

# Lead More, Control Less

*8 Advanced Leadership Skills  
That Overturn Convention*

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# Why This Book?

**T**HERE ARE THOUSANDS OF BOOKS DEFINING LEADERSHIP as planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling. Here we offer you a nontraditional perspective that you are unlikely to find elsewhere. We do not intend it to replace whatever works for you. Rather we see these eight skills as additive. They upend conventional practices, giving you leadership options you may not know you have. We will show you how to achieve superior results while reducing your need to control. Paradoxically, you may gain more control than before. Whether you work in business, government, education, or social services, you can add these leadership skills to your repertoire. We believe that self-control is the most reliable kind. The more you find it in yourself, the easier it is to get others to exercise it. You can enhance your freedom of action, self-confidence, and authority with those who depend on you. They in turn will produce superior results.

## **Our Goal Is Helping You Gain *More* Control by Controlling *Less***

We did not grow up thinking this way, nor did we learn it in school. We picked up these lessons while managing strategic planning with communities, business firms, non-governmental

organizations (NGOs), and United Nations agencies in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, India, New Zealand, and the Americas. We learned to set up structures that help people motivate themselves. We now have led thousands of people to do things that they and we had once believed impossible. They differed in ethnicity, culture, age, jobs, titles, social classes, religions, world-views, and gender. Put in charge of their work, people found they could implement plans with longer-lasting impact than those designed by expert planners.

In this book several top executives report similar results. Drawing on their work and our own, we devised three simple principles:

- Let people build on their personal experiences rather than impose yours.
- Set things up so that people coordinate and control their work rather than your doing it for them.
- Change the conditions under which people interact rather than try to change their behavior.

To apply these principles, we offer eight skills for leading others and managing yourself in an uncertain world. We found that they require inordinate self-discipline while we are learning. And we are always learning. How about you? You cannot internalize advanced skills from lectures or books. You need real-time practice. If you are a leader, we imagine that you operate in the unknown on many days. You will cope more easily with unfamiliar situations as you apply these skills. We invite you to practice self-control, expect the same of others, and create conditions under which people discover how to do their best.

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

# Self Control Is the Best Control

ONE OF THE GREAT MOTIVATIONAL DISCOVERIES OF THE twentieth century is that people who coordinate and control their own work produce greater economic *and* social results than those who do not. Many leaders, though they might deny it, act as though they prefer control to results. How do we know? They impose coordination and control from above. They have never experienced the alternative: control from within.

Running large-group strategic-planning meetings in the 1990s, we soon recognized that we preferred results to control. We could not control scores of people working in the same room toward a plan that incorporates all of their experiences and aspirations. We found that we got the best results by focusing everyone on the same goal, creating structures for self-managing, and getting out of the way.

That way of leading proved harder than we imagined. Our biggest challenge was controlling ourselves—holding back, waiting, listening, opening doors, and letting people learn their own capabilities. Doing that meant setting the bar higher.

We had given ourselves a new leadership challenge. We had to overturn the conventions we inherited. As we became more confident of consistent results, we began inviting others to try leading in new ways.

We have now helped thousands of people access the advanced skills presented here—“advanced” in the sense of adding new capabilities to your repertoire. These skills need not replace anything you do now. If you are trying some of them for the first time, however, you will indeed be “overturning convention” if you employ them to plan, organize, motivate, and control. We settled on eight core skills after much iteration. You could easily make our list longer.

These are skills that reinforce one another, that we could use anywhere, and that led people to do more than they dreamed they could. Best of all, we could bring them to bear on any given day. You can do likewise if you are willing to experiment.

But are you?

More than 50 years ago, Douglas McGregor, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, wrote an all-time best seller, *The Human Side of Enterprise*. His was the famous Theory X, Theory Y book. McGregor described how our assumptions about human nature determine how we lead. Theory X assumes that most people are dependent, dislike work, and require close supervision. Theory Y assumes that most people enjoy work, want to learn, and welcome responsibility. Each theory is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The tighter the control, the narrower the jobs, and the less judgment people exercise, the more helpless, inept, and dependent they become.

“They act like children,” says the boss.

“He treats us like children,” say the employees.

By contrast, people who have discretion, broad skills, accurate information, and opportunities for growth motivate themselves. From birth we carry the seeds of both theories. Babies come into the world helpless and dependent—and also curious and eager to learn. When (unconscious) Theory X assumptions dominate an organization, they translate into dysfunctional policies, procedures, and structures. They discourage the behavior leaders want to instill.

On the other hand, we have seen people around the globe act out (unconscious) Theory Y assumptions. Under the right conditions, they rediscover natural impulses they had since birth, impulses nourished by unconventional policies, procedures, and structures. People respond to jobs that foster autonomy and growth. Structure includes determining who is allowed to do what. That is something you can control. It involves encouraging people to take initiative beyond their job descriptions. It means enabling communication up, down, and sideways, not just top to bottom. It means turning supervisors into coaches. It means insisting on integrating meetings between departments rather than putting up with silos.

Much organizational conflict is structural. People act the way their jobs require. Salespeople emphasize interpersonal skills. They spend time in small talk before getting down to business. Production workers relate to their machines. They skip the small talk and solve the problem. The structural strategy is to encourage people to maintain their functional differences. This includes appointing people to integrating roles, using project coordinators, and having cross-functional mechanisms

such as product teams and ad hoc problem-solving teams that head off conflict.

## **Creating Optimal Structures Requires Leadership**

In this book we show how to develop the following skills:

- Gain more control by controlling less
- Get others to share responsibility
- Change the structures under which people interact without struggling to change the people
- Demonstrate how getting the “whole system” to explore the “whole elephant” leads to high motivation and fast implementation
- Use anxiety and authority projections to build respect and improve teamwork
- Resolve conflicts and lead people to find where they are 100 percent in agreement
- Experience what you can accomplish by trying out actions that may not come naturally

Throughout the book we emphasize a stubborn reality:

***Change means doing something you never did before.***

That is the message from ordinary leaders in business, education, health care, and community building who discovered

new capabilities in themselves. We quote them throughout the book. You may find changing structure ahead of behavior a stretch if you are used to managing personal styles, attitudes, motivations, and extrinsic rewards.

## **The Eight Leadership Skills**

*Lead More, Control Less* has eight chapters. Each chapter advocates an advanced leadership skill and principles of action that you can try out every day:

1. Control Structure, Not People
2. Let Everyone Be Responsible
3. Consider Anxiety “Blocked Excitement”
4. Avoid “Taking It Personally”
5. Disrupt Fight or Flight
6. Include the Right People
7. Experience the “Whole Elephant”
8. Surface Unspoken Agreements

We invite you to travel with us down a road where people perform better the more you let go. If you go far enough, you will discover higher performance, greater self-control in others, and greater freedom for yourself. When you see the results you are getting, you will need no further proof.