

Leadership Manifesto

26 Principles for Leading in 2026

1 Get Comfortable with Uncomfortable

Chaos and uncertainty run counter to our human need for control. But Chaos is a natural and necessary step as we transition from one state of order into another. Just like you can't take a shower without getting wet. Feel the discomfort certainly, but recognise it also as evidence of progress and one step closer where we want to go. It doesn't last forever, it will pass...and meantime it's OK not to feel OK.

2 Concentrate on Strengths

Do you, and your significant people get to do what you do best every day? Nobody is great at everything. Even the most talented leaders spike in one or two areas. Concentrate your time and effort on knowing and strengthening your superpower (and the super-power of those around you). No matter how much you work on your kryptonite, it will still be kryptonite.

3 Don't compromise on your Values

If you do, you may gain in the short-term but the conceding on your Values will continue to aggravate you like a stone in your shoe...and one you can never take off.

4 Hold your Assumptions lightly, not tightly.

In a world so volatile, ambiguous and fragilely balanced, yesterday's firm convictions can rapidly become tomorrow's fallacies. Re-evaluate your assumptions on a regular basis. And hold them lightly, not tightly.

5 Use your Imagination wisely

What distinguishes you from all other mammals is the unique gift of imagination: use it to create the future you want - not to catastrophise, worry and fret.

6 Look for the Good in the Bad

Without challenge, there can be no growth. Adversity may not be comfortable at the time, but even if you don't win, you can at least learn. In the words of Douglas Malloch, "*Good timber does not grow with ease; the stronger wind, the stronger trees*". However, just like mining, what we encounter in adversity is mostly dirt. To find the gold, you've got to look for it.

7 Beware your Comparative Mind

Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today.

8 Find Your Flow

Elite athletes allude to it as being "in the zone". Musicians and artists call it "in the groove". What they describe is peak performance - or Flow - a state we now know can be readily accessed once you know how. So, find more Flow, more readily and more often.

9 Start with the End

The essence of the leadership contribution is to define the End. Before we embark on the journey - where is the destination? And what does it look like? Content (tasks, plans, milestones, priorities) is useless without Context. And the leader's primary role should, more than anything, be CCO or Chief Context Officer. If not you, then who?

10 Iterate. And Reiterate!

You will never, ever get to perfect; but you can always get to better. If you want more success, then double your failure rate. And iterate. As Beckett said "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." After all, the world belongs to the successful dis-satisfieds that continually iterate.

11 Begin Anywhere

This is the advice of John Cage, experimental musician, advising on how to start (composing) when there is no playbook, no right way and no right answers. To avoid the paralysis, just start... and begin anywhere, no matter. As psychologist George Zalucki expressed it, "*Do the thing, and you shall have power*".

12 Continually ask Why?

Whilst we are learning, we are conscious. Once mastered, it becomes unconscious. However, unconsciously repeating something we have mastered but is no longer useful is the quickest way to extinction. When you are stuck, asking Why is the fastest way to break the deadlock. And routinely asking Why is the fastest way to efficiency.

13 Manage your Impact

And speaking of Why, a very useful question is always "Why should anyone be led by you?" Nobody sets out to be a poor leader, and (coupled with that) leaders routinely overestimate their own ability. Leadership is an Away game, not a Home game. Forget about yourself and instead pay close attention and try to improve your impact on others. People judge your leadership not by your (good) intentions, but by your impact.

14 Stay Calm

In times of turbulence, people more than ever look to their leader for guidance. Holding their breath, they pay scrutinous attention and take their cues from you. And nobody needs a nervous pilot.

15 Create a Safe Environment

Every organisation/team is the extension of the leader's shadow. You set the tone by what you promote and what you permit. Ensure mostly that the environment is one where everyone feels comfortable to say what's on their mind.

16 Communicate for your audience (not Yourself)

You don't need to persuade you, you need to persuade them. You already understand; they don't. So craft your message in their language, in a way they can understand. Create from your side, but through their eyes. Throw open the door, don't barricade the entrance.

17 Listen for Implications (not the Situation)

People don't resist Change –they resist the implications of the change for THEM. They don't resist you – (truly, you're not that important!) – they resist what you represent to THEM. People don't fear restructure; what they fear is the implications of restructure for THEM.

Get curious and listen for the implications (to THEM!) of the situation, and it will transform your conversations and your connection with others.

18 Be Agreeable

One of the most under-rated qualities is that of agreeability. It costs nothing to be nice, polite and pleasant with others. And there is no downside. The upside is that more people are moved to work with people that are likeable, and it builds valuable social capital. Being agreeable is not the same as being a pushover as it is backed by the principle that 'no one is either above or beneath you'. As Michael Caine put it "I've met many equals, no betters".

19 Schedule What's Important.

You must decide BOTH what's important AND schedule the time for it (every day, week or month). As the old Japanese proverb goes "Vision without Action is a daydream; Action without Vision is a nightmare".

20 Resist Temptation – Minimise Distraction

We live in a technology-fuelled Garden of Eden – an Attention economy where the most sophisticated dark forces are constantly, covertly at work to distract you. Your old biological defences aren't sufficiently seaworthy any more. In an age of swirling distraction, you're gonna need a bigger boat

21 Keep your Focus – Avoid Procrastination

Many very skilled and clever people are paid very well to lull you into following their path and stealthily controlling how you spend your time. Take every opportunity to reduce their opportunity.

22 Stay Golden – Look after #1

Only a Golden Goose can produce Golden Eggs. As a leader, you are both the strongest and the weakest link. You are also the No.1 influence on the performance of the team – which is index-linked to your capacity to produce. The speed of the leader, after all, is the speed of the group. Mind yourself as a constant priority, and do whatever it takes to stay Golden – mentally, physically, psychologically and spiritually.

23 Zoom Out Often

Spend more time on the Balcony, and less on the Dance-Floor. Some of your greatest thinking is done when you are not thinking.

24 Choose Consciously and Wisely

The only thing you ever truly control in life is NOT the situation, but your response in the moment to the situation.

25 Remember that Happiness is about having 3 things:

...Something to Do
...Something to Look Forward to
...Someone to Love

26 Control the Controllables

The ancient Stoics called it the 'Dichotomy of Control', which acknowledges that there are some things in life (and business) we can't control (weather, market conditions, other people's behaviour) and some that we can (our emotions, behaviours and our response to situations). Focusing purely on what we can control immediately reduces suffering and waste and instils calm. As the Dalai Lama advises,

"Do not let the behaviour of others destroy your inner peace".