

GET
OUT OF
THE
WAY!

*You'll never manage your way
to great leadership*

Brad Fregger

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by
Brad Fregger



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To those who blessed my life as mentors

Rolly Fregger
Sy Acker
George Capanas
Joe Kipper
Joan Shogren
Herb Faulk
Jackie Reynolds-Rush
Ken Coleman
Barry Silverberg

To those I may have missed,
this book is dedicated to you, too.

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Preface

This book is about The Art of Leadership. It's not a thesis on the subject; I haven't talked to the experts or surveyed America's top business executives. I'm a practitioner/scholar, which means I learn by doing and watching what others are doing, then analyzing to determine what works best. For the past forty years I've been learning about, practicing, and teaching The Art of Leadership.

The importance of the practitioner has been broached by two well-known writers: the poet Kabir, a fifteenth-century East-Indian poet, and Peter Senge, director of the Center for Organizational Learning at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

Kabir wrote:

There is nothing but water in the holy pools,
I know, I have been swimming in them.
All the gods sculpted of wood and ivory can't say a word,
I know, I have been crying out to them.
The sacred books of the East are nothing but words,
I looked through their covers one day sideways.
What Kabir talks of is only what he has lived through,
If you have not lived through something it is not true.

In the foreword for *The Living Company* by Arie de Geus, Senge discusses the practitioner and the academic:

It has been my experience that extraordinary practitioners like Arie can make unique contributions to management thinking Unlike academics who write about what they have thought, practitioners think about what they have lived through. Because the source of their thinking is experience rather than concepts, they show how sometimes the most profound ideas are the simplest.

This book is *my truth*. I have spent my life thinking about and analyzing, what I have lived through, what I have experienced. I have spent hours determining why one course of action works while another doesn't. Just being competent at a task is not enough; you must know exactly what you are doing and why it is working. This is the difference between a person who does the right thing intuitively (subconsciously competent) and the one who understands the entire process, how it works and why. This latter person has gained the level of Mastery.

This book is about *Effective Leadership*, about becoming an outstanding manager, one who has attained Mastery in *The Art of Leadership* and is therefore able to pass this knowledge on, creating the next generation of Effective Leaders. And, as Senge says, "sometimes the most profound ideas are the simplest."

This is the truth that I have to bring: Effective Leadership is profoundly simple at the concept level.

There will be nothing in this book that you will not quickly understand; many of these simple concepts, however, are surprisingly difficult to implement.

During the reading of this book, there will be times when you are affirmed, times when practices that you have been using, skills and knowledge that you have already gained, either on your own or in other courses will be mentioned. This affirmation is valuable because it is the reinforcement of good habits, and you will continue their use with even more confidence than before.

There will be other times when you will be confronted with an idea or concept that you've never considered before; when I will suggest a behavior, or share a learning that is brand new to you. When this happens you may set it aside, maybe even decide that it's not important. During these times, please try to keep an open mind; new knowledge takes time to absorb ... have the patience to give it a chance.

Finally, there will be times when you will have an "Aha!" experience. When something you read all of sudden provides a "truth" that you knew, but had never been able to put into words before. You knew something was going on, but you weren't quite sure what. This is the most valuable learning of all. During these times you discover not only what has been working for you, but why it has been working—you've begun to

attain Mastery of that skill or knowledge. I discuss the process of attaining Mastery in Chapter 2.

Ultimately you can only master The Art of Leadership by leading; but you can learn a lot by talking to, and reading about, Effective Leaders; the ones who know *why* they were effective. This is the critical part ... they must know why what they are doing works. The truth is, many Effective Leaders are subconsciously competent; they're effective, but they don't know specifically what they are doing that makes them effective. Because of this, they can't effectively mentor others. Those of you who fit this category will gain the most from this book.

However, there are those ineffective managers who don't know they're incompetent; in fact, they may be getting the job done, largely through their own "tireless" efforts. These people don't know they don't know and continue on, believing that they've got it all figured out. Those of you in this group may find much in this book to be overly simplistic, maybe even a waste of time.

Becoming an Effective Leader doesn't mean that you will succeed all the time, but it does mean you will find that it takes less time and less effort to accomplish more than you would have initially thought possible.

To gain the most from what you will read, bring an open and inquisitive attitude ... give any new ideas

a chance. I know these principles have worked well for me, but you may run into some concepts/ideas that seem counter to what others have told you, to what you believe brings about the successful completion of a project, goal, or objective.

Also, realize that I am a maverick, that much of what I have to say is either different from what you may have read elsewhere, or was not even mentioned in other books on leadership. You will find that I don't beat around the bush—I tell it like I see it.

For example, my case studies are from real life; I know what happened because I was there, analyzing the process and the outcome—I mention names.

I will also turn some concepts upside down. For example, I will tell you that any manager who says, "Don't assume," is ignorant and hasn't yet learned anything about Effective Leadership.

And, I will talk about the critical importance of embracing the unexpected; that luck, coincidence, and serendipity are important contributors to the successful completion of any project. Those managers who say, "There is no such thing as luck; there is only excellent planning and effective implementation," are ignorant and have not yet learned of the significant results that can come from embracing the unexpected.

I have been honing these techniques of leadership for over 40 years, and I have been mentoring others for

over 30 years now. They, too, have discovered the truth of what I will be sharing with you. Again, while the concepts are simple, easy to understand, the implementation can be very difficult, especially if you have been operating in the traditional way for a number of years.

Old habits are hard to break and ingrained concepts are difficult to set aside. However, believe me when I tell you, the efforts you expend to change your old ways into the new ... will be well worth it.

It takes time to get comfortable with some of the specific skills, to become comfortable with some of the new knowledge. It's very possible that you won't feel effective in the beginning. Don't worry about that—it's natural. If you stay committed and push through the uncomfortable stage, you'll come out significantly improved, more effective than you thought possible.

I will be using stories extensively, and most of the stories are from my own experience. This is not an ego trip on my part; it is a necessity. As a practitioner, my learning has come through doing and experiencing; every story had a lesson in it for me. The best way to share that learning with you is by telling you the story.

Well, that's about it ... GOOD READING!

Brad Fregger
September, 2008

Foreword

I invited my friend and mentor, Ken Coleman, to write this foreword for my first book on leadership, *Get Things Done*. He graciously accepted. I've decided it is also the best possible foreword for this book. Ken demanded more of me than anyone else before or since.

I met Brad in 1982 when I hired him to begin the corporate training function at Activision. At the time we were flying high and growing at an unbelievable rate, sure that we were on our way to becoming a Fortune 500 company. We were determined to hire only the best, and Brad's accomplishments at Mervyn's and Atari showed him to be one of the top corporate trainers in America.

From the beginning, it was obvious he knew how to get things done. His only flaw was a tendency to do it all himself, to be slow to involve others in the process. I once asked him why he didn't get some help and he told me, "After Atari this is a walk in the park ... there's really nothing I can't handle." It was hard to argue with him; the job was getting done.

At about this time it became obvious that Product Development needed someone who had a passion for getting things done, the creative energy to

either solve the problem or find another way to do it, and exceptional capability to motivate and lead a team. When Brad suggested he might be the person we were looking for, I realized he did indeed have all of these characteristics. In fact the only thing he was missing was content knowledge, but I knew he had the ability and drive to learn quickly.

There are principles put forth here that some of you will find controversial. However, many more of you will be affirmed as you find his words speaking to beliefs you've held but perhaps have not expressed. There is only one supposition of Brad's that I disagree with: his contention that this book is not about getting ahead¹. While there is some truth to his view that Effective Leaders are sometimes overlooked because they make their job look too easy; more often those that know how to get things done rise to the top and experience the financial and career success that is their due.

This was true for Brad also. If anything got in his way, it was his lack of respect for authority and his over-the-top passion for what he believed was right. In spite of all this, we wanted to promote him to Vice President of Entertainment Software; and he turned us down, telling me, "I don't think I'd make a good VP ... I don't have the temperament for it." We wanted to promote him because he was the best we had at getting things

¹ Secret 1, see page 9.

done. During the time he was at Activision, his teams produced very profitable software. It was in our best interest to increase Brad's responsibility.

This increasingly fast-paced world demands we be at our very best. In this environment of constant change, the ability to get things done becomes more and more critical. There is no doubt the days are numbered for those companies who don't recognize the individuals within their organizations possessing the needed leadership skills to handle the challenges they will inevitably confront.

The bottom line: this book is about getting ahead because the way that you get ahead is by knowing how to get things done.

Ken Coleman's Profile

Mr. Coleman currently serves as the Chairman of the Board for Accelrys Software Inc., having previously served as a director since 2003. Mr. Coleman is the founder of ITM Software Corporation, an enterprise software company for which he served as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer from 2001 to 2006.

Previously, from 1987 until his retirement in 2001, Mr. Coleman served as the Executive Vice President of Global Sales, Service and Marketing for Silicon Graphics, Inc (SGI) a \$2.3 billion computer

systems company. In this capacity, he managed an organization with some 4,000 employees in 184 locations in 37 countries. As the senior executive accountable for SGI's revenue and gross margins, Coleman was responsible for all sales, marketing and services functions for the company.

Prior to joining SGI, Coleman was Vice President of Product Development at Activision, Inc., responsible for software development activities. Earlier he spent 10 years at Hewlett-Packard Company, where he held several management positions including a 2-year assignment in Europe.

Mr. Coleman is a member of the Board of Directors of MIPS Technologies, Inc., a licensor of microprocessor architecture; United Online, an internet service provider; and City National Bank, a commercial banking institution. He is a member of The Ohio State University Alumni Advisory Council and the Dean's Advisory Council for the Business schools at Ohio State and Santa Clara University

Coleman earned a B.S. degree in Industrial Management and an MBA from Ohio State University.

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Introduction

A major focus of mine over the years has been to learn how to *get things done*. What took awhile to realize was that difficult things seldom can be done alone. Most often, you accomplish the difficult, even the impossible, only through coordinating your efforts with others, through the power of an exceptional team.

There were two times when this lesson was brought home to me. Once when there was so much to do that one person couldn't possibly do it alone, and a second time when there was expertise needed that I didn't have and couldn't get.

The first instance was when I was director of training and development for the Atari Corporation. During my eighteen months with Atari, the company went from 3,500 employees to 18,000; with the majority being hired to work in Sunnyvale, California.

In that short amount of time, we hired a full staff of trainers and support personnel; took over a significant part of the Sunnyvale High School (which had been closed by the school district); and developed, implemented, and managed workshops and seminars in a variety of subjects, including: company orientation,

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supervisory skills, management and leadership, communication skills, sales, manufacturing, and creativity. In addition, we put together partnerships with the local community college district and the University of Santa Clara.

We touched, in one way or another, every Atari Silicon Valley employee, and reached out to manufacturing plants in El Paso, Texas, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Taken all together, this was an impossible task ... one that couldn't have been accomplished without the power of an exceptional team.

The second instance was when I became the first computer games producer for Activision², a video and computer games publisher. This was right at the start of the personal computer industry. When you are one of the initial companies in a brand-new industry, you have to figure out how to do everything from scratch. We didn't know the best way to develop games. Should we have design teams? Or should we let the game developers (programmers) do whatever they thought was best?

Since programmers founded Activision, we were inclined to give them free rein; and then we did our best to market and sell what they developed. However, this didn't give us the control we felt we needed. Someone

² Activision was the first computer entertainment company to have producers. Electronic Arts quickly followed, and then everyone else.

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had to watch the process and be the link between the programmers and the rest of the company.

Initially, like the high-tech industry, we had project managers in this role. But they didn't have the authority to adequately control the process. And then we realized that while technology was at the heart of what we were doing, we were really in the entertainment business. So we came up with the concept of having producers instead of project managers.

I was hired into Activision to create their Corporate Training Department; and one of the first things my boss, Ken Coleman, the VP of Personnel, showed me after I arrived was a description of the ideal video/computer games producer. It was a listing of the characteristics, skills, and knowledge the executive team felt was essential for success in this role.

Months later, we still hadn't found the right person for the job. One day, on a flight back from Los Angeles, I was reading over the list of characteristics, when all of a sudden I recognized myself. When I got back to Activision, I went into Ken's office and said, "I think I've found your first computer games producer."

He looked up from his work and said, "You have?"

"I think so. He seems to have all of the characteristics we've been looking for."

"Who is it? Do I know him?" he asked.

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“You know him pretty well; it’s me.”

He just looked at me for a minute and didn’t say a word. Then he said, “I’ll talk to you about it tomorrow.”

A week later I started my job as a computer games producer. Now, all of my concepts of effective management had to be set aside. I had to find a new way to get the job done.

Prior to this, I was the one with the answers. When it came to tasks under my supervision, I knew better than anyone else what needed to be done and how to do it. I liked people with high initiative; but I needed them to believe that I was more than the boss, I was also the expert. Now that was no longer possible ... I didn’t know a damn thing about computer programming, and the programmers were well aware of that.

All of a sudden the successful completion of every project depended on individuals with skills and knowledge I did not, and would never, possess. I had to figure out how to effectively manage a group of people that knew more about what they were doing than I did. In this way, I was forced to learn *The Art of Leadership*.

I was forced to discover the secrets of finding the right people, gaining their respect, and motivating them so that my teams would do the right things and do things right ... so that we could, time and again, accomplish, if not the impossible, at least the very difficult.

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It turned out to be a fairly easy transition. I had learned early the importance of seeking the advice of my team members; that it was counterproductive to tell them what to do even when there was a problem. Instead, I'd get them to tell me what they thought should be done to solve the problem. Initially I'd had the confidence that if they came up with a bad idea, I could always nip it in the bud ... but I quickly discovered that most of the time they knew what to do ... they just needed to hear that they were right. In this way they gained confidence in their own ability, and realized that they had known the answer all along.

So, once again, I used the same approach, although this time I'd didn't know whether their solution would get them into trouble or not. ... What that meant was that I had to be sure that I understood what was happening. As a result, in explaining the process to me, they discovered their own pitfalls. One of my best programmers once said to me, "You know, Brad, we almost never do what you suggest during your search for understanding, but we always discover the best answer while we're talking it over with you."

My teams had a remarkable record of achievement; ultimately the products I produced became some of the most successful computer games of that era (in fact, two of the most successful computer games

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ever, *Shanghai* and *Solitaire Royale*³). At Activision my team's success rate was so high that products we developed were delivering the vast majority of the company's revenue and profits.

Near the end of my time with Activision, after I had announced my decision to start my own business, Ken asked me what my secret was, "How have you been able to create such a remarkable string of successful products?"

After thinking about it for a minute, I said, "Do you remember a few years ago when you told me that I needed to depend on others more ... that I depended on myself too much?"

"I do."

"Well, when I began producing computer games, I found out very quickly that I *had* to depend on others ... this was a job I couldn't do by myself. Then I discovered certain people were more dependable than others; and when I worked with the right people, things got done easier, faster, and better. This resulted in my credo for getting things done: "*Find the right people, show them how good they are, and then get out of the way.*"

"Is that it?" Ken asked.

"Pretty much ... of course, you have to make sure they're aimed in the right direction and they stay on course ... otherwise, that's it."

And that is what this book is all about. That's the foundation for *Get Out of the Way*. Like anything

³ I produced *Solitaire Royale*, the precursor to all computer card solitaire games, after I started my own software development company, Publishing International.

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important, even revolutionary, it sounds simple; but, as I've said, implementation is another matter.

Hopefully, by the time you reach the end of this book, you'll understand what you're doing right, why it works, and which things you need to do differently in order to be an exceptional leader of an exceptional team.

Where Are Our Leaders?

In *Get Things Done: Ten Secrets for Creating and Leading Exceptional Teams*, Secret 1 was:

The ability to get things done does not guarantee management's respect and recognition, or your financial and/or career success; in fact, it can be a hindrance.

This is the statement that Ken Coleman disagreed with; he believes that the ability to get things done will always be recognized and that those individuals will realize career and financial success most of the time.

However, in my experience in working with managers throughout the world, I find a pervasive lack of understanding as to what leadership is and where it can and must be found. Most of the confusion can be found at the very heart of the issue, right in the definition of leadership.

Merriam-Webster Unabridged defines leadership in two ways:

1: the office or position of a leader.

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2: the quality of a leader: capacity to lead ...

So, according to Webster, leadership is either associated with the office an individual holds in an organization, or the characteristics of the individual that “causes men to follow.” In both instances there is a strong tendency to assign the leadership within an organization to the individual in charge; the alpha person. And, in order for the organization to succeed, all others must be followers.

This concept is extremely pervasive. I remember a statement from Jack Welch’s book, *Straight from the Gut*. He was talking about the president of NBC and the reason for his resignation, which was to take the job of CEO at another company. This is a paraphrase, “I can understand his wanting to leave; he was too good to be stuck in that dead-end job the rest of his life.” To Jack, and to the ex-president of NBC, that job was a dead-end. The reason: within the GE organization there was only one alpha position, and that was held by Jack Welch; all others only existed to get done what Jack believed needed to get done. There was only one leader; the rest were managers.

This view of the world is true in the vast majority of our major corporations and, even more telling, in our most prestigious academic institutions. Warren Bennis, Distinguished Professor of Business Administration and Founding Chairman of The Leadership Institute at the

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University of Southern California, one of our most influential academics in the area of leadership, sees the roles of the leader and manager as being distinctly different. He states that leaders are concerned with “doing the right things,” while managers are focused on “doing things right.”

His concept is that leaders are focused on the long term, change, and ends; they are the architects, the individuals responsible for inspiring and motivating; while managers are focused on the short term, the status quo, and means. They are the builders, the problem solvers; responsible for getting done what the leader has said must get done.

According to this concept, managers and leaders are two distinctly different animals and the area of leadership responsibility is limited to those at the top of the organization.

Every year *Fortune* magazine does a survey to determine America’s “most admired” companies, during which they often look at the leaders of those companies. In their March ’98 issue they made the following telling statement, “Every conceivable leadership style is represented by these CEOs.”

This is the pervasive view of management: that there are many different styles of leadership. This is true, if you are defining leadership as the individual in charge, as “the office or position of the leader.” But, if you do,

Where Are Our Leaders?

you've learned nothing about leadership. You've only learned that the "leaders" of these companies do things differently. What *Fortune* was really saying was, "Every conceivable *management style* is represented by the *leaders* (CEOs) of these companies."

Both Bennis and *Fortune* got it wrong. Bennis sees leadership and management as two different roles and *Fortune* defines leadership from the perspective of the CEO. In neither instance is the need for leadership throughout the organization considered.

Bennis believes that the characteristics of the leader and manager are distinctly different; and that these roles are performed by different individuals. In his world there is the leader, providing the vision and inspiration, concerned with change, focused on the long term and ends. And, below the leader, are the managers, problem solvers; focused on the means and the status quo.

He is right in his contention that leaders and managers have very different characteristics—see the world from very different perspectives. What he doesn't seem to understand is that while the traditional manager will seldom, if ever, be able to assume the role of leader, those with strong leadership tendencies can be extremely effective as managers.

My name for the situation where individuals are exhibiting the characteristics of leadership while performing the functions of team managers is Effective Leadership.

Where Are Our Leaders?

These are the individuals who embrace The Art of Leadership, who understand, either consciously or subconsciously the power of Effective Leadership to get things done, to not only do things right, but to also do the right things.

So, if both the traditional manager and the Effective Leader get things done, where's the problem? Why did Secret 1 say, "The ability to get things done does not guarantee management's respect and recognition, or your financial and/or career success; in fact, it can be a hindrance"?

The problem lies in the different ways that the Effective Leader and the traditional manager see and operate in the world. Traditional managers tend to be power and control focused. They are very self-reliant, extremely good at problem solving, usually communicate on a "need-to-know" basis, and they strongly support the status quo. On the other hand, Effective Leaders tend to be communication and relationship focused. While being very self-confident, they are team-dependent, "over-the-top" communicators, open to change, and anxious to discover new and better ways of getting things done.

The two areas that give them the most trouble are their "over-the-top" communication style and their dependence on, and celebration of, the team. This is exacerbated by the fact that many (if not most) Effective

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Leaders are subconsciously competent but do not know exactly what they are doing and why it is working.

Lucky That Way

This reminds me of a favorite story of mine involving one of my mentors, Joe Kipper. Joe was the manager of the Sears store that was next door to the menswear store I managed in Mountain View, California. For some reason, that I never quite understood, Joe decided to mentor me. I was honored, since Joe was one of the most outstanding managers, actually, Effective Leaders, that I have ever known.

Joe Kipper was a Sears “million-dollar manager,” which meant he had been a successful manager for so long that his Sears stock was worth over a million dollars—a lot of money in 1970. This story took place when Joe was the manager of the Arden Fair Sears Store in Sacramento, California.

Joe had managed one successful Sears Store after another for decades. At Arden Fair, his final store before retirement, he reached his peak, managing that store to the achievement of being the highest profit store in the entire Sears chain two years in a row.

When a store reaches this level of accomplishment, the CEO of Sears himself comes and hands out the award at a ceremony attended by all store personnel. He’s introduced to everyone and spends some individual time with each member of the store management team.

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After the festivities, the CEO and Joe were riding the limo back to the airport when the CEO turned to him and said, "That's a great team you've got there, Joe."

"Thank you, Sir. I agree"

With a conspiratorial look in his eye, the CEO added, "With a team like that ... anyone could win profit store of the year."

Joe looked at him for a moment and than said, "Yep, I've always been lucky that way."⁴

Traditional managers tend to see the accomplishments of Effective Leaders as being lucky. They were in the right place at the right time, caught that supplier in a good mood, found the perfect person to fill that critical position, and luckily ended up with a great team.

The sad thing is that those Effective Leaders, who don't exactly know what they are doing that is working so well, often see themselves as lucky. If they see themselves this way, is it any wonder that their peers and superiors also judge that they are simply lucky?

This is just one of the reasons that the Effective Leader isn't promoted to their level of competence, but it isn't the critical reason. What's really going on is that the traditional executives in the organization don't recognize Effective Leadership when they see it. They're looking for attributes that demonstrate power and control,

⁴ I used Joe's phrase, "lucky that way" as the title of my first book about my years in the computer games industry; it's titled, "*Lucky That Way – Stories of Seizing the Moment while Creating the Games Millions Play.*"

Where Are Our Leaders?

individuals with self-reliance, managers who can command respect and demand the level of achievement the organization is requiring. They want men (and women) who are hardworking and dedicated, the individuals the organization believes it needs to accomplish its goals and objectives.

These traits are easily recognized in the traditional managers that are working for the executives. The fact that the organization needs these traditional managers is apparent whenever they're not around and a problem in their area of responsibility occurs. However, the traditional managers who have become corporate executives through their hard work and high intelligence, often don't recognize these traits in their Effective Leaders.

Effective Leaders often make their job look easy and natural, but they are focused and deliberate when they need to be. They demand exceptional performance and teamwork and they expect individuals to take responsibility, while giving them the authority to make it happen. They don't expect team members to spend extra time in the office to prove their loyalty, nor do they work extra hours themselves unnecessarily. They work smart and also reward others for doing so.

Traditional managers often stay late at night and/or get in early in the morning. They are not necessarily trying to make an impression ... they simply

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have to spend more time in the office, because it takes them longer to get less done. Management observes this "working harder" behavior and perceives it as commitment and loyalty to the organization. Traditional managers often exhibit endless persistence and the ability to accomplish things "in spite of the incompetence that surrounds them."

These characteristics are seen as highly desirable by those executives who were also traditional managers and, therefore, understand what it takes to succeed under conditions where you ultimately can only depend on your own hard work and persistence.

The result: traditional managers continue to be promoted, until reaching their level of incompetence; while the Effective Leaders are left behind.

This is why the ability to get things done doesn't always lead to promotions and career success. There is no doubt that the Effective Leader seldom gets the chance to experience their true potential, but, the organization also suffers. It never gets the chance to exploit the competence of its best people, because it doesn't know who its best people are. The end result: the organization continually suffers from a lack of leadership.

I've never met a senior executive that would consciously hold back their best people in favor of the ones ultimately doomed to failure. In fact, they would

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vehemently deny that it was happening under their watch. But, it's happening and they know it because they see the results: the lack of leadership, the inability to get done what must get done. And they wonder, "Where are the managers I need to be successful?"

With the exponential rate of change corporations have to deal with in the 21st Century, those organizations that can identify and recognize their Effective Leaders will have a distinct competitive advantage over those organizations who continue to promote traditional managers.

In my opinion, it is *only* the Effective Leaders that will excel. Effective leaders naturally create the innovative environments that are critical to success in this rapidly-changing world. Traditional managers are focused on the "status quo," which means that they tend to be obstacles to change and will, therefore, have an extremely difficult time managing the high rate of change that is going on around them.

Bennis complains about the lack of leadership at the top of organizations throughout the world, "American organizations (and probably those in most of the rest of the industrialized world) are under-led and over-managed. They do not pay attention to doing the right things, while they pay too much attention in doing things right."

Well, what does he expect? ... if our tendency is to promote the organization's managers, while leaving

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behind the Effective Leaders, we're going to get managers at the top and the focus will continue to be on doing things right, with very little understanding or knowledge of how to do the right things.

There is no doubt that the lack of Effective Leadership is a global crisis, one that is not understood and, therefore, essentially ignored by our most prestigious organizations, from our *Fortune* 500 companies to our most influential business schools.

Some time ago, I shared a speech I gave on Effective Leaders with my brother, Dennis Fregger, who had just retired from the City of Santa Clara Fire Department (California). He told me he realized in retrospect that over the years he had worked under both Effective Leaders and traditional managers:

The real surprise for me was that I hadn't recognized the Effective Leaders I had worked with. I had one boss in particular who was an extremely Effective Leader. This was obvious when we were fighting a fire, where he would instantly hold you accountable for your statements by asking probing questions in response to your off-hand remarks. I learned very quickly to own my statements in a mature and responsible manner, and that made me better at what I did.

The part that was unseen was the day-to-day nuts and bolts of working with him. When I had a problem, I'd talk to him; and in a short time, I'd see the solution and that would be that. Everything went so smoothly when he was my supervisor. It was easy, like breathing. I didn't recognize the power of this style of leadership until I read your speech.

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My brother identified a major part of the problem: Effective Leadership is hard to recognize because it seems so natural, as my brother said, "...like breathing." Here's a personal experience to illustrate this beautifully.

I was attending a workshop at our church on how to read aloud from the Bible in an effective, inspiring way. We were given a Bible verse to prepare, with our "final" being the reading of that verse. I knew the instructor, and he knew my capabilities as a speaker ... he gave me the most difficult Bible verse he could find, smiling a knowing smile as he handed the assignment to me.

It took me all day and night to figure out how to read it in a way that would both inspire and clearly reflect what the author was trying to convey.

At the end of the workshop I was talking with one of the other attendees and he said, "It wasn't fair, I had such a difficult reading. If only he had given me yours ... it was so much easier." This, of course, was the ultimate compliment ... a very difficult reading came off sounding easy and natural.

The Ripple Effect

A good friend of mine, I'll call him Tom, was working for an Effective Leader, having the best time of his life and accomplishing more than he'd ever accomplished before. The company, a major Silicon Valley high-tech firm, had just announced their first ever layoff. The CEO told the stockholders and employees they would only be cleaning house. "Nobody valuable to our future success will be leaving."

Tom's boss was laid off. Tom was then assigned to the most ineffective traditional manager he had ever worked for. He was so

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disillusioned he almost quit. The company nearly lost one of their best engineers because they weren't able to recognize Effective Leadership within their own organization. In addition, because his new boss was so ineffective, Tom's productivity was negatively impacted; and the company got much less from him than before—during a time when they needed maximum productivity from everyone.

Defining the Effective Leader

An Effective Leader gets the job done in ways that increase the competence, confidence, and potential of the individual members of the team; while building an exceptional team that can accomplish the seemingly impossible (at least the extremely difficult), all to the long-term benefit of the organization.

Characteristics of the Effective Leader:

- Understands clearly and is committed to the goals of the organization
- Is highly ethical and trustworthy
- Can recognize, recruit, and motivate the best people
- Is able to build and maintain critical business and personal relationships
- Knows how to create an environment where people can excel
- Is genuinely curious about what and how others think
- Is sensitive to cues concerning potential problems and opportunities
- Lacks arrogance around problem-solving and decision-making

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- Is not afraid to make tough decisions but only after deep consideration
- Is highly intuitive and not afraid to trust those feelings
- Is extremely creative, not afraid to consider seemingly impossible ideas
- Is willing to take risks
- Embraces the unexpected
- Accepts responsibility for one's actions (or inactions)
- Is compelled to effective mentoring, eager to pass on skills and philosophies
- Uses centering techniques for relaxation and heightened awareness

The Pros Know Who the Best Are

In the Bible reading workshop example earlier, the other workshop attendee wasn't able to recognize that it was my skill that made the reading appear to be so easy. But the leader recognized this and had been quick to compliment me. In the same way, a symphony conductor can easily tell the difference in skill between the violinist sitting in the first chair and the one sitting in the fifth chair. Likewise, a professional sports coach knows immediately who the best players are. In most professions, the pros can easily recognize those most capable of excellence.

It continues to amaze me that so many senior executives do not recognize the real pros, the Effective Leaders they have working for them. They don't seem to grasp that doing less and accomplishing more—leveraging the available talent—is the smart way to lead teams.

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Jim and Bob – Case Study

Jim and Bob work as managers for XYZ, Inc., a typical manufacturing company. Jim's team runs very smoothly; the job always gets done with very little fanfare and not much observable effort. Jim insists that his key people attend important meetings with him; and when specific questions are asked, he defers to the appropriate expert on his team.

After the meeting is over, the executives agree that Jim is lucky to have such a talented group of people; and the decision is sometimes made to move one or two of the more talented team members to areas of greater urgency.

When Jim goes on vacation the company hardly realizes he's gone, and his team seems to get along just fine. When a question arises, his peers and his boss, as well as others in the organization, have no problem checking with the appropriate person to find the answer.

Bob doesn't have it so "lucky." His team often seems like an albatross around his neck. The job always gets done, but not without a series of near disasters that would have been catastrophic if Bob had not "saved the day." Bob does not like to have his people in attendance at important meetings; and if they must be, he still does most of the talking, interrupting and adding his own "wisdom" even when members of his team are asked direct questions. Often at these sessions it is obvious that his team members are not capable of understanding some of the more complex issues only Bob can handle.

After the meeting is over, the executives agree that without Bob running that group, they would be in bad shape; it's good to have someone of his capabilities around when the going gets tough.

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When Bob goes on vacation, all hell breaks loose. Nobody can answer the more complex questions that come up ... which means that the boss is often forced to call Bob and get the answers directly. There have even been times when Bob was asked to come back from vacation early.

Bob and Jim have both been in their jobs for a couple of years when a position opens up that would be a significant promotion for either of them. The position is available because a senior manager, Ted, had reached his level of incompetence, and the job just wasn't getting done. His team was perceived as being weak, unmotivated, and with low morale.

At the senior executive's monthly meeting, the executive responsible was asked, "Who do you have that can take over Ted's group?"

"I've decided Bob's the man for the job," he replies.

"Why Bob?" asks another executive.

"He's extremely loyal and committed. He's the first one here in the morning and the last one out at night. Most importantly, he always gets the job done, even under very adverse conditions. I think he's ready to move up."

Yet another executive asks, "Why not Jim? He's made all of his goals, hasn't he?"

Then the deciding executive adds, "Ted's group has not been performing well at all. They don't seem to have the skills or knowledge to do the job, and their motivation to improve is almost nonexistent. I need a strong person in that role, someone who won't put up with incompetence and isn't afraid to make the tough decisions. I won't be surprised if that entire group is replaced within the year.

"Jim's a great guy and his people love him; but his accomplishments are as much, or more, a result of his people's

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efforts than his. He's been lucky to have such a great team ... but ... could he handle a bunch of incompetent malcontents? I don't think so. I also wonder about his commitment; he's seldom here late and I've never seen him arrive before eight-thirty. Nope ... Bob's the man we need in this job."

"I agree ... Jim would probably be eaten alive by that group. There's no doubt Bob would show them who was boss," replied the executive who had started the discussion.

Questions

- 1) Which one, Jim or Bob, would you promote?
- 2) What were your reasons for making this decision?
- 3) What assumptions did you make?
- 4) Why do you think the executives made the choice they did?

See **Appendix – Case Studies** for the author's answers to these questions.

Afterword

You work your whole life, and accomplish many things. If you're lucky, you have that one defining moment that reflects everything you've believed in. In other words, it all comes together.

One Defining Moment

My brother worked for the Santa Clara, California Fire Department for twenty-eight years. This story took place on January 29, 1996, when he was the "C" Shift captain at Station Three on Homestead Road. This is a single-engine station in a mostly residential area. Each engine has a firefighter, a driver/engineer, and a captain. On duty were Sherman, Dan, and my brother Dennis.

This particular night Sherm and Dan were already in bed when Dispatch phoned.

"Dennis, I don't think this is much so I didn't sound the alarm ... thought I'd let you decide whether or not you want to investigate it," she said.

"What's up?" my brother replied.

"A citizen smelled natural gas in an area on Homestead about half a block from your station."

"Thanks for the information," he said and hung up the phone.

Although Gas Investigations rarely turn out to be anything, he knew he was in the business of safety. There was really no decision to make, so he woke up Sherm and Dan and

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said, “Hey guys, we have a Gas Investigation to check out.” They shook out the cobwebs and ambled to the rig.

He figured it would be the normal “nothing call” and they drove to the area, noses alert for the smell of natural gas.

As they passed a three-building apartment house complex in which all the buildings had been “tented”⁵ for fumigation, my brother caught the slightest scent of natural gas. He told Dan to make a u-turn at the next intersection, return to the complex, and see if the smell was stronger there.

They parked in front and my brother exited the engine to investigate. The smell seemed stronger, but what really concerned him was the distant sound of rushing air. He followed the sound and when he was right on top of it, it sounded like a little jet engine. It was coming from inside one of the tented buildings in a location where he knew there to be a bank of natural gas meters. He was sure this was a very large leak of natural gas into the tented structure. He immediately contacted Dispatch and told them, “Give me a Structure Response (five more rigs) to this location and have police close the street (a major thoroughfare) at the two intersections on either side of our location.”

Then his team quickly donned their turnout coats and fire helmets, having casually arrived with their turnout pants and boots on over their clothes. Dan wanted to investigate further; but my brother told him to get away from the building, get in the rig, and back it away from the area. “I’m sure I hear gas escaping ... this thing could blow at any moment! We’ve got to get moving on this before we’ve got a real disaster on our hands.”

⁵ In California, the most common form of termite eradication is “tenting.” A large tent is put completely over the building and the fumigant released inside. It sits that way for a day or two ... the tent is then removed ... and the termites have been dealt with.

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Dennis knew if the building blew, it would cause a tremendous amount of damage to the entire area. There would probably be some loss of life. The potential of this happening called for an immediate evacuation of all the surrounding buildings; plus, they would need the police to cordon off the neighborhood, wake people up and get them out. It would be a major undertaking.

On the other hand, if it didn't blow ... well, at the very least, he'd be the brunt of a lot of kidding. At the most, he'd be held responsible for the inconvenience caused, as well as the time and money wasted. It really wasn't a tough decision.

When the Battalion Chief, who was responding with the Structure Response, radioed for a description of the incident; my brother explained what he had seen and heard and recommended evacuation of all buildings and homes within a certain distance of the complex. It would be a massive job, more than the three of them could do. He said to his firefighters, "Sherm, go find the fumigation guard and get him out here right now." And, "Dan, take the rig around the corner to the closest, safest hydrant and get ready to lay line into the fire. If this thing blows, I want to be ready to pour water on it as fast as possible."

While responding to the scene, the Battalion Chief assigned various evacuation tasks to the responding apparatus; and a Second Alarm (three more rigs) was called to insure as fast an evacuation as possible and to strategically place rigs for the potential, massive explosion and fire. The evacuation went as smoothly as could be expected. There were some people who needed help, including a mentally impaired woman in one of the apartments facing the building and a quadriplegic in an apartment house across the street.

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It seemed like time was flying by, while the possibility of that building exploding into flames was constantly on every firefighter's mind. It took about forty minutes to evacuate everyone to a safe location and get the rigs placed into position with lines laid and ready to go.

The Battalion Chief had set up the command post within sight of the building a half-block away, and my brother had been assigned to assist him because Dennis knew the area well. They were now in the mode of figuring out what to do next. It was an extremely difficult situation.

"Well ... we can't stand around waiting all night ... if something doesn't happen soon, we're going to have to send a couple of men in there. We need more information," the Chief said, then added, "Sometimes we have to make tough decisions."

The Chief decided to keep Dennis at the command post and send in his firefighter, Sherm, with another Captain. Dennis was uneasy about this decision because he knew Sherm had four children, and Sherm was a member of *his* crew; he felt that he and Sherm should remain a team, but he said nothing—the Chief had made his decision.

It was forty-five minutes after they had ambled out of the firehouse to this call when the Chief's decision was implemented. He touched my brother on his shoulder and said, "Get 'em ready ... we've gotta send 'em in."

Dennis looked over at Sherm and the other Captain and said, "Paul, Sherm ... get ready. You're going in."

They began donning their air-packs and facemasks. Dennis looked at them uneasily. He thought, *I should be going with Sherm.*

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When Sherm received the order, he knew it was going to be a very dangerous mission so he stopped for a moment and prayed, *God, I have four children and a wonderful wife; it wouldn't be a good idea for me to leave them right now. If that building's going to blow ... why not blow it now before I get there?*

And the building blew, with an enormous fireball and a shockwave that was felt for miles!

Immediately following the explosion, Command added a Third Alarm (three more rigs). The hose was already laid and charged, and they had water on the fire in record time. Many of the surrounding buildings suffered major damage from the explosive force, including some nearby homes that were moved off their foundations. The next day you could see debris hanging in the electrical wires, but they had contained the fire to two of the complex's three buildings.

A few days later Dennis told me, "What I'm most proud of is that not only didn't anyone die ... but not a single person, including firefighters, was even injured. You know, Brad, you wait your whole career for that one defining moment ... well ... that night was my moment. It showed me why I'd become a firefighter."

The night of the explosion, I was in my home in Sunnyvale about ten miles away. I was working at my computer in the family room, when about 11:15 p.m. the windows rattled like someone was shaking them. I went out to the backyard to figure out what was going on.

It wasn't until the next day I learned what had caused the sound. But I didn't find out for a couple of days about the role my brother had played.

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The City of Santa Clara gave Dennis and the other firefighters a special award ceremony for their role in saving lives and property. During the ceremony, a City Councilman got very emotional as he explained that his mentally impaired daughter had lived in an apartment facing the apartment house that had blown up. He told how the firefighters had taken care of her, how considerate they had been; and then he said, “When I walked into her apartment and saw the destruction, I thanked God and these firefighters that my daughter had gotten out in time.”

My wish for all of you is that you, too, will have “that one defining moment.”

Contact

Groundbreaking Productions coordinates all of Brad Fregger’s speaking engagements and offers seminars and workshops based on the concepts presented in his books.

Groundbreaking Press is an author-services company designed to take advantage of the digital revolution in publishing and dedicated to providing the services authors need to get their books into publication.

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Author's Bio

Brad Fregger has 45 years combined experience in retailing, corporate training, publishing, and software development. He has worked in large and small companies, started three of his own businesses, and worked as a senior executive in two other startups. He is currently President/CEO of Groundbreaking Press, an author-services book publishing company. Additionally, Brad is a lecturer (professor) at Texas State University-San Marcos (*Business Communication*) and a member of the adjunct faculty at Franklin University (Business Ethics for Leaders) in Columbus, Ohio.

Brad taught graduate-level courses at Saint Edward's University in Austin, Texas, for over five years, including one year (2002) as the Executive in Residence for the Graduate School of Management. Fregger helped develop and then teach courses in the MBA Program (*Introduction to eCommerce* and *Managerial Communications*) and the Master of Science in Organizational Leadership & Ethics (*Leadership & Imagination*). He also designed and taught the online version of *Introduction to eCommerce*, which received strong reviews from the Instructional Technologies department at the University. He also

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taught two other courses for both the Graduate School of Management (*Human Relations*) and New College (*Business Communications*).

Brad is a practitioner/scholar, using the skills and knowledge he has learned, to amass a remarkable record of accomplishment over the past 25 years. In addition to the numerous programs he developed as founder of three major corporate-training departments (Mervyn's, Atari, and Activision), he has produced more than 50 videos, 50 books, 12 audio books, over 100 consumer and business enterprise software products, including the most successful computer game in the world (*Shanghai*) and the most played computer game in the world (*computer solitaire*), and published over 50 books on a wide variety of subjects. He has completed every project begun in the past 25 years, and, even more important, during that time not a single team member left during the development of a product. This is what Brad calls "employee retention."

Brad is an expert in many critical areas of business, from customer service to the management of technology. He's an international speaker providing programs to major companies throughout the Middle East (Tunisia, Dubai, Beirut, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar), Europe, and Canada in a broad spectrum of subjects including, Effective Leadership, negotiation, project management, technical risk management,

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creativity, and team building. As an author he's written five books, *Get Things Done - Ten Secrets of Creating and Leading Exceptional Teams*; *One Shovel Full - Telling Stories to Change Beliefs, Attitudes, and Perceptions*; *Lucky That Way - Stories of Seizing the Moment while Creating the Games Millions Play*; *Why Publish? - Making the Right Choices for Your Book*; and his most recent book, *My Thinking Cap – Solutions for Global Crisis*.

In addition, Brad has published articles in professional journals, including a series on book publishing for *Sharing Ideas* magazine (Los Angeles, California), an article on career change for *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal* (San Jose, California), and he wrote a column, "On a Tangent" for *Creative Pulse* magazine (Austin, Texas).

Brad's amazing ability to complete projects on time and on budget, plus his creative management style, caught the attention of Tom Peters (*In Search of Excellence*), who then featured Brad in his book, *Liberation Management*.

Brad is especially skilled in facilitation toward solving motivational and managerial communication issues. Brad believes that ineffective communication is at the heart of most personnel issues, but that these issues are often not solved by learning listening techniques. "Courses that teach listening skills can be a waste of time. Why? Because we already know how to listen; we

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just choose not to. The secret is learning why we make this choice and why it's important to make other choices.”

Brad holds a Master's Degree in Futuristics (San Jose State University). His speech, "*Earthward Implications of Cosmic Migration*," was given at the American Astronautical Society's proceedings in honor of the tenth anniversary of Apollo 11's landing on the moon. He is a frequent guest on radio-talk shows across the nation, usually discussing the future of our society in the areas of genetic engineering, space travel, virtual reality, and extinction-level events.

Brad and his wife/business partner, Barbara Foley, live in the beautiful Texas Hill Country south of Austin.

