

# Leadership Lab<sup>(R)</sup>

Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome.



Safeguarding the rights of others is the most noble and beautiful end of a human being.

Khalil Gibran

Every person has a longing to be significant; to make a contribution; to be a part of something noble and purposeful.

John C. Maxwell.

One should never do wrong in return, nor mistreat any man, no matter how one has been mistreated by him.

Socrates

A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination.

Nelson Mandela

## Idea in Brief

Leadership is a privilege, and with that privilege, one must make a choice. You must make a choice of whom to serve in your leadership role, yourself or those you are responsible for. Noble leadership is a choice you make to serve those that you lead with the most virtuous of intentions. As a noble leader, you put others ahead of your own interests and work to make them the greatest that they can be.

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[www.leadershiplab.ca](http://www.leadershiplab.ca)

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## Noble Leadership

By B.L. Janke

In a speech in 1961, John F. Kennedy ascribed the following quotation to Edmund Burke, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men [people] do nothing.” And regardless of the veracity of the attribution, the sentiment is powerfully true and stands the test of time. Whether it is a social injustice that must be challenged and overturned or a tyrannical grab for power that must be blunted, the only way a misdeed can persist is if those that recognize it stand idly by and allow it to continue. And this is the same for the smaller everyday things that we all face as it is for the massive geopolitical and social injustices that we see and hear about.

From a pure excellence perspective, mediocrity can be substituted for the word “evil,” and the sentiment remains so very true as well. The only way that mediocrity succeeds is if the people that see a better way and a more enlightened path simply turn their backs and refuse to expend the effort to make a difference, to coach, teach and inspire others in the pursuit of excellence. In the absence of a relentless commitment and input of energy to uplift the attainment of better results, mediocrity will prevail. Mediocrity is the

domain of the banal, of the lazy and of the uninspired. Without the “good people” stepping forward and investing their time, energy and knowledge to the creation of something better, the devolution to anarchy, entropy, and mediocrity are assured.

And leadership is no different either. If you believe that there is a better way to lead, one in which all people are valued, respected and appreciated for the work that they do, and where they can do their best work every day, then you must change your leadership to make this happen. Leadership is not about barking orders and maliciously manipulating people for your benefit; leadership is something much more than that. Leadership is the sum-total of the values, beliefs, behaviours, actions and activities you undertake to create something that didn't exist previously. And I'm not talking about the tangible goods or services that you and your organization provide. I am talking about the changes that you create within others to make them better people, better contributors, and better leaders themselves. I am talking about the work that you do that allows these others to feel fulfilled in their work, families, and communities.

***Greatness resides in that moment  
when you decide that a fear will no  
longer hold you back.***



## LEADERSHIP LAB

Leadership Lab is a forum for the exploration and discovery of personal and leadership excellence. Excellence is a core value of who I am as a person, an educator, and a leader. It is what drives me to perform and to grow; testing the limits of my capability both personally and professionally and pushing them farther.

Excellence is an attitude that one must cultivate and support its growth. To do so, one must study excellence and be committed to life-long learning.

Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome.

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Leadership is the work that we undertake that facilitates people's personal growth, becoming better and taking pride in themselves and all their contributions (whether at work or not).

It is stunning to think that in the year 2020, we still have "leaders" who, upon hearing that one of their employees, or employee's spouse, is pregnant, react negatively. And often with panic, alarm and a complete lack of respect. I have heard of leaders telling their employees to keep it quiet so that they are not impacted by the upcoming compensation or succession planning cycles. I have even heard about leaders transferring these employees to other departments because they don't want to deal with the "issue" or be concerned with the employee being distracted from their work. In the 21st

century, we still seem to have a lot of 19th-century style management responses to the extraordinarily joyful and natural event of creating and bringing a new life into this world. These "leaders" are, obviously, not leaders at all, and I wouldn't even call them responsible managers either. And so with such an outdated perspective and belief system, why are these people still in positions of authority over others, and why haven't organizations taken decisive action to fix this and other similar problems within their firms? The problem sits with leadership and the moral courage to correct the wrongs that they and their companies have perpetuated for decades.

Nobly intended leadership, a leadership with a moral compass that points accurately, is the antidote to the "evil" that we see in the world today.

Whether this "evil" is bullying and harassment in the workplace, discriminatory work practices, or apathy to correct a known wrong, leadership is the solution. Too often, leadership is defined for us, by those above us, as alignment with, and unwavering loyalty to, the set direction. There usually is an unwillingness to consider alternative perspectives and viewpoints. And too often, disagreement is confused as disloyalty. In contrast, the airing of differences and being psychologically safe to disagree, is, in fact, the greatest example of loyalty that there may be within an organization. Leadership should not be fueled through fear but enlightened through empowerment.

There is no doubt that all leadership is manipulation. It is the intention from which leadership draws that

determines if that manipulation is noble or malicious. Malicious manipulation is blatant, and there is way too much of it in today's work environment, politics and world affairs. But nobly intended leadership is much more rare, much more uncommon, but also much more precious and valuable. Leadership that builds people up with respect, support, and love is harder to do and a more long-term proposition than leadership that flows from fear, anxiety and threats. But this purest of leadership intentions is where the real magic happens.

Think for a moment if you were to work in an organization that had nobly intended leadership versus a fear-based leadership paradigm. It might take you longer to get "hired on" into this organization in the first place. Hiring decisions are essential to these organizations because of the impact it has on culture and longevity. These companies will want to make sure that every hiring decision is one that will produce a long-term relationship and not merely one that is transactional. You are not a commodity to be bought and sold, but an asset that will appreciate over time. A nobly intended organization would see every hiring decision as a life-long commitment and partnership, one in which they are making an "employment for life" type decision. Not unlike choosing a life partner in which the vows "...until death do us part," are uttered by both parties to "seal the deal" a nobly intended company sees every hiring decision as a life-long decision. And with this decision, a commitment is being made to your long-term growth, development,

satisfaction and fulfillment. And so, this decision needs to be made well with the best information and insight available.

And that is not to say that like in life, divorces and separations may not happen, they do, and they will happen, even in the most nobly intended organizations. All relationships have good times and bad times, ups and downs. Still, the best relationships and the most nobly intended companies commit to working through issues that develop in great detail and not simply cut and run at the first sign of trouble. A nobly intended company with leadership that supports that perspective would be committed to working through problems that exist in the relationship that they have with an individual; this is what noble intent means.

Leaders and companies have abdicated their responsibilities for employee growth and development for years. It seems that the cancellation of these programs is the first thing to get cut when economic times are strained. But in reality, the continuous training and development of employees is a responsibility that employers cannot and should not shirk. As John C. Maxwell has eloquently pointed out, "Companies get better as their people get better." The corollary to this is if companies don't like the results they are getting, it is a direct result of the lack of leadership they have provided in developing their people in the first place.

There is an excellent internet example of a conversation between the CEO and CFO of a company that highlights the

necessity of a continuous focus on employee training, development and growth. The story is that of a CEO and CFO reviewing the company's financials and budgets, and the results are not very good. The CFO, looking for ideas to save money, engages the CEO in a conversation about the training line item in the budget. The CFO, looking to trim this item, highlights the affordability of training by saying to the CEO, "What if we spend all this money on our people's training and they just decide to leave and go to work for someone else? Even our competitors!" The CEO, in this story, coolly turns to the CFO and replies, "What if we don't train our people and they stay!" While I'm sure this is an entirely fictitious story, I also know that it is playing out in thousands of companies and at different levels in those firms all the time.

The tension between training and development being a cost or an investment seems to be a classic unsolvable question to many. But it is solvable. It is clear from Maxwell's quote that the development of your people is an imperative for any organization to become better. It is an investment, unlike any other because of the multiplier effect it has on everything else that the organization does and undertakes. If you genuinely want to be a world-class organization, one in which world-class business results flow, you have to focus on the people of the organization. This people-focus includes their training, development, personal well being, psychological safety, fulfillment, and satisfaction. And all this starts and ends with the leadership that they are provided. It is

straightforward in the math, very simple in the process and effortless in the results; you get the leadership right, you get the results right.

Nobly intended leadership truly cares about the people that they are responsible for, and well beyond only the health and safety responsibility they may have while the team member is at work. But noble leadership is deeply concerned about the entire person both on and off the job. A nobly intended leader knows about their team member's family, what they enjoy doing, where they are going on vacation, and what is important to them. A caring leader not only helps their team member to accomplish the goals they have at work but other goals that they have for the other parts of their lives as well. The work may include figuring out how to get the team member to work from home on Wednesday afternoons so that they can coach the high-school basketball team, supporting them in their educational endeavours, to flexibility to attend religious services or serving on a community board. The leader has a whole person responsibility and accountability for their team member, not just a 9-5 one. This whole-person perspective is where truly extraordinary leadership resides.

A leader that has noble intent is not afraid of providing meaningful, regular performance feedback to their charge. It is expected. Whether reinforcing good performance, correcting mistakes, or offering suggestions on how to be even better, a leader sees their feedback and viewpoint of their ward as something already

owned by the individual. This feedback is merely in the temporary care of the leader until it is shared. When viewed this way, the leader must provide their protege with the input they hold as it belongs to the protege. This way, the protege is free to decide to do what they will with the data. It is not the leader's duty or obligation to withhold this information nor protect the protege from it. Instead, the leader's responsibility is to share it and then help to address it, overcome it, or discard it as the charge decides.

Too often than not, we simply manage people at work. Managers give work direction, check the quality and accuracy of the work, make corrections, and then hand out the next assignments. Management is all about doing things efficiently. However, what organizations need more of is leadership. Leadership should be more concerned about creating the environment in which people can succeed, one in which they can bring their entire selves to the work that they do. Leadership is about understanding the motivations and desires of each individual and then works to create a unique set of conditions and circumstances for each individual that maximizes their contribution and achievement. And this includes the totality of their charge's goals while achieving the companies goals as well. This work is hard work to do, which is why many people and companies refrain from stepping into this space. But when people are put first and treated like the assets that they are, the results that are achieved are almost unimaginable. Nobly intended

leaders that know organizational success resides on the contribution of their people. These leaders know that they will succeed in achieving and exceeding their corporate goals while their people meet and exceed their own.

For the "evil" of poor leadership to continue, it only takes the apathy and fear of good people to sit by and allow it to continue to happen. There is a better way to lead, one in which takes the whole person into consideration. Empowerment is key. Training and development are essential. Good performance feedback is critical. But most importantly, to all of these characteristics is the place from which leadership flows. If the intention is noble and from a place of caring for the individual, the transformation that our teams and companies will undergo will be stunning.

