

ESSENTIALS

Leadership

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Leadership is the capacity to translate intention into reality. Leaders ensure strategies and people are in place to make a vision (future state) a reality; it is a one-to-many relationship. In contrast, managers guide the day-to-day work of execution; it is a one-to-one relationship.

Before we get into the work and best practice behaviors of leaders you need to be clear on why you want to be a leader.

Motive – why do you want to be a leader?

This is the most important question a leader needs to answer. Leading for the wrong reason(s) is dangerous – not just for you as an individual, and your organization, but for the community as well. Future generations of leaders will fail to learn that leadership is a "joyfully difficult and selfless responsibility."

Some leaders seek attention, status, and power. Afterall, it is the reward for hard work. Such **reward-centered** leaders believe being a leader should be pleasant and enjoyable with freedom to choose what they work on and avoid the uncomfortable things.

Other leaders see leadership as a responsibility and accept that it should be difficult and challenging at times.

"The best kept secret of successful leaders is love: staying in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with those who honor the organization by using its work."

James Kouzes and Barry Posner in The Leadership Challenge

Reward-centered leaders commonly delegate, abdicate or avoid five hard tasks of a leader:

- 1. **Developing the leadership team**. Teamwork is, as shared in previous posts, a practical competitive advantage that enables fulfillment of an organization's mission. But, because it involves people, it can be "messy."
- 2. Managing subordinates (and expecting them to manage theirs). We are not talking about micromanagement of subordinate's daily work, detailed bureaucratic activities such as writing procedures/work instructions, conducting performance reviews, or setting compensation. Rather, we are talking about setting direction, assuring work is aligned and understood across the organization, identifying and removing potential barriers and putting systems in place to support the work. It is more about coaching each team member.
- 3. **Having difficult and uncomfortable conversations.** A primary responsibility of a leader is to confront difficult and awkward situations quickly. This is everything from a team member's body odor to team dynamics. Failing to confront small issues quickly is a guarantee it will become a big issue sometime in the future. Holding back and avoiding these is an act of selfishness.
- 4. **Running great meetings.** Most strategic decisions and communications happen in meetings. Most people, however, dread meetings. If meetings are not great (engaging and value-add), then it is likely that the quality of decisions made in those meetings are also subpar. Bad meetings at the senior leader level sets the precedent for the rest of the

- organization. Meetings can be engaging and productive if designed to avoid "death by meetings."
- 5. Communicating constantly and repetitively to employees. Most leaders underestimate the amount of communication necessary to implement new strategy. Research indicates that people need to hear a message seven times before they believe it. The key as a leader is not to get bored by your own message to find new ways and channels to communicate the same thing to make it visual, wrapped in a story, linked to metrics, and using different media.

Servant Leadership

Cohesive leadership is a philosophy centered on service – building trust, commitment and accountability **to one another**. Service has multiple meanings: the action of helping someone, a system of supplying a need, and performing routine maintenance. The action of helping is to make it easier for someone to do something. In a manufacturing environment, it is to provide a person not only with the materials, but also the time necessary to operate their process effectively. It is more than providing training or SOPs, it is investing in the individual, growing their knowledge and experience. This allows the individuals to be part of something bigger than themselves, to feel empowered to make improvements, to execute on a daily basis.

"You can have the most wonderful motives for what you do, but if what you do harms other people, you're fooling yourself."

- John Carroll Lynch

Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great*, found through his research on the best organizations, two qualities of great leaders: 1) humility, and 2) a strong, professional will to do the right thing for their organization. Collins and his team called this "Level 5 Leadership," as the use of the word "servant" conjures up negative images for most people. He states: "*The most powerfully transformative executives (level-five leaders) possess a paradoxical mixture of personal humility and professional will. They are timid and ferocious. Shy and fearless, rare—and unstoppable. Good-to-great transformations don't happen without level-five leaders." In Built to Last, Jim Collins also writes: "Leaders must define the organization by reference to core values and purpose; build connection and commitment rooted in freedom of choice, rather than coercion and control; and accept that the exercise of true leadership is inversely proportional to the exercise of power."*

Servant leaders bring a caring humbleness. Humbleness is the mother of all the virtues because humbleness acknowledges that there are natural laws or principles that govern the universe. They are in charge. We are not. Pride teaches us that we are in charge. Humbleness teaches us to live by principles and values, because they ultimately govern the consequences of our actions. If humbleness is the mother, courage is the father of innovation, wisdom and execution. Servant leadership integrates a caring humbleness and courage, bringing with it, new mindsets, mindsets rooted in serving before self.

When we serve purposes greater than ourselves, going beyond our comfort zones, we desire to build upon the help of others, with shades of caring humbleness. Serving others' needs rather than one's own builds trust in a leader. The more people trust their leaders and each other, the more they take risks, make changes, and move forward together. Successfully working with others makes us more productive and facilitates the building-up of those we touch to create forces that are almost invincible. Stephen Covey reminds us that servant leadership increases our commitment to mentored learning in such areas as personal growth, relationships, and communication. When information and knowledge are seeded with worthy purposes and principles, we create innovation, wisdom, and execution.

Why does an organization need servant leadership? What organization does not need better innovation, wisdom and execution?

Work of Leaders

In *The Leadership Challenge* by Kouzes and Posner we learn that leadership is not about personality, but about behaviors – an observable set of skills and abilities.

So, what is the work of leaders?

The work of leaders can simply be stated as:

- 1. Craft a Vision imagining a future state that the group will make real
- 2. Build Alignment
- 3. Champion Execution

We will simply refer to this model as VAE. While these responsibilities on the surface appear to be sequential, as we have seen from previous sections on leadership, it is an on-going process.

But, how do you actually do this work? In the book, *The Work of Leaders* Julie Straw, Mark Scullard, Susie Kukkonnen, and Barry Davis identify three drivers each for vision, alignment and execution that make it achievable. We'll summarize the drivers in this section.

Drivers of Vision

A truly great vision elevates our work. Every organization, every social movement begins with a vision; it is the force that creates the future. A vision sparks our imagination. It touches our human need to do something bigger than ourselves. The drivers of Vision are: Exploration, Boldness and Testing Assumptions.

"The human is the only animal that thinks about the future."

Exploration

There are two strategies or best practices for exploration:

Remain Open	Prioritize the Big Picture
Many of us have a need for closure – to	People want to follow those who see beyond
check things off the to-do list, to remove	today's difficulties and imagine a bigger, brighter
ambiguity, to create a clear path forward.	tomorrow. It is always easier to put together a
Unfortunately, if that need for closure is	puzzle using the picture on the front of the box
high, you will tend to run with the first good	as a guide – literally the "big picture." As shared
idea you have and accept a vision that is	in our Clarity paper, the six questions of strategic
not a good fit. Being open does not mean	clarity help leaders define the big picture:
indecision. Rather, remaining open is about	1. Why do we exist?
not making a decision too early, resisting	2. How do we behave?
the temptation to run with the first idea,	3. What do we do?
giving ourselves permission to take time to	4. How will we succeed?
let the brain wander into unchartered	5. What is most important, right now?
territory	6. Who must do what?

Boldness:

Boldness is stretching beyond the status quo. The two strategies or best practices for boldness are:

Be Adventurous	Speak Out
Leaders are pioneers willing to step into the	The desire to not look like a fool is a strong
wilderness. Adventurous leaders stretch the	instinct. As leaders, we need to rein in our self-
boundaries beyond current practice and/or	preservation instincts and go out on a limb,
knowledge. Our nature too often is to "play it	speaking out to voice ideas that seem
safe." Leaders that want to be more	unconventional and/or impractical. Most bold
adventurous need to ask themselves: What's	ideas are born into a fragile existence. If the
the worst thing that could happen? What's the	idea is powerful, analysis and ingenuity will
best? Once you have identified your worst	turn it into a practical, winning idea. This takes
fear, you can confront it. Knowledge of the	courage. Build up to it by pitching your ideas to
best thing can help you instill confidence in	others informally to get a sense of how others
yourself and your team	will react and to polish your delivery. Don't
	apologize or back down too quickly when you
Innovation and change involve experimenting	get negative feedback. Instead use the
and taking risks. As a leader that means	feedback to refine the idea and your
creating a climate for experimentation,	pitch. Also, challenge others skepticism, don't
	let them off easy playing 'devil's
	advocate.' Some people will need time to

recognition of good ideas and support of failure as an opportunity to learn.

reflect on the idea and come to see it from their own perspective. That is always part of change. Expect it.

Test Assumptions

Testing assumptions is about thinking beyond the obvious while not overlooking the obvious. The two strategies or best practices for testing assumptions are:

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People are predictably prone to overconfidence when it comes to checking their intuition. When we believe we have come up with the greatest idea ever, our instincts are to protect it from criticism and rejection. Due diligence, however, is an opportunity to enhance, tweak and understand the vision at a deeper level. Seek counsel by inviting people whose skills, knowledge and experience you respect into your vision – test it out with them and let it unfold. This is <u>not</u> asking for approval, but input. Counsel is best done individually to prevent "groupthink." Seek fresh perspectives from suppliers, customers, neighbors, or your

Explore Implications

Sometimes the vision seems so clear, so compelling we are more likely to believe arguments that support it, even when those arguments are unsound. One way to avoid this is to conduct a "pre-mortem" on your vision. We are all familiar with postmortems or "after project reviews." Don't wait until after the vision is achieved to review it. Ask your team to imagine the vision has failed and to identify all the reasons for the failure before starting to work the plan. This will not only give you confidence in the vision and insights to improve the vision, but will sensitize your team to early warning signs of failure and give them time to respond in a way that will enhance the probability of success.

Drivers of Alignment

Grand visions do not become reality through the actions of one person; it requires a team effort. Gaining alignment is critical in moving from an imagined future state (vision) to reality. It is a dynamic, ongoing process that requires constant realigning as condition and needs change. True alignment will meet <u>both</u> the rational and emotional needs of employees, customers and partners. It requires trust and relationship. This means that you must reach <u>both</u> the head <u>and</u> the heart through Clarity, Dialogue, and Inspiration

Clarity

family

Clear communication is crisp. It is communication that provides enough information, but not too much; it is well-structured and efficient. It is simple but addresses real-world complexities. But

crisp is hard work. Leaders often overlook communicating what is obvious to them but a mystery to everyone else. This means leaders need to share enough specifics to anticipate questions without overwhelming the hearer in details. Two strategies/best practices of clarity are:

Explain the Rationale

A simple reason for a change (answering *Why*?) should help people follow your logic and reach the same conclusion. Providing rationale is particularly important in times of uncertainty or large change. Speculation and gossip will occur if leaders do not step forward to offer clarity on the situation; people will fill in the gaps in communication, often with information that is far from the truth. A way to address this is through transparency – people at all levels have access to essential information when they want/need it. When crafting communications, leaders should look at the situation from the listener's point of view and then monitor people's reaction for comprehension.

Structure Messages

Being crisp and clear takes time to structure the message. Meandering, unfocused communication leaves people confused and questioning leadership. Start by identifying the "headline." This should be no more than 8 words. Next, nail down the talking points. Ask: "If people walk away with nothing else, what two or three points do I want them to remember?" Finally, once you have structured your message, refer back to it often and consistently. Repetition and familiarity will shape people's attitudes and feelings.

Dialog

The word dialog means "through meaning," suggesting, "a free-flow of meaning through a group, allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually. Dialog is an opportunity to give people voice which opens the door to shared ownership and accountability. The two strategies/best practices of dialog are:

Exchange Perspectives

The factor with the highest correlation to job satisfaction is "a chance to have my opinion heard and considered." To exchange perspectives, leaders first need to give people a safe place to open up, a place where they do not feel rushed or threatened. People will not perform at their best if they feel weak, dependent, or alienated. Second, leaders need to practice "reflective listening." Reflective listening is the leader summarizing what someone said using their own words and checking for understanding.

Be Receptive

Being receptive is not about the message or process of dialog (crisp and reflective listening); it is about the vibe the leader is sending out during dialog. People sense, both consciously and unconsciously, whether you are receptive and approachable. Your tone of voice and body language verify your receptiveness. People can quickly sense skepticism or disapproval, so leaders should try to suppress these emotions and to hold back on challenging the response from others. Remember dialog is a time for openness, not debate.

Inspiration

Inspiration helps leaders obtain buy-in. It breathes life into the vision, galvanizing people. It is about bringing positive energy to the group and its goals. Two strategies/best practices for inspiration are:

Be Expressive	Be Encouraging
Being expressive is connecting to the audience. To do this, a leader must first be clear in their own mind why they are passionate about the vision. Next, leaders need to be specific. Like structuring the message for alignment, the leader should choose three key points. These points should speak to people's hearts, not just their heads. Employees perceive the environment through the eyes of their leaders. The moods, opinions, and actions of leaders rub off on their employees. If the leader is cynical or pessimistic about the vision, it will be reflected by the group. Likewise, if the leader appears excited and committed to the vision, the	As we discussed in the post on servant leadership, leadership is about relationship. If the relationship goes sour between leader and follower, followers/employees will gradually lose their commitment to work. Being encouraging means giving support, confidence and hope to someone. It makes people feel good about themselves, their team, and their work. Genuine acts of caring draw people forward. To encourage, give people a common aspiration, something the whole group can latch onto and be inspired by. Traditional strategies are to identify a "common enemy," a "noble cause," or a 'rallying cry." This requires knowing your audience – what motivates you may not motivate others.
group will be too.	

Drivers of Execution

Execution is making the vision a reality. Execution is how organizations take good ideas and turn them into results. Harvard Business School research has identified components necessary for people to do good work. Two components deal with a sense of achievement: passion for a task, and a working environment that stimulates creativity. Leaders are responsible for making sure people have what they need to do their work effectively, including creating the work environment. Leaders that champion execution, *defend* the time needed by the team to accomplish the work, *advocate* for the team, praising and providing feedback, *lobby* for resources and support from other work areas, and *cheer* on the team to maintain momentum. The drivers of execution are: Momentum, Structure, and Feedback.

Momentum

Momentum is the ability to accentuate the positive, making success more certain and challenges few and manageable. Consistent with Newton's First Law of Inertia, a body at rest tends to stay at rest, and a body in motion tends to stay in motion, it is harder to create momentum than to sustain it. 50% of change efforts fail at the first stage of "Create a Sense of

Urgency." Complacency is hard to overcome. Momentum starts with the mindset of the leader. It is the mentality that the work we do contributes to the success of the team. But leaders cannot do this alone; they need to create a culture of momentum.

"The speed of the leader determines the pace of the pack."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The two strategies/best practices of momentum are:

Be Driven	Initiating Action
Being driven is pushing yourself and others forward, believing things could always be better, never wasting an opportunity. There is an unspoken assumption that we don't wait around. A fast-paced organization doesn't have to be stressful. Leaders should "model the way," never asking team members to work harder than they are working or to maintain a level of sustained activity that they are not committed to do. This requires leaders to know their own values and confidently act on them. Leaders set high standards and commit their team to deadlines associated with external events. Why an external event? External events are harder to break or change as someone outside the organization is depending on the team.	Leaders take responsibility for change when they see it rather than look the other way; Leaders have initiative. Initiating takes energy, especially when it is about initiating around difficulties that arise during execution. Time is the biggest obstacle; leaders are already busy. To initiate action leaders must continually challenge priorities. What is the most important thing we ought to be doing to make a difference right now? Leaders must help team members take on new initiatives in their daily work, perhaps by writing the initiatives into annual objectives.

Structure:

One cannot be a good leader without being a good manager, where being a good manager means you: structure, plan, organize, direct, coordinate, and control work. The two strategies/best practices are:

Provide a Plan

A plan is a framework to bring together

people, strategy, and operations. A plan ensures everyone is on the same page and provides a common foundation for the team to rely on. The leader's role in creating the plan will depend on the leader's role, experience of the team, and type of work. A front-line leader in a small organization may be very immersed in the details while the CEO of a large organization may only champion the leaders that report to him to invest in planning. The best way to obtain a team's buy-in to a plan is to engage them in the planning process. Planning is inherently an iterative process that takes time. Leaders need to provide the time to create a realistic plan with those involved in the change.

Analyze In-Depth

A good plan that can be successfully executed needs to have rigor and depth of planning. Analyzing in-depth is about appreciating the true purpose of execution and understanding all the moving parts. This requires critical thinking to anticipate the cause-and-effect relationships that play out in execution of the plan. Leaders involve the team in this analysis and create an environment in which there is consistent and timely communication across functions and shared understanding of how the pieces are connected (process thinking). Leaders also challenge the team to think critically about what may happen so undesired impacts can be eliminated or minimized. Leaders must be deliberate about providing plenty of time for such analysis.

<u>Feedback</u>

Perfect feedback requires complete transparency – all the cards on the table. This is often not possible in the real world. The two best practice behaviors are:

Address problems

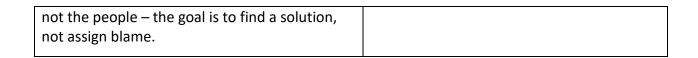
To provide feedback, a leader must be involved, getting hands dirty to understand what is really going on in the trenches. People do not always speak up about problems due to organizational politics. A leader must speak up (be bold) Addressing problems can be tough as it means disrupting harmony. No one likes confrontation or risking hurting someone's feelings. If candor is done recklessly, it can kill transparency. Leaders must make themselves vulnerable by acknowledging their own

mistakes. Also, leaders should facilitate regular,

Offer Praise

People also need to know what is working right and to feel valued. Don't assume people know you appreciate the good work they do. Prioritize celebrations of milestones and build recognition into all your plans. Celebrating values and victories create a spirit of community that can carry an organization through tough times. Make sure the recognition is personal and fits the accomplishment.

semi-formal dialogues about what is not working. Remember to focus on the problem,



VAE is a simple model, but not simplistic. It is hard work that requires focus and intention. Start by understanding your tendencies and current performance using the drivers.

Adaptative Leadership

There is broad agreement that the world has become more complex, fast-paced and unpredictable – your organization needs to work in a fundamentally different way. Adaptive leadership requires learning and doing things in ways not immediately apparent to the leader. The responsibility for solving the problems the organization faces does not rest in the C-Suite, but shits to its people. Leadership is within the grasp of everyone.

Adaptive change is stressful for everyone going through it – new roles, new relationships, new ways of work. Rather than protecting people from this stress, leaders must allow it so that the way we've always done it can be challenged and new, better ways found.

Six principles help leaders lead organizations through adaptive times we live in.

1) Get on the Balcony

Leaders need to view patterns and context, not to be on the battlefield of action. Leaders must be able to step back, reflect day-to-day on the larger view, watching for struggles over values and power, recognize functional and dysfunctional reactions to change and habits/practices/policies that sabotage adaptive work. Getting on the balcony is a prerequisite for the remaining five principles.

2) Identify the Adaptive Challenge

Organizations, like their counterparts in the natural world, cannot appropriately address challenges/threats without identifying the challenge/threat. Leaders need to understand themselves, their people, and the potential sources of conflict as they diagnose and understand the nature of the challenge.

3) Regulate Stress

People can only learn so much so fast, they cannot learn new ways when they are overwhelmed. Removing stress, however, removes the motivation for doing adaptive work. Leaders must balance having people feel the need to change and having them feel overwhelmed by change – a productive level of tension. A leader can do this by one or combination of 3 ways:

- Creating a "holding environment" where diverse groups talk about the common challenges they face, debate issues and clarify assumptions and differing perspectives
- Providing direction by identifying the challenge, framing key questions and issues
- Holding steady with presence and poise
 This is perhaps the leader's toughest job tolerating uncertainty, frustration and pain while communicating confidence.

"Followers want comfort, stability, and solutions from their leaders, but that's babysitting.

Real leaders ask hard questions and knock people out of their comfort zones. There they

manage the distress."

Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie

4) Maintain Disciplined Attention

A leader must get employees to confront tough trade-offs in values, procedures, styles and methods – the leader must get conflict out into the open and use it as a source of creativity. Employees will want to avoid it – scapegoating, denial, focusing on technical issues rather than dealing with the underlying conflict. These distractions must be called out and people refocused.

5) Give the Work Back to the People

Too often employees look to those in the C-Suite as knowing everything about every role, product, and customer of the organization (humanly impossible) and passively wait for direction. Leaders who try to be this not only burn themselves out, but create complacency and the habit of work avoidance. On the contrary, people who see changes in the environment are often at the periphery. Leaders need to let these people take initiative to define and solve the problem. This requires leaders to play a supporting rather than controlling role, enabling others to act.

6) Protect Voices of Leadership from Below

An organization that is willing to learn and experiment is one that gives voice to all people. But, creative voices can generate disequilibrium. Leaders must provide cover to people who point out internal contradictions, no matter how poorly packaged — within that package may lie an important nugget that needs to be teased out and considered. Getting on the balcony, resisting the urge to silence that individual and asking questions is the best approach to protecting these voices.

Adaptive situations are hard to define and resolve. They demand the work and responsibility of leaders and people throughout the organization. In this new world, leadership happens every day; it cannot be the responsibility of a few at an annual strategic event. When anyone in the organization sees a gap between the organization, its objectives, its market, or attitudes and habits of its employees, he/she faces an adaptive challenge that requires a learning strategy. Regardless of level or role, the leader has to engage others in confronting the challenge, adjusting perspectives and learning new ways of work. The adaptive challenges of our time demand leaders take responsibility without waiting for revelation or request. Everyone can lead with no more than a question in hand.

"Leaders do not need the answers, they need the questions."

Lovett Weems

Women Leaders

None of these definitions or behaviors of leadership described in this paper (work of leaders, servant, adaptive) is unique to men – they are all gender neutral. So, why aren't there more women in leadership? Organizations recognize that a diverse workforce provides a competitive advantage as it brings diversity of thought, problem-solving, and innovation. It is not a pipeline problem; it's about deeply rooted cultural barriers.

Unconscious gender biases that society ascribes to men and women (women are the caregivers, men are the breadwinners) are deeply rooted and difficult to overcome. Women are often viewed as dependable, not visionary and too emotional to make the tough decisions. These views influence women's ability to craft a vision and build alignment within an organization, particularly one with a male-dominated culture (i.e., a technology organization).

Women are also less comfortable with self-promotion - a positive trait for servant leadership, but, in our 'dog eat dog' culture, does not give women the visibility and respect they have earned. Then, when women do grab the spotlight, they are more likely to be criticized (it is not 'ladylike'). In addition, organizations tend to ignore or undervalue the behind-the-scenes work which women are more likely to do while rewarding the heroic work which is most often done by men. These practices are not meant to be discriminatory, but the cumulative effect disadvantages women and reinforces the belief that men are better suited to leadership roles.

A strong network can open doors to opportunities for leadership and growth. Women do not use their networks to get promoted; women's networks are informal and social. Whereas, men view networking as transactional and leverage their network to get promoted.

Despite changes in family dynamics, women still have greater demands outside work/profession competing for their attention. -children, parents, household responsibilities – than men. 57% of women report they have prime responsibility for children.

Women also face a double -blind paradox. They must project confidence to advance at work but retain a 'feminine mystique' in order to be liked.

Under-representation of women in top positions creates a second-generation bias in which the lack of women in top leadership positions reinforces the notion that women are not capable leaders.

So, what can women do to become leaders?

- Focus on purpose/passion. Everyone is judged by their results. A person asserts leadership by taking purposeful action in pursuit of shared goals to advance the collective good.
- 2. Network and mentor other women; find others to develop and encourage as leaders.
- 3. Be confident/comfortable in yourself, your style of leadership; leverage your strengths and work on improving best practice behaviors associated with the work of leaders.
- 4. Learn to flex your style. Don't be ingenuous but observe and listen to the culture and change your interactions to best fit your style.
- 5. Recognize other women. Support/champion others when they step into leadership.

"A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult. This 'voice' is your best tool in the boardroom...Once you find your voice, hone it and practice."

Melinda Gates

What should organizations do to support women's access to leadership positions?

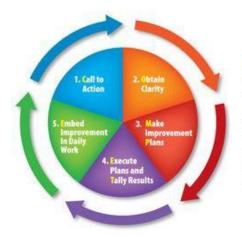
- Educate women and men about second-generation bias. Without an understanding of second-generation bias, people are left with stereotypes to explain why women are not found in top positions.
- 2. Create 'safe identity workspaces' where women can learn and experiment as they transition into larger roles where women are scarce. When in the upper tiers of an organization where women are scarce, visibility and scrutiny is more intense. In this environment, women may become risk averse and overly focused on details and lose their sense of purpose.
- 3. Anchor women's development efforts in purpose rather than perception. Anchoring enables women to redirect their attention toward shared goals. Over investment in one's image diminishes the emotional and motivational resources available for larger purposes. People who focus on how others perceive them are less clear about their own goals.

Leaders can make a positive difference in the workplace and create a climate in which people turn challenging situations into extraordinary success with behaviors that turn values into actions, visions into reality, silos into teams, and risks into rewards.

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