

Foreword by David Gergen • Afterword by Warren Bennis

TAKE THE LEAD



Motivate, Inspire, and Bring
Out the Best in Yourself and
Everyone Around You

BETSY MYERS

Praise for TAKE THE LEAD

“The defining difference in this superb book is Myers’ insistence that every day provides leadership opportunities for every one of us—from the most junior employee to the top of the organization.”

—*The Washington Post*

“A home run. . . . Written in an intelligent but conversational and approachable tone, this inspirational primer is a perfect read for anyone seeking to understand, develop, or unleash his or her genuine leadership potential.”

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“Myers offers a cogent, articulate addition to modern leadership theory, citing her experiences with both President Clinton and Obama. . . . An enjoyable and insightful read for anyone interested in increasing their personal and professional effectiveness.”

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“A principled yet practical guide to twenty-first-century leadership. Myers’s candid, courageous stories offer convincing evidence of what it takes to be an authentic leader.”

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“Betsy has a huge heart, tremendous empathy, and a genuine interest in others. That not only makes her a wonderful friend, it also makes her an exceptional leader. In *Take the Lead*, she makes a compelling case that all of us can learn to lead with our hearts.”

—Dee Dee Myers, former White House press secretary and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Why Women Should Rule the World*

“In working with some of the most powerful leaders in the world, Betsy has had the opportunity to see into their hearts and minds and understand what makes them inspiring and successful leaders. The result is a book filled with insight and wisdom.”

—Steve Belkin, chairman, Trans National Group

TAKE THE LEAD

*Motivate, Inspire, and Bring Out the Best
in Yourself and Everyone Around You*

BETSY MYERS
with John David Mann

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*For Madison, my precious daughter,
who teaches me more about love and leadership
than I ever thought possible*

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FOREWORD BY DAVID GERGEN

What a delight to welcome to the front ranks of leadership books a fresh, vibrant, down-to-earth voice. Readers of this fine new work will quickly discover here what I began learning a decade ago—that Betsy Myers is special.

I had first heard about Betsy in the early 1990s. She and her sister Dee Dee, the first woman to serve as a US president's press secretary, were rising stars in the Clinton administration. Growing up in California as daughters of a navy pilot, they had each found separate paths into politics. They were both attractive, so they turned heads, but they soon won professional respect because they had good heads of their own. Erskine Bowles, then head of the Small Business Administration and later chief of staff at the White House (yes, the same Erskine who cochaired the national deficit commission in 2010), recognized Betsy's talents and put her in charge of working with women who were small business owners, a growing force in the country. Later Betsy came to the Clinton White House herself to run outreach efforts to women. The president and Hillary often spoke highly of her.

So it was with some curiosity that I greeted her as a student in my classroom at the John F. Kennedy School of Government just as the Clinton years were coming to an end. It was the first year at Harvard for each of us—she in pursuit of a master's degree, me

as a rookie on the faculty. What hit me immediately was that she asked thoughtful questions and was one of the best networkers I had ever seen; her warmth and laughter were a magnet for the students who were always buzzing about her.

Neither of us expected to be entwined in each other's lives, but when Betsy agreed after graduation to rescue the alumni relations office at the school and then immediately turned it around, I thought about trying to lure her to the Center for Public Leadership, where I was faculty director. Erskine Bowles confided to me, "Never ask Betsy to do something unless you are sure you want it—because she will always get it done."

It took some wooing on my part, but eventually she agreed to serve as executive director of the center, a decision that proved wonderfully fateful for us both. From my perspective, she was a booster rocket for the center, bringing to it a zest and glamour that inspired the students there. For her, it was a chance not only to build the center but also to make a deep dive into the literature and teachings about leadership. Before long, she was becoming a leadership coach herself.

We were professional partners for three years, working every day to help build a new generation of leaders for America and the world. During those years, Betsy shaped countless lives for the better. You can imagine how mixed my feelings were when she told me one day that a long-shot candidate for the presidency—a freshman senator by the name of Barack Obama—wanted her to become the chief operating officer of his campaign team. Her departure would be a huge loss for the center, but I could also see that it just might be an opportunity of a lifetime for her. And after all, weren't we dedicated to helping new leaders take the stage?

Even though Obama was an underdog, I urged her to take

the job. I had only one caveat: “You know that Hillary is likely to win the nomination,” I advised, “and that this may destroy your bridges to her and her husband. But they have been good to you over the years. You have to tell her team—*before* it is announced.” She had the courage to do exactly that, and she managed to keep her old friendships intact.

Betsy tells the whole story with verve here in the pages of this book—from her early days as a business entrepreneur through her time with the Clintons, at Harvard, and then on to the Obama team. And you will find packed into these pages valuable lessons about leadership, not only for women—and mothers—but for men as well. Some who write about leadership bring to bear years of experience; others bring an understanding of the literature. Betsy is one of the few who combines both, helping to close the gap between practice and theory.

She is too modest to say so, but Betsy also walks the talk. Over the past couple of decades, she has come to personify some of the most important lessons I have learned about leadership over the years. I might briefly mention three:

First, Betsy illustrates the point that leaders are made, not born.

Yes, some people are born with a little more magic than others. Abe Lincoln attracted a following as a young boy who threw the best wrestlers in town; Dwight Eisenhower was organizing football games when he was a kid, too. But both had long journeys ahead of them before becoming giants of their generations. Lincoln worked for years as an itinerant lawyer and local politician in Illinois before he ascended the national stage, and even then, no one was sure of his capacity to lead. Ike’s growth as a leader spurred forward when he was on army assignment to Panama and

found a fabulous mentor, General Fox Conner. Even then, though, he remained stuck in the middle ranks of the army, serving sixteen years as a major, before the coming of war allowed him an opportunity to win his stars and become a world-famous leader.

So it was with Betsy. She did not spring forth suddenly as a full-grown leader; she gradually worked her way up, making her share of mistakes and becoming better at each turn in the road. When she first became executive director of the Center for Public Leadership, she found major barriers confronting her. She had to learn how to persuade others to follow her even though they were older and more experienced than she was. She was devoted to expanding opportunities for women, but found that, in some instances, winning the support of a woman as a follower could be more difficult than that of a man. She also had to learn how to bring change in an institution that prided itself on tradition. Surmounting each of these barriers, she became not only a wiser person but a better leader. Indeed, as she and I learned together from our joint mentor, Warren Bennis (the guru of leadership studies and author of the afterword for this book), the process of becoming a leader is really the same as the process of becoming a full human being: each of us has to become the author of our own life, the maker of our own leadership.

Second, Betsy personifies the axiom that the best leaders are also the best listeners.

Some would-be leaders believe that if they just talk long enough, or even loudly enough, other people are bound to follow them. Not true: other people hit the mute button. The most accomplished leaders have found that if they listen closely to others—“deep listening,” as Warren Bennis puts it—they can relate far more effectively to the dreams and fears of others. For some years, I watched

as Bill Clinton would first enter an unfamiliar group. He would stop and talk intently to one individual after another, hearing their stories, learning about their families and friends, figuring out what made them tick. Only after he had immersed himself in the group would he step forward to speak or lead. He would capture the zeitgeist of the group and help give it voice. And, by the way, he had an astonishing memory. It is said that at the top of his game, Jack Nicklaus could remember almost every shot he had made in a championship golf tournament even many years earlier. Bill Clinton could remember every conversation—and every name.

Betsy is a leader very much in this tradition. As you read this book, you will find story upon story of conversations she has had with friends and acquaintances over the years—and in each case, she shows how intently she listened and learned from what she heard. Don't get me wrong: Betsy is a voluble person and spell-binding as a speaker. But her words come from a place of deep listening.

Third, Betsy practices the central message of this book: she leads through the power of feelings.

All leaders must have a well-developed capacity for critical thinking; good judgment and sound decision-making are crucial. But we know from an accumulating body of research, especially built around “emotional intelligence,” that a leader's self-awareness and self-control, together with an acute awareness of others and accompanying social skills, matter much more than conventional wisdom has held. Daniel Goleman, whose work on EQ is widely read, has found that brains can often lift people into the C-Suite, but what then distinguishes them as good or bad executives depends heavily upon their ability to engage in relational leadership.

Betsy is a person of feelings—she has feelings for others and she can make others feel better about themselves. Years of experience in the arena have convinced her that this is the best path to leadership. Her website prominently displays one of her favorite quotes, drawn from Maya Angelou: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

I hope you enjoy and gain as much from these next pages as I have. I know that by the time you finish, you will learn what I have—that Betsy Myers is special.

INTRODUCTION

A Road Map for Leadership

At a recent back-to-school night, I was chatting with one of my daughter's teachers. "Madison told me you are writing a book," she said. "What's it about?" I told her it was about leadership and how successful leaders bring out the most productive feelings in those around them. "Like what you do here with the kids in your class," I added.

"Oh," she mused, "I don't really see myself as a leader."

"Are you kidding?" I said. "You're teaching all these children how to read and write, how to share and other important life skills. They are growing and developing their sense of self-worth, and you are right in the middle of that process, teaching them how to learn and nurture their own abilities. You're leading them into their future!"

She looked surprised and thoughtful as she considered this idea. "I never thought of it like that," she said.

Most of us don't.

It's easy to view leadership as being something that relates only to the elite few. So often we see a "leader" as someone larger than life, as if leadership were something exclusive to powerful people in distant places: the CEO's suite or the general's tent, the pulpit or the podium. We tend to think of leadership in terms of grand

gestures and historic events: Washington crossing the Delaware, Lincoln issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, or Gandhi facing down the British Empire. But every CEO, general, or president starts as a child, with teachers and parents, coaches and friends who support and help shape them into the adult they will become.

LEADERSHIP IS EVERYWHERE

When my little sister JoJo was in first grade, her teacher was so mean to the kids that it often made her cry. This teacher ruled her classroom by fear and intimidation. She asked me once, “Why does your sister cry all the time?” I replied, “Because she’s afraid of you!” No matter how I try, I cannot recall her name.

I have no trouble remembering my fifth-grade teacher’s name. Hugh Beaton loved kids and loved teaching. Where JoJo’s teacher would hover like a hawk, waiting to catch her pupils doing something wrong, Mr. Beaton always managed to catch us doing something right. He let us know he believed in us, and being in his presence brought out the best in us.

As the years passed and I encountered other teachers and mentors like Mr. Beaton, I have been fascinated by this mysterious quality these people seem to have in common.

What exactly *is* this thing we call leadership?

Why is it that some people challenge us and motivate us to rise to our best abilities, while others seem to drain our energy and spirit? What is that particular quality certain people have that causes those around them to engage fully and feel connected?

All my life I have been curious about this. What is leadership all about? How and when does it work? This curiosity has

led me through careers in the worlds of business, academia, and political life.

Working in the Clinton White House, I would observe cabinet secretaries and senior staff with fascination. Why was it that Treasury Secretary Bob Rubin could walk down the halls of the White House and people would practically bow in respect, while another cabinet secretary would elicit nowhere near the same response? Why are some places such great places to work, while others feel grueling? Why does one department head or business executive inspire her people to greatness, while another evokes only apathy and disinterest from the ranks? Why is it that one teacher is beloved by students, while another is loathed and feared? What is that magical quality that brings out the best in people, and is it a secret known only by a precious few or something available to us all?

This book is my effort to address these questions. I don't claim to have discovered the exclusive "secret sauce" of leadership for the twenty-first century, because the answers to these questions have been here all along—but they are often missed or ignored. And I might well have missed them, too, but for the fact that I have been fortunate enough to have a front-row seat in some of our nation's most prestigious governmental, academic, and business institutions, offering me the chance to witness leadership success and failure in places large and small, public and private.

This is not a political book, although some of the stories and examples I'll share with you are drawn from my experiences in the Clinton White House and the 2008 Obama presidential campaign. It is not an academic book about leadership principles, although I'll also draw on experiences in the academic world, where I served as executive director of the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Along with

stories from these times, we'll also explore examples from friends and colleagues in the business world and insights gained through life with my family.

From what I've observed, genuine leadership is not something that magically happens because we've been handed a certain position or role to play. It is a quality we nurture in ourselves, regardless of our job or station in life. It is a function not of title, academic degrees, or access to power, but of how we treat and connect with the people around us.

I believe this magical quality *is* available to all of us, although it is often counterintuitive and quite different from what we may have been taught, or come to believe, true leadership looks like.

Many of us don't see ourselves as leaders, but the truth is that we are all confronted constantly with opportunities to *take the lead*. Whether we are managing a division of a company, interacting in our community, participating in a PTO or church organization, or raising our children, the way we feel about ourselves and treat others has an impact that adds or detracts, inspires or deflates. That takes the lead, or fails to do so.

From the Oval Office to the playground, whether in private life or public, in the home or workplace, in our communities and organizations, friendships and relationships, it's exactly the same principles at play. Leadership doesn't happen only on mountaintops and in summit meetings—leadership is *everywhere*.

A LEADERSHIP CRISIS

In the summer of 1999, I left the Clinton administration to pursue a master's in public administration at the John F. Kennedy School

of Government at Harvard. Upon graduating in 2000 I joined the Kennedy School administration as director of Alumni and External Relations, and three years later I was recruited by David Gergen, director of the Center for Public Leadership at the Kennedy School, to take a position there as executive director.

There couldn't have been a more perfect job for me at the time. My position at the center offered an academic dimension to my years of experiential learning about leadership and allowed me to make this my full-time passion and occupation.

Harvard prides itself on being the premier institution in the world for the training of the world's leaders, whether in education, medicine, government, or business. The Center for Public Leadership was created in 2000, by a generous endowment from the businessman and philanthropist Les Wexner (owner of The Limited and Victoria's Secret) and his wife, Abigail, with a mandate to focus on research, curricula, and teaching, both inside and outside the classroom, on leadership thought and practice. The next few years at the center provided a rare opportunity to meet and work with some of our country's top leadership experts from business, academia, and government, as well as graduate students from all over the world, bringing a broader perspective and sharper focus to my fascination with leadership. I was especially interested in exploring a new kind of leadership—one that the new century required.

When I began working as the center's executive director in the fall of 2003, it was evident that trust in our leaders had been steadily declining in every sector nationwide, and it seemed that this prevailing sense of distrust had been deepening for well more than a decade.

Warren Bennis, the distinguished scholar and dean of American leadership who also served as our board chairman, suggested that

we undertake an annual study to identify how ordinary Americans viewed the current state of leadership, both generally and across all the professions, and to track these trends over the next several years.

In the summer of 2004, at the Democratic Convention in Boston, David Gergen and I met with the publisher and the editor of the *U.S. News & World Report (USNWR)*: Bill Holiber and Brian Kelly. We pitched the idea of teaming up to conduct an annual survey of attitudes on leadership and creating a report to be published jointly, with a special issue of their magazine devoted to identifying the nation's best leaders. The following spring the project was launched, and that October we published the results of our first annual *National Leadership Index*, titled "A National Study of Confidence in Leadership." (The *Index* and special issue of *USNWR* have continued publication every year since.)

The numbers were alarming, though hardly surprising. We were able to verify that, yes, public confidence in leadership had seen a twenty-year decline, and that two-thirds (66 percent) of Americans felt we were mired in a leadership crisis. Nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of them believed that unless the country's leaders improved, the United States would decline as a nation. Americans across all categories of age, geography, gender, and political affiliation were not confident that their leaders would respond effectively in a crisis, such as a natural disaster or a terrorist attack.¹

This deficiency was felt at the highest levels of government as well as in most other sectors of society, including education and business. The only places where our leaders garnered even a "moderate" level of confidence (and even here just barely) were

1. These numbers had declined further by the time of our 2006 report, and even further by the 2007 report.

in medicine and our military. The lowest-rated leadership of all was in the media. Our data showed that we were in the throes of a full-fledged leadership crisis. From our homes and families, to our churches, mosques, and synagogues, to our workplaces and halls of government, Americans were deeply disappointed in their leaders.

Since the publication of our first *Index*, the numbers have only grown worse.

Not surprisingly, this crisis in leadership has brought with it a parallel crisis in the workforce. Polls and studies indicate that as many as 70 percent of American workers report feeling “not engaged” or “actively disengaged” at work. It seems that poor leadership makes for unhappy and disaffected people.

In addition to the enormous toll this takes on the human spirit and such intangibles as family and personal happiness, there are also mind-boggling economic costs involved. According to one study, disengagement and low morale in the workplace create an economic burden of some \$350 billion annually in the US alone, with similar impact occurring in other countries around the world.²

A NEW ERA OF LEADERSHIP

The leadership crisis documented in the *Index* was not simply about the particular individuals who happened to be in positions of power at the time. Something bigger and deeper was going on. We had entered a new era, one that required a new leadership paradigm.

There was a time when the classic command-and-control style

2. Robin Athey, “It’s 2008: Do You Know Where Your Talent Is?” Deloitte Development, 2004.

of leadership worked, but what worked then doesn't work now. The world has changed in the past two decades, in profound and permanent ways. Society has grown more diverse, with the younger generation, women, and minorities playing a far more central role. According to the US Department of Labor, by 2008 seven in every ten new entrants into the workforce were women and people of color.³

One of the most intriguing results from our first annual *Index* was that the majority of those surveyed felt the country would be better off with more women in leadership positions.

Why?

One reason surely is the increasing presence of women in the workforce: by 2010, the number of women in the US labor force actually outnumbered men. Yet I believe there is another, more central reason. Women tend to bring a very different dynamic to leadership, one that is collaborative and team-centered, that thrives on connection, relationship, openness, and cooperation with those who have different viewpoints and beliefs. This is a kind of leadership that does not simply direct or manage people but *engages* them.

Since the experiences and views that inform these pages are mine, *Take the Lead* naturally reflects a woman's reality and point of view. Yet it is not my intention to write a book for women alone but for everyone who shares my fascination with leadership, regardless of the individual leader's gender. These are the qualities of leadership, I believe, that are central to what our new era demands and that today's leaders, both men and women, need to embrace.

In the traditional corporate world, the focus was about going up the ladder. People would enter the workforce and be with the same company for forty years. Not anymore. The pace of change

3. Aon Hewitt, "Preparing for the Workforce of Tomorrow," February 2004.

has dramatically accelerated and society has become incredibly fluid and mobile. The Internet has transformed social and economic patterns as radically as electricity and the automobile did in the early twentieth century, giving people a voice in a way that was not possible only a generation ago. Today, people expect and even demand more out of their lives—and their workplaces. We want more participation in decisions. We want to have an impact, to live a more purposeful and values-centered life, and to be acknowledged for doing so. The emerging need is not simply for *better* leadership but for a new *kind* of leadership, one based on listening, transparency, and a fundamental honoring of relationships. As we are seeing in the Middle East and Africa in early 2011, people everywhere are demanding to have a voice.

In the spring of 2006, six months after the release of our first annual *National Index*, we convened a special conference at the center, titled “Growing Leaders in a Changing World,” to explore these issues. The conference’s theme was also chosen to honor the life and work of our board chairman, Warren Bennis, who had just turned eighty-one.

Warren is unique among leadership authorities in that his work has been influential in academic circles as well as in business and the popular literature. Among his dozens of works, Warren’s classic 1989 book, *On Becoming a Leader*, has served (and continues to serve) as the bible of leadership to several generations of American leaders.

The conference brought together the top experts in leadership from three vastly different worlds: academia, business, and popular thought. On the program, for example, were such respected academics as Max Bazerman, Hannah Riley Bowles, Ron Heifetz, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Barbara Kellerman, Rod Kramer, Joseph

Nye, Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, and Noel Tichy, sharing the dais with such popular bestselling authors as Ken Blanchard (*The One Minute Manager*), Stephen Covey (*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*), Tom Peters (*In Search of Excellence*), Harvey Mackay (*Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive*), John Kotter (*Our Iceberg Is Melting*), and Spencer Johnson (*Who Moved My Cheese?*). Adding yet another dimension to the proceedings was a long list of extremely successful and influential business leaders, including Steve Belkin (Trans National Group Services), Bill George (Medtronic), Georgette Mosbacher (Borghese), Howard Schultz (Starbucks), Jack Welch (GE), and Les Wexner (Limited Brands). Rounding out the roster were such leadership authorities as Brian Duffy, editor of *U.S. News & World Report*, former governor Michael Dukakis, Eric Shinseki, former chief of staff of the US Army, and Admiral Thad Allen, commandant of the US Coast Guard.

It was a remarkably distinguished who's who of contemporary leadership, a rare combination of political and business experience with leading academic researchers and popular bestselling authors, known as *thought leaders*, all under the same roof. In essence, it was a collective state of the union address on leadership in America and what is needed for the new century.

What made the conference even more remarkable was that all these diverse authorities were describing essentially the same picture. There was a new kind of leadership afoot, said the conferees, a leadership of the mind *and* the heart. This new paradigm emphasized such traits as authenticity, collaboration, and caring.

"As leaders, we are all angels with only one wing," Warren said in his concluding remarks that evening. "We can fly—but only if we embrace each other."

The Harvard conference echoed the experiences and observa-

tions I'd had over the decades and further validated my own ideas about leadership, which boil down to these three fundamental beliefs:

- Leadership is a function first and foremost of self-knowledge and honest self-reflection.
- Secondly, leaders don't always have all the answers. In fact, the strength of their leadership comes from their willingness to ask the questions.
- Finally, and most importantly, leaders draw their effectiveness less from what they know or what power they wield, and more from how they make the people around them feel.

LEADERSHIP STARTS WITH OURSELVES

Warren Bennis laid the groundwork for this view of leadership twenty years ago. He was the first to clearly articulate the understanding that leadership *is* self-knowledge.

At the time, most academics and researchers were still looking for that elusive magic formula, as if to say, "If leaders will just follow these five steps or imitate the actions of that particular Fortune 50 CEO, they will surely find success." But it doesn't work that way. Leadership isn't something you can put on like a suit of clothes or generate by copying someone else. Leadership is about who you genuinely *are*.

Successful leaders are those who are conscious about their behavior and the impact it has on the people around them. These leaders are willing to step back from the fray and get an accurate picture of what is working in their organizations—and in their

lives—and what is not. Moreover, they want to know the *why*. They are willing to examine what behaviors of their own may be getting in the way. Successful leaders understand that if we don't lead consciously, it's easy to repeat patterns that could be keeping us from achieving the results we are hoping for.

The toughest person you will ever lead is yourself. We can't effectively lead others unless we can lead ourselves, which starts with knowing who we are.

LEADERS DON'T ALWAYS HAVE THE ANSWERS—
BUT THEY ALWAYS HAVE THE QUESTIONS

Many of us grew up thinking that leaders and other authority figures had all the answers. But nobody can possibly know everything about every issue in the organization, business, school, or family they lead.

I have seen people shy away from leadership because they thought that to be the leader, they needed to have it all figured out from the start. In reality, it is very much the opposite. Effective leaders often don't have all the answers, and don't pretend to. What makes them leaders is that they are willing to ask the questions. They are *curious* about other perspectives, of both the experts and the people in the trenches, knowing that the answers are often right in our midst. And they are *generous* with what they learn and share it with others, devoting their own energies to helping others achieve success.

The old-fashioned command-and-control leadership style sees this sort of thinking as a weakness, but the new kind of leader knows that being open and asking questions is a strength that includes and motivates others. Effective leaders make it a priority in their schedules to get to know their community, seeking out the

knowledge and experiences of their team members, constituents, colleagues, and family members, and giving credit where it is due.

LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT FEELINGS

Advanced degrees, years of experience, an important title, or access to power do not guarantee that you will be a successful leader. Leadership is about how you make people *feel*—about you, about the project or work you're doing together, and especially about *themselves*.

Why? Because people do their best work when they feel good about themselves and what they're doing. When people feel valued, appreciated, heard, supported, acknowledged, and included, they are motivated to bring their best selves forward. This is how initiatives get launched, profits are made, and the work gets done. It's not just about being nice, it is about being effective.

Most of us don't think of feelings as being the key to leadership success. It seems almost counterintuitive. But think for a moment about the times in your life when you have been most productive: were those also the times when you felt the most valued, supported, and appreciated?

LEADERSHIP IN THE TRENCHES

In January 2007, I left the center to take a position as chief operations officer for Barack Obama's presidential campaign, which was just getting under way. For the rest of that year I worked at the Chicago headquarters, building and managing the campaign's national operational infrastructure, which gave me a big-view, top-

down frame of reference for the campaign's operation. However, the following year gave me the opportunity to gain a very different perspective. After transitioning in late 2007 from COO to become the chair of Women for Obama (WFO), I spent the next year gaining a very grassroots, in-the-trenches view of the campaign effort.

Sleeping in motels and driving rental cars, I crisscrossed many of the campaign battleground states during much of 2008, working side by side with staff and volunteers of all ages and from all backgrounds, witnessing firsthand the participation and dedication of these field organizers and staffers, donors, volunteers, and voters. It was this second, more ground-level perspective that showed me the true heart of this campaign.

Everywhere I traveled, the scene was the same: hundreds of people fully engaged and tirelessly devoted to their shared goal. These people had not been enticed with big expense accounts, cushy salaries, or public recognition. It was quite the opposite. Most of them had taken precious time away from their jobs, their families, and their careers, working for little or no pay, to knock on doors, stuff envelopes, and commit their time to mobilizing perfect strangers, often in towns and states they had never visited before.

It was in these hundreds and thousands of people on the ground that I saw some of the most powerful examples of what it looks like when people feel connected and passionate about what they are doing—and the results those feelings can bring about.

Regardless of your own political views, it is hard not to appreciate what this candidate and campaign accomplished in two short years. At the beginning of 2007, Senator Obama had less than 20 percent national name recognition and no endorsements to speak of—and twenty-two months later he was elected to become the na-

tion's first African-American president. And this historic accomplishment was due largely to the enthusiastic staff and volunteers across the country, many of whom had never been involved in a political campaign before.

Most businesses and organizations dream about this kind of engagement, and would give anything (and *pay* anything) to generate that kind of participation and commitment from their people. How do you create that kind of experience? What causes people to bring that kind of energy and dedication to an organization or project? Was the Obama campaign an anomaly, or can that same level of passionate engagement be created in other organizations and companies?

During that year in the campaign I reflected on these questions every day, and whether I was in Montana or Rhode Island, the answers were amazingly similar. People got involved and stayed involved because they felt included and empowered to have a voice. They felt their contributions were valued and appreciated. They felt they were a connected part of something bigger than themselves.

Can that kind of powerful, committed engagement be replicated in other organizations? From what I've seen, it absolutely can.

This book is organized around seven core ideas:

authenticity

connection

respect

clarity

collaboration

learning

courage

These seven qualities are not a magic formula or paint-by-numbers recipe, but they do provide a road map to effective leadership. Whether you are leading a class of kindergarteners, a team of employees, or a committee in Congress, these seven principles will help you bring out productive feelings in yourself and in those around you, while addressing and dealing with conflict in the healthiest and most constructive way.

The pages that follow trace these seven qualities through my encounters with everyday people, in places big and small, who have touched my heart with their leadership example.

It seems to me that our core desire to feel valued in our companies and organizations is not so different from the way we all want to feel valued in our families and relationships. In fact, it's not different at all. Whether you are sitting with your child in the playground or championing a new policy initiative in the White House, it's the same. We are all human. And perhaps deeper than any other human need is our desire to feel that we *matter*. It is in those moments of connection that people become inspired and motivated to take the lead and collaborate with you rather than remain passive observers or even struggle against you. It is in those moments of passionate engagement that we rise to our greatest abilities and proudest accomplishments, bringing out the best in ourselves and everyone around us.