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LEADERSHIP

TWO WORDS

AT A

TIME

SIMPLE TRUTHS FOR LEADING
COMPLICATED PEOPLE

BILL TREASURER

FOREWORD BY ELAINE BIECH, AUTHOR OF *SKILLS FOR CAREER SUCCESS*

**LEADERSHIP
TWO WORDS
AT A TIME**

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BK

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

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TO THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS,
TO WHOM OUR FUTURE IS ENTRUSTED:

BE COURAGEOUS

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THE PLIGHT OF NEW LEADERS

Congratulations, new leader, you've joined the leadership ranks at an exceptionally complicated time. The world in which you will operate is fraught with touchy political divisions, economic disparities, generational tensions, and racial disharmonies. Magnifying the difficulty are the ever-shifting dynamics of today's workplace. More leaders are leading remote teams across larger geographic distances, presenting unique challenges in terms of onboarding new employees, giving performance feedback, building esprit de corps, and nurturing healthy relationships. The traditional stability of consistently applied standard operating work protocols has also been upended. Now individual exceptions and customized deals are common, tailored to flexibly accommodate each person's extenuating life realities. Today's leaders struggle to treat everyone fairly, yet individually. Letting one person work from home three days a week to care for an immunocompromised parent may make sense to you, but it may not make sense to the healthy single person you require to be onsite every day. You'll simultaneously be seen as exceedingly fair or unfair, depending on who benefits from policy exceptions that today's realities require you to allow.

While the realities facing new leaders are unprecedentedly novel, challenging, and anxiety-provoking, the meager

amount of support and training that has historically been provided to new leaders remains, sadly, unchanged. According to Development Dimensions Inc.'s Global Leadership Forecast, 83 percent of organizations say it's important to develop leaders, but only 5 percent have fully implemented plans to do so. While your organization may not be intentionally setting you up to fail, they likely aren't setting you up to succeed either.

If you're not getting the new-leader training you need, you're likely to seek out leadership guidance on your own—as well you should. Even if you do, though, you're likely to be disappointed. Most leadership books are targeted at experienced leaders whose leadership challenges and developmental needs are far different from those of new leaders like you. C-level executives (CEO, CFO, COO, etc.) and senior leaders (EVP, SVP, VP, etc.) are a tiny fraction of the overall leadership ranks, yet the bulk of leadership advice goes to them—the already-experienced. The more urgent and unique needs of first-time and mid-level leaders like you go largely unaddressed. Advising a C-level exec to “establish a clear organizational value proposition” is sound guidance. Giving the same advice to a new project manager who is frantically trying to keep her under-resourced team on task is a ridiculous waste of time. New leaders aren't trying to go from good to great, they're just trying to survive till the end of the week.

PILING ON

Transitioning into your first leadership role can be hugely challenging and most new leaders are wholly unprepared for it. Getting promoted into a leadership role is often your reward for delivering exceptional individual performance. A high-potential person gets noticed for working harder and

producing more than their peers and gets tapped to lead a team. But very few new leaders are given training to equip them with the foundational skills necessary for effectively leading others. Instead, new leaders stumble their way through the development process, straining to figure things out with minimal support. As many seasoned leaders can attest, when you move into your first leadership role, nobody hands you a playbook.

Complicating the plight of new leaders is the fact that leading others has always been terrifically hard. Unlike when you were an individual contributor, you are now responsible for the output and performance of others. It's not like adults always behave rationally, right? People are complicated, temperamental, and unpredictable. Grown-ups can act like big babies—petty, selfish, unreliable, hyper-sensitive, and whiny. Not all the time, mind you, but definitely when they don't get their way, and, certainly, more than should be expected of adults. Too often the biggest inhibitor of great results isn't lack of resources or a clear plan, it's the idiosyncratic personalities of team members clashing with one another or pulling in different directions. Your leadership approach with one person may be met with openness and gratitude. The same approach with another may be met with crossed arms and burning resentment. All this becomes a diversion from the work at hand, and you'll spend an inordinate amount of time nursing bruised egos and hurt feelings. Leaders lead people and people can be a pain in the rear end.

Complicating matters further, you'll be under intense pressure from your bosses to produce results. Your knowledge needs to be broader and deeper than just what's on your own to-do list. You have to know more about the business itself, and all of its operational parts. You have to interact with other team leaders who might be competing with you for

limited resources. Whatever work/life balance you used to have gets subsumed by the insane workload. All of this is far more exhausting, frustrating, and just plain hard than when you were knocking out tasks on your to-do list. Yet, here you are, thrust into the most daunting job you've ever had. Virtually no support. No playbook.

Be forewarned that, at least initially, it is common for new leaders to flounder as they face the job's complexities and contend with complicated people. If you flounder, you may start to question yourself and find your confidence shrinking. The excitement you had about finally becoming a leader may give way to a sense that your work is becoming a joyless burden and you aren't cut out to lead. Some people who get to this point voluntarily take themselves off the management track and go back to being individual contributors or specialists. Some may carry lifelong stigmas as failed leaders.

HOLD ON!

Despite this being a particularly challenging time to move into a role that has always been particularly challenging, my advice to you, new leader, is hold on! Much of the hardship new leaders suffer through is entirely preventable. I am convinced that most of what you need to succeed as a new leader comes in the form of personal attention, strong advocacy, and sound guidance. That's why I wrote this book: to give you the playbook that seasoned leaders often complain they didn't have. *Leadership Two Words at a Time* aims to give you time-tested advice for building the skills, knowledge, mindset, and wherewithal needed for effective and enduring leadership success.

This book was written for you, not seasoned leaders—they get enough attention as it is. I hope that the book will speak to and address your own unique needs and challenges by

covering the leadership essentials that all leaders must eventually learn. The book aims to provide the practical guidance and support that will extend whatever leadership development your employer is providing or failing to. As you progress through each chapter, I invite you to think of me as your own personal leadership coach. Few things are as gratifying for me as working with new leaders like you and watching them gain competence and confidence. As you'll come to discover, new-leader floundering is entirely optional.

TWO WORDS?

Over the course of twenty-five years, across thousands of hours, I have coached hundreds of leaders from all ranks. Over time, I noticed that leaders were far more likely to benefit from a coaching conversation, to act on commitments made during those conversations, when they were left with brief, memorable headers about the insights that we discussed. Often the insights were captured in two simple words. Following a coaching session, for example, one leader started mentally reciting the words “calm confidence” whenever he was getting ready to attend meetings with executives whom he found intimidating.

Another somewhat negative leader benefitted by continually reminding herself to “practice gratitude.”

Another learned to control his urge to always chime in by simply remembering to “talk less” to be a better listener.

Many leaders who struggled to set boundaries benefitted from the words “personal fidelity.”

Simple two-word phrases often had a neutralizing effect on situations that leaders formerly found charged, intimidating, or baffling. Hard situations were made easier to face just by simplifying how they were described. “In the fewest

words possible,” I started to ask my coachees, “sum up the solution to the challenging situation we just discussed.” The fewer words they used, the clearer the coachees got and the more bearable their situations became.

Ten years ago, I started stockpiling some of the two-word concepts that my coaching conversations centered around. A pattern developed as many of the two-word headers described important ideas that most leaders struggle with or need to know. As time went on, I would add to the list. As the list of two-word essentials grew, I recognized that they could prove especially useful to new leaders. There is a huge amount to learn as you transition into a new leadership role, but lessons can be more manageable, understandable, and actionable when carved up into two-word leadership essentials.

Leadership as a practice will always be hard—but it doesn’t have to be hard to understand. In fact, the basic building blocks of being a good leader are surprisingly easy to understand once succinctly explained. Years of coaching have taught me that nearly all essential leadership lessons and important truths can be summed up with two-word headers. The concepts themselves may be robust and full, but they can be grasped and comprehended immediately, and, with a little practice and effort, fully mastered. *Leadership Two Words at a Time* catalogues the two-word imperatives that are essential for new leader effectiveness, removing complexity and confusion. When your leadership role gets overwhelming—and it will get overwhelming—you’ll be much better off if you simply focus on taking things two words at a time.

JOYFULLY HARD

The habits, practices, and mindset you adopt early in your leadership tenure will set the trajectory for the rest of your

career. What you learn now will impact how you lead when you become more seasoned. I hope that this book acts as a sort of intercessor, reaching you at an impressionable moment in your leadership career, to ensure that you don't get subsumed and discouraged by all the challenges you're bound to soon face. Learning about leadership's basic building blocks—in the form of memorable two-word essentials—will help you do a better job of leading and have a more positive impact on the people and organization you serve. Regardless of how little leadership training or support your organization provides, the specific and practical guidance in this book will let you take charge of your own development while increasing your leadership effectiveness, enjoyment, and potential for advancement. As this book will show, leadership can be challenging and hard, yet also be easy to understand and enjoy. Leading should never be joyless. Quite the contrary.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Leadership Two Words at a Time is organized around three core and supremely important leadership responsibilities: self-leadership, people leadership, and operational leadership.

Part I, Leading Yourself, covers essentials related to the development of your own character, and the disciplined practices that guide self-governance. You'll never be qualified to lead others without first learning to lead yourself.

Chapter 1 Know Thyself *How understanding yourself prepares you for leading others*

- Self-exploration takes courage.
- Our internal condition affects our outward results.

- Everyone has “Sunshine” and “Shadows.”
- Leadership has everything to do with one’s fitness of character and integrity.

Chapter 2 Model Principles *How developing a leadership foundation built on character and integrity has a huge impact on those you’ll lead*

- Following your lead often means mimicking your behavior.
- Given that people mimic their leaders, you should be intentional with the behaviors you transmit to others.
- Drawing out the best in others requires a strong “core” and leading as your best self.

Chapter 3 Aspire Higher *Why elevating your standards, as well as the standards of those around you, needs to be a perpetual part of your leadership journey*

- The quest to improve oneself as a leader is unending.
- The more you improve, the more value you add, and the more valuable your leadership becomes.
- Self-development is your responsibility.

Chapter 4 Gain Control *Why effective leadership is a function of self-discipline, self-control, and self-governance*

- Leadership is hard because it comes with many pressures.
- Leaders who incessantly push themselves to the limits put everything at risk.
- Self-care requires making healthy choices and using one’s time wisely.

Chapter 5 Practice Humility *How humility is an underappreciated, yet key, leadership strength*

- Humility is as important to leadership as integrity and confidence.

- Ego inflation is the most dangerous leadership ailment of all.
- The more you manage and tame your ego, the better the leader you will be.

Chapter 6 Cultivate Composure *How cultivating composure will help you manage your ego while keeping your motives and intentions pure*

- People don't want to be led by hotheads.
- Composure, level-headedness, and reasonableness are essential to effective leadership.
- How practicing centeredness ensures that you'll act in ways that are consistent with your deepest and purest values.
- Silence and meditation change your perspective on everything...for the better.

Part II, Leading People, deals with those demanding, fickle, and ever-changing resources: human beings. This section covers your role as nurturer, developer, and encourager of talent, and your direct responsibility to promote an inclusive environment that inspires people to give their very best.

Chapter 7 Trust First *Why trust is essential to developing strong relationships, with practical tips for building it*

- You will fail as a leader if you can't figure out how to trust those you're leading.
- The vibes you transmit to others will tell them whether they can trust you.
- Trust takes vulnerability, and vulnerability takes courage.

Chapter 8 Create Safety *Why creating psychological safety is your best way of ensuring that the people you're leading will have the courage to innovate and improve*

- Too many leaders still use fear to motivate people to get things done.
- The people you lead will be courageous when they know it's safe to do so.
- Your composure is key to creating a safe work environment.
- There are healthy and mature ways to confront direct reports.

Chapter 9 Nurture Talent *How spending focused time developing each individual who reports to you adds value to the organization and to their careers*

- Delegation does more than free up your time: it is a powerful means of developing the skills of your direct reports.
- Development takes a person-to-person time investment.
- Making people uncomfortable—in a good way—is part of your job.

Chapter 10 Promote Inclusion *What you can do to provide a welcoming, equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment for everyone you're privileged to lead*

- Everyone has biases. As a leader, you need to guard against allowing yours to favor certain people over others.
- There are a host of tangible benefits of a diverse workplace.
- As a leader, you should do more than just “accept” diversity...you should promote it.

Part III, Leading Work, focuses on the strategic and operational aspects of getting work done. The whole point of leadership is to produce positive outcomes that didn't exist before. Leaders do that by setting goals and priorities, employing sound management, promoting ownership and accountability, and getting work done.

Chapter 11 Love Business *Why business can initially be intimidating, and how you can, and must, learn to love it*

- Leadership requires knowing, understanding, and loving business.
- All organizations, even nonprofits and government agencies, involve business.
- Business can be a spirited adventure, inspiring your creativity and seasoning your judgment.

Chapter 12 Get Results *Why the whole point of leadership is to deliver results that are positive and sustainable, and what you can do to increase the likelihood that you will*

- As a leader, you'll be judged based on whether you can "make it happen."
- The pressure to get results will stay with you as long as you serve in a leadership role.
- The most satisfying results are those that take a long time to produce.
- Your bosses will expect that the results you delivered today will be exceeded tomorrow.

Chapter 13 Master Management *Why work needs to be more than led—it has to be managed...by doing these things*

- Good management starts with clear goals.
- To truly motivate, goals need to be explicit and aggressive.

- To promote shared accountability, you have to clarify expectations and inspect the work.
- “Acting like an owner” means being financially responsible!

Chapter 14 Lead Up *Why you have to carefully, thoughtfully, and deliberately lead one audience in particular: your bosses*

- Supporting your boss's success is your job.
- The more you get involved in extracurricular corporate activities, the stronger your network will be.
- The fastest way to get promoted is to think beyond your boss's thinking.

In the pages to come, you'll learn what it takes to be and stay a leader. You'll learn memorable two-word leadership essentials that you can put to good use right away. I've done my best to explain these essentials in a clear-cut way. For those who have read my other books, you know I'm big on using quotes from famous people. This time, nearly all the quotes are from real-life leaders like you. I hope you find them relatable and instructive.

AGELESSLY NEW

At some point on their leadership journey, most leaders reflect back and think, “I wish I had known then what I know now.” This book is to help you know now what other leaders learn later in their careers. Thus, the book wasn't written to share newfangled methods with crusty old late-stage leaders. It's to share ageless and tested wisdom with folks just starting out on their leadership journey. My biased opinion is that the book has value for seasoned leaders too. Leadership is one of those topics that benefit from constant reminders, so even older leaders are bound to find something new. After all,



REMOTE REALITIES

“Wait! Hold on!” you might be thinking, “What about having to lead teams remotely? How am I supposed to lead people who are so far away from me?” I’m with you, and I understand your concern. We’ve all lived through the challenges of having to communicate, coordinate, and get work done while working from home. You’re right: leading remotely presents genuine leadership challenges in terms of onboarding new employees, giving performance feedback, building esprit de corps, and nurturing healthy relationships. Beyond that, spending countless hours on computer meetings is plain exhausting. True enough! That said, this is not a book specifically devoted to remote leadership. Happily, the experience of the last few years has resulted in a glut of books, articles, podcasts, and other resources on that topic. Seriously, search for “remote leadership resources” at least fifty billion results (I just checked!). Regardless, you’ll be glad to know that, with a little finessing, nearly every tip in this book can be applied with the people you’re leading, whether you’re physically present with them or not.

what other leadership book has a whole chapter dedicated to Cultivating Composure?!

TWO AGAIN

Over the years I’ve found that new leaders often make things much harder than they need to. They get in their own way a lot. They get mired in the weeds and take on too much themselves, becoming off-center and grumpy. They live in their heads a lot, overthinking and overplanning, and getting overwhelmed in the process. They rely too much on brown-nosing, and not enough on truth-telling and transparency. They get the alchemy between relationship and task wrong, either being likable to the point of being a pushover or dominant to the point where people want to mutiny. In

extreme cases, they start to lose confidence in themselves, or worse, their direct reports and bosses start to lose confidence in them. The harder they make leadership, the less effective they are and the less enjoyable it becomes. To date, very few books, if any, have addressed the unique plight of new leaders, much less offered essential leadership guidance to help them thrive in their new leadership roles.

As noted, thirty years working with new leaders have convinced me that nearly all the most important truths about leadership can be boiled down into simple two-word concepts. What do I mean? Let me share one of the first two-word leadership lessons I learned during my years at Accenture. There was a partner named Larry Coates who was sort of a mix between Bill Gates and Emmett Lathrop “Doc” Brown, PhD, the wild-eyed inventor played perfectly by Christopher Lloyd in the Back to the Future movies. Larry had a brilliant technical mind and served as the technical lead for hundreds of project teams. (He was also a skilled barefoot water-skier!) The two-word leadership imperative that Larry would often share with new consultants was memorable, useful, and critically important: No Surprises!

It took very little explaining for Larry to relay the two-word concept: bring people in to help you solve problems before they become bigger problems and explode in your face. This simple yet wise leadership advice has been shared by thousands of seasoned leaders to their less-experienced counterparts throughout the ages. It’s a lesson involving discipline, courage, and risk mitigation, all of which we’ll explore when we revisit this two-word lesson more fully later in the book.



While this book may be the first to be built around two-word leadership essentials, the business world is full of other important concepts and functions that are

described with two-word titles. A tiny sample includes emotional intelligence, psychological safety, employee engagement, talent management, operational excellence, continuous improvement, business development, customer service, strategic planning, and servant leadership.

PLEASE ENGAGE!

Novelist Courtney C. Stevens, author of *The Lies About Truth*, says, “If nothing changes, nothing changes.” That certainly applies to leadership development.

To support you in committing to positive leadership changes that you identify as you read the book, at the end of each part, you’ll be asked to sign an oath. Leaders keep promises, and the three oaths you’ll sign will be to yourself, to the people you’ll lead, and to the work you’ll do. Throughout the book, you’ll also be encouraged to sharpen your leadership point of view by answering leadership-related questions that appear at the end of each chapter under the header Think Now. But thinking is not enough—you can’t think yourself into behavioral change. Only action will do that. Thus, each chapter also concludes with specific and immediate actions you can take to apply what you’ve learned, under the header Act Now. The aim of the book is to be memorable, practical, and useful. So, as you engage with it, you’ll actively do what leaders do: envision outcomes, make commitments, and take action! (Notice the two words?) Are you ready to go to work? Good. Start with the questions and actions below.

THINK NOW / ACT NOW

Think Now

What attracts you to leadership?

Why do you think you’re fit to lead?

At the end of your career, what impact do you hope to make through your leadership?

What do you hope to learn by reading this book that will strengthen your leadership impact? Where do you feel you could use more confidence?

Act Now

- List the names of people who you know that you consider to be leaders.
 - Pick one of those leaders and reach out to them to have a conversation about leadership.
 - Start documenting your own Leadership Lessons using whatever note-taking tool is most convenient for you.
-

ABOUT BILL TREASURER

Bill Treasurer has been designing, developing, and delivering leadership and courage-building programs for three decades. His aim is to help leaders be more confident, courageous, just, and good. He believes leaders should be role models of courage and encouragers of brave and ethical behavior. His ultimate goal is to relegate fear-based leadership to the trash bin of history.



Bill is a pioneer in the area of courage-building and his bestselling book, *Courage Goes to Work*, introduced practical ways to build individual and workplace courage. He also authored *Courageous Leadership*, a comprehensive facilitator training program that equips leaders and training professionals to teach courage-building workshops in their own workplaces. Bill's courage insights and workshops have been taught to thousands of leaders throughout the world.

Bill regularly works with senior executive teams to ensure that they are good role models for the organizations they serve, and to prevent dysfunctional behaviors from causing the workforce to lose confidence in their leadership.

A sought-after keynote, Bill regularly carries his message of courage to audiences and organizations of all sizes. He is also an active member of the Association for Talent Development (ATD) and serves on the board of ISA—an association of learning providers.

Bill discovered his courage at the top of a one hundred-foot high dive platform as a member of the U.S. High

Diving Team. For seven years he traveled around the world performing in aquatic entertainment productions and has done over 1500 high dives into pools that were only ten feet deep.

Bill attended West Virginia University on a full athletic scholarship and received his master's degree from the University of Wisconsin at Green Bay.

Bill's most fulfilling role is being husband to Shannon and father to his three children, Bina, Alex, and Ian. His family quickly squashes any of Bill's attempts to get full of himself.

Learn more at BillTreasurer.com and GiantLeapConsulting.com. Connect with Bill through social media by visiting Facebook (facebook.com/bill.treasurer), Twitter ([@btreasurer](https://twitter.com/btreasurer)), and LinkedIn (LinkedIn.com/in/courage).

ABOUT GIANT LEAP CONSULTING

Founded in 2002, Giant Leap Consulting, Inc., is the world's first courage-building consulting firm. Its mission is to build leadership and workplace courage by driving out fear so that everyone can get superior results. Our services include:

Courageous Future: Strategic planning and futurecasting engagements to set an organization's bold and compelling future.

Courageous Leadership: Comprehensive leadership development and succession-planning programs for emerging and experienced leaders.

Courageous Teaming: Teambuilding programs for executive teams to ensure top team alignment, and team interventions for functional teams throughout the organization.

VR Courage-building: Programs involving geographically dispersed leaders and teams as they participate in a unique and memorable virtual reality courage-building simulation!

Giant Leap takes pride in working with its clients as a trusted partner not a servile “vendor.” Its most rewarding work involves working closely with clients to cocreate transformative learning experiences—delivered in-person, online, and through virtual reality—that get real and lasting results. Giant Leap is proud of its client list, which includes NASA, Lenovo, UBS Bank, Saks Fifth Avenue, Walsh Construction, nCino, Hugo Boss, Spanx, Aldridge Electric Incorporated, IES Communications, Total Energies, Southern Company, the National Science Foundation, the Social Security Administration, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

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We believe that the solutions to the world's problems will come from all of us, working at all levels: in our society, in our organizations, and in our own lives. Our publications and resources offer pathways to creating a more just, equitable, and sustainable society. They help people make their organizations more humane, democratic, diverse, and effective (and we don't think there's any contradiction there). And they guide people in creating positive change in their own lives and aligning their personal practices with their aspirations for a better world.

And we strive to practice what we preach through what we call "The BK Way." At the core of this approach is *stewardship*, a deep sense of responsibility to administer the company for the benefit of all of our stakeholder groups, including authors, customers, employees, investors, service providers, sales partners, and the communities and environment around us. Everything we do is built around stewardship and our other core values of *quality, partnership, inclusion, and sustainability*.

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