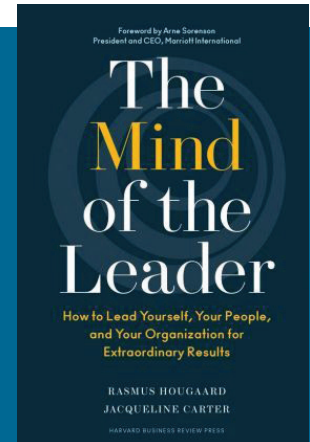


The Mind of the Leader

How to Lead Yourself, Your People, and Your Organization for Extraordinary Results

A book excerpt by Mobius Friend, Next Practice Institute Keynote speaker, and Founder of Potential Project Rasmus Hougaard and his colleague and co-author, Jacqueline Carter



From the Introduction

How can we create more human leadership and people-centered cultures where employees and leaders are more fulfilled and more fully engaged?

As human beings, we are all driven by basic needs for meaning, happiness, human connectedness, and a desire to contribute positively to society. That's true whether we're at home, out in the world, or at work. But it's one thing to realize this and another to act on it. As Javier Pladevall, CEO of Audi Volkswagen, Spain, reflected when we spoke with him, "Leadership today is about unlearning management and relearning being human."

The Mind of the Leader provides a way to do this. It outlines how leaders can lead themselves, their people, and their organizations to unlock intrinsic motivation, create real people-centered cultures, and ultimately deliver extraordinary results.

How important is the message of this book? Consider this: In a 2016 McKinsey & Company study of more than fifty-two thousand managers, 77 percent rated themselves as inspiring and good role models. But this stands in stark contrast to how employees perceive their leaders. A 2016 Gallup engagement survey found that 82 percent of employees see their leaders as fundamentally uninspiring. In fact, the same survey found that only 13 percent of the global workforce is engaged, while 24 percent are actively disengaged.

This seeming lack of good leadership is not because

of a lack of effort. According to a recent report, organizations around the globe invest approximately \$46 billion annually on leadership development programs. That's a lot of money for seemingly little return. What's going wrong?

In part, the system is broken. According to research by Dacher Keltner, professor of psychology at University of California, Berkeley, when many leaders start to feel powerful, their more benevolent qualities start to decline. Leaders are three times more likely than lower-level employees to interrupt coworkers, multitask during meetings, raise their voices, and say insulting things. He also found that leaders are more likely than other people to engage in rude, selfish, and unethical behavior. None of this is going to speak to the intrinsic motivation we all share.

While the \$46 billion spent on leadership training might improve leaders' effectiveness—at least in a strictly business sense of focusing on the bottom line—something more is needed: leadership that truly engages employees, is truly human, and addresses basic human needs any employee has.

And it starts in the mind of the leader.

Leadership pioneer Peter Drucker said, "You cannot manage other people unless you manage yourself first." If this is true, the majority of leadership education and training programs have it backward. Most leadership education starts with skills like strategy, people management, and finance. But from

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Drucker's point of view, this approach starts at the end and misses the beginning. It's like building a house by starting with the roof.

Like Drucker, we argue that leadership starts with yourself. More specifically, it starts in your mind. By understanding how your mind works, you can lead yourself effectively. By understanding and leading yourself effectively, you can understand others and be able to lead them more effectively. And by understanding and leading others more effectively, you can understand and lead your organization more effectively—and by “more effectively,” we mean in a way that's going to tap into your own and your people's intrinsic motivations and sense of purpose. If you're able to do that—and we have witnessed that with practice and persistence, anyone can—you'll have a more engaged and productive workforce. And perhaps more importantly, you'll be part of creating more happiness, stronger human connectedness, and better social cohesion within and beyond your organization.

For over a decade, we and our colleagues at Potential Project have trained tens of thousands of leaders in hundreds of companies like Microsoft, the LEGO Group, Danone, and Accenture, utilizing the practice of mindfulness. The outcomes have been thoroughly researched and proven to deliver remarkable results. But with the emerging movement of employees looking for more meaning, happiness, and connectedness, we have asked ourselves what else leaders need for leading themselves, their people, and their organizations for extraordinary results.

As part of this research, we and our research team surveyed and assessed more than thirty thousand leaders from thousands of companies in more than a hundred countries. We have conducted in-depth interviews with hundreds of C-suite executives. And we have reviewed thousands of studies on leadership in the fields of neuroscience, leadership, organizational development, and psychology.

Based on this research, we have conclusively found that three mental qualities stand out as being foundational for leaders today: mindfulness (M), selflessness (S), and compassion (C). Together, we call these foundational skills MSC leadership.

So how do you as a leader achieve MSC leadership, to better engage your people at their intrinsic level

and unleash better performance? By applying mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion first to yourself, then to your people, and then to your organization. *The Mind of the Leader* takes you step by step through this process.

ENABLE ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS

From Chapter 11

Through working with organizations in various industries all over the world, we've found four consistent challenges to maintaining focus for both leaders and employees. Leaders and employees are under pressure, always on, information overloaded, and working in distracted environments. We call it the “PAID” reality. The problem with the PAID reality is that it's a multipronged attack on our attention. It makes us multitask and turns us into action addicts. Multitasking and action addiction, as explained in chapter 3, destroy our focus and ruin our prioritization skills. Instead of focusing on the big issues, the high-

THE THREE LEVELS OF LEADERSHIP



**Many distracted minds
equals a distracted culture.**



Get Rhythm by Jim McManus, Mobius featured artist

value actions that drive performance, we keep ourselves occupied and become overwhelmed with busywork—small, easily accomplished tasks.

When this is a widespread characteristic of an organization, the organization as a whole lacks focus. Many distracted minds equals a distracted culture. Having a clearly defined mission statement or an explicit strategy is not enough to counter this problem. It can only be accomplished by training and rewiring the brains of individuals in the organization in a way that increases attention and reduces the appeal of distractions.

Some years ago, the Carlsberg Group undertook a series of significant reorganizations and layoffs. Leaders and employees alike were left with new responsibilities, ongoing changes, and a strong feeling of uncertainty. Understandably, this generated significant levels of distraction within the organization. Then CIO Kenneth Egelund Schmidt observed how individuals, teams, and the organization failed to focus on the longterm plan. “Groups of people were working in different directions and reacting to every bit of news that came their way,” he lamented. “Entire teams would get caught up in low-priority projects for days before realizing that they were on the wrong path.” As a result of this turmoil, people at Carlsberg became severely stressed, which only made them more reactive. Collaboration faltered. Distraction became more widespread. Performance suffered—all part of a downward cultural spiral.

Kenneth decided it was time to act. He believed that he needed to reinstate a collective focus and enhance well-being. For a year we worked with him and his teams to first develop their individual skills in mindfulness and then to create more focused and mindful collective work habits. Assisting Carlsberg for a year helped us gain greater insight into the anatomy of organizational focus and prioritization. Individual focus and prioritization is about doing the right things rather than trying to do everything. Similarly, organizational focus is a collective focus on doing the right things rather than doing lots of things. In this sense, it’s a high degree of shared focus and awareness toward realizing well-defined goals and objectives. In a mindful organization, leaders and employees have greater clarity on collective priorities and, therefore, greater organizational focus.

Organizational focus allows individuals and teams to make better decisions about what to do—and often more important, what not to do. It facilitates constructive conversations among colleagues when priorities conflict, providing clarity and reaching consensus based on the overarching goals and objectives of the organization.

As a leader, your role in securing organizational focus is to continually help your people have clarity. What are the right tasks to do at the right time? Do these tasks serve the larger objectives of the organization? Depending on employees' level in the organization, their function, and job requirements, this clarification may need to happen once a month, once a week, or even daily. It must be done not only at the individual level but also for all teams across all functions.

Based on our years of experience helping organizations develop stronger organizational focus, here are a few practical tips that you as a leader can implement in your organization.

CULTIVATE MINDFUL MEETINGS

One of several tactics described in Chapter 11

Meetings are low-hanging fruit in a journey toward creating a more mindful culture. According to a survey reported in *Industry Week*, two thousand managers claimed that at least 30 percent of their time spent in meetings was wasted. And similarly, according to a 3M Meeting Network survey of executives, 25 to an alarming 50 percent of meeting time was viewed as wasteful.

Meetings in most organizations tend to be unfocused for a number of reasons. First, with back-to-back meeting schedules, the beginning minutes are generally wasted, because people are late or mentally lingering on the meeting they just left. Second, many meetings lack collective focus because it is culturally accepted to bring and use phones and laptops in meetings, creating distractions. Third, if people have too much going on and are overwhelmed by busyness, they will have a difficult time being fully present, especially if the meeting objectives and agenda are not crystal clear.

After we worked with Carlsberg's people to bring more organizational focus to their culture, they were

THE MINDFULNESS MATRIX



able to decrease their average meeting time by 30 percent. What was most interesting about this result is that reducing meeting time was not a core objective of the initiative. The reduction in meeting time happened naturally as people became more focused and less distracted. They were simply able to get more done in a shorter amount of time. Here are some simple guidelines for creating more mindful meetings.

At the beginning of each meeting, invite everyone to join in one minute of silence before getting started. Although for some people a moment of silence can seem strange, in our experience, it can become quickly adopted as people appreciate the benefits of having a moment to settle in. This simple one minute can be key to helping everyone mentally arrive—versus just being there physically—in the meeting with a little more focus and presence.

During the meeting, have a collective agreement that phones and laptops are off or put away unless specifically required. If even one person is busy writing emails, texting, or reading the news during a meeting, it has a negative impact on the collective focus. It is also important that meeting objectives are clear and that someone is leading the meeting and ensuring everyone sticks to the agenda. This helps everyone stay more on task and engaged.

Toward the end of the meeting, establish a collective discipline of ending five minutes before the scheduled end time—often at the top or the bottom of the hour. These five minutes enable everyone to have time to transition mindfully to their next meeting.

COMPASSION AND THE POWER OF SOCIAL COHESION

From Chapter 13

Social cohesion is the invisible glue that connects us as human beings in cultures. It's the bond that makes us stick together, collaborate, and collectively contribute to a shared purpose. Compassion and trust create social cohesion, and social cohesion can make the difference between a good company and a great company.

To better understand this relationship, consider Southwest Airlines. Southwest is the most profitable airline in the world and one of the fastest-growing companies since it was established in 1976. The company made headlines throughout the airline industry when it achieved record-setting gate turnaround times. Turnaround time may not sound exciting, but in the airline industry, turnaround time is money. As Southwest cofounder and former CEO Herb Kelleher said, "Planes make money in the air, not sitting on the ground." When planes are parked, they're a direct cost to the company. So when

Southwest cracked the turnaround time code, it was big news throughout the airline industry. Of course, in a short time, every other airline copied Southwest's turnaround procedures.

But there was a problem. Nothing changed for the other airlines when they copied Southwest's actions.

Even using Southwest's procedures, other airlines couldn't cut their turnaround times. Why? Because other airlines lacked Southwest's social cohesion. Southwest had established a strong culture of compassion in its teams, which led to a stronger sense of social cohesion—the bond for collaboration. To get a plane turned around requires up to twelve different teams to collaborate efficiently and willingly. Pilots, ticketing agents, baggage handlers, maintenance teams, and tarmac crews all need to work together to more quickly get a plane in the air. In most airlines, these functions aren't particularly keen to collaborate because of distinct power hierarchies and cross-team disputes. The culture instilled in Southwest Airlines, however, is one of genuine respect and concern. Pilots aren't seen as superior, and maintenance crew members aren't seen as expendable. They're all part of the same organism, with the same purpose of getting their passengers in the air as quickly as possible—and accomplishing this while experiencing joy and kindness toward one another.

Much to the chagrin of other airlines, operational procedures are not the cause of quick turnaround times — compassion and social cohesion are.

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LEADERSHIP FOR A HARD FUTURE

From The Afterword

Leadership must be about serving for the greater good. We are all children of this planet. We all want to be happy. No one wants to suffer. Our most honorable responsibility as leaders is to help increase happiness and kindness and decrease unnecessary suffering. And to serve our societies in a way that they become a little better by means of our actions.

In this light, we as leaders must think and lead for the long term. We must have the courage to face the facts of the challenges lying ahead of us and be ready to make unpopular decisions when needed. And such decisions are much needed today.

The biggest and most dramatic challenge is undoubtedly climate change, which forever will impact our life on this precious planet. The seas will rise. The weather will become unpredictable. Some regions will dry out. Others will wash away. The natural balance of nature is being disturbed far beyond our reach of understanding and influence. Why are we not reacting?

Because our brains don't perceive it.

Imagine this: You are standing on the highway and a truck is coming toward you at full speed. What do you do? Do you start contemplating whether the truck is real and how much it will hurt you to be hit? Or do you do everything you can to get out of the way?

Our brain is designed to help us survive by being tuned to immediate changes, such as an oncoming

storm, or the roar of a truck coming full speed toward us. But the brain doesn't sense the thinning of the ozone layer; the increased carbon dioxide levels in the air and oceans; and the very slow changes in climate, temperature, and rising seas. We have no neurological alarm system for slow change. When it comes to slow change, the normal fight-or-flight reaction of the amygdala draws a blank.

If the brain could react to slow change like it does to a fast-approaching truck, we would all be dogmatic about decreasing our individual environmental footprints and would take to the streets to make companies and governments do the same. But it doesn't. And we are all blind to the fact that we may be killing the planet as a habitat for our children. We are indeed facing a hard future, and we don't really see it coming.

As leaders today, we have a responsibility to face the hard challenges of the future. Even if the brains of the people we lead are not alarmed by the slow threats we face, we can't neglect them. We have to stand up to face the future with clear minds. Because when the challenges hit, as slowly as they will, if we don't stand together—clear minded, with selflessness and compassion—we will do what humans have always done: stick with our tribe and fight the others.

We can't change the tsunami of challenges coming our way, but we can prepare ourselves. Prepare to stand together, rather than fight one another. We can start now by building more mindfulness, selflessness, and compassion in our organizations and societies, so

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that trust and social cohesion is in place when things become more challenging. That is the responsibility we all have, and especially those in positions of power. And it starts with our own minds.

Any conflict or war, at any time in history, has always originated in a mind or in a collection of minds. Conflicts do not come out of nowhere, and wars are not made of weapons but of minds that hold anger, attachment, or ignorance. In a rapidly changing world, with hard challenges coming our way, we need leaders with stable minds who can respond mindfully, with selfless confidence and wise compassion. It gives us great hope to see that leaders across the world and across industries and cultures are embracing these qualities and creating more social cohesion in their organizations. ■

RASMUS HOUGAARD joins us at the 2023 NPI to offer a keynote address. He is the Founder and Managing Director of Potential Project, a global leadership training, organizational development and research firm. They help leaders and organizations enhance performance, innovation and resilience through mindfulness and other practices grounded in neuroscience and research. They partner with forward thinking companies like Cisco, LEGO, Accenture, Microsoft and 500+ other global clients helping create people centric cultures and truly human leadership. He is the author of *One Second Ahead: Enhance Your Performance at Work with Mindfulness* (2016); *The Mind of the Leader – How to Lead Yourself, Your People and Your Organization for Extraordinary Results* (2018) and *Compassionate Leadership* (2022).

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Out of the Blue by Jim McManus, Mobius featured artist