

BOOK CLUB SYNOPSIS

**The Blueprint: 6 Practical Steps to Lift  
Your Leadership to New Heights**  
Douglas Conant with Amy Federman

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# CONTENTS

## Introduction | 3

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## Part I: Blueprint | 6

- 1. Your Foundation is Everything | 7
- 2: Your Life Story *Is* Your Leadership Story | 9
- 3: Step 1 — Envision: The Power of Intention and Purpose | 10
- 4: Step 2 — Reflect: Dig Deep | 13
- 5: Step 3 — Study: Lay Your Groundwork | 15
- 6: Step 4 — Plan: Design Your Leadership Model | 17
- 7: Step 5 — Practice: Build Your Leadership | 19
- 8: Step 6 — Improve: Reinforce Your Foundation | 20
- 9: Putting It All Together: Your 5 Day Action Plan | 22

## Part II: Manifesto | 24

- 10: Leadership That Works: It's All about the People | 25
- 11: High Performance | 27
- 12: Abundance | 29
- 13: Inspire Trust | 30
- 14: Purpose | 32
- 15: Courage | 33
- 16: Integrity | 34
- 17: Grow or Die | 37
- 18: Humility | 39
- 19: How Can I Help? | 41
- 20: Have Fun | 42
- 21: Stay True to Yourself | 44

---

## Afterword | 45

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## About World 50 | 46



# Introduction

Douglas Conant was given no warning or explanation when he was fired at age 32 from his job as director of marketing for Parker Brothers. At the time, he felt only uncertainty about the future, though he later came to see the experience as an opportunity—one that allowed him to pave his own path to success.

Getting fired allowed Conant to redefine his goals. He went on to serve as president of Nabisco Foods, president and CEO of Campbell Soup Company and chairman of Avon Products, as well as starting his own company and serving on the boards of numerous others.

As a young man, Conant was “committed to working hard, putting my best foot forward, and helping those around me.” But getting fired threw his identity into free fall. He couldn’t understand why he was facing such a severe setback when he had been so industrious.

“I hadn’t figured out how to translate all of these characteristics into a winning formula for success,” he explains. “I hadn’t yet learned to leverage the parts of my personality, motivations, temperament, and beliefs that were uniquely mine and transform them into a foundation for limitless possibility and greater impact.”

In retrospect, he already had what he needed to change his leadership life—all he needed to do was start small.

Conant was assigned an outplacement counselor, Neil MacKenna, who helped him organize his thoughts into actions. The first task MacKenna had him do was to handwrite his life story in detail. He recognized that what Conant described in his life story didn’t match up with the persona he was presenting to people.

MacKenna helped Conant realize that he wasn’t being authentic in his professional pursuits, which was preventing him from reaching his potential. Showing up authentically would require this self-exploration in order to determine who he really was.

The fast pace of life today—alongside growing expectations—means that many leaders don't have the time for self-exploration in the same way Conant did, which is why he wrote *The Blueprint*. This book seeks to help each leader create a framework for achieving their own goals in a way that reflects who they are. But there's one catch: The framework is always open to improvements, so the process is ongoing.

Part I of the book includes six practical steps of self-reflection and study, which ask the reader to use a number of exercises and prompts to guide their reflection. By the end, the reader will have designed a customized leadership foundation. Part II delves into what leadership is and does, brought to life via anecdotes from Conant and others.

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Scan the QR Code to listen to audio commentary of this synopsis.



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PART

1

BLUEPRINT

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# 01

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## CHAPTER ONE

### YOUR FOUNDATION IS EVERYTHING

Leaders are facing an oftentimes overwhelming, rapidly changing world and are looking for practical solutions to their challenges. Individuals are expected to figure out how to solve problems on their own, and hierarchies are becoming more obsolete. This in and of itself is challenging, and many feel that they're "treading water."

So, how do you begin to tackle all that's before you? Start microscopically small.

According to Robert Maurer, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist at UCLA, starting small works because "it outsmarts the brain's fear response: the innate tendency to avoid things that seem too overwhelming or hard, things that might result in failure, danger, or misery."

In order to prevent paralysis by analysis, according to Conant, one must take "an iterative approach that starts small, is broken down into practical steps, and that can always be improved upon but never has to be perfect or 'finished.'"

*The Blueprint* seeks to help the reader develop just that—but it requires intention, not just hard work. The reader must be prepared to look deep within to achieve their dreams.

Throughout the first half of this book, you will work through the steps of the Blueprint to develop your Foundation. The Foundation brings together beliefs, values, personality, characteristics and temperament, to be applied in the most productive way. The six steps in the subsequent chapters focus on helping you design this Foundation, one that "can withstand almost anything."

The Foundation includes: your Leadership Purpose, your Leadership Beliefs, your Leadership Model, your Leadership Practice Treasury and your Leadership Improvement Plan.

The Blueprint involves six steps for building your Foundation:

1. Envision—Reach High
2. Reflect—Dig Deep
3. Study—Lay the Groundwork
4. Plan—Design
5. Practice—Build
6. Improve—Reinforce

The first step entails setting an intention to improve and includes the first attempt at drafting your Leadership Purpose. The second step is an opportunity to get a better sense of who you are and what motivates you. The third step builds on the first step by including lessons from outside of your own personal experiences—you will also solidify your Leadership Beliefs during this step. The fourth step relies on design thinking to help develop your Leadership Model, pulling from the work you did putting together your Leadership Purpose and Leadership Beliefs. The fifth helps you brainstorm small, actionable steps you can take to help bring your leadership plan to life. Finally, the sixth prompts you to assess what went well and what can be improved upon to reinforce all of the previous steps.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### YOUR LIFE STORY *IS* YOUR LEADERSHIP STORY

Conant credits MacKenna's process of writing his life story as a pivotal step in his leadership journey because leaders tend to believe that "their work life and their 'real' life are two different things." In reality, this lack of cohesion prevents leaders from reaching their true potential.

Conant asks the reader to begin by doing the same exercise, envisioning an "anchoring intention for your leadership."

Reflect on the most important parts of your life—and leadership—to date, and write down at least 10 highlights. Next, write down at least five defining moments that have had an impact on you throughout your life, as well as at least five of your biggest goals—either those not yet achieved or those already accomplished.

Next, think about at least three changes or events that affected your personal or professional life. Reflecting on your life more broadly, extract the parts that surprised you, positively or negatively. This can include both fulfilling moments and times you wish you had acted differently.

The last step in this process is to think of about five items or highlights that you would deem the defining aspects of your leadership story.

There is no right answer to any of the above exercises. They are simply the first step of the Blueprint.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### STEP 1 — ENVISION: THE POWER OF INTENTION AND PURPOSE

In the previous chapter, you began to reflect on the highlights of your leadership story in service of envisioning a fulfilling path for yourself. Before moving explicitly into the Envision step, though, Conant calls for understanding the power of intention, looking specifically at the difference between intentional and incidental leadership.

Incidental leadership is reactive, whereas intentional leadership is proactive. While every leader will use both, it is critical to aim to be increasingly intentional.

To delve deeper into the meaning of “intention,” Conant refers to a TED talk by David Brooks that poses the question, “Should you live for your résumé ... or your eulogy?” Résumé virtues are “external; they’re the skills you bring to the marketplace.” Eulogy virtues, conversely, are internal. While most people would accede that the internal virtues are more important, we tend to focus our efforts on the résumé virtues—due in no small part to the instant gratification that comes along with them.

By focusing on the short term at the expense of the long term, “we can find ourselves hopelessly stuck between the person we actually are day-to-day and the person we want to become.” But there’s a way to bring these two people together: defining a “why,” or a unifying purpose.

Conant notes that while his purpose has changed over time, its current iteration is as follows:

“I intend to help build high-trust, high-performance teams that honor people, defy the critics, and thrive in the face of adversity.”

To develop your own purpose, try to use your head, heart and hands to be the most effective. Use the following questions to nurture all three.

The first question is: Why do I choose leadership? This requires thinking about not just what you hope to get from leading, but also what you plan to give. After reflecting on this question, try to summarize it into one or two sentences. This is the first draft of your Leadership Purpose.

The second question is: What is my promise? This requires reflecting on what people can expect of you, your values and what sets you apart.

The third question is: What are my values? Your values should reflect what you believe are the qualities or behaviors that define a leader—ones you expect from yourself and others. These can also be aspirational, not just qualities that you already exhibit.

Defining your values is not easy. It requires deep reflection, which Conant suggests can be prompted via the following questions:

1. “Can you think of a time where you took a principled stance even though it may have been risky, inconvenient, or even damaging to your career?”
2. “Can you think of a time(s) when you feel certain you behaved with integrity even when it was very challenging to do so: times when you went against the grain, had an uncomfortably candid conversation, or defended an unpopular decision?”

After answering these questions, think about which principles were at play and why it was so important to you to act that way in each moment. Do the same exercise considering instances in which you could have acted and didn't. Try to define five to seven of your essential values from these prompts.

Pulling together your answers from the three questions—why you choose to lead, what you can promise and what your values are—write a draft of a purpose statement that encompasses each of these components. Envision what you want your future to look like.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### STEP 2 — REFLECT: DIG DEEP

Conant begins this chapter with an anecdote from one of his peers, Richard Cavanagh, who describes working with a group of self-doubting economists. By authentically reassuring the economists that they were better than they thought they were, Cavanagh succeeded in instilling confidence in the group.

Cavanagh noticed that genuinely believing in people more than they believed in themselves was key to quality performance. Conant uses this anecdote to prompt readers to employ the reflection process.

The first question in the process is: What motivates people to give their best? Think about your own motivations. Consider the moments when you were most driven personally or professionally and under what conditions, and write them down. Then reflect on whether you're more driven by external rewards or internal satisfaction, and whether you respond better to direction or autonomy.

After writing down all that comes to mind, consider what motivates the people around you. What have you done in your capacity as a leader that has motivated people?

Identify the motivators, and look for where there is synergy between these and the values you defined in the previous chapter. Also think about what has led people to disengage, and write these down. Armed with this information, record your top five pieces of advice for how to best motivate people.

The second reflection question is: How do you influence people to deliver a consistently high performance in an inconsistent world?

Think about specific motivating tactics that have worked for you. Consider how standout people you've worked with or observed have approached problem-solving and big projects: How did they create momentum? What steps did they take, and how did they get the job done without sacrificing long-term performance?

After you've taken some notes on this, think about the opposite: instances in which you've observed leaders discourage people or contribute to a toxic culture. Summarize your findings.

These steps will help you define your Leadership Beliefs, but first you must think about your Leadership Vocabulary, or "the precise words you will use to communicate your beliefs."

Based on Conant's own experiences, he has defined a number of words and phrases that make up his Leadership Vocabulary, including "be kind" and "work hard." They help communicate his Leadership Beliefs, which include statements such as, "It's ALL about the people," "To win in the marketplace, you must first win in the workplace," and "A leader should anchor their approach in the spirit of, 'How Can I Help?'"

Building on your defined values, beliefs and purpose, begin to think about your Leadership Words. What words reflect what is important to you or the leader you hope to be? Using this list and your values, begin to draft your Leadership Beliefs.



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## CHAPTER FIVE

### STEP 3 — STUDY: LAY YOUR GROUNDWORK

Beyond reflecting on his own life experiences after losing his job, Conant also spent significant time reading to expand his understanding of leadership. The concept of Study became a crucial part of redefining his personal idea of leadership.

There are two key components to the Study step: building a network and doing your homework. To build his own network, Conant spent time developing relationships with people, particularly through writing letters to those he had connected with during his outplacement. Through this process, he learned that a network is “not just a means to an end,” but also a means to learn more about leadership. Conant spoke to people about how they led others and how they would approach particular situations.

Doing your homework requires “reading about leadership, studying leaders past and present that you admire, consulting with executive coaches, seeking out mentors, and more.” Combining these two pieces of Study helped Conant realize that there are no new problems and that he was never alone in any struggle.

Develop your own Study, looking to external perspectives to help you on your journey and bolster your leadership skills. One tool Conant suggests is what he calls the “Entourage of Excellence,” a group of people who have positively influenced you.

Choose two people from your professional life, two from your personal life and two leaders from history who have inspired you. Write down their names, the qualities you admire about them and a reason that you’re including them in your entourage. You should

continue to add people over time. Remember that these people are always with you—conjuring them is as simple as posing the question to yourself, “What would \_\_\_\_\_ do?”

Leadership is not just about observing the outside world. It’s also about thinking critically and analyzing that you’ve observed to create “tangible nuggets of wisdom that will serve you on your journey.”

To kick off this process, with your Entourage in mind, put together a list of the best practices you’ve observed. Try to conjure specific actions people in your Entourage have taken that had an impact on you.

After you’ve developed your do’s list, think about what you should absolutely *not* do. Create a list of don’ts from the behaviors and actions you’ve thought about or observed.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### STEP 4 — PLAN: DESIGN YOUR LEADERSHIP MODEL

Most leaders have a plan for how they'll approach any given business initiative, but they should have a plan for their personal leadership, too. This chapter seeks to equip you “with a plan for bringing your leadership to life in the real world,” starting with building a prototype.

The Leadership Model draws on your Leadership Purpose and Leadership Beliefs to create a “representation of a system, comprised of concepts and practices, which you use to help people—including you—know and understand your approach to leadership.” It is a visual representation of how you intend to lead.

Conant presents his own, which takes the form of “The Conant Leadership Flywheel,” but notes that your model is a personal reflection and should take whatever form best suits you. It is meant to ensure that what you do aligns with what you believe.

While each person's model is unique, Conant presents a few guiding questions and thoughts. First, consider how you will advance your purpose and honor your beliefs. The model should also include two pillars: performance and people. From there, Conant's flywheel includes a number of distinct but connected practice areas.

To begin thinking about the practice areas that will appear in your own model, take note of all the work and reflections you've completed thus far, and organize them into clusters. Thinking about recurring ideas or key revelations, write down everything that comes to mind and then look for where you can group them together. Try grouping them based on themes, such as growth,

trust, authenticity or humility. Begin to organize them into a shape or framework that works for you, remembering that perfection is not the goal.

You now have the prototype of your Leadership Model.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### STEP 5 — PRACTICE: BUILD YOUR LEADERSHIP

Practicing in the right way is vital to ensuring that you're not learning the wrong skills.

That's why Conant subscribes to a "mastery model" of leadership. He considers leadership a craft "honed with intention, practiced mindfully, and improved constantly." He prescribes "deliberate practice," a term coined by Geoff Colvin in his book *Talent is Overrated*.

Deliberate practice has four tenets: It's specific, repeatable and takes time, subject to feedback, and demanding. With practice defined and its importance established, identify your Key Practice Areas. They are "the finalized guiding themes of your Leadership Model; they are what your clusters should evolve into." Looking at your do's and don'ts list and the rough draft of your Leadership Model, consider what practices fit with which clusters and what elements you want to include.

From there, define one practice from each Key Practice Area. Make sure each practice you choose is specific, repeatable, demanding and is subject to feedback. One example is the practice of writing handwritten thank-you notes. This falls under Conant's Key Practice Area of "Build Vitality." Make sure each practice you choose is "simple and achievable."

Before moving onto the next chapter, identify a few practices that you can begin working on immediately, and write them down.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### STEP 6 — IMPROVE: REINFORCE YOUR FOUNDATION

“The best leaders ... are always learning, improving, and pushing themselves out of their comfort zone.” Leaders must have a growth mindset and be ready and willing to tackle everything that comes their way, exhibiting resilience and agility.

Psychologist Carol Dweck defines a growth mindset as a belief that one’s intelligence can always develop and improve. Having a growth mindset is often what sets leaders up for success.

To internalize the growth mindset, ask yourself: “How can I do better?”

The first component of the Improve step requires going back through the previous steps and evaluating them. Did you answer all of the questions to the best of your ability? Is there anything that can be expanded or improved upon?

Conant puts forth the following questions associated with each of the previous steps:

1. **Envision:** What is my boldest dream of leadership success?
2. **Reflect:** What life experiences have influenced my leadership beliefs?
3. **Study:** What leadership lessons can I learn from the world around me?
4. **Plan:** What does my personalized leadership model look like?
5. **Practice:** How can I bring my leadership approach to life?”

Once you've reviewed your work, add value. Drawing on Susan Cain's book *Quiet*, Conant advises to look at how you can add value. "Pick something you care about, immerse yourself deeply in it, commit to constantly improve, and you'll be positioned to add enduring value wherever the wind may take you."

To do this, think about three areas you care deeply about from the work you've done thus far—areas in which you're strong. Then consider what your vision of leadership success looks like and what you need to improve upon to reach that. Write down three areas you want to improve and one action you will take in service of those goals. Commit to taking this action over the next 30 days.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER—YOUR 5 DAY ACTION PLAN

You've made it through all of the steps of the Blueprint. Now it's time to put it together, ensuring that the work you did aligns with your organization's values.

Before you bring it all together, Conant recommends revisiting each of the steps once a month over the next three months to solidify your work, and then continuing to revisit it periodically over time.

Review what you've worked on: You should have defined your Leadership Purpose, your Leadership Beliefs, your Leadership Model, your Leadership Practice Treasury and your Leadership Improvement Plan, all of which comprise your Foundation.

Now it's time to share, which is where the 5 Day Action Plan comes into play. On day one, you will align your Foundation with the expectations of your workplace. Reflect on the following prompts while keeping your organization or job description in mind:

1. What are you expected to deliver?
2. What are those who report to you expected to deliver?
3. What qualities are expected of those in leadership positions?
4. In what areas do you feel you are strongest?
5. Write down any other thoughts or expectations that come to mind.



On day two, you'll begin to share your work. The practice, which Conant calls "Declaring Yourself," entails walking a trusted colleague through your Foundation. On day three, you will put a practice of your choosing into play. It doesn't matter which one you choose, as long as you commit to doing it. If you're able, reflect on what you did and how it went at the end of the day.

On day four, write a handwritten note to yourself, contemplating what you've done over the past three days. This is essentially a progress report that you will read again in three months' time. Finally, on day five, take a few minutes to consider how you've done so far. Have there been any noticeable changes? Have you effectively worked in alignment with your Leadership Model? Be proud of what you've accomplished and then begin again. Continue to refine and redefine your work throughout the six steps over time—this is a continual process.

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PART

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MANIFESTO

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## CHAPTER TEN

### LEADERSHIP THAT WORKS: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE

“You can’t become a world-class leader without being anchored in the fundamentals of your craft, the craft of leading people.”

Drawing on his own experiences and those of his peers, Conant will use Part II: Manifesto to describe leadership that works.

The best leaders are those who “have an unmistakable appetite for growth,” are “forward thinking,” are somewhat “restless” and have a “thirst for fresh ideas.” But they’re not good leaders because of these qualities; they’re good leaders because these qualities are built on a strong foundation.

“Leadership is the art and science of influencing others in a specific direction.” The most important truth about leadership is that it’s about people; without followers, there are no leaders. But “followers are earned; they’re not guaranteed on the merit of your title alone.” This is why honoring people is so key to successful leadership.

Conant uses an anecdote about David White, who was global vice president of supply chain at Campbell Soup Company, as an example of the importance of honoring people. When White was hired in 2004, there was a fairly high lost-time injury rate at Campbell Soup Company. To turn the situation around, White took the following key steps, all surrounding the idea of honoring people.

White made his values clear to everyone on the team and remained steadfast in these beliefs. He followed up every lost-time injury report with a personal phone call, but he also maintained a zero-tolerance

policy regarding diversions from safety protocol, eliminating those who weren't willing to take the necessary steps to ensure employee safety. Finally, White incentivized safety by developing a recognition program for the safest teams or offices at the company.

White's efforts to focus on the well-being of the people at Campbell Soup Company demonstrate that organizations only succeed because of the people who work there. Keeping this in mind, remember that "when you honor others with your attention, they will honor you back with their commitment, hard work, and trust."

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### HIGH PERFORMANCE

“Leadership is about using every available tool in your arsenal to lift performance and build a better world.” But a tool is only useful if it helps bring about the results you seek, which is why Conant asserts: “Process must always be in service to outcome.” In turn, “The performance must reflect the practice.”

Conant identifies two key pillars to performing: competence and character. Competence includes three components: intellectual intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ) and functional intelligence (FQ).

IQ includes processing information and decision-making, EQ is about interpersonal relationships, and FQ entails the hard skills needed to perform a specific function. No one is expected to be equally strong in all three areas, but it is important to assess your strengths and identify areas for improvement in order to bring all of them together in service of your goal.

Character, meanwhile, is often easier to define in terms of red flags.

Beyond competence and character, there is another component of high performance: the interplay of intuition and wisdom. Conant posits that the process of developing your IQ, EQ and FQ strengthens your intuition. The three pieces of competence, combined with intuition, help develop wisdom. Finally, wisdom is “how you display your mastery of all the components of competence in concert with one another.”

Another way to improve decision-making specifically is to rely on what Conant calls “leading in three time zones.” A good leader must “learn from and honor the past,” “meet the expectations of the present,” and “create a clear and tangible path for a more prosperous future.” Ask whether you are satisfying the expectations of each of these time zones each time you make a decision.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

### ABUNDANCE

Successful companies and leaders don't get stuck in the "or," but rather embrace the "and." This is not about finding balance or seeking compromise, but about doing it all. According to Jim Collins' and Jerry Porras' book *Built to Last*, "A truly visionary company embraces both ends of a continuum: continuity and change, conservatism and progressiveness, stability and revolution, predictability and chaos, heritage and renewal, fundamentals and craziness."

This "Abundance Mentality," a term coined by Stephen Covey, is in contrast to what he calls the "Scarcity Mentality." Those who hold the latter view see life as a zero-sum game. Those with the former view see life as having enough for everyone.

Conant puts forth his own interpretation of abundance, which he views specifically through the lens of leadership. One way to bring the abundance view to life is when faced with a problem. Instead of looking at a couple ways to solve the problem, weighing the pros and cons and choosing one path, Conant suggests pursuing multiple paths simultaneously. At times, this may be the best way to get to the heart of the problem, as it precludes the possibility of overlooking or excluding something that may be key to solving it.

It is not easy to switch to an abundance mindset. To begin so, try using the word "and" any time you're inclined to use the word "or." The idea is to "include and embrace; it is engineered to help you find the best ideas." Use your judgment, as this technique won't work in every instance.

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## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### INSPIRE TRUST

Trust is critical to an organization's success. Drawing on Stephen Covey's experience merging his own company, the Covey Leadership Center, with Franklin Quest in 1997, Conant notes that Covey learned that most issues related to performance result from trust issues. When Covey was in the process of handling the merger of the two companies, he declared his intention to build trust, and over time, he succeeded.

One way to inspire trust is by showing that you're willing to do what you ask of others. There are seven essential components of inspiring trust: honoring stakeholders, declaring (and then doing) what you're going to do, developing character and confidence, maintaining ethical standards, modeling the behavior you expect, acknowledging when you've made a mistake, and meeting performance expectations. Several of these tenets hark back to the discussion of competence and character from an earlier chapter, as these concepts are integral to delivering high performance because they help build trust.

Respect is also central to trust, which dovetails with Conant's theme of honoring people. Recounting his experience of becoming CEO at Campbell Soup Company, Conant notes that his simple step of listening to people and taking action based on their input led to better outcomes from his employees. It's all about showing you care.

Another way to demonstrate care or respect is to recognize people for their work by thanking them. Don't shy away from verbally thanking people for their work and celebrating what they've accomplished. In Conant's experience, this simple act increased the



number of people around him who wanted to help him—because they know he'd do the same for them.

“If you lay the foundation of trust, it will come back to you. Trust is reciprocal and symbiotic.”

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### PURPOSE

Patagonia CEO Rose Marcario attributes the success of the apparel company to its commitment to a higher purpose that serves to inspire every stakeholder and helps guide the organization's practices.

Successful leaders should develop a purpose for their own organizations, one that “resonates with all stakeholders and delivers economic and social value.” Numerous studies show that purpose contributes to employee retention and helps attract customers.

Purpose is underpinned by meaning. Meaning propels the purpose forward, helping employees understand why they're doing what they do. But leaders are responsible for delivering that meaning and helping employees feel fulfilled by their work.

But, getting there requires authenticity. It is not enough to talk the talk—you must also walk the walk. A leader and an organization's purpose must be reflected in actions and communications. Purpose is the “greater ‘yes’ that should burn within.”

A higher purpose should have three qualities:

1. It should deliver economic and social value.
2. It should be promoted with intentionality, passion, persistence and humility.
3. It should drive the direction of your organization.

# 15

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### COURAGE

Doing what is right for you—or your team—requires courage. “Having a strong Foundation is only half the battle. You must have the courage to share it with others.”

Quoting Maya Angelou, renowned poet and civil rights activist, Conant calls courage the “‘mother’ attribute,” as it is a necessary condition for developing a new skill. But, it’s not easy to have courage; it requires feeling any and all of the most uncomfortable feelings, those you might typically avoid, and doing it anyway.

Some of the most important parts of leadership—such as integrity, authenticity, or being tough-minded and tender-hearted—all require courage. But courage is a practice; you don’t simply have it. You must be willing to work at it and strengthen it as you would a muscle.

Try to take just one step, or do just one thing that scares you, no matter how seemingly insignificant it might be. The more you practice, the easier it will get and the better leader you will become.

# 16

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## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### INTEGRITY

When Conant was named CEO, Campbell Soup Company was in a prolonged downturn and morale was low. To turn the company around, he knew he needed to rebuild trust, but doing so required proving that he was deserving of employee trust.

To approach the challenge, he developed a leadership pledge that he intended to present to the company's global leaders, telling them what he hoped to achieve and how he planned to do it.

That day, Conant brought two guests who were to speak to the group before he presented his leadership pledge. Both guests ended up making insensitive remarks that upset some of the leaders in attendance.

While he had intended to deliver his pledge later in the day, he knew had to address the issue immediately. In fact, his leadership pledge included the lines, “[We] will treat you with respect and dignity,” and “If we fall short of a commitment, we will openly and honestly acknowledge our shortcoming and consciously work to remedy the situation.”

Conant delivered his pledge, apologized to those in the room and made a commitment not to make the same mistake again. This event demonstrated to Conant the importance of ensuring that his behavior matched his words. Integrity is “not an ‘either, or’ proposition. To demonstrate integrity you have to say how you will act, then do what you say.”

Turning back to a concept presented earlier in the book, *Declaring Yourself*, Conant notes that people are not mind readers and don't know the intention behind your behaviors and actions. It is, therefore, important to communicate exactly what's happening—and your expectations.

In his own life, when Conant begins working with someone new, he spends the first hour “removing the mystery from our working relationship.” He tells the person a variety of things: the type of leader he hopes to be, what he values, what he's looking for in an employee and what they can expect from him. He then invites the other person to share their own philosophy—but only if they feel inclined to share.

The act of declaring yourself and being transparent imbues trust in your working relationships and also holds you accountable for what you've said you'll do.

Declaring yourself is also relevant for building trust with your customers. Conant draws on the example of World 50, noting that the organization has committed to complete privacy for its members. World 50's unwavering commitment to privacy demonstrates its integrity with regard to its non-negotiables. Try brainstorming non-negotiables that are relevant to your own organization.

Another crucial piece of integrity is taking the high road: owning up when you've made a mistake rather than hoping others won't pick up on it. While integrity “starts with creating alignment between your words and your actions,” it is equally important to ensure that you do the right thing even when no one is looking. We may not have control over what happens in any given circumstance, but we do have control over how we respond to it.

Taking responsibility for your actions is key to an integrity-driven practice. People will notice if you divert responsibility or take the easy way out. Instead, demonstrate to your employees that you're aware of a given situation and that you're prepared to handle it. It is often helpful to address it head on. And when something does go

wrong, “instead of spreading blame, spread accountability.” Don’t look for who’s culpable, but hold those who contributed to the situation accountable, while making sure that it doesn’t happen again.

According to Conant, there are four steps to taking responsibility:

1. “Own the issue.”
2. “Deal with it swiftly, honestly, and as completely as possible.”
3. “Pledge to not make the same mistake twice.”
4. “And then move on.”

# 17

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## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE 'GROW OR DIE' MINDSET

Conant espouses a simple truth, that “in today’s marketplace, you either find a way to grow, or you die.” Performance and success require constantly growing and improving.

When Conant was in business school, he had a professor who told him that he could do better after he came unprepared to a class and was unable to adequately answer a question. Those words continue to remind him that we always have a choice to do better or fall back on excuses.

Drawing on the “grow or die” concept, this chapter looks at how the same view can be applied to an organization at large.

To foster what Conant calls a “learning culture,” there are steps to take at both the individual and group levels. At the individual level, leaders must serve as models, demonstrating their own thirst for knowledge and investment in the growth of their employees. At the group level, leadership should praise and push for learning.

Conant relies on a “push/pull” principle to move employees toward a growth mindset. The push entails making learning expectations clear and pushing employees to meet these expectations. Conveying why you expect your employees to learn and grow is essential. The pull is as simple as celebrating learning, encouraging people do so through “positive reinforcement, leading by example, and recognition.”

But it’s not enough to learn just for learning’s sake. Ideally, the learning should be aligned with the broader goals of the organization.

When Conant was up for the role of CEO at Campbell Soup Company, he began to assemble a team. That team included Carl Johnson, someone with whom he had worked previously. He wanted Johnson to serve as chief strategy officer.

Johnson took on the role at a time when it was a new concept and also had to reckon with the idea of serving at a company that had made significant cuts to research and development before he joined. Rather than get discouraged, he forged a new way forward. He spent a significant amount of time and several million dollars to analyze buyer behavior and uncovered the reason why Campbell Soup Company had lost market share. He persisted despite opposition and succeeded, demonstrating “why it is imperative—more today than ever—to hire people who will challenge your paradigm in service to the grow or die mindset.”

A grow or die mindset is essential and is encouraged through learning, constantly improving and growing, using the push/pull principle and hiring people who will inspire you to think outside the box. Without these elements, an organization can become complacent and fail to survive.



# 18

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### HUMILITY

Humility is another key ingredient of leadership. It comprises two parts: bringing your full self to the table—flaws and all—and recognizing that you don't have all the answers. These two parts can be boiled down to two essential elements: “connecting and listening.”

Drawing on the experiences of Bill George, former chairman and CEO of Medtronic and an authority on the topic of authentic leadership, Conant recounts how George had spent much of his life trying to be who he thought others wanted him to be. Over time, he realized that he had to take the time to get to know his true self, a process George likened to “peeling an onion.” Without that self-awareness, it is not possible to truly connect with people because you haven't presented your real self.

Consider how you can use the reflections you've already completed as part of the Blueprint to uncover any areas in which you're inflating, preventing you from presenting your real self to the people around you.

Working on the listening component of humility requires doing away with the misconception that seeking advice or help from others is weak. Rather, learning from others and getting curious about alternate points of view will help cultivate a diverse set of ideas and aid in the process of decision-making. Conant adds that having a diverse network of people at our disposal “is a leadership skill unto itself and it can make you indispensable.”

In this highly connected time, it is difficult to be present and actually listen to people, rather than interrupting, letting your mind wander or getting distracted by your devices.

There are three essential components of active listening:

First, listen “with your ‘head’ for the evidence.” It is essential that you get all of the information about a situation. Then, listen “with your ‘heart’ for the energy.” Sense the energy of the situation and tune in to the moods of the people around you. Finally: “Listen exponentially to all the other voices that touch the issue.”

A sign of active listening is being able to accurately and succinctly summarize what was just said by others. Follow up with any questions you might have and be open to the thoughts and opinions of those around you, rather than insisting on sticking with the status quo.

# 19

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## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### HOW CAN I HELP?

Good leaders always proactively offer their help. “Many people think that leadership presence is earned by being imposing or austere, or by seeming busy, unavailable, or unapproachable. Aspiring leaders often worry that the vulnerability that accompanies kindness, or offers of help, will make them seem ‘weak.’” Conant argues that exactly the opposite is true—that when leaders help out, they let others know they’re in good hands.

Leaders are not more important than their employees simply by virtue of being a leader. Everyone has competing demands, full email inboxes and responsibilities at home. A good leader will show that they are as committed as their employees and willing to help others.

One way to be truly helpful is to move away from transactional interactions. Asking, “How can I help?” allows people to feel more valued “by offering them a chance to feel heard and respected; it’s also a concise way of showing that you are right there with them, that you’re in this together.” Treating people well and becoming successful are not mutually exclusive endeavors. Without help, life is a lonelier place, and it’s a lot harder to succeed.

# 20

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## CHAPTER TWENTY

### HAVE FUN

Though at the beginning of his career, he firmly believed that, in order to succeed, he had to be deathly serious, Conant now recognizes that “you can have fun and get the job done.” In fact, fun is desirable; it motivates people and lessens the possibility of burnout.

You are more likely to have fun in a workplace where your values are aligned with those of the organization. Use the work you’ve completed through the Blueprint to reflect on what matters to you and how aligned these values are with your work environment. If you feel connected with your company’s culture, you’re more likely to be happy and have fun.

Having fun at work becomes possible by being fun yourself. This can be as simple as smiling at a colleague or scheduling off-site meetings. The objective is to try to make people feel good when they’re around you.

That being said, “you can’t pour from an empty cup,” so make sure you take care of yourself first. Identify the areas that are most important in your life so that you can mentally check in with each of them on a regular basis. Choose the areas that feel natural to you; Conant has chosen work, family, faith, community and personal well-being. By checking in regularly, you can be sure that you’re not trying to run on empty and can change course.

Leaders succeed when they truly love what they do. Of course, work is not always fun—nor is anything worth doing. “That’s where love comes in. Adversity provides a test for how deep your devotion runs.”

If you know why you're doing what you do, it'll be that much easier to remain committed and devoted, even on the hardest days.

# 21

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF

“The key message of *The Blueprint* is that your life story is your leadership story. Only you can write it. Only you can chart your course.”

Turning inward is how you determine your own leadership model. The tools that work for you to help weather the storm and face adversity head-on are yours alone.

*The Blueprint* is a means to help you identify your experiences, beliefs and skills that form your unique framework and help you leverage this combination to help achieve your leadership dreams. But this is just the beginning, and this process is intended to be continuous.

# Afterword

Mette Norgaard, who wrote the afterword for *The Blueprint*, calls for keeping four things in mind over the course of your leadership journey:

1. “It’s all about performance.”
2. “It’s personal.”
3. “It’s about practice.”
4. “It’s about purpose.”

In the end, after she lauds Conant for his consistent leadership, resilience and sense of humor, she encourages the reader to “imagine a close colleague writing some words about you in a few years. What would you like that person to say about how you’ve shown up, about the difference you’ve made as a leader, about your presence and purpose?”

## **About World 50**

Founded in 2004, World 50 consists of private peer communities that enable CEOs and C-level executives at globally respected organizations to discover better ideas, share valuable experiences and build relationships that make a lasting impact. The busiest officer-level executives and their most promising future leaders trust World 50 to facilitate collaboration, conversation and counsel on the topics most crucial to leading, transforming and growing modern enterprises. Membership is by invitation only.

World 50 communities serve every significant enterprise leadership role. World 50 members reside in more than 27 countries on six continents and are leaders at companies that average more than \$30 billion in revenue.

World 50 is a private company that serves no other purpose than to accelerate the success of its members and their organizations. It is composed of highly curious associates who consider it a privilege to help leaders stay ahead.





