Leadership requires learning on the job. With the willpower—and the heart—to continue, you can lead the way.

Christian Fux, International Committee of the Red Cross in Kenya

There are no shortages of opportunities for people to do great things. They can, and they must.

Mary Beth Cahill-Phillips, TrustLine

Throughout this book we’ve told stories of ordinary people who’ve gotten extraordinary things done. We’ve talked about men and women, young and old, from a variety of organizations, public and private, government and third sector, high-tech and low-tech, small and large, schools and professional services. Chances are you haven’t heard of most of them. They’re not famous people or mega-stars. They’re people who might live next door or work in the next cubicle over. We’ve focused on everyday leaders because we firmly believe that leadership is not about position or title. It’s about relationships, credibility, and what you do.

Beyond the practices, beyond the action steps, there’s another fundamental truth about leadership: leadership is everyone’s business.
Sometimes leadership becomes your business unexpectedly, as it did for Mary Beth Cahill-Phillips, years ago. Her morning began like any other, with the family scurrying to get up and about. She left her six-month-old daughter, Elizabeth, at a friend’s home, to share services of a child-care provider (their own having just moved away), and made her way to graduate school classes. Two hours later, Mary Beth and her husband were paged to come to the emergency room at Alta Bates Hospital. Elizabeth was in a coma. Over the next few days, weeks, and years they learned that Elizabeth had been shaken so severely by her child-care provider as to suffer brain damage and be permanently blinded. Subsequent events revealed aspects of that child-care provider’s background that made her quite unsuitable, even dangerous. “Had anyone known, none of us would have left our loved ones in this monster’s hands,” Mary Beth explains.

How could this have happened? How could it have been prevented and avoided? What needed to happen so that no other parents, or their children, would experience this nightmare? Mary Beth certainly did not choose this experience, but she took on the questions and led a battle with the State of California so that parents could have background checks done on the men and women to whom they were entrusting their children. More than 85 percent of those providing child care in California are unlicensed; the percentages are generally even higher in other states and countries around the globe. Mary Beth saw the need and established TrustLine.

It wasn’t easy and it wasn’t quick: the journey from Elizabeth’s tragedy to the governor’s signature, State Assembly’s funding, and implementation by the departments of Social Services and Justice took more than a decade. Mary Beth did it without benefit of any existing organizational launching pad, formal position, authority, or initial expertise in child welfare. She was driven in her quest—and she was not alone. She involved and mobilized thousands of others—she modeled, inspired, challenged, enabled, and encouraged—all along the way. Mary Beth found her voice and the leader within her to make certain that no other family would suffer her family’s experience.

Even while Mary Beth was leading the TrustLine effort, she wondered how much her reaction to her family nightmare resembled how other parents dealt with, made sense of, and even found some purpose in cruel twists of fate. For her doctoral dissertation, she focused on a sample of women, each of whom had, like her, suffered through the death or serious injury to her child.¹

They had all become leaders, creating organizations (Vanished Children’s Alliance and the Head Trauma Clinic at Children’s Hospital San Diego) and galvanizing people and special interests. Their efforts resulted in new product standards and recalls (new safety requirements for pool covers by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission), social movements (Mothers Against Drunk Driving—MADD), and government legislation (California’s TrustLine).

Based upon a priori criteria, none of these “ordinary” women would have been singled out from the population for their leadership potential. They were mostly young or middle-aged, many were single parents, less than half had graduated from college, many worked at home, and all lacked substantial years of work experience, unique professional talents, and prestigious organizational positions. They hadn’t had any formal (or perhaps even informal) training or special preparation to be leaders. Yet each suffered the death or serious injury of her child and determined that this situation would not—must not—happen again for another parent or another child. These women got extraordinary things done because they cared. There’s no denying the leadership within them.

Like Mary Beth and the women featured in her dissertation, many of the leaders we studied didn’t initiate the personal-best leadership projects that they wrote and talked about, yet they rose to the occasion. Some got angry and caught fire. Some saw an opportunity where others didn’t. Others simply believed they could make something better than it was or had been. And still others accepted an assignment and then found something within themselves that they hadn’t known they had. None of us knows our true strength until challenged to bring it forth.

LEADERSHIP IS LEARNED

There still persists, even in this new millennium, a pernicious myth that leadership is reserved for only a very few of us. That myth is perpetuated daily every time someone asks, “Are leaders born or made?” Whenever we’re
asked this question—which is almost every time we give a speech or conduct a class or workshop—our answer, always offered with a smile, is this: "Yes, of course, all leaders are born. We’ve never met a leader who wasn’t. So are all accountants, artists, athletes, parents, zoologists, you name it." We’re all born. What we do with what we have before we die is up to us.

There’s another leadership myth that stands in the way of personal and organizational success. It’s the myth that leadership is associated with position. It’s an assumption that leadership starts with a capital “L” and that when you’re on top you’re automatically a leader. It’s part of a larger hero myth that inhibits us from seizing the initiative. "It’s not my job," we say, and we wait for someone to ride in and save us.

Well, forget it! It’s just pure myth that only a lucky few can ever understand the intricacies of leadership. Leadership is not a place, it’s not a gene, and it’s not a secret code that can’t be deciphered by ordinary people. The truth is that leadership is an observable set of skills and abilities that are useful whether one is in the executive suite or on the front line, on Wall Street or Main Street, in any campus, community, or corporation. And any skill can be strengthened, honed, and enhanced, given the motivation and desire, the practice and feedback, and the role models and coaching.

It’s very curious—and revealing—that no one has ever asked us, “Can management be taught? Are managers born or made?” Why is it that management is viewed as a set of skills and abilities, while leadership is typically seen as a set of innate personality characteristics? It’s simple. People assume management can be taught. Because they do, hundreds of business schools have been established, and each year thousands of management courses are taught. By assuming that people can learn the attitudes, skills, and knowledge associated with good management practices, schools and companies have raised the caliber of managers. They’ve also contributed to the idea that good management skills are attainable.

The same can be said for leadership. In over twenty years of research, we’ve been fortunate to have heard and read the stories of thousands of ordinary people who’ve led others to get extraordinary things done. And there are millions more. It’s not the absence of leadership potential that inhibits the development of more leaders; it’s the persistence of the myth that leadership can’t be learned. This haunting myth is a far more powerful deterrent to leadership development than is the nature of the person or the basics of the leadership process.

It’s our collective task to liberate the leader within each and every one of us. Rather than view leadership as an innate set of character traits—a self-fulfilling prophecy that dooms society to having only a few good leaders—it’s far healthier and more productive to assume that it’s possible for everyone to learn to lead. By assuming that leadership is learnable, we can discover how many good leaders there really are. Somewhere, sometime, the leader within each of us may get the call to step forward—for the school, the congregation, the community, the agency, the company, the union, or the family. By believing in yourself and your capacity to learn to lead, you make sure you’ll be prepared when that call comes.

We wouldn’t have written this book if we didn’t know that it’s possible for ordinary people to learn how to get extraordinary things done. We wouldn’t have written this book if we didn’t know that ordinary people can become extraordinary leaders. We cast our votes on the side of optimism and hope. Chances are good that you do, too.

Certainly, we shouldn’t mislead people into believing that they can attain unrealistic goals. However, neither should we assume that only a few would ever attain excellence in leadership (or in any other human endeavor). We do know that those who are most successful at bringing out the best in others are those who set achievable “stretch” goals and believe that they have the ability to develop the talents of others. We do know that effective leaders are constantly learning. They see all experiences as learning experiences, not just those sessions in a formal classroom or workshop. They’re constantly looking for ways to improve themselves and their organizations. By reading this book and engaging in other personal development activities, you’re demonstrating a predisposition to lead. Even if some people think that they’re not able to learn to lead, you must believe that you can. That’s where it all starts—with your own belief in yourself.

Jim Whittaker, REI’s first employee and the first American to climb Mount Everest, once observed, “You never conquer the mountain. You conquer yourself—your doubts and your fears.” We would say the same for leadership. You don’t conquer your organization. You don’t conquer leadership. You conquer your own doubts and fears about leading.
LEADERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By now, you know that we believe there’s a lot to be learned from leaders—both the famous, whose biographies line the shelves, and the everyday leaders. You know that we regularly ask people in our classes and workshops to share a story about a leader they admire and whose direction they would willingly follow. From this exercise, we hope they’ll discover for themselves what it takes to have an influence on others. We have another objective as well: we want them to discover the power that lies within each one of us to make a difference.

Virtually everyone we’ve asked has been able to name at least one leader whose genuine influence they’ve felt. Sometimes it’s a well-known figure—perhaps someone out of the past who changed the course of history. Sometimes it’s a contemporary role model who serves as an example of success. Most often, however, it’s someone personally close to them who’s helped them learn—a parent, friend, member of the clergy, coach, teacher, manager.

Verónica Guerrero’s story underscored for us just how extraordinary those around us can be. Verónica selected her father, José Luis Guerrero, as the leader she admired. She told the story of her father’s leadership in the Unión Nacional Sinarquista (UNS) back in the early 1940s. (UNS later became part of another political party—Partido Democrata Mexicano [PDM], or Mexican Democratic Party.) She related in detail what her father did and then summed up his influence with this remembered observation from José Luis: “I think the work that I did back then helped me extend myself and others to levels that I didn’t know I could reach…. If you feel strongly about anything, and it’s something that will ultimately benefit your community and your country, don’t hold back. Fear of failing or fear of what might happen doesn’t help anyone…. Don’t let anyone or anything push you back.”

Verónica Guerrero closed her description of her father (who was then dying of pancreatic cancer) with this observation: “As I heard his story and I saw a sick, tired, and weak man, I couldn’t help thinking that our strength as humans and as leaders has nothing to do with what we look like. Rather, it has everything to do with what we feel, what we think of ourselves…. Leadership is applicable to all facets of life.” That’s precisely the point. If we are to become leaders, we must believe that we, too, can be a positive force in the world. Leadership does have everything to do with what we think of ourselves.

And does that make a difference? Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. observed that “the very concept of leadership implies the proposition that individuals make a difference to history.”2 Yet there has never been universal acceptance of this proposition. Determinism and fatalism govern the minds of many. Some management scholars claim, in fact, that leaders have little impact on organizations, that other forces—internal or external to the organization—are the determinants of success.3 Others claim the role of the leader is largely symbolic, even romantic, but not substantive.4 Our evidence suggests quite the contrary. Managers, individual contributors, volunteers, pastors, government administrators, teachers, school principals, students, and other leaders who use the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership more frequently are seen by others as better leaders.5 Here are a few particulars:

- They’re more effective in meeting job-related demands.
- They’re more successful in representing their units to upper management.
- They create higher-performing teams.
- They foster renewed loyalty and commitment.
- They increase motivational levels and the willingness to work hard.
- They promote higher levels of involvement in schools.
- They enlarge the size of their congregations.
- They raise more money and expand gift-giving levels.
- They extend the range of their agency’s services.
- They reduce absenteeism, turnover, and dropout rates.
- They possess high degrees of personal credibility.

Additionally, people working with leaders who demonstrate the Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership are significantly more satisfied with the actions and strategies of their leaders, and they feel more commited, excited, energized, influential, and powerful. In other words, the more you
engage in the practices of exemplary leaders, the more likely it is that you'll have a positive influence on others in the organization.

Other researchers have also found that leaders can have a significant impact on their organizations. Leadership has been shown to account for improved performance as measured by a variety of factors: net income; sales, profits, and net assets; employee commitment; job satisfaction, and role clarity; and employee turnover, achievement of company goals, and teamwork.⁶

Reaching the top of Fortune's annual list of the world's most admired companies isn't easy. To make it, a company needs innovative products, financial stamina, global reach, empowered employees, and a devotion to shareholders. And if getting to the top of the list is hard, staying there is even tougher. Every year business moves just a bit faster, the competition gets a little more menacing, and the world seems slightly smaller. The answer to how some companies manage to stay ahead year in and year out isn't luck. No, say the editors at Fortune, "Try the other L word. Try leadership. Leadership is what Fortune's all-star ranking is all about." Mel Stark, a Hay Group vice president who co-led this research, says the findings confirm the importance of aligning the behavior of leaders with the values and culture of their organization. "In today's environment," he says, "leaders must do far more than merely meet the numbers. To effectively implement strategy, they must put people first and continually connect with and motivate their human capital."⁷

Leaders make connections—between people and between the present and the future. Person to person and over time, leaders do make a difference. If you want to have a significant impact on people, on communities, and on organizations, you'd be wise to invest in learning to become the very best leader you can. But first you too must believe that a leader lives within each of us.

**FIRST LEAD YOURSELF**

Leadership development is self-development. Engineers have computers; painters, canvas and brushes; musicians, instruments. Leaders have only themselves. The instrument of leadership is the self, and mastery of the art of leadership comes from mastery of the self. Self-development is not about stuffing in a whole bunch of new information or trying out the latest technique. It's about leading out of what is already in your soul. It's about liberating the leader within you. It's about setting yourself free.

There's a scene in the film adaptation of Muriel Spark's classic, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, during which Headmistress MacKay calls Miss Brodie to her office to chastise Miss Brodie for her somewhat unorthodox teaching methods.⁸ Headmistress MacKay comments on the precocity of Miss Brodie's students. Miss Brodie accepts this as a compliment, not a criticism and says:

"To me education is a leading out. The word education comes from the root 'ex' meaning 'out', and 'duco,'I lead." To me education is simply a leading out of what is already there."

To this Headmistress MacKay responds rather haughtily, saying, "I had hoped there might also be a certain amount of putting in."

Miss Brodie laughs at this notion and replies, "That would not be education, but intrusion."

We agree. The process of development should never be intrusive. It should never be about just filling someone full of facts or skills. It won't work. Education should always be liberating. It should be about releasing what is already inside.

The quest for leadership is first an inner quest to discover who you are. Through self-development comes the confidence needed to lead. Self-confidence is really awareness of and faith in your own powers. These powers become clear and strong only as you work to identify and develop them.

Learning to lead is about discovering what you care about and value. About what inspires you. About what challenges you. About what gives you power and competence. About what encourages you. When you discover these things about yourself, you'll know what it takes to lead those qualities out of others.

Sure, we've said already that every leader has to learn the fundamentals and the discipline, and to a certain extent there's some period during which you're trying out a lot of new things. It's a necessary stage in your development as a leader. The point is you have to take what's been acquired and reshape into your own expression of yourself.
Sometimes liberation is as uncomfortable as intrusion, but in the end when you discover it for yourself you know that what’s inside is what you found there and what belongs there. It’s not something put inside you by someone else; it’s what you discover for yourself.

**LEADING QUESTIONS**

As you begin this quest toward leadership, you must wrestle with some difficult questions:

- How certain am I of my own conviction about the vision and values?
- What gives me the courage to continue in the face of uncertainty and adversity?
- How will I handle disappointments, mistakes, and setbacks?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What do I need to do to improve my abilities to move the organization forward?
- How solid is my relationship with my constituents?
- How can I keep myself motivated and encouraged?
- What keeps me from giving up?
- Am I the right one to be leading at this very moment? Why?
- How much do I understand about what is going on in the organization and the world in which it operates?
- How prepared am I to handle the complex problems that now confront my organization?
- What are my beliefs about how people ought to conduct the affairs of our organization?
- Where do I think the organization ought to be headed over the next ten years?

Honest answers to these questions (and to those that arise from them) tell you that you must open yourself to a more global view. The leader, being in the forefront, is usually the first to encounter the world outside the boundaries of the organization. The more you know about the world, the easier it is to approach it with assurance. Thus you should seek to learn as much as possible about the forces—political, economic, social, moral, or artistic—that affect the organization.

Honest answers tell you that to become as effective as possible, you must improve your understanding of others and build your skills to mobilize people’s energies toward higher purposes. To be a leader, you must be interpersonally competent, and you must be able to develop the trust and respect of others.

**MORAL LEADERSHIP**

Leadership practices per se are amoral. But leaders—the men and women who use the practices—are moral or immoral. There’s an ethical dimension to leadership that neither leaders nor constituents should take lightly. This is why we began our discussion of leadership practices with a focus on finding your voice—your authentic self grounded in a set of values and ideals.

These, you have to find for yourself and test against others. There are, according to the late John Gardner, Stanford professor, secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Johnson administration, and founder of Common Cause, four moral goals of leadership:

- Releasing human potential
- Balancing the needs of the individual and the community
- Defending the fundamental values of the community
- Instilling in individuals a sense of initiative and responsibility

Attending to these goals will always direct your eyes to higher purposes. As you work to become all you can be, you can start to let go of your petty self-interests. As you give back some of what you’ve been given, you can reconstruct your community. As you serve the values of freedom, justice, equality, caring, and dignity, you can constantly renew the foundations of democracy. As each of us takes individual responsibility for creating the world of our dreams, we can all participate in leading.

All great leaders have wrestled with their souls. For instance, while attending Crozer Seminary, Martin Luther King Jr. read extensively in history. The more he read, the more he questioned whether Christian love could be a potent force in the world. He doubted his own capacity to be a
Encourage the Heart. And we found that leaders who more frequently engage in the Five Practices are significantly more likely to achieve extraordinary results than leaders who make use of these practices less often. Exemplary leadership and credible leaders make a difference in the world.

But there's a catch. You can do all of this perfectly and still get fired! Maybe we should have told you this sooner, but no doubt you knew it already. There's absolutely no way that we can say that it will always work all the time with all people. We know for certain that there's a much greater probability that it will, but there's no ironclad, money-back guarantee. And if any gurus ever stand in front of you and claim—or if any authors, including us, ever write—that they have the three-, five-, seven-, or nine-factor theory that's 100 percent certain to get you results and rewards, then grab your wallet and run. There's no get-rich-quick, instant-weight-loss program for leadership.

Remember film director Sidney Lumet's comment we quoted earlier? He said that he was "dependent on the talents and idiosyncrasies, the moods and egos, the politics and personalities, of more than a hundred different people." That was just in making the movie, and didn't include all the other aspects of the business. Leadership in all settings is just like that. You will never find, in historic or present times, even one example of a leader who controlled every aspect of the environment. And you'll never find an example of a leader who enlisted 100 percent of the constituents in even the most compelling of future possibilities. Not only is this realistic, it's fortunate. We should all be grateful for the forces we can't control and the voices we can't enlist. We need the cynics, skeptics, and alternative voices to keep our freedom. We need the challenges, surprises, and adversities to strengthen our courage.

There's another catch. Any leadership practice can become destructive. Virtues can become vices. There's a point at which each of the Five Practices, taken to extremes, can lead you astray.

Finding your voice and setting an example are essential to credibility and accomplishment—but an obsession with being seen as a role model can lead to being too focused on your own values and your way of doing things. It can cause you to discount others' views and be closed to feedback. It can push you into isolation for fear of losing privacy or being "found out"; it can also cause you to be more concerned with style than substance.

Contrasts and Contradictions

In our research we identified Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership. We learned that in performing at their personal bests leaders Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and
Being forward-looking and communicating a clear and common vision of the future are what set leaders apart from other credible people. Yet a singular focus on one vision of the future can blind you to other possibilities as well as to the realities of the present. It can cause you to miss the exciting possibilities that are just out of your sight or make you hang on just a little too long to an old, tired, and out-of-date technology. Exploiting your powers of inspiration can cause others to surrender their will. Your own energy, enthusiasm, and charm may be so magnetic that others don’t think for themselves.

Challenging the process is essential to promoting innovation and progressive change. Seizing the initiative and taking risks are necessary for learning and continuous improvement. But take this to extremes and you can create needless turmoil, confusion, and paranoia. Routines are important, and if you seldom give people opportunity to gain confidence and competence they’ll lose their motivation to try new things. Change for change’s sake can be just as demoralizing as complacency.

Collaboration and teamwork are essential to getting extraordinary things done in today’s turbulent world. Innovation depends on high degrees of trust. And people must be given the power to be in control of their own lives if they are to accomplish great things. But an overreliance on collaboration and trust may reflect an avoidance of critical decisions or cause errors in judgment. It may be a way of not taking charge when the situation requires. Delegating power and responsibility can become a way of dumping too much on others when they’re not fully prepared to handle it.

And people do perform at higher levels when they’re encouraged. Personal recognition and group celebration create the spirit and momentum that can carry a group forward even during the toughest of challenges. At the same time a constant focus on who should be recognized and when we should celebrate can turn us into gregarious minstrels. We can lose sight of the mission because we’re having so much fun. Don’t become consumed by all the perks and pleasures and forget the purpose of it all.

Far more insidious than all of these potential problems, however, is the treachery of hubris. It’s fun to be a leader, gratifying to have influence, and exhilarating to have scores of people cheering your every word. In many all-too-subtle ways, it’s easy to be seduced by power and importance. All evil leaders have been infected with the disease of hubris, becoming bloated with an exaggerated sense of self and pursuing their own sinister ends. How then to avoid it?

Humility is the only way to resolve the conflicts and contradictions of leadership. You can avoid excessive pride only if you recognize that you’re human and need the help of others. As Egon Zehnder, chairman emeritus of Egon Zehnder International, told us “Listen to what your colleagues have to say. They know more than you do. Have the humility to step back and correct yourself.” Humility. It comes up time and again. In fact, in their research on companies that transition from mediocrity (or worse) to long-term superiority, Jim Collins and his team found a remarkable pattern of humility among the chief executives of what they categorize as “good-to-great” companies. “In contrast to the I-centric style of the comparison leaders, we were struck by how the good-to-great leaders didn’t talk about themselves. During interviews with the good-to-great leaders they’d talk about the company and the contributions of other executives as long as we’d like but would deflect discussion about their own contributions.” Their compelling modesty is perhaps why most of these executives were not the ones to grab the headlines of the press or gain rock-star status in the popular leader-as-hero culture. Instead, they focused their attention and will on their company and on others.

Jim Collins’s observation is consistent with our own findings. As we’ve discussed, exemplary leaders know that “you can’t do it alone” and they act accordingly. They lack the pride and pretense displayed by many leaders who succeed in the short term but leave behind a weak organization that fails to remain strong after their departure. Instead, with self-effacing humor and generous and sincere credit to others they get higher and higher levels of performance; they get extraordinary things done.

There’s another way to avoid the temptations of power that lead to becoming overbearing and presumptuous. You can avoid this arrogance by refusing to become one-dimensional, focused narrowly on your work. Do not allow work to consume you. Get involved in the world that surrounds you. The very best leaders have numerous pursuits and interests—arts, literature, science, technology, entertainment, sports, politics, law, religion, and family and friends.
There's one other important lesson here. Nothing in our research even hints that leaders should be perfect. Leaders aren't saints. They're human beings, full of the flaws and failings of the rest of us. They make mistakes. Perhaps the very best advice we can give all aspiring leaders is to remain humble and unassuming—to always remain open and full of wonder. The best leaders are the best learners.

THE SECRET TO SUCCESS IN LIFE

Constituents look for leaders who demonstrate an enthusiastic and genuine belief in the capacity of others, who strengthen people's will, who supply the means to achieve, and who express optimism for the future. Constituents want leaders who remain passionate despite obstacles and setbacks. In uncertain times, leaders with a positive, confident, can-do approach to life and business are desperately needed.

Leaders must keep hope alive, even in the most difficult of times. They must strengthen their constituents' belief that life's struggle will produce a more promising future. Such faith results from an intimate and supportive relationship, a relationship based on mutual participation in the process of renewal. In keeping hope alive, credible leaders demonstrate their faith and confidence by first accepting responsibility for the quality of the lives of their constituents. Even when everything goes wrong or when they suffer resounding defeats, leaders display constancy and unwavering commitment to the cause.

Without hope there can be no courage—and this is not the time or place for the timid. This is the time and place for optimism, imagination, and enthusiasm. Leaders must summon their will if they are to mobilize the personal and organizational resources to triumph against the odds. Hope is essential to achieving the highest levels of performance. Hope enables people to transcend the difficulties of today and envision the potentialities of tomorrow. Hope enables people to bounce back even after being stressed, stretched, and depressed. Hope enables people to find the will and the way to unleash greatness.

And yet, hope is not all. There's still one more final leadership lesson that we have learned. It's the secret to success in life.

When we began our study of leadership bests we were fortunate to cross paths with U.S. Army Major General John H. Stanford. We knew that he had survived military tours in Vietnam and was highly decorated, and that the loyalty of his troops was extraordinary. He went on to head up the Military Traffic Management Command for the U.S. Army during the Persian Gulf War. When he retired from the Army he became manager of Fulton County when Atlanta was gearing up to host the 1996 Summer Olympics, and then he was recruited to become superintendent of the Seattle Public Schools, where he sparked a revolution in public education.

All of his service was impressive, but it was his answer to one of our interview questions that most influenced our own understanding of leadership. We asked John how he'd go about developing leaders, whether at Santa Clara University, in the military, in government, in the nonprofit sector, or in private business. He replied,

When anyone asks me that question, I tell them I have the secret to success in life. The secret to success is to stay in love. Staying in love gives you the fire to ignite other people, to see inside other people, to have a greater desire to get things done than other people. A person who is not in love doesn't really feel the kind of excitement that helps them to get ahead and to lead others and to achieve. I don't know any other fire, any other thing in life that is more exhilarating and is more positive a feeling than love is.

"Staying in love" isn't the answer we expected to get—at least not when we began our study of leadership. But after numerous interviews and case analyses, it finally dawned on us how many leaders used the word love freely when talking about their own motivations to lead.

Of all the things that sustain a leader over time, love is the most lasting. It's hard to imagine leaders getting up day after day, putting in the long hours and hard work it takes to get extraordinary things done, without having their hearts in it. The best-kept secret of successful leaders is love: staying in love with leading, with the people who do the work, with what their organizations produce, and with those who honor the organization by using its work.

Leadership is not an affair of the head. Leadership is an affair of the heart.