



"An essential book on leadership." —**DANIEL PINK**

GET UNSTUCK

THE **BLUEPRINT**

6 Practical Steps to Lift
Your Leadership to New Heights

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WILEY

Introduction

The Raw Materials of Change Are Already within You

“Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.”

—**Arthur Ashe**, American tennis player

“Your job has been eliminated. Clear out your desk by noon.”

Those were the words that changed my life. In the spring of 1984, when I was 32 years old, I drove to my job as the director of marketing for the Parker Brothers Toy & Game Company in Beverly, Massachusetts. I can remember the commute vividly. The salty sea air wafting off Boston’s North Shore filled my senses. A snap of wintry briskness lingered in the air but there was a whisper of warmer weather to come. It was a beautiful day, serene and promising. I felt good. Sure, our company had recently changed ownership, and things had been chaotic, but I was still confident in my ability to contribute. I walked into my job that day energized, expecting to put in another honest day’s work moving things forward for the organization.

When I arrived, I was asked to report directly to the office of the VP of marketing, who was fidgeting nervously and waiting for me outside his door. Gravely, he asked me to step into his office. He was having trouble looking at me, his eyes darting around at everything else in the room – landing on inanimate objects like his stapler, the doorknob, his chair – anything but me. Despite his strange temperament, I had no idea what was coming. Once we were both settled in his office, he fired me immediately, and with barely an explanation.

I couldn't understand it; there had been no warning whatsoever. All he could muster as a reason for letting me go was that my job had been "eliminated" and I was too blindsided to choke out any follow-up questions. Gesturing toward the door, he asked me to clear out my desk and go, ushering me out of his office as quickly as possible

Although it would have monumental impact on my life for years thereafter, the whole miserable conversation came and went in manner of minutes. It was crushing. In a daze, as I made my way toward my desk, a storm of feelings converged inside me: I was stunned, hurt, indignant, angry, and most of all, humiliated. How could this be happening to me? And, worse, how did I not see it coming?

As I gathered my things and left the building, my feelings gave way to an even heavier sensation of dread as I realized I would have to deliver this disastrous news to my wife. How I would break it to her? We had young children and a hefty mortgage; everyone was relying on me. What was I going to do?

As I drove home, my self-esteem was in freefall. The drive that had felt so full of promise hours earlier now had the feel of a funeral procession. The refreshing spring sea air that had

wafted through my window before now felt thick and stagnant. Without a doubt, it was the most awful day in my entire career. And in the wake of it, I felt hopeless and stuck. This wasn't how I envisioned my journey; as a dedicated and committed professional, I had always hoped for more. Now, all I felt was uncertainty.

But as you'll learn, this defeating experience turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me; it was the *beginning* of my leadership story, not the end. It was in this crucible moment, after this abrupt and devastating firing, that I first began to consider what might be holding me back from realizing my potential, fulfilling my dreams, and making a bigger impact on the world around me. It was the first step toward total reinvention.

Ups and Downs

People are often surprised when I tell them this story. Since that harrowing time when I was fired, I've been blessed with much success on my leadership journey. I'm fortunate to have become well-known (at least in the business world) as a president, Fortune 300 CEO, and chairman. I've served as president of Nabisco Foods, president and CEO of Campbell Soup Company, and chairman of Avon Products. I've had the joy of starting my own company and the privilege of serving as a board member for many others, in the public, the nonprofit, and the academic sectors. It's been an honor. When I tell people that I once got fired and struggled to find my footing, they often admit they had assumed that my success story was smooth and seamless. But of course it wasn't. As is so often the case, my journey could have easily turned out very differently.

My career got off to a floundering start. I began at the very bottom of the ladder as an entry-level marketing assistant at General Mills. It was my first experience working in a corporate office environment and I was out of my depth. I certainly didn't look the part: On my first day, I walked into the corporate offices in a tacky khaki suit and long, wild, curly hair. Everyone else was clean-cut. I didn't act the part quite right either; I was shy and hesitant, not comfortable in my own skin. Struggling to find my footing, I worked hard but delivered lackluster results at first. Early in that role, in my first performance review, my most senior manager only wrote six words: "You should look for another job." It was tough feedback to receive so early in my career and I was discouraged.

But I persevered. With encouragement and support from my direct manager, eventually I was promoted, and I made a predictable ascent to better jobs with more responsibilities. Although I wasn't very flashy, outgoing, or even remarkable, I was always committed to working hard, putting my best foot forward, and helping those around me, so I managed to make some progress.

Back to Square One

Then I faced the *big* setback, the crippling one: I got fired.

When I got home on that fateful day, I felt bitter and hopeless. I'll never forget walking through my front door to face my family, feeling defeated. Usually an agreeable guy, I felt an uncharacteristic anger rising inside me. My calm demeanor was riled so much that when the HR manager called me later that day to follow up on my exit package and transition details, I cursed and hung up on him mid-sentence, slamming the phone down in frustration.

The worst part was that I felt like a victim. I didn't have a sense of agency or control over my life. And I went down a dangerous road of self-pity. It seemed like my entire career had been flushed down the toilet. All my hard work, all that striving, all my quiet adherence to rules and expectations, behaving how I thought I was supposed to – what had it amounted to? I didn't know how to deal with the large mortgage payments looming, or how to overcome the shy temperament that had kept me removed from the world around me. I was stuck.

The Question

The more I thought about it, the less I understood it. Why weren't my efforts yielding the career I envisioned? Why was I experiencing these setbacks? Even though I'd had modest success in my career, something was always holding me back from achieving a breakthrough, from being the leader I believed I could be. *But what?*

It wasn't that I lacked ambition or work ethic; I had always kept my head down, worked hard, and done exactly what I thought I was supposed to do. It wasn't that I lacked a competitive drive; the grit that had carried me to success as a Division 1 collegiate tennis player still burned within me. It wasn't that I wasn't competent; I'd always shown a proficiency for the work I was given. And it certainly wasn't that I didn't have strong values. Family, faith, and a commitment to community and public service were deeply ingrained in my personhood, instilled in me since childhood.

I had a lot going for me. But there was a glaring problem: I hadn't figured out how to translate all of these characteristics into a winning formula for success. I hadn't yet learned how

to leverage the parts of my personality, motivations, temperament, and beliefs that were uniquely *mine* and transform them into a Foundation for limitless possibility and greater impact. What's more, nobody at the time would have ever known any of these defining things about me; always playing it safe, I mostly kept to myself. I had no approach for reflecting on my inner self or communicating to others what mattered to me. But all of that, luckily, was about to change.

A Game-Changing Lesson

At this rock-bottom point in my life, I knew I wanted to stop merely going along to get along. I wanted more. I yearned to love my work, to be really good at it, and to feel fulfilled by the difference I was making in the world. But, like so many of the leaders I speak to every day, I didn't know how to do it. Amid the competing pressures of my life and job search, I had no idea where to look, or how to start. I felt like my life was happening to me, not like I had influence over it; I wanted to be the driver of my circumstances, not a mere passenger along for the ride.

What I know now that I didn't know then is you can start where you are, with what you have within you. And you can start small. **You already have the raw materials to change your leadership life.**

But I didn't learn that lesson on my own. I had help. My best clue as to how to elevate my leadership came from a straight-shooting outplacement counselor named Neil Mackenna, who was hired to support me after I got fired.

Fortunately, I had swallowed my pride and called the HR manager back (yes, the same person I had cursed at and hung up on). Thank goodness I made that call because the HR manager connected me with Neil, and meeting Neil changed my life.

Neil was a gruff straight-shooter with a hearty New England temperament. He didn't suffer whining, BS, or a victim-y "poor me" attitude. Not for a second. I could tell he cared about me and genuinely wanted to help, but he was a tough guy. Which is why I was surprised when, in our second meeting, Neil asked me to handwrite my life story and share it with him. That seemed like a strangely intimate request from such a gristly man. But he insisted. He didn't care how long it took; he wanted every detail I could remember. I was dubious – but I was desperate to find a job, and he said this could help, so I got cracking on the task of cobbling together my autobiography.

Before this assignment from Neil, I had never taken the time to think that carefully about my life experiences. Most people haven't. It felt uncomfortable but I took it seriously. I wrote about growing up in the suburbs of Chicago with my three younger brothers, my unrelenting competitive drive as a tennis player, the values of service, grit, and industriousness my family had instilled in me, the forthright nature I admired in my mother, the unconditional love and support of my wife and children, the inspiring role models we had in both of our families, my admiration for Teddy Roosevelt, my love of Louis L'Amour Western stories, my passion for learning about exceptional people in sports and public life, and on and on. Everything and anything I could think of, I included. Then I handed it off to Neil, confused that anybody would even be interested in reading such an account.

Straight Talk

Two weeks later, Neil had read the entire document cover to cover. And he had drawn some harsh conclusions. Bluntly, he told me that one of the main reasons I wasn't living up to my

potential was that I was *lying* to people; I wasn't telling them who I really was. "I looked at what you wrote down. And it just doesn't match up," he said in his typically brusque manner. I bristled at the accusation at first. "I'm no liar," I said.

Gesturing at the pages I'd written, he explained, "The person who wrote *this* life story is a fierce do-or-die competitor. It's the opposite of the face you're presenting to your colleagues. What you're showing to the world is a modest guy who goes with the flow. But the Doug who wrote *this* story is a leader and a fighter." Incredulous, he said, "The person who wrote this life story, and the person you're showing to the world – these are two completely different people!"

Everything started to click. I wasn't forging connections with people because they were never really meeting the real me. I had been hiding without even realizing it. Why? **Because I had no foundation in my true self.** I'd never done the self-exploration necessary to connect with what makes me, me. And, like so many leaders today, I had never been exposed to a usable process for getting to the bottom of it.

With a challenging job hunt ahead of me, Neil warned, "You're going to interview terribly because you're not honest with people about who you really are. They're not ever meeting the *real* you." It was hard to hear but I realized he was right. I wasn't showing up in an authentic way, not in *any* of my pursuits. How would anybody know about my fierce resolve, my tenacious spirit, my desire to contribute? I didn't tell them. And I didn't show them. I kept a low profile, staying mostly sequestered in my office where I did my work. I made halfhearted plans to try to find a way to do things differently. But, inevitably, because I did not know where to begin and felt swamped with my work, those plans had always remained unrealized.

All this time, I had been looking outward for answers, blaming my setbacks on a complex world, on uncharitable bosses, on external factors altogether. But this dose of eye-opening tough talk changed me. I began to understand that to make a change, I couldn't just try harder, I had to try *differently*, to *do* something different. Maybe the secret to raising my impact wasn't somewhere *out there*. Maybe it had been within me the whole time. And it was up to me to transform it into a platform for reaching my goals and connecting more fully with the people with whom I lived and worked.

I couldn't just sit back anymore and wait for things to change. If I wanted to realize my full potential, it was going to require some work.

Determined, and true to my roots as a competitive athlete, I devoted myself to learning everything I could about leadership. I became obsessed. I read every book I could find. I practiced endlessly. I committed myself to the pursuit of leadership excellence, consulting mentors, friends, and experts. And eventually, over a 45-year career that would carry me to unforeseen adventures, setbacks, and triumphs I never imagined, I developed and honed the life-changing six steps, now simply called *The Blueprint*, that would change the entire arc of my career and lift my leadership to new heights.

Paying It forward

My path to leadership success was bumpy, slow at the start, and riddled with setbacks. It took me a long time to figure out a practical approach to reaching my potential. I don't want you to have to go through the same thing.

Today's leaders don't have the time to figure it out on their own. The pace of life has accelerated rapidly; technology has ushered in a tacit expectation that we be "on" and reachable 100% of the time. The number of texts and emails we receive has tripled in recent years. Expectations are higher. Companies want more, better, faster. That's why it's now my mission to share *The Blueprint* with you, so you don't have to go through what I went through to figure out how to lift your leadership to new heights.

The leaders I talk to, coach, train, and mentor every day – they need help! They want to do more, to dream bigger, to become the leaders they know they can be. But they're busy and stressed and they don't know where to look for a road-tested way to do better. I've done the hardest part so leaders – both seasoned and aspiring – don't have to muddle through figuring it out on their own anymore.

While this book is years in the making, you can start putting it to work for you *today*. Following the same exact six steps I took to change my leadership life, you too can fulfill your potential and deliver ever-improving results in a demanding, confusing, and time-starved world – and actually enjoy yourself along the way.

Built Especially for YOU

The most important thing about *The Blueprint* is that it is all about you. You shouldn't have to learn to lead like somebody else. These steps teach you about yourself, and help you build a customized framework for reaching your goals, in a way that works uniquely for you, with your own leadership voice and style. All you have to do is follow the practical steps in earnest. Each step is small and manageable; nothing in *The Blueprint* ever has to be "perfect" or "complete." Because that's not the way life works.

The Catch

There is one small catch: you must enter into this journey understanding that it is ongoing. While you'll be making measurable progress right out of the gate, noticing changes, and achieving goals, you won't ever truly be "finished." Once you embark on this journey, it never ends.

Although the steps are numbered, the Blueprint is not linear. Its power is derived from the fact that it is cyclical by design. It's iterative, designed to fit into the cadence and pace of your life. Because the tempo of modern life has accelerated, this change process nests harmoniously within the complex structure of the life you are leading today. It's comprised of small steps that you can start, revisit, and revise whenever it suits you. You can begin exactly where you are with exactly what you have right now and you'll keep improving it whenever you want, at your own speed. The process is ongoing. You begin where you end. And you end where you begin, getting better each and every time.

After you've worked through the six steps once, you'll be ready to work through them again and again throughout your lifetime, continuously honing, improving, and reaching higher. You'll find it will become second nature to progress through the steps, and it will go more quickly each time around. It's simple – but not easy. Hard work – but well worth it. Aspirational – but also approachable. Let's go!

About This Book

There are two primary parts to this book that will help you design, and build, your own customized path to fulfilling your infinite potential. With this book as your guide, you can get

short-term results by applying the practical advice herein on Monday morning *and* use the six-step Blueprint to develop a strategy for reaching your most ambitious, shoot-for-the-stars goals in the long-term.

You'll also learn how to marry your own insights and expectations about your personal leadership with the expectations of your organization. Becoming a better leader won't be particularly helpful if you can't apply your improved approach in the real world so, while the steps are designed to empower your personal leadership journey, they are also created with a view toward helping you integrate your learning in the workplace to deliver more powerful results for your organization. Taken as a whole, this book can help you to get unstuck, maximize your impact, and yes, even change your leadership life.

Part I: Blueprint

In **Part I: Blueprint**, I'll guide you through the practical six-step process of self-reflection and study that I used to build the **Foundation** for my own leadership success. It's not an academic or scientific process; it's based on my lived and learned experiences. Unlike many professors, gurus, or thought leaders in the leadership space, I offer a change process based on real experience climbing the corporate ladder – starting at the very bottom and ending at the very top. It is further strengthened by my lifetime of study and years of teaching leadership to hundreds of managers and executives.

In Part I, you'll learn how to use small steps to meet big goals. You'll learn why you must dig deep to reach high and why building a solid Foundation is the most powerful thing you can do to achieve leadership success. In each of the six steps, there are exercises and prompts for reflection. I'll guide you through the

process each step of the way as you learn how to articulate your leadership Purpose and Beliefs, how to identify your own unique strengths and values, how to design a Leadership Model, and how to build a Treasury of practices that work for you.

How to Use Part I

In this section, there are actual exercises embedded within the pages of the book, so get a pen or pencil and a packet of Post-it® Notes ready.

If you prefer not to write within the pages of your book, I recommend that you use our e-workbook – available for complimentary download at **conantleadership.com/blueprint** – as a supplementary tool. The e-workbook includes prompts to help you with exercises, space to record your answers, and additional materials to help you on your Blueprint journey.

If you prefer to record your reflections and answers to the exercises elsewhere, you can use a notebook, a laptop, the notes app on your phone, or any other tool that allows you to document your thinking.

Post-it® Notes

As you work your way through the exercises in Part I of this book, I encourage you to use Post-it Notes along the way to help you record your key thoughts and takeaways. At a glance, a packet of Post-it Notes may not look like much, but they can actually be used as the building blocks of the personal Leadership Model you will create during the Blueprint process.

If you are using the e-workbook available for download on my website, you'll notice there is a double-sided "Notes" page

at the end of each section for you to record your “epiphanies”: all the notes, ideas, questions, words, and inspirational tidbits that occurred to you during the completion of the exercises in the corresponding sections. You’ll be prompted to record each meaningful word, thought, idea, practice, or phrase on its own Post-it and stick it right there on the “Notes” page.

By the end of Part I, you’ll have collected quite a few “Post-it epiphanies,” and they will be instrumental in the development of your leadership model prototype. Even if you are not using the e-workbook, you can keep track of your Post-it Notes in a journal, notebook, or pad of paper – whatever works for you.

Part II: Manifesto

In **Part II: Manifesto**, you’ll get anchored in foundational leadership lessons. As you work your way through *The Blueprint*, you will design a customized leadership Foundation that speaks uniquely to you.

But your greatest support in the realization of your special leadership dreams will be a deep understanding of what leadership is, and the timeless principles that make leadership work, no matter the practitioner.

Just as the great innovators in art, literature, and business had to first understand the rules of their craft in order to break or evolve them, so it is the same with leadership. To transform your leadership, it is helpful to understand the parts of it that are steadfast and unchanging no matter the era, situation, or person involved. In Part II: Manifesto, I explain these bedrock principles of “leadership that works” as I see and have experienced them. In this section, I’ll walk you through ten essential leadership tenets, bringing them to life with personal anecdotes,

stories from my leadership colleagues and contemporaries, and battle-tested practices that you can apply immediately.

Ready? I'm excited for you. Armed with these lessons, more things will be within your reach. You can do whatever you put your mind to. By working through the six steps, you can reach high and start to become the leader you've always wanted to be; you can finally shed the skin of the overwhelmed workaday leader who toils from one task to the next without purpose, and be reborn as an enlightened practitioner of a noble craft. Yes, you can.

PART

I

BLUEPRINT

Get Unstuck

Your Foundation Is Everything

“There is nothing permanent except change.”

—Heraclitus, Greek philosopher

To get the most out of this book, it helps to understand the root of the problem leaders face today.

The world is changing rapidly. You’re looking for practical answers because the modern workplace reflects these changes in ways that can be overwhelming. The digital age has ushered in an era of unprecedented complexity and dysfunction. Hierarchies that used to dictate the processes for managing problems are crumbling. Technology has accelerated the pace of business; people are inundated with a perpetual onslaught of communication and messaging from text, email, push notifications, and more, so much that they feel like they’re gasping for air. Adding to this, there are six disparate generations of men and women from every part of the world, often with different communication styles and value systems, working together elbow to elbow.

There used to (sort of) be a way to manage the daily onslaught: you could ask your boss what to do. But as hierarchical structures are collapsing, and leaders are themselves struggling under a deluge of competing priorities, often your boss wants you to figure it out on your own. Today more than ever, your leadership is up to you.

What I’ve observed in my years of research and leadership practice, and in my ongoing work training and mentoring leaders, is that most people can’t find the time to “shoot the lights out” because they can barely even find the time to turn the lights on. They’re treading water, fighting just to stay afloat. People know they need to do better. And most people genuinely want to. You’re probably one of those people. You want to be more present for your direct reports. You want to run better

meetings. You want to listen more intently. You want to provide more direction. You want to deliver more aggressive growth. You want to build better relationships. You want to infuse your teams with vitality, to find creative ways to keep people engaged in the work, and on and on. There are a million things you want to do. But then reality happens. A crisis hits. Your next call is waiting. A meeting runs long. You get a call from your kid's school. Or worse, you get fired, your company is acquired, you get sick, you're hit with any variety of bad news. And, for the umpteenth time, figuring out how to do all the things you dream of doing gets pushed aside. It's understandable. But it's not sustainable. To contribute at ever-higher levels, to achieve what you want to achieve, you need to find a way to do better, to get unstuck. And it needs to be a way that works within the rhythm of your busy, fast-paced life.

Rather than embarking on one giant discovery endeavor that could take years, you need something that can be broken up into manageable chunks, into little steps that acknowledge the reality of your daily life.

Start Small

Dr. Robert Maurer, PhD, is a clinical psychologist at UCLA. His specialty is helping people approach change in a feasible way. In his book *One Small Step Can Change Your Life*, he shares his approach to change: you start microscopically small. The bigger the change you want to make, the more miniscule a first step he'll ask you to take. If somebody wants to start an exercise regimen? He tells them to stand – just stand still – on a treadmill for 60 seconds a day. Inevitably (and amazingly), once they wire their habits to this almost laughably small step, they are able to

expand the behavior to become an indispensable part of their life. Down the road, 60 seconds of standing often turns into 30 minutes of running or more.

Maurer's approach works because it outsmarts the brain's fear response: the innate tendency to avoid things that seem too overwhelming or hard, things that might result in failure, danger, or misery. Because the initial actions taken are so small, his patients' resistance is disarmed. His approach is doubly effective because it jives with the pace of modern life. While you might not be able to engineer an extra hour into your zany schedule for exercise, everybody has 60 seconds to spare. And that's all you need to get started. Exercise is merely one application; Maurer's small-step approach can be applied to any goal.

James Clear, an expert in habits and author of the book *Atomic Habits*, has discovered much to back up Maurer's "small steps" idea in his years of researching habits. Clear advocates shifting our focus from the goals themselves to the systems that help us reach those goals. The key is in understanding the power of small habits. Clear writes, "Too often, we convince ourselves that massive success requires massive action." But, in reality, we only need to improve by 1% to see better results over time. Just like making seemingly insignificant deposits into a financial investment can yield big payouts in the future, so too can focusing on tiny tweaks and improvements. Clear explains, "Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement. . . . They seem to make little difference on any given day and yet the impact they deliver over the months and years can be enormous." The research and advice from top experts is clear. Investing in small changes, in incremental steps, is the smart approach to getting better.

Forget Perfection

Part of the problem today's professionals face is that they are overwhelmed by expectations. They have so many looming "to-dos," not to mention the litany of unfulfilled wishes that keep getting cast aside. It's all too much. When you look at the giant list of your goals and aspirations all at once, it becomes too daunting to manage.

I speak with leaders daily, and they tell me they feel stuck. When we dig a little deeper, we often discover it's partially because they are driven and high-achieving types; they don't want to start something new unless they can do it perfectly. But perfection is an unattainable myth. (As one of my old mentors used to say to me, "Don't let 'perfect' become the enemy of 'good.'")

To combat this stifling (and pervasive) perfectionism, and to circumvent your brain's natural resistance response to new things, you need an iterative approach that starts small, is broken down into practical steps, and that can always be improved upon but never has to be perfect or "finished." Because guess what? Your life will never be perfect, the conditions will never be just right, and your growth as a person will never be finished. That's just not the way things work.

You need something you can start doing today, something that starts small but yields big results. That's what *The Blueprint* is designed to do. It takes some work upfront, but once you begin, it's an ace in the sleeve for the duration of your leadership career. And it addresses everything you want to do, all at once, because using it has the potential to transform your behavior in every single moment, no matter the situation.

Building Your Future

Until I was fired, I'd never thought carefully about any of this stuff. I'd never considered what it might take to get to the next level beyond simply working hard. But what I learned on the journey that followed is that a strong work ethic is just not enough. You've got to bring discipline and careful thought to your leadership. *You must start with the intention to change.*

To do this, you must find a way to connect with your truest self before you can connect with others and get the best out of them. To realize success, you have to *build* your own leadership future brick by brick, from the studs up to the sky. And the way to do it is from the inside out. I've learned that it's a mistake to think the answers to your problems lie somewhere "out there." A leadership approach that helps you reach your goals, and provides joy and fulfillment, must come from within. Nobody "out there" can do it for you.

The upside is that if you're willing to go through the process, you can design the life and leadership you want. And then you can build, enhance, and evolve it. You can choose what a highly effective and enjoyable leadership approach looks like to you and you can start to make it come true. It's completely up to you. Here's how.

Like an Architect, Dig Deep to Reach High

"Freedom is from within."

—Frank Lloyd Wright, American architect

"I work from the inside out."

—Frank Gehry, American architect

Before you set to work on your six-step blueprint, it's instructive to think about what blueprints are for. In the world at large, a blueprint

is a tool for bringing to life the dreams of an architect. **The blueprint in this book is a tool for bringing to life the dreams of leaders.** Rather than building a structure, you are building your future; while the output is not as tangible as concrete, steel, or glass, it can be just as magnificent as the most dazzling skyscraper. You're not manufacturing a building; you will be manifesting your leadership dreams. Using this process, you will create the capability to achieve leadership success in a way that works uniquely for you.

Since we are borrowing inspiration from architects and engineers, let's think about their process for creating tall, impressive structures that loom high in the sky. If you ask any good structural engineer, they'll tell you that the trick to building a soaring skyscraper is laying a deep foundation. The taller the structure you want to build, the stronger and deeper the foundation you'll need. Without a sturdy foundation, a tall building is susceptible to all kinds of calamities. It can topple under its own weight and it may not be able to withstand natural disasters like high winds or earthquakes. If the foundation is not deep and strong, the building will not be able to reach the sky or weather the inevitable storms to come.

The same thing is true in leadership. I've had firsthand experience in dozens of leadership roles and I've found that the leaders who succeed have a sturdy and secure **Foundation**. That Foundation tethers them to their beliefs and values, keeps them connected to their unique personality, characteristics, and temperament, and allows them to put their skill set to work in the most productive way.

Leaders who are operating from a strong Foundation are less likely to be phased or waylaid by adversity and crises. As they build their leadership approach, they are able to stand firm and tall, secure in who they are and confident in how they can adapt to any situation. The stronger their Foundation, the higher

they can reach toward their goals. **That's what your journey through the six-step Blueprint will be focused on: designing the Foundation that allows you to build a personal leadership approach that can withstand almost anything.**

How does it work? You will use each of the six practical steps in the Blueprint process to create your leadership Foundation. The Foundation you will develop is the key to unlocking your potential.

What Will Your Foundation Look Like?

For our purposes, a Foundation is a wholesale accounting of your unique characteristics, motivations, temperament, values, beliefs, and skill set, and it's a platform for using those things to reach your goals in a way that is authentic to who you really are. It is further enhanced by your study of highly effective practices and your observation of other leaders you respect.

You use the steps in the blueprint to glean the key components. Using my guided prompts for reflection and study, you will excavate the raw materials of your Foundation:

- **Your Leadership Purpose** – the reason you choose to lead
- **Your Leadership Beliefs** – the thinking that governs your approach to influencing others
- **Your Leadership Model** – a personalized expression of your leadership beliefs, purpose, and skills
- **Your Leadership Practice Treasury** – a suite of behaviors that brings your model to life
- **Your Leadership Improvement Plan** – a list of focus areas and key actions to jumpstart your lifetime of continuous improvement

The individual components of your Foundation are much less important than the whole. Your Foundation will be strengthened by the way these components forge together into something that is grounding and steadfast, supporting you from within. You can stand firm in your Foundation, rising tall in your leadership, only so far as all the materials you've used to create it are melded together as a cohesive whole. Each piece is interconnected to all the others; each step is interdependent with all the steps that precede and follow it.

In a nutshell:

Your Foundation is **what** you will be creating.
The Blueprint is **how** you will create it.

The Six Steps

The **Blueprint** is a six-step process (Figure 1.1) for building the **Foundation** you will need to lift your leadership to new heights: a way for you to put down roots that tether you firmly to the ground even as you rise higher toward the sky. These are the exact same steps I used to go from getting fired to becoming a chairman and CEO who deeply enjoys my work.

THE BLUEPRINT PROCESS

6 Practical Steps to Lift Your Leadership to New Heights



FIGURE 1.1 The Blueprint Process

It starts with changing your mindset. If you treat leadership as an ordinary job, you will get ordinary results. But leadership is more than a job; leadership that really works is a *craft*: honed with intention, practiced mindfully, and improved constantly.

To build your Foundation, and get where you want to go, there are six steps.

Step 1. ENVISION: *Reach High*

First, you have to set the intention to do better and **Envision** what success looks like to you – to reach high. It is in this step that you will take your first crack at articulating your **Leadership Purpose**.

Step 2. REFLECT: *Dig Deep*

Next, you will **Reflect** on your experiences to uncover your leadership beliefs, to dig deep into what makes you, you; in this step, you will uncover the life lessons that anchor your leadership, and develop a deeper understanding of your unique personality, motivations, temperament, and skill set.

Step 3. STUDY: *Lay the Groundwork*

In the third step, you will **Study**, to fill in all the cracks from your dig, laying the groundwork with all the learnings and insights from the world that exists beyond your own personal experiences. It won't be as dry and scholarly as it sounds. You'll find inspiration all around you, in high and low places, not just in dusty old books. In this step you will solidify your **Leadership Beliefs**.

Step 4. PLAN: *Design*

Next comes the fun part. Using design thinking as well as prompts, Post-it® Notes, and pen and paper, you get to conceive

your **Plan** – an exquisite design for the exact **Leadership Model** you envision, derived from your **Leadership Purpose** and your **Leadership Beliefs**.

Step 5. PRACTICE: *Build*

In this step you will build **Practice** into your change process. You'll brainstorm small steps you can take – little, actionable practices – that you can begin to fold into your habits. You'll learn the important difference between repetition and **deliberate practice**. And you will begin to create your **Practice Treasury**, a stable of behaviors that, step-by-step, will help you to more precisely bring to life the leadership plan you designed.

Step 6. IMPROVE: *Reinforce*

Finally, you **Improve**, continually learning from what you did right, and what you could have done better, reinforcing the strength of your Foundation in perpetuity. In this step you will learn why the best leaders must “grow or die” and you will develop a simple **Improvement Plan** to propel you forward on your ongoing journey. Here, you will also work to align your personal leadership approach with the expectations of whatever organization you are currently working for; the Blueprint is primarily about you, but it is also about helping you succeed in the world and delivering better results for your organization.

Ultimately, all six of these steps will forge together in an interconnected Foundation of behaviors and beliefs that you continue to refine and recommit to throughout the duration of your leadership life. It gets easier each time you work through *The Blueprint*. And I'll guide you through every step. Let's get started.