

As business leaders, we are hyper focused on delivering results. Those KPIs, or metrics, are what propels every organization to constantly push forward and improve. However, those metrics don't magically appear—an environment that fosters that level of growth needs to be implemented and permeate everywhere within the company. This book provides all of the elements for the secret sauce that creates a winning culture, delivers consistent results, and fosters growth. Read the book. Be inspired!

—**JEFFREY HAYZLETT,**

Primetime TV & Podcast Host, Speaker, Author, and Part-Time Cowboy

Leadership is an adventure. Perfect! This is what makes it so exciting! Well done! The book was fantastic! I know I am reading a great leadership book when I find my mind wandering. Not because I am bored, but because I am engaged. I kept finding myself thinking of scenarios, interactions, and ways I could apply what I was reading. Very applicable to leaders at all levels. Great Read!

—**DENNIS RISEMAN,**

Vice President of Sales, PC Connection Business Solutions

Chris Fuller combines information, practical skills, passion and entertaining stories and examples to bring you a book that will make the most seasoned leaders stop and think about leadership. He drills down on the foundational challenges that derail many leaders and empowers the reader with the tools to get intentional in your leadership style. He'll have you flipping from "Thank God it's Friday," to "I can't wait for Monday!"

—**SHEP HYKEN,**

New York Times and Wall Street Journal Best-selling Business Author

In *InSPIRED Leadership*, Chris Fuller has assembled a contemporary tool kit of leadership framework and business maxims that are relevant for every business and team looking to get better results. This book maps out the path to create the systems and culture that will produce Tier 1 actions and results. Invest in your team with this approach and remarkable results will follow!

—**MALCOLM O'NEAL**,

Vice President of Human Resources, BJ Services

The book is fantastic! Inspired Leadership is an adventure-packed read filled with real-world examples and "Ah-Ha" moments and life-lessons. The book showcases a treasure trove of practical tools for high-performance leaders from someone who really gets it.

—**SCOTT DREXLER**,

Doctor of Management, Learning Chief-Strategic National Stockpile

Inspired Leadership displays Chris Fuller's influence as a leadership mentor and coach, Chris's real-world business experience and zest for life adventures reveal his passion for excellence in leadership. Whether you are new in your leadership role, a seasoned leader, or a leader struggling under the weight of your responsibility, *this book is for you!* The InSPIRED principles are the key to excellence in leadership and developing strong people leaders. It's what our teams want and need!

—**BARRY RUSSELL JR.**,

Senior Executive, Aviation Industry (36 years)

YOUR PROVEN PATH
TO REMARKABLE RESULTS

INSPIRED

LEADERSHIP

Chris Fuller
with Bill Blankschaen

Inspired Leadership: Your Proven Path to Remarkable Results

By Chris Fuller with Bill Blankschaen

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To all of the hard working, dedicated leaders who give their very beings to make the world a better place for those around them.

Your modeling of dedication and servant leadership may never be acknowledged by those who reap the benefits, but know it is not lost!

You care more than most, do more than most, and truly make a difference!

You. Inspire. Me.



CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: Your Leadership Adventure.....	1
CHAPTER 2: When the Dream Becomes a Nightmare	19
CHAPTER 3: Intentional.....	39
CHAPTER 4: Service.....	59
CHAPTER 5: Passion	79
CHAPTER 6: Integrated.....	99
CHAPTER 7: Real.....	123
CHAPTER 8: Execution.....	147
CHAPTER 9: Developed.....	169
CHAPTER 10: InSPIRED Culture.....	185
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	203
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	204



CHAPTER 1

YOUR LEADERSHIP ADVENTURE

"Leadership is a privilege to be passionately pursued."

—CHRIS FULLER

Matt found himself mentally drifting, lost in a brain fog on a train to nowhere. He looked out his office window at a nearly empty parking lot and sighed as he glanced at the clock ticking away on the wall—7:30 PM. Another late night at the office. He had promised to be home for dinner tonight. He thought of his wife and three young kids waiting for him—again. By now, they would have given up waiting. If he hurried, maybe he'd make it home in time to tuck the kids into bed and warm up his dinner before knocking out a few more hours of paperwork.

Things didn't use to be this way, he thought. How did I get so far behind?

It began with his promotion to management. He had been running nonstop ever since just to feel any hope of survival. And now he had to be back for an early meeting with senior leadership before catching a plane to—where was it again?

What difference does it make, he thought as he headed to the break room and rinsed his coffee cup. *Clearly, I'm not cut out for leadership*, Matt closed the dishwasher door a little too firmly.

When he had first gotten this promotion, he and his wife had been over-the-moon-excited about the opportunity. The extra money meant they could finally get out of their cramped apartment and into a house. They had even hoped to afford private school for the kids. But although they'd bought a house, somehow the money never seemed to stretch to cover school tuition.

In fact, when he did the math, Matt was actually making less per hour than before—but he couldn't exactly ask for his previous job back now, or could he? He had enjoyed that work more. He knew how to do that work. He had the respect of his peers. He could see remarkable results at the end of the day.

Now all he seemed to do was put out endless people and project fires—only to have another blaze up in its place the next day. *Was he even making any difference at all?*

As Matt made his way back toward his office, he passed rows of closed doors and darkened rooms. Sometimes he envied the managers who walked out at five and left yet another hot mess for everyone to deal with the next day. They were content to stagger in and out every day. *They seemed to get away with it*, Matt thought, *so why not try it?* But even as he thought it, Matt knew that just wasn't him. He wanted to do a good job. He wanted to help his people and his company. So why did it have to be so hard?

When he had first been promoted, his boss had told him that although they usually give more in-depth training to new leaders, Matt would need to do on-the-job-training due to budget cuts. At the time, Matt said he understood, but after talking with a few other managers

who had been there awhile, Matt realized that tossing new leaders into the deep end was the norm.

Matt shut out any thoughts of tomorrow as he put his laptop into his briefcase and crammed in a stack of folders from his desk and headed out of the office. Jabbing the elevator button for the parking level, he wondered if his time tonight might be better spent browsing LinkedIn for a job he loved that would keep the higher paychecks coming—though he had no idea what that might be. He easily found his car in the nearly empty lot, right next to the big red sign that read, “In Case of Fire, Use Stairs.” He smirked as he unlocked the car door and thought, *If only it were that easy to escape this nonstop, always-a-fire-drill way of doing things.* Suddenly, he felt his phone vibrate with a text. He tossed his briefcase into the car and fished out his phone.

It was his boss: “Be ready 2 brief senior team in AM on new strategy we discussed this afternoon. Need to show real data!!” Matt sighed and shook his head before sending a quick “OK.” His long night had just gotten longer.

ZOMBIES IN THE WORKPLACE

Unfortunately, if you’re a leader in today’s business climate, Matt’s tale sounds all too familiar. Too many workplaces feel like an episode of *The Walking Dead*—and reruns at that. *Zombies, zombies, everywhere,* and the hits keep coming. Matt dealt with it by putting in twice as much time, believing hard work and long hours are the answer. Other managers left at closing time, no matter what messes they had created or avoided during the day. Neither approach helps solve the problem.

But is there any hope? Even when struggling to lead well, organizational momentum works against leaders to produce the same outcomes: less engagement and lower productivity. Leaders and their

teams stumble into work on Monday with one eye on the clock and the other on Friday. And the sad truth is that both the workplace zombies and their families feel the effect.

These zombified workplaces know few walls or borders. According to the 2017 Gallup *State of the Global Workplace* study, global productivity is in decline. This extensive annual study covering three years and drawing data from 195 countries around the world serves as the benchmark for measuring business success and productivity around the world. It tells a rather bleak story. Global worldwide employee engagement is at *only 15%*. That means a shocking 85% of employees are NOT engaged at work! That's a lot of zombies.

A whopping 67% of employees are indifferent at best, just punching the clock for a paycheck, while another 18% are actively disengaged. In the US and Canada, engagement rises to 31%, but that still leaves almost 70% of the workforce NOT engaged on a daily basis—or worse, actively undermining the company where they work.

This disengagement costs organizations a lot in revenue and productivity. Companies who measured in the highest quartile of employee engagement—as compared to the bottom quartile—saw significant real-world improvements in customer metrics, sales, profitability, and productivity, while drastically reducing absenteeism, turnover, shrinkage, and even employee safety incidents. It turns out that when people are engaged at work, they do more, complain less, and make a healthier contribution to the bottom line.

But what about those who are not actively engaged? As the largest group, they're also the ones most directly affecting results. Unlike toxic employees, who can be easy to spot, disengaged people often hide in plain sight. As the Gallup study notes, “These workers are not hostile or disruptive. They do not hate their job or set out to wreak havoc. They are indifferent and will put the time—but not the energy or

passion—into their role.” These camouflaged zombies make it difficult to get anything done. Innovation, creativity, productivity—basically everything needed to improve organizational performance—slows to a blind stagger. In short, disengaged workers cause massive losses in productivity—between \$450 and \$500 billion a year.¹

So if engaged employees result in more of everything organizations want and less of what they dread, what is the key factor that determines an employee’s level of engagement? *Leadership*—and the culture it creates.

Engagement is ultimately a leadership problem. When it comes to job satisfaction, most employees cite factors the leader or organization can control but chooses to ignore. Indirectly, or directly, it comes back to leaders who fail to lead people to a better, more inspired performance. People won’t give their discretionary effort to leaders they don’t like or respect.

Leaders bear responsibility for the disengagement crisis. Leadership is both the cause and the solution. To improve underperforming team members and retain top performers, leaders must improve how they engage and equip people. They must behave in ways that earn respect and make them worth following. What they do shapes the culture of an organization. It’s not that most leaders don’t care, they just don’t know how to lead. They’ve never been properly equipped and empowered. Most leaders get promoted because they achieved results in one setting and were rewarded with a position of leadership without being handed a leadership manual.

They get tossed into the deep end of a position that requires a totally new skill set. They start doing what got them there—only to discover that the new level requires a different recipe for success—and no one has told them the secret ingredients. Frustration, burnout, turnover, and poor performance soon follow. Technical skill sets and IQ, as important as they may be, don’t automatically translate

into better leadership. In fact, some of the worst leaders can be the smartest people in the room.

Maybe it's time we started thinking differently about preparing leaders to lead? What if instead of accepting the high costs of disengagement or blaming it on the employees, we equipped leaders fully so they could embrace leadership as an adventure? What if we taught them how to create an InSPIRED culture that produces truly remarkable results, the kind of bottom-line, real-world success that gets talked about for years to come? How might that kind of high-performance culture impact the underlying success factors that lead to a decisive competitive advantage: employee retention, leadership vitality, and customer service?

If culture eats strategy for breakfast, then getting the day-to-day culture right will pay massive dividends for leaders and the companies they serve. InSPIRED leadership transforms zombies into raving fans of you and your brand, engaged employees who eagerly anticipate Monday *and* enjoy the weekend to the fullest.

HOW ZOMBIFIED ARE YOU?

The truth is that no one sets out to create a zombified workplace culture. No one searches for a job where they can be disengaged. Yet here we are. The numbers don't lie. Most people are not only uninspired by the workplace experience, they're barely surviving. It feels as if no one understands or cares about the pain. They get no understanding from the boss, who's just trying to keep his or her own head above water. They get no understanding from direct reports who are resigned to going through the motions to get a paycheck. And to top it all off, their peers are working their own agendas to fight for the headcount they need to survive.

On the home front, kids' soccer games, dinner with a significant other, or just some down time to relax and recharge, all get cut for the endless fire drills at work. Bottom line: people feel judged at home for working too much, judged at work for not working fast enough, and judged by their direct reports for running a sweatshop—all while their peers elbow them on the way up the corporate ladder.

Diet and exercise get sacrificed. The brain becomes locked in hyperresponsive alert mode, killing creativity and focus. Sleep vanishes. Relationships shrivel and die. But the boss just keeps asking for more. So people find a way to cope—food addictions, alcohol, drugs of all sorts, marital affairs, becoming a zombie to protect oneself—the list can be pretty long. Then at some point, the switch gets tripped and life implodes.

I get it. Maybe you do, too. I've been there, done that—and got the tattoo. When I was a younger leader and father of two young children, I poured myself into building a construction company. And when I say *poured*, I mean I was a human *doing*, not a human *being*. The guy whose company I was helping to build was a demanding leader who used negative motivation to manipulate people. After I would kill myself to achieve the impossible, he would say things like, “I was hoping for more. Maybe you're not as good as I thought you were. Let me know if you want out. I have guys who will take your place tomorrow.”

So I'd double down and do more. He would even pit one of us against the other. It was a workplace mess, but one that may sound all too familiar to you.

Over the course of several years, I helped him grow that company from \$600,000 to \$21 million with annual revenue streaming in from seven different offices. Unfortunately, I wasn't wise in how I set up the deal I had with him. After years of living the zombie life, I got only

a fraction of the multiple six-figures I had been promised with an invitation to “sue me” for the rest of it.

And the results I did achieve for him came at a high price. I was running all the time, always on, and traveling nonstop. I packed on the pounds, settling for the easy option of burgers and fries, too exhausted to think of eating better or exercising. Because I’d been taking grief all day at work, when I got home I created spousal disconnect and fights about, well, everything—and nothing—all at the same time.

Even when I was technically home, I’m ashamed to say that I wasn’t truly present. When I walked in the front door, the kids would run to me, wanting to play—but I would strike the Heisman pose, stiff-arming them so I could squeeze in one more phone call while juggling my laptop loaded with precious spreadsheets. I shudder to think of all the times they ate without me, then went to bed while I kept working long into the night. I pretty much defined “uninspired” for far too long in my career.

But life has a way of helping us see things clearly eventually. The only question is: What price will we pay for that clarity?

Fast forward many years and numerous leadership and life lessons to July 4, 2009. Out of nowhere, my son Josh’s military base in Afghanistan got hit by a Taliban attack. As the base started getting shelled, one of Josh’s friends, Army PFC Aaron E. Fairbairn, took a direct hit. PFC Justin Casillas rushed to save him, carrying him toward the medic tent—when they both took a second direct hit. Both men, my sons’ buddies, died instantly. Then a truck loaded with explosives drove full speed toward the main gate.

Already under mortar attack, Josh’s military unit knew they had to stop the approaching 5,000-kilogram truck bomb from completing its deadly mission. My son ran to the tower where his team of brave soldiers focused everything on stopping that driver. The radio operator

called for Blackhawk helicopter support knowing this was likely their last stand.

The truck made it through the first checkpoint, but Josh's unit shot the driver before the truck got through the second and final gate. Even so, the truck still exploded. The Taliban had installed a remote detonator on the truck activated with a "dead man's switch." At the time of the blast, Josh was partially shielded by the tower, or he too would have died instantly. As it was, he was blown backward and suffered a severe concussion after being knocked unconscious.

Within a couple of years, his brother would face similarly deadly scenarios in the Helmand province. Had either son not come home, I don't know how badly I would have beaten myself up over not being present for them when I had the chance. But I know the price I paid for living an uninspired life wasn't anywhere close to worth it.

How many boys and girls go without moms and dads because marriages end due to workplace stress or a parent stays late at work? How many kids seek affirmation elsewhere through substance abuse, sex, or relationships that lead them astray, when all they really want are parents who choose to be fully present in their lives? How much human carnage ensues because parents come home stressed out from work and fuss at the kids instead of investing the time to nurture them? How many kids ask Siri or Google for life knowledge, rather than seeking it in the critical parental context?

Why such horrors? Where does life disengagement begin? It starts when we refuse the invitation to lead others in an inspired way. It worsens when we come to believe we must hold onto a job at all cost. Ultimately, if we don't architect an inspired plan for ourselves and the people we lead, we contribute to and create real tragedy.

THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

The way I see it, life is an adventure to be lived, not a crisis to be survived. Leadership is a privilege to be passionately pursued. I've experienced leadership at every level imaginable, from being a first-time leader thrust unprepared into a position to working in the trenches alongside C-Suite leaders at Fortune 500 companies who feel overwhelmed—but think they can't afford to let anyone know.

When I started working in sales at an electronics store at the age of eighteen, I got noticed after I blew by everyone else. Consequently, the management there did what gets done to most people who produce: they assumed I could lead and promoted me into sales management. They seemed to think that if I was good at sales, imagine what I could do when I cloned five other people to sell just like I did!

I eagerly threw myself into my new leadership position—and face-planted in the first week. I planned an awesome first meeting, but not one of my former peers even showed up. Right then, I knew I had a lot to learn about leadership. I was ill-equipped to take responsibility, and that lack of training set me up for failure.

I committed to a leadership growth journey and started consuming books on leadership. I got my accounting degree and became Director of Information Systems for an aircraft fastener company. Then the guy I mentioned earlier approached me about helping him grow the construction company. In spite of many missteps in that experience, I learned about growing people in the sales process, logistics, distribution, and project management.

My passion for helping people learn and grow led to my partnering with my brother to invest in an instructional design business. Our first major client was The John Maxwell Company. I helped John develop and deploy relevant resources for corporate leadership training. Over

the past fifteen years, as the business scaled and morphed into more leadership consulting than instructional design, I've had the privilege of working with numerous organizations, from start-ups to Fortune 500 companies and many brands that are household names.

Leadership is a privilege to be passionately pursued.

All the while, I was building my own intellectual property that reflected my unique vision for leadership as an adventure to be embraced. I've always been intentional about building adventure into my life. Rock climbing, dirt bikes, supersport motorcycles, skydiving, scuba diving, deep-sea fishing—you name it, I've done it.

Adventure inspires me. It lights me up and helps me fully engage life. As a result, I've experienced a few adventures most people would never attempt. I've traveled to Nome, Alaska to mush an Iditarod dogsled team. I've choppered into base camp at Mount Everest to be as near as possible to the top of the world. I attended the America's Cup sailing competition to watch those engineering marvels fly over the water. I went out in a retired *Stars and Stripes* boat to try my own hand as part of the crew of an America's Cup boat.

Every time I engaged one of these experiences, I learn more about leadership. I returned inspired, ready to tackle the next great leadership adventure. I'll share some of those stories in the pages that follow, but it's important for you to know that you don't have to jump out of planes or fly to the highest summits to live and lead in an inspired fashion. Your people just need you to show them the InSPIRED pathway.

THE INSPIRED LEADERSHIP PATHWAY

According to Gallup, employees “are now driven more than ever by mission and purpose and require a workplace culture that delivers it.” People want to know their work has a deeper purpose they can tap into every day. This purpose makes them want to get out of bed and go to work. I think of it as an Ethos of Impact—people want to be inspired by the work *and you*.

But how? The tyranny of the urgent, the muscle memory of the organization, and the status quo can make change extremely difficult. In mature organizations, bureaucracy and silos can create distance and encourage indifference. Meanwhile, companies that have grown quickly also face challenges to creating inspired culture—*scale* and *speed*.

It starts by imagining a workplace where people are not zombies but fully-engaged, energized, and passionate people. As they leave your company for the day, they head home to their families and significant others better people than when they arrived that morning. That’s what an InSPIRED culture does. And those people who go home full of life each day can’t wait to return on Monday to fully engage in *your* InSPIRED mission. It’s not fantasy. It *can* be reality for your workplace.

So how do you get there? Engage the leadership adventure using The InSPIRED Leadership Pathway. I developed this proven pathway over many years of working in the trenches alongside leaders of all backgrounds in a wide variety of organizations.

The letters of the word *inspired* form an acrostic of the seven areas leaders and organizations must address to achieve remarkable results:

Intentional. An InSPIRED culture begins to form when you get intentional. Some companies and leaders succeed without ever understanding why. But how can you replicate what you don't understand? Excellence is never an accident.

Service. More than ever, service matters. An InSPIRED culture serves both external and internal customers. How people experience your team or organization over time becomes their expectation. Their expectation of you becomes your brand. Is your brand one that serves others well, or is it a self-serving brand? Do you even know?

Passion. What fires you up? What passions fuel your best performance? Inspiration may influence you, but passion moves you and motivates the people you lead. At the end of the day, it doesn't matter what your product or service is—if you're in leadership, you're in the people business. And people run on passion.

Integration. Everything is connected in your organization. But how well do all the parts and pieces work together? The gears and sprockets that make up the inner workings will determine whether you produce inspired results or the clock expires on your results. If you've ever found yourself thinking, "It really shouldn't be this hard," then you know the pain of disintegration.

Real. As much as business leaders focus on hard data like production numbers and the bottom line, real people touch everything and determine long-term success. Everyone is wired for greatness, but not everyone is wired for greatness in the same areas. Consequently, the best leaders develop a team of people who lead where they're strong and team where they're weak. To do that, you must first get to know the people you lead in a real way.

Execution. Why do you need to inspire? To get results. And to get results, your team has to execute. If you don't actually get things done with an accountability cadence, all your work becomes merely a relational exercise. The reason you need to be intentional, service-focused, passionate, integrated, and real is so you can execute with excellence to achieve optimal results.

Develop. Once you achieve excellence, the question becomes: can you sustain it tomorrow, next week, and next year? The best leaders know they can't stand still—they must continue to develop. So how do you and your team do that? By choosing to get better every day. Leaders must choose to develop continually.

In the pages to follow, we'll unpack and apply each of these components to help you embrace your own leadership adventure—from wherever you are to wherever you need to go.

LEAVING THE ZOMBIES BEHIND

The InSPIRED Leadership Pathway isn't a fire-and-forget action. It's a process. Becoming an InSPIRED leader and organization won't happen tomorrow, but it can happen if you choose to start changing today. The first thing you may have to change is your beliefs, because beliefs drive behavior:

- Do you believe you *can* impact the workforce culture?
- Do you believe you *can* create an InSPIRED microculture within the existing culture?
- Do you believe you *can* lead your team and organization to produce extraordinary results consistently?

- Do you believe people *can* break out of the zombified stupor and truly enjoy coming to work on Monday?
- Do you believe you *can* experience a workplace culture that sends people home at the end of the day energized and ready to engage a full life with family and friends?

You may be thinking, *Chris, can we really just wave a magic wand and suddenly enjoy an inspired workplace?* Of course not. You must lead well. I want to help you lead your team, and perhaps your entire company culture, to a place where you and everyone else enjoys a fulfilling life, both at and outside of work. The InSPIRED leadership adventure is all about pursuing the opportunity to do meaningful work with great people who work an inspired process.

The InSPIRED leadership adventure is all about pursuing the opportunity to do meaningful work with great people who work an inspired process.

Now, if you're ready to stop following the zombies and become an InSPIRED leader, no matter what your current position or title, keep reading. Because the InSPIRED adventure begins, right now.



TOOL KIT

Summary

- Unlike toxic employees, who can be easy to spot, disengaged people often hide in plain sight.

- When it comes to job satisfaction, most employees cite factors the leader or organization can control but chooses to ignore.
- If culture eats strategy for breakfast, then getting the day-to-day culture right will pay massive dividends for leaders and the companies they serve.
- InSPIRED leadership transforms zombies into raving fans of you and your brand, engaged, customer-centric employees who eagerly anticipate Monday and enjoy the weekend to the fullest.
- The numbers don't lie. Most people are not only uninspired by the workplace experience, they're barely surviving.
- Life is an adventure to be lived, not a crisis to be survived. Leadership is a privilege to be passionately pursued.

Startling Statistics

- Global worldwide employee engagement is only 15%. That means a shocking 85% of employees are NOT engaged at work!
- A whopping 67% of employees are indifferent at best, just punching the clock for a paycheck, while another 18% are actively disengaged.
- In the US and Canada, almost 70% of the people in the workplace are NOT engaged on a daily basis—or worse, actively undermining the company where they work.
- Disengaged workers cause massive losses in productivity—between \$450 and \$500 billion a year.

Action Steps

- **Evaluate your zombie level.** If you're struggling to keep your head above water—or burying your head in the sand, you may not realize how zombified you are. Take an honest look at where you are in your leadership journey. Are you faking it, but not making it? Are you struggling to get by?
- **Embrace the adventure.** Think about why you wanted to be a leader in the first place. It probably wasn't just to make money; it's usually about impact. It's time to reconnect with what you loved about leadership. Write down all the benefits that come from being a good leader—for you, your team, and your company. Then display that list prominently where you'll see it and be motivated every day.
- **Get intentional about your leadership.** Leadership may mean saying no to some things so you can say yes to the best. It's time to put mediocre behind you and strive for the excellence only you can deliver. Make a commitment to yourself to work through The InSPIRED Leadership Pathway and intentionally apply the lessons to reclaim your leadership adventure.



CHAPTER 2

WHEN THE DREAM BECOMES A NIGHTMARE

*“One way to get the most out of life is to look upon it
as an adventure.”*

—WILLIAM FEATHER

We are all wired for adventure. You may be more or less risk averse than others, but we all want to experience the highest summits—whatever those summits may look like for you. It’s when those summits call to you that you discover what you’re really made of.

Real-life adventure inspires me personally. It makes me feel alive. And when it comes to settings for adventure, one setting stands high above the rest—Mount Everest. At 29,035 feet above sea level, Everest is quite literally the tallest summit on earth, the ultimate pinnacle of the mountain-climbing world.

Everest resisted all attempts to summit until Sir Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay did it in 1953. It’s not a feat for the

faint of heart. As veteran Everest climber Ed Viesturs describes the experience, “You don’t assault Everest. You sneak up on it, and then get the hell outta there.”²² In spite of, or perhaps because of, the danger, the summit beckons to bold adventurers. George Mallory, a British mountaineer who participated in the first three British climbing expeditions in the early 1920s was once famously asked, “Why do you want to climb Mount Everest?” His classic response, “Because it’s there.”

But having the desire to tackle a mountain that has claimed nearly 300 lives isn’t enough. For one thing, the average expedition costs around \$65,000. It takes nearly two and a half months to get there, become acclimated to the higher altitude, and make the ascent. And it all has to happen during a tight window each year in late April and early May. Before April, the bitter cold makes climbing nearly impossible. After June, the monsoon season begins.

Climbers usually begin their trek by flying to Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. From there, adventurers take a short flight to Lukla—with an elevation of nearly 9,000 feet. With a short runway of only 1,729 feet, it’s labeled the world’s most dangerous airport. Most climbers spend the next two weeks trekking about thirty-eight miles up to Base Camp at 17,600 feet, more than three miles above sea level. The thin air at that altitude demands that everyone take the time to acclimate if they want to stay. But the summit of Everest is still two miles higher.

During the spring climbing window, Everest Base Camp typically houses around 300 people, including climbers, sherpas, cook staff, doctors, scientists and expedition leaders. The climbers spend weeks there, taking day hikes into the higher elevations to transport supplies and become familiar with the treacherous landscape, blistering winds, icy crevasses, and decreased oxygen levels. The time invested waiting

for the ideal climbing window isn't wasted; it's critical to achieve the desired result—summit the world's highest mountain, the most inhospitable place on earth and live to tell the story.

From Everest Base Camp, the next steps on the most popular Southeast Ridge or South Col Route are a series of designed stages which bring climbers closer to the peak while getting their bodies ready for the grueling challenge. The very first challenging stage is crossing the Khumbu Icefall, a jumbled mass of ice that can only be crossed with the aid of jerry-rigged ropes and ladders. This shifting landscape must often be crossed several times by climbers moving supplies using duct-taped ladders to transverse crevasses that seemingly have no bottom. Ropes and ladders must be checked daily as the ice constantly shifts, sometimes as much as three feet each day.

Once across the icefall, climbers reach Camp I, elevation 19,900 feet. The next stage runs through a glacial valley known as Western Cwm and ends at Camp II, elevation 21,300 feet.

The fourth stage requires climbers to tackle the imposing Lhotse Face, a sheer wall of ice that can only be climbed using fixed ropes. If they make it past that challenge, they arrive at Camp III, elevation 24,500 feet. From there, climbers trek through the Geneva Spur to reach Camp IV or South Col.

At 26,000 feet above sea level, it's the last camp for climbers before they begin the final push to the summit of Mount Everest. Conditions at this camp are brutal. It's known as the Death Zone because of the frigid temps, high winds, and lack of oxygen.

Most climbers waken early for the final push to the summit, often setting out hours before daylight. They must summit by 2 PM or face the deadly prospect of attempting to climb back down in the dark—a feat few have attempted and even fewer survived. On the way up, usually with the aid of oxygen tanks to keep their brain

functioning clearly, climbers travel to The Balcony, a platform at 27,700 feet where they can rest briefly before moving on to The Cornice Traverse, a horizontal face of rock and snow. Then they must ascend The Hillary Step by way of fixed ropes one person at a time.

As hard as it may be to believe, traffic jams on good climbing days can doom an expedition without coordination between teams. However, if a climber can navigate all of those challenges, he or she can stand on the very top of the world. Yet for all the time, money, energy, and effort, most climbers can only spend less than an hour there before beginning the descent, which is every bit as harrowing and hazardous as the ascent.

Needless to say, no one ever arrives at the highest summit by accident. It requires intentional planning and action.

SHORTCUT TO THE TOP

On April 8, 2015, I had my own opportunity to experience Everest. I had been in India meeting with a client and realized I was probably as close to the world's greatest adventure as I was ever going to get. I had my destination in mind but needed a plan to get there. So, I booked a flight to Kathmandu with the goal of at least getting to Everest Base Camp.

I learned that the hike from Lukla to Base Camp takes around two weeks. I had three days—and the wrong boots. So I chose to take a shortcut. I convinced a pilot to chopper me all the way up through the Himalayas to Everest Base Camp. Even with a stop at the world's deadliest airport in Lukla to refuel, it seemed like a good plan. In a period of about 6 hours, I traveled from Noida, India (elevation 656 feet) to Kathmandu, Nepal (4,593 feet) to Lukla Airport (9,000 feet). After stopping to refuel there, I excitedly jumped back on board

to head to Everest Base Camp (17,500 feet). I was on an incredible adventure!

I was a prime example of knowing just enough to be dangerous.

As we crested the majestic peaks, I saw the small city of tents that make up Base Camp. As I saw the flags whipping in the breeze, my excitement mounted. In a few moments, I'd stand at Base Camp, look across the Khumbu Icefall, and stare up at the top of the world. When my feet touched the ground, it was everything I had hoped for—amazing and exhilarating.

Then the sinus pressure kicked in. It didn't take long for a splitting headache to follow. I had given myself hours to the acclimate to the thin air. Without preparation, my body could only take so much. My trip to what was almost the top of the world lasted less than an hour.

Although my brief journey was an adventure of sorts, it was nothing like the adventure Sir Edmund Hillary had scaling Everest. It couldn't be, because I had been dropped in, unprepared for the experience. I had no chance of summiting Everest or even staying long enough to watch the sun go down. It was fun while it lasted, don't get me wrong, but I was in over my head without proper training, equipment, and an intentional plan.

WHEN THE DREAM BECOMES A NIGHTMARE

My brief Everest experience mirrors the leadership journey of many well-intentioned leaders who get promoted without adequate training and preparation. They get dropped into Base Camp after a quick helicopter ride. They're pumped to get climbing. They're amazed and exhilarated, but quickly realize they're having trouble breathing the rarified air. All the excitement in the world won't help.

But unlike my experience, no one really gets the option of heading back down to a comfortable place once they've been promoted, do they? So they rapidly feel stuck, dazed, and frustrated and the leadership dream becomes a nightmare.

If your leadership dream has become a nightmare, let me give you some good news: *it's not your fault*. I coach and counsel leaders all the time who are exactly where you are right now. Just like when I was promoted into sales management without training, you may have been promoted to a position without being prepared. On one hand, you can't blame the leaders above you who saw your potential and wanted you to lead. And you probably can lead well—with the right preparation. The fact that you're reading this book, after all, proves you have an interest in acclimating for the climb.

Even so, it can be incredibly frustrating to feel like you're out of oxygen but are afraid someone will find out. Organizations the world over are filled with frustrated, overwhelmed leaders who are doing their best but not achieving success.

As I lead corporate training sessions, I often encounter glazed looks from people who have become numb to the day-to-day pressures instead of leading the drive to relieve those pressures. It's

<p>If your leadership dream has become a nightmare, let me give you some good news: it's not your fault.</p>	<p>as if they never acclimated to the leadership altitude and are simply trying to survive on a fraction of the oxygen they really need to thrive. It's not uncommon for me to find cautious, skeptical, even sarcastic “that'll-be-the-day” reactions to the thought of an inspired workplace culture. Sure, people want it—and they'd even be willing to step up and help get it done—but experience has taught</p>
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them to keep their heads down, their mouths shut, and just grind out the work.

For new leaders, this jaded thinking from grizzled veterans can be hard to understand. *Shiny ideals are great, but when the rubber meets the road, you'll see how it really is around here.* And so the zombification of the workforce continues. Ultimately, the culture fills with burned out, used up, and exhausted people—perhaps people like you—who really want to perform at a higher level, but have become frustrated and disengaged. They don't know how to be a catalyst for positive change.

If you're like me, however, you refuse to accept that bleak status quo. If, in spite of your frustration, you think, *There's got to be a better way*, I have good news for you! InSPIRED Leadership can create an inspired culture that encourages inspired employees and makes an inspired difference in the world. That sort of inspired adventure isn't a dream. It can become a reality for you, your team, or your organization.

4 INSPIRED QUESTIONS

Whether you are just starting your leadership journey or have been in leadership most of your career, one thing is always true: the leadership adventure can overwhelm. Like quarterbacks in football, leaders get more than their share of both credit and blame. It can be easy to feel you're giving a Herculean effort but still feel under-resourced and victimized.

But what are you going to do—quit? Maybe you've got a mortgage, a spouse, kids, and a whole list of other reasons you need the paycheck. When you accepted the promotion, you likely elevated your lifestyle to match your new income. And, if you're honest, there's likely some ego

involved. After all, none of us like to fail or admit we don't know what we're doing.

On top of all of that, American corporate culture tends to value action, not planning or (gasp!) pre-planning. We prefer to make our mistakes in real-time, rather than wait for a prototype. The consequences of action without intentional forethought can be devastating. We think we boarded the scenic Orient Express to the leadership summit, but instead, we're on a bullet train headed for an abyss.

It's very likely you have unrealistic requirements, fuzzy expectations, and impossible deadlines—and no one prepared you to handle any of them. Oh, and if you were recently promoted from within, you're probably one of the top performers on the team, and now your spot is vacant, and you may feel the expectation to continue to be the top individual contributor even as you try to fulfill your new role as a leader. Unfortunately, that math doesn't work. It won't be long before you run out of gas. You're on the trail to being a zombie.

Fortunately, if your dream *has* become a nightmare, there is a way to reconnect to your inspiration, fuel your growth, and start working a more effective process. But before we work on your inspired process, I suggest you start with you—the inspired person. The best way I have found to do this is by considering four InSPIRED questions.

1. WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I understand what it feels like to feel unappreciated at your job, to lose sight of what inspires you and go through the motions. I know what it can feel like when you're carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders and falling short as a leader for your team. But I've also learned to tap into inspiration.

When you hear about my Everest story or that I've mushed with dogs in Alaska, you might think I just like to go to cold places. The truth is I've learned to seek out adventure no matter where I am. I find adventures to be inspiring, but they may just sound crazy to you. That's ok. It doesn't matter what I find inspirational, but what inspires you?

Reengage the leadership adventure by reconnecting with what inspires you.

What lights you up? Your inspiration is as unique as you are. Is it music? Is it art?

Is it architecture? When you go to a theater for a performance, are you just as inspired by the architecture and the design of the stage as you are by the power of music, drama, or spoken word? Or do you find your inspiration in nature or simply getting out in the fresh air? Maybe it's strolling through national forests or kayaking down the Colorado River.

Do patriotism and a passion for country stir you? Do you stand a little taller as the flag goes by, or are you moved by great stories of selfless sacrifice? What about the story of some guys from Dallas who headed to Houston with their boats to help after Hurricane Harvey struck in 2017? Does selfless sacrifice inspire you?

Or are you inspired by the human condition? What about the amputee boy who can now walk, and even run, because somebody designed running blades? When you look at his beaming face, are you inspired to want to become the engineer who creates more products that unleash the human potential?

Are you moved by committed educators or medical caregivers, doctors, nurses, and healers who invest years of their lives to make a difference in others' lives? What about the story of Sara Tucholsky tearing her ACL while running the bases on her only college home run? Opposing team members Mallory Holtman and Liz Wallace made sure she made it around the bases, touching every base.³

What about strapping an airplane engine to a Formula 1 car and the engineering required to fly at 300-plus miles an hour while navigating tricky S-curves? Do you admire the power and beauty of such a machine?

Are you inspired by story? Do grand tales move you to learn and grow so you can live a story worthy of being told someday? If so, what kind of stories move you?

All of these can be inspiring in their own way, but here's the most important question: *What fuels your life?*

Maybe a better question would be this: *what fire inside have you allowed to fade?* We all get busy. Life happens. I get it. But life is too short to let those passions die. Uninspired leaders produce uninspired leadership. It's time to reignite those flames and release that inspirational energy.

I invite you to reengage the leadership adventure by reconnecting with what inspires you. Tap into what lifts your spirits and moves you to think bigger, bolder, and more beautiful ideas.

Inspiration is all about being stimulated to do or feel something deeper. The reason organizations are filled with walking zombies is because those zombies have lost the ability to feel much of anything at all. The more we stay on that treadmill of organizational muscle memory—doing what we've always done but expecting different results—the less inspired any of us act.

It may be that you are so far removed from an inspired place right now that you've forgotten what it feels like to be inspired. If that's the case, I encourage you to pause and think about what inspires you.

Inspiration is electric. It can stimulate you to become a better person and a better leader. It prompts creativity that enables you to see problems differently and solve them in intuitive ways. When people are inspired, time moves quickly. They stay focused, get in the groove, and enjoy work because it's no longer drudgery, but elevated and important.

You may have to go back to your childhood and think about things you used to love. Children don't think about whether or not someone else is watching; they just do things that make them happy. They play in the mud. They take a bite out of the middle of their sandwich and smear peanut butter and jelly on their cheeks. They dance and laugh and wiggle with internal joy. When you were a kid, what did you love to do? Was it sports, music, art, imagination? How long has it been since you've used those inspiration muscles?

Growing up in Texas, I spent most summers outdoors. I would head out in the morning with friends to ride bikes or explore. Many times I didn't return until the sun went down. We found undeveloped fields that became our canvas for imagination. We baited string rods to catch crawdads in the nearby creeks. We intentionally sought out each new day's adventure!

Tapping into what inspires you is the first step to becoming an InSPIRED leader. So if it's been a while since you've connected with what inspires you, now's your chance to remember what it is—*and why*.

2. WHO INSPIRES YOU?

Inspiration is contagious. Inspirational people have a way of affecting our souls and changing our thinking. We all model our lives after somebody. As kids, we model what we see in our parents and older siblings. Our word choices, actions, attitudes, and way of viewing the world all are shaped by what we see modeled for us. As adults, we encounter more and different viewpoints, we get to choose new patterns to imitate and replicate.

There is no one right way to achieve success in life. Mohammed Ali rose to athletic greatness and inspired millions. Oprah Winfrey started out as a small-town newsperson and became a media mogul.

Inspiration is contagious.

Mother Teresa served the poor in the worst conditions. Gandhi, Steve Jobs, Malala from Pakistan, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., Albert Einstein—the list goes on. Each of these people had drastically different personalities, values, and vision, yet they all inspired millions.

One of the first people to inspire me and speak deeply into my life was a guy named Jim. He put a John Maxwell book in one hand and Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* in the other and began to teach me about leadership. As one of my first mentors, he told me he believed in me and saw amazing talent in me. It changed me and made me want to elevate my game.

So who inspires you? You may have never given it much thought. I encourage you to pause and consider it now. Who are your heroes? What leaders inspire you? Great leaders have a way of bringing out the best in people. They encourage, uplift, and inspire. As you think about

Imitation isn't just the sincerest form of flattery, it's also the quickest way to get remarkable results.

leaders who've inspired you, ask what it is about them that speaks to you on a deep level. What is it about them that energizes you and makes you want to make them proud?

When you know who inspires you, you can identify the individual components that make them who they are and find things to replicate in your own life and leadership. Everyone's life can be a lesson if you understand how to let it teach you. Imitation isn't just the sincerest form of flattery, it's also the quickest way to get remarkable results.

Why reinvent the wheel when so much of what you need to live an inspired life has already been modeled for you? Find awesome and copy it.

You don't have to know someone personally to gain wisdom from them. You can engage some of the best mentors in the pages of books or via an online course or video. Use it all. Read voraciously, take notes, and apply what you learn to your own life to equip you for your own leadership journey.

3. CAN BRANDS BE INSPIRATIONAL?

What about brands? Can they be inspirational? What is the brand you serve? Think for a moment before you answer. You may sell one thing but deliver another. When Steve Jobs introduced the iPod, he sold a metal box with a microprocessor, small screen, and a clickable wheel. But what did he deliver? A thousand songs in your pocket. That small piece of hardware changed the way people consumed music. It might be retro cool now to buy albums on vinyl or even cassette, but a thousand songs in your pocket was transformational in 2001, helping pave the way for the iPhone and establish Apple as a global monolith.

Brands clearly have an identity, much like a person, but do they always inspire? As a leader in an organization, you are a torchbearer for your brand. The things you say and do reflect on the brand. The NFL for years has talked about the shield when referring to their logo. They have high standards for what they want their brand to be. That's why players get fined for wearing the wrong cleats or something that doesn't match the uniform. It's seen as disrespectful to the shield. The NFL has a brand code that it expects its players to live up to and abide by. Unfortunately, however, many fans feel

the NFL has been inspiring in the wrong direction lately. Right or wrong, the League has paid a price for that perception.

Some brands, like Apple, become status symbols. Others like Tom's Shoes and Patagonia become outlets for causes the owners and employees can support. Now more than ever, brands have a say in how they are perceived in the marketplace. Dove, a Unilever Skincare brand, launched a campaign several years ago called "Real Beauty." You may remember the ads. It began when they "put six women in their underwear on a billboard in Times Square and challenged conventional norms of beauty imagery." These women weren't famous supermodels with recognizable faces. They were women of all shapes, sizes, and skin tones and showed that Dove products were for everyone. It was a risky proposition that could have backfired, but according to Rob Candelino, Vice President of Brand Building for Unilever Skincare, the campaign transformed the company's image. Candelino said that the billboard "was so groundbreaking and profoundly *inspiring* to women" that they were flooded with positive feedback.⁴

Think about the following brands: Zappos, Starbucks, Target, Salvation Army, Red Cross, Tesla, Google, Disney, Chick-fil-A, Walmart, Home Depot, and Amazon. Do they evoke a positive or negative reaction in you? Would you want to work with these brands? Why? Why not? What have these brands done that sticks in your mind and causes a reaction? What cultures do you think these brands have inside the company's walls? Some are listed among the top places to work. Others are frequently defending their culture and treatment of employees. Are their employees happy, highly regarded, frustrated, exhausted?

Now consider this: just as you have a reaction to these brands, your customers and the marketplace have a reaction to *your* organization's brand. Your company brand is and will be known for something. It may

be the lowest cost, the highest quality, reliability, luxury, economy, sportiness, value, or humor. The list of possibilities is nearly endless. How your company is perceived by your customers and stakeholders who view you from the outside is shaped by the way you build your culture on the inside. An InSPIRED culture intentionally built by InSPIRED leaders produces an InSPIRED brand.

Whether you lead an organization of millions, a division of thousands, or a team of a few, your leadership can inspire—or exasperate—the brand you lead. Yes, that’s right. Even a small team has a brand identity. You can decide to be an inspirational leader or an exasperating leader who shapes that brand in either direction.

If you choose to do nothing about your leadership style, you’ll naturally become exasperating to those you lead. No one wants to follow someone who simply goes through the motions. What do you want your brand to be? What type of leader will you need to become to create a team that embodies that brand?

4. IS YOUR PERSONAL LEADERSHIP BRAND INSPIRATIONAL?

Everyone knows what it’s like to work under bad leadership. It frays our nerves, frustrates our efforts, and leads to burnout. Yet most leaders think they’re doing a good job of leading. The zombification of employees and extraordinarily high levels of disengagement in the workforce today (almost 70% in the US and Canada!) tell a different story. People won’t give maximum effort to a leader they don’t like or respect.

So how inspirational are you? Do you know you have a brand of your own? You are known by what you do—good, bad, or ugly. Does your personal brand inspire or exasperate? One of the biggest issues I

see with sincere leaders is a lack of self-awareness. They've either never taken the time to learn about themselves, or they're just paddling as fast as possible to keep the ship moving forward.

InSPIRED leaders, on the other hand, are extremely self-aware. They know themselves inside and out, or at least have a plan for self-discovery. They know their personalities and their strengths. They have a plan to use both to motivate and empower others. They also understand their weaknesses and have a plan to shore them up. Plus, they know where they want to go, seldom becoming stagnant. They create opportunity and train others to become inspiring leaders.

This book will be most beneficial to you if you are willing to take stock of where you are and consider where you want to go. You may be a first-time leader feeling your way forward, an established leader who wants a reset, an experienced leader who wants to transform a culture, or that leader frantically trying to stay afloat after being tossed into the deep end of the corporate productivity pool.

No matter where you find yourself now, if your leadership dream has become a nightmare, now is the time for you to pause, make a plan, and begin your trek towards an InSPIRED Leadership summit. I've helped hundreds of leaders reach the summit, achieve their goals, and live a life that few experience. I've seen the lights come back on as the road ahead fills with invigorating adventure.

How do you get back to that adventure state? You lead intentionally. You make sure you have the adventure, rather than the adventure

Life is too short to clock in, clock out, go home and do it all again the next day.

having you. If you've ever gone whitewater rafting, you know what I mean. When you're barreling down a raging river, and the raft starts to careen, you feel an adrenaline rush. But that adrenaline only helps when you follow the guide. The guide has

navigated that river a thousand times. He or she knows exactly when the bumps will hit, how hard they'll feel, how each rock affects the water's flow and raft, what to do with the paddles, how to integrate with other guides, and the critical ways to gain stability in the midst of chaos.

But when you are not intentional you're at the mercy of the water tossing your boat around the rapids and against the rocks.

As we engage in this InSPIRED leadership adventure together, allow me to come alongside as your guide. I've seen this process change individual leaders and turn entire companies around, multiplying productivity, profitability, and enjoyability.

Adventure is always, by definition, challenging, but the journey that follows will...

- Teach you to be intentional about how you lead.
- Help you serve others well.
- Reconnect you with your passion and the energy to do the things that matter to you.
- Equip you to integrate and work well with others to achieve great things.
- Empower you to be real and authentic, a leader people will gladly follow.
- Move you from theory to action as you execute on what you've learned.
- Help you develop a process to get where you want to go and reach your highest potential.

Perhaps most importantly, it will help you become a catalyst for creating an InSPIRED culture in your organization, your community, and beyond.

Life is too short to clock in, clock out, go home and do it all again the next day. Leadership is meant to be an exhilarating adventure as you answer the call to the summit. Whatever your summit may be, let's tackle it together.



TOOL KIT

Summary

- If your leadership dream has become a nightmare, let me give you some good news: it's not your fault if you were not set-up for success. But you are responsible for fixing it— Identifying your knowledge gaps, learning your unknowns, and developing a growth plan.
- Whether you are just starting your leadership journey or have been in leadership most of your career, one thing is always true: the leadership adventure can overwhelm.
- Uninspired leaders produce uninspired leadership.
- Imitation isn't just the sincerest form of flattery, it's also the quickest way to get results.
- Find awesome and copy it!
- An InSPIRED culture intentionally built by InSPIRED leaders produces an InSPIRED brand.

Action Steps

- **Check your inspiration levels.** Before you can even think about reaching your summit, you've got to reconnect with what inspires you. Take some time to think back and really delve into those sources of inspiration. Remind yourself why you were attracted to leadership in the first place.
- **Find awesome and copy it.** Think about who inspires you. Set up a time to talk with that person if possible and bring a list of questions. Make sure the questions are thoughtful and designed to help you become a better person and leader. Be respectful of their time and let them know you appreciate them.
- **Modify your systems.** Once you've done the research on what others do, you can apply what you've learned to your specific situation. Not everything will work for you, so pick what will and put it to work. When you start to see improvements be sure to let that person know how the advice helped you.