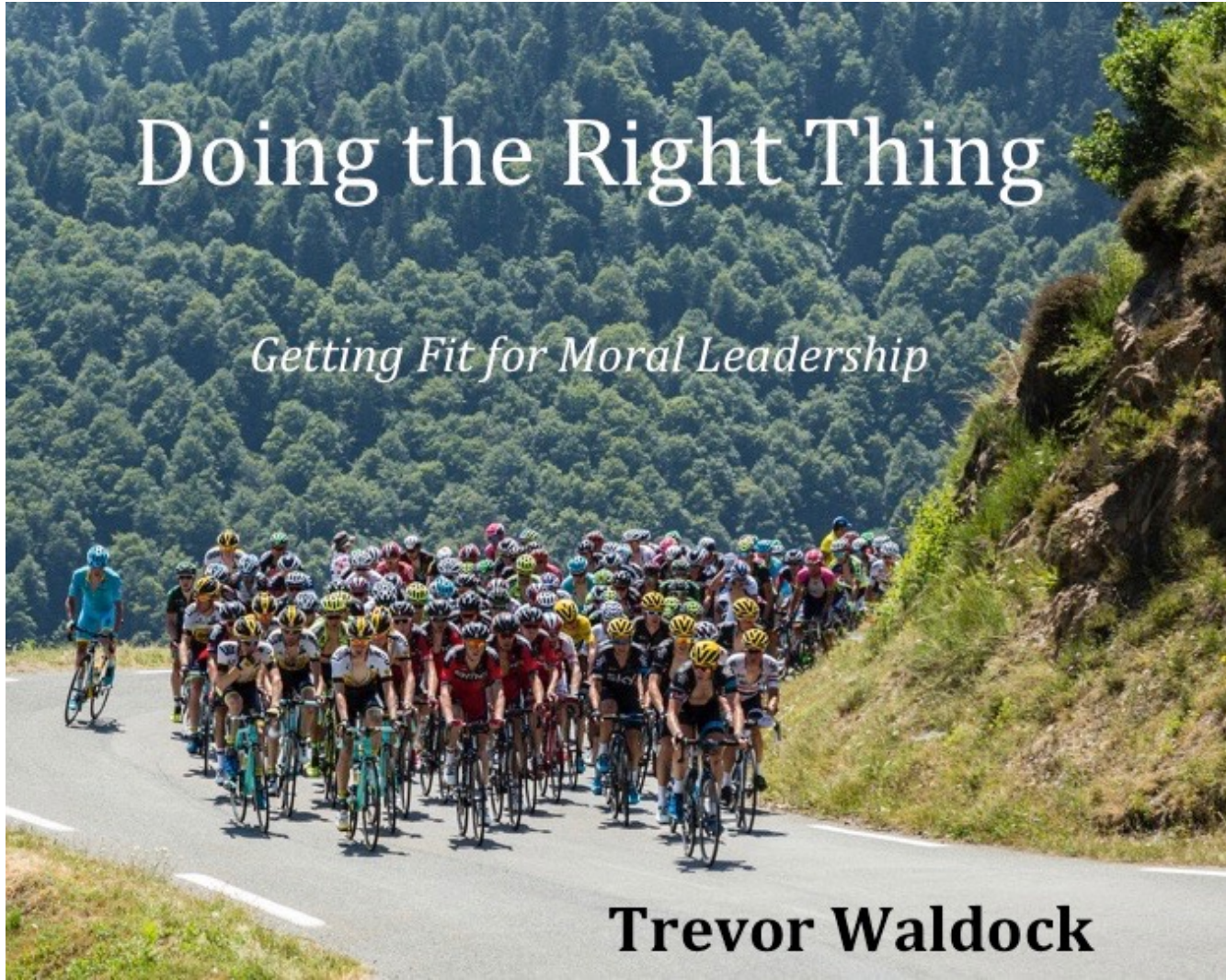


Doing the Right Thing

Getting Fit for Moral Leadership



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Preface

Scene one: It is late December and the year-end book closes at the end of the month. You have booked all the work you have sold so far and it takes you up to £800,000. The next bonus level kicks in at £1m, so you're £200,000 short. You have almost concluded a sale for £250,000, but it won't be signed until early January. Your boss says 'Just book it', because it will make him look good, as well as you getting a handsome bonus. You know that booking work that isn't contracted is illegal. What will you do? Book it or not book it?

Scene two: You work in the public sector and everyone is having to make huge budget cuts. There is a local service for autistic children that you could cut and, while it would affect over 100 children, their parents mostly have low incomes and so probably won't cause much of a fuss. What will you do? Cut or not cut?

Scene three: You have been told that your performance has been pretty average this past year. You know the organization is looking to make cuts in head count. Your team did a brilliant piece of work last week on a new product and it's your job to present it to your boss – which you do. Your boss says, 'This is an amazing piece of work! You've really knocked the ball out of the park on this one.' Knowing that you did little yourself to contribute to the team's success, what will you do? Speak up or remain silent?

Here's the thing. Every day as a leader you make 1001 decisions, choices, responses, reactions, actions connected to whatever is going on. If what you do, what you lead, is important to the world, then what happens in those 1001 moments is really, really important to the bit of the world that you are trying to affect, and to the kind of leader you are.

We all have a set of defaults within us – instinctive, reflexive or 'gut' ways of seeing, thinking and feeling – that lead us to arrive at conclusions, shape our perceptions and guide our choices and actions. These defaults influence everything, from steering away from the *Big Issue* seller all the way through to

exaggerating the facts to make our story look more compelling. We have defaults for everything. The question is:

What are your defaults?

Put simply, there are two roads your leadership defaults can be set to travel down. There's **Leadership Road 1**:

- Get more money – creates more choice for you
- Get more status (in your own or others' eyes) – creates more significance and power for you

Or there's **Leadership Road 2**:

- Develop more heart – being about more than just you
- Develop more character – being trustworthy
- Be more civil – living well in the world, with others
- Be more sustainable – doing something that is built to last
- Create a legacy – having gravitas, being a role model, creating an outcome that outlives you

Put even more simply, your defaults will be built around:

- What you want (the usual route)

or

- Who you are (the route I am proposing)

It will be one or the other, but often we don't consciously decide which it's going to be, and certainly the route that was promoted to me at school and college was the second option. So if that was true for you as well, then you have to reset your defaults or set new ones.

Defaults are like muscle memory. Usain Bolt ran like he did because he had trained every muscle in his body to run in a certain way. Every time Usain

got down on the starting blocks, his muscles had memorized the whole of the next 9.58 seconds. As if using muscle memory, you too act in ways that you have learned over many years. To set or reset those muscle-memory defaults requires you to work on every aspect of who you are as a leader.

And you need to do that every day. True leadership development isn't a three-day course you attend, a book you read or an MBA you sign up for; true leadership development is what you do every single day of your leadership life, where you are developing the muscle memory, the defaults, that you need for those 1001 daily decisions. It's exactly like going to the gym each day – that's where muscle memory is formed. The programmes, the books and the MBAs should simply point you to the gym.

What I am talking about here is how leaders do the right thing, consistently, day after day and year after year. Doing the right thing is everyday language for what has usually been called moral leadership. Love it or hate it, 'morality' is back in vogue and the term 'moral leadership' is being used increasingly in articles, speeches and newsfeeds. Many people are calling out for more investment in moral leadership development on MBAs, executive development programmes, internal training courses and induction programmes alike, because there is a common feeling that many leaders aren't doing the right thing. Yet if we look at what the impact from such training has been so far, even years on from the big Lehman/Enron scandals, then Friedman and Gerstein are not too positive:

Little has changed and the moral compass is broken at many organizations; greed still reigns. Examples from the financial, automobile, retailing, and accounting industries ... demonstrate that many leaders have no qualms about selling dangerous products or using dubious accounting to maximize profit. ... organizational leaders and boards may be paying lip service to the importance of integrity and ethics but are not practicing what they preach.¹

You can add political, legal and religious organizations to that list. Collapses and scandals at Enron, Lehman Brothers, Volkswagen, Carillion, charities, churches... the list is endless and grows by the week. How do you learn to do the right thing?

Leadership development courses often use case studies that describe the organization, the people and the context, and then divide participants into discussion groups to answer the question: 'What would you do?' The problem is, we often don't know what we would really do until the pressure is on us personally. We won't know until it's our boss who's threatening us with the sack if we don't play the game. We won't know until it's our chance to hide our mistakes so no one notices. We can't assume that we will just know how to do the right thing. Doing the right thing is not our birthright, it doesn't come naturally and it doesn't automatically go with the leadership 'badge'. It has to be learned. What we will *actually* do in those moments is scripted deep within our real values, our default thoughts and the resulting default actions. Case studies and courses are great illustrations, but they won't develop those defaults, the hard-wired ways of thinking and acting that load the dice so we don't even have to think before we do the right thing.

So leadership development classrooms are a start, but the real work has to be done in the classroom of our leadership life, every day. The difference between leadership development and the reality of working life is like the difference between watching the Olympics 100 metres on TV and then stepping outside and doing it yourself. Watching is inspiring, but trying to do it hits hard against reality; it's humbling, hard work. Executive development may show you inspiring role models, great case studies, best practice, how it looks on the test track, but only the gym will get you personally fit. Only in your daily working life will you develop the muscle memory, the character, that you need for the reality of leadership. And that is what this book sets out to show you how to do.

It's worth me saying a few things about myself. First, I'm a leadership practitioner, not an academic or theoretician. I have been leading in the profit and non-profit sectors for the past 40 years, so this book is written out of my experience.

Second, I'm a pragmatist. My work in public, private and international development has meant I've had to focus on the key question: 'Does this work in the real world?' That means this is an everyday book for all leaders who are searching for how to do the right thing.

Third, when I talk about moral leadership, to me that means leadership with integrity. I'm convinced that we are humans first and leaders second. We can't split off 'leadership' from the rest of our lives. Who we are as a person flows into absolutely everything we do, including what we do as leaders. So my examples in this book come from all aspects of life, not just business.

Finally, as the Bible says, '*Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone.*'² Like everyone, I fail the test of moral perfection. This is not a 'we should be more moral, better people' type of book. It's a 'hey, I've been down this road and I've learned some things I wish I'd understood sooner' type of book. There are some things in my leadership journey that I wasn't fit and ready for, and it's taken me some hard knocks to find out how to develop the muscle memory and defaults so that doing the right thing comes a little more naturally. It's this practical wisdom I want to share with you to help you in your leadership journey, whatever level you're currently at.

Part I

Doing the Right Thing

1. The Examined Life Is Not Worth Living

The cool air that hit me as I emerged from the London Underground station into the sunlight reminded me that autumn had slipped in unnoticed. I was going to be late for my meeting, so I upped my pace as I climbed the large staircase that would take me over the city's imposing river. At the top of the steps, a woman was seated on the ground. She was dressed in shabby clothes and was either trying to sleep or was crying, and she had a crumpled coffee cup in front of her to receive money. I made sure I didn't catch her eye, walked past her quickly and headed over the bridge. As I descended the other side, a man stood right in front of me holding out a copy of the *Big Issue*. I sidestepped him, avoided his gaze and headed to my meeting twenty metres away.

Pause. What really happened there?

If I were to play you my trip out of the Underground to my meeting in slo-mo via two cameras – one observing my actions and the other one inside my head – the narrative would have gone something like this:

Someone's begging at the top of the stairs. Don't have time for that right now. She looks sleepy or sad or something. Can't stop. Don't have any cash. She's probably being run by a gang of beggars anyway.

Why are there so many people on the bridge, can't they see I'm in a hurry?

Oh no, not the *Big Issue* seller. I don't have time or cash for him either, so I'll just avoid him. I need to get to that meeting.

You may well ask whether any of this matters. The meeting was important and it's good manners not to keep people waiting. Maybe you're more interested in whether I got to my meeting on time and was it a good meeting and did I

conclude any new business? But if you did ask whether it matters, I'd tell you I didn't suddenly become a leader when I walked into my meeting. I was a leader when I left home that morning, travelled on the Underground and walked across the bridge. I'm not just a leader when I sit at my desk, or around the boardroom table or on the phone, or reading a spreadsheet or deciding where to invest. I'm as much a leader when I walk past the people on the security desk, share the lift to the office and encounter others who are already at their desks. A leader is who I am, it's not just what I do. I *am* a leader all of the time, even when I'm not doing things normally associated with leading – finance, strategy, partnering, selling, networking, marketing, decision making.

Something happened to me on the bridge, but something is always happening for us as leaders – at the breakfast table at home, on the way to the office, in the office or at a meeting. The details might be different, but the point is that something is happening all of the time.

You may counter that my organization's focus is on leadership – I speak about leadership, train people in leadership, coach and mentor leaders. All this is true, but it still matters whether I do the right thing in the reactions, perceptions and actions that fill my day. It matters who I am, where my head is, where my heart is, where my character is. Whether I ignore a beggar on the street does have a bearing on the decisions I make at work that day.

Why? The little things become big things if you do a lot of them – little thoughts become attitudes, little actions become habits, little decisions become directions, and little habits become our character. The big things of my leadership *today* are made up of the little things I have been doing all day, every day up to this point. I bring *myself* to the job and *myself* is being shaped every day. The little things are the countless thoughts, decisions, actions and conversations I don't even really think about. The moment on the bridge is simply a snapshot, a window, that reveals what kind of person I am as a leader.

Everything has an impact. Sometimes it's almost imperceptible, but it has an impact nonetheless. Saying thank-you or not saying thank-you to your PA has an impact. Showing empathy or not showing empathy to your struggling co-

worker has an impact. Showing irritation or not showing irritation has an impact on your partner, child, line report or whoever. Bending the truth has an impact, exaggerating your expenses has an impact, rushing from one thing to another has an impact. Even if you just do it once, it has an impact, and when you do something regularly it has a big impact. And why does impact matter to leaders? Because, of the over 450 academic definitions of leadership, *influence* sits at the heart of all of them. Impact on others really, really matters. Without other people our leadership is nothing. Without other people nothing will get done, nothing will get sold, nothing will get resolved, nothing will get made, nothing will get organized.

Why should leaders focus on the little things?

Why am I focusing on the little things? Because we are so used to hearing about the *big* things, whether that be corporate scandals at Lehman Brothers or Volkswagen; questionable corporate cultures at Pixar, Wonga or Anglo Irish Bank; inappropriate behaviour by people like Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby or Rolf Harris; corporations such as Google, Amazon or Starbucks exploiting tax loopholes; the election and actions of politicians such as Donald Trump or Boris Johnson, and on and on. And it's easy to look at the big things and then look at yourself and say: '*That's not me, I'm not that person.*' But the big things don't just happen. The big things are the result of a long period of little things.

Clayton Christensen, author of the well-known book *The Innovator's Dilemma*, was at business school with Jeff Skilling, former CEO of Enron. Christensen describes Skilling as a good man: smart, hard-working and he loves his family. But Christensen was shocked at what the court cases that followed the collapse of Enron revealed about Skilling's character. The man Christensen knew wasn't the man in the court case – he *became* the man in the court case. He became that man over many years of practice. Many years of *little* things led Skilling to the *big* thing. Christensen's conclusion was: '*Something had clearly sent him [Skilling] off in the wrong direction.*'³

The 'wrong direction' doesn't start out like that. A leader generally sets off in what seems like the right direction for good motives, and yet in these big public leadership scandals something goes wrong. What is more, it has generally been going wrong for a long time before anyone knows about it. We don't see or pay much attention to the first outburst of anger, the first creative entry on the expense account, the first inappropriate text, the first bigging-up of one's own role in the project or the first put-down of a colleague. The wrong direction starts with one innocuous step that doesn't draw anyone's attention. The wrong direction is made up of one small step, then another small step, and then another small step. All small steps that don't get checked or questioned. And who would they be questioned by? By you, by me, by the person who is witness to whatever happens, however small, when it happens.

By the time others have the courage to question the steps we have taken, we've often gone some way in the wrong direction and we've found good ways of justifying and explaining to ourselves and to others why that first little step was OK. And if we've become powerful enough, we can block people from even asking us the difficult questions. That's why the walk from the metro to the meeting matters. Either I take those steps and ignore myself, my thoughts, my attitudes and my actions, considering them small and actually irrelevant to my job – *or* I take my steps seriously enough to know that the little things will become big things if I don't pay attention to them and they *will* have an impact. Maybe I won't notice it today or tomorrow, but the chickens will come home to roost.

I've worked with tough leaders who tell me in no uncertain terms that this is introspective nonsense. They say, 'This kind of book should be subtitled "leadership for wimps".' They believe that Socrates was wrong when he said 'the unexamined life is not worth living'. Instead, their mantra is: 'The examined life is not worth living. I don't have time for it.'

These are the kind of people we end up reading about in the newspapers. The last leader who told me a version of 'the examined life is not worth living' was fired by his board of directors after his staff refused to work with him any longer. That's a place that no one wants to get to in a leadership career. No one

plans to become the focus of a lawsuit, newspaper headline or boardroom slap down.

Scanning, not introspection

In order to be the kind of leader I'm talking about in this book, you need to be introspective. Introspection is where you stop, lift up the manhole covering your head and your heart and start sorting through the crazy mixture inside. But there is a step before introspection, which is called *scanning*, and that means simply noticing what is going on inside you.

What would scanning look like on the morning of my metro to meeting scenario? I would be noticing that I'm rushing not walking, noticing that I feel irritated and that the irritation began because of a conversation I had with my partner when I left home about the hours I'm working. Noticing that I don't want to look a beggar in the eye. Noticing that I've put them in a box rather than seen the real person. Noticing that I've done that a couple of times today already. Scanning doesn't mean I'm necessarily going to do anything about any of this right now, but I'm aware of myself as a leader who is just about to walk into a meeting and is conscious of the attitudes and feelings that are already shaping my leadership that day. I know that if I don't take responsibility for the small things going on inside me already that morning, I will be likely to project them into the meeting.

Scanning is part of what is called emotional intelligence. Daniel Goleman⁴ says that emotional intelligence is even more important for a leader than their intellectual intelligence or skills (although he isn't saying that these things don't matter!). This kind of awareness, this ability to scan ourselves like a quick pass through a personal X-ray machine, is what allows us to make immediate mid-course changes in our hearts, minds and actions. It's the same as when I'm running: scanning tells me that I need to do a little more work on my speed or that my stamina seems to be dropping or that my tendons are slightly tighter. It doesn't stop me running at that moment, but it alerts me what to work on when

I'm next in the gym. When our scanning reveals a pattern emerging in our head, heart, attitudes or direction, then we can look at how to do the introspection part and do the work of mid-course correction so that we don't head off in the wrong direction.

Trust is everything

Years ago, an organization I worked in took on an intern. He was great: proactive, likeable, effective. I suppose I became a mentor to him in some ways, and when he left he stayed in touch through the next stages of his career. A few years later, he rejoined the organization as an associate and I thought all was still well. He had a few challenges he wanted me to listen to because he considered that we were rushing a few areas of our strategy, and in my view I handled them well enough. But then suddenly he was gone. He just left. However much I tried to re-engage him, he didn't want to connect. He seemed very angry with me, but I could never get to the bottom of why.

Years later, I got a call from him saying he was in the city and would love to meet up for dinner. To be honest, I felt nervous and curious at the same time – nervous because I didn't want to be on the end of another angry tirade, and curious because I might finally find out what had gone wrong. We did meet for dinner and I began by saying, 'I'm delighted that you wanted to meet up and I'm looking forward to catching up with each other. But I have to ask from the outset, what happened back then? Why did things break down so badly between us? I never understood what the reasons were.'

While he couldn't remember all the details, it was clear that over a period of a few years I hadn't listened, I'd bulldozed through his objections to some issues and I'd made lots of assumptions about whether he was 'on side' or not. Trust between us had broken down, certainly from his side. I hadn't done any one big thing, it was a history of little things that, like building a pile of pebbles, eventually became a wall separating us from each other. Leadership that doesn't build trust won't survive.

Imagine you go into the office early one morning. You want to reduce the pile of work in your inbox while no one else is around. You get to your desk and notice that your boss is already in. He puts his head round the door, says 'good morning' and then asks you if you could bring him the list of creative ideas on the new project you came up with yesterday. Freeze-frame that moment. What is your response to that request?

The answer will depend on your level of trust in your boss as a leader, which will be based on your experience of them and their character. That experience leads to a whole range of reactions, such as:

- She's so hard-working, she always comes in early
- He only comes in early when he wants to criticize you
- He's such a great role model of commitment to the team
- He only comes in early when he's got her eye on a potential intimate liaison with a new member of staff
- She takes on board everyone's ideas and advocates to her bosses on behalf of the team
- He takes other people's ideas and pretends they are his own
- He's so committed that he always does the difficult, creative work herself
- She left her last job because she didn't work hard enough
- He's never critical of others behind their back
- He snoops around people's workstations when they're not around

Our daily experience of leaders shapes our trust in them. It's their character that walks into the office ahead of any job title. And that's true of us too. People are constantly watching us and making conclusions about us, and that affects how much they want to work with us... or not. Trust is the bedrock of everything. Economist Tim Harford's research⁵ suggests that 99.5% of the economy is based

on trust. We trust teachers with our kids; we trust doctors and surgeons with our health. At work, trust is required for creative problem solving, leadership in vulnerable situations, sales relationships, working relationships, marketing, after-care, conflict resolution, courageous decisions – almost everything is based on trust. To work well, the relationship between leaders and followers demands trust.

Why is trust so important? Imagine a reservoir full of water and call it ‘your potential’. All your intelligence, experience, wisdom, creativity, skills, and energy – everything you have is in that reservoir. What does it take to get the water in the reservoir to flow fully to where it can really make a difference? It needs clean channels. If the channels are clean, the water flows easily. If the channels start to block, the water stops flowing and it doesn’t get to where it needs to go, which leads to drought and lack of flourishing. Trust is a clean channel. When the channel of your potential is clean, then ideas, fun, creativity, extra effort, the best outcomes, problem solving, strong relationships, the flow of ideas and information – all these things happen. When the channel gets blocked, it’s the opposite and important outcomes don’t get reached. What determines the flow is the level of trust, between people, but in particular in the leader.

This issue of trust doesn’t just scratch the surface, it goes really deep. From a developmental level as a human being, the most core, foundational thing a baby and child learns is to trust or mistrust. Psychologist Erik Erikson’s⁶ research shows that every single thing about the rest of our lives is built on how that trust–mistrust question is answered. When we start to crawl and explore as a toddler, the basic issue is still: ‘Can I trust you?’⁷ Is the parent still going to be there when we get back? Fast-forward that to adult working life and building teams at work, and what the work of people like Patrick Lencioni⁸ shows is that if there is no trust, then there is no team. It’s like we all have a trust radar that is constantly scanning and reassembling and reshaping the picture we have of others. It is still focused on answering that unspoken but fundamental question: ‘Can I trust you?’

Trust is everything – trust in yourself; trust in other people and in the relationships you have with them. As a leader you are a broker of trust. Trust is a living, dynamic bond between people that is either strong like rope, or thin like cotton threads, or frayed and about to snap. And when it does snap, the one thing that is crystal clear is that the breaking of trust is painful – whether you did it or it was done to you. It hurts. It bites deep. Once trust is broken by any failure in moral leadership, the flow from the reservoir of potential stops almost overnight.

And how do you create trust? As you'll see in the next chapter, trust is created every day, by doing the right thing in all of the little things that make up your day. That's why the little things are so important.

2. ‘A Bright Idea, But No Moral Compass’

This book is about moral leadership, but what does the word ‘moral’ really mean? Morality is a touchstone, something that can be seen as unattainable, something that can make hypocrites of us all, yet we are instantly outraged when someone doesn’t ‘do the right thing’ in a given situation. People judge us and we judge them by whether we are seen to be moral.

Take a headline from the *Sunday Times*: ‘Wonga: a bright idea but no moral compass’.⁹ Or a quote from *Fortune* magazine’s editor Alan Murray:

Being a ‘good’ corporate leader once meant delivering superior results to shareholders. Today that’s still necessary, but not sufficient. Workers and customers as well as politicians and the public are holding those who lead to a new—and higher—moral standard, and leaders must learn how to respond.¹⁰

Or entrepreneur Richard Branson:

There is no question in my mind: moral leadership will be in high demand for years to come. Moral leadership is not just any leadership – it certainly isn’t the type of leadership that muscles its way through global challenges without regard for casualties.¹¹

Or a *Huffington Post* article on the five principles of moral leadership, which concludes that US Founding Father Benjamin Franklin ‘believed that the appearance of integrity would inevitably be undone without the reality in support of it’.¹²

Let’s unpick how moral leadership is based on the idea of ‘doing the right thing’. As we saw in the previous chapter, every day we make a thousand little decisions that combine to make us the person and the leader we are. There are

also certain principles, like laws of gravity, that act like filters when we scan our actions. As we scan, we ask ourselves: 'Was what I just did – that decision, that thought, that action, that developing habit or character trait – the right thing?' We also ask ourselves: 'Did that little (or big) decision I made today break the principles I want to live by or build on those principles?'

There are six principles or filters (I'm sure there are many more) that will illustrate what I'm saying. Let's start by briefly revisiting trust.

Filter 1: Trust

Trust is the lubricant that makes every human interaction work. Trust is at the heart of every working relationship. Break the trust and you break or distance the relationship. And as we saw earlier, every academic definition of leadership puts influence at its heart. Influence is an interpersonal transaction, it is always between people. So influence relies on trust, as does every relationship you have.

Take three very different decisions. I have an important leadership thought and I want to share it with everyone on my team. Do I just ping off a general email, or do I run it past my leadership team first? If I send it off now then it's out there; if I consult my team it will take longer to get to people, and they might reshape it or even disagree with it. I have the authority to send it. What's the right thing to do? The question I have to ask myself is: 'Will sending the email build or diminish trust?' Now, I know I can convince myself that everything I do is good and right; self-justification is the easiest leadership skill to practise. But fast-forward that one little decision to send an email a thousand times and I become an autocratic-style boss, who everyone knows will do his own thing anyway – either they will tolerate me or they'll go and work somewhere else, where they can be more involved in creating the future as part of a team.

Or take a little decision about some feedback from a client that isn't too good. Do I share it with the team or not? What's the right thing to do? Again, the question I have to ask myself is: 'Will this create or diminish trust?' I might

decide not to send the feedback out in the hope that the team won't find out. But such a response already indicates that if they *did* find out, and they were aware I'd known about it, that would break the trust between us. If the boss's wife finds out he's been sending inappropriate texts to the woman heading up finance, he knows it would break their trust. If the shareholders get to know that the organization's leadership has been using clever accounting to hide this year's losses against hoped-for future gains, then the stakeholders will likely have some feelings about it. If a team leader claims as her own an idea generated by another team member, it will affect how well that team member and maybe the rest of the team trust the team leader in future. One of the effects of diminished trust is that it leads to diminished sharing of information, which leads to a dangerous decision-making process.

What is the key 'right thing to do' question for the filter of trust?

- **Will this decision or action build or diminish trust?**

Filter 2: Power

It was one of those meetings that you hope will end very soon. I was sitting in front of a group of South African farmers and I was a panel of one. I didn't realize until halfway through the Q&A that I was being set up by the people who'd invited me. They had a point they wanted to make to the farmers and I was being used as the fall guy. We were discussing a programme that we'd been piloting with farm workers. An Afrikaans farmer stood up and told me his concerns about our work: 'Your training is good. It works. But we don't want it going too far.'

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'Well, once these workers get empowered they might not want to work for us, they might have ideas of their own, they might cause trouble. But the worst is that they will leave and go somewhere else, and we can't have that because labour is in such short supply.'

I was shocked. What was he saying? We want people to get a little bit of empowerment, but not too much? What was going through my mind was: 'Isn't this a form of oppression? Does this farmer's decision lift people up or push them down?' I realized that this was the moral leadership question in this situation.

Every human has power of some kind. It might be physical power (I'm bigger and stronger than you), positional power (I'm the boss, you're not), gender power (men are listened to more than women around here), resource power (I have clean water, you don't; I have budget control, you don't) or it might be security power (I am safe, you are not). If we assume (as the Declaration of Human Rights states) that 'the inherent dignity and ... the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world', then any decision a leader takes that uses power over someone else to make them smaller, so the leader can feel or act bigger, is a decision that breaks the principle of power.

What is the key 'right thing to do' question for the filter of power?

- **Does this decision or action put power into people (empower) or remove it from them (disempower)?**

Filter 3. Empathy

I'm often struck by that phrase 'the real world', as if there is any other kind.

- 'You don't live in the real world.'
- 'We have to make this decision work in the real world.'
- 'That's all very well, but we have to live in the real world.'

What is the real world? A leader is a person, surrounded by a lot of other people. These other people all have a life story and experiences and perspectives and viewpoints. Reality, the real world, is interdependent, not independent, and so it does us and others damage if we only look at life and make our decisions from

our own limited perspective. Everything is connected; everything relies on everything else. Arrogance looks at the world through my eyes. Humility looks at the world through as many eyes as possible.

Empathy is the experience of understanding another person's thoughts, feelings and conditions from *their* point of view, rather than from my own.¹³ Whether it is Stephen Covey's principle 'Seek first to understand before being understood' or Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence, there is plenty of evidence for the fact that empathy is a core principle of effective human relationships and functioning, and therefore of leadership effectiveness – because that's how life works, that's the real world.

When you throw your fast-food wrappers out of your car window, you are only thinking of yourself: 'I want my space clean.' What that decision lacks is empathy. The empathic question is: 'How will it affect others' space, if I litter their and my space?' If I defraud or put at risk the company pension fund, how does it affect the pensions of a thousand employees? What if I was one of those employees – what decisions would I want the bosses to take?

What is the key 'right thing to do' question for the filter of empathy?

- **Who is this decision for – me or you or us?**

Filter 4. Humanity

Think through these questions:

- If I were a woman, would I want to be paid less for doing the same job as a man?
- If I were a woman, would I want a man to abuse me emotionally or physically?
- If I were a low-paid worker, would I want to know that my boss was paying me fairly?

- If I were a maintenance worker in someone's factory, would I want to be treated like I didn't really exist?
- If I were a worker on the shop floor, would I want to be bullied by my supervisor?
- If I lived in that dilapidated house, would I want to know that my family is safe?

These questions all have pretty obvious answers, because they are based on a pretty obvious principle. The problem is that while it seems obvious, in reality it isn't. Human nature being what it is, the obvious had to be enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Everyone is human! Everyone has the right to be treated as a human.

And if that isn't simple and clear, then you only need to ask the question: 'Is that how I would like to be treated?' If the answer is 'No, it isn't', then the decision you need to take is to treat the other person as you would like to be treated if you were in their shoes.

The basic moral leadership question you need to ask is: 'Does my decision treat other people like I want to be treated or not?' This is called the Golden Rule. It is a very old measurement of the humanity of a decision. If you'd like to explore this more, then look no further than the brilliantly illustrated book *Imaginal Cells*,¹⁴ with input from many great leaders.

What is the key 'right thing to do' question for the filter of humanity?

- **Am I treating others how I want to be treated?**

Filter 5. Sustainability

I was in my late 20s when I had my first burnout. I had a young son, I was leading an organization and I wanted to be God and to change the world. A tall order, I think you'd agree. My plan worked fine until I picked up an infection, but I kept

going as only superheroes do. Until one day I couldn't keep going and I found myself having tests in a hospital bed. It's like running: I set out on a run and for a minute I'm Mo Farah, but very soon I have to stop because my breathing can't keep up with my ambition. The only way to live, the only way to run, is at a pace that you can sustain.

Questions to ask yourself:

- Can I keep this work pace up?
- Can I expect my team to keep working this hard?
- Can the planet survive the current demand on its resources?

The planet is a finite resource and it cannot endlessly give us what we want at the speed that we want it. We are part of the ecosystem of planet Earth, not bosses over an unlimited bank account of resources. Every extraction of natural resource, every emission, has a price tag, and currently we are using roughly 1.5 Earths at our rate of consumption, when we only have 1. Where is that going to lead?

What are the key 'right thing to do' questions for the filter of sustainability?

- **Is this decision sustainable for the team, my health, my relationships, the resources of the planet?**
- **Am I borrowing resources from myself, from others, from the planet that I'm not paying back?**

Filter 6. Legacy

Sit quietly for a moment, reflect and note your knee-jerk responses to the following names:

- Nelson Mandela

- Jacob Zuma
- Jimmy Saville
- Lance Armstrong
- Google
- Arthur Andersen
- Standard & Poor's
- M&S

What did you think of? What is the lasting taste these individuals and organizations leave you with? What will you remember them for? The answer to these questions is what we often call legacy.

Moral leadership has to focus on the longer game if it's going to be sustainable. If it isn't built to last beyond your lifetime, then it won't. Leadership needs to leave a legacy. So much of leadership is currently based on the short term. Forget fifty years from now; what will we make this quarter?

Legacy is an issue I am very aware of as a 61-year-old leader of an international NGO. All of my decisions have to be run through a double filter:

- What is the right decision here?
- What is the right decision here to ensure a lasting organization fifty years from now?

Legacy is a 'today' question, not something that can be deferred to some point in the future.

Your legacy is what you leave behind when you die, and reflects the sustainability of your personal decisions. What do you want your kids to say about you, your neighbours to say about you, your workmates to say about you?

I wrote a book called *To Plant a Walnut Tree*¹⁵ that is all about legacy. I chose the title because of something a mentor once said to me:

The most unselfish thing you can do with your life is to plant a walnut tree ... because you probably won't see the fruit in your own lifetime.

That is legacy. What are the walnut trees I want to leave behind at home, at work and in society?

The Iroquois Native Americans have a great law that insists that every decision a person makes today should deliver sustainable results for at least seven generations to come. That is legacy. In the history of the world, our own leadership is a tiny blip at best. But even a blip has a far-reaching impact when it creates a wave. The wave moves way beyond the drop of water that started it. A real test for our leadership is whether we are investing today in decisions that will create a sustainable legacy of benefit for the future in terms of effectiveness, the climate, human rights, a circular economy, justice and equality for all, from cradle to grave.

The late Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop, said:

I believe in businesses where you engage in creative thinking, and where you form some of your deepest relationships. If it isn't about the production of the human spirit, we are in big trouble.

Contrast that with an email sent by a Standard & Poor's employee just before the financial crisis:

Let's hope we are all wealthy and retired by the time this house of cards falters.¹⁶

Anita Roddick believed in creating a sustainable legacy; this employee of Standard & Poor's didn't seem care beyond their own backyard.

What is the key 'right thing to do' question for the filter of legacy?

- **What is the legacy of this action or decision for the next generation?**

I've tried to make sense of the idea of moral leadership and the popular sense of 'doing the right thing' by looking at some of the filters we can use to put us on the right road to doing the right thing. But if learning how to do the right thing requires us to start by learning to scan ourselves through these filters, then what comes next? Where do we need to start? As you'll read next, it may be with something as simple as a cup of coffee.

3. Leadership Development Starts with a Cup of Coffee

'It always starts with a cup of coffee.'

I could tell my audience was looking at me through the eyes of people who were thinking, 'This guy is either a nutter, or he totally doesn't get the question we just asked him.'

Before they got too worried, I continued, 'Let me tell you a story...'

I had been invited to do a session on leadership with about sixty managers in one of the largest financial institutions in a European city. Recently there had been two major financial scandals involving the CEOs of very prominent organizations and they had rocked the country. I had arrived after lunch to run my session, but before I got into my stride I was interrupted with a question.

'How did it happen?'

'How did what happen?' I asked.

'How did this financial scandal happen? We knew this guy. We loved him. We trusted him. We've known him for years, worked with him, been promoted by him, in some cases he came to our kids' parties... How did it happen? We're gutted by the betrayal of trust.'

I digested both the man's question and the evident pain around the room. Scandals are good stories for newspapers, but they are personal and hard-hitting for those who live in the middle of them. That's when I decided to tell a story fresh from that morning's events.

'It always starts with a cup of coffee.'

I'd flown into the city the night before, ready for a day full of meetings. As I was eating my way through an early breakfast, I received a very apologetic phone call that said all of my morning's meetings had been cancelled; something had happened overnight that changed everyone's priorities for the day. So I was now free until lunchtime.

I settled my hotel bill and headed out in search of a good coffee shop with Wi-Fi. Having found one overlooking the river, I spread my papers across the table and began some work.

A waitress came over and asked, 'What can I get you?'

'A cappuccino, please.'

And off she went, returning promptly with that all-important good cup of coffee. I took my time drinking it and when it seemed appropriate, the waitress came and cleared the empty cup away.

About halfway through the morning I noticed that the waitress had gone and a new waiter had come on duty. After he had got the measure of who was in the café, he approached me and asked whether he could get me anything.

'A cappuccino, please,' I replied.

He returned with the coffee and I continued working.

Around noon I looked at my watch and realized I needed to be making my way across the city to the seminar. So I went to the bar and asked for my bill. The waitress printed off the total and it read '1 Cappuccino €3.00'.

There's a TV sports programme that has a section called 'What happened next?', where they play a piece of sports footage and pause it. The panel then has to guess what happened next. Now, freeze-frame my head at that point in this café scene. What would you have done?

I won't lie; the thought flashed through my mind: 'Hey, I could get two coffees for the price of one!' That's when it also occurred to me: 'It starts right

here.' What starts right here, right now? This one small, hidden decision is where moral leadership begins. Right at that moment the thoughts in my head, which are a reflection of the attitude of my heart and my lived values, or my character, will lead to an action (just pay for one cup when you know you had two), which could lead to... And that's where a scandal starts. I told the café their error and I did pay – as much for *my* heart as for *their* business.

But the story doesn't stop there. Another true chapter was written. A few weeks after that day, my eldest son got married and my wife and I hosted a dinner at a restaurant for all our family and friends the night before the wedding ceremony. Forty people, food and drinks all paid for by us. At the end of a wonderful evening, I went to the bar and asked for the bill. This time the printout was half a metre long, so I didn't bother to read the detail, I just looked at the bottom line and handed over my credit card. While paying, a quiet thought went through my head – 'This bill is less than I'd expected' – but I dismissed the thought and left the restaurant.

The next day, driving to the wedding, my wife asked me, 'As a matter of interest, how much was last night's bill?'

I told her the figure and she said, 'That's less than we'd thought!'

'Yes, that's what occurred to me,' I replied.

'Let me see the bill,' she asked.

I pointed to my wallet in the glove box and she pulled out the bill. She studied it carefully and said, 'My goodness, they haven't charged us for any drinks. None at all. No sodas, beers, wine – nothing.'

As soon as I could, I phoned the restaurant and paid the balance.

So here is the point. If I had cheated the café out of €3 for a cup of coffee, then it wouldn't have been such a big deal to cheat the restaurant out of over €150 for the wedding drinks.

But the story didn't stop there either. A while later, someone hit my car. I took it to a garage for a written insurance quote. That came to €500, which would be passed on to the guy who'd caused the damage. When it actually came to do the repair work, the garage owner told me: 'When we looked closer it was actually only €50 worth of work. We're happy to charge the other guy the full €500 and we'll give you a credit of €450 to get some other repairs made on your car.'

If I had cheated over €3, it isn't so far to cheat over €150; and if I'd cheated over €150, it isn't that far a step to cheat over €500; and if I cheat over €500, it isn't such a big step to cheat over €1000; and if I cheat over €1000, it isn't such a big step to cheat over €5000... Before we know it, I could be found guilty of a €500,000 fraud. It would have started with a cup of coffee. It always does.

There is a 'first' for everything

The key point for all leaders is acknowledging that big crashes, big scandals, always start in hidden places, years earlier. The first cup of coffee not paid for. The first lie. The first exaggeration. The first deceit. The first inappropriate hug. The first text. The first angry outburst. The first use of power to make someone else feel a little smaller, so you feel a little better about yourself. It is those little, hidden responses today that will be the shapers of how someone deals with the bigger issues in a few years' time. The rationalization of decisions, the seedlings of attitudes and behaviours today, will bear the fruit of big rationalizations over mishandling an organization's money or sexual harassment scandals in later years.

There is always a first. Take some famous person 'outed' in the news. There was the first improper text, we just didn't see it. It may have happened when they were 15 or 17, or even earlier. No one saw it, but it happened. The first improper touch, the first improper lie. Or take bank directors who won't give back their bonuses when their bad leadership has become evident and

others are losing their jobs... there was the first 'me first' choice. Or the first 'keep it quiet, don't admit to mistakes' choice. All of these firsts happened years ago, years before the big thing happened. Every little moment of our personal history shapes our character.

But that is good news! If the little things matter, then I can make different choices over today's little things and start a journey towards different, better outcomes. Every little choice I make today can reshape my personal leadership story tomorrow.

Who am I in private?

The question is: 'Who am I in private?' What are my private thoughts, feelings, attitudes, choices and behaviours? Whatever is going on in the ignored, out-of-sight, dark or hidden places in my life will come into the light when the pressure is on. It always does. The cup of coffee stories of each of our lives are often hidden from public view, or, if they are noticed, are quickly dismissed by the 'owner' and the observer, as being too small to worry about. After all, how much is one cup of coffee? A few euros? A couple of dollars? And besides, it was his fault anyway, for not charging me the right amount.

Remember Christensen's conclusion about Jeff Skilling in the last chapter? 'Something had clearly sent him off in the wrong direction.' The journey began right there, in that moment.

Our first **actions** (not paying for the missed cup of coffee) always start with a **first thought** (I can get away without paying; I'll just send that text; I'll keep quiet about that mistake; it's not my fault anyway). Those thoughts have **feelings** associated with them (feel good/feel bad) and it is often those strong feelings that almost drive or compel us to do things we know deep down are not 'the right thing' (that deep, inner voice is the filter). Those thoughts and feelings first passed through a **moral filter** (Is it OK to do this or not?), which says 'Register the thought, but ignore it' or 'Don't even register that thought'. If we consistently practise our actions, right or wrong, then they become **habits** (she

always shouts when she doesn't get her own way); and if we consistently practise our habits, they form our **character** (she's a bully). We will look at this in detail later on.

You should get it checked

I learned the importance of not ignoring the small things the hard way. Back in 2013, I discovered that I had cancer and that it had been there for a long time before I even realized it. As a child I loved the outdoors, I loved the sunshine. It never occurred to me to put a hat on or cover up or put on sunblock... especially on the top of my head. When the brown spot appeared, I didn't see it. It was out of my sight. Why would I pay attention to little things like hats and sunblock on a part of my body that I couldn't even see? Even when the spot began to grow, I did nothing because I still couldn't see it. A few people close to me started to give me feedback.

'Hey, the mole on your head... have you had it checked?'

'What mole? I can't see anything.'

'You should get it checked.'

I didn't. More feedback. Eventually I decided to get it checked and the first doctor I saw said it was just a little thing and I needn't worry about it.

It grew. More feedback from friends and family: 'You really should get that checked!'

So I saw a consultant and within 30 minutes I had gone from a friendly chat with a doctor into surgery where they cut wide and deep. Thankfully, while it was most definitely cancerous, they caught it soon enough for it not to destroy my whole body. But I still have a crater on my head to remind me that paying attention to the small things, before they become big things, really does matter.

When we live at speed as leaders, we often miss the small things. Say a director is working on a strategy paper for the next board meeting. She has to get it right. An email passes across her eyeline about a policy issue. She feels irritated that this issue still hasn't been sorted out, irritated that she is going to have to spend precious minutes dealing with it. She sends off an email that is very short and to the point. 'That will nail it,' she says to herself. And she moves on with her important work.

The email arrives in someone else's inbox like a slow-acting grenade. It feels to the recipient like an angry brush-off, an insensitive, not-thought-through response from an often unempathic boss. And so begins the slow journey of a manager distancing themselves from their boss, bringing less of themselves to work the next day, deciding that honesty isn't worth the risk and that information sharing should be minimized to what will cause the fewest ripples.

This is why the small things matter. The email wasn't just an email, it was the outworking of where the heart and character of the boss were on that day. Where her heart and character were on that day was a result of the days and days over which she had neglected her scanning of the small things of her leadership life. One little thing led to a diminution of trust.

We need to reset our defaults

Remember, our defaults are those thoughts, emotions, attitudes and actions that we instinctively resort to without even thinking about it. Defaults are our instant reaction. They are like well-worn tracks that we always go down. A computer has defaults too. They are the actions that are set into the hard-wiring of how the computer works and when no other option is around, the computer just continues down that road.

Real leadership development is the work that I do on myself and my own leadership every day. Executive development programmes are the relatively few days that we spend in classrooms and on courses. The real purpose of executive development programmes should be to teach us how we can do daily leadership

development – and daily leadership development is all about setting your defaults.

Let me explain. I was sent a survey yesterday for some research that we wanted to carry out. The questions that had been drafted were things like these:

- Are you equipped to make ethical decisions?
- Do you feel able to speak truth to those in a position of power if you saw them behaving immorally or unethically at work?

I found myself thinking back over my life to the decisions I'd made that I wish I hadn't made. If you'd asked me:

- Do you intend to be an ethical business leader?
- Do you want to live a moral and ethical life?
- When your boss asks you to cut corners on financial reporting, will you stand up to them?

I would have answered: 'Of course I will be ethical, moral, upright, not corrupt, a role model of an honest, trustworthy leader.'

But I realized that such questions were pointless. Why? Because the issue is not what I *intend* to do, or aspire to do, but what I *will* do. And that is a whole other ball game. What I intend to do is the right thing, every time and in every situation. What will I actually do? Who knows until I do it? The point is that it's our defaults that operate when we are under pressure, up against the wall, under stress, fighting deadlines, looking down the barrel of a very powerful boss's eyes.

There are obvious defaults, such as my typical response when I look at a spreadsheet. There's the default emotion of 'Oh crap', or 'I can't do this' or 'I'm no good at spreadsheets'. But there are the deeper, subtler defaults, such as my desire to 'talk up' the numbers to make a story look good because I fear that the bald facts won't be so impressive. The reaction in both instances kicks in before

I've even thought it through. If I don't stop and check my default settings, then those defaults will create actions, and those actions will have consequences.

Your defaults are the settings that kick in without you even thinking about it. Often you won't know what your defaults are until a particular situation arises. I don't believe that in most cases of big public leadership scandals, whether private, public, non-profit or religious organizations, the people involved set out on a career of making unethical decisions. I'm not saying that they aren't fully responsible for the decisions they made – they are – but I don't think they set out to make bad decisions. They learned a set of defaults over time, sometimes over a very long time that went back to their childhood, and sometimes from the work situations they found themselves in and the bosses and peers they had. Wherever or however they learned them, they developed these defaults through the little things they did over many years. It is these defaults that play out through their – and our – leadership each day in the present.

How can we reset our defaults?

So we all have these defaults in our thoughts, feelings, actions and attitudes. They kick in without any invitation. What we need is moral filters that enable us to speak to our defaults and say: 'Hold on, let's just look at where I'm heading with that thought, feeling, action or attitude... Is that the right thing to be doing here?'

How do we set our defaults in line with the moral principles I described in the previous chapters? This is a big issue, because there are so many different kinds of moral challenges for a leader:

- Personal morality challenges – whether it's unwanted or prolonged hugs, creative expense accounts or simply shading the truth
- Systemic morality challenges – those that have found their way into the corporate culture: 'We all do it, so don't you make a fuss'

- Principled morality challenges – which ask us: ‘Is this decision fair?’¹⁷
- Private morality challenges – ‘It’s none of your business’
- Public morality challenges – ‘It’s all of our business’
- Business morality challenges – the fifty shades of a corrupt deal

How can we get fit to lead? How can we actually create the defaults that will work when we need them to – when we are busy, under pressure, time hungry? That is what the rest of this book is about. The great news is that moral leadership can be learned; trustworthiness can be retrieved; defaults can be reset. It will take fitness, or readiness or responsiveness – and that doesn’t come overnight, by accident or off the shelf.

I said earlier that developing defaults is like developing muscle memory. We develop muscle memory by practising every day. That’s what a gym is for and that’s why we go there (or run, or do yoga or Pilates or swim, or whatever we prefer to get fit). The leader is in the gym every single day of their leadership life. Every day is a leadership development day, for good or for ill.

We need a way of taking the everyday and using it as a gym to develop muscle memory for all the small things we do. If we get fit for the small things, then the big things will take care of themselves. Former US President Jimmy Carter said recently, ‘I never lied. I always told the truth.’ Never lying occurs one small decision at a time, day after day, year after year. Every big thing is just an accumulation of little things – little thoughts, little decisions, little seeds of an attitude, little hidden actions. That’s what makes this leadership journey so doable. We all have a day full of little things, and therefore we all have a daily opportunity to go to the leadership gym.

Let’s start looking at how we get fit. Think of a fitness gym with a range of different equipment. Each piece of equipment will get you fit in a different way. The bench press exercises a different set of muscles than the running machine or the cross-trainer or the yoga mat. What connects every piece of equipment in the gym is that however different they might seem, they all work towards a single

goal – your complete fitness. The one thing that connects the different elements in your daily leadership development gym is everything that works together to achieve your overall fitness, your muscle memory and your defaults for the small things.

It's time to head to the gym.

Part II

Getting Fit to Do the Right Thing

4. Lead Yourself – the Door In

I'm not a huge fan of the exercise gym, although I value the role it plays in getting me fit. But we're going to a slightly different kind of gym – a leadership gym – and its aim is to get us fit for moral leadership. What does that mean? It means I will be helping you to develop the leadership defaults, the leadership muscle and the muscle memory that you can use in the thousands of little decisions you will need to make as an organizational leader over the next five, ten, fifteen or twenty years. No one can assume they are fit for moral leadership; it is not a given, it is a developed ability. If you have grown up in a culture where you have developed some 'right thing' muscles, then you need to keep on working those muscles so they remain in shape; if you are working in a morally ambiguous culture, then you need to get to the gym on a regular basis.

Every gymnasium has an entrance, a door that leads into the rooms within. What is written on the door to this leadership gymnasium?

You won't lead others if you can't lead your own life

Once I was coaching a CEO who was finding it difficult to create a vision for his team. He wasn't even really clear what the difference was between vision, mission and strategic goals. After an hour of struggling, I decided to ask him a personal question: 'Phil, how important is it to leading this organization to develop a mission, vision and values?'

'Very important,' he answered.

I pushed him a little harder and asked, 'On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it?'

'10,' he replied.

Then I asked him the key question: 'Have you ever created a mission or a vision for your own life? Forget about your work for a moment, just you... your life?'

There was a short pause and Phil's eyes and shaking head gave me the answer before the word 'No' finally left his mouth. The reason he could not lead his team on these issues is that he had never had to learn how to lead himself first.

Developing a mission, vision and values for your life takes time – months to do it properly – and it will lead you through chaos and confusion and asking yourself challenging questions, then further challenging and deepening the thoughts that arise. But as a result you'll have a clearer sense of who you are, what matters to you and where you are going in your life.

The process you work through to do this is pretty much the same process you use when developing a mission, vision and values for a team or organization. If you have learned how to run this process in your own life, if you have developed that personal leadership muscle, then that muscle is what you use in your working leadership life. If Phil had been through a personal struggle to create a vision for his own life, he would have been able to speak to his team from experience. We can't fudge this one key lesson of starting by leading our own life first, which is the foundation of all leadership in relationships, groups, teams and organizations. I am convinced that the rise in the use of consultants is partly due to leaders not learning how to lead themselves. Organizations call in the 'experts' because their leaders haven't developed their own set of muscles.

The idea that it starts with a cup of coffee follows the same principle. If I can't lead my small, personal, private moral decisions, then how will I lead large teams or organizations? Paying for the extra cup of coffee is a vital personal leadership step that develops the muscle for corporate leadership. At every turn, the muscle you develop to work out in the leadership of your own life is the muscle you will use to lead at work.

The famous story of David and Goliath in the Old Testament is an interesting example. Goliath is a big giant of a guy who is terrorizing the nation of Israel and no one knows how to defeat him. Enter David, a very young shepherd boy and totally inexperienced soldier who is only on the scene to bring his brothers their lunch. When he puts himself forward to defeat Goliath, everyone is

rolling in laughter that such a young, inexperienced kid could even think of dealing a blow to the giant. But note David's response: 'I've spent my whole life killing lions and bears with my slingshot in the desert, where no one sees what I do. I've honed my killing skill in private, so I know I can take on the much bigger challenge.' And sure enough, he does. One straight shot from his catapult and Goliath is down. David learned to lead in his private life and that's why he could win in his public life.

Stephen Covey based his world-famous *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* on the exact same premise, structuring the first half of the habits in 'Winning the Personal Battle', as the necessary precondition for winning the public battle. If you are going to lead others (the public victory), you first have to lead yourself (the private victory).

There is no substitute for doing the daily work on your own motivations, your mind-set, your character, your heart and your skills of leadership, in the writing of your personal and relational life story. With the use of a journal or notebook, you can reflect on each day and ask yourself what you did in your own life that day to develop your personal leadership muscle. It's like a private daily audit of your leadership.

Here are a few thoughts on how you might use a journal to review your personal leadership each day. These are just examples, and you'll be able to think of many more triggers of your own once you develop the habit. I've selected a few possible headings, but feel free to choose your own.

Heart

- What did I do for free for someone today?

Character

- Did I tell the truth all the time?
- Did I take any moral short cuts today?

Mindset

- Was I proactive today?
- Was I focused today?
- Were there things that weren't working that I made changes to?

Control

- Did I have control over my own life story today or was I caught up in everyone else's agendas?

Mission

- What did I do to deepen my sense of mission today?

Values

- Which of my values did I see in action today?
- Have I spent time working out my values?

Strategy

- What steps did I take to achieve one of my goals today?

Influence

- Who among my family or friends did I invest in today to build my emotional bank account with?

Moral dilemmas

- What moral dilemma did I face today? How did I handle it?

All of these are daily practices for the rest of your life. You will hear me return to this theme again and again – if you can't lead yourself, you won't have the muscle to lead others. Or, turned to the positive, the muscle you use to lead others is developed through learning each day to lead in your private life.

So, practices such as these enable you to open the door of the leadership gym. Let's step inside and start looking at the equipment you can use.

5. Know Yourself

I received an email from someone who used to be a country leader in our organization and had left suddenly and unexpectedly. It had been a real shock to us all, and everyone – including me – began soul searching as to what her reason was for leaving. Was it this? Was it that? Who was to blame? After much looking under the carpet, we eventually laid the matter to rest and moved on. Receiving an email after so long was a surprise and it was with a little trepidation that I opened it. What it actually said was that she'd had a lot of time to think about her actions and why she'd suddenly left, and she now realized her decision was driven by fear – fear that she hadn't been able to spot at the time, but was affecting and infecting all of her work and her relationships with other staff. The email was a kind of confession from a leader who had woken up to herself.

The title of Chapter 1 of this book – 'The Examined Life Is Not Worth Living' – is a tongue-in-cheek version of the Greek philosopher Socrates' famous words, 'The unexamined life is not worth living.' In fact that's a pretty strong statement: if you don't know what's going on inside you and the impact it is having on those around you, then life isn't worth living. I think he means that not knowing yourself means that you're living an unconscious life, one that's instinctive, habitual, and that you're merely existing, rather than living wide awake. It could be said that this whole issue of moral leadership is about living a very conscious life, one in which you examine yourself with questions such as: What am I thinking? What am I feeling? How am I reacting? What am I avoiding? What is motivating me here? What impact am I having on these people right now? What am I doing with those difficult or strong emotions at this moment? This is the examined life.

Some people will say, 'I don't have time for all that soft, introspective stuff, all those feelings. I'm too busy getting on with my job and my life to waste time on that kind of thing.' I fully appreciate that line of thinking, but given that leadership is always about influence in some form or another, then such a person is not asking one particular question: 'If this is how I choose to live my

(unexamined) life, what impact is that having on me and on this team or organization?' No leader can afford to ignore this question. It has a real bearing on the subject of moral leadership and I have witnessed the effect of not asking it first hand, as well as seeing it played out in public scandals.

When a leader is in a position of power and has little self-awareness, the vibe they often give off is: 'Don't tell me anything I don't want to hear, because if you do, then I will get very angry and maybe even a little threatening or overly fragile.' What we then end up with is what Manfred Kets de Vries calls 'corporate lying'. People don't share vital information upwards and they don't tell the truth, so the culture and performance of the team and organization suffer. Think about bank boardrooms in the early days of the financial crisis, or any number of other corporate failures.

This whole book is about knowing yourself, but in this chapter let's look at a few aspects of the first piece of equipment in your leadership gym, self-awareness.

Keeping a third eye on your internal world

You have two eyes that are hopefully working well, but you also have a third eye: where you place your attention at any given time. You may be thinking about the task you're doing, the report you're writing, the book you're reading, or what you think about the person standing in front of you, or the one who's just cut you up on the motorway or been kind to you in the supermarket queue. You are putting your attention somewhere all of the time, and that is your third eye.

Pause for a moment. Think about the best beach or mountain or lake you have ever seen. What was it like? You just took your attention away from this book and put it somewhere else, so you can control where you place your attention (even though controlling it may seem like trying to take a skittish dog on a walk). Knowing yourself means learning to turn that third eye on yourself – not obsessively, but by quietly monitoring what is going on inside you. This is

one of the basic tenets of emotional intelligence, noticing your thoughts and feelings. You may notice emotions like these and a thousand others:

- I'm feeling a little irritation this meeting
- I can see that I want to be noticed here
- Ouch, that comment hurt
- I can feel some tension arising in my body, some anxiety
- That person is attractive
- I'm not feeling full of energy right now
- It doesn't get better than this

I'm not suggesting that you try to change what you are feeling, just notice it.

The next step to knowing yourself is then to get a little curious about those emotions or actions. Again, simply be curious about what's going on just beneath the surface, don't try to fix anything:

- That's interesting, I can see that I keep wanting to interrupt people in this meeting with my ideas
- That's interesting, I can see that in my attempt to get my ideas heard I'm not listening to anyone else
- That's interesting, because if I'm honest I don't think they have anything valuable to say here, but I think I do!
- That's interesting, I heard an irritated edge in my voice just now – what's that about?
- That's interesting, I can feel my defences rising when anyone challenges me – it feels like they're criticizing me

Yesterday morning I was working on what I thought was a vital project. Someone came in and asked me some questions about it, and inferred that I probably should be sharing some of my thinking with the leadership team before I got too far down the track. I could feel my frustration rising. It was like they were trying to hold me back. I was irritated at the prospect of more delays on a project that I thought was already a year behind. I could feel the energy rising within me to drive this project through, to steamroller it to a conclusion. At the same time, I could get the whiff of an even deeper anxiety about a void I would feel, a blow to my own sense of achievement if I didn't make this project happen. I could sense that all these feelings weren't new. They were old and familiar. If I stopped working on this, then what would I do? How would I justify to myself that I was making a really useful contribution?

The problem was, I was also aware of the impact I was having on the person who had had the courage to tell me, the CEO, what everyone else was probably thinking but didn't dare say. I saw them begin to deflate and give up when I started to justify my actions with the controlled frustration I felt. I caught a glimpse of the impact my internal world was having on the working world of the organization. This is why confronting the little things is so important if a leader is to get fit for moral leadership. If I didn't confront myself, I could write the story of the future:

Huh, that Trevor guy? He just got his own way. He had these ideas and he steamrolled them through. No one knew what he was really up to and we couldn't be bothered to try and confront him any longer. The guy is a law unto himself.

Getting curious about what's going on beneath the surface is not about trying to make a therapist out of you. Daily awareness allows you to take responsibility for what is going on in your life and the impact it has on others. Awareness opens up choices – you could respond one way *or* completely differently.

For instance, one set of responses might be:

- I notice that I want my ideas heard

- I notice that I'm not listening to what other people say
- I notice that I'm only really interested in what I think
- I notice that I think I'm the only person here who 'gets' it
- I notice that I'm talking down everyone who disagrees with me
- I notice that the room is getting quieter
- I notice that there's less energy in the room than when this meeting began
- I notice that people seem to be treating me with plastic smiles and a little distance

That could be the story behind many a corporate scandal.

Or think about this:

- I notice that I'm feeling anxious in this meeting
- I notice that there are things I want to say that no one else is saying
- I notice that I don't want to look stupid in front of the director
- I notice that I'm very aware of my reactions to my peers in this meeting
- I notice that despite the fact they aren't looking at all the facts here, I feel safer staying quiet

That might be a senior manager at a bank in the lead-up to the credit crisis.

St Augustine provides a surprising example of the third eye in operation. When he was younger, Augustine stole some pears. That is not shocking news, but he then used his third eye and made a very important discovery about himself. He noticed that the emotional 'high' he got from stealing the pears derived from the act of stealing, *not* from actually getting the pears to eat. I think

he threw the pears away, in fact. Why is this important? Because it would be easy to deduce that the moral issue is not stealing pears. But that wouldn't have helped Augustine get fit for moral leadership.

Imagine a present-day Augustine growing up, going to university and maybe even doing an MBA, before getting a great job with Corporate Inc. The real help for Augustine came in realizing that he got a buzz out of stealing and that if this instinct was left unchecked, stealing pears (Augustine's version of not paying for a cup of coffee) might lead him to seek the same *feeling* (not the pears, or not the money) via stealing from his banking clients by overpricing products, or embezzling from the construction company's pension fund. It wouldn't be that Augustine needed the money (the pears), but that he wanted the emotion.

It's like driving a car. If you're an experienced driver, your third eye becomes aware of a change in the engine's revs and without much consciousness asks itself: 'Why is that?' Just as subconsciously it replies: 'OK, we are going slightly up hill and the engine is beginning to labour.' In an imperceptible instant, it follows that up with: 'Is there anything I can do to adjust that?' And then just as quickly: 'Yes, change gear for the next 400 metres until we get to the top and reassess.' All of this happens without you consciously thinking about it.

Taking the driving analogy a little further, you first learn the basic steps: *depress the clutch – change gear – reengage the clutch – mirror – signal – manoeuvre*. To start with, your attention is absolutely focused on these basic actions. Once you've mastered these, the majority of driving is about awareness – internal awareness of the engine revs or car temperature, and external awareness of what everyone else on the road is doing up ahead and the problems that lie behind you. So this third eye activity isn't anything new, it's just about consciously applying it to yourself each day.

It may sound easy, but it isn't. It takes practice – every day, like going to the gym. However, it is difficult to have a third eye on your internal world when your external world is increasingly full of noise, twenty-four hours a day. What is the time gap between when you last look at your mobile phone and turning out the light to go to sleep? What is the time gap between waking up and looking at

your mobile phone? Like going to the gym, getting fit for moral leadership requires some discipline.

In developing this third eye for self-awareness, we also need to recover space for ourselves. There is a myth that great leaders work at 110% capacity and anything less is for wimps. In fact the opposite is true: great leaders work with reflective space. They walk, they meditate, they go for coffee just to think and reflect. Ariana Huffington makes the case clearly from her own experience and gives some practical help in her book *Thrive*.¹⁸ Rob Bell offers another helpful and practical perspective in his book *How to Be Here*.¹⁹

It is quite hard to always be awake or even honest with yourself about your emotional state, so you need others close to you who can reflect back that state, in order to help you with your self-awareness. I'm going to look at this more fully in Chapter 14, 'Build Team You'.

Strengths and weaknesses

It's hard to see yourself without a mirror and one of the most helpful and available mirrors to get to know yourself is the wide range of psychometric tests. None of these tools tells the whole truth, and many of them give you only one way of looking at yourself. Nevertheless, most of them do provide a good perspective and a form of language that you can use to talk with others about you and them.

Here are links to some of the best-known self-tests, where you get the chance to test yourself for very little or no cost.

CliftonStrengths: www.gallupstrengthscenter.com

Many people experienced getting feedback at work and the conversation focused on their weaknesses and how to fix them. Gallup rightly thought this was nuts and realized we should focus on our strengths, what we are good at and where we can add the best value. The Gallup Strength Finder looks at 34 possibilities for our untapped potential.

MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator): www.mbtionline.com/TaketheMBTI

If I threw a ball to you and asked you to catch it with one hand, then you would respond with the hand you feel most confident to catch with. We call that a preference. Based on a typology created by Jung, the MBTI is one of the world's most widely used 'mirrors' for seeing how we interact with our world, with ourselves, make decisions and process all that is happening. Like all psychometric tests the MBTI isn't trying to put you in a box, but rather to give you a group of sixteen possible lenses through which to view yourself and others.

RHETI (Riso-Hudson Enneagram Type Indicator):

www.enneagraminstitute.com

The Enneagram is one of the newest psychometric tests available and yet it is in fact probably the oldest. The difference is that it is a much more holistic, psycho-spiritual way of looking at yourself. Understanding the nine different approaches to life for yourself and others proves to be a liberating possibility for those who take it.

PEQ (FranklinCovey Personal Effectiveness Quotient):

<http://7habitspeq.com>

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People is still among the best-known must-reads for new leaders. The PEQ allows you to assess yourself against the 7 Habits so you can create a personal development plan around these foundational principles.

KLLP (Kendall Life Languages Profile): www.lifelanguages.com/the-kllp

Less known than the others, the beauty of the KLLP is that it integrates the MBTI and the 7 Habits as well as other dimensions to create a very right-brain, holistic report on who you are and how you best relate to others.

There are plenty of other tests you can take, including **INSIGHT Inventory** (<https://insightinventory.com/insight-inventory-self-version>) and *Extended DISC* (www.extendeddisc.org), but my advice is to start with one and spend time

digesting the results before you do a second one. Getting more comfortable with the apparatus for knowing yourself lays the necessary groundwork to help you feel safe enough to dig a little deeper into the world of your own ego and the powerful influence it exerts on the way you live and work.

6. Do the Work on Your Ego

Worshipping a dictator is such a pain in the ass. It wouldn't be so bad if it was merely a matter of dancing upside down on your head. With practice anyone could learn to do that. The real problem is having no way of knowing from one day to another, from one minute to the next, just what is up and what is down.²⁰

Such is the problem of working with the narcissistic leader. It is easy to see the problem of ego in the lives of leaders around us – but facing down the ego issues within ourselves is one of life's biggest challenges. The huge problem with our ego is that it makes us blind – blind to ourselves, blind to our impact on others, blind to good decision-making and blind to upcoming moral train crashes.

Larry McDonald worked with Lehman Brothers up to its collapse. Like everyone else, he could see very clearly the giant ego issues of two of the key architects of the disaster, Lewis Glucksman and Richard Fuld:

The tragedy is that men like Glucksman and Fuld are unable to see what it is about them that can turn others against them ... almost barricaded inside their ivory towers, snarling and growling at bad news, taking every scrap of credit for good news, learning to enjoy the fear and dislike of others, pretending that respect is all they really want.²¹

Interestingly, McDonald's reflection from inside of that situation was not just about their egos, but also his own:

I think it's the hardest challenge all leaders face – to be honest about our own ego. I'd read most of INSEAD professor Manfred Kets De Vries's books about ego and leadership before it finally dawned on me just how much of a problem I had with my own ego. Let's face it, who wants to admit to having an ego! But I ignore this fact at my leadership peril, because one thing is certain: at the centre of

every single moral failure in the leadership world is ego. Ego is the main character on the stage, every single time.

Ego generally has a bad press, and not without good reason. But it's not all bad, so let's start with what's good about ego. We need an ego to get started in life and if we are fortunate in our upbringing we will have had some good help developing a positive ego:

- 'You can do it!'
- 'Well done, that's great!'
- 'You're really good at cycling.'
- 'That's a great drawing. You're really good at art.'

From these positive noises we develop a relatively positive sense of ourselves that allows us to tell ourselves that we're OK, that we're relatively secure in who we are and what we can contribute to life. So developing our ego-centric world view is good and vital. But it's just the starting block. We have to move on from this place, or we get stuck and it's the stuck ego that causes all the damage later down the track.

How do we move on? From a secure sense of ourselves, our **ego-centric** worldview, we move to what is called an **ethno-centric** worldview. This simply means we know who we are and we know where we belong. Who our 'tribe' is: 'I'm part of the Waldock tribe, that's who I belong to.' We develop wider tribes beyond our family, like our work tribe, our ethnic tribe, our religious (or non-religious) tribe, our national tribe and so on. This is good, but once we have some sense of our tribe, we move on to a more **world-centric** view. I am part of the world and everything that means. My tribe is now everyone, the ecosystem matters, sustainable resources matter, climate change matters, global issues matter, everyone's well-being and prosperity matter. Why? Because I'm not just about me, not just about my tribe, I'm about the **world**. Some would argue that there's even more: there is what is called being **cosmo-centric**. There is more

beyond our world and there is more beyond what is purely visible. But we'll leave that for another book!

So there's a journey to be made as we grow up, from a good starting point of being ego-centric, which leads us to being ethno-centric and to world-centric – if all goes well.

However, none of us has a perfect foundation; we don't have perfectly secure egos. There are cracks, there is damage, there are gaps. Ask anyone their story. They will tell you good things about growing up and they will tell you some painful things. Not everyone told us we were great. Not every key person in our lives told us they loved us. Not everyone around us made us feel secure. Not everyone around us was kind all of the time. Just as the good things cut some deep but good grooves in our lives, so the tough things did some damage. What did we do with those cracks? What any normal person would do: we plugged them and we built some defences to make sure nothing got in that made us feel bad about ourselves. We even surrounded ourselves with people who told us we were OK, or at least we avoided surrounding ourselves with people we thought might hurt us. We present ourselves to the world as being just fine, but in reality we know that we're a mix – parts of us are OK, but in some parts there are cracks.

Being this mixed-up kind of person is totally normal. The problem for the ego begins when we start to cover over the cracks, so that not only are others not allowed to see the truth about us, after a while we don't even admit the truth to ourselves. Once this happens, the cracks don't go away, they just get played out on the screen of life, as if with a cinema projector. The problem in here (within me) becomes the problem out there (how I see those others). The need in here (within me) becomes the quiet demand out there (what I started demanding from others). I can hear myself wanting hear feedback like,

- 'No, Trevor, you led that meeting brilliantly.'
- 'No, Trevor, of course it was the right decision to fire Mike. He clearly wasn't with us, wasn't one of us. Good decision.'

You may be familiar with the word 'narcissistic'. It comes from Greek mythology, where a beautiful but very proud young man called Narcissus is invited to gaze into a pool of water. He is hungry for affirmation. He looks down, sees his own image reflected back at him and falls in love with himself. He cannot be moved from looking into his image reflected back at him in the pool and it eventually kills him. From this story came the term 'narcissist' and 'narcissistic personality disorder'. Here is the problem for leadership. How we seek to mend the cracks, the damage, the vacuum, whatever you want to call it, is crucial. Ego is good – all leaders have it and all leaders need it. It propels them to say to themselves:

- I can do this.
- I can make this thing happen.
- I can start this business.
- I can lead this team.
- I can change this injustice.

But if the leader then uses the leadership opportunity to try to fix their *own* damage, then the problems of moral leadership can begin. Take a simple example:

- I need to be good at something.
- Being good at something makes me feel good about myself.
- If I can turn this team around and get them performing, then it will reflect well on me, and then I will confirm to myself that I am good. My self-esteem will be reflected back to me in the 'pool' of my team's performance.

There is a dimension to this that Kets de Vries calls 'productive narcissism'. So far, this kind of narcissism gets things done. But how might it then play out?

- I drive my team too hard.

- I criticize them.
- I undervalue them.
- I get angry with them.
- I take the glory for work they are doing.
- I demotivate them with my self-centredness, which they easily pick up in my attitude to them and others.

Kets de Vries suggests that the leadership style most often found in top managers is the narcissist. He describes the warning signs for us all to heed:

- They focus on their own importance. It's more about them than the work.
- They broadcast their vision, rather than talk to people in a meaningful way.
- There is only one way to do things: their way.
- They show very little curiosity about the people around them.
- They appear to be invulnerable. They never apologize.
- They can be emotionally volatile.
- Their style is trendsetting, flamboyant or quirky.
- Their name is closely associated with the company.

Senior executives are at the top for a reason: they have powerful ideas, and they deliver. But clues such as these are warning signs of potentially destructive narcissistic behaviour.²²

I spent many years as an executive coach to leaders in all sectors. Over time, I began to get a picture of how leaders' behaviours shape the world of their teams and the performance of their organizations. Those with more secure egos were open to feedback, collaboration, being team players, happy to let others have the glory, and didn't take themselves too seriously. But to be honest, it wasn't always very encouraging to see leaders' egos laid bare in the privacy of

the coaching room. Over time I identified twelve different ways that *not* dealing with your ego affects how you lead.

1. Hiring people who are better than you

I remember years ago a principal at a college I was attending confessed that he used to be a top-class professional magician. He admitted that when it came to organizing the big shows in major cities, he would always choose a support act he knew was worse than himself. He knew they would make him look good every time. This is what the fragile ego does. But the secure ego of the leader is focused on getting the best person every time. If you are leading well, you will hire people who are better than you and you won't be threatened, but if you are feeling insecure, then you will make sure you hire people who are good enough, but who will make you look even better. Every time you compromise on hiring the best possible staff member, the organization's performance definitely suffers – no exceptions.

It was said of Dick Fuld, CEO of Lehman Brothers, that throughout his long leadership of that company he never had a powerful second in command.²³ He didn't want the risk of someone doing to him what he had seen his mentor do to the previous boss – push him out – so he followed the rule of keeping people around you who are less ambitious than you, or less intelligent than you, or less of an expert than you, or less experienced than you, or less influential than you.

2. Building a strong team

I was once part of a leading-edge European organization, a market leader. But the CEO never managed to pull together a leadership team – when it seemed like he would, something always went wrong and the team just didn't happen. On one occasion we all breathed a sigh of relief because a new chief operating officer and a new head of marketing were brought in to begin to build the dream team. We were full of anticipation that finally we would have a team that could deliver

the potential future this organization was destined for. In the event, both of these new hires left in acrimony after a short space of time and only the CEO was still left.

High performance relies on effective teams. Teams need trust, honesty, great communication, a high degree of interdependence and shared not personal glory. 'We did it', not 'I did it'. Teams know when a leader is using them for their own ends. You can't build a strong team if you have an ego issue, because your subtle (or not so subtle) ways of insisting on being in control or making it all about *you* destroy the possibility of a high-performing team.

3. Not minding who gets the glory

US President Harry Truman once said, 'You can accomplish anything in life... provided you don't mind who gets the glory.' This sums up the ego's problem. A damaged ego *does* mind who gets the glory. Glory is the reflection they want to get back from the 'surface of the pool' of their work.

A few years ago I was co-presenting a programme with a woman we'll call Angela B. The programme had been organized by another woman, called Angela R. At the end of the programme when the CEO of the sponsoring organization was thanking everyone, including us, she thanked Angela. We didn't really know if was Angela B or Angela R she was thanking, but it didn't matter. Suddenly, there was a loud commotion as someone scraped their chair back and leaped up. It was Angela R rushing to her feet. 'Angela R! Angela R!' she shouted out to the few hundred participants. 'Angela R!' She couldn't bear that people would mistake which Angela was getting public praise. She needed everyone to know it was her and not Angela B, so she got the glory. Imagine what effect that had on the rest of the team!

4. Realizing that people are different to you

I listened to a debate between Deepak Chopra (a more Eastern, transcendental view of the world; there is more to life than what is in front of our eyes) and Richard Dawkins (a Western view and an evangelical atheist; there is nothing more to life than what a scientist can see). They were trying to convince each other of their own worldviews and why they were right and the other person was wrong. It was no surprise that they totally disagreed with each other and the debate ended up with a slightly acrimonious 'I'm right and you're wrong' from both sides.

Saying that leadership needs the richness of differences sounds rather obvious. Everyone will say 'of course we are different', but in reality many people don't believe it. It comes back to how ego-centric you are.

Think about when you're falling in love. The conversation starts out something like this:

'I love Beethoven.'

'Oh wow. I love Beethoven.'

'I love Indian food.'

'Oh wow. I love Indian food.'

You are enamoured by what you have in common. But when you really start to get to know someone, you're confronted by a sea of differences of every kind. You may experience someone who is different as a threat, or simply not understand what their perspective is. Because you don't understand it, you disagree with it, ridicule it and shame it.

An insecure leadership ego hires people who are often 'just like me'. You even hear people say of others, 'Mike really *isn't* one of *us*, is he?' or 'Miranda *is* one of *us*'. The emphasis is on the 'us', because you're working out of your ego and thinking about tribes and 'others' or 'differences', and the other person is seen as a threat. You see it when a leader hires a new person from outside their organization. To start with the new person is warmly welcomed – they are

instantly treated as 'one of us'. But as soon as they start to challenge the status quo of the organization, or challenge the perspective of the boss, or challenge the team's current way of thinking, they suddenly become treated as 'not one of us'. It's very dangerous to surround yourself with people who are just like you, because there is so much that you won't see, in terms of perspectives, risks and opportunities.

5. Standing up to the boss (or your friend)

Related to the issue of not hiring people who are different to you is not surrounding yourself with people who will stand up to you. This is a very real issue in most corporate scandals. The boss, at whatever level, exudes a kind of backdraft, a force, a power, which says, 'Don't come close to me with anything I don't want to hear.' Think of Philip Green, chairman of retail group Arcadia, who one of his former senior executives alleges is a bully to his staff.²⁴ How do you stand up to the force of someone so powerful who acts like that?

Or take Enron. In his first week as a trader at the company, Brian Cruver's friend Bickers phoned him and tried to warn him that Enron was in grave danger, but Cruver's response was to rationalize what his friend was saying: 'Bickers is just being his usual stubborn self. ... Bickers was new at this. Bickers didn't understand Enron the way everyone else did.'²⁵ Bickers was standing up to his friend and his friend dismissed him. Bickers was moved from 'trusted friend' status to 'Bickers doesn't get it; Bickers isn't one of us' status. But Bickers was right and Cruver was wrong.

Those with secure egos have people around them who will stand up to them and will be heard. It may take a while, but they will be heard if the leader is wise.

6. Building the right culture around you

I haven't met a senior leader who didn't say, 'My office door is always open and people can come and say whatever they want at any time.' They say it, but for some leaders it just isn't true.

I met with a boss once for a tough conversation to give him feedback. He had asked for honest feedback, so I mistakenly thought he actually wanted to hear it. With his agreement I had conducted a full 360° analysis of his leadership team and support staff. We met over coffee in a private space and as he'd requested, I shared what I'd observed of his behaviour and its impact in the most affirming and constructive way I knew, and then went through the 360° feedback from his team. There was one of those pregnant silences. He proceeded to tell me that I was wrong in all of my views and that the 360° feedback was nonsense. The CEO's team leader, who'd given feedback, was dismissed as a psychopath (yes, that's exactly what he said). People weren't supportive, they didn't share his vision or commitment to the organization. I sat there quietly listening to all this, concluding 'note to self: don't bother giving this guy feedback', and I was sure his staff had reached the same conclusion a long time ago. They had thought maybe I could succeed where they had failed. He had built a culture around him that was competitive, defensive, protective and driven by 'the end justifies the means'. All of these things would be clearly affecting the performance of the team and the organization as a whole.

Secure egos build open, trusting, non-defensive, collaborative and accountable cultures. The place that feedback has in the culture that surrounds those with power is probably the best litmus test of the overall culture of the organization. It is for the boss, at whatever level, to create such a culture.

7. Leaving a legacy, not a name

I asked a group of young high fliers from an investment bank why they thought their company existed. 'Share price' was the reply. Everything everyone was doing seemed to revolve around current profitability and how much the

shareholders were making from their share options. They were all fixed on the short term.

If the organization, the team, is just about you and making a name for yourself, or just about short-term gains and profits so that you can move on to the next job with a great name to sell, then the world around you *will* become very short term. I see it in my own organization. I can do great things today and next year and even in the next ten years, but if I don't leave an organization that outlives me, then I have failed. Ego wants a name, it wants power and influence, and it wants it now. For such an ego everything, all the decisions you make, are built around making your name, or what people think of you. A secure ego is about the future, the legacy.

I explore this much more fully in *To Plant a Walnut Tree*.²⁶ The title was based on what a friend once told me his dad had said to him: 'Son, the most unselfish [no ego] thing you can do with your life is to plant a walnut tree, because you probably won't see the fruit in your own lifetime.' The whole thesis behind Jim Collins' book *Built to Last*²⁷ is that we need to build organizations that outlive us. But you can't do this if the main aim of coming to work each day is *you*.

8. Discerning what is right – not having to be right

I am in a meeting and we are discussing a new idea and there is lots of energy in the debate. I have a view and I put it forward. Other people have a view and they put theirs forward. It's at that point that I notice within myself what can only be described as an inner surge: *I want to be right!* An insecure ego wants to be right. An insecure leader's ego feels like it's failing, it isn't doing its job well, it isn't justifying its existence, it isn't building a good name for itself unless it is right and others can see it. Why? Because the messed-up thinking of the insecure leader says to itself variations of: 'If I'm wrong, then someone else could be doing my job and we can't have that, can we?'

The secure ego looks at their role through a different lens. They see themselves as one of the team and their role as not to *be* right but to discern *what* is right, regardless of who, or where, the right answer comes from. The need to be right leads to poor decisions, because the decisions you make are all filtered down to your level of expertise, experience and knowledge, which is limited. Everyone's mind has a limited perspective. That's just being human. And the need to be right demotivates the team, because they end up withholding their own energy and creativity, saying to themselves quietly, 'No point in saying much here, because Juanita has already made up her mind what we are going to do anyway.'

9. Not needing to know

Not knowing something is not an excuse for ignorance and incompetence. Leaders need to know their stuff and to go on investing in their own learning. What I'm talking about here is a higher level of skill. There is so much you don't know, you can't know. The world is such a large and complex and partially understood entity that you need to surround yourself with people who, *together*, know as much as possible. The secure ego values the whole, the wisdom and knowledge that a team can bring to an issue. But more than this, the secure ego is OK with saying 'I don't know' and living with ambiguity. The insecure ego feels like they are paid to know. That's their job. *Not knowing* is failure.

In fact, when leaders are trying to grasp the extent and complexity of a system that they need to make sense of, then it is wisdom to say as a starting point 'I don't know.' There's honesty and humility in saying 'I don't know'. 'I don't know' is the foundation for all learning; it's the starting point of what is called the growth mindset. 'I *do* know' is the dead end of a closed mind. It is always from a place of unknowing that creativity, innovation and new levels of thinking are allowed to emerge. Not knowing is a vital leadership skill that only secure egos can master.

10. Not being surrounded by 'yes' people

Let's go back to Narcissus for a moment. He wanted a pure reflection of himself because he needed to feel good about himself. The damaged ego needs to hear certain words repeated back to them:

- 'You are right.'
- 'Good call.'
- 'I agree with you.'

Christopher Lasch sums this up well:²⁸

Notwithstanding his occasional illusion of omnipotence, the narcissist depends on others to validate his self-esteem. He cannot live without an admiring audience. His apparent freedom from family ties and institutional constraints does not free him to stand alone or to glory in his individuality. On the contrary, it contributes to his insecurity, which he can overcome only by seeing his 'grandiose self' reflected in the attentions of others, or by attaching himself to those who radiate celebrity, power and charisma. For the narcissist the world is a mirror.

Looking at the anatomy of the great scandals of moral failure, you can see a pattern of leaders who surround themselves with 'yes' people. The result is corporate lying: leaders who have given up on telling each other the truth. They don't tell truth to the people in power, and then they somehow write reports and draft accounts that embody the lie to make it look good or acceptable to watching eyes and auditors. The opposite is where leaders admit to mistakes, are the first to make transparent any learning they got from failures, and take responsibility for their own role in what happened.

11. Being free to see

Former US Vice-President Al Gore said about climate change science: 'It is difficult to understand something if your salary depends on not understanding

it.' Putting it another way, it is difficult to see something if you are paid not to see it. Money blinds you. Once your salary becomes the reason for not looking honestly at the unpaid-for cup of coffee, then you will make compromised decisions.

Money and salary aren't necessarily about ego, but in Enron there was a culture of greed. In collapsed services and facilities company Carillion, whatever the motivation, big bonuses were at stake. In the high-paying institutions of the world's cities, young workers have staked everything on buying a lifestyle that rests on getting that yearly bonus. They can't afford to lose their job and therefore they're vulnerable to any pressures from any direction that might hint that they could. They will choose not to see things because their lifestyle depends on them not seeing.

A secure ego will do the right thing regardless of whether it costs them their job and their salary. In 2018, Tracey Crouch resigned as UK Sports Minister as a moral stand over control of fixed-odds betting terminals, for instance. You need to answer the question about what role your salary plays before you start any job – you need to get fit now – because it's no good waiting until the moral dilemma is facing you.

12. Not being stuck in your own expertise

We all have expertise that makes us good at what we do. I'm good at strategy and communicating and thought leadership. There are strengths as a leader in each of these abilities, but there's a danger as well, especially if you are both the founder and the leader. The danger is that I shape the organization around my skill set. The same would be true if I were a good accountant, a good salesperson, a great marketing person, a great rainmaker, or a great engineer. You develop a set of skills and a way of seeing the job through the eyes of your skill. Your expertise and your experience with that expertise are what got you up the ladder, they're what you are known for and it's what you build your ego identity around.

That's not a problem so far. It becomes a problem when, in order to defend your ego, you rise to an influential position of leadership, but you hold on to your expertise as the main lens through which you look at the organization. An organization is all of a range of skills – sales, marketing, strategy, innovation, R&D, rainmaking, human resources – and each has its own lens. You need to allow your ego to step back so you can become a bigger person. Salespeople see the world through a sales framework, which is great in sales, but isn't if you're overseeing all these functions. Marketing people see the world through a marketing framework, which is great, but the bigger picture isn't just marketing. Accounting is crucial, but as technology entrepreneur Elon Musk once said, if you leave your organization in the hands of a pure accountancy mindset, then the organization will die. Expertise is an important part of the ego development, but it needs to move beyond that.

Doing the ego work

Many books have now been written on the leader and their ego, but what does it mean to do the ego work? Again, self-awareness is the first step: realizing that you have an ego and that it is affecting people around you every day and shaping how you lead your team and your organization. Your inner landscape has a constant impact on others. Not dealing with your ego probably is the largest potential source of damage for your leadership capacity.

A good clue about the state of your own ego is if you are reading this chapter and thinking, 'I don't need any of that psycho crap.' As Steve Salbu, Professor at McCombs School of Business, said: 'students most in need of the elective courses offered [in moral leadership] by most high-quality M.B.A. programs routinely self-select *out* of the classes.'²⁹

Secondly, you need to spot the shape of your own particular pathology, the shape of your suffering or damage. It may be always being nice, when you need to learn a little more challenge or give clear direction; or being aggressive when you need to learn more kindness; or being oversensitive to a negative

interpretation of what people say to you, when you need to relax a little and smile at yourself; or deferring to others who are male, female, older, smarter than you; or you may not have good boundaries in your relationships with people, resulting in you being inappropriately intimate or, at the other extreme, letting people spew their venom over you.

You need to get a clear picture of how your insecurities are being bolstered by others. What narcissism does is it borrow your identity from others' reflections of you. Your responses, applause, smiles, and recognition all feed into how I might view myself. If you rely on others' responses as a reliable compass for your actions, then what happens if they are wrong, or people are just telling you what you want to hear? You become vulnerable to the other person, and if you or they don't have a good moral compass, they will point you in the wrong direction.

Thirdly, combined with having a strong team around you and a strong feedback culture, therapy is an essential investment in your own leadership capacity early in your career. To be honest, I'm not sure I've met any healthy leader who hasn't spent some time in therapy to understand themselves and sort through their own ego issues. I'll be talking more about this later in the book.

Fourthly, what is the opposite to ego? Answer: vulnerability. Brené Brown has made the word popular through her TED talks and her books,³⁰ but just reading a book or watching a talk doesn't build your vulnerability muscle. That only happens in the context of trusting relationships, which you need to develop. And that takes time. Learning to build strong relationships doesn't come as an off-the-shelf life skill and it takes the kind of time that working 14-hour days doesn't ever give you. But spending time on the relationship-building treadmill is an essential part of your leadership muscle-building work. And as you'll see in the next chapter, it's all about using your weaknesses.

7. Use Your Weaknesses

'There is a crack in everything... that's how the light gets in.'³¹

So says the late, great philosopher, poet and singer Leonard Cohen. He is talking about us and our humanity. As a leader, I've struggled with being human. That sounds a little nuts, I know, but it's true. Leaders want to do well, they want to succeed, they want to be on top of their game, they want to get things done, they want to achieve their goals, they want to bring others along with them. They don't want to be fragile, weak, failing, falling or the cause of problems for others. The truth is, though, that we're all a little cracked, a little damaged, as you found out in the last chapter. None of us has it all together, however much we try to pretend, like peacocks showing off our feathers, that everything is great with us.

The key to developing the muscle of moral leadership, as you saw in Chapter 2, is not about perfection; it's about integrity, honesty and humility. The key to doing the right thing is to be very alert to all the ways you are currently hard-wired to do the wrong things. When someone goes to a therapist to work on themselves, they often wonder: 'Will I be fixed at the end of this process?' But what does it mean to be 'fixed'? It doesn't mean that the cracks disappear, although it does mean that you now see the cracks, call them by name and make sure you put things in place to get over them, so that you can make good decisions and do the right thing.

Taking the bike as a piece of apparatus in the gym, it is made up of wheels, pedals and a seat. Similarly, the 'use your weakness' apparatus is made up of three of life's realities. To make friends with our cracks, as Cohen calls them, we need to embrace failure, suffering and pressure. Let's look at each of these in turn.

Failure

Everyone fails. It's impossible to achieve anything without falling down, picking yourself up, falling down again, picking yourself up again. Abraham Lincoln failed as a businessman, and was impractical and temperamental as a lawyer; Winston Churchill failed at school, failed to get into Sandhurst Military Academy and had the searing failure of the Dardanelles Campaign that haunted him for most of his life; Sigmund Freud was booed off the stage when he presented his first academic paper; Jack Welsh practically blew up the laboratory at the start of his career at GE; Thomas Edison failed 1,000 times before he got it right with the light bulb. I squirm when I think of some of the mistakes I've made with people, with strategy, with performance issues... as well as failing most of my exams at school!

There are all kinds of failures: moral failures, because we broke the principles we looked at in Chapter 2; burnout failures, because we were trying to run at a pace we couldn't sustain; knowledge failures, because we didn't do our homework; relational failures, where good friendships turned sour; HR failures, where we dealt badly with someone's poor performance and it blew up in our face. The issue is not so much the failure (although the only way to deal with it is to own up to it, call it what it is, apologize and not defend yourself or make it look like something it wasn't), but **whether you got the wisdom**. What did you learn from the failure? How much time did you spend on your own, with a trusted mentor or coach, or with your journal, sucking the juice out of the failure?

- What happened?
- Could I have seen it coming?
- What were the signs?
- How did I contribute to this?
- What would I do differently next time?
- Who could have helped me so that I didn't get to this place?

- Who could help me if I ever find myself in this situation again?
- If I could turn this failure into the best thing that ever happened to me, what would I do?

These are the 'easy' questions. You also need to dig a little more honestly and a little more deeply – and that's where you need some other person who will make sure you don't collude with your own blindness. Collusion is an unspoken agreement *not* to talk about what is really going on. It's the elephant in the room or the elk on the table. You need to lift up the paving slab of your own ego and see what is slithering away underneath. What cracks did the failure reveal?

Digging a little deeper into the issue of failure, it is interesting to read Napoleon Hill's '10 reasons for failure':³²

1. Inability to organize details
2. Unwillingness to do that which you ask of others
3. Expectation of pay for what you know, rather than what you do
4. Fear of competition
5. Lack of imagination
6. Selfishness
7. Intemperance, overindulgence
8. Disloyalty
9. Emphasis on the 'authority' of leadership
10. Emphasis on title

The thing to note from Hill's list is that *nine out of ten* of the reasons for failure (all except the first) are around ego issues. Richard Rohr describes this as like having a steel manhole cover over your ego. It takes all your will and strength to lift it up. Because your ego may be a little (or a lot) fragile, then that fragile ego

will do almost anything rather than die to itself and grow up. Failure is like someone kicking the manhole cover off for you and giving you an opportunity to grow a more secure self.

Suffering

The second reality of life is suffering, by which I mean anything that disrupts you with pain. I have had cancer twice and while I have gained so much through the experience, I would be lying if I pretended it hadn't disrupted me and caused me pain. There is physical pain, psychological pain and mental pain. I have a coach and he openly admits that he struggles a lot with his mental health, but strangely, that's why I go to him – because his pain has made him who he is, an amazing coach.

I explore the issue of suffering in *To Plant a Walnut Tree*,³³ but the key message is that while you may want to avoid suffering... don't! Don't seek it, that would be perverse, but don't avoid it, don't pretend it isn't there when it is, don't shrug it off or make light of it.

The thing about suffering is that it *reveals* the cracks in you, it doesn't *make* the cracks. The cracks are there and hidden from sight, but the suffering reveals what has always been there and undermining your fitness for moral leadership.

I remember watching the famous comedian and singer Harry Secombe (from the *Goon Show*) in a programme where he plays a round of golf with ex-professional golfer Peter Allis. Allis interviews Secombe about his life as they play golf together. In response to one question Allis asks about the quality of young comedians today, Secombe says: 'They haven't suffered enough.' He goes on to describe the terrible hardship comedians faced in the 1900s, which shaped their characters. By revealing to them their weaknesses, their cracks, their suffering acted like a gymnasium for young comedians to develop the muscle they needed to survive against the pressures of their career.

Suffering is a gift that no one wants, but it *is* a gift – if you use it; if, like with failure, you suck the juice out of it. The learning, the wisdom and the muscle come because you consciously invest in learning from the pain. In Dawna Markova's iconic poem 'I will not die an unlived life', she speaks about the role of suffering in letting life open us up. It makes no sense when someone goes through hard times and they come out the other side without any character growth to show for it. The Bible calls the tough stuff in life 'discipline'. That isn't the kind of discipline where the head teacher punished you for getting your spellings wrong again. The literal Greek word is the same as that for 'gymnasium'. The tough stuff of life is a gym. In the Greek Olympics, the disciplined athletes ran naked. Their vulnerability was shown to all. What the wisdom literature says is: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline.' To 'make light' means trying to shrug off or make the pain smaller than it is – say to yourself and others that it doesn't matter, and you don't let the experience get to you.

Suffering either opens you up to become a bigger person or it closes you down and makes you a smaller person. The rewards of doing the gym work on your suffering don't usually come instantly, but they do arrive and they are solid character muscle when they do.

Pressure

The third reality of life is pressure. If you look at the anatomy of most moral failures, they happen when we are under pressure. Why? Because when we are under pressure the defaults kick in. When we are under pressure, it forces the hairlines cracks in us wide open. When we are under pressure, we don't have the time or mental space to work out the right response. Whatever our default, underlying character 'grooves' are what we will act out. If we haven't dealt with the cup-of-coffee choices and someone offers us a bribe, whether it's blatant or dressed up in its finest clothes, we will take the bribe. We have all experienced these pressures hundreds of times. They are so fast and so subtle that we find ourselves responding before we even know it.

An electrician was fitting something in our house and I knew something wasn't right, but he was in a hurry and I just let it go. The builder working on our roof broke a tile and he was such a nice person and was in such a rush that at first I just let the issue go. And then I came indoors and sat back at my desk and thought, 'No, that isn't what we agreed. We had this conversation the other day and he said if he broke a tile he would replace it.' I had let the issue slide without dealing with it in the way I really wanted to. Why? Because of pressure. I was worried he would think I was a fussy client, or get irritated or even angry at me for challenging him over the problem, especially since he was late and needed to go.

I'm using these little examples because they are the seedbeds of the bigger examples. Study corporate failures like Enron and you see these incredible multiple layers of pressure:

- The pressure of the market and Wall Street on the directors
- The pressure of the directors' greed and dishonesty
- The pressure on the monthly share price
- The pressure on everyone through Enron's ruthless performance management system
- The pressure to succeed according to Enron's norms of success (cars, houses, macho attitude, etc.)
- The pressure of that hard-to-name but very real thing called 'company culture'
- The pressure not to blow the whistle
- The pressure to be seen as 'one of us'
- The pressure of abuse and shaming – 'you're not with us; you're not one of us; you don't belong in this team; you're not up to it, are you?'
- The pressure not to be mocked by peers

- The pressure of hierarchy – one boss pushing down hard on another boss who is pushing down hard on someone else
- All the internal pressures people bring to these situations – their own ambitions, values and egos

Have you ever been caught up in a freak current while out swimming? All is well and then suddenly there are these pressures all around you, tugging, confusing, pulling, pushing, and your easy swim strokes are getting you nowhere. There is pressure upon pressure.

Maybe you've heard the phrase 'speaking truth to power'. What's behind it is that the pressure from the people with power to keep those without power silent is incredibly... well, powerful. So people don't speak the truth to those in power, because it's easier not to. Learning to speak up and to speak truth to power is probably one of the most vital muscles anyone can learn from a young age, if they're going to work in any kind of organization or group.

When I was at college, I took a job with a small construction firm. We were asked to work one Saturday and told how much we would be paid. All good. We did the work and the boss came up to me at the end of the day and handed me cash. Not a problem... yet. The problem started when he said, 'By the way, don't declare this cash to the taxman. It's a cash job.'

I felt I was able to speak back in a reasonable and quiet way and I said, 'I always declare my income.'

'I know,' he said, 'that's great. But not this cash, OK?'

'I'm sorry,' I replied respectfully, 'but I will have to declare it.'

He then started mocking, shaming and eventually shouting at me not to declare this money. 'You don't understand! If you declare this and the Inland Revenue follow it through, they will look at my books and see I didn't show it, and then they will start to dig deeper. Don't £\$%**&### declare it!'

I handed the money back to him and told him I had no wish to put him in a difficult position, so I would work the day for free. That just made him even more mad at me!

How do you speak truth to power? It is incredibly tough when the pressure is on, when you're really tired, feeling unwell, under stress, overworked, under the cosh of deadlines or targets. Where do you learn this muscle called 'speaking truth to power'?

It starts with a cup of coffee. It starts with the builder or the electrician or holiday boss. The Greeks had a great word – docimacy – the name given to the process of refining impure metals. You put the base metal in a vessel and turn up the heat (the pressure). The heat forces the impurities to the top. You can see them, so you deal with them. You scoop them off. That's called the dross. Then you turn up the heat further. More dross comes to the surface. You face it and deal with it. You turn up the heat further. More dross. More cleaning... and so on until the metal is pure. The dross is like the cracks that Cohen spoke of. The pressure reveals the cracks, which creates the opportunity to grow.

We often say that it's tough at the top. What we mean is that it's very hot at the top, the pressure is massive and it *will* reveal the cracks. This is why the best of people can be caught out in a scandal, because they were not fit to deal with the levels of impossible pressure that senior leaders have to handle and still make good moral decisions. Don't ever criticize a person before you've lived in their shoes. With increasing responsibility comes increasing pressure, and in some cases pressure that you and I can't even imagine, but by then it's often too late to start trying to develop the moral leadership muscle. People just aren't fit enough to cope.

Letting the light in

Failure, suffering and pressure force open the cracks within us, but there's an upside. While Cohen said 'there's a crack in everything', he followed it immediately with another line: 'that's how the light gets in'. Or, in the language of

this book, 'that's how the moral leadership muscle gets built'. If you work with the cracks early on in your working life, then you create good muscles that stand a much better chance of working under pressure – pressure that forces open the cracks so you can work with it and let the light in. This is what it means to get fit for moral leadership.

So what do you need to do to face up to the cracks and work with them? Get a coach. You will keep hearing me say this vital piece of wisdom until you are bored of it. But everyone needs help to grow to their leadership potential.

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So everyone needs a coach. For instance, maybe when I hear myself speak to someone I think I'm being calm and rational. But if there's a third person who hears me talking to this person, they might tell me that my voice sounded irritated and that set up tension in the conversation that followed, which is why the conversation didn't achieve what it could have. Our own behaviour always makes sense to ourselves.

I was coaching a senior management once when someone knocked at the door. The guy I was coaching said 'Come in', so the door opened and a man asked my coachee politely for an urgent signature on something. I was shocked when my coachee bawled out the guy for disturbing him: 'Can't you see I'm ^@**&%\$ busy?' The guy closed the door and disappeared.

I asked my coachee, 'What just happened there?'

He replied, 'Huh? What do you mean?'

'That little incident... what happened?' I persisted.

My coachee replied, looking at me like I was a bit stupid, 'He interrupted and I asked him to leave.'

So I said to him, 'Let's run the last five minutes as a video, frame by frame.'

As we did this and I told him at each 'frame' what I'd witnessed, he honestly had no idea what he'd done. To his credit, when he did realize, he got up, left the room, found the guy and apologized.

What happens when we don't address our weaknesses in the small things? Just take a look at how it plays out at a deeper, more senior level of an organization. It made sense to the board of some companies to set up other companies to hide the corporation's actual levels of debt. They called it terms like 'creative accounting' or 'aggressive accounting'. Insider traders rarely call what they do 'insider trading'. They use words like 'maximizing my position' or 'leveraging my influence'.

The cracks can let the light in or they can keep the light out. This is the challenge of moral leadership. You make sure you stay on the side of the light by taking a daily audit of your leadership fitness, as we'll explore in the next chapter.

8. Take a Daily Audit

One day I was flying back from the UK to Kenya, where we were living at the time. We were travelling economy, which for someone who is six feet two inches tall is never any fun. Soon after take-off and after the seat-belt signs told everyone they could relax, the chair in front of me sprang back towards my face with no warning and hit my knees. I wasn't pleased! I felt real irritation and anger. I pushed back hard on the seat to let the person in front realize their behaviour had had an impact on me, and said out loud 'Woa!'

There was a pause and then the seat in front of me went forward again.

'That told them!' I thought to myself, feeling very justified.

Just as I was settling down, the chair in front of me sprang back unexpectedly again and caused the same pain on my knees. I responded exactly the same way, with a push into the back of the chair in front and once more saying 'Woa!' But this time it made no difference.

I was feeling very angry by then. 'How dare they? How inconsiderate and thoughtless.' And so my inner tirade continued. I could feel this was going to ruin the whole flight.

My wife was watching all this with bemused interest. In self-justification, I asked her, 'Well, what would a good leader do in this situation?'

Her answer was very unexpected. She said, 'You could go and apologize to her.'

That just made me feel even more angry! Was she taking this other passenger's side? Did she think it was OK for people to be so thoughtless? The woman in front should be apologizing to me, not me to her! And so the conversation went on inside my head for next ten minutes.

It was in those ten minutes that I realized my wife wasn't looking at the character development of the woman in front of me, she was looking at what was going on in me. I reflected on how I wanted my character to be. I had grown up with a parent who was always irritated and angry and it wasn't pleasant at all. Is that who I wanted to become? Is that the character I wanted to develop? I could see anger and irritation and self-justification and arrogance all poking their heads above the ground within me, like weeds growing almost imperceptibly. Now I had a choice. It wasn't just a choice about who I was going to be on the flight, it was a choice about who I would become as a husband, father, friend, team leader and organizational leader.

So I got up and moved alongside the seat of the passenger in front of me. She eyed me with huge suspicion, but I was able to say, 'I'm really sorry about my reaction just now. You didn't deserve that and I apologize.' What struck me was when I changed my stance towards her, she responded warmly to me about the situation.

Why do moments like these matter, whether you're leading an organization or yourself? Remember Dieselgate, or the Diesel Dupe, as some called it? In the US, the great motor company Volkswagen created software that could detect if someone was checking the car's emissions and adjust the results to look good for the duration of the test. A year before the scandal broke in 2014, regulators had raised concerns, but these were dismissed by the company as 'technical issues' and 'unexpected real-world conditions'. Since then nine senior figures in the company have been found guilty, including the CEO Martin Winterkorn, who was charged with making 'false representations to regulators and the public'. The question is, how do at least nine very senior people in one of the world's largest vehicle companies learn to create a culture where they set out to deceive the public, the regulators and presumably their own staff? Why did they need to invent a device that could pull the wool over the auditors' eyes? Presumably it takes a lot of time and people to create this software (called a 'defeat device'). Having created it, how did the senior leadership decide to conspire to lie?

But let's go much further back than that. When did Winterkorn and the many others involved learn to lie and that it was OK to cheat and break the rules and think they could get away with it, all in the name of profit? Was it when they were 16 years old, or 24, or when? When was that first 'cup of coffee' and how did they rationalize it? And when was the second 'cup of coffee' and how did they rationalize that? Somewhere in the previous decades of their lives they laid down a way of doing business and a set of defaults that ended up with them being prosecuted.

In getting fit for moral leadership, one way of looking at our character is like a flower garden. Left on its own, a garden will grow good things (flowers) and bad things (weeds). The problem with weeds is that they can crowd out, or squeeze out, the very life from the good things. Left to its own devices, a flower garden can very easily become a weed garden. This process is never ending and is active. You can weed every inch of the garden today, but by tomorrow more weeds start to appear. This is the normal dynamic of living systems, so weeding your garden every day is simply part of the normal process of growth. It is because of this reality that you need to build weeding into the daily process of living with a garden. Exactly the same is true with your character. Every day you are growing your character and every day you are growing either a principle-centred, moral and ethical character, or an unprincipled, immoral, unethical character. If you have a perspective that sees every single day of your life like a character garden – or a character gym – then you will have an awake and active response to everything that's going on and you can either ignore it or you can 'weed' it. It's your daily responses to life, as it hits you moment by moment, that are the secret to getting fit for moral leadership.

The Jewish tradition talks about the Mitzvot, the tiny little actions you can take every day that make up who you are and who you are becoming in that day and the many days that make up your life. For example, I pass someone selling *The Big Issue*. Do I cross to the other side of the street? Do I buy a copy even if I don't need one? If I decide not to buy one, do I look the seller in the eyes as a fellow human being and greet them, or do I stare at the ground and pretend I haven't even seen them?

Do I practise kindness in the little things today? Do I practise generosity in the little things today? Do I practise forgiveness in the little things today? Do I practise listening in conversations today? In little situations, do I exert power over people with my words, with my position, with my gender? The choices I make today will build the shape of my responses in years to come when I may be in a senior position in an organization, as well in as my wider life. So that journey on the plane and my reactions to the woman in the seat in front of me *were* a leadership development classroom. The weeds were all too apparent and the question was whether I would leave them to continue growing in my interactions with my team, my negotiations or any aspect of my life.

It is these tiny choices that address the weeds of your character formation; and your character will shape your actions, which will shape the outcomes of your work. Weeding your character garden every day is a crucial investment in getting fit for moral leadership now and in the future. So how do you weed your character garden every day? There are two steps.

Step 1: Learn to spot the weeds early

Awareness is everything in getting fit for moral leadership: awareness of yourself and others and the interactions between you. Daniel Goleman's research showed that good leaders have lots of emotional intelligence. Intelligence means you have the ability to think things through, and emotional intelligence means you can think through what's going on inside you and between you and others. We've all met bosses who've made cutting remarks or demeaning comments to people and they didn't even realize they were doing it.

I spoke before about the need for a third eye in your moral leadership gym. Here is the place to use it:

- Did I just feel an 'ouch' when my name wasn't on that report?
- Did I just feel some irritation when they didn't ask my opinion?
- Did I just feel a sense of 'this is mine... you go and get your own'?

- Did I just feel a fear of upsetting them?
- Did I just feel some fear about my reputation?
- Did I just feel some fear about provoking someone's anger against me?
- Did I just feel like I want to hide myself away from public view on this issue?
- Did that comment she made scratch me a bit?
- Did I feel envy when I heard everyone praising him and not me?
- Did I feel a surge of a power-need to push my idea through?
- Did I feel some anger that I'm not being noticed or respected here?
- Did I feel like I need my voice and opinion to be heard?
- Did I notice that I walked out of that meeting and the only person's opinions I can remember are my own?

The list could go on. You need to be awake to yourself and your reactions, because in every interaction there's the possibility of spotting the seeds of arrogance, greed, fear and ego insecurity.

Step 2: Take action in the opposite direction

If your character is heading in a bad direction, it's because your thoughts and behaviours are driving it there. Once you start behaving consistently in unhelpful ways, then your character almost takes on its own momentum... and not necessarily for the good. So when you spot the weeds in yourself, you need to take action in order to drive your character growth in the right direction. For example:

- When you see yourself living with a scarcity mentality ('this is mine!'), then do acts of random generosity.

- When you spot that you're so busy you're beginning to treat people as objects for your own ends, then do acts of random kindness.
- When you spot arrogance, do acts of humility.
- When you feel yourself needing to be right, apologize.
- When you see you need to be respected as the best, choose acts of vulnerability or humility. Make the coffee, wash the cups, be honest with someone about your own knowledge gaps and weak spots.

When you spot your fears in their different disguises, then name them out loud:

- The antidote to *arrogance* is *humility*
- The antidote to *greed* is *generosity*
- The antidote to *abrasiveness* or *disrespect* of others is *kindness*
- The antidote to *fear* is *naming it*
- The antidote to *ego insecurity* is *vulnerability* and *self-worth*
- The antidote to building a musculature impervious to *failure* is to *admit* when you get things wrong

You grow good character by weeding your garden every day, as you will see even further in the next chapter.

9. Develop a Leadership Compass

I like walking and thankfully so does my son. We were walking in the English Lake District one time and had reached the top of the mountain named Scarfell. In one instant we were looking around at the amazing views and in no time at all the sky changed, the mist came in and we couldn't see beyond our hands. This is a dangerous situation and the first rule is don't panic. What is most scary is how quickly you lose your bearings. You can't remember or, more worryingly, you *think* you remember which way the path was. You take a few steps and realize it isn't where you thought it was and now you have a real problem. You know that you don't know where you are or where to go next. You know that any next step you take could easily be the wrong one and that it will make your situation even worse.

I looked at the map and I was adamant which way we should go.

My son looked at his compass and said, 'But Dad, that isn't where North is; the compass is showing it's in this direction', pointing in a very different direction to the one I was suggesting.

If we got this wrong, we would be in very serious trouble. Should we trust the map or the compass?

Of course, it's in such moments that you realize the difference between a map and a compass. A map is just a representation of the facts on the ground. It relies on you identifying that tree, that triangulation point, that river, that path. But if you can't see any of the facts on the ground, then a map is pretty useless as an authoritative guide to making decisions. A map is like the rulebook we would all like in life that tells us do this, do that, turn left here, turn right here, and we can mindlessly follow the lines.

A compass is different. A compass works when you can't see what's going on, when you can't make sense of the facts on the ground. In life, a compass is like a set of moral principles. A compass gives you a few certain ideas that you

have to think through, do the mental work, to work out how a particular principle applies in the situation you're in. With a compass, the pointer is showing you where North is, but you have to work out how to translate that direction into the reality that is in front of you.

You may have heard the scary fact that most young pilots crash their planes because they think they know better than their instruments. They feel like they are flying upside down in a fog and their compass says fly straight on. They listen to their own feelings and disregard the compass... and most of them crash. A compass is an instrument. It tells you where North is even when the mists come down hard. Trust it.

It's the same with leadership. There are plenty of maps that show where previous leaders have walked, what they learned and the pathways they propose. That is all good wisdom to stock up with for your leadership journey. But when it comes to moral leadership, you need to know where North is so that when the mists of ambiguity, or the snowstorm of pressures, come down on you, you can judge any situation up against the true North of a moral compass. The moral compass of leadership is the principles you agreed in the second chapter of this book, things like trust, interdependence, being ego-less and so on.

I tried the compass idea out with a group at a conference. I got everyone to stand up and asked them all to point North. It was a difficult task, because we were in an enclosed auditorium in a conference centre, so there was no natural light to make an accurate judgement against. People's responses were going to be instinctive. What we got were fifty people all pointing in what they thought was North, and that translated into fifty hands pointing in fifty different directions. Every decision they made in terms of their strategic direction would be made against where they thought North was.

I then chose one person from the group and asked her to pretend she was the boss, the most powerful person in the room. I told the group she paid their salary and she had 'made it' in their eyes. I got the group to see where she was pointing to as her understanding of true North, and then I asked the group to point to the North. Most of them now pointed to where this young woman was

pointing. My next comment was, 'OK, so now we're all going in her direction. But what if her direction is wrong? What happens now?' I think they got the point.

That was just a bit of fun. The reality is a lot scarier, because it's exactly this dynamic that easily happens in groups, teams and organizations. A lot of senior people followed the pointing hand of Jeff Skilling, Dick Fuld, Ken Lay or Martin Winterkorn, and they were all pointing in the wrong direction.

The key learning from this piece of equipment in the moral leadership gym is summed up in the words of a well-known saying: 'If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything.' Getting fit for moral leadership requires you to develop a moral compass as early in life as you can. You can bring that compass to any situation and ask:

- Where do I go from here?
- What is the right decision here?
- What is the right thing to do?

One simple way of defining the necessity for a moral compass is to answer the questions:

- Who am I?

and

- Where am I going?

Like a compass, you can hold your answers up to any new situation or dilemma or challenge that you face and ask yourself: 'Which way is North here?'

Let's take some time to look at four dimensions that help build a moral compass – vocation (where), values (who), character (what) and heart (for whom).

All are important, and all will be needed to help you navigate the decisions and pressures that leadership brings.

Vocation – Where

Over lunch, a young person was reflecting on her peers in the business world she operated in and she said, 'They all want that shiny look.' What she meant was that they all seemed fixated on how they looked to others. Were they seen professionally and in appearance as 'shiny', like an attractive piece of jewellery or clothing? Did other people look at them and feel envious in some subtle way?

The word **vocation** can sound a little outdated to some people, a new term to others, or not edgy enough for those on the corporate racetrack. It comes from the Latin root 'to call'. What is your calling in life? Or, more accurately, what is life calling you to do? Based on the conviction that everyone on planet Earth is unique and that they will, whether consciously or not, write their life story, then what is the vocation of your life story? Some might call it mission or purpose, but it goes deeper than those words, because it is based on the idea that your life is like a seed which contains the DNA of all your potential. What is the message your deeper self and the world are giving you about your calling?

Finding your vocation in life is neither quick nor easy. It is a process of continual learning and discovery. It is a core within you that needs to be detected, literally like a detective, following the clues of your interests, passions, experiences, frustrations and convictions. It is less important that you find a precise answer than that you are continually on the journey of asking yourself: 'Why am I on this planet? What is my contribution?'

How is engaging with your vocation part of your moral compass? Because having a sense of your vocation acts like a safeguard to being pulled in any 'shiny' direction in life. If you find yourself saying 'I want that job!', then ask yourself:

- Why do I want that job?
- Does it fit with my sense of vocation?
- Is it building the story of my life?

You may respond 'Because it pays great money', or 'it carries more prestige', or 'I want to be seen as more responsible' or 'it fulfils my ambition to...' 'Ambition to do what?' you then can ask yourself.

Or if it turns out that your answer is 'I want this job to make loads of money', then ask yourself: 'Why do I want loads of money?'

By asking yourself 'Why?' to each of your answers, you follow through your motivations to their roots. If the root is 'I feel like I'm on the planet to make a positive impact in this area', that is one kind of response; but if you track down the roots of your motivations and the answer is 'greed, power, control, being noticed, seen as the best, etc.', then it allows you to ask yourself: 'Is my life really about accumulating things? Is my life really about greed, power, jealousy, control?' When it's put like that, you will often be confronted by a deeper choice:

- Is this who I want to become? Is this why I'm on the planet for these few short years?

I encourage you to approach this issue of vocation positively and spend a little time reflecting on the following questions:

- What calls to you in the world as something that needs changing or supporting?
- Where do you see the pain in the world around you? (It could be up the road from you, or further away in other countries.)
- What is the legacy you want to leave behind after you die?

Once you answer these questions, you can set your compass point by your understanding of your vocation.

A young couple I know set their compass to support a few key organizations that helped people get out of poverty. They did this by capping their income at a certain level and giving the rest away. They had good jobs and they got promoted and they made more money, but any extra money above the level of their agreed cap was given to these charities.

In another example, Blake Mycoskie³⁵ set up TOMS Shoes as a for-profit company, but he put generosity at the heart of the business model. His view is that far too many young people become ambitious to make a lot of money and say that when they have made big money, *then* they will start giving it away. Blake put generosity at the heart of the business model from day 1 and ensured that for every for-profit pair of shoes the company made, another pair of shoes would be given to a child with no shoes – one for one.

These kinds of decisions are driven by a sense of vocation that is held up like a compass point at every challenging moment. A decision is like a ‘one-degree moment’. Ships and airplanes have the same dynamic in their journeys: they are always having to make micro corrections when their instruments tell them they are on track or off track. They know that one degree off track today translates into being totally off track further down the road. It is a dynamic, compass-type process, not a static, rulebook-type process. But if you ignore the constant course corrections in the little one-degree decisions, the cups of coffee, then, like big ships or airplanes, one degree off course today becomes thirty degrees off course a few years down the track.

Values – Who

I think it’s common wisdom that who we really are is only seen under pressure. Do we act kindly when tempers are fraying? Do we continue to practise generosity when the economy is in a downturn? Do we practise patience when deadlines are under threat? Do we tell the truth when it might lose us our jobs?

What really matters to you is what matters to you when you’re under pressure – and that represents your values. What do you value so much that it guides the decisions you make?

There are two kinds of values: aspired values and lived values. As the words suggest, I might aspire to be kind because kindness is a value I really admire in others, but in reality what I actually live out is frustration and irritation; they become my lived values. We judge ourselves very often by our

aspired values, but others judge us by what they experience of us, our lived values. This is always a painful one!

The compass point of your values is to do the work in deciding what values you aspire to and then making decisions on your behaviour that nudge you towards living out that value each day of your life. You know that you will never be all that you aspire to be, but you can at least know that the direction of travel is increasingly seen in the way your behaviour conforms to the values you want to be known for.

Jamie Carragher, an English footballer who used to play for Liverpool FC and is now a TV commentator on the Sky Sports channel, was suspended from his job because he spat at a passing car whose driver was jeering at him over his side's recent losses in a few games. Painfully for Carragher, the incident was caught on camera and was all over the news. To his credit, he apologized publicly, but then said, 'Give me the chance to show you my real self.' It could be argued that his aspired values would not have led him to spit at anyone, but his lived values, his real self, actually did.

I was coaching a strategy director in a finance company who was very successful and worked a punishingly hard schedule. 'What matters most to you?' I asked him.

'My family is the most important thing in my life,' he said.

But he had just told me that he left home each morning before his children got up and he arrived home after they had gone to bed, and he had worked 60% of weekends for the past few months. Aspired values are not the same as lived values, and it is the lived values that write the script in all of the world's public and private scandals.

The work you can do for this dimension demands the investment of a little time and a notebook.

Step 1. Ask yourself:

What are the values I aspire to? What really matters to me?

Here's a list of values you might consider. It isn't exhaustive but may help stimulate your thoughts. Feel free to add words that are missing for you.

Accountability	Achievement	Advancement
Adventure	Affection	Altruism
Artistry	Attractiveness	Authority
Caring	Challenge	Change
Closeness	Coaching	Community
Compassion	Competence	Competition
Conformity	Connectedness	Cooperation
Courage	Creativity	Culture
Decisiveness	Democracy	Design
Development	Ecology	Education
Effectiveness	Encouragement	Endeavouring
Energy	Ethical	Excellence
Excitement free	Exhilaration	Experimentation
Expertise	Fame	Family
Financial gain	Financial security	Freedom
Friendship	God/faith	Growth
Harmony	Helping	Honesty
Imagination	Impact	Independence
Influence	Ingenuity	Inner harmony
Inspiration	Integrity	Intellect
Invention	Involvement	Knowledge
Leadership	Learning	Living
Location	Love	Loveliness
Loyalty	Meaning	Meaningful work
Merit	Money	Nature
Openness	Order	Originality
Others	Patriotism	Peace
Personal development	Physical pleasure	Play
Potential	Power	Pressure
Privacy	Promotion	Public service
Purity	Quality	Questing
Recognition	Relationships	Religion
Reputation	Respect	Responsibility
Risk	Security	Self-respect
Sense	Serenity	Service
Society	Sophistication	Stability
Status	Stimulation	Supervision
Tranquillity	Truth	Variety
Venture	Wealth	Wisdom
Working alone	Working with others	

Reflect on these and add your own to come up with a short list of your top five aspired values.

Step 2. Look at each of the five aspired values you have just identified and write the answer to this question in your notebook:

How would I behave under pressure if this value was alive and well in me?

Step 3. Ask yourself:

What behaviours can I start practising each day, from today, that will build muscle in this aspired value?

When the pressure is on, if you have developed some muscle-building in turning your aspired values into lived values, then you will have a compass that works.

Character – What

Your character is what you look like to others, not physically but behaviourally. It may be good or bad:

- They aren't trustworthy
- They are really kind
- They are very courageous
- They are wise

Character isn't about one-off behaviour, it's about how you behave consistently over a long period. The word character originates from the Greek *charassein*, which means to scratch or engrave. Every action, every behaviour, cuts grooves and makes scratches. These scratches build up over time through a process that starts with our thoughts:

- 'I'd like to be successful, like my boss.'

which lead to feelings:

- ‘The thought of that nice house, car and the prestige that surrounds him feels good.’

which lead to us taking actions:

- ‘I will work long hours today.’

which lead to habits:

- ‘I work long hours every day.’

which cut the groove of our character:

- ‘That guy is a workaholic.’

Imagine a car driving through a very wet field. As the car tries to get to the gate at the opposite end of the field, it cuts grooves or ruts in the wet earth. Now imagine taking a car into that field a few days later and trying to drive across the same field. The car will, by default, go into the ruts it cut last time. All this is great if the ruts are going where you want them to go to, if they reach the desired destination. But if the ruts take you somewhere you don't want to end up, then you're going to have to make the effort to cut new grooves.

If the grooves you establish early in your career lead you to a balanced life and relationships and that is what you want, then all well and good. If the grooves you establish early in your career take short cuts, are economical with the truth and use other people for your own ends, then you should not be surprised if your destination is the kind of lack of moral leadership that has prompted this book to be written.

In the novel *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice comes to a crossroads and doesn't know which road to take. She asks the Cheshire Cat:

‘Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?’

‘That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,’ said the Cat.

'I don't much care where—' said Alice.

'Then it doesn't matter which way you go,' said the Cat.

If you don't have a clear destination for the kind of character you want to build in your life, then any road will take you there, as George Harrison paraphrased Carroll's story. What is certain is that we all end up with a character, but is it the one we would have chosen if we had stopped at, say, 19 years old, asked ourselves 'What kind of character do I want to be known for? Who do I want to become?' and then set out to cut grooves in our thoughts, feelings, actions and habits that would take us to that character? Developing moral character doesn't happen by accident, it is a conscious and daily act of personal leadership.

The great encouragement for all of us is that we *can* change. No matter what grooves you have been cutting, you can change them. The discovery of neuroplasticity means that we know you can rewire your brain, but you need to want to and you need to do the work. To get fit in the moral leadership gym, you have to develop the necessary character so that you have the muscle strength and the muscle memory to be able to do the right thing despite outside pressure.

In developing the compass point of a good character, a good starting place is to ask yourself

- 'How would people describe me?'

Then, if you are able, ask a few honest friends:

- 'How would you describe me?'

Then, take a little time and ask yourself:

- 'How do I want people to describe me?'

Finally, list in your notebook some new mantras or thoughts about who you want to be and a list of actions you could start to practise each day to cut these new grooves.

The fourth part of the moral compass is the issue of heart – who do your leadership and life exist for? Let's head to the next chapter to look into this vital question in depth.

10. Ask Who This Is For

The stories of King Arthur and the knights of the round table have entertained and inspired generations. They circle around the search for the Holy Grail. This was the cup that Jesus was meant to have drunk from at the Last Supper before his crucifixion, but it also came to be a symbolic metaphor for the search for the meaning of life itself. One of these stories is the legend of Parsifal. Young Parsifal is one of Arthur's knights and he has a mentor called Gournamond. As Parsifal is about to go off in search of the Holy Grail, Gournamond gives him two crucial pieces of wisdom:

Do not seduce or be seduced.

and

When you find the grail it will only be given to you if you can answer the grail question: Whom does the Grail serve?

Parsifal sets off on his great life mission and his adventures take him all over the world, where he witnesses much suffering and has many rich experiences along the way. Eventually, he arrives at the castle where the Grail is reported to be kept. When Parsifal enters the castle, he cannot believe his eyes. Everything his heart could desire is laid before him in abundance: food, wine, women and every sensory delight. He is intoxicated with all he can now feast on.

As he enters the castle, he meets the legendary Fisher King, who he sees is wounded with a wound that just won't heal. The Fisher King offers Parsifal a sumptuous feast with everything he can eat and drink and Parsifal gorges himself into unconsciousness. But when he wakes up the next morning, everything has gone. The castle is a deserted wasteland and his chance to find the Grail has gone with it. He is deeply angry with himself, because he knows that he has only himself to blame. He remembers that before he set out on the journey to find the Grail, his mentor, who was both his godfather and his spiritual guide, gave him that key piece of advice: 'Do not seduce or be seduced.'

Gournamond had counselled him that he must not allow himself to be deflected from his life's search.

So Parsifal carries on with his long and testing search, hoping for a second chance to find the Holy Grail. Eventually he arrives back at the castle and the Fisher King is waiting for him, but this time Parsifal is not seduced or deflected from his task. He remembers Gournamond's second piece of wisdom – that he has to ask the Grail question. So, as he stands before the Fisher King, he summons up the courage to ask: 'Whom does the Grail serve?'

The answer he gets from the Fisher King is: 'The Grail serves those who serve.'

Consciously or not, people rise up the leadership ladder because they are in search of their own Holy Grail – money, success, power, fame, meaning, purpose, quietening inner demons, whatever their particular Grail may be. A deep quest to fulfil or answer some fundamental life questions through their leadership role (again, often unconsciously) is seen as the route to doing this. It is this Grail question that we now need to explore:

Who does your Grail serve?

To do this, buckle up for the 'deep dive' into getting fit for moral leadership.

The world-famous Alcoholics Anonymous 12-Step Programme works because it is based on deep and timeless principles of human transformation in the most challenging areas of our character and morality. Step 4 says: '[We] made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.'

Leadership courage, in this crucial area of getting fit for moral leadership, means that you need to take this kind of searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself as a leader. Psychoanalyst Carl Jung once wrote: 'Knowing your own darkness is the best method for dealing with the darkneses of other people.' How can you do this? How can you look at your own darkness, or your own motivations, or your own deeper impulses? The first place you need to look

when you face up to yourself in this leadership mirror is actually a surprising issue – love (or heart, if that feels a little safer).

Having spent years working with organizations, what I have noticed is that no one talks about love. There's work.... and then there's love. Love is what happens after 5.30 pm weekdays and at weekends. Yet love is the very core of human relationships, it is what it means to be human. So if we create a split between the working world we lead in and the word *love*, we are creating a dangerous split in what goes on every day, for every person, at work.

A while ago I was having dinner with a group of chief executives from the UK's National Health Service hospitals, as part of a development programme. The honoured guest at the dinner was someone from the government's Department of Health. At some point he and I got into a discussion about the core mission of the NHS. A bunch of terms were thrown around the table – achievement, patient experience, quality, clinical excellence – and I took a risk and introduced the words *care* and *love*. That was a conversation killer! I reflected that love is a catch-all for care, kindness, giving people the best, empathy and healing. But he basically told me that we can't talk about love in the context of business or healthcare.

'Why not?' I asked. Knowing he was married with children, I added, 'Surely you tell your wife and children regularly that you love them. If we use the word "love" as part of our humanity, then why don't we use it in business and organizations, because they are one big mass of humanity?'

Needless to say, I'm off his Christmas card list after that evening.

Love, or heart, simply means going beyond yourself to benefit the lives of others. To love is to step beyond the boundaries of your ego, to extend, to give something to others. If you merely use others to benefit yourself, that is narcissistic love, not the real deal.

What is at the centre?

Because organizations are full of humans, the issue of love has to be looked at. Leadership is ultimately about being human and bringing out the best in humanity. Once we separate the 'heart' centre from a business, then we have to focus on words like profit, success, market share, stakeholder value, quality, efficiency and so on. All of those are important, but they are divorced from the human context; the 'why', as Simon Sinek³⁶ calls it. **Ego-centredness** is the biggest danger leading to a lack of moral leadership, and **heart-centredness** is the biggest protection against ego-centredness. Principle-centred leadership has long understood that whatever sits at the centre of someone's life, of their team and of their organization, whether private or public, will be the ultimate driver of the performance of that person, team or institution.

What is at the centre of your life? Think hard and be honest. Your behaviours and your choices will tell you the truth.

- Is it money?
- Is it success?
- Is it fame?
- Is it greed?
- Is it innovation?
- Is it efficiency?
- Is it 'I want to make a contribution in some area of need?'
- Is it love, wanting to go beyond yourself to benefit the lives of others for their good, not yours?

What sits at the centre drives you to do what you do. Is it **ego**, or is it **heart**? We have already explored ego in Chapter 6. Ego-centred leadership is where the centre of your drive is for you, to bolster up your fragile or incomplete sense of

who you are, to reinforce that you have worth in your own eyes and often therefore in the eyes of others:

- I want you to be impressed by me.
- I want you to think well of me.
- I want you to make me feel good about myself.

Ego life and ego leadership use external relationships or achievements to try to supply what is lacking within your own secure sense of who you are.

Heart-centred leadership is the outworking of three millennia of leadership wisdom that leadership and your life exist for the benefit of others. There are some basic questions you can ask yourself about the people who work with you to evaluate how heart centred you are:

- Is there evidence that my team grows, flourishes and develops under my leadership?
- Who is being served by whom in this conversation?
- Does my team have more bounded choice (empowered within agreed goals) to get on and get things done?
- Are the individuals on my team becoming bigger or smaller people?
- Is difference celebrated among our staff?
- Is generosity valued above charity or selfishness in our team's decisions?
- Do the most vulnerable members of the team become less vulnerable over time?
- Is sustainability a reality in all that my team does?

Ego or heart? This question requires you to conduct a searching and fearless moral leadership inventory of yourself, if you are going to get fit to lead others.

I hear some leaders defending themselves at this point by saying:

- 'I make my decisions based on ensuring the share price rises for the shareholders, therefore my focus *is* on others.'

or

- 'I make this company profitable, which gives all these people jobs and means that their families don't starve.'

That is their moral justification for making a whole host of dubious or immoral decisions. If you really were acting for the benefit of your staff's well-being, you wouldn't put profit before building a sustainable business, otherwise you would actually be undermining these workers' long-term security. They might easily lose their jobs and pensions if the company collapses through fraud. Let's follow this through a little further.

Roger Martin,³⁷ a strategic advisor who was named one of the world's leading business thinkers, said of shareholder value:

It isn't just about the money for shareholders, or even the dubious CEO behavior that our theories encourage. It's much bigger than that. Our theories of shareholder value maximization and stock-based compensation have the ability to destroy our economy and rot out the core of American capitalism.

A pervasive emphasis on the expectations market has reduced shareholder value, created misplaced and ill-advised incentives, generated inauthenticity in our executives, and introduced parasitic market players. **The moral authority of business diminishes with each passing year**, as customers, employees, and average citizens grow increasingly appalled by the behavior of business and the seeming greed of its leaders.

When I asked young high fliers in a Deutsche Bank leadership development programme why they thought the bank existed, they reflexively replied

'shareholder value'. These are the brightest, high-potential young people in one of the world's notable investment banks and among the 0.001% of best-educated minds. I kindly pointed out that their response was not only poor, but one that even such names as Jack Welch, Roger Martin or Stephen Green³⁸ would challenge. I asked these young people in front of me whether they had really committed their lives for twelve or more hours a day to ensure the share price was higher, so that an even smaller group of people could become rich?

When we get caught up in any system, we stop thinking intelligently about what it (the organization) is doing, what it is doing to us, what we are doing in it and what the consequences are if we carry on behaving in the way we currently are. (I define intelligence not by how many exams you passed with A* grades, but the more classical definition that focuses on your ability to think things through from their start to their logical consequences or impacts.) What is most worrying is that these young high fliers are the inheritors of a corporation where they have little connection to its founding roots and principles.

The truth is that DB was started to enable people in post-war Germany to get out of poverty, in a way that maintained their dignity and self-respect. That sounds like a worthy mission. If we look at the roots of Allen & Hanburys (now GSK), Amnesty International, Barclays Bank, Bethlehem Steel, Bradshaw's, Bryant and May, Carr's, C. & J. Clark (Clarks Shoes), Cornell University, Crosfield's (now a subsidiary of Ineos), Friends Provident, J. S. Fry & Sons, Greenpeace, Huntley and Palmers, Johns Hopkins University, John Fowler & Co., Lloyds Bank, Oxfam, Elias Rogers (evolved into Imperial Oil, now the Canadian subsidiary of Exxon), Rowntree's (now Rowntree Mackintosh, owned by Nestlé), Strawbridge and Clothier (now part of Macy's), Sony (formerly Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo) and Waterford Crystal – all of these were founded by people with a deep conviction that business exists for the social and economic benefit of others. They were all originally formed and shaped with heart at the centre.

Who do you exist for?

The key issue is that when you cut yourself, or your team or your organization, from a core and founding set of drivers, then you are open to the ego-driven pressures that lead to a different kind of moral decision. The removal of heart from business, politics and public organizations has seen the ground being prepared for the kinds of failures in moral leadership that we have witnessed. If the centre of what it means to get fit for moral leadership is the issue of heart, then the core question each of us has to answer at an individual level is: 'Who do I exist for?' The key question for any leader to answer is: 'Who does my leadership exist for?' And the key question for the board and the CEO to answer is: 'Who does this organization exist for?'

If the answer is still 'the shareholders', you need to challenge yourself to come up with a more intelligent answer. If by shareholders you mean literally those who will make money out of a rise in the company's share price, then this is a recipe for short-termism, relying on gambling on the market's possible performance and disaster.

As we saw earlier, there is a high correlation between some very 'successful' leaders and narcissistic tendencies. In that case, the answer from the narcissist to the question of who a particular organization exists for is: 'Me!'

None of us really wants to look in the mirror and say, 'It's all about me: my life is about me and my leadership is about me.' None of us really wants to say we have created all kinds of smoke and mirrors to justify the decisions we make and the systems we create to make *us* look successful, even when that success is built on very shaky sand.

So, if it's not yourself, then who are your life and your leadership existing for? Some might say, 'They exist for me, but I hope others benefit along the way.'

I spoke to one very successful owner of an international company about his style and approach to his staff, which were perceived by others as somewhere between bullying and high control. His response was that basically he paid them all extremely well and they wouldn't get that salary anywhere else,

so however much they might complain, they were locked in with golden handcuffs. How did that story end? Eventually the top leaders within the company confronted the chairman and said, 'He goes, or we go.' He went.

We are all good at rationalizing our own motives:

- 'I work all these crazy hours so that my spouse and kids can have a great house, private schools and a wonderful standard of living.'

But what do the spouse and kids actually want?

- 'I drive my team hard so we get the results and they all get their bonuses. They love me for it really.'

But what do the team actually think about their boss?

We all tell ourselves stories about our motives and why we do what we do that make us feel OK about ourselves. So you need to be honest with yourself when you look in the mirror and ask:

- How do I hope that people will benefit from my leadership?
- Will they become richer?
- Will they become better human beings?
- Will they develop greater self-confidence?
- Will they develop greater skills?

Of course, you may say that an organization exists for its stakeholders, by which you mean humanity. Then you are getting closer to the founding principles that were meant to undergird modern economies. Somewhere along the evolution of corporate business, we have lost our connection with the roots of why business exists. It's worth taking a little time to reflect on how we have, in many instances, lost the heart of leadership and therefore get the moral failures that are bound to follow. But the key question is whether you personally have lost or are gaining back the heart in your own leadership.

In the next two chapters, I want to spell out the heart of an organization in five ways – the economy, living a life without shame, power and self-interest, generosity not charity, and organizational culture.

11. Check Your Use of Power

Organizations and everyone exist in this thing we call the economy. It's the sea we all swim in. But what actually is the economy? Most of us haven't got a clue, because it seems so complicated and removed from our lives, and yet of course it affects all of those lives, from the price of a pint of milk, to whether your favourite retailer shuts down a hundred stores, to how your pension is doing.

It wasn't always that complicated and it was very well understood by the peasant and the farmer. The word 'economy' comes from the Greek word *oikos*, which means household. The economy was like a household where we all needed to work together to live decent lives. In this household *you* had cows and could produce milk, *I* had vineyards and could produce wine, *they* had fields and could produce wheat, *those others* had skills in turning wheat into bread, *my mate* reared pigs for meat and *their mate* grew vegetables. The economy was a system where we bartered with each other. This means we exchanged what we had for something our friends had, so we all benefited. As trading increased its borders beyond the village, we needed currency to act as a promise of how much my cows were worth against your pint of milk. The driver of the *oikos*, the economy, was the protection and strengthening of the local community. The key value behind the economy was that everyone participated and everyone benefited.

What is important in our discussion about moral leadership and doing the right thing is this idea of a household, of everyone's interconnectedness. Today we may not be worrying about the interconnectedness of our cows, wine, bread or vegetables, but in 2008 we found out the painful reality that there is a huge interconnectedness between a bus driver in the USA taking out a \$400,000 mortgage he was sold by an unscrupulous estate agent, propped up by a profit-driven financial sector, run by ego-centric bosses, and a homeowner somewhere in middle England, who felt the impact when the system collapsed. We suddenly realized that all of these 'rooms' in the 'household' that had seemed so totally unrelated were in fact one household, one *oikos*, one economy.

Getting fit for moral leadership is looking at the interconnectedness of all our decisions on the visible stakeholders whom we may know *and* the invisible stakeholders whose faces we may never see. The economy isn't about money (it uses money as its currency) – it is about the interconnectedness of our livelihoods, our salaries, our expenses, our houses. When the sales 'bodybuilders', as they were called, of subprime mortgages sold a product they knew their buyers couldn't afford, they didn't care at all about the knock-on effects of their decisions, any more than the finance houses cared about the impact on tens of thousands of lives resulting from their decisions.

When you are learning to drive a car, developing peripheral vision is probably the most important skill you can learn. You don't simply focus on what is going on in front of you, but keep an eye out for what is going on around you and how your behaviour is affecting others, as much they are seeing how their behaviour is affecting you. Getting fit for moral leadership means **learning** how to think **interdependently**:

- **Learning** – we have to invest time in teaching new leaders, in all areas of life, how to think morally; we can't assume such thinking patterns happen automatically – they don't.
- **Interdependently** – everything is connected and all your choices have ripples of impact on seen and unseen stakeholders.

So moral thinking is an interdependent way of thinking that has to be learned.

It's about living a life without shame

Adam Smith, one of the founders of the modern economy, wrote a book in 1759 called *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which basically underlined the point that however selfish a person is, there are some principles that make them human. We understand that our personal happiness is bound up in the happiness of those around us; we feel some pain when we see the pain of others; and we take an innate pleasure in seeing that we have done something good for someone

else. Empathy is our basic human condition, which we either develop as we grow up or we lose. It was on this foundational understanding of what it means to be human that Smith then wrote the key work that most people know him for, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776).

Why does this bit of history matter? Because we have lost our connection with the moral roots of the economy, and this has had a great impact on the moral decisions we make in the workplace. Let me explain.

Adam Smith did not say that the economy was all about money, money, money. He said that the purpose of the economy was to create **prosperity**. But he used the original definition of that word. Today, prosperity is often defined as three smart cars, a huge house and a second home at the beach. The original Latin definition, the one Smith was using, means 'towards hope'. The economy is designed to bring hope to everyone. He spelt this out even further when he said that prosperity, or hope, means everyone living a 'life without shame'. He defined it even more when he said that living a life without shame means everyone should have a shirt on their back. When people are poor and walking around the streets in rags, then we look at them and say, 'Gosh, they are poor.' And the poor feel the shame of it. You don't need a shirt on your back to survive in biological terms, but you do need a shirt on your back if you are to live a life without shame.

So when Smith envisioned the modern economy, he saw it as individuals and organizations that would ensure that everyone was out of the poverty trap, that everyone had a life of dignity and value. This was not some vague religious or philosophical ideal, but the very purpose for which business exists. Some people might say that Smith wrote those words a very long time ago and life has moved on. Not so. Economist and Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen, economist Tim Jackson, philosopher Martha Nussbaum and researchers Kate Pickett and Richardson Wilkinson all underline the same point. The household, the *oikos*, the economy has a moral compass and that is to create the opportunity of human flourishing, a world where people are able to participate in the 'household' to create a living for themselves, participate in their society, feel secure, belong

somewhere, have a common purpose with others, all within the finite resources of this one planet. The economy, rightly understood, is like a moral compass for all leaders to work for and work within.

It's about power and (self-)interest

If the opportunity of the 'household', the economy, is for everyone to work together to ensure a life without shame then, as the research published in *The Spirit Level*³⁹ shows, it is in everyone's interest to narrow the gap between those who have and those who don't have. If we do, everyone is better off in terms of life expectancy, health and happiness, and there will be lower rates of teenage pregnancy, violence, obesity, imprisonment and addiction, as well as a sustainable future for the planet. But of course, there is another side of human nature that *wants* at the expense of others.

All of this assumes that people will use their personal power in the interests of others, not themselves. If we use our power for the benefit of others, as the economy was designed to do, then people will benefit in terms of true prosperity and human flourishing. If we use our power for our own interests, or even the interests of our small 'tribe' (family, team, church group, etc.), then we make others smaller and we make ourselves smaller people in the process, because this goes against one of those earlier principles that are hard-wired into how things are – everything is interdependent. If we hurt someone else, we hurt ourselves.

There are many kinds of power and they can all be used to lift people up or to push people down:

- **Financial power** – If I have more money than you, I have more opportunity and more options in everything, from the food I eat, to the education I receive, to the neighbourhood I live in, to the quality of my healthcare, and to the possessions I can buy.

- **Physical power** – If I am stronger than you, I can make you do what I want, from fighting you in a war to oppressing you through domestic violence.
- **Knowledge power** – For example, I know how to be creative with my taxes and you don't; I know how to eat well and look after my body and you don't.
- **Education power** – If I went to an elite school or have a good degree, I am likely to have opportunities that you don't have if you're less well educated.
- **Gender power** – If I'm a man, I'm likely to earn more than you if you're a woman, and to have a more high-profile job.
- **Hierarchical power** – If I'm your boss, I hold the key to whether you keep your job or get a pay rise.
- **Political power** – If I'm in power, I can choose who gets looked after and who doesn't.
- **Police power** – In some countries, if I'm a police officer I'm the last person you would turn to in a crisis, because law enforcers are responsible for more violence against vulnerable people than any other group.
- **Organizational power** – If I'm an employer, I decide who gets a job and how much people are paid, and I also control which suppliers have favoured status and which don't.
- **Corruption power** – If I'm corrupt, I may control who has opportunities and who doesn't, who faces justice and who avoids the consequences of their actions.
- **Donor power** – If I give large sums to an international development organization, I decide which projects get funded and which don't.

- **Parental power** – In the early years of a child’s life especially, if I’m a parent I can choose between empowerment and oppression, between persuasion and coercion, or even between love and violence.

Nevertheless, the central issue isn’t power itself, but how we use it. We all have some kind of power. If I have a shirt on my back, I have power; if I have clean water, I have power; if I have knowledge, I have power; if I have physical strength, I have power. What is central is what I do with even the limited power I have, and for whose benefit I use it.

I once heard the late Chinua Achebe, winner of the Nobel prize for literature, say:

Leadership is a sacred trust ... on behalf of others.

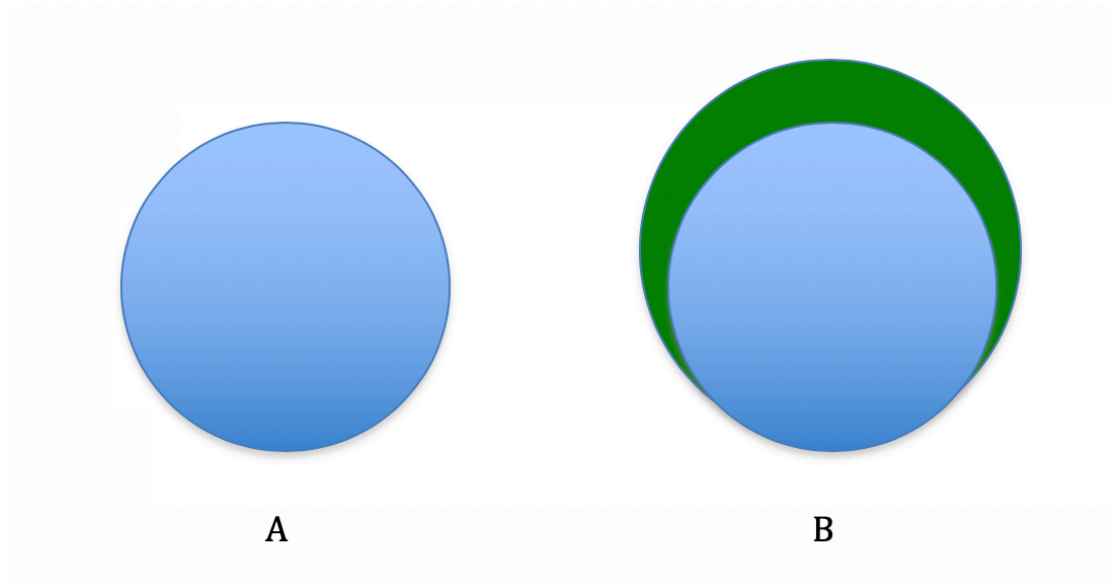
On behalf of. Leadership exists *for the benefit of* others. We should use our personal and organizational power to lift people up to their potential, not push them down for our own gain.

It’s about generosity, not charity

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is something that has come to the forefront of thinking about business over the past decade or so. The concept was created to counteract the criticism that business had become too self-centred.

Organizations were making profits, but who was actually benefiting? They were being seen to draw out of the community they were based in, or some might say to exploit it, but it was not obvious what they were putting back into it.

The question to ask about CSR is whether it’s based on charity or generosity. How do you tell the difference? The answer is whether we are giving from the edge or the centre of our wealth. Charity, whether personal or corporate, gives from the edge. We have a resource (A) and we feel we can afford to share a little of it with others (B).



That narrow outer circle is called charity. It's giving from the edge of our personal or corporate 'wealth'. The way you can tell if it's charity or generosity is what happens when the wealth gets smaller. Does our giving then get smaller too? That £20 a month we give to sponsor a child – do we reduce it to £10 or zero if we hit harder times? And if we do reduce our giving, is it the first or last thing that goes from our expenditure? Does the weekly bottle of wine stay or go first? Does the company's tax-deductible £5,000-a-year donation to a local school remain in place when profits go down by 5% in a particular year?

Generosity is the visible embodiment of putting heart back into the leadership of an organization. Generosity hard-wires investment in others into the core of the business. TOMS Shoes was started on the principle of generosity, and the company hard-wired giving into turnover, not profit. Firms like Marks & Spencer and The Body Shop have sought to hard-wire sustainability into their way of doing business. Charity doesn't challenge the heart, whereas generosity does.

Moreover, charity can be a subtle (or not so subtle) form of 'power over'. It can be based on control: 'We will give you this gift... if you spend it how we think you should spend it.' This kind of donor money can reduce the dignity of the recipient, who is always left having to demonstrate that they are grateful to the giver. Even using the word 'poor' or 'slum' can diminish the dignity of the

receiver. As I was once told, 'Don't insult us by keeping on calling us "poor" to your stakeholders; this isn't a slum, it's where we live, my home, my people.'

True generosity recognizes the centrality of humans and humanity to any endeavour and puts the growth of people at the centre of all we do.

Let's take a final look at the moral heart of a leader by considering what it means to do the right thing within the challenging arena of the organization itself.

12. Create ‘Us’, not ‘Me’ – Getting the Organization Fit for Moral Leadership

As a consultant, I spent my days in and out of many different organizations. By working with senior leaders, managers, executives and their teams, I got a bird's-eye view of what it was like to ‘live’ inside that organization. To be honest, there were some buildings I couldn't wait to get out of, even though the individuals I worked with were invariably really great people. Something happens when a lot of people are employed under one roof. All of that reasonably decent and good personal energy somehow combines to create a dynamic within the organization overall. A new, subtle force begins to emerge that shifts from the individual ‘this is how I go about my work’ to ‘this is how we do things round here’. This subtle force, which every single organization has, is called the organizational culture.

The reason I want to talk about this for a moment is that the organizational culture has an effect on the individual. It doesn't matter who you are, you are not immune. The culture exerts a pressure on every individual to behave and think in a certain way. Some organizations even *call* it a ‘Way’ – ‘The HP Way’ or ‘The Logica Way’. The Way is meant to be a set of values that the organization believes and lives by.

Enron had a clear set of values that every new employee learned at their induction into the company:

Respect. We treat others as we would like to be treated ourselves. We do not tolerate abusive or disrespectful treatment. Ruthlessness, callousness and arrogance don't belong here.

Integrity. We work with customers and prospects openly, honestly and sincerely. When we say we will do something, we will do it; when we say we cannot or will not do something, then we won't do it.

Communication. We have an obligation to communicate. Here we take the time to talk with one another... and to listen. We believe that information is meant to move and that information moves people.

Excellence. We are satisfied with nothing less than the very best in everything we do. We will continue to raise the bar for everyone. The great fun here will be for all of us to discover just how good we can really be.

These were the values that Enron said it aspired to for every one of its workers and the values that should have controlled 'the way we do things around Enron'. But as it turned out, this *aspired way* wasn't the *actual way* that controlled the workforce at the company.

The unseen culture

Corporate culture is the force field that is actually operating in any organization, the hidden pressures on people to act in a certain way. The reason some people call this culture the *spirit* of the organization is because it can't be actually seen, but it is most definitely experienced by staff. It is the reason people work the hours they do, make the decisions they make, put pressure on other people or encourage them, challenge dubious behaviour in superiors or fail to do so, speak respectfully or disrespectfully to each other, manipulate or empower each other. These hidden pressures, usually created and reinforced from the top down, are what get embedded into how the organization operates in a day-to-day, moment-by-moment way. What is created are informal systems and a culture that supports or undermines moral decision-making. The unseen corporate culture, rather than any visible mission or vision statement, is what governs what values are embodied in the lives of the leaders and the relationships and processes of the organization.

The idea that organizational culture is 'the way we do things round here' sounds reasonable at face value, but what it doesn't tell you is that often

organizational culture means ‘this is the way you *have* to do things round here if you’re to fit in, to be “one of us”’. Another phrase is cultural norms – ‘these behaviours are normal round here’, which implies ‘these other behaviours aren’t normal, aren’t rewarded, aren’t supported, aren’t tolerated’. Cultural norms are like an offshore undercurrent. You can’t see it on the surface, but it exerts a huge force on you to go in a certain direction, even when you don’t want to.

Embedding the desired values and creating a culture where moral leadership is the everyday substance of everything doesn’t happen by accident. A strong, healthy culture requires a robust and constant investment in the organization from top to bottom. When culture-building is done well, it doesn’t stop morally bad decisions from being made, but it does mean that there is no place to hide if you make such a decision, whether you’re the CEO or the janitor.

Moreover, the culture either makes moral leadership easier, or it makes it a lot harder. Jim Whitehurst describes the difference in his move from chief operating officer at Delta to CEO at Red Hat, an Open Source software company. At Delta the structure was strongly hierarchical and no one would dare challenge the boss for fear of losing their job. In contrast, at Red Hat the culture supported challenging anyone in the search for the best outcomes, even if that someone was the CEO.

Moral decision-making

I discovered a great example of culture-building to support strong moral decision-making in the British Army⁴⁰ (put aside whether you think war is moral or not, for a moment). How does it excel in building a culture of moral leadership that works at every level of the organization?

First, the values-embedding process starts from day 1 for the new recruit. There are three pillars to every part of a soldier’s life, of which moral leadership is one. Then, because everyone knows the values from day 1, moral leadership is evaluated and discussed in every decision a soldier makes. Moral decision-making is thus reinforced throughout a soldier’s training. All the way through

induction, classroom training, live modelling of situations and understanding the law that underpins moral decision-making, a soldier learns to think within a moral framework for every decision.

Next, the Army's performance management system ensures that no soldier has just one line manager. This safeguards objectivity to make sure that there is always another ear or another voice in an ambiguous situation. Soldiers are taught how to think through the implications of their values in 'what if this happens... what if that happens' scenarios. They also undergo peer critique of their decision-making. On top of this, soldiers are taught from the beginning to speak truth to power through confidence-building and learning to separate the authority figure from the morality of what they are being asked to do. They are encouraged explicitly to challenge any decision that they feel is unlawful. A failure in moral courage is seen as among the worst of failures.

Take one practical training exercise. The British Army uses a version of Laser Quest as part of training its soldiers to think in terms of moral leadership. The soldiers are taken, fully equipped, into a virtual reality warehouse with a full-sized screen. A live scene is acted out in front of them and they have to respond in real time. If they fire a bullet, that bullet is tracked by a computer to mark who fired it, what or who they fired it at and when. After the session is complete, a video replay is conducted with the squad to debrief them on the whole exercise. The purpose of the debrief is to get each soldier fit for moral leadership by helping them learn to think about each choice they make through a moral lens. The conversation might go something like this:

Captain: 'The video shows you fired fifteen rounds of ammunition at 07.57, why did you do that?'

Soldier: 'The enemy opened fire and so I fired back.'

Captain: 'What was behind the enemy who was firing at you?'

Soldier: 'A building, I think.'

Captain: 'What did you see in the building? What kind of building was it?'

Soldier: 'I don't know, Sir.'

Captain (replays the video in slow motion): 'Behind the enemy was a building, which was marked Kindergarten, and there were children at the window. The fifteen rounds you fired killed two children and injured three others.'

The purpose of these video exercises is to try to teach soldiers to think morally in a safe setting, so that their minds have laid down the mental networks, the defaults, to hopefully make better decisions in real life. They are taught that every action isn't just 'one room', but part of an interdependent 'household' or economy.

The question for those of us who are leading organizations is: how much time do we devote to running our own versions of Laser Quest? What is more, how much time do business schools give to running a version of Laser Quest for MBA students to help them develop moral leadership? I did my own unofficial research in conversations with MBA students on these issues and drew responses like: 'We didn't cover any of this stuff at business school.'

Supporting moral leadership

What should we conclude about creating an organizational culture that supports staff to 'do the right thing'?

First, moral leadership has to be hard-wired into the culture of the organization if you want to support individuals to make moral decisions. This doesn't excuse any individual leader from taking responsibility for their own decisions, but it makes it infinitely easier for them to do so. There is a pivotal moment in all moral decisions, a moment when you are confronted with a choice and there is that big feeling that overwhelms you – the pressure to take the easy road, the quiet road, the hidden (for now) road, the short-term road, the non-confrontational road, the peaceful (for now) road.

It's at that pivot point that you need to call on what you've developed in the leadership gym:

- The support of the people around you (more on this in Chapter 14, 'Build Team You').
- A clear moral compass of your own (see Chapter 9, 'Develop a Leadership Compass').
- Courage (see the final chapter, Grow Your Courage – the Door Out').
- Wisdom (see Chapter 16, 'Navigate the Moral Maze').
- An organizational culture that supports you to do the right thing, rather than making it harder.

These are what you need to support you to do the right thing. These are the leadership muscles that will help anyone over that internal bump, that pivot point, that big feeling inside that you wish would go away, when confronted by tough moral decisions as a leader.

13. Invest in a Balanced Life

It's never fun to fall over. My scarred knees are testimony to a childhood full of doing that! There's that awful moment when the solid ground you thought was there suddenly isn't and you can feel yourself out of control and headed towards a painful landing. Losing balance almost always leads to falling over – and falling over in leadership-speak is making a bad strategic or moral decision. What do the early symptoms of losing balance look like in the leadership world?

- You get overtired
- You get overstressed
- You become disconnected from any nurturing relationships
- You're not sleeping properly
- You develop bad eating habits
- You find yourself in ill health and bad physical shape
- You start to fall under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- You begin to engage in risky behaviours like gambling

The key point is this: If moral leadership is about doing the right thing, then you are most at risk of *not* doing the right thing when your life is out of balance.

It is when you are off balance that you make the worst decisions.

You're exhausted and running on fumes. You come into work and you just take a short-cut decision to get that task off your desk. The decision is made on the basis of easing your pain, rather than whether it is wise. You are totally stressed out when the boss asks you to restate your numbers so they look better for the auditors and you haven't got the strength in you to challenge him. Your partner and the kids need you to be bringing in this level of income, so you

daren't risk your job... and so it goes on. Losing balance happens most often when you're in your wrong mind, rather than your right mind.

I speak from experience here. I've had one full burnout and definitely two or three very near misses. What I discovered is that you can burn out in a host of ways: emotionally, physically, mentally, morally or spiritually. Burnout simply means that what you are taking out of your human system is more than you are putting into it. Burnout means that your fuel tank of resources is empty. When you're out of balance you don't have the resource of courage to draw on, the strength to push back, the emotional bandwidth to cope with a period of unhappy stakeholders.

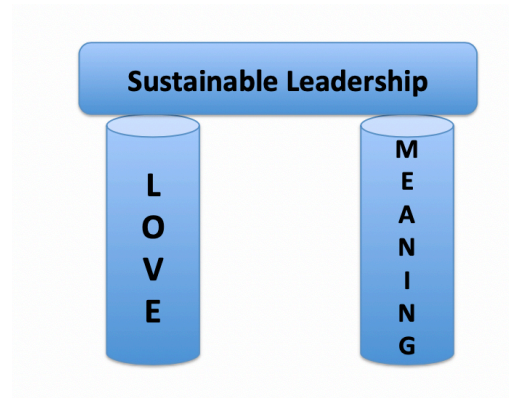
Learning to spot the signs of imbalance is crucial for a leader and those signs are probably different for each of us. For me, the amber light starts flashing when I notice that I'm not exercising regularly, not reading regularly and not listening to music. A couple of other warning lights are more subtle, but I have come to pay attention to them. One is when I sense I'm getting more easily angered or irritated by other people. The other is when I feel a kind of internal black hole approaching: the work has lost its joy and doesn't seem to give me anything any longer. For you it could be noticing that you're spending less time with your partner or the children, or less time doing a favourite energizing hobby, or mindlessly watching TV shows you aren't really interested in, or playing hours of computer games. What is key is that you learn to spot your own set of symptoms.

I'd like to share two points of wisdom on how to keep balance in your leadership life in order to keep you fully resourced and more likely to do the right thing.

Love and meaning

I remember a period in my life when I felt worn out and ragged. It had been a time of great personal and work stress and I felt like I was running on empty. Around that time a friend came by and drew for me a simple picture of two

pillars. Across the top of the pillars is your ability to lead well – ‘Sustainable Leadership’. One pillar is ‘Love’ and the other pillar is ‘Meaning’. What she explained to me very gently was that we need both pillars to sustain good leadership.



Love is about our relationships – being close to and connected with a few people: people we can be honest with, people we don’t have to censor ourselves with, people we can share the ‘first shitty draft’ of our lives with, as Brené Brown⁴¹ calls it. Why is this important? Because we are humans and not machines. When we work so hard that we aren’t investing in building authentic relationships, then we are quietly draining our tank. We need love. It’s part of who we are.

Meaning is also important – we want to do something that matters, that’s meaningful, even if it’s just meaningful for us. Getting results, making something happen, achieving and success – all fall into this pillar of meaning. Some people call it the balance of being (love) and doing (meaning). Both matter and so investing in both pillars is vital to living a balanced life.

As a result, I have got into the habit of asking myself these questions at regular intervals:

- How are my relationships?
- Am I investing in my key relationships?
- Does what I am doing give me some sense of meaning or purpose?
- Am I just going through the motions at work?

The four dials of balance

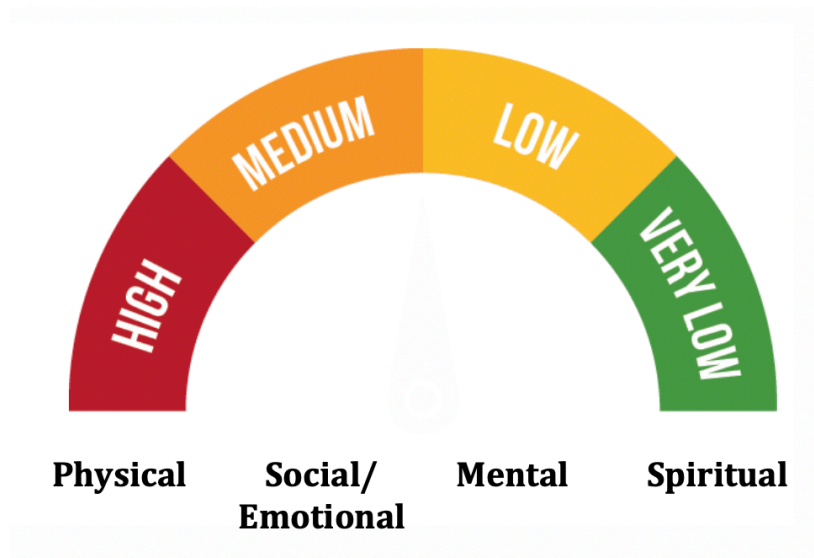
Earlier this year we installed solar panels on our house and I'm learning to monitor our electricity flow for the first time in my life. After the initial scare of the technology, I'm quite enjoying it. I can see when the solar panels are producing energy for what we need; I can see when we're actually building up more than we need (it then goes into heating our water); but I can also see when we're using more electricity than the solar power is producing, when our drain on the system is costing us. It's a similar principle to a car: is it full of petrol or is it emptying of petrol? Fuel in or fuel out? How do I know whether its full, half full, close to empty or dangerously running on fumes? I know because I'm watching the dials on the dashboard. It's not just fuel indicators on a dashboard, it's also engine revs, engine heat and speed on the road – a few basic but crucial bits of information that translate into me being able to take action when the car is getting low/fast/hot. What is certain is that once you're running on fumes, a breakdown is very close. And it's the same for a leader: when your resources are too low, you are vulnerable to any of the different forms of breakdown – physical, social/emotional, mental or spiritual.

I heard one well-known leader speaking soon after his burnout and he shared a simple piece of wisdom, based on the dials on a car dashboard. What he'd realized was that his burnout hadn't come suddenly, it had been gradual over time, and that it wasn't just one thing draining his resources, it was a range of things. Simply put, some things fill up your resource tanks and some things drain them, and the secret is knowing the difference.

Leading yourself means knowing yourself well, and knowing what drains you and fills you up is a vital muscle to develop in the leadership gym. A leader needs to be able to say:

- 'I'm running on empty at the moment.'
- 'I'm dangerously low, I need some time out.'
- 'I am vulnerable to making bad judgements and decisions right now.'

Knowing whether I find relationships energizing or draining, or knowing whether doing admin tasks fills up my tanks or empties them, helps me to monitor my input and output on four key dials. Where are you in your level of resourcefulness and energy in each area? Is it up there on ten and full, or is it down at one and in the red zone?



As an exercise, take each dial in turn and rate yourself on a scale of 1–10 (1 is almost empty; 10 is full) and then ask yourself: ‘What can I do in this area to put fuel back in the tank?’

Physical

It’s easy to assume you’re physically in good shape, but it’s important to check. I’ve had two different cancers and a genetic blood disorder diagnosed, and in each case they were picked up early by proactive routine checks. It’s important for busy leaders to take a physical inventory of themselves regarding fitness, stamina, eating habits and general health. Take the silent killer – high blood pressure. Leaders under stress are very susceptible to high blood pressure. It can kill you slowly or quickly, but it isn’t called the ‘silent killer’ for nothing – often you don’t know your blood pressure is high. Your general fitness level, regular exercise, cholesterol level, weight... these are all indicators of what shape you’re in.

What can you do to put fuel back into the physical tank?

- Go to a Wellman or Wellwoman clinic for a full physical health check.
- Get up from your desk once an hour and go for a short walk.
- Get a fitness monitor to make sure you're doing at least 10,000 steps a day.
- Increase your physical activity.
- Get your cholesterol checked and eat more healthily.

Make your own list of actions and carry them out consistently.

Social/emotional

Do this little test. Think of someone at work who you love talking to. Imagine them walking up to your desk and you instinctively feel energized. Now, think of someone else you'd prefer to avoid. Imagine them approaching your desk and you immediately close down and want to pretend that you're busy. Some relationships are energizing and others are just plain draining. Some conversations, especially the difficult ones, drain us and others fill us with new energy.

There are people in your life who never ask you anything about you, or if they do, they never ask the follow-up questions that signal that they are actually interested in what you think, rather than simply going through the motions. These are the people who take and not give. Surround yourself with givers rather than takers.

Some relationship situations are draining, like conflict, a difficult performance review, some board meetings or having to fire people. If you travel for a hundred miles in your car, then you know your fuel tank is going to be depleted and you need to put fuel back in the tank. It's the same with draining emotional relationships. The danger is that if you have a day filled with multiple difficult conversations, on top of long hours and little positive human interaction with someone who loves you, your social/emotional reserve tanks will be empty. You need to counterbalance a draining meeting or encounter with a nourishing

input of some kind: a restorative action like phoning a friend, going for a walk round the park, or reading two pages of a novel you're enjoying.

I used to train business coaches. Once I met a guy I had trained years earlier and asked how he was doing.

'I'm fine... now,' he said.

That response hit my curiosity button, so I probed a little deeper. He said he'd had a breakdown and it had taken a while to recover. He was in HR and had to lead the company through a downsizing operation. Day after day he'd sat in front of scores of people to tell them they were being made redundant and he'd had to experience their anger and desperation as they faced how they would tell their families, pay for their mortgages and cope with the loss of self-esteem. What he hadn't paid attention to was that every single conversation had drained his emotional resources. Eventually, his mind and body mounted an insurrection and demanded that he stop and refuel.

A quick note here: the rule of thumb is that it will take you as long to recover from a breakdown as it did to create it in the first place. A breakdown normally builds up over a few years, so it can take a few years to get back up to strength. Prevention is much, much wiser than cure.

What actions do you need to take to ensure that you are taking care of your emotional/social tank each day? How do you ensure that you are meeting people who fill you up and doing things that emotionally recharge you?

Mental

I had an interesting experience with the leadership team of a company I was working with. We were going to spend some time on strategy issues, so I thought I would start by 'humanizing' the meeting a little. I asked them all to share what they were reading at the moment. Embarrassed silence followed. Either they weren't reading or they cited some book they had read a year ago. When leaders stop learning, they stop growing. The idea that we go to university and study

hard and then get a job and then work hard is a dangerous model for anyone, let alone a leader.

Developing your mental capacity is vital for three reasons. First, you need to keep on growing the use of your thinking capacities. Your brain is the most underdeveloped and underused organ in your body. It is filled with billions of neural pathways, and there is limitless opportunity to learn more and learn how to think more effectively.

Secondly, knowledge even within your own area of expertise is developing all the time, and if you don't continually broaden your thinking then you will be leading this year on last year's knowledge (or even older), which is dangerous. Old thinking can provide good wisdom, but it can also provide very limited scope for good decision-making.

Thirdly, you need to develop your mental capacity as a leader in order to develop perspective on your challenges. Reading things that have nothing to do with work but stretch your thinking, or that are completely at odds with your own favourite viewpoints, is vital to keep a healthy leadership mind. One great thing for leaders is the podcast: stretching material delivered straight to your earpiece while you're travelling home on the train. Learning to ringfence mental training, reading or listening time, is a vital investment for any leader.

Spiritual

I was having breakfast with some business leaders in India. It was my first time in this vibrant and challenging subcontinent. Very quickly they began talking about issues of life's meaning and spirituality, almost in the same breath as discussing business challenges. At a respectful gap in the conversation, I asked them all a question that was burning inside me: 'Do you always talk like this to each other in a business conversation? Where I come from no one dares to talk about these areas at work.'

They thought my question was odd, because for them body, mind, emotions, spirit are all part of simply being human, so why wouldn't your conversations naturally wander across the whole domain of humanness? For

them it was just more evidence of how we have compartmentalized our lives in the West. For many people work is work, home is home and spiritual is spiritual or non-existent, but most definitely private and not for the work context.

Let me redefine that word spiritual in terms of **what gives your life meaning**. Every leader has a finite life of a certain number of years and the reality is that we all make some kind of sense of the short time we have on Earth. We all have a view – philosophy, spirituality, call it what you will – that we use to explain to ourselves why we are here, whether there is more to life than can be apprehended with our five senses and whether it all ends with death. It's also true that no one caught up in a disaster is worried about work as the ultimate issue of life and death – the phone calls of the dying are to those they love. If you do not continually invest in what gives your life meaning, then at some point you will experience spiritual burnout – a place where what you do, however successful, is meaningless and feels empty and pointless.

The key is to decide what gives your life its meaning and then invest in that thing. Even if it's as simple as 'my family is what gives my life meaning', then how much time and how much of your best energies are you actually investing in your family each day? If it's some kind of view of the divine, then are you actually investing time each day in some form of spiritual practice like meditation or prayer?

I want to take this idea of mindfulness and meditation a little further, simply because for thousands of years people of wisdom have known that there is a way to calm the inner pace of our busy lives. Let me explain.

I have come to value my regular visits to a chiropractor, not simply to fix a problem, but as a good life investment. The spine is at the centre of everything in our body, since it carries the main highway of our internal communication system. A healthy spine plays out in a much healthier body. The purpose of the chiropractor is not to fix anything, but to realign what has been put out of shape by the daily rigours and pressures of life. Anyone who has been to a chiropractor will know the slight humiliation of trying to push back on the practitioner's pressure on some part of your body and simply not having the power to push

back. The chiropractor then does a few adjustments and suddenly you discover you do have the necessary power. Where did this energy come from? It resulted from a simple realignment of the spine.

The same is true with the pressures of leadership. Leadership often requires periods of sustained pressure – some you can control, some you can't. Making new hires, cutting costs, trying to gain more funding, difficult performance conversations, trying to keep up with growth opportunities... the list is endless. When your body is out of shape, it can't perform certain basic functions, it can't push back against the pressure. The same is true in moral leadership. Pressure bends you out of shape in often silent ways and it is only when you are called on to act that you find you don't have the power. You know what you ought to do, what the right thing to do is, but you simply don't have the power to push back – you lack the power to resist that boss or stick with a long-term decision rather than short-term gain. What's the answer? You need to stay aligned, to follow practices that realign you in heart, mind and body so that you are strong enough to make the moral calls when they are needed.

Meditation is a historical way of realigning yourself. It is no surprise that Steve Jobs discovered it as a daily practice in the later stages of his career, or that Nelson Mandela meditated for twenty minutes a day, even for all those years in prison. Google, AOL, Apple and Aetna all offer meditation and mindfulness classes for employees, and the top executives of many major corporations say that meditation has made them better leaders. Journalist and entrepreneur Ariana Huffington had a collapse at her desk with burnout before she woke up to the need to practise daily realignment in the form of meditation. Ford Motor Company chairman Bill Ford, former Google.org director Larry Brilliant and Oprah Winfrey, to name but a few, all point in the same direction.

In essence, meditation provides a silent place where you can let go of the ego noise, a place to stop being so attached to all those things you thought you needed to be doing, a place to hear for yourself just how addicted you have become to success, long hours, being right, thinking or feeling or you wouldn't cope – and to discover a reconnection with all of yourself, rather than just a

limited part. Meditation is a well-recognized path to energizing yourself in a way that turns the power back on for you to do the right thing.

Keeping your eyes on these four dials, knowing what depletes you and what invests new energy and resources, and building daily disciplines and habits that invest in your physical, mental, social/emotional and spiritual reserves are all crucial to living a balanced life as a leader.

14. Build Team You

I used to cycle race when I was young. When I got good, I got a coach. Often we think that getting a coach is a remedial step, but one thing that all sportspeople know is that you cannot get the best out of yourself on your own. You need people around you who can help you find and use all your resources.

International cyclist Chris Froome recently won an outstanding race in Italy, but it took a team of over thirty people to make it happen.

Every high performer needs a team. Nowhere is this truer than in the dimension of doing the right thing, of moral leadership. You need a team, for at least ten good reasons.

1. Because the nature of reality is that it's interdependent

The world is interdependent. That's the way it is. Try to live an independent life in an interdependent world, as if you can make it on your own, and you will bruise yourself against reality. Every cause has an effect; every decision has an impact. The African leadership philosophy Ubuntu literally means 'I am because we are' – my well-being is tied to your well-being, my humanity is tied to my acknowledging your humanity. I cannot become who I fully am without you.

2. Because we can't get the best out of ourselves

It sounds a little obvious, but all we can see is not all there is. I can't see my back. It's real, but it's unseen to me. With the help of someone else, I can work on the parts of me that I can see, as well as my blind spots that I can't see. For instance, I did a conference talk recently. I prepared the best way I could, but then I took my presentation to a coach and he helped me find at least 30% more effectiveness in what I ended up presenting. Whether it's gaining more courage, more skill, more

effort, more wisdom, you need others to help you find the extra that already exists within you, but that you cannot access on your own.

3. Because of the ego

Your ego wants you to be the ruler, to be the best, to be the star, to be the winner, to be noticed. But your ego is often bent on doing almost anything other than admit it's wrong or limited or doesn't know something. The ego struggles with humility, with saying 'I don't know what to do here'. The ego is what will trap your personal leadership in self-justifying choices that may be dangerous choices.

4. Because of your 'cracks'

As you saw in Chapter 6, there are cracks in everything. Everyone is a little broken, fragile and messed up at some level. We all have our weaknesses, which show themselves in different ways in the work context. Highly sexualized behaviour, alcohol, gambling addictions, arrogance, deferring to hierarchy, conflict avoidance – these are just a few of the many behaviours that happen when pressured organizational leaders try to find ways of coping with their stressful jobs. You need people who know you and your fragilities and can help you to work within, or compensate for, the cracks.

5. Because you only have a small part (however visible) of the whole

However good you are, you don't have all the knowledge, all the skill, all the perspective, all the courage, all the influence. Humility requires that you see what you do have, but also what you don't have, and to be OK with others having what you don't have. As leaders like Richard Rohr⁴² point out, 'you're just not that important'. Everyone wins when we all win, not by one person in a solo

performance. Even if one person fronts the team, everyone needs to bring their best and unique contribution to make up the complete performance.

6. Because you get tired

Even great performers get tired: they have peaks and troughs of energy and concentration. That's why I love to watch professional cycle racing. When the team leader gets tired, the whole team work around them to bring food, water, take the strain of the headwinds and the relentless pace. When leaders get tired they do stupid things, make unwise decisions, take short cuts. You need people around you who can see the signs of your tiredness and ensure you live a balanced life. You need people around you who will tell you to go home, go to a therapist, get a coach, take a break, not take yourself too seriously, and point out where you are becoming irritated with others. You need people who can ensure you have the extra strength, or courage, to make moral decisions when your tiredness may tempt you to take the easy, short-term road.

7. Because you will be tempted

Temptations to the leader come in many forms. You may be tempted to do it all yourself and not train up the next generation to be leaders. You may be tempted to seek approval, to go after extra profit in order to get the extra bonus. You may be tempted to keep quiet when you should speak up, or tempted to speak up when you should be quiet. You may be tempted to put performance over values, self-interest over empathy. On top of these are all the temptations to addictions, abuse, seeking luxury or fame. You need people in your team who know you well and can call you out when they notice the temptations facing you and see the potential for a dangerous response.

8. Because you need transparency and accountability

All moral leadership requires a context of accountability and transparency. That's what organizational governance is all about, whether you are a private, public or charitable enterprise. Transparency and accountability are your safeguards. Proactively choosing to share your decision-making with your team or your boss keeps you leading with a third eye on your work. It's not a case of 'Big Brother is watching me', it's a case of 'If I can make my decisions in the light of other people's gaze, then I and the organization are safer for it'. One of the early warning signs is starting to hide work from others. Leaders who begin getting secretive about their expenses, their call sheets, their proposals, their ideas, their sales sheets, their conversations are beginning on the slippery slope to bad decisions.

9. Because you need grace and grit

High performance requires two things – support and challenge. Both of these come from others. You need a team who can provide support and who can also provide challenge. Ken Wilbur calls these grace and grit.⁴³ You need people who can tell you that you're doing a great job and you need those same people to be able to say, 'That last marketing meeting, it felt like you were trying to score one over the others and it created tension in the room.'

When someone says this, you may well hear a defensive response like, 'No I didn't. They just didn't get the point.' It's then that you need the grit of friends on your team, who can say, 'Listen, I'm for you, I'm on your side, but it looked to me like you were so engrossed in what you were trying to say, you lost your third eye on what was happening in the room.'

You need a team with grace, because leadership is a challenge and your strength comes from encouragement. But you also need a team with grit, who won't back down just because your ego wants to be right.

10. Because you need a strong feedback loop

The importance of feedback is that it connects your intentions with your impact. You might make a decision with the intention of increasing profit, but feedback tells you whether you did actually achieve that profit, and at whose expense and how sustainable it is. You might have an honest conversation with a co-worker with the intention of helping them to perform better, but feedback tells you how you delivered the conversation and what the real impact was on that person. Leadership that *isn't* fit for moral leadership ensures that you are surrounded with 'yes' people, who only give you the feedback you want to hear, or the people around you are so aware of your fragile ego that you don't get any feedback from them. We all want to think we are amazing, brilliant and wise... but we're not. We all need feedback for our growth, our safety and the security of the organization.

What I've noticed is that even when feedback is 'wrong', it is usually a very timely warning that I'm affecting people in ways that may not be helpful. Let's be honest, feedback is always a little, or a lot, challenging. It's never totally comfortable. You need to pay attention to how you receive it, though, because if you can spot your defensiveness to feedback it will tell you a lot about your ego and where you are vulnerable in your leadership. You should also note who you surround yourself with and who you *avoid* having around you and why in each case.

Abraham Lincoln intentionally surrounded himself with his adversaries because he wanted his decisions to be the best, and he knew that the best decisions would come from a team of his friends *and* his enemies. This is brilliantly documented in the book *A Team of Rivals*.⁴⁴

Who do you need on your team?

When I talk about the leader's team, I'm don't necessarily mean the organization's leadership team (though it might be part of it) or the leader's own team that they lead (though it might be part of it), I'm talking about the *informal*

team that a leader proactively creates around themselves to protect and support them in getting fit for moral leadership.

You can answer the question 'Who do I need on my team?' with four groups of people: friends, a mentor, a coach, a therapist and an internal mentor.

Friends

You need friends on your team, because organizations and businesses come and they go. They demand much of you, but they can just as easily drop you tomorrow. They can draw you in like you're part of a timeless family and they can spit you out at any point. While organizations have a personality and often a powerful one, they are not a person. Friends love you even after 5.30 pm and at weekends. Friends ensure you stay human and balanced, they help you keep perspective and they will provide the back-up team when the work team seem to have abandoned you. Friends know more about you than just the part you take to the office. They know your larger history.

When a friend of mine was unjustly accused of fraud at work because of the tactics of a jealous boss, the people at his company took one step back from him, but his friends stood by, provided encouragement, read through documents with an objective but supportive eye and walked him through the nightmare.

Friends provide the informal wisdom to talk decisions through, so that you get a first 'gut' perspective on the morality of the decisions you are thinking about making. Interestingly, when the workload gets very heavy, people often neglect their investment in their friendships, and yet keeping friendships healthy is vital.

Mentor

Mentor was a character in Greek mythology. When Odysseus went off to war, he left his son, Telemachus, in the hands of his old friend Mentor, with the famous instruction: 'Teach him everything you know.' A mentor is often an older, or certainly more experienced, person. They have already walked further down the path you are walking; they've been there, they've seen the pitfalls, they have the

experience. A mentor has encountered countless pressures to make immoral decisions and they can tell you where the minefields are and how they navigated them. A mentor can help you to suck out the wisdom that can be gained through experience and the mistakes they have made, as well as ensuring that you are learning on the job.

Coach

A coach plays a different role to a mentor. The coach's job is to get you to reflect deeply on your leadership performance, as well as your learning and development. A coach puts the emphasis on *you* to work through problems, create solutions, test them out and then review them. A coach is there to help you to look at a moral decision and explore what is going on, and then to find the learning within yourself to make the right and moral decision in the particular instance you are facing.

Therapist

When I say to young leaders that a leader needs a therapist, they always laugh... until they see that I am serious. At some point in developing as a leader you have to face up to yourself. You need to take an honest look at who you are, the impact you have on others and the deep attitudes you have developed that shape how you are acting at work. Spending a period with a therapist isn't a failure, as some people perceive it, it is a vital step in developing the emotional intelligence that is fundamental to all good leaders.

A therapist helps you sort through your ego issues; a therapist helps you look at your 'cracks' and how they make you vulnerable in your moral decision-making. A therapist is the person who can help you examine why you aren't sleeping, why you are becoming increasingly irritated, compliant, exhausted or depressed and vulnerable to compromising behaviours. Often people go to a therapist at certain periods when they can see there's a problem that doesn't seem to be shifting, when they feel stuck.

Seeing a therapist is frequently a very hard step, because it's associated with a lack of coping, or failure or shame. This is why leaders need a therapist on

their personal team. My suggestion is to find a therapist before you need one. Why? Because the time when you most need one is the time when it's hardest to ask for one. Go and meet a potential therapist, someone you feel safe to talk honestly with, and have a few conversations, so that the relationship is already there when you need it.

There is a hill in southwest England called Porlock Hill. Every half mile on the way down there is a run-off road on the left, full of deep sand, that goes nowhere. The point is that if you're driving down the hill and your brakes fail, you can run off into a safe place without crashing. Having a therapist on standby is just such an escape road. It's no good trying to build an escape road when your brakes have failed; you have to have the escape in place *before* it's needed. It's very hard to pick up the phone when you're in real need, but you can make it easier for yourself by having the relationship with the therapist in place beforehand.

Internal mentor

The final person on your team is you! Let me explain. We all carry years and years of lived experience, as well as the experience of others that we've observed. For instance, I never met Winston Churchill, but I have vague memories of his life, and his impact on my life, through the outcome of the Second World War, the books I've read and the films I've seen. In the same way, you will have internalized experiences of people you've met and people you haven't met but have learned about. What I call the internal mentor is the skill of accessing these people in order to tap into your own wisdom. How does it work?

You take a moral issue you are facing: a decision, a conversation, an action. You then choose three 'mentors' who could help you make a wise decision. They can be people you know and/or people you know of but haven't met. Let's say you choose:

1. Your dad
2. Winston Churchill

3. Your ex-boss from your previous job (we'll call her Jane)

You write down the dilemma and ask yourself:

- 'What would my dad say to me about how I should respond in a situation like this?'

You write down everything your dad would say. Then you ask yourself:

- 'What would Winston Churchill say to me about how I should respond in a situation like this?'

You access in your own mind what you know about Churchill and write down everything he would say. Then you ask yourself:

- 'What would Jane say to me about how I should respond in a situation like this?'

You write down everything Jane would say.

What you end up with is a page full of wisdom that actually came from you, not them. The mentors were in the room, but you used them as a device in order to access your own deeper wisdom – your internal mentor. From this wisdom, you can make better moral decisions.

I've seen people with wristbands with WWJD on them, standing for 'What would Jesus do?' Internal mentors are something similar – what would Nelson Mandela do? What would Graça Machel do? Eleanor Roosevelt? My late uncle? These internal mentors can be greatly boosted by your reading. Read biographies of other leaders to see what they did in difficult moral situations. Read novels that explore how the characters deal with tough moral situations. All of this is a crucial part of gaining wisdom in order to be fit for moral leadership.

Take the case of Shakespeare's King Lear. His leadership style is summed up in these words:

King Lear the aging king of Britain and the protagonist of the play is used to enjoying absolute power and to being flattered, and he does not respond well to being contradicted or challenged [a leader with a fragile ego]. At the beginning of the play, his values are notably hollow—he prioritises the appearance of love over actual devotion and wishes to maintain the power of a king while unburdening himself of the responsibility.⁴⁵

This is a great example of where good literature acts as a mirror to our modern context and the challenges of getting fit for moral leadership.

Building Team You doesn't happen by accident. It is an intentional investment of a wise leader in your own leadership health. It takes time to build a good team and it takes time to invest in the relationships that will keep Team You strong. But it is a priceless investment in your ability to do the right thing.

15. Focus on Your Legacy

The setting was the mountains in the north of Rwanda and it was surely the most beautiful training venue imaginable. Under an awning, stretched across a raised platform, protruding out from the mountaintop into the valley below, adjoining the open space of an old tennis court, we had uninterrupted views across the folds of mountains that led to the Virunga volcanic range in the far north of the country, famous for its gorillas. It was in this stunning setting that I suddenly had an idea for a teaching point I was trying to make. I gathered some warm, moist dirt and made a rough square of almost a metre of soil. The group of tea pickers and tea factory workers around me watched in bemusement as I then took one of my feet, complete with a big black shoe, and stepped onto the soil, leaving a clear imprint. I took my foot carefully away. The footprint remained, even though I had left. This was the point I wanted to make: ‘What is the footprint you want your life to leave as you walk away?’

This is called legacy. What is the legacy you want your life to leave?

I was discussing South Africa with someone the other day and I asked them about two frontline warriors in the fight against apartheid, Desmond Tutu and Jacob Zuma. What words come to mind when you think of them? Are their legacies different or similar?

We all leave a legacy – a legacy of reputation, of actions we took or didn’t take, of ideas we had or inventions we created. These all leave a footprint behind after we die. But why does the issue of legacy have anything to do with doing the right thing, or moral leadership, at work today? The answer is that our lives have a long arc that goes way beyond our physical years on Earth. The larger story that we would like to write, the legacy story of our lives, is shaped by the little decisions we make today.

When I’d completed the book *The 18 Challenges of Leadership*,⁴⁶ I was asking myself: ‘What next?’ This question, like all good questions, set me on a journey of challenging the leadership paradigm I had witnessed exploding over

the previous few decades (before that the buzz word was all ‘management’). Leadership had become the great mountaintop that everyone was talking about, the business world’s new poster child. What I came to see was that if leadership was *not* actually the pinnacle of organizational life, if there was more, something beyond leadership, then leadership would become a glass ceiling. The focus on leadership would actually hinder long-term growth, not help it. What started out as something that was growing us and organizations (leadership) would eventually become a limit to our growth. So the question I was wrestling with was: ‘Is there something that lies beyond leadership?’

What I discovered by unearthing the traditional wisdom of millennia was that something does lie beyond leadership – it’s called eldership. All old and traditional cultures had their version of elders. Even in the UK, the historical title of alderman means ‘older man’. Eldership is the wisdom of the wiser, older person who has made the journey of life and can give perspective, ask the deeper questions and help us shape more meaningful lives. The Great Law of the Iroquois Indians says that all decisions that we make today must be able to deliver sustainable results for at least seven generations.

As I write these words, the COP 24 conference on climate change is making a last desperate plea for global action to avert or at least minimize the global disruption from climate change. All of my decisions today need to be made in the mirror of the question: ‘How will my decisions play out in relationships, sustainability, values-building, for the next generation and the ones after that?’

When Richard Branson and Peter Gabriel sat down with Nelson Mandela and asked how the world could respond to some of the seemingly intractable issues that are facing it, the result was the birth of The Elders.⁴⁷ We need elders to enable us to create legacies by asking us the right questions and helping us to keep perspective. We, as leaders, need help making the right decisions *now*, knowing that we may well not see the fruit of those decisions for a long time to come, maybe not even in our lifetime. As Richard Branson said to the conference on ‘The Moral Imperative of Modern Leadership’:⁴⁸

A good test of our capacity for moral leadership is whether we are willing to accept that the fruits of our work may not be ours to harvest. It's the relentless pursuit of recognition, affirmation and instant gratification that often gets in the way of long-term thinking for the greater, the common good.

The relentless pursuit of recognition, affirmation and instant gratification versus long-term thinking, the greater good and the common good. Ego versus legacy is often at the heart of the battle to get fit for moral leadership.

Keeping it fresh

Lance Clark died recently. He was part of the sixth generation of the shoe company C. & J. Clark, founded in 1825 by Quakers Cyrus and James Clark on the clear principle of putting heart at the centre of the business; it was created to exist for the benefit of other people, not the shareholders. This was the drive of the business in that first generation. What was Cyrus and James's legacy? Six generations later, Lance was still operating by the same founding principles. Much of his philanthropy and endowment of the arts will go untold in their impact on the lives of countless families in Africa. For instance, he formed the Soul of Africa Charitable Trust,⁴⁹ providing job and educational opportunities, as well as investing in art and movement. Lance said of the principles that he inherited and made his own, 'The Quaker ethos I was brought up on was that workers were part of the family.'⁵⁰

How does a sixth-generation leader of an organization still own the founding principles of the first generation, when most organizations lose their anchor point within a generation? How do you become a first-generation leader who promotes a legacy to future generations? The answer may lie in history.

The Puritans, an English religious group who laid the foundations of the modern USA, said that you needed revival every three generations. What did they mean? By revival they meant the fire of the founding principles and passion of the first generation – but why revival every three generations? The first

generation is the generation of the **founders**, the entrepreneurs. These are the people with an idea, a set of values and principles that they are passionate about; they work tirelessly for them, they suffer for them and in some cases (the martyrs) they even die for them. The cry of the first generation is: 'This isn't a job, it's a mission.' The second generation is the generation of the **inheritors**. They saw the work of the founders and admire it greatly, so they try to protect it; they put systems in place to ensure things stay as they are. The cry of the second generation is: 'Keep it going as it is.' Then along comes the third generation – these are the **functionaries**. The first thing they want to know is where their desk is and whether they get a laptop and a car and what the extra benefits are in pension and healthcare. They assume that what they see is how it always was and they view the organization as something that they can *get* something from, whether it's a sense of purpose, cash or a good line on their CV. The cry of the third generation is: 'It's a job, what can I make from it?'

It's easy to see how organizations begin to fail by the second generation. In come the new leaders, the buy-out teams, to start things up in a 'new' way, some of which is necessary. However, what is lost is why the organization began in the first place. Hence the investment bank is now a profit machine, but it started out as poverty-reduction machine. So what is the answer? That's why the Puritans said you need revival every three generations. Every new employee needs to understand the first-generation story of how the organization began. Every second- and third-generation employee needs to have the clarity and conviction of the first generation, because the moral imperative is usually rooted in those founding values and convictions. Making a fast buck is the mindset of a third-generation person; patience, values, moral courage – these are the muscles of the first generation.

Embedding the first generation into the third generation takes a lot, lot more than a one-hour induction seminar. It starts with the leadership of the organization and the leadership of the teams within it being first-generation people themselves. Legacy is like a compass and an anchor all in one. Legacy guides and roots us in the heart of leadership, its value-based roots, to make the

organizational ship less vulnerable to anything that may come and push it around from day to day.

The bigger 'yes'

As we have seen throughout this book, the challenge of getting fit for moral leadership requires wisdom, courage, values, resilience and long-term thinking. It's often that 'long-term thinking' part that gets missed out of our regime in the gym. We want everything fast, fast, fast. If a fitness programme doesn't yield results in days or weeks, we give up; if meditation doesn't make us a more peaceful, balanced individual after three tries, then it's not working. The word **patience** has dropped out of the lexicon.

It wasn't always so. The Great Law of the Iroquois I mentioned earlier is long-term thinking. It encourages you to think about how your moral decisions will play out in the sustainable future of this organization as well as your own future. One executive from Enron, when challenged about the fact that he had done very well out of the company, said: 'Yes... but I sold my soul to do it.'

Where do the courage and resilience come from to make moral decisions? One of the sources is having a bigger 'yes'. What this means is that you can only find the strength to say 'no' to something if you have a bigger 'yes', something you want more than a fast decision. Stephen Covey talked about 'starting with the end in mind'. What is your end in mind? What time horizon are you working on? It's a question that applies to every area of life. Do you give your child loads of sweets today to keep them quiet, or do you take a lifetime view of their health and say 'no'? Do you get into an irreparable argument with your teenage son, or do you take a lifetime view and say that staying connected and having a relationship for a lifetime are more important? Or take the environment. Do you burn endless fossil fuel today because it gets the job done, or do you invest in renewable energy so your great-grandchildren can get their jobs done a hundred years from now? Bring this down to daily work. The decisions you make may lead to a fast profit, or a fast easing of pressure, but what are they doing to the

long-term relationship with and trust of your clients? Volkswagen will take a long time to shrug off the 'cheat' label being associated with its brand. Often the short-term decisions are harder, if you are to take the moral line, and they require an extra dose of strength that can only come from the bigger 'yes', your answer to the legacy question. The old adage remains pretty true: 'Short-term pain for long-term gain.'

The way to create a bigger 'yes' is to focus from the outset of your leadership journey on legacy. In American football they talk about 'plays' – a plan of action, which could be a running plan, a defensive plan or an offensive plan. The reason I use the word 'play' here is that you need to set out to have a plan, to leave a legacy. You need to make it an *intentional* strategy and not leave it to chance or hope. What is the legacy 'play' you want to leave with your life? What is the legacy you want to leave when you move on from this team? What is the legacy you want to leave in this organization? What is the legacy you want to leave in this community? What is the legacy you want to leave for your grandchildren?

Legacies need to be planned and they need to be invested in. We will all leave a legacy for sure, whether we like it or not, but will it be the one we want?

- 'He did a great job, but he was a stranger to his kids.'
- 'She had a great career, but it cost her her friends.'
- 'Trevor who?'

Legacy needs to be a core module in any leadership development or MBA programme. Legacy also needs to be the currency of the boardroom and team meetings. It takes work to work out what your legacy will be. You can't buy it off the shelf from the local supermarket. When my friend Louise did her MBA at Insead, she spent countless hours learning finance and how to be world class with a spreadsheet (and rightly so), but she told me that they spent zero time on working out why they were there, who they were as people and what their legacy would be in business and the world they are part of – they invested

nothing in what their bigger 'yes' was. There was no time spent on learning how to ask, every day, of their business, or their organization, or themselves:

- 'Yes, but how will this play out for the next generation?'
- 'Yes, but what legacy will this leave for the brand?'
- 'Yes, but what kind of organization do I want to hand over when I retire?'

16. Navigate the Moral Maze

If I tell you that this is the greatest good for a human being, to engage every day in arguments about virtue and other things you have heard me talk about, examining both myself and others, and if I tell you that the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being, you will be even less likely to believe what I am saying. But that's the way it is, gentlemen, as I claim, though it is not easy to convince you of it.

Socrates, in Plato's *Apology*, 38 CE

A few weeks ago I went to Wyken Vineyards in Suffolk and discovered to my delight that they had a maze. I had great fun as a child working my way through the maze at Hampton Court, one of Henry VIII's homes. The thing about mazes is that they are filled with choices from the moment you enter: Do I go right or left? Will going left lead to a dead end? Should I have gone right – would that have been better? Does it matter? Are both good routes or do both lead to dead ends? BBC presenter Michael Burke took that analogy and created a radio programme called *The Moral Maze*.⁵¹ Each week he takes a current moral dilemma and examines the challenges of moral decision-making in that particular situation. Recent episodes have included:

- Children and the internet
- The morality of diversity
- Climate change
- Guilt and innocence
- The morality of ends and means
- The morality of compromise

What makes something qualify for the moral maze, whether it's a radio programme or your day at work, is that you are confronted by a moral issue and you could argue a number of different ways for what is the right thing to do. In this book I have been looking at how to do the right thing, but what happens when there are three right things, or no right thing? It feels like you are in a leadership moral maze and don't know which step to take. This is another area where you need to get fit by learning how to think morally.

If there is one message to take from this book, it's that to get fit for moral leadership, to do the right thing, you need to work on it every day. If I wanted to get fit for anything, I really wouldn't expect anyone to tell me anything other than that I need to practise every day. It's common sense. So why do we struggle with what Socrates said nearly 2000 years ago – that to get fit for moral leadership, we need to practise thinking morally and doing the right thing every day? If that muscle is fit, then it will be much more likely to respond morally when a sudden need arises, or big leadership pressures are exerted.

Casuistry

There is actually a name given to this daily practice of self-examination, reflection, thinking through complex life challenges, thinking through what to do in confusing situations – *casuistry*. It's a word we seldom use these days, but maybe it's time to resurrect it. Casuistry is where you learn how to think through the moral problems of your leadership day (as opposed to sophistry, where you get clever with your reasoning but it's unsound):

- 'What would I do if my boss asked me to lie?'
- 'What would I do if I sensed that my boss was being less than honest with his numbers?'
- 'What would I do if I drank two cups of coffee and was mistakenly only billed for one?'

- ‘What would I do if I was working on a foreign contract and I was told that “extra payments off the record” were the norm?’

You need to face up to the fact that not every issue or decision or situation in life is straightforward; there isn’t always a one-size-fits-all decision. So what do you do? You have to think through the complexities of a situation, practising the thinking behind your decisions when it’s quite possible that two totally different decisions could be justified. It is trying to work out why you would make a certain moral decision in one situation, but might be tempted to make a different decision in another situation. Casuistry gets you asking: ‘Why would I do that? What would be the short-term consequences of my doing that?’

Some decisions are black and white and the moral issue is around your heart and your character. But other decisions are grey or both black and white. These are the decisions where both options look wrong or both look right. Casuistry allows you to think through scenarios to their logical conclusion so that you can face the real underlying dilemma, such as:

- ‘Am I prepared to lose my job?’
- ‘Am I prepared to lose this contract?’
- ‘Am I prepared to let that person go?’

In the most extreme cases, wonderfully portrayed in Robert Bolt’s film *A Man for All Seasons* about the life of Sir Thomas More, or Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible*:

- ‘Am I prepared to lose my life?’

The result of practising casuistry is that you, or the team or the organization, form a set of moral rules or operating principles to apply to leadership in these complex situations. Thinking these things through allows you to develop thought processes, neural pathways, decision tracks that can help you be consistent in the decisions you make and the reasons behind them. If you think through complex situations outside of the pressures of everyday realities, then you are

much more likely to have developed the thought muscle – and the moral muscle – to do the right thing when reality hits.

Humility, plus casuistry, equals a constant review of your thinking as you encounter more evidence and experience in your decision-making. The British Army is a good example of embedding casuistry not only in the training process, but also in the operational and review process. Soldiers are trained to ask:

- ‘How should we act in this situation?’
- ‘What are we going to do in this situation?’
- ‘Where are the moral ambiguities in this situation?’
- ‘What did we actually do in this situation?’
- ‘What could we do if faced by a similar situation again?’
- ‘Were there a number of options?’
- ‘How would we work out which option to use in which situation?’

In engineering we run test beds. We try out the design of something in the safety of the wind tunnel, or the test track, or the laboratory, or the workshop. We look at whether a situation actually works the way we think it should. It allows us to think through:

- ‘What’s the worst that can happen?’
- ‘How does it hold up under pressure?’

Casuistry is the workplace, or personal, ‘test bed’. However, it only works with heavy doses of humility rather than ego:

- ‘I took this decision and it was the best one I could make, given everything that I knew at the time... but I now know that there was a different decision that could have been made and so I will do it differently next time.’

- 'I made a judgement call knowing both decisions could be right or wrong. In hindsight I can see that one decision was less helpful than the other.'

Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown was given a tag line when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer (in charge of the money) – Prudence. Prudence, like casuistry, is a less used but very necessary word in getting people fit for moral leadership. Prudence refers particularly to how to think through the grey areas of moral dilemmas and moral ambiguities. The Latin root of the word comes from focusing on taking the time, or caution, to consider a moral dilemma. Step number one in any potential moral dilemma is to take a step back. Leave the room. Go for a walk. Go for a coffee. Call up your coach for a chat. Do whatever you need to do to slow down the urgency and pressure of the situation. So many bad decisions are made instinctively under pressure. By slowing down the pressure, you make space to think and reflect. Prudence creates the space for casuistry.

In reality it actually takes much less time than you may think to practise casuistry or prudence, either personally or with your team. Little and often is the key to getting fit. Try the following exercise.

1. Look up a list of moral dilemmas on the internet. For example, <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/common-ethical-workplace-dilemmas-748.html> lists three common dilemmas:

- Taking the credit for others' work
- Harassing behaviour
- Stealing on the job

Or <http://www.speedupcareer.com/articles/ethical-dilemmas-in-workplace.html> lists twelve ethical issues for both employees and employers.

2. Ask yourself and your team: 'What moral dilemmas have I faced yesterday, this week, this year?'

3. Using the list created from the answers to 1 and 2, take five minutes on your own with your journal, or with your team, pose the dilemma and think it through.
4. Do this a few times a week for ten minutes each time.

The result of this will be, firstly, that you and/or your team will develop your thinking muscle around moral leadership; you will be practising casuistry and prudence. Secondly, if you do this with your team you will be creating a culture where you are showing people that this is important and that you can talk about these challenges in a transparent way. When a 'real' situation comes up, you will also be more able to talk through what to do. All this training for a few minutes a week and at zero cost!

The examined life

Stronger moral muscle is developed by pushing deeper into motives, what Socrates called 'the examined life'. This is where you look at the ego dilemmas behind the moral decisions. The real courage in taking moral decisions as a leader is the courage to look at yourself first. It is so easy to project your own feelings onto others rather than to own them for yourself. It always takes more courage and hard work to work on yourself than to blame or dump the problem on others. As Shakespeare said, 'The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.'⁵² If you start from a place of humility, then you will take a courageous look inside yourself.

I think the principle developed by Ed Catmull⁵³ (president of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation) of 'What is it that I'm not seeing?' is really helpful. He assumes that in any given situation you never see the whole. You only see what you see. So ask yourself:

- 'What is it that I'm not seeing and what is it in me that resists feedback?'
- 'Do I not want to be proven wrong?'

- ‘Do I need to be right?’
- ‘Do I feel it’s a failure for me if I don’t see the whole picture?’
- ‘Just because I don’t like that person much, does it mean their feedback is wrong?’
- ‘What is driving me primarily? My bonus? My appearance of success? Envy? Anger?’
- ‘Why do I want to take the easy way out here?’

You also need to challenge your reasons for not learning the art of casuistry in moral leadership:

- **I’m too busy** – How much time do you think it will actually take to have these conversations? 5 minutes, 5 hours, 5 days?
- **I know all this stuff** – OK, what is it that you actually know about the moral decisions you face right now?
- **If I pause even for a second, I will lose our competitive edge** – What is your evidence for thinking that you will lose out if you invest in this kind of thinking?
- **If I lift up the ‘slab’ of this decision, I may see things I don’t want to see, so it’s better to leave things well alone and hope it doesn’t come back to bite us** – What is it that you fear under the ‘slab’ and what will be the actual result of taking a closer look?

Prudence slows us down, casuistry gets us learning how to think through complex situations – and **courage** is what it takes to live the examined life. That is the final piece of equipment in our leadership gym.

17. Grow Your Courage – the Door Out

If you remember back at the start of this second part of the book, you entered the moral leadership gym through a door bearing the message:

If you can't lead yourself, then you won't be able to lead others

Once inside the gym, you found out about twelve pieces of apparatus to get fit for moral leadership.

- ✓ Knowing yourself
- ✓ Working on your own ego
- ✓ Using your weaknesses
- ✓ Taking a personal daily audit
- ✓ Develop a leadership compass
- ✓ Working out who you are doing things for
- ✓ Checking your personal use of power
- ✓ Creating a sense of 'us', not 'I' in your part of your organization
- ✓ Creating a balanced life
- ✓ Developing your own support team
- ✓ Building a legacy
- ✓ Learning how to navigate the moral maze

As you head to the exit door, it isn't that the training session is over – in fact, it's only just started. Paracetamol doesn't help you feel better unless you take it, and just going to the gym once doesn't get you fit. As Cristiano Ronaldo, probably one of the world's best soccer players, said, 'No days off.'

You need to use the gym daily if you're going to get fit. And, just like you need reminding of something every time you step into the gym, every time you come *out* of the gym door you need a prompt to your memory. So what is it that is written large over the exit door of the gym?

Courage

Why is courage so integral to getting fit for moral leadership?

- Taking a fearless moral inventory of yourself takes courage.
- Looking your ego in the eye takes courage.
- Facing up to your cracks and fragility takes courage.
- Speaking truth to power takes courage.
- Learning to think and act for yourself (not in a selfish way) and not being co-dependent on others take courage.
- Not giving up takes courage.
- Getting up after failure takes courage.
- Hanging on until a crisis passes takes courage.
- Creating something new takes courage.
- Apologizing takes courage.

- Making that first phone call to a therapist takes courage.
- Going to see the therapist takes courage.
- Weeding the garden of your own character each day takes courage.
- Doing something for someone else takes courage.
- Fighting for justice takes courage.
- Fighting for human rights takes courage.
- Saying 'no' takes courage.
- Breaking addictive behaviours and thoughts takes courage.
- Stepping out of your comfort zone takes courage.
- Keeping going when you don't know what to do takes courage.
- Doing the right thing even when it may cost you your reputation, promotion or job takes courage.

Winston Churchill said that courage was the *most important* and the foundation of all the virtues, because without courage you won't be able to put every other virtue into action. So courage is vital, but it is messy. In the words of Franklin D. Roosevelt:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails

while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.⁵⁴

Courage needs to be grown, like every other muscle of moral leadership. How do you grow courage? There are seven ways.

1. Realize it's a muscle

I know I'm repeating myself, but if you don't see courage as a muscle then you won't give it the daily attention it needs. Every day presents you with the opportunity to develop muscle rather than let it get flabby, and this is presented in the little things, something as small as not exaggerating. Even deciding to tackle this afternoon the project in your inbox that has sat there for the past two weeks is a step of courage. As a leader, saying 'I have no idea what to do next, but I'm going to lean into it' takes courage. The courage muscle needs to be exercised if it's going to be developed.

2. Keep stepping off the cliff

Developing courage is never easy. The fact that it *is* developing means that it will never feel like a walk in the park – it will always feel like stepping off a cliff. It will always cost you something, whether that's energy, reputation, vulnerability, time or risk. You will always have to dig into your resourceful self to take the next courageous step. It will always feel uncomfortable and so you can tell yourself that this is the norm for courage development.

3. Keep stepping of the cliff even when you don't have everything figured out

Control is the food of the ego. You always desperately want to be in control and a part of that control is that you have everything sorted. Often you want others to believe that you have things sorted, that you know what is going on, you know

what to do and you know how things will turn out. That's nonsense, of course, but it's what the ego craves – control. Courage lies in taking those steps when you *don't* know – when you don't know exactly what is going on, how things will turn out or exactly what to do. Much of leadership is about handling the not knowing rather than the known.

4. Face the fear

Courage, as Nelson Mandela once said, is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. Or, as Susan Jeffers put it, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*.⁵⁵ Behind every growth in courage is a fear that needs to be faced down:

- 'Am I enough?'
- 'Will I survive their criticism/ridicule/anger/disagreement?'
- 'Will I know enough?'
- 'Will I be seen as deficient in knowledge or skill or intellect?'

5. Touch the void

I take the phrase 'touching the void' from Joe Simpson's book⁵⁶ of the same name. I am talking about that deep place within you that suddenly feels like you're on our own – a place of deep loneliness. Sometimes leadership needs you to be able to touch that void and not run away, because if you do run away from the place of aloneness then you will run away from making the courageous decisions. In that moment of moral decision, you feel like you're on your own; whether that's true or not, it's a real feeling and you need to own it. Can you stand on your own for that moment that requires you to do the right thing, even if no one else can see you, help you, support you, cheer you or agree with you? Taking courageous moral decisions requires you to be able to touch the void within yourself and be OK with that.

6. Lean into it

Fear always makes you move away from the things you fear. If you fear a person, you will move away from a crucial conversation with them. To lean into anything is to be proactive. Do you fear a particular meeting? Then prepare for it now. Shape your thoughts, meet people beforehand to talk through the difficult issues you know will arise, do something that leans *into* the meeting rather than avoids it. Get on your front foot now and act, rather than avoid and *react*.

7. Find your heroes

Who are the people you know, whether in your own life or historical or literary figures, who have run the race of moral courage before you? Whether it's Rosa Parks or Desmond Tutu or your grandmother or your boss or your friend, it's worth building up a pile of cheerleaders as your inner resources. In the ancient Greek Olympics the audience was filled with past athletes, people who had run the race you are now running, who knew exactly what you are now going through. They were called the *witnesses*. You need to build up your own private audience of witnesses.

The ability to lead

At the very core of the challenge of getting fit for moral leadership is the need for leadership itself. The analogy for leadership that I spoke of at the start of this book was from Gardner's definition:

Leadership is the ability to create a story that affects the thoughts, feelings and actions of others.⁵⁷

If leadership is the ability to create a story in your life, your team, your family, your organization, your sector, your community, then the issue of leadership is always:

Who has got the pen?

Because if you don't have it, then someone else does. If you are not authoring (authority) your own story, then the pressures of people, or teams, or organizational cultures, or bosses will always be trying to get you to write *their* story. Getting fit for moral leadership gives you the courage to keep hold of the pen when the noise and the pressure around you and the fears within you are trying to pull it out of your hand.

Moral leadership is never going to be the easy road, or the fast road, or necessarily the most popular road or the best rewarded. More and more businesses are shifting the narrative from doing the easy thing to *doing the right thing*. The tide is turning to recognizing that doing the right thing is actually good for business in the long term. And moral leadership is having the courage to do the right thing.

I'll leave the final word to Kofi Anan, Chair of The Elders, who, when asked to define moral leadership in action, gave the following advice:⁵⁸

- Strive – to do what is right.
- Power – it's not personal... it's held in trust for the people.
- Serve – that's what you're there to do.
- Empathy – understand the needs of others.
- Tomorrow – think of the future.
- Others – ask 'What should I/we be doing?' 'How can I help?' Don't say, 'This is what *I* do'.

That is what moral leadership is all about.

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