

5 Things Every New Leader Needs to Do

An Excerpt from the Book 'Uncommon Greatness'

Have you ever thought about what leaders actually do?

Our team asked this question twenty-five years ago. We were overwhelmed by the number of things the best leaders do—hundreds, maybe a thousand or more specific activities. I remember the day well—we filled page after page of flip chart paper. We wallpapered the entire conference room from floor to ceiling with our findings. Obviously, leadership is a huge topic and encompasses a very large and complex set of competencies and skills. Our exercise validated the challenge, complexities, and enormity of the task leaders face on an ongoing basis.

Unfortunately, this realization created only a fleeting sense of accomplishment. On one hand, it helped us realize why our previous multi-year effort to articulate our leadership point of view had been so arduous. We had conducted interviews, explored global best practices, and, collectively, I'm guessing we also read over two hundred books on leadership. All of these efforts led to a moment of clarity: those we lead expect and deserve so much from us. Only when we faced the scope and scale of our responsibility could we begin to search for a more simplified way to tackle this gargantuan topic.

The question we asked was: Could we create a short list of the critical few things the best leaders consistently do? We did ultimately identify these competencies and called them the Fundamentals. They provide the structure for the balance of this book. Now, almost a quarter century later, I'm making only one tweak to our original list, which I'll explain in due time.

The following is a summary of the Fundamentals of Uncommon Leadership.

01 See the Future

“To weave the threads of what you know to be true and what you want to be true into a compelling picture of a better tomorrow.”

Leadership always begins with a picture of the future. What are you trying to accomplish? Where are you trying to take the people on your team or in your organization at large? Why is the journey necessary? The future you envision will be informed by your experience, intuition, creativity, judgment, and more. Leaders must be able to describe their preferred future with sufficient detail to rally people to pursue it.

02 Engage and Develop Others

“To help those you lead care deeply about their work, coworkers, and the organization while fueling their growth along the way.”

Engagement is the precursor to elite levels of sustained performance. Without it, the most you can expect are flashes of brilliance. Engagement has two different forms. First, who do you invite, or engage, to join you on the journey? Next, what do you do to ensure these people really care? How much they care about their work, their coworkers, and the organization is largely up to you.

03 Reinvent Continuously

“To routinely escape the bounds of the present and the known in pursuit of improved skills, methods, and outcomes.”

All progress is preceded by change. Change is at the heart of our role as leaders. Not change for change’s sake—change in service of growth, performance, and the vitality of our organization and those we lead. Change is not a distraction or an inconvenience—change is the primary lever at our disposal to determine our success, failure, or irrelevance. We are responsible for and expected to help create and sustain positive change. Your present reality has been greatly influenced by your current and past practices. Therefore, if you want different outcomes, you’ll need to change something. Reinvention is a core and reoccurring theme among the most successful leaders.

04 Value Results & Relationships

“To successfully navigate the challenges of honoring those we lead while ensuring sustained levels of elite performance.”

There is a way to maximize results and it’s not what most leaders think. To focus exclusively on results will, over time, suboptimize them. The ability to focus on results and relationships is the key many leaders have been looking for. When leaders embrace both, tremendous power is released within an organization. This is the classic example of what the former Stanford professor, author, and leadership expert Jim Collins calls the “genius of the and.” There is tension inherent when you embrace both, and this tension should never be resolved—it must be managed.

05 Embody a Leader's Heart

“To live and lead in a fashion that makes you a leader people want to follow.”

Think about a leader who you admire. What is it about them that brings them to mind? If you make a list of their attributes, I'm guessing you'll include something about their heart—traits, characteristics, or attributes that transcend their skill set. Yes, skills matter, but as we'll explore in more detail, skills alone are never sufficient. If your heart is not right, no one cares about your skills. We'll explore some traits and characteristics that will set you apart and be the real differentiator for Uncommon Leaders. Your heart can be developed, and it must be. Your efficacy as a leader hangs in the balance. If you fully embrace this fundamental, you can become a leader people want to follow.

The World Needs You

The Fundamentals of Uncommon Leadership are the keys to unlock Uncommon Greatness in you and those around you. But to what end? Why should anyone want to accept the role and responsibility to lead others? Because you can change the world. I have long talked about the power of leaders to change the world. However, for the pages that follow, I want to narrow my challenge. Don't think about changing the world. Think about how the ideas represented here can help you change your world. When you change yours and I change mine, and leaders everywhere do the same, collectively, we can change the world.

Enjoy the journey!



It's your move!

Transform your leadership with hands-on coaching.

Contact us at Info@LeadEveryDay.com