of thinking and ultimately the outcome.

From there, simple techniques such as slowing your breathing, grounding yourself physically or pausing to refocus your attention can help you stay present and respond with clarity in the moment.



Understanding others

When pressure builds, our focus often turns inward. We become preoccupied with how we are performing, what we are saying and how we are being perceived. The risk is that we stop paying full attention to the person in front of us.

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This outward focus reduces the noise created by internal pressure. It creates space for better questions, stronger connection and more meaningful dialogue. And in doing so, it improves both the quality of the relationship and the quality of the outcome.



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Mindset matters

Our mindset really does matter, particularly when the pressure builds. Being calm and open is the key to becoming more aware in the moment. Small, practical techniques can make a significant difference. Pausing, picking up a pen, uncrossing your legs or simply shifting your posture can help you reset and refocus.

The key is to become more aware of what is happening in your body. These physical signals provide valuable data about how you are responding. Approaches drawn from somatic coaching help leaders move out of their heads and pay attention to these internal cues, enabling a more grounded and intentional response.

By focusing on how you show up, centring on others, managing your mindset and staying flexible in the moment, you can shift the quality of your thinking and the impact of your conversations

Act and adapt

Ultimately, performing well under pressure is not about getting it perfect, it is about how you respond in the moment. A coaching mindset enables leaders to stay flexible, to adjust their approach and to respond to what is actually happening, rather than what they expected to happen.

This means being willing to pause, to ask a different question or to shift direction as the conversation unfolds. It is about letting go of the need to have all the answers and instead focusing on creating the conditions for a better outcome.

When leaders are able to do this, conversations become more dynamic, more responsive and ultimately more effective. They move from trying to control the situation to working with it.

Next steps

So what does this mean in practice? Performing well under pressure is not about eliminating it. Pressure will always be part of leadership. The difference lies in how you respond. By focusing on how you show up, centring on others, managing your mindset and staying flexible in the moment, you can shift the quality of your thinking and the impact of your conversations.

The opportunity is to start small. Notice how you arrive in your next meeting. Pay attention to where your focus goes when the pressure



builds. Experiment with simple techniques that help you reset and refocus. Over time, these small shifts compound into a more consistent and confident way of leading.

Think of it as building your mindset muscle. Something that develops over time. The more aware you are of what is happening and the shifts you can make, the more effective you become at responding to pressure in the moment.

Reflection is a powerful practice to build into your weekly routine. Used extensively in the coaching world, taking time to reflect through writing or journalling helps you learn from your experiences and embed new ways of thinking and responding.

Because ultimately, the ability to stay present, think clearly and connect effectively under pressure is not just a leadership skill. It is your human advantage.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Armaan Hoyvoy

Most transformations are not dramatic breakthroughs, but prolonged negotiations between who a person has been and who they can no longer remain.

✦ SANJAY KOUL, AUTHOR, *HAPPINESS: ILLUSION OR REALITY*

The art of reinvention

There is a version of reinvention that gets written about constantly, the clean pivot, the bold leap, the inspirational transformation captured neatly in a few paragraphs. This article is not about that version. What follows is an attempt to look at reinvention honestly, as the prolonged, uncertain, frequently humbling process it actually is. Drawing on psychological insight and hard observation of how human beings actually change, this piece examines what genuine transformation demands of a person, inwardly before outwardly. The intention is not to motivate but to illuminate.

Introduction

Something happens to a person when the life they have carefully constructed begins to feel like a costume. Not a dramatic collapse, not a crisis with a clear beginning. Just a slow, creeping sense that the role being played no longer matches the person playing it. The job title still appears on business cards. The routines continue. But somewhere underneath the daily motion, something has gone quiet that used to hum.

Most people in this situation do not act immediately. They wait, rationalise, tell themselves that restlessness is just a phase, that dissatisfaction is the universal condition of adults. Some of this is true. Some of it is fear wearing the clothes of practicality.

Reinvention, the real kind, is one of the harder things a person can attempt. Not because the external steps are impossibly complicated, but because the process asks something that daily life rarely demands: honesty about what is not working, patience with what cannot be rushed, and a willingness to be unfinished in public for longer than is comfortable.

Why people stay too long

The question worth starting with is not how to reinvent oneself but why reinvention gets postponed so long in the first place. Most people who eventually go through significant change will admit, if pressed, that they knew something was wrong years before doing anything about it. The knowing came early. The doing came very late.

Part of the answer is structural. Adult life, once a career is established and financial obligations are layered in, is not designed for experimentation. Walking away from a decade of accumulated expertise means walking away from credibility, from an identity others recognise, from a salary that reflects years of value in a specific context. Starting over means

starting at the bottom in real ways, and the psychological cost is genuine.

But structure alone does not account for the full delay. There is also identity. Over time, what a person does becomes fused with who they understand themselves to be. To question the career is, on some level, to question the self. And most people would rather be quietly miserable in a known identity than genuinely uncertain in an unknown one. This is why the delay is almost never really about timing. It is about the terror of disrupting everything a person has understood about themselves.

The uncomfortable requirement of honest looking

Once a person accepts that something genuinely needs to change, the next encounter is with clarity. Or rather, the difficulty of achieving it. Because the mind that spent years constructing a rationalised narrative about why the current life was acceptable does not simply hand over an honest assessment when asked. It has too much invested in its own story.

One of the more damaging myths about reinvention is that it happens at a point in time. A decision is made, a letter is written, a new chapter begins

Real self-assessment is not self-criticism. It requires sitting with questions that have no comfortable answers. Not "what do I wish I had done differently" but "what is actually true about what I want." Not "what would look good as a next move" but "what, if no one were watching and no external reward existed, would I still find meaningful."

These questions are not answered in an afternoon. The noise of daily life, the constant availability of screens and tasks and other people's opinions, functions very efficiently as a way of never having to hear what is actually going on inside. Reinvention begins in the space where that noise is, at least temporarily, turned down. What surfaces when it is removed is rarely dramatic. More often it is a quiet recognition that certain work has been draining rather than energising for longer than anyone cared to admit, that achievements being pursued stopped genuinely mattering somewhere along the way even as the pursuit continued.

Whose life is actually being lived

Here is a question most people in need of reinvention are not quite asking, but probably should be: how much of the life currently being lived was actually chosen, and how much was inherited, absorbed, or defaulted into?

The career path chosen at a certain age was shaped by what was valued in the household growing up, by what seemed financially sensible, by what peers were doing, by what happened to be available. The definition of success being chased was assembled from external sources long before any independent examination of what success might actually mean for this particular person.

None of this makes those choices wrong. But it does mean that a significant portion of many people's lives is being lived on inherited terms rather than examined ones. Reinvention, at its core, is the project of replacing inherited terms with examined ones. That is more unsettling than changing jobs, because it requires questioning the framework that produced the decisions, not just the decisions themselves.

The person who sits honestly with this question tends to find that what they actually want and what they have been pursuing are not always the same thing. Seeing the gap clearly is more useful than the years spent not looking.

The transition is not a moment, it is a passage

One of the more damaging myths about reinvention is that it happens at a point in time. A decision is made, a letter is written, a new chapter begins. Real transitions do not work this way.

What actually happens is more like geological change. Slow, invisible day to day,



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occasionally punctuated by something that looks dramatic but was actually prepared by a long accumulation of smaller movements. A person begins shifting their attention before they shift their circumstances. They develop capacities in the new direction while still operating in the old one. They become, for a period that can last years, two things at once.

A reputation in any field is not established by intention. It is established by work, and work takes time to accumulate into something others recognise

This in-between state is uncomfortable in a way that is hard to explain to people who have not experienced it. There is the problem of how to describe oneself when the old description no longer applies but the new one has not yet been earned. There is the erosion that comes from being mid-process with no clear finish line visible. The people who get through this phase intact are not necessarily those with the most detailed plans. They are the ones who have developed some tolerance for ambiguity, the capacity to keep moving without needing every question resolved first.

What makes this easier to sustain is having a clear sense of direction rather than destination. Destination implies a specific arrival point that can be measured against reality and found wanting. Direction is more forgiving. It means orienting consistently toward a particular kind of work or quality of life, trusting that the specific form will clarify through the doing of it.

Building credibility in the new direction

The inner work eventually has to meet the outer world. This is where reinvention becomes a practical project rather than just an interior one.

The most reliable approach involves building before announcing. A person moving toward genuinely different work is better served by developing real competence quietly, through actual projects and tangible output, than by making bold public declarations and scrambling to justify them. A reputation in any field is not established by intention. It is established by work, and work takes time to accumulate into something others recognise.

Internally, this period of quiet building produces something that planning alone cannot: the specific confidence that comes from actually having done a thing rather than imagined doing it. What tends to undo people during this phase is the gap between where they are and where they imagined they would be. The gap is real, usually wider than expected, and takes longer to close than any optimistic planning would suggest.

Sustainable transformation is built on rhythm, not intensity. The person who works obsessively

for a month and burns out is not building the same foundation as the one who works consistently over two years. Reinvention is a long project. It must be paced like one. This sounds obvious and is routinely ignored.

Failure is not optional

No serious treatment of reinvention is complete without an honest account of failure, not as an obstacle to be avoided with good planning, but as a near-certain component of the process. Months, sometimes years, go into directions that do not work. Skills expected to transfer do not quite land. Projects meant to demonstrate new capability fall short.

What separates people who complete their reinvention from those who abandon it is usually not the absence of failure. It is the relationship to it. Specifically, whether failure is treated as disconfirmation of the whole project or as information about a particular approach within it. The first response ends the process. The second refines it.

There is also a category of failure that is instructive differently: discovering that a direction which seemed right from a distance is, on closer examination, not actually what was wanted. This is genuinely useful information, even arriving wrapped in disappointment. The person who spent a year moving toward something and found it hollow has not wasted a year. They have eliminated a possibility that might otherwise have haunted them for decades, and they now know something specific about themselves they did not know before.

The company kept during change

Other people play a role in reinvention that rarely gets enough attention, not as formal mentors or advisors, but as mirrors. The people a person spends significant time with during transition are partly co-authoring the story of whether that transition is possible.

Someone mid-change is unusually susceptible to the perceptions of those nearby. People who can only see the previous version, who refer to who the person was rather than who they are becoming, can be quietly destabilising even with entirely warm intentions. Their image of the person is frozen at an earlier point, and the person is being asked, implicitly, to remain consistent with it.

This is not an argument for cutting off relationships. It is an argument for paying careful attention to where energy goes and where it comes from. What helps enormously, and what people in transition often underinvest in, is the company of others who are themselves in the process of building something new. The shared understanding of what it actually feels like to be mid-transition, uncertain but continuing, cannot be approximated by the sympathy of people who have never been there.

Conclusion

Reinvention does not arrive as a finished product. It arrives as a direction, followed by a long period of movement in that direction, with setbacks and clarity and confusion appearing in no particular order. The person who comes out the other side is not the same person who went in. But they are also not unrecognisable. They are, most often, a version of themselves that feels more honest than what existed before, less constructed around what was expected and more organised around what is actually there.

The signal that something needs to change, the quiet hum beneath the routine, the sense that the life being lived does not quite belong to the person living it, is worth taking seriously. Not because acting on it is easy, or quick, or without real cost. But because the alternative, continuing to perform a version of the self that has stopped being genuine, carries its own cost. One that accumulates silently over years and is rarely recognised until it has already taken more than it should have.

Begin not with a plan, not with an announcement, not with a vision board. Begin with honesty. Everything else can follow. IM



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