LEADERSHIP MANUAL 2021

THE YEAR OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STAMINA & CONSTRUCTING YOURSELF

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INTRODUCTION

Going into a new year is not like trading an old car in for a new one.

You can't rid yourself of all the frustrations of the previous year in one grand move. You must deal with the delayed consequences of your actions and decisions. And, unfortunately, this year you must also deal with the delayed consequences of the pandemic.

However, the focus has shifted from surviving the crisis to accelerating out of it.

We have all had enough of being in survival mode and want to claim back our power. Feel in control again. It's time to get off the roller coaster and instead go in search of highways. Not that we expect the highways won't be laden with obstacles, but rather that we'll have some clarity in terms of where we're going and how we're going to get there. We want to actively get behind the steering wheel again.

Although the title of this manual says that it's for leaders, I can guarantee that every person in your organization should read it if they are ready to swim for the shore in 2021.

THE CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP IN 2021

Most of the challenges that we pay attention to are the things that are happening outside of us. For leaders this has meant trying to answer questions such as:

How will I lead a remote team?

Will we work from the office or remotely or adopt a hybrid solution?

Are we effectively engaging in digital transformation within the business?
Are we being agile enough?

Do we need to pivot?

It's quite easy to become fixated on these business issues and in the process forget to pay attention to the source of every decision and every action that will happen in the business: The mindset of the people in the business.

These external challenges require swift action and clear thinking. They require that we operate from up-to-date and relevant mental models. That we adopt the right kind of mindset and that we continuously work on cultivating a creative capacity to deal with the onslaught of changes occurring around us.

These challenges necessitate the ability to dig deep and truly understand who we are and who we are becoming. We must spend time engaging in real personal development (not the pseudo kind that I see happening every day), and actively become better learners.

Therefore, I want to suggest that the biggest challenge facing leaders today is not the external, but the internal.

The real challenge is:

- To maintain a steady resolve without losing one's footing.
- To ease into the process of personal transformation.
- To accept new realities and to shape them.
- To reconfigure how you show up in the world.
- To effectively engage in learning and personal development.

During the early days of lockdown, I wrote an e-book called Lockdown Leadership. It dealt with the more technical areas of leadership when working remotely, including how to run effective meetings and build trust in a virtual environment.

Although I enjoy this component of the work I do, my true expertise lies in creating environments in which people can create new ways of thinking and being. Many years ago it's what I did for my patients during rehabilitation from severe trauma, and in recent years it's what I have done for the many executives and teams that I have worked with, and the audiences that I have spoken to.

This Leadership Manual is divided into four sections:

1 First, I will deal exclusively with the mindset required to be successful in 2021. It's a curation of powerful ideas by great thinkers and my own experiences in coaching and constructing learning practices for leaders and teams.

2 In the second section, you will find a curated list of trends that are likely to emerge specifically as they pertain to leadership.

3 Third, I have included some of my own predictions and observations.

4 And finally, there are some questions for you to reflect upon. Some you can use for your own personal development and planning in 2021 and others you can use with your team.

MINDSET

THE BURDEN OF LEADERSHIP

> ❝ Leadership involves the heavy burden of responsibility, and the fear of getting it wrong can paralyze a leader.
>
> John C. Maxwell

Leadership literature is often drenched in positive thinking culture.

You are told to be grateful for the opportunity to lead. To have deep appreciation that you get to be of service to others. And although this is true, we do our leaders no favours by skirting around the truth of another aspect of leadership.

Leadership is also a burden.

And it's okay to say that. It does not mean that you are not grateful for the position. It does not mean that you are not going to persevere or that you don't want this burden.

In fact, if you are leader, you are choosing this burden willingly and that is why you are a leader.

Doctors have been a beacon of inspiration and hope for us during the pandemic. These are people who have devoted their lives to the service of others. But there is a burden that comes with that too. You literally have the lives of others in your hands, there are long calls, ungrateful patients, and high-risk situations.

It takes its toll.

Just like with leadership.

There are high-risk decisions that need to be made, opportunities that must be captured, threats that must be dealt with, and people whose jobs must be saved. And this all needs to take place while you're perhaps feeling lonely, stressed, concerned about your family and loved ones, and keeping your own psychological and physiological health intact.

A heavy load to carry.

When we ignore this burden, when we don't speak about it, when we don't collectively acknowledge it, it grows larger and heavier.

One of the positive results of the pandemic is that it has highlighted the need for us to be more human in our business interactions. It has prompted many conversations around topics like resilience, mental toughness, and mental health.

We have seen companies launch initiatives like manager well-being calls, weekly self-care videos, coaching options, and morale boosting activities.

But I want to suggest that these conversations might run the risk of being too generic if we don't also contextualise them to the burden of leadership. For example, speaking about the impact of having to let people go during a pandemic.

> "It is not wise, or even possible, to divorce private behavior from public leadership ... By its very nature, true leadership carries with it the burden of being an example.
>
> Gordon B. Hinckley

So, below are a few action points to consider.

1. Leaders must collectively acknowledge the burden of leadership.

This is straightforward, but everything starts with a point of awareness. And awareness is liberating, not only because it provides you with a starting point for change, but because we realise that we are all suffering in silence and that it's not necessary.

2. Teams should create opportunities for this to be discussed.

Standard team meetings are purely about the work that must be done. Where will you create the space for your leaders to also talk about the burden of leadership?

3. Executive coaching and therapy are great options to provide leaders with an avenue for mental support.

Providing external support to leaders is an important option. Coaching or therapy is impartial, without politics, and an avenue that many people might feel more comfortable with. The days of coaching being used strictly as a remedial measure are long gone. Coaching is for support, accountability, and most of all, to see individuals succeed in actualising their potential.

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAMINA

2021 is going to push the limits of your mental stamina. It's one thing to deal with a severe change in environment and move into reactive mode. It's quite another to live with it for much longer than anticipated.

Particularly if there is no clear deadline in place.

The best way to think about navigating your way through these unpredictable times is through the lens of pace.

You've probably been told to "pace yourself" in many situations before the pandemic hit. From late nights at a party, to working long hours, to stepping out onto the sports field. The premise is quite simple. If you want to run a marathon you can't run it at a 100-meter sprint pace. If you want to finish the race in a good condition, then you will need to strategically expend and replenish energy for the entire duration of the race.

Pacing yourself has two inherent principles:

1. Think marathon, not sprint.
2. Manage your energy and bandwidth accordingly.

These principles have never been more important – and more relevant to each and every one of us – than they are today.
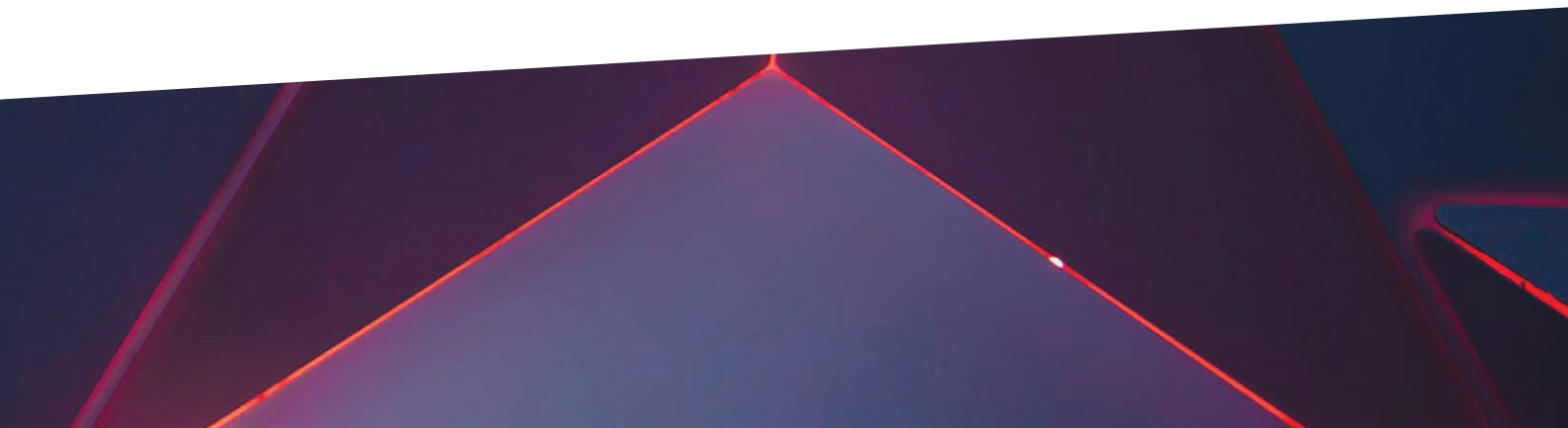
THINK MARATHON, NOT SPRINT

> **If you think 2020 is hard, I would say buckle up now for what is around the corner.**
>
> Mark Lowcock, emergency relief coordinator, U.N.

As of writing this, vaccines are being rolled out across the world. Many experts are saying that once everyone has been vaccinated against the virus, we should be able to return to a life without pandemic-related restrictions.

This sounds promising but unfortunately, as we know, life rarely unfolds according to plan.

- Many people won't get vaccinated because of distrust in institutions. As we've seen, this is a rising trend.
- Some countries will only receive the vaccine much later.
- Corruption and logistical challenges will delay the process of distribution.
- There is still no clarity around how long the immunity from the vaccine will last.

What all of this means is that we are likely to be living with the corona virus for quite a bit longer.

But more than that, and the real reason why you need to see this as a long game, is that the real effect of Covid on the markets, people's mental health, and businesses is likely to only be seen and felt throughout 2021.

Accepting that this is a long game has an important psychological consequence – you stop waiting for this to end. Getting your hopes up that things are "returning to normal" only for another lockdown to be imposed is a sure-fire way to run out of optimism.

Acceptance allows you to start dealing with what is whilst aiming for what could be.

MANAGE YOUR SURGE CAPACITY

Anne Masten, a psychologist and professor of child development at the University of Minnesota, says that surge capacity is a collection of mental and physical systems that allow humans to rally in the face of acutely stressful situations.

In other words, it's the fuel in your physiological and psychological tank.

However, surge capacity has a limit.

How we cope during the early days of an acute stressor is not how we cope when traumatic events start dragging on. Therefore, psychological stamina, the ability to endure, to keep your mind focused is going to be of the utmost importance in 2021.

2020 was an all-out attack on people's psyche. 2021 is not going to let up. The difference between last year and this year is that we all entered the Covid period of 2020 with some reserve level of energy and grit. However, we are entering 2021 already carrying the pain and pure exhaustion from 2020.

You cannot simply push through this.

You must create an environment for emotional and mental endurance.

THREE STRATEGIES FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL STAMINA

1. The Performance/Recovery Zone

One of the most important principles to embrace is the conscious shift required to move from the performance zone to the recovery zone – a concept introduced by Jim Loehr. The idea is quite simple – we have to rest and recover so we can perform at our peak.

Conceptually I don't think anyone will argue the point.

However, in practice we rarely see people adopt a serious approach to rest and recovery. Sometimes it's because high performers simply struggle to switch off. Other times, it's because the work environment doesn't allow for rest. As you can imagine this "always on" phenomenon receives an additional layer of complexity when you are facing a crisis.

Your mind needs to decompress.

Do not think that pushing harder is the key. In fact, it can and will work against you.

Just like any battery it will take you longer to recharge from a fully depleted state than it would if you are regularly making the time to recharge.

2. The Dark Side of Resilience

I've previously written about the fact that I think resilience has a dark side that few people acknowledge and understand. The problem that I see is that many people will see resilience as a call to action that means, "I have to tough it out and emerge victorious on the other side no matter what."

Research has shown that extreme resilience in leaders lowers their awareness of how they are showing up and how they are treating those around them. I've seen leaders push their employees to the max because of this exact phenomenon. For example, leaders insisting that employees work at the office despite infections soaring. In this particular case, even when people were scared and voiced their concern for their own safety as well as the safety of their families, they were told that they need to be at the office because it's "all hands on deck".

They were the victims of the leader's grit.

Resilience is a good thing until it's not. I mention this because as a leader you are also responsible for creating an environment that takes into consideration the psychological stamina of others.

Are you adding more stress to an already stressed environment?

Are you demonstrating sufficient levels of understanding and empathy?

3. Adjusting Expectations

A piece of advice that I have heard quite often is that you should also expect less of yourself in this time.

I don't like that.

Instead, we should rather be telling people to adjust their expectations.

I am being pedantic here.

"Expect less of yourself" and "adjust the expectations that you have of yourself" might result in the same outcome but I believe the language of adjustment is more empowering. In my mind it's easy to conflate a lowering of expectations with a lowering of standards.

The next few months will provide you with an opportunity to practice what Steven Kottler calls being your best at your worst.

My interpretation of that is that some days I will only get 4 hours of quality work done instead of the usual 10 hours. That's ok. But I am still going to give it my best in that time.

PSYCHOLOGICAL STAMINA PRACTICE

There is a lot to say on the topic of cultivating mental and emotional staying power. A quick Google search will inundate you with millions of results on the topic.

As with all successful endeavours, the key here is application.

It's my challenge to you that you create a Psychological Stamina Practice (PSP). A collection of habits and activities that keep you aligned, focused, recharged, connected to others, and moving forward.

If you want me to talk to your people about this simply reach out using the email at the end of this manual.

POSITION YOURSELF FOR SUCCESS

A variation of the picture below lives as the wallpaper on my laptop to remind me of one important principle: you must position yourself for success.

Salamine_battle_map-de.svg: *Salamine_battle_map-fr.svg: Pinpin derivative work:✓Bergi derivative work: Geraki TLG, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons

There are many things that you can do before engaging in action of any sort that will increase your likelihood of success. Yet, we become so obsessed with the goal, the target, that we don't take the necessary steps to strategically set ourselves up to succeed.

In short, the map above tells the story of the Battle of Salamis, the first recorded naval battle. The Persians and Greeks were at war. The Persians had large, powerful ships, whilst the Greeks had smaller but more manoeuvrable ships. The Persian fleet also outnumbered the Greek fleet by 2:1.

Knowing that they would be overpowered and outnumbered on the open ocean, the Greeks set a trap for the Persians. They lured them into the narrow waters at the strait of Salamis. In this narrow channel of water, the numbers of the Persian fleet didn't matter, as they could only squeeze so many ships into the canal. Ultimately, their biggest advantage – their size – became a disadvantage as the Greeks were able to quickly steer their ships into favourable positions.

This bit of strategic brilliance helped the Greeks to decimate the Persian fleet on the

day and secure an important and much needed victory.

You must position yourself for success in 2021.

Before engaging with the challenges and threats that the year will bring, ask what you can do that will position you best.

Let's call it a Power Position.

There are countless things that you can do, habits you can create, and mindsets you can adopt to create a Power Position. It's beyond this manual to create an extensive list of Positions. I am working on a separate series to this end, however.

Here are three Power Positions for you to consider. The goal is for these examples to trigger your own strategic thoughts around this critical concept:

The first is to really take the idea of psychological stamina to heart and to optimise your points of recovery. You cannot be effective if you are dull, tired, and depleted. You are positioned for victory when you are rested and energised.

So, you might want to pre-plan when you will take breaks and what you will do with these breaks. You might want to explicitly communicate to those around you that you will not be available for work during your breaks and that, in general, you will be more consistent with enforcing the boundaries between work and play.

The second is to find an accountability partner. This might seem like boring and even clichéd advice, but from my experience as an executive coach I can tell you that this might be one of the best things that you can do for yourself. Bringing people into your corner increases your chances of success in any goal that you

are pursuing. You will need their support, advice, mentorship, and even oversight.

So, you might want to message a friend or colleague and tell them that you want to talk to them about an accountability relationship for 2021. Create a schedule for when you will check-in with each other and then stick to it.

The third is to find time to think. If you are like most modern leaders, you will find that every second of your day seems to be filled with something to do. Again, a symptom of survival mode. This means that we become reactive instead of pro-active.

Book out at least 15 to 20 minutes a day where you simply get to think about your day, your challenges, your goals and whether you are the kind of person that you want to be.

I run a program called Think Week. It's something you should consider for some of the teams in your organisation. It's a five day long facilitated process, during which we meet for an hour each day. Each session has specific prompts and allows for people to think about their lives through different high-quality ideas and filters. (Marketing, done).

What has been interesting is seeing the insights that people discover when they have some dedicated time to think. Even if it's just for five minutes. You are positioned for victory when you have the time to think about your approach.

CONSTRUCT YOURSELF

In 2020, I spoke quite a bit about how a necessary part of any transition is acknowledging the ending that is taking place. We saw many endings in 2020. Lives ending. Businesses ending. Traditions ending.

Another ending was how we identified ourselves in relation to the work that we are doing. Who are you without your morning commute, the same parking spot at work, the pre-work mingle, the smoke breaks, the specific office you occupy, the clothes you wear, the way you interact with those around you?

One of my absolute personal highlights of 2020 was during a Think Week I hosted with Silica. At the start of the week, I mentioned how much I missed wearing suits. A three-piece suit is my armour of choice when speaking at events or working with clients. However, I can't bring myself to don a three-piece just to sit behind a computer screen. So, life has felt kind of weird without my suit.

It was during our final session for the week that I noticed that everyone was wearing a suit. It struck me as odd. When I asked about it, they said that it was a gesture to say thank you for the week. A tribute to something that meant a lot to me.

It was one of the most heartfelt moments for me of 2020.

Our identity becomes tied up in what seems like the smallest, most trivial of things (like wearing a suit). When we then go through a time where our routines, aspirations, and usual mode of operating are disrupted, it's natural to start questioning who we actually are.

In this way, disruption is a great gift, in that it brings the question of who you will become to the forefront of your mind.

In some ways, you have to put yourself back together, but in a different configuration.

In some ways, it's a total reinvention.

In some ways, it's a beautiful amalgamation of the old and new.

All of this requires 'unlearning', a crucial component of adapting yourself to a new world. The term is overused, but it does still have some utility, despite its vagueness.

THE PROCESS OF UNLEARNING SIMPLIFIED

It might be easier to think of the process of unlearning not as the removing of certain patterns of thinking and being, but rather as a modification of choice.

So, it's not uninstalling software, but rather coding a new response. This also feels more like a process that supports speed and adaptation.

Unlearning then looks something like this:

1. Your beliefs, actions, and thoughts are in response to the world that you are living in. Based on your experiences you have created your own internal operating system.
2. You then re-enact those beliefs, thoughts, and actions whenever you encounter the appropriate trigger. For example, you see your friend's success on Instagram and instinctively scold yourself for not being as successful. Or someone does something wrong in your eyes and you explode.
3. Modification of the response (unlearning) would mean that you become aware of this pattern and moving forward intentionally set out to choose a new response.
4. With enough repetition you create new beliefs, thoughts, and actions.

As you would expect, this is also the process through which you condition new behaviour and ways of thinking.

UNCERTAINTY ACCELERATES LEARNING

Choosing a better response also means learning new responses.

Our library of responses is mostly filled with things that used to work in the old world. These are things that we are familiar with and that will lead us down a predictable path. Adding new responses to the library requires us to learn new things.

For example, someone sits down with you because they have a serious issue they are trying to navigate. Your default response is to give them advice based on your own experiences. However, had you learnt how to coach someone the conversation might unfold differently and more effectively.

It's important to know that simply coaching someone is not available to you until you have acquired a certain mindset and set of skills. Learning new responses generates endless possibilities of dealing with familiar (and new) situations.

Fortunately, it seems that in times of uncertainty we crave learning. It's most likely because our inadequate responses are so glaringly obvious to us. Unfortunately, craving learning does not automatically translate into sufficient learning.

In 2021, I am declaring a war on ineffective learning.

The world is rife with pseudo-learning. We have new information available in every conceivable format. From 15 second TikToks to hour long videos on YouTube.
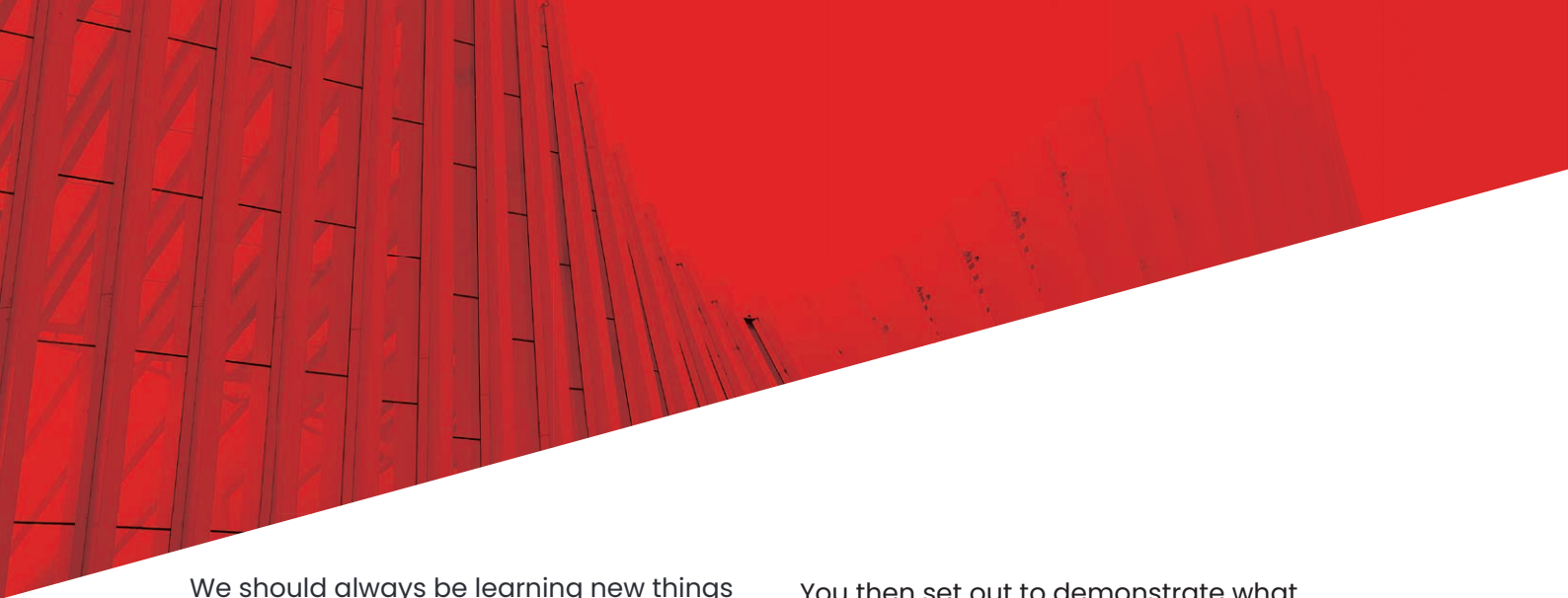
While this might seem like a good thing on the surface, content availability or accessibility is part of the problem in a few ways:

1. We feel like there is always more to discover. So, we consume and consume without ever translating it into behaviour.
2. Easy come, easy go. People don't value free content in the same way as they do paid content.
3. The platforms that deliver quality education also deliver quality distractions.

So, what happens is that we confuse consumption with learning.

It's not the same thing.

We should always be learning new things by using feedback from the world around us so we can modify how we think and what we do. For example, through experimentation you will quickly learn the best time to go to gym so that it's not too busy, or when the best time to book a flight is, or what you can do to help you sleep better.

Let's call this Evaluative learning – you evaluate the consequences of your actions and decisions and iterate based on them.

A second type of learning is Constructive learning. This is when you attempt to learn a specific skill or mental model so that you can further your position in life. You are in essence constructing a new part of you that didn't exist before. When I started playing golf, I constructed not only new skills but also a new element of my identity.

These two types of learning should be used in conjunction. Both require you to be intentional. Both require you to have a hyper awareness of your own limitations and strengths.

Let's use a quick example:

Constructive learning is identifying that you want to be a better remote leader. You then find the right resources, identify the necessary skills, and enrol in a course to help you improve. There is an end goal that you can visualise.

You then set out to demonstrate what you are learning. You evaluate your own behaviour and the effectiveness of the changes that you are making and also ask for feedback from those who are on your team.

You bring this information back into the Constructive state and use it to further construct your ideal self as a remote leader.

Evaluative learning is something that you are hopefully naturally engaging in as you go about your life. It's the process of iteration that lies at the heart of high-performance.

However, it might be beneficial to go for quality over quantity when it comes to Constructive learning. The process of developing yourself is not easy. It takes time to ingrain new routines, habits, and ways of thinking and being.

Trying to change too many things about yourself is likely to lead to frustration and poor results. I have often suggested to clients that you choose one new behaviour or area of interest to dive deeper into every quarter.

This focuses the mind (and your intentions) on one specific area of improvement and allows for an easier flow between Constructive and Evaluative learning.

THE MOUNTAIN CHANGES YOU

> **If you don't challenge yourself, you will never realize what you can become.**
>
> Anonymous

What is the quickest and best route to a meaningful life and to accelerate personal and professional development?

To embrace the obstacles on your path.

There are so many entry points to personal development. To follow one's passions. To work on one's weaknesses. To further develop one's strengths.

But I passionately believe that in doing the work required to overcome the challenges in your life, you are engaging in the most direct and effective manner of self-development.

If you decide to climb Mount Everest, the tallest mountain in the world, you will no doubt go through a strenuous process of preparing for the climb. You will exercise your body and prepare your mind. So, before you have even stepped a foot on the mountain, you are already stronger, fitter, and more mentally prepared.

The real test of course arrives when you start your ascent to the top. You will encounter the harshest of conditions, battle your mind, and push your body to the limits. Every step of the way you learn something new about yourself.

But, perhaps, the greatest gift of finally arriving at the summit of the mountain is that you now know that you are the kind of person that conquers mountains.

One of my favourite maxims of all time is from Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius, who said, "The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way."

What stands in the way becomes the way.

The challenges that you are facing in life embody a certain duality. It's both the force that will prevent you from living your full potential, as well as the force that enables you to live your full potential.

By rising to the occasion, you become better. By striving to become a formidable contender your will is strengthened, and your skills sharpened. Do you see how this makes you a little more Dangerous in every area of your life?

LEADERSHIP TRENDS IN 2021

WHAT THIS NEW YEAR WILL BRING

Below are six leadership trends that I'll be following closely in 2021. Admittedly I have a bias towards trends around personal and professional development.

1. Wellbeing Leadership

It should come as no surprise that there is a continued and intensified focus on people's wellbeing – both physical and mental. Wellbeing was already an important trend entering 2020, with 80% of respondents citing it as a priority in the Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends study.

It's the prerogative of leaders to not only provide a structure and framework, but to demonstrate it too. We often talk about how we should maintain boundaries between our professional and personal lives, but then we still send Slack or Whatsapp messages at 9pm at night.

Leaders should be clear on what wellbeing looks like. It's a vague enough term that it could induce paralysis because we don't know where to start.

According to a survey of 2000+ members done by the Society for Human Resource Management, two in three employers say that the maintenance of employee morale is a challenge.

2. Leadership & Personal Development at Scale

One major benefit of the remote working trend is that everyone has become more comfortable with technology as a medium for communication and learning. This provides an opportunity to engage people in learning beyond the traditional workshop or the boring static online courses.

In fact, this probably becomes more important because we start missing out on the natural occurrences of mentorship and coaching that used to happen at the office. This is further fuelled by uncertainty, which creates a craving for learning.

Organizations must be more intentional than before about the development of their people.

Three ways through which this can be implemented include:

1. **Group coaching (remote)**
2. **AI powered coaching through tools such as LeadX and Butterfly.ai.**
3. **Micro-content to support learning paths (think TikTok but for professional development)**

3. Learning to Learn

According to the 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends survey, the ability for people to adapt, reskill, and assume new roles is the top ranked item when executives were asked how they would navigate an uncertain future.

As mentioned earlier in this manual, I firmly believe that many people engage in a form of pseudo learning and that most learning is ineffective and rarely translates into

behaviour changes or improved skill.

Apart from the ability to deliver learning programs at scale, organizations must figure out how to improve the effectiveness of such programs.

4. Curtailing Detachment

We have no idea what the future of remote work brings. However, it's quite possible that in the long run it leads to lower engagement and employees emotionally detaching from organizations.

5. The Rise of Monitoring Software (but hopefully trust wins)

The proliferation of tools designed to track remote employee behaviour has been staggering (and concerning). Remote work is an opportunity to signal trust and promote agency. Instead, tools like Work Examiner, Staff Cop, and Controlio (the tagline is "a web-based cloud system for employee surveillance"), seek to monitor the digital footprint of employees.

When were they working, when did they stop, when did they tweet, when were they browsing the web? With privacy concerns at an all-time high, this is a recipe for disaster and will surely lead to a high churn of highly talented people who prefer to be treated like adults and not naughty kids.

6. The Era of Trust

The flip side of the coin is that trust is increasingly important. It has been shown time and again to be a massive driver for performance in organizations. Now that teams are distributed, leaders must find new ways to build trust.

Not only is this a priority because of the nature of remote work, but also because transparency and ethical behaviour continues to be highlighted in organizations across the world.

Based on the work of Cook & Wall, we know that trust comes in two flavours – cognitive and affective trust.

Cognitive trust is logical and stems from a job well done. When you deliver work to a high standard and on time consistently, I will trust you in this regard.

Affective trust is emotional and has a lot more to do about how you feel about the person. It's possible to have one type of trust and not the other.

As you can imagine, remote work lends itself well to cognitive trust. But makes it harder for people to build emotional trust.

PREDICTIONS

MY OWN PREDICTIONS

1. Remote will increase in popularity but Hybrid wins

One of the e-books I wrote during lockdown was called Hybrid Vigour. It speaks to the idea that the best option is often found at the intersection of two different ideas or practices.

When it comes to the future of work there are three camps:

1. Back to the office. Some people still cannot conceive operating without their office space. I know of many organizations that are positioned to adopt a remote work operating system, yet they cannot escape the comfort of the office.
2. Remote only. People in this camp believe that all work should be done remotely and that the asynchronous work and communication is the way forward.
3. Hybrid. People who fall into this camp believe that the future of work is a mashup of the above two ways of doing work.

I think Hybrid wins in the long run for two main reasons:

- People crave human connection that cannot be replaced by video calls.
- There is an energy that comes from working together.

We must be wary of the law of unintended consequences. When the open office was conceptualised, we thought that it would dramatically increase productivity and collaboration. It didn't. We ended up with open spaces but hushed conversations.

What if the advent of remote work further isolates an already lonely world?

Having said that, hybrid work is not without it's challenges. In fact, research has shown that leading in this way is quite difficult. For example, when working from the office how do you make sure that people working remotely don't feel excluded? How do you treat people fairly when some are working from their home offices and others have to slog through a commute?

Luckily, great leaders never shy away from difficult challenges.

2. Rise of online social learning (Cohort-based learning)

Let's face it. Most online courses have an abysmal finish rate. Researchers at MIT in a 2019 study found that Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) have about a 3% finish rate. Their data spanned 12.6 million course registrations and 5.6 million learners. There are of course outliers. Harvard claims to have an 85% completion rate for online courses. But it's not hard to believe that online courses battle to keep the attention of participants.

Courses should not be about information but about transformation. It should not be about consumption, but rather discovery. Specifically, discovering more about yourself. Enter cohort-based learning experiences. As you can see, I am doubling down on my Think Week program here. What I have seen in 2020 is enough to convince me that online, social, engaging courses are the way to go for the future.

Not only is it scalable, but it's interactive and people gain tremendous value.

3. Personal branding & thought leadership for leaders

This is something I have seen coming for quite some time. For a while, my coaching practice was full of leaders who wanted me to assist them in their journeys to become thought leaders.

Now that the world is remote, personal branding for leaders is even more important.

Think of personal branding (specifically for leaders) as having three components:

- Consistently being in front of your people
- Sharing your ideas and insights
- Building rapport and trust

It's too easy for interactions in the digital world to be transactional. When a leader incorporates thought leadership into their leadership style, they open an entire new world to themselves and their people. A world in which they provide value in the form of content, build relationships through consistency, and expand their influence and reach.

If you have some trouble getting your head around the idea of being a thought leader (some people think the term is a bit grandiose) I suggest instead considering yourself a visible leader. This obviously means visibility within the company but could also extend to the public domain.

There is another advantage to adopting a visible leadership approach and that is that content scales. You can influence and impact people beyond your immediate team. It allows people to access your thinking and ideas without the need for proximity.

REFLECTION
POINTS

REFLECTIONS FOR 2021

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

- **How will I maintain my psychological stamina in 2021?**

  As mentioned earlier, this is going to be vital this year. Blind resilience will not be enough and will most likely lead to a mental implosion. Look after yourself.

- **What is my word for the year?**

  Feel free to search for The Expansive podcast, a weekly show that I host with John Sanei, to find out more about this. In short, find a word that themes your year and reminds you of what is important. My word(s) for the year are – relaxed focus.

- **What are some assumptions that I am making about the year that could be wrong?**

  This might be about the world at large or about your own ability. It's important to revisit assumptions because, as you have seen, things change. But often our opinion or mindset doesn't.

- **Am I building anti-fragility into my life?**

  A phrase that's been useful to me is "one is none and two is one." Simply put, bring a back-up. Build some buffer into your life so that when things go wrong, and they will, you are prepared and have the capacity and resources to deal with the challenge.

- **What is the one thing I must commit to improving?**

  Intentionality beats all. Find something worth improving on and be serious about the process. Find a coach, an accountability partner, or a habit tracker (both the Apple App store and Google Play store have countless options).

FOR THE TEAM

- ### How will we support each other during this year?

  An important question to answer. This isn't something to just figure out as you go along. Spend time upfront to establish an implementation intention i.e., don't just intend to do it, have a first step in mind.

- ### What might some of the unintended consequences be of the decisions that we have made over the past few months?

  Will our new remote work policy lead to more isolation of our people? Will our new pivot change the structure of the business? There are many things to consider and leaders will ignore them at their peril.

- ### What are the challenges that our customers are likely to face in 2021?

  And what can you do to help them manage those challenges? It's this exact question that caused me to sit down for 20+ hours and write a 6000+ word document to help people mentally navigate the year ahead.

- ### What are our values and are the actions we are taking aligned with them?

  Value-based decision-making can remove a lot of stress. There are many variables that become irrelevant once we simply focus on how a certain decision or action stacks up against our core values.

  Having said that, there are times that you might need to make a decision that goes against your values. For example, if one of your values is "people first" then what do you do when you must let people go for the company to survive?

- ### How can we support/develop our people so we can accelerate out of the pandemic?

  I unapologetically will keep saying that this is not the time to let up on personal development. Not only because people need to develop the mechanisms for coping with the stress and pressure, but because uncertainty creates fertile ground for learning new skills.

HOW I CAN HELP

Thank you for taking the time to digest this manual. This was my first time compiling it, but I can see it becoming an annual occurrence.

There is no doubt that 2021 is going to be tough. However, I have faith that you will come out of this on the other side stronger than ever before. I don't say this out of blind positivity, but because I honestly believe that the obstacle is the way.

I wanted to end this off by sharing how I can further support you and your people in 2021.

Speaking

I speak at many different types of events. From large conferences, to town halls, to team meetings. It seems for now we will still be going the virtual route; however, I look forward to joining you in person when the time is right.

This manual is a good representation of what I will be speaking about this year. Of course, I will also still be speaking about How To Be Dangerous, a topic for those who are serious about leaving survival mode behind.

Think Week

Think Week is a premium week-long learning experience for leaders and teams. I hosted my first Think Week in May 2020 and have since enrolled more than 500+ participants with an overall feedback rating of 9.2/10.

Although a Think Week lasts for an entire week, the actual time investment is about 60 to 120 minutes per day, depending on the approach.

The ultimate aim is for us to use the Think Week to get participants to think deeply about a specific question/challenge that they are facing. For example:

- What does great digital leadership look like?
- How can we build a strong team in 2021?
- Which areas of development do I need to focus on?
- How can we be more Dangerous?

Your Think Week can either be based on a current version that we have, or we can design a Think Week based on your specific requirements. This would include sourcing the right experts and creating the necessary material.

I'll be spending a lot of time on this in 2021.

I hope to be working with you on your own Think Week.

ERIK KRUGER

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