



# LEADERSHIP ISN'T FOR COWARDS

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*How to* **DRIVE PERFORMANCE**  
*by* **CHALLENGING PEOPLE**  
*and* **CONFRONTING PROBLEMS**

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## SECTION 1

# YOU ARE MESSING WITH PEOPLE'S LIVES

**T**his section lays the foundation for all that follows in the rest of the book. You will be challenged to understand the depth and breadth of leadership and to see how doing so can transform the way you lead. You will receive a clearer understanding of organizational culture and realize the true extent of your own impact. The journey begins here.

## CHAPTER 1

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# *Do You Know What You Are Doing?*

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**F**or your sake, let's hope you answered that question with a resounding "sometimes." I hope you are like the rest of us, having to stop on some days and wonder what you were thinking when you said yes to leadership. The fact is, most leaders have times in their lives when they find themselves asking, "Do I know what I'm doing?" It's a normal and expected part of being in a role where you influence people.

You first have to know and accept one major thing that you are doing as a leader . . .

*You are messing with people's lives!*

(I'm not sure how much more clearly I can say that.)

**You are messing  
with people's lives!**

The day you said yes to someone, somewhere up in your organization, and decided to join the ranks of leaders, you decided (with complete false confidence) that you had the willingness and ability to tell other people what to do.

Or maybe you didn't. Maybe you were recruited—placed in a leadership class and given three points and a poem on how to lead before you were tossed the keys and wished good luck.

Maybe you entered into a management training program with wide-eyed enthusiasm and a commitment to change the world.

Maybe you decided that you would take a stab at starting your own business. Spreading your entrepreneurial wings, you jumped into the world of business ownership with all of its thrills and risks.

Whatever the case, your decision to say yes to leadership was driven by something—a need to help others, to make more money, to save the world, to boost your self-esteem, to make a difference, or some other reason. Regardless of your reason, your choice resulted in one simple fact: You began *messing with people's lives*. You may not have realized it or wanted it, but that's what happened.

Unfortunately, most leaders do not start with that knowledge. They don't start with a clear and compelling understanding of the real challenges facing them. Their understanding is diluted with operational plans, goal setting, revenue and sales forecasts, cash flow, HR compliance, and the magical bottom line. While all of those are important, they're not the *most* important. How you influence others is the most important.

It takes courage to accept the challenge of influencing another person. Do not underestimate that challenge. In most cases, the people who report directly to you will spend more time with you than with their families. You will occupy their thoughts (positively or negatively) more than most other people, and you will be the subject of stories around the bar or the dinner table more times than you can imagine. When they go to lunch they will talk about you. When you lead meetings they will evaluate you. You are on their minds, whether you want to be or not. Leadership is not a job for cowards!

It's time to adjust your perspective on your job as a leader. You do not lead an organization, department, or group, and your people do not follow strategic plans, fancy goals, or year-end reports. They follow a person. If you are their leader, that person needs to be you. Begin with the idea of influence and your role will start to take shape.

I sat in a room with ten high-level executives from the same industry. I had been invited to speak to them about courage. It was a train wreck. After the train wreck there was dinner and a reception. At the reception, I was talking with the senior vice president of a large company. Once he loosened up a little and realized I wasn't there to coach him or diagnose him, he shared an interesting story.

He had been a top salesperson in his company for years. He was relentless in his pursuit of the numbers and the prestige that comes with being a top performer. He always exceeded expectations and

thought he was more or less guaranteed the highest and best awards the company had. He was promoted to sales manager and, true to form, his team hit it out of the park every quarter. He was clearly a star and wasn't afraid to throw his success and influence around to get what he wanted.

One day his boss called him into his office and told him that if things didn't change, he would be fired. He almost fell off the chair. "Me? The superhero? The guy who led the most successful team in the company? How could this be?"

Then his boss hit him right between the eyes. He told him that his team hated him, the other teams disrespected him, and he didn't have a clue about how to relate to people. People were just a means to an end for him. The next thing he knew, they had hired a coach for him and he began *the* most difficult transformation of his career. Without the intervention of his insightful boss, it is likely his career would have been derailed. With all of the prizes and plaques and accolades, he still would have failed.

Now before you go off saying, "Oh, I'm nothing like that," just take a step back and look at the real moral of that story. Don't compare your behavior to his; compare your awareness. His trouble was as much about his awareness as it was his actual behavior. Even though he was wildly successful, he didn't know what he was doing. Oh, he had the technical expertise, but he didn't have any insight into the extent to which he was messing with people's lives. He didn't understand that his award-winning results had a great price. He made money but lost the respect of those he worked with and, worse, he damaged the relationships that were necessary to his success. He was blinded by his great results and lack of awareness.

In his case, he was lucky enough to have a boss who stopped him in his tracks and plainly said, "Hey, not only are you messing *with* people's lives, but you are also messing *up* people's lives." What's fortunate is that his boss was courageous enough to tell him, in so many words, that all his success was not worth it to the company unless he made some major changes. His boss understood how to be influential in a constructive way. He possessed and demonstrated an understanding of his influence.



Do you know what you are doing? Do you have the courage to honestly answer that question? Here are five questions to get you started:

1. Take an honest look at your leadership mindset. Do you appreciate and respect the fact that you are messing with people's lives? What makes you think that?
2. Is that awareness apparent in the way you carry yourself and interact with the people you influence? Take a moment to write down or think about a few times when you have successfully used your influence.
3. Do you have balance between the results you create and the human impact of those results? Have there been times when the cost to your relationships was too high, even though the results were good? What would you do differently in the future?
4. Find a person you trust to give you the clear and constructive truth about the positive and negative impact of your behavior. What did they say?
5. What are some small, incremental adjustments you can make to your behavior to emphasize the positive impacts?

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For a download of a worksheet for this chapter and others please go to [www.leadershipisntforcowards.com](http://www.leadershipisntforcowards.com) or scan the QR code.



Leadership Isn't for  
Cowards Workbook

## CHAPTER 2

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# *How Much of an Impact Are You Really Having?*

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**D**on't worry for a second about whether or not you are having an impact. You are. The question is whether the impact you are having is the impact that will make you proud years from now. Are you satisfied that you hit the numbers and brought home the profit, or do your values demand that you have greater and more profound impact on your workplace and on the people you influence?

Consider this on a variety of levels: What impact are you having on the values of your people? Do you model the kind of character that would make you a compelling figure to follow? What impact are you having on your direct reports' emotional states? Are they happy to work for you? Do they feel good about their work? Are they fairly compensated? Do you encourage personal development? To what extent do your followers feel better about who they are because of the way you lead?

If your direct reports are going to talk about you behind your back (and they are) then you had better get busy influencing that gossip. Right now, as you read this sentence, someone who reports to you is out there telling a story about you. That story is about the impact you have on them. While they may tell stories about some cool thing you did or some deal you closed or some speech you gave, your real power comes from how you affect them as individuals. That is what they will talk about the most, and that is what they will remember about you.

Courageous leadership involves developing clarity and awareness about the impact you want to have on those you lead. There is risk involved in being more personal and more engaged with your

**Courageous leadership involves developing clarity and awareness about the impact you want to have on those that you lead.**

followers. It takes courage to reveal your core values and admit your weaknesses to your team. It takes courage to raise your voice and say, "Follow me!" It takes courage to ask people to trust you with the uncertainty of the next quarter's business plan. You have to earn that trust. If you get in front of them and ask them to follow you, you'd better be clear about where you are headed and why they should go there. You'd better be certain that they are each personally and powerfully connected to you and the future you see.

On a recent teleconference, I asked a company's vice president about the current mindset of the followers in his part of the organization. I found his response both refreshingly authentic and extremely troubling all at once. He said, "They're skeptical about the future of our company. They trust the leaders they report to but lack confidence in those higher up in the organization. They feel disconnected from the bigger picture. They aren't sure that the C-level executives really understand what they are dealing with every day."

In other words, the followers didn't have confidence that the senior leaders knew what they were doing. Uncertainty and skepticism spread throughout the organization because of the leaders' lack of clarity about where the company was headed and how that would affect everyone.

So how do you take control of your impact?

There are two elements in your leadership impact: scientific and artistic. The scientific side encompasses everything a leader has to do every day to execute the fundamental processes of the business: making widgets, getting widgets into stores, writing reports about widgets, making the widget makers happy, evaluating the competitive widget producers in the market . . . you get the idea.

The artistic side is all about answering personal questions: *What are my values? How do I communicate them to the culture? How do I connect those I lead to what I believe? How do I create the right kind of culture for the people who follow me? What type of experiences do I need to create for my followers so that they have the greatest chance for success? Are they*

*really following me, or are they simply complying with directives?* (Those aren't rhetorical questions. Answer them! Evaluate how your leadership behaviors measure up to your answers.)

Your followers care less about the scientific side of your leadership and more about the artistic side. Have you ever known a leader who was technically competent but was asked to leave the company because his or her artistic leadership was so pathetic? Someone who could meet the numbers but made everyone miserable in the process? Of course you do. You've probably worked for someone like that, and you probably hated every minute of it. Don't let that happen to your own leadership.

Most leaders focus almost exclusively on the scientific aspects of leadership throughout their careers. I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong with the scientific side. I *am* suggesting that the best leaders find a balance. They are able to meet their numbers and understand the stress their people experience. They are able to create a positive customer experience and develop a great place to work. They are able to demand excellence and hold true to their core values.

For many, the artistic side makes them uncomfortable. They can get their heads around numbers. They can measure and quantify cash flow, balance sheets, and profit and loss statements. They see values and culture as intimidating, unquantifiable things. There are those who go so far as to act like the artistic side of leadership doesn't produce tangible results. Nothing could be further from the truth!

It takes courage to investigate the pieces of the business that you can't neatly and cleanly pin down. It takes courage to look inward and get clarity on what you believe. Once you have clarity, it takes courage to step up and talk about how those beliefs have impact on the work you and your followers do. It requires introspection, emotional intelligence, and a sense of focus that is different from what most of us were taught in business school. You are lost in the woods if you think you can have positive and productive impact while ignoring the artistic side of your leadership. In the next chapter, we'll discuss the courage you need to do this,

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but for now, the following three steps will help you start to emphasize the artistic side of your leadership and get control of your impact.

1. Evaluate where you spend the majority of your energy. Are you more comfortable in the scientific elements of your leadership or the artistic ones? (I know you think you are balanced, but all of us favor one over the other, if only slightly.)
  2. Clarify the impact you are having on those you lead. Use a 360 assessment, a focus group, or hypnosis (just kidding). Find out what your subordinates think about your impact.
  3. Write down specific steps to help you balance your impact and make it more intentional.
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For a download of a worksheet for this chapter and others please go to [www.leadershipisntforcowards.com](http://www.leadershipisntforcowards.com) or scan the QR code.



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praise for **LEADERSHIP ISN'T FOR COWARDS**

"Staver delivers practical and useful leadership advice that is profoundly helpful and thoroughly entertaining. His storytelling and ability to blend concise and actionable techniques to challenging situations help the reader connect immediately."

—BRUCE KLEIN, Senior VP U.S. Public Sector Theater, Cisco Systems

"This book will get you out of the weeds and cause you to step back and look at the big picture of your leadership style. It will increase your self-awareness of how others are truly reacting to your behavior. Most importantly, it will provide you with an action plan to make a difference in others' lives and build powerful loyalty that results in positive business outcomes and lasting relationships."

—PAM O'CONNOR, President and CEO, Leading Real Estate Companies of the World®

"Once again, Mike Staver has taken us to a unique place in the practice of management and leadership.

Over the years, Mike has been able to get to the exact heart of every issue that he explores in his speeches and writings. He brings a unique perspective to issues like customer service, company focus, and numerous other topics. With his new book, *Leadership Isn't for Cowards*, he drives home the unique concept that managers/leaders are 'messing with people's lives.' I found that to be an interesting yet sobering thought. It has caused me to realize that it is not appropriate to try to lead by the seat of my pants. It takes a lot more thought and preparation. This new book contains some great tools to help me get the job done better."

—LARRY R. STEVENS, President and CEO, Med One Capital Inc.

"Mike Staver has an uncanny ability to get in your head and read your thoughts as a leader.

He challenges you to look at who you are, who you THINK you are, and who you want to be. This book pushes you to have the courage to be an impactful and successful leader, while focusing on the 'must haves' in business AND the 'should haves.' This book can be career-changing to those leaders open to growth."

—CASI DILEVA, Vice President, Licensed Banker, and Insurance Program Manager, UnionBanc Investment Services

"*Leadership Isn't for Cowards* puts leadership in the right perspective. The introduction about leadership is spot on and concurs with my experience. The book has forced me to answer important questions and to make subtle changes in my approach as a leader. I highly recommend you read this book regardless of whether you are in a leadership role or not. I found it enlightening as well as entertaining."

—HEINZ RUCH, President and CEO, Amplifon USA