

THE **EXTREME LEADERSHIP** FIELD GUIDE

Tips and Ideas for Bringing Love, Energy, Audacity and Proof to Your Business.
A Compilation of Blog Posts from www.SteveFarber.com

By Steve Farber

C O N T E N T S



Steve Farber is the founder of The Extreme Leadership Institute, an organization devoted to changing the world through the development of Extreme Leaders in business and beyond.

Listed on Inc's ranking of the Top 50 Leadership and Management Experts in the world, Farber is a bestselling author, popular keynote speaker, and a seasoned leadership coach and consultant who has worked with a vast array of public and private organizations in virtually every arena, from the tech sector to financial services, manufacturing, health care, hospitality, entertainment, retail, direct sales, public education, non-profits, and government.

IDEAS FOR
CULTIVATING
MORE LOVE

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MORE ENERGY

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CHOOSE TO BE EXTREME

Here's the problem: many people who call themselves leaders are only posing. They're wearing the label or accepting the title without putting their skin in the game. So I'm asking you – assuming that you really do aspire to lead – to approach the act of leadership as you'd approach an extreme sport: learn to love the fear and exhilaration that naturally comes with the territory. And that takes a personal commitment and a significant, personal choice. As my friend and colleague, Terry Pearce, said in an article in the San Francisco Examiner:

“There are many people who think they want to be matadors, only to find themselves in the ring with two thousand pounds of bull bearing down on them, and then discover that what they really wanted was to wear tight pants and hear the crowd roar.”

If, however, you do make the choice to leap into the ring, it's because of your love of the challenge, the adventure, and that love is what makes the fear of the “sport” worthwhile. Not only do you accept the fear as part of the experience, the fear – in large part – creates and defines the experience. Extreme would not be extreme without fear. And fear would not be worth it without the love of the game.

The same is true of Extreme Leadership: it is the dynamic interplay of fear & love—two of the most powerful forces in the human experience. And in my estimation, those who actively and intentionally use the experience of fear and love everyday in their attempts to change things for the better – in whatever arena – are Extreme Leaders. Read on if you're ready to make that choice...

PURSUE THE OS!M

Extreme Leadership is intensely personal and intrinsically scary. You are striving to change the nature of things, and that's a scary endeavor because you are asking yourself and others to give up the familiar. It is scary because you have no guarantee of a positive outcome. It is scary because you don't know how you are personally going to be judged; your credibility is on the line. There is no way – absolutely no way, therefore – to participate in an authentic leadership experience without fear.

We've been conditioned to believe that fear is “bad.” And while it's true that fear can save your life or keep you from doing something stupid, avoiding it can also keep you from doing something great, from learning something new, and from growing as a human being. Fear is a natural part of growth, and since growth, change and revolution are all on the Extreme Leader's agenda, fear comes with the territory.

In the right context, therefore, your experience of fear (or exhilaration, for that matter) is your internal indicator that you're moving in the right direction. That you really are leading, in other words. That scary/exhilarating experience is what I call the Oh Shit! Moment or OS!M.

To put it bluntly: if you're using all the buzzwords and reading all the latest leadership books, and holding forth at every meeting on the latest management fads, but you're not experiencing that visceral churning in your gut, and you're not scaring yourself every day, and you're not feeling that OhShit!Moment as regularly as clockwork, then you are not doing anything significant – let alone changing the world – and you are certainly not leading anyone else.

As an Extreme Leader, your OS!Ms will happen as a result of your taking a Radical LEAP every day: cultivate Love, generate Energy, inspire Audacity, and provide Proof.

CULTIVATE LOVE

Do what you love in the service of people who love what you do.

The emotion of love is considered to be out of place or simply inappropriate in the world of business. Many believe that good business people keep their hearts out of their work. The opposite is true. It's the heart that brings the fire of creativity to bear on the day-to-day. It's the heart that inspires drive, loyalty and leaps of innovative brilliance.

The word, "love," appears frequently in the leadership literature, and in many studies, love is identified as an important ingredient in productive leader/follower and coach/employee relationships. In research conducted at the Tom Peters Company, we found that in order to be an effective coach, you have to care about the person you're coaching. You can't simply go through the motions because you're so obliged.

I use the word, "love," in the broadest sense. I'm not saying that you should fall in love with everyone you work with. That could get a bit complicated, to say the least. I am saying that you have to find something to care deeply about in your business and in each individual that touches your business. And it has to be real. And they have to know it.

The key, then, is to find a way to genuinely and sincerely love the customer and then act from that level of motivation. Great business relationships are won in ways analogous to romantic relationships: by paying nearly obsessive attention to the needs, desires, hopes and aspirations of the other person. By knowing not only when to stand firm on your own principles but also when to sacrifice your short-term needs for the long-term relationship. And by proving through your own actions that you really mean it, and that you're not simply following the advice that you gleaned from the latest training program. The Extreme Leader – in other words – actually does love the customer and strives, therefore, to enhance the customer's life.

GENERATE ENERGY

Energy is not abstract or metaphysical; it's real, tangible, palpable. You know when you have it and you know when you don't; you know when you have to drag yourself out of bed in the morning, and when you have to use the law of gravity to slide your slack, lifeless body off the mattress and smack on the floor.

I can tell within – and I'm being generous here – 30 seconds of walking into the reception area of a company whether the place is energetic, exciting and scintillating, or a morgue populated by zombied paycheck-collectors.

It's not an accident, either way. Someone is creating that environment, and if it's your place of employment, that someone may well be you.

Here's a good question to ask yourself: "Do I generate more energy when I walk into a room, or when I walk out of it?"

Energy is what keeps us coming back to work day after day without waning in passion or enthusiasm. It comes, in part, from what John Chambers called the "*higher purpose*." A CEO survey conducted in 2001 by Accenture and The Conference Board said, "*Many CEOs observe that people want to feel a passion for the company's work, to become part of a higher purpose than business results alone.*" The Extreme Leader's job is to help define and redefine, day after day, what that higher purpose is.

Michael Cunningham in his novel, *The Hours*, said, *“If you shout loud enough, for long enough, a crowd will gather to see what all the noise is about. It’s the nature of crowds. They don’t stay long, unless you give them reason.”*

INSPIRE AUDACITY

Audacity is, *“A bold and blatant disregard for normal constraints.”* But audacity also has mixed connotations. Here’s the way Webster’s New World Thesaurus breaks it down: audacity n. 1. [Courage] – Syn. daring, boldness, valor; see courage 2. [Impudence] – Syn. impertinence, temerity, brazenness, insolence

Love-inspired audacity is courageous, not impudent. (Literally-the word, courage, has at its root the word, cor, which means heart). The Extreme Leader, then, is courageously audacious in his or her actions and approach.

Carly Fiorina, the controversial former CEO of Hewlett Packard said, *“A leader’s greatest obligation is to make possible an environment... where people can aspire to change the world.”* That’s an audacious statement of purpose for any leader, and it’s exactly the question that I pose here for the Extreme Leader: *“How are you/we going to change the world?”* Choose your scope: World (with a capital W) or world (with a small w).

Can you make the connection between the work that you do and its potential impact on the entire World? Great. Be bold about it. Henry Ford said, *“The horse will disappear from the highways.”* Audacious. If you’re not going to change the World, then what about the world of your customers, your company, your co-workers?

PROVIDE PROOF

Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have shown that credibility is the foundation of leadership, and they go on to define credibility behaviorally as DWYSYWD: Do What You Say You Will Do. If it’s true that leaders lead by their own example, it follows then that Extreme Leaders lead by their own extreme example.

You have to put your skin in the game, put yourself and your reputation at risk. You have to prove yourself through significant, observable, daily action. It’s insanely easy to talk a good game. (How many buzzwords per minute can you crank out?) Do you say you love your team? Prove it! Do you say we need to be bold and inventive for our customers? Prove it! Do you tell your folks that they’re “your most important asset”? Prove it and prove it again in every action that you take.

The minute you say the words, *“I can’t do that in this organization”* or *“they won’t let me,”* your credibility as an Extreme Leader is shot. On the other hand, when you are absolutely convinced that you can change your organization, family or community for the better, you have to prove it through the radical courage of your own action. As British management guru, Charles Handy, says in *The Hungry Spirit*, *“If we want to see more of the good news than the bad we will have to do it for ourselves. It is no good waiting for some unidentified ‘they’ to fix our world for us.”*

Gandhi said it this way: *“Be the change you want to see in the world.”* And you already know how Nike says it. Use this field guide to find ideas that will help you take a Radical LEAP every day.



IDEAS FOR
CULTIVATING
MORE LOVE



LOVE AND WARREN BUFFETT

In a video interview posted on The Motley Fool, Warren Buffett talked about how he goes about finding and buying great companies run by great CEOs:

“I look into their eyes and try to figure out whether they love the money, or if they love the business... if they don’t love the business, I can’t put that [money] into it.”

“[Then] my job is to make sure that I don’t do anything that kills that love of the business.”

When I hear that, of course, it brings me right back to the “L” in LEAP: cultivate Love.

When I first started using that language years ago, I felt that I had to make a really strong case and present nearly irrefutable evidence that “love” is the right word and describes the right experience for business leaders. I had to convince people that cultivating love is just damn good business, after all. (Apparently – and no surprise – Mr. Buffett never would have needed convincing in the first place).

But nowadays, I’ve noticed that I get very little resistance to the idea. Now I feel like I’m reminding more than convincing. Maybe that’s not as exciting a challenge, but I’ll take it any day. That’s progress.

It goes without saying that there’s much more to business than the L word. But as Buffett goes on to say in the interview, if the CEO loves money more than the company he or she runs, business becomes all about the exit strategy, not the building of something lasting and significant.

I’ve posed this question to tens of thousands of people over the last decade, and I offer it to you as well: *Why do you love your business, and how do you show it?*

Answer it well and prove it through the way you work, and maybe one day Warren Buffett and his team will be looking into your eyes.

THE ROMANCE OF BUSINESS

If you want your customers to love you (and you should, because if they’re just “satisfied” you’ve lost the game), then take a lesson from your own romantic adventures.

For example, think back to the first date or two with that person you were really crazy about.

I’ll wait.

If you’re a guy, it went something like this:

You really paid attention, didn’t you? You listened intently to her every word; you noticed every detail: what she was wearing, what she ordered for dinner, and what songs she said she liked. And you took volumes of mental notes. You gathered data, and you responded; you acted. You delivered on her expressed desires and guessed at her unarticulated needs and responded to those, too.

So, on the next date, you picked her up in your freshly-washed convertible, but you left the top up, because – even though you loved the feel of the wind whipping through the car – you remembered she told you how long it took her to get her hair just the way she liked it.

At her door, you handed her one red rose – which you’d learned was her favorite flower – and you escorted her on your arm to your waiting chariot.

With me so far?

Then you headed for the opera house, because you knew she loved La Traviata and it happened to be in town – even though last week you thought La Traviata was an Italian restaurant and, frankly, still wished it were. Even though you’d rather see the Rolling Stones for the 20th time, or get your teeth drilled by a very nervous dental student.

But when you saw those tears of operatic exhilaration roll down her cheeks, your joy ultimately came from the knowledge that you had done a very good thing, and from the realization that you had won her heart.

Here’s the punch line:

Relationships in business are won in analogous ways: by paying nearly obsessive attention to the needs, desires, hopes, and aspirations of everyone who touches your business and acting on what you’ve learned before they ask. By knowing not only when to say no and stand firm on principle – there is such a thing as tough love – but also when to sacrifice some of your own short-term needs in order for your clients to be successful in the long run.

And they will love you for it.

Think of a current client, partner, or prospect in light of the Early Romantic Encounter. How are you stacking up?

THE EXTREME LEADER’S MANTRA

It’s always true, but particularly in these challenging times, you have to find a way to fall in love with your life’s work; otherwise, your energy will wane, your voice will falter, and there will be nothing to prove but the fact that you’re taking up valuable space.

And you certainly won’t be helping to develop and perpetuate the Extreme Leadership approach that our world so desperately needs right now.

I believe that our individual and collective challenge is to live up to this ideal:

Do what you love in the service of people who love what you do.

There are three parts to this mantra:

1. *Do what you love:* Make sure that your heart’s in your work, and that you’re bringing yourself fully and gratefully into everything you do. If you’re not connected to your own work, you can’t expect to inspire others in theirs.
2. *In the service of people:* This is what keeps you true, honest, and ethical at the very least. If you’re doing what you love, you’ll make yourself happy, but if that’s all you’re doing, you’re a narcissist, not a leader. Leadership is not only about you; it’s about your impact on others and your ability to help transform things for the better. Ideally, for all of us.

3. *Who love what you do:* This doesn't mean that you should only find the people who already love you and just serve them – although it may, in some circumstances. (Have you ever fired a client, for example? I have). Mostly, it means it's your responsibility to give everyone you serve something significant to love about you and what you're doing for them.

How close are you to living this ideal? What can you change in order to get closer?

THE RADICAL QUESTION

The powerful Net Promoter Score system started out by asking a very simple question: *What is the likelihood that you would recommend Company X to a friend or colleague?*

And if you think about what that question really asks, we end up with the significant conclusion that NPS essentially measures the degree to which your customers love your company.

In a post on the Net Promoter blog, Intuit CEO, Brad Smith, says that their product guys call NPS the “love metric.” And it boils down to the question, “Will customers love [our product] so much that they will recommend it to friends?” And the more your customers love your company, product, or service, the more successful you'll be.

Since “cultivate Love,” is, of course, the core of the LEAP Extreme Leadership framework, this comes as no surprise to any readers of this blog or of my books. And “Do What You Love in the Service of People Who Love What You Do,” has long been the Extreme Leader's credo.

As I look back over the last 20 years at the rise of individual-as-brand/CEO-of-your-own life kind of thinking (which gathered a lot of steam with Tom Peter's groundbreaking 1997 *The Brand Called You* article in *Fast-Company* magazine), it occurs to me that we should all be asking a similar, “Love Metric” question about ourselves, our lives, and the way we lead.

But let's make it a bit more direct by turning the credo into a Radical Question:

To what degree are you doing what you love in the service of people who love what you do?

Try an experiment:

Think about yourself. Take the full measure of your business and personal life, including all your circumstances, relationships and roles co-worker, businessperson, parent, friend, neighbor – and conduct an honest, self-assessment by breaking down the Radical Question into three parts:

To what degree...

...are you doing what you love?

...are you serving others?

...do others love the service you provide them?

That's a good starting place, and I suspect it'll provoke some great insights.

Try it out and let me know what you discover.

LOVE AND THE DEFENSE CONTRACTOR

For those of you who think that love in business is a soft, California, group hug, hoo-ha kind of thing, I offer this story from a sourcing agent at a defense contractor. His job is to procure the materials his company needs to make guns, missiles, and other things that go boom. Most of us would consider that to be the polar opposite of “soft stuff,” true? We would be right. That’s why even more of us struggle with the very idea of love as an operating principle in that kind of business.

We would be wrong.

From his email to me after my speech at his company (used with his permission):

“I recently had to acquire material necessary for training our soldiers to deploy a device that will save many of the lives of our troops in the field. We received the contract for these devices from the Marine Corps. The lead time for this material we needed was quoted at 6-8 weeks. We needed it in 1 week. I figured the very best we could hope for was 4-6 weeks with some arm twisting. The supplier could not and would not accept premium dollars for overtime. We couldn’t throw enough money at the problem.

During the course of our conversation, I simply related to the supplier that I was not their customer. Our mutual customer was the Marine in the field, whose very life could depend on what we did. I do not believe that I was being dramatic, nor was I waving the flag. I simply stated the facts. That same afternoon, I received a call that the lead time would be reduced to 1 week. In fact, the supplier wound up shipping a day earlier than they promised. They had pulled together all of their team and did what couldn’t be done under normal business conditions.

I’d like to think that my skills as a negotiator had something to do with it, but that would be far short of the truth. Especially after listening to your talk, I’m convinced that something far more powerful was at work.

On my desk I have two 8x10 photos of Marines. People often ask me why I have 2 pictures of the same Marine. Most of the Marines look alike in their uniforms anyway, but these two are [my identical twin sons]. They joined the Corps a few months apart, and both of them finished their service about 10 years ago. I still display their photos with pride. When I see them, I can’t help but think about all our Marines on duty. Whenever I see a Marine, it’s like seeing my own.

Maybe it was the genuine Love I have for those Marines that came across the phone. After all, you did say it was contagious.”

Amen to that.

LOVE OF WHAT

Tragically, very few leaders and businesspeople take the time to reflect on why they care about anything they do; why they care about the decisions they make; why they care about their customers and employees; or why they care about their business beyond the paycheck and bottom line.

And even for those that do, the act of “caring,” as important as it is, doesn’t go far enough. Because our real efficacy as leaders – and, I’d argue, all human beings – is rooted, ultimately, in love.

Love of what future we’re trying to create together, love of what principle we’re trying to live out, love of what people I have around me, and love of what they want for their lives. Love of what customers I have, and love of

what customers I might have in the future if I'm smarter, faster, and more creative in serving their needs. Love of what impact we can have on the lives of our customers and—if we're audacious enough – on the world as a whole. Love of what our business really is, and love for what—when we cut away the chaff – we really do every day.

And why is this so critical?

Because if I love who we are, and if I love what we can be, then I'll love the process of how we get there. And in order to make it all happen, I will act boldly and courageously and I will, at times, fail magnificently. But my love demands that I try.

Demands it.

What can you do to fall in love with something about your work, your colleagues, your team, your clients, your customers and – bottom line – your life?

WHAT IF YOU DON'T LOVE YOUR WORK?

The ideal state for all of us at work—from leadership to the front line—is to do what you love in the service of people who love what you do.

The emotion of love is often considered to be out of place or simply inappropriate in the world of business. Many even believe that good business people keep their hearts out of their work, but the opposite is true. It's the heart that brings the fire of creativity to bear on the day-to-day. It's the heart that inspires drive, loyalty and leaps of innovative brilliance.

I'm NOT saying you should love every aspect of your work or job. We all have things that we have to do whether we like (let alone “love”) them or not. We have a technical term for that; it's called “being an adult.”

So here's the key: If you DON'T like your job, your company, your boss or the people you work with, then don't start by jumping to the conclusion that you're in the wrong place (you may be—just don't start there). The first step is to find something – *anything* – about your work that you do love (and if love's too strong of a word for you, I'll accept “like” or “care about”).

Is there colleague at the office you enjoy working with? Are there particular clients or customers who appreciate the great work you do for them? Is there a role model in your company that you look up to and get inspiration from? Is there something about the principles or mission of your company that you find personally gratifying?

In the day-to-day crush and pressure of things, it's very easy to forget about the good and meaningful elements of your job; yet, if you intentionally remind yourself of those things and focus on them for a time – you'll find that your level of personal satisfaction, energy, and enthusiasm will come back. Sometimes right away.

So, next Monday morning, after you brush your teeth and have your coffee, instead of allowing yourself to be overcome with a sense of dread about the imminent workday and week, ask yourself this question:

“What do I love (or at least “like”) about this work/company/team/project/colleague/client, etc... and how can I show it in the way I work?”

And if you find that you have absolutely no answer to any variation of that question – not even if you squint – then let me offer a simple, one-word answer to your dilemma: **Leave.**



IDEAS FOR
GENERATING
MORE ENERGY



GIVE THEM REASON

“If you shout loud enough for long enough, a crowd will gather to see what all the noise is about. It’s the nature of crowds. They don’t stay long, unless you give them reason.” – Michael Cunningham, *The Hours*

It’s become conventional wisdom that in order to get people excited about the present, you should talk about the future. You should have a vision of where you’re aspiring to go and communicate it in a formal statement.

In fact, just about any business book you pick up will tell you that you need to have a vision statement, so any company that’s done its required reading will have one. And it often develops like this:

A group of senior executives – now known as the “Executive Team” – goes away on an off-site, sits down together, and has a poetry contest. They try to hammer out just the right words and phrases, and they argue for hours – days, sometimes – over the word choices.

“Should we call them *customers* or *clients*, are they *shareholders* or *stakeholders*, do we have *employees* or are they *associates*?”

They tear their hair out, and they threaten, and they fight, and ultimately – at the end of the day – they have created a magnificent document, and they’re so proud.

So, what do they do? They laminate it on little wallet-sized cards, hand it out to everyone in the organization, and hang a full-color calligraphy version in the reception areas.

And then they stand back and wait for the people to change and the magic – the energy – to happen.

But it doesn’t.

I’m not cynical about vision statements or the workshop processes and dialogue used to create them. In fact, I think those things are valuable because they create a STARTING POINT, not the now-we-can-check-vision-off-our-list END point, which is, unfortunately, how most companies treat them. To paraphrase the quote above, people will gather around to read the vision statement, but they won’t stay, engage and energize around it, until you give them reason.

Workshop-engineered vision statements by themselves don’t generate energy, love does. Great ideas, principles, and values do.

Your own example does.

CONNECT THE HEARTS AND BURN THE VISION STATEMENT

To generate energy, put away the vision statement and personally strive to connect the hearts of the people you’re leading and working with.

Without that connection, you may have a peer-peer, or a employer-employee thing going on, or a bureaucratic boss-subordinate “relationship.” But people who don’t resonate heart to heart won’t try to change the world together. And if you’re not trying to change the world, you haven’t entered the realm of the Extreme Leader.

So how do you establish that connection?

By revealing yourself as a human being to those you hope to lead. So, instead of reciting a vision statement, feel the intent of that statement, reflect on the ideals that it represents, and take it all into your own heart. Then at every opportunity—whether you're talking one-on-one or standing in front of a crowd—you say, in essence:

This is who I am, this is what I believe, this is what I think we can do together if we put our hearts into it. Look at how magnificent our future can be. Please join me and let's help each other make this happen.

Then you can burn the Vision Statement, because, in effect, you have become it. And the resulting connection is electric.

Energy. Generated straight from the heart.

3 CONVERSATIONS TO ENERGIZE YOUR TEAMS

No matter the structure of your team, no matter the challenge your team is working on, and no matter the proximity (or lack thereof) of its members, there are three ingredients all successful teams have in common:

1. They are all made up of human beings
2. Humans perform better with great leadership (although not necessarily the traditional top-down kind).
3. Great team leaders generate energy by fostering meaningful connection among the members of the team.

Teams thrive on collaboration made up of meaningful connection with one another, and individual team members will perform better when they feel like they're all in it together. You need to connect your team members to one another on a personal level. So, if you find yourself leading (or being expected to lead) a virtual team, your primary job is to go out of your way to facilitate the very interpersonal connection that remoteness tends to inhibit.

And while nothing encourages trust and connection better than good old locked-in-the-same-room, face-to-face, oxygen-sharing meetings and social time, assume that you'll never have that luxury with your virtual team. Even though it is, arguably, easier to lead a team that lives under the same roof, that's a rarity these days. The good news is you can still get your team to know, trust and commit to each other by using virtual collaboration tools like web conferencing and social workspaces to enjoy face-to-face conversations and continuous collaboration.

Connection is all about conversation, and, as the team lead, you're in charge of making sure those conversations happen.

So, what do you think? What conversations do you need to have with your team to get them energized, connected, on the same page, and ready to work together across time and distance?

Here are my top 3 conversations to create an energized team:

Conversation 1: Personal Discovery

To prepare for Conversation 1, write down the names of the people on your team. Now, list everything you know about each person – beyond the team function he or she serves. Do you know anything about their family? How about previous companies they've worked for? Can you list any successes they may have had or failures

they've endured? Do you know anything at all about their personal and professional hopes, needs, dreams and aspirations for the future? Assess how much you know or don't know about each as a human being. The less you know, the more tenuous your trust and connection is with that person.

Each day for the next week, connect with as many people on your team as possible through a medium other than email; video conferencing is the best alternative to an in-person meeting, but you could use the phone too. And instead of getting right down to business, spend some time checking in on a personal level with the goal of learning as much as you can about who this person is and what makes him or her tick.

As uncomfortable as this might be at first, ask each person to share with you his or her number one business/career/work challenge. Now dig a little deeper, and try to uncover a personal goal or dream. And if the opportunity presents itself, learn at least one important story or event from his or her life.

With some, you may have to coax a bit – but you'll be surprised how many will open up right away. And once they do...

Ask if there's some way you can be of service – is there something you can do to help with their challenge or get them closer to their personal goal? Even if that person declines your offer, he or she will appreciate your asking.

At the end of the week, you'll not only have a much deeper knowledge of each individual on your team, you'll have shown each individual that you care. And then you'll be ready for The 2nd Conversation.

Conversation 2: What Is This Project or Team Really About?

John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems, once said in an interview that a business should be able to identify and articulate its *"higher meaning and purpose."* Yes, money is important. So are the deliverables, client outcomes, job descriptions and expectations etc. – all those things we learned back in Project Management 101. But human beings have a deep, primal need to be a part of something great, something significant, something meaningful. And if you can tap into that need and help to fill it for your team members, they'll put much more energy and creativity into their work. Your job as a leader of this virtual team, therefore, is to cut quickly through the transactional elements of the work, go right to the essence of its meaning and then lay it out clearly for all involved.

The first step is for you: Carve out some solo time to think about your project and reflect on the challenge ahead. Ask yourself the following questions and write down your responses and answers:

4. What is this project really about—beyond its obvious transactional activities and details?
5. What kind of impact are we trying to have on the lives of our customers/end users?
6. How does each of us contribute to the enhancement of our end user's life and business?

Feel free to add other similar questions and allow yourself to follow your musings wherever they take you.

When you're satisfied with your answers (you'll know because of how energized and inspired you feel), the next step is really quite simple: Talk about it with your team.

Share it on your screen in your web conferences and ask people to respond. Ask them to think about the same questions and share their answers at a subsequent meeting.

Watch what happens to the energy of the team.

Conversation 3: What Does Success Look Like For Us?

It's become conventional wisdom that in order to get people excited about the present, you should talk about the future. You should have a vision of where you're aspiring to go and communicate it clearly to all the stakeholders. Well, the conventional wisdom is true, but the practice is rare.

As important as vision is to us, the act of having and communicating vision is mysterious and even intimidating to most. But there's really nothing mysterious about its value: The clearer and more inspiring the picture of our end goal is, the more committed we are in the work we're doing today to make that vision a reality.

Your job, then, is to paint a clear and compelling picture of the end state of the project. Not to worry, though! There's no crystal ball required for this. Vision isn't about predicting the future, it's about envisioning what you're striving to create, then describing that end-state in vivid detail.

Here's a simple process that you can do on your own or with your team:

Roll the clock forward and imagine that your project is complete, and that it was a phenomenal, earth-shattering success. Pretend it's all been done, and then "remember" the following:

1. Make a list of everything you accomplished as a team.
2. Write down all the ways you and each of your team members gained personally from having worked on this project.
3. Describe the legacy you've left behind, the reputation you've established individually and collectively, how your clients describe the impact you've had on them, etc.

Now, using those notes as a guide, come back to present day and write at least one paragraph to complete this statement: "At the end of our project, here's what our success will look like..."

These conversations do require some time and energy (what great relationships don't?), but they don't have to be an all-consuming effort. Even if your team is working on a tight deadline, or if you'll only be working together for a short period of time, your investment in these conversations will, I believe, ultimately save you time. But you'll need to be smart about the platform you use to create the dialogue and share your perspectives.

SPRING CLEANING

Not that this kind of thing should be reserved exclusively for springtime, but any excuse for a good, old-fashioned eradication.

So, there's no time like the present to purge the energy-suckers around you and yours. Here's your challenge:

Get rid of the things in your work life that sap you and your folks of the energy required to do great things—the unnecessary, bureaucratic policies and procedures that suck the life out of you.

Encourage yourself and others to root out and discard any work that hinders your cause. Determine what you might be doing that keeps you from fulfilling your goals and dreams, as well as your customers'.

Now, stop doing them. Figure out what must be changed to make your office a more interesting, exciting, and awesome place to work.

What will you start with today?



IDEAS FOR
INSPIRING
MORE AUDACITY



WHICH AUDACITY ARE YOU?

My dear friend, Matt Brandt, once described “audacity,” as “a bold and blatant disregard for normal constraints,” and from that moment on, those words have been emblazoned on my brain.

If you look up the word “audacious” in Webster’s Thesaurus, however, you’ll see that it has several, very different connotations. One, as it relates to words like courageous, heroic, and gallant, and another is the audacity synonymous with impudence, temerity, or brazenness.

The difference between the two meanings comes down to love versus ego. Love-inspired audacity is courageous and bold and filled with valor. It’s the kind of audacity that’s required to change the world for the better.

Ego-inspired audacity is just annoying, irritating, or even – when taken to an extreme – dangerous. Some people are audacious just for the purpose of drawing attention to themselves, grabbing the spotlight, puffing themselves up, or advancing their own agenda. They have no care or concern about the impact of their behavior or action on anyone else. They’re not concerned about anything except their image.

And, therefore, they certainly don’t qualify for Extreme Leader. Not in my book, anyway.

If you think of yourself as an audacious person – or aspire to be one – I’d encourage you to ask this critical question:

“In order to do what?”

If your answer falls anywhere south of “in order to change my piece of the world for the better,” you’re not there yet. Technically, you may be acting audaciously, but – if I may be blunt – the rest of us will experience you as nothing more than a pain in the patootie. (I’ve always wanted to use that in a sentence).

So up the ante and raise the stakes. Be bold. Be blatant. Disregard the normal constraints in order to leave this place better than you found it.

And that’s as audacious an intent as I can imagine.

A BOLD AND BLATANT DISREGARD FOR NORMAL CONSTRAINTS

The Extreme Leader is audacious not to serve his or her own ego, but to serve the common good – and to do so boldly and blatantly and let the naysayers be damned.

But watch out.

The most common and insidious “normal constraints” are ones imposed on you by others. This imposition isn’t malicious, necessarily. It just comes from their sad, limited set of beliefs about what’s possible.

Don’t let their beliefs become yours.

Presumed limitations take many forms. Whenever you see a better way to do things or better things to do, **make a list of all the “normal constraints” that seem to be holding you back.**

Are they systems, policies, or procedures? Is it a particular person or group of people? Do you doubt yourself? Or is your company’s history holding you back? Many audacious ideas and actions have been thwarted by

the simple words: “We tried that once, and it didn’t work then,” or “That’ll never work around here; it’s just not the way we do it,” or “You’re dreaming.”

Now, for all the right reasons, disregard that list.

And then ask (and answer) the following question. It is the ultimate audacity question because of its scope and extraordinary possibilities. It is impossible to be an Extreme Leader without putting this question at the center of your agenda:

“How are we going to change the world?”

You can tackle that by thinking – literally – about the entire world, the global community. And bless you for thinking that way. By the same token, however, it is no less noble to ask (and answer) this question:

How are we going to change the world of our company, employees, customers, marketplace, and industry?

Remember, the “entire world” is made up solely of people like the ones you touch in your personal and professional life. So, why not start with your world? Every “normal constraint” in the proverbial book will tell you that this question is unrealistic and a waste of time. Boldly and blatantly disregard that book.

Now... ask others to join you in this endeavor; show them what you think is possible, and show them that your belief in their capabilities is greater than their belief in their own. Ask others to help you to change the world...

...and you have just inspired audacity.

PURSUE THE OS!M

Extreme Leadership is intensely personal and intrinsically scary. You are striving to change the nature of things, and that’s a scary endeavor because you are asking yourself and others to give up the familiar. It is scary because you have no guarantee of a positive outcome. It is scary because you don’t know how you are personally going to be judged; your credibility is on the line. There is no way – absolutely no way, therefore – to participate in an authentic leadership experience without fear.

We’ve been conditioned to believe that fear is “bad.” And while it’s true that fear can save your life or keep you from doing something stupid, avoiding it can also keep you from doing something great, from learning something new, and from growing as a human being. Fear is a natural part of growth, and since growth, change and revolution are all on the Extreme Leader’s agenda, fear comes with the territory.

In the right context, therefore, your experience of fear (or exhilaration, for that matter) is your internal indicator that you’re moving in the right direction. That you really are leading, in other words. That scary/exhilarating experience is what I call the Oh Shit! Moment or OS!M.

To put it bluntly: if you’re using all the buzzwords and reading all the latest leadership books, and holding forth at every meeting on the latest management fads, but you’re not experiencing that visceral churning in your gut, and you’re not scaring yourself every day, and you’re not feeling that OhShit!Moment as regularly as clockwork, then you are not doing anything significant – let alone changing the world – and you are certainly not leading anyone else.

As an Extreme Leader, your OS!Ms will happen as a result of your taking a Radical LEAP every day.

HOW ONE COMPANY MEASURES AUDACITY

Here's an excerpt of an actual performance appraisal used by a company to measure Audacity.:

INSPIRING AUDACITY: Demonstrating a bold and blatant disregard for normal constraints in pursuit of the good of the team and the world of our contractors and clients.

(The scale is 1 to 5 where 1 = Unacceptable, 2 = Passable, 3 = On Par, 4 = Strong, 5 = Extraordinary)

1. Stays within the lines or doesn't demonstrate the ability to discern when it's appropriate to disregard norms and perceived limitations in pursuit of changing the world of our teammates, contractors and clients. Struggles to overcome the barrier of fear of failure.
2. Demonstrates the ability to discern when it's appropriate to disregard norms and perceived limitations in pursuit of changing the world of our teammates, contractors and clients; occasionally acts on it. Understands the difference between OS!M's and reckless abandon. Can let fear of failure prevent audacious actions.
3. Sees obstacles as simply something to be overcome in the pursuit of the OS!M. Accepts that fear is part of the package for the extreme leader and embraces it as a symbol of the potential for personal development & growth. Demonstrates a consistent personal commitment to carving out own future in line with understood company objectives.
4. Has a good sense of when to disregard norms and perceived limitations in pursuit of changing the world of our teammates, contractors and clients and acts courageously to make the right things happen. Inspires and supports audacious behaviors in others & demonstrates success at helping people learn from OS!Ms.
5. Inspires & supports audacity in teammates. Demonstrates a bold and blatant disregard for normal constraints and acts courageously to make the right things happen. Willing to fail miserably and enthusiastically share learnings with others in pursuit of changing the world.

THIS AIN'T NO KUMBAYA

In describing Extreme Leadership, I use a lot of words that have been traditionally written off as soft, squishy, kumbaya stuff by people who think of themselves as hard-core, no-nonsense, business types.

It doesn't bother me, though, because, frankly, the sun is setting on those folks.

All you have to do is look at the economy in the wake of Enron, Andersen, WorldCom, Imclone, and Tyco (remember them?), followed by the Madoff debacle, the sub-prime blow up and the Wall St. melt down; all you had to do was watch your 401(k) and mortgage evaporate with your retirement dreams, and it should be glaringly obvious that trust and love and values are anything but touchy-feely.

Now, even average people on the street know that integrity and their bank accounts are intimately connected. Because they've experienced it the hard way. Trust and love and humanity *are* hard-core business principles. Well, how about that?

And understanding this, it's time for us to step up as Extreme Leaders.

Thankfully, the term "Corporate Social Responsibility" has become the buzz-word du jour. So, let's take ourselves at our word. Let's make this a new era of love-inspired audacity and set an example of what's right in business and everywhere else. We have to be audacious enough to follow the examples we respect and challenge the ones we don't.

Do you agree?

Then I say the world needs you right now. It needs your influence and your audacious action. And your actions will require you to find strength in your heart. Never let anyone tell you that your heart's not big enough, and don't believe the hype that the world is controlled by a select few. Nobody controls your world unless you choose to let them.

This is the time to shift the image, behavior, and ultimately, the legacy of business, and you do that through your own behavior and example.

You may not think you can change the Whole World that we live in (and you may be wrong) but you can certainly change the world—small w—that you and yours live in: the world of your company, the world of your employees, the world of your industry, or the world of your family. To deny that is to deny your capability as a human being.

And that ain't no Kumbaya.

5 WORDS YOU'LL NEVER HEAR ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

Every election year, I find myself amazed all over again at the phenomenal effort our elected and would-be elected officials put into the denial of their own mistakes. They don't ever want to fess up to anything, it seems.

5 words you'll never hear on the campaign trail:

"Here's How I Screwed Up."

I get it; I understand their motives. They want to get nominated, elected, or re-elected, and they don't want to give any more grist to their competitors' meat-grinding mill than absolutely necessary. They want to look perfect. They want to look invulnerable. They want us to love them. Or, at least, tolerate them just enough.

I understand that leadership in the political arena is, in many ways, different from the day-to-day, up-close-and-personal leadership you and I practice in our places of work. But, still, I think our politicians are missing the main point:

There's no such thing as a perfect human being, and the minute one tries to appear to be perfect, he or she is automatically suspect.

So, how about we all stop trying so hard to market ourselves as flawless?

In fact, how's about we boldly talk about our mistakes and share what we learned from the experience of falling and failing and flailing?

Again, many people – most, in fact – in positional authority are afraid that if they publicly cop to their mistakes (and fears, too), others will see them as incompetent. (Competence is an important part of the game, certainly. Let's agree right now that if you're incompetent you should just get out of the way). But there is a difference between mistakes of incompetence and mistakes associated with boldness, innovation or experimentation.

Here's the question: How bold and public are you willing to be with your own valuable screw-ups? In other words, how willing are you to let us learn from your mistakes? Whether you're running for office or not.

How have you screwed up?

Care to go first?

THE (MOST?) FUNDAMENTAL LEADERSHIP QUESTION

Are you frustrated with some of the things you're seeing around you at work? Do you wish that “those people” (whomever they might be) would just get their acts together and give you the resources, support, time, etc that you need to do what you need to do? Do you find yourself saying something like “If these freakin' customers would just leave me alone, I could get my job done around here”?

Well... you *are* human. I get that. And we all have to deal with at least some people who need attitude adjustments – or maybe even lobotomies.

I get that, too.

Nonetheless, as valid as it might feel, finger-pointing is the last thing we should be engaging in – particularly if we aspire to be worthy of the handle, Extreme Leader.

There's that old cliché that says for every finger you point at someone else, there are three pointing back at you. A little over-used, maybe? Kind of sappy? Yeah, I guess. But it's still true. And it serves as a damn good reminder.

So, the next time you find your digit poking in some else's direction, stop and ask yourself this (most?) fundamental of all leadership questions:

“What can I do, right now, regardless of what anyone else around here is or is not doing, to change my piece of this company/organization/world for the better?”

The solutions that pop out may very well surprise you. Let me know what happens.

And don't forget to watch your fingers.

A PERSONAL VOW FOR CHALLENGING TIMES

I've always found it inspiring when couples renew their vows to each other. It's their way of saying, *after all we've been through together, you and I, we carve out this moment to remind each other of our mutual love, devotion and commitment.* And to re-affirm that they still mean it.

But I don't often (ever?) hear of people renewing vows to themselves.

For many of us, there's nothing to renew because we never made a conscious one to begin with.

Have you ever made a vow to yourself? I think it's a powerful idea, particularly in these challenging times.

So powerful, in fact, that I'd like to offer to go first.

Here's mine:

As of now, I take up a calling, rooted in love, to transform the particulars of my life.

From this day forward, I will, with every bit of energy and audacity I can muster, approach my relationships, my work, and my activities with the expressed intent of changing everything I touch for the better.

The proof of my success will be the legacy I leave, the imprint I make, and the people I boost up along the way.

And if, from time to time, I fall short of the mark or even "fail" completely, I won't have the slightest residue of regret, because my intent will always be noble.

I will Leap, dammit.

And it will be exhilarating.

Now it's your turn; try writing your personal vow and see if it makes you feel and act any different.



IDEAS FOR
PROVIDING
MORE PROOF



PROVIDE PROOF

Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner have shown that credibility is the foundation of leadership, and they go on to define credibility behaviorally as DWYSYWD: Do What You Say You Will Do. If it's true that leaders lead by their own example, it follows then that Extreme Leaders lead by their own extreme example. You have to put your skin in the game, put yourself and your reputation at risk. You have to prove yourself through significant, observable, daily action. It's insanely easy to talk a good game. (How many buzzwords per minute can you crank out?) Do you say you love your team? Prove it! Do you say we need to be bold and inventive for our customers? Prove it! Do you tell your folks that they're "your most important asset"? Prove it and prove it again in every action that you take.

The minute you say the words, "I can't do that in this organization" or "they won't let me," your credibility as an Extreme Leader is shot. On the other hand, when you are absolutely convinced that you can change your organization, family or community for the better, you have to prove it through the radical courage of your own action. As British management guru, Charles Handy, says in *The Hungry Spirit*, "If we want to see more of the good news than the bad we will have to do it for ourselves. It is no good waiting for some unidentified 'they' to fix our world for us." Gandhi said it this way: "Be the change you want to see in the world." And you already know how Nike says it.

A 7 WORD SEQUENCE THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

I'm over ½ a century on this planet, and I'm embarrassed to say that it's taken me so long to figure this out:

People who consistently follow through on their words are exceedingly rare.

Unfortunately, most of us, no matter how well-intentioned we may be, let our words fly out of our mouths with reckless abandon without realizing that the person we're talking to is hearing us with critical precision.

We think we're just spewing words; they're hearing a commitment, a pledge, a vow to follow up and deliver.

I believe that we've let ourselves get away with mindless lip flapping for far too long; therefore, let me suggest this: if you could, somehow, hold yourself ridiculously accountable to your own words, if you spoke with a contractual attitude, you could earn a tremendous competitive advantage over 99% of the population. You could earn the rare status of the person whose word truly is their bond. Imagine the cred you'd gain.

I don't mean to be preachy. Truth is, I'm lecturing myself more than anyone. None of us is perfect, and neither is the world we live in. But I can tell you this: since I've been thinking deeply about this subject, I am intensely more aware of my own words, and much more upset with myself when I don't follow through on even the smallest of commitments. Because in truth, there is no such thing as a small commitment, simply because each feels gigantic to the recipient.

So, yeah, I've been beating up on myself more than usual. But the good news is that I'm also getting much better at that follow-through thing.

So let's try something together. For the next week, pay very close attention to your own words and challenge yourself to treat your every utterance as though you've just signed a contract. Just try it. See what it does to your thought process, and, even more important, your actions. And I'll do the same.

Because I said I would. (Get the point?)

Years ago, Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner coined a 7-word phrase that would change everything if we took it seriously:

DWYSYWD: Do What You Say You Will Do

Try it for a week and see what happens.

4 STEPS TO TRACKING YOUR COMMITMENTS

In response to the challenge in the previous section, Bob “Batch” Batcheler launched himself on a personal Do What You Say You Will Do campaign. He shared his experience in the comments on stevefarber.com:

“One of the things that I am trying to do is to write down EVERY commitment/promise that I make. While that may sound obvious, it is a real change in habit for me. It makes each commitment much more real, much more like a contract. I am capturing them in Evernote, so they are always with me. I will let you know how my progress goes.”

True to his word, Batch reported back the following week:

“So here’s my score – 69 promises kept out of 107 promises made. I am batting 0.644; better than I feared, but nowhere near what I aspire to. Here was my process – for the past week, I captured every promise / commitment I made. As some of the other folks suggested in their comments, I captured promises to myself, my family, my co-workers and anyone else that I interact with. I also captured implied commitments, like the one I made to you to let you know my progress. Then, at the end of each day, I scored myself, rolling over/rescheduling any promises not kept that day. A promise rolled over to another day counts as unkept in the total, and kept when it is delivered; I am not sure about that part of my scoring – that that’s the right way to account for something not done – but it does force me to evaluate when I can actually deliver on a promise that’s blown. There probably should be some metric for promises delivered when originally promised. I may try that next week.”

If you’d like to build on Batch’s work and/or try it out for yourself, here’s a simple 4-Step Process to get you started:

1. Capture every *overt* promise/commitment you make to

- Yourself
- Your family
- Your coworkers
- Your clients
- Your prospects
- Your etc.

2. Capture every *implied* promise/commitment you make.

- Be hyper-aware of the casual, thinking-out-loud things you say that could be interpreted by the listener as a commitment, and write those down, too.

3. Score yourself at the end of each day.

- Tally up the promises you followed through on, and roll over the pending ones to the next day.

4. Assess your performance at the end of the week.

- How many promises did you keep?
- How many did you either forget about or consciously blow off?
- How will you adjust this “audit” process to better suit your own needs?
- How did this experience make you feel?
- What did you learn from this process?

Any takers?

PROVE TO OTHERS THAT YOU'RE PROVING IT TO YOURSELF

Extreme Leadership is not a solo act; it doesn't happen in a vacuum. You're not going to change the world by yourself. It's your job to recruit, cultivate, and develop the up and coming Extreme Leaders in your midst. This is nothing new. You've heard it before: develop people. True, true, and true again.

However...

The most overlooked way to develop Extreme Leadership in others is to let them participate in your development. You be the living, breathing example of a work-in-progress.

That's what we all are anyway, right? Say to them, Watch me try. Give others the benefits of your OS!Ms.

That's right. Pursue your OS!Ms in full, public view. Show others that you're learning, you're trying, and that you're botching it up from time to time. Then let them in on what you've learned.

Guess what will happen?

They'll try, too. You've proven to others that you're proving it to yourself. They'll want to prove it to themselves, too. But don't leave it there.

Invite them to share in your development—directly—by asking these questions:

What do I need to do to improve as an Extreme Leader?

Where am I screwing up?

Where am I doing well, and how can I get better?

And don't stop asking until you get their answers—until you've proven that you mean it.

4 STEPS FOR EXTREME FEEDBACK

It's the oldest skill in the management texts: listen to your employees. Seek their input. But it's not enough to ask for feedback; you have to be genuinely interested in the response especially if you think you won't like it. Those posing as leaders seek feedback because HR has ordered them to do it, not because they're really interested.

Extreme Leaders will not only use 360-degree assessments (which can be powerful tools when used effectively), but they seek extreme feedback face-to-face because they know they need it in order to be great. If you're willing to hear the unpleasant truths about yourself – or at least about how you're being perceived – and you're ready to use them to progress in your journey as a leader, then these Extreme Feedback steps should be just the ticket:

1. Put Yourself at Risk By asking for feedback (and meaning it) you automatically put yourself in what can feel like an exposed, underbelly-up-to-the-mad-wolves position. But – and this is counter-intuitive – it's really a very strong position for a leader to be in. We follow human beings, not idealized icons of unattainable perfection, so your vulnerability gives us the opportunity to connect with you human to human, and a strong human connection engenders commitment and loyalty, the elements that every leader longs for in his or her team. Putting yourself at risk when asking for extreme feedback not only gives you the chance to learn from those around you, it deepens the relationships as well.

Take your risk by personally going to your team – either one-on-one or as a group – and asking them to tell you what, specifically, you need to do to improve as an Extreme Leader.

2. Accept What You Hear (And Show It) Take copious notes as they're answering your question. Don't defend yourself, justify, or make excuses for what you're hearing (and writing). If you'd like, ask some questions to make sure you fully understand each item, and talk it through to make sure you're understand the details and context with crystal clarity.

And then, when they're all done, when they've unloaded all there is to unload, read your notes back, out loud, and check to be sure you've captured it all accurately.

And then, look him, her, or them in the eye and say these two words straight from your heart:

“Thank you.”

3. Do Something About It Nobody will realistically expect you to start at item one and work your way down the list, fixing each one in turn. But they will (and should) expect to see you try. Let them see what you're doing, where you're improving, and where you need their help to improve. Prove through your own actions that you're taking their input to heart.

4. Close the Loop (and Start a New One) After a month or so, have a follow up conversation to review your notes and discuss your progress (or lack thereof). And then start it all over again.

CAUTION: DO NOT ATTEMPT UNLESS YOU REALLY, SINCERELY DESIRE TO HEAR THE TRUTH AND ARE WILLING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

If you do try this, however, you'll find that you'll soon earn the right to ask the people from whom you've been getting feedback to go forth and replicate the process with their teams, colleagues, co-workers and clients. You'll soon find that even though you started out attempting to improve your leadership skills, you'll end up setting a new standard of communication and openness throughout the organization.

And that's the kind of organization that cultivates Extreme Leaders at every level.

(I) HAIL THE FIRST-PERSON SINGULAR PRONOUN

If you work for a company – small, mid-sized, corporate behemoth, whatever – chances are pretty good that you've been provided with a company values statement. Chances are also good that it's laminated in a convenient wallet-sized card that does not, funnily enough, reside in your wallet. Readers of *The Radical Leap* will know that I'm dubious at best about the value of values statements. I think there's a major problem with almost all of them, but it's not, you may be surprised to hear, in the way they're written. It's in the way we read them.

The problem is in the pronouns.

Allow me to demonstrate with this excerpt from Home Depot's corporate values statement. (This isn't a commentary on Home Depot, per se; they just came out near the top when I Googled "values statement" corporate). Here's how it's written:

Doing the right thing: We exercise good judgment by "doing the right thing" instead of just "doing things right." We strive to understand the impact of our decisions, and we accept responsibility for our actions.

The problem is that many people will interpret the pronoun "we" as "other people around here; a group that doesn't necessarily include me."

Now try reading it this way:

Doing the right thing: I exercise good judgment by "doing the right thing" instead of just "doing things right." I strive to understand the impact of my decisions, and I accept responsibility for my actions.

Feels different, doesn't it? That's the power of the first-person singular pronoun. That's the power of "I": nothing's going to happen around here unless I do something about it.

So, back to your company's statement. Go find it, dust it off, and read it again with a new set of first-person singulars – change the "we's" to "I's" and the "ours" to "my's". How do you feel when you read it that way?

Guilty, perhaps?

Good.

Maybe we should do something about that.