

SECTION II

THE CHALLENGES 360-DEGREE LEADERS FACE

If you are a leader in the middle of an organization, you don't need me to tell you that you have a challenging job. Many of the middle leaders I meet are frustrated, tense, and sometimes tempted to quit. I hear them say things such as, "It's like banging my head against a brick wall." "No matter how hard I try, I never seem to get anywhere." "I really wonder if it's all worth it."

If you and I were to sit down and talk for a few minutes, I bet you could list at least half a dozen problems you face because you are trying to lead from the middle. Perhaps you even feel you have been struggling to succeed where you are. But did you know that the things that frustrate you also frustrate nearly every other middle leader? Everyone who attempts to lead from the middle of the organization faces common challenges. You are not alone.

As I've mentioned, the best opportunity for helping yourself—and your organization—is to become a 360-Degree Leader. However, before you dive into the principles that 360-Degree Leaders practice to lead up, across, and down, I think you ought to acquaint yourself with the seven most common challenges that leaders in the middle face. Defining and recognizing them will help you to navigate the world of the middle, where you are trying to be a good leader even though you are not *the* leader.

I believe the challenges will resonate with you, and you will find yourself saying, "Right on." And, of course, I've offered some suggestions to help you, since recognizing the challenges is of little value without solutions. Read on so that you can resolve some of these issues and get ready to lead 360 degrees.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT THE TENSION

The effects of the Tension Challenge are not experienced equally by everyone trying to lead from the middle of an organization. A leader's temperament and ability certainly come into play. In addition, the way the tension impacts a leader is affected by the following five factors:

Challenge #1

THE TENSION CHALLENGE:

The Pressure of Being Caught in the Middle

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE TENSION CHALLENGE:

*Learn to lead despite the restrictions others
have placed on you.*

One of the toughest things about being a leader in the middle of an organization is that you can't be sure of where you stand. As a leader, you have some power and authority. You can make some decisions. You have access to some resources. You can call the people in your area to action and direct them in their work. At the same time, you also lack power in other areas. And if you overstep your authority, you can get yourself into real trouble.

My friend and colleague Dan Reiland calls this "the pressure of feeling like you have all power and no power." If you are not the top leader, you are not running the show, but you may be responsible for it. Even if you think you possess the vision and skill to take the organization to a higher level, if it requires the organization to go in a different direction from its present course, you don't have the authority to make such changes on your own. And that can make you feel like you are caught in the middle.

As a leader in the middle of an organization, the authority you do possess is not your own. Unless you are the owner and CEO of the company, the power you have is on loan from someone with higher authority. And that person has the power to take that authority away from you by firing you, demoting you, or moving you to another area of the business. If that does not create tension, nothing will.

1. EMPOWERMENT—HOW MUCH AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY DOES THE PERSON ABOVE YOU GIVE YOU, AND HOW CLEAR ARE THE LINES?

In his book *It's Your Ship*, former navy Captain D. Michael Abrashoff recounted how he turned around the performance of the crew of the U.S.S. *Benfold* using empowerment.

When I took command of *Benfold*, I realized that no one, including me, is capable of making every decision. I would have to train my people to think and make judgments on their own. Empowering means defining the parameters in which people are allowed to operate, and then setting them free.

But how free was free? What were the limits?

I chose my line in the sand. Whenever the consequences of a decision had the potential to kill or injure someone, waste taxpayers' money, or damage the ship, I had to be consulted. Short of those contingencies, the crew was authorized to make their own decisions. Even if the decisions were wrong, I would stand by my crew. Hopefully, they would learn from their mistakes. And the more responsibility they were given, the more they learned.¹

Not everyone experiences the kind of freedom to succeed—and safely fail—that Abrashoff's crew did. How clearly the lines of authority and responsibility have been drawn greatly impacts how strongly we feel the Tension Challenge. The more vaguely the lines are drawn, the greater the potential for stress.

If you've led a volunteer organization, as I have, then you may have observed that high-powered leaders and entrepreneurs often experience the Tension Challenge when they step out of their business world and volunteer. As top leaders, they are used to their authority being equal to their responsibility. They are used to casting vision, setting direction, and making things happen. When they volunteer to serve in an organization, they no longer possess all the authority, and they find themselves in the gray area of the middle. Many are not sure how to navigate in that environment. (That's especially true when they are better at leading than is the person running the volunteer organization.) Many

of these business leaders respond by either trying to take over or going off in their own direction. Others simply give up and return to the world they know best.

Good leaders rarely think in terms of boundaries; instead, they think in terms of opportunities.

2. INITIATIVE—HOW DO YOU BALANCE INITIATING AND NOT OVERSTEPPING YOUR BOUNDARIES?

Good leaders rarely think in terms of boundaries; instead, they think in terms of opportunities. They are initiators. After all, the number one characteristic of leaders is the ability to make things happen. Sometimes that desire to initiate leads to the expansion of their responsibilities—and their boundaries. Other times it leads to conflict with the people who lead them.

You need to realize that the stronger your natural desire to initiate, the greater the potential for tension. If you continually push the limits, it's likely you will rub others the wrong way. The good news is that if you work in an environment where leaders at all levels are empowered, people may tolerate your challenging the process of how things get done. If you challenge the vision or the authority of your leaders, however, you may go from being caught in the middle to being on the outside, looking for another job.

3. ENVIRONMENT—WHAT IS THE LEADERSHIP DNA OF THE ORGANIZATION AND LEADER?

Every organization has its own unique environment. If you have a military background, you can't walk into a corporate environment and expect it to function like the army or marines. If your experience is in large corporations, and you go to work in a mom-and-pop business, you will have problems if you don't adapt. That's just common sense.

Likewise, an organization takes on the personality of its leader. The leadership DNA of the *Benfold* changed during the course of Abrashoff's command. He wanted to create an environment of empowerment where initiative and ownership were valued. People who demonstrated those characteristics were rewarded. And as long as Abrashoff was in command, the ship's environment exhibited those characteristics.

If you are a leader in the middle of an organization, assess your environment. Is it one that increases or decreases the Tension Challenge? Can you thrive in

the kind of environment you're in with the level of tension it presents? Do the positive aspects of the organization outweigh the negative effects of the environment on you? An environment may be fine for one leader but not for another. Only you can make the assessment for yourself.

4. JOB PARAMETERS—HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW YOUR JOB AND HOW TO DO IT?

Have you ever noticed the level of tension you experience when starting a new job? It's pretty high, isn't it? The less familiar the work, the greater the tension. If you don't know how to do the job, you're going to be stressed, even if you're a fast learner and have a teachable attitude. Even after you know how to do the work, if you have no idea what others' expectations are of you, you won't be on solid ground. Only when you really have a handle on your job and you are good at your work does it reduce the tension of being in the middle.

5. APPRECIATION—CAN YOU LIVE WITHOUT THE CREDIT?

Someone once said, "What's causing so much disharmony among the nations is the fact that some want to beat the big drum, few are willing to face the music, and none will play second fiddle." The reality of leading from the middle of an organization is that you are not going to get as much public recognition and appreciation as leaders at the top. That's just the way it is. The greater your desire to receive credit and recognition, the more frustrated you are likely to become working in the middle of an organization. You need to decide for yourself if you receive enough satisfaction to keep you going where you are.

HOW TO RELIEVE THE TENSION CHALLENGE

It's not enough to merely recognize that leading from somewhere in the middle of an organization can be stressful. It's not good enough to simply survive. You want to thrive, and to do that, you need to learn how to relieve the tension. Here are five suggestions:

1. BECOME COMFORTABLE WITH THE MIDDLE

We often think leadership is easier at the top. The reality is that it's actually easier to lead from the middle—if a really good leader is above you. Good leaders at the top break ground for their people. They create momentum for the entire organization. Haven't you seen average or even below-average leaders

succeed because they were part of an organization that was led well overall? Haven't you seen colleagues overachieve because their leader made them better than they were on their own?

When you have excellent leaders, you don't need as much skill and energy to make things happen. You benefit from everything they do. So why not enjoy it—and learn from them too? I've long admired the following poem by Helen Laurie:

How often I've been put to the test
To make the best of second-best,
Only to wake one day and see
That second-best is best for me.

Being in the middle can be a great place—as long as you have bought into the vision and believe in the leader.

So how do you get comfortable with the middle? Comfort is really a function of expectations. The wider the gap between what you imagine to be and reality, the more disappointed you are likely to be. Talk things out with your boss. The more you know about what's expected of you, what's normal in the organization, and how much authority you have, the more comfortable you will be.

Comfort is really a function of expectations.

2. KNOW WHAT TO "OWN" AND WHAT TO LET GO

Nothing frees a person from tension like clear lines of responsibility. When I became the senior pastor at Skyline Church in California in 1981, even before my first day, I found out what I had to own personally. (Even leaders at the top can still be in the middle—the board was my boss.) I asked the members of the board to give me their short list of things I had to do that no one else could do for me. There were four things on that list:

- *Take final responsibility.* The buck stopped with me. I answered for whatever happened in the church.
- *Be the main communicator.* I needed to determine what was communicated during the services, and I needed to be in the pulpit most Sundays.
- *Be the main representative of the church.* I was to be the primary face and voice for the church, within the congregation, and to the community.

- *Live a life of integrity.* Author and entrepreneur Byrd Baggett defines *integrity* as "doing what you said you would do, when you said you would do it, and how you said you would do it." Nothing is more important in the life of a leader who desires to represent God to others.

One of the best things you can do is ask what is expected of you, and then maintain a dialogue concerning expectations with the people to whom you answer. Todd Mullins, who works on staff for his father, Tom Mullins, at Christ Fellowship in West Palm Beach, Florida, often found that ongoing communication helped them to resolve this tension in their somewhat fluid environment. Tom does a lot of speaking around the country, and when he would come back to the church, he would want to step back into leadership in some areas where others had been leading. Todd learned to ask, "Is this mine or yours?" (And by the way, in cases like this, it is the responsibility of the staff to communicate with their leader.) That made it possible either for Todd to step back as Tom stepped in, or for Tom to be gracefully reminded not to make a mess in an area where he didn't really want to lead.

3. FIND QUICK ACCESS TO ANSWERS WHEN CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

I can think of few people who get caught in the middle more than executive assistants. They experience the Tension Challenge to a high degree every day. I know that's true for my own assistant, Linda Eggers. The people she interacts with on my behalf are very demanding. And for that matter, so am I. One of the best ways I can help Linda is to get information to her as quickly as possible. If she asks me a question, I try to give her an answer right then. When I am traveling and we haven't spoken in twenty-four hours, I call her. She always has a list of questions to ask and issues to discuss. If I don't keep her waiting, she can do her work much more effectively.

Everybody needs to find a way to get quick answers in order to succeed when caught in the middle. Sometimes that can be difficult, especially if the people you work for are not communicative. In such cases, you need to find others who can help you. That may take time. And it will require that you have good rapport with the people around you. As you develop the skill of 360-Degree Leadership, it will become that much easier for you.

4. NEVER VIOLATE YOUR POSITION OR THE TRUST OF THE LEADER

If you want to know what will increase the Tension Challenge to the breaking point, it's violating the trust given to you with your authority or position. That can mean abusing the power of your position, intentionally undermining your leader, or using the organization's resources for personal gain. David Branker, executive director of a large organization in Jacksonville, Florida, said, "Trust is built one block at a time, but when it is violated, the entire wall comes crashing down. When you have been empowered with authority you exercise that on behalf of those you report to. It's never to serve your own interest. Over the course of your leadership journey your character and integrity will invariably be tested."

"Trust is built one block at a time, but when it is violated the entire wall comes crashing down."
—DAVID BRANKER

As someone leading from the middle of an organization, your ability to sustain the authority that has been invested in you is entirely dependent upon your faithfulness in serving the people who gave you that authority. Accordingly, you must guard against the temptation to try to advance at the expense of your leader. And it would be wise not to allow yourself to have an "if I were in charge" conversation with another staff member. If you have difficulties with your leaders, talk to them about it.

5. FIND A WAY TO RELIEVE STRESS

You will never completely eliminate the stress of the Tension Challenge, so you need to find a way to relieve it. Rod Loy, who leads a large organization in Little Rock, Arkansas, says that when he was a leader in the middle of an organization, he kept a file called "Things I will never do to my team when I become the top leader." As a leader in the middle, he knew that his natural temptation would be to let off steam with his coworkers. He short-circuited that tendency to vent his frustrations to others by simply writing down his observations and putting them in a file. It cleared the air for him, prevented him from violating his leader's trust, and ensured that he would remember the lesson of any mistakes made by his leader.

That kind of thing may work for you. If not, find something else: hit golf balls, jog, take up kickboxing, do aerobics, take a walk, get a massage—it doesn't

matter what, as long as it is a good, healthy outlet for when the stress of the Tension Challenge gets to be too much for you.

Nobody said becoming a 360-Degree Leader would be easy. Leading from the middle of an organization is stressful, but so is being the top leader. And so is being a worker who has no say in how his job should be done. The key to succeeding is to learn to deal with the tension of whatever position you are in, overcome its obstacles, and make the most of its advantages and opportunities. If you do that, you can succeed from anywhere in the organization.

Challenge #2

THE FRUSTRATION CHALLENGE:

Following an Ineffective Leader

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE FRUSTRATION CHALLENGE:

Your job isn't to fix the leader; it's to add value. If the leader won't change, then change your attitude or your work address.

On February 6, 1865, the Congress of Confederate States of America, the government of states that had been battling to secede from the United States for nearly four years, did something that Robert E. Lee had hoped to prevent. It adopted a resolution making him general-in-chief—leader of all the nation's armies, not just the Army of Northern Virginia.

Why would the Southern leaders do such a thing? Because they could see that Lee, a great military leader, was following an ineffective leader—their president, Jefferson Davis—and they still hoped to win their independence from the United States in what they thought of as the second American Revolution.

Most people agree that Lee was the most talented military leader on either side during the American Civil War. In fact, as the Southern states seceded, President Lincoln offered Robert E. Lee command of all Union forces in the field. But Lee declined Lincoln's offer. His loyalty was to his home state of Virginia. He chose to fight for the Confederacy. Lee, a West Point graduate and experienced army officer, quickly distinguished himself on the battlefield and soon became commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

As the war continued, leaders within the Confederate States of America became restless because of their lack of victory. Jefferson Davis, they found, did

not have the leadership skills required to win the war, despite his credentials—a West Point education, respected military service, experience as a U.S. representative, senator, and secretary of defense. Many Confederate leaders wanted to make Lee commander-in-chief, a move that would have usurped Davis's authority and stripped him of power over the military. But Lee would not allow it. He was loyal to his state, his cause, and his leader. He worked within the hierarchy. So finally, in desperation, the Confederate congress did what they could—they made Lee general-in-chief, hoping it would change the South's fate.

It was obvious to many good leaders that Lee was being asked to follow someone who could not lead as well as he could. Even Lee's opponents, including General and later President Ulysses S. Grant, observed it. Grant remarked in his memoirs: "The Confederacy had gone a long way beyond the reach of President Davis, and there was nothing that could be done except what Lee could do to benefit the Southern people." Lee felt it was a point of honor not to overstep his bounds. That is one of the reasons the Confederates lost the war and the Union was preserved. Lee was faithful and respectful, but there is no telling how differently things might have turned out if Lee had developed the ability to lead up!

LEADERS NO ONE WANTS TO FOLLOW

Few things can be more maddening to a good leader in the middle of an organization than working for an ineffective leader. I have not read anything indicating how Robert E. Lee felt about following Jefferson Davis. He was probably too much of a gentleman to express any negative feelings publicly. But I know it must have been frustrating.

There are many different kinds of ineffective leaders, all of whom are frustrating to follow. Here are a few particularly difficult examples:

THE INSECURE LEADER

Insecure leaders think everything is about them, and as a result, every action, every piece of information, every decision is put through their filter of self-centeredness. When someone on their team performs exceptionally well, they fear being outshone, and they often try to keep him from rising up. When someone on their team does poorly, they react in anger because it makes them look bad.

Insecure leaders think everything is about them, and as a result, every action, every piece of information, every decision is put through their filter of self-centeredness.

More than anything else, insecure leaders desire the status quo—for everyone but themselves. They are like the company president who is reported to have sent a memo to the personnel manager with the following message: "Search the organization for alert, aggressive young leaders capable of stepping into my shoes. And when you find them—fire them!"

One friend I talked to while writing this book said that he once worked for a leader who had one basic leadership principle: keep everyone off balance. If someone working for him started feeling a little too secure, he would "shake him up."

In an organization, security flows downward. When leaders are insecure, they often project that insecurity down to the people below them. If you work for an insecure person, not only will you have to work to deflect that individual's insecurity from yourself, but you will also have to work harder to "break the chain" and create security for the people who work for you. If you don't, the people under your care will suffer.

THE VISIONLESS LEADER

Leaders who lack vision create two immediate problems for the people who work for them. First, they fail to provide direction or incentive to move forward. The ancient Proverbs author wrote, "Where there is no vision, the people perish."¹ Why? Because they don't go anywhere or do anything. And that's no way to live. Second, people who lack vision almost always lack passion. They have no fire—and no fuel to keep themselves and their people going. That doesn't create the kind of positive environment that is exciting to work in.

The good news is that if you have vision when your leader does not, you can rely on your vision to create an environment of productivity and success for the people working within your area of responsibility. The bad news is that other people with a different vision—even a destructive one—may try to rush in and fill the void created by your leader. You must beware of the conflict that can create.

THE INCOMPETENT LEADER

Several years ago while traveling in Turkey, I listened as a tour guide talked about many of the sultans in Turkey's history and how they put their people under tremendous pressure. Often if someone didn't meet their expectations, the sultans would simply put the person to death.

The guide spoke about the sultan who had ordered the construction of the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. The sultan wanted the architect to make the building's minarets out of gold. The problem was that the architect knew there wasn't enough money to do that. The architect also knew that if he disagreed with the sultan, it might cost him his head. It was quite a dilemma, but the architect came up with a clever solution. The word for *six* was very similar to the word for *gold* in Arabic, *alti* versus *altin*. So the architect built six towers made of stone, and when the sultan questioned him, the architect feigned misunderstanding and explained that he thought the sultan had said *alti*, not *altin*.

"Advice is seldom welcome, and those who need it most like it the least."
—SAMUEL JOHNSON

Leaders who follow incompetent people often feel the pressure that the architect in the story did—though they usually don't face such potentially dire consequences. Incompetent leaders are ineffective, and they often stay that way. Poet and critic Samuel Johnson said, "Advice is seldom welcome, and those who need it most like it the least."

Incompetent leaders are trouble, not only for the people they lead, but also for their entire organization. They are "lids" on the parts of the organization they lead. The Law of the Lid states in *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, "Leadership ability determines a person's level of effectiveness."

THE SELFISH LEADER

In *The Circle of Innovation*, author and business guru Tom Peters writes:

The selfish leader will attempt to lead others for their own gain and for the detriment of others. These people believe that life is a point driven, zero-sum game, with winners and losers. They encourage others to be losers in the game of life so that they can collect all the spoils for themselves. This is the businesswoman who cheats suppliers in order to make her department look good in hopes of getting a raise. This is the father who selfishly motivates his son to excel in sports so that he might gain vicarious pleasure at his son's expense.²

A selfish leader advances at the expense of everyone around him or her. An executive I interviewed said that one of the leaders he worked for earlier in his career was someone who selfishly hoarded all the perks that came with his leadership position. As a result, now that the executive is a top leader himself, he makes it a point to share the perks of leadership with the people who work for him. That's good advice for anyone in a leadership position anywhere in an organization. Share whatever you have with the people below you. Legendary basketball coach John Wooden said that to be successful "you must be interested in finding the best way, not in having your own way."

"The selfish leader will attempt to lead others for their own gain and for the detriment of others."
—TOM PETERS

THE CHAMELEON LEADER

President Lyndon Baines Johnson used to tell the story of a young, unemployed schoolteacher who came to the Texas hill country during the Depression in search of a job. When the local school board asked him whether the world was round or flat, the would-be teacher panicked, fearing a trap, and blurted out, "I can teach it both ways!"

That's the chameleon leader's reaction when you try to pin him down. When people follow a chameleon leader, they never know how he will react. As a result, valuable time and energy that could be used getting work done is often wasted in trying to predict and anticipate the leader's next move.

THE POLITICAL LEADER

Similar to the chameleon leader are political leaders. They can be just as difficult to pin down, but where emotional issues often fuel the chameleon leader's problems, political leaders are motivated by the desire to get ahead. It's hard to follow people whose decisions are based on political ambitions rather than the mission or the good of the organization. They are like the mayor who was asked where he stood on a particular issue. He answered, "Well, some of my friends are for it. Some are against it. As for me, I'm for my friends."

THE CONTROLLING LEADER

Have you ever worked for someone who wants to be in the middle of everything you do? Few things are more frustrating for a competent person.

And few things are more irritating for a good leader. It's difficult to generate momentum when the person you work for is continually interrupting your progress by micromanaging you.

People who micromanage others are often driven by one of two things: the desire for perfection, which is unobtainable, or the belief that no one can do a job as well as they can, which really boils down to their thinking others' contributions aren't as valuable as their own. Neither makes for positive working conditions for the people answering to them.

THE SOLUTION TO THE FRUSTRATION CHALLENGE: ADDING VALUE

A normal reaction to the Frustration Challenge is to fix or replace the leader you're working for, but that is usually not an option for leaders in the middle of the pack. Besides, even if it were, it would be inappropriate. No matter what our circumstances, our greatest limitation isn't the leader above us—it's the spirit within us. Remember, your leadership is as much disposition as position. The role of leaders in the middle of an organization—in nearly every circumstance—is to add value to the organization and to the leader. The only time that is not true is when the leader above you is unethical or criminal.

No matter what our circumstances, our greatest limitation isn't the leader above us—it's the spirit within us.

What should you do when you find yourself following a leader who is ineffective? How do you add value in such circumstances? Most good leaders have had to ask themselves those questions at some time in their lives. In fact, the stronger you are as a leader, the more likely you are to face a situation where you can lead more effectively than the person to whom you report.

It may not be easy, but it is possible to survive—and even flourish—in a situation like this. Here is what I recommend:

1. DEVELOP A SOLID RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR LEADER

The first reaction to working for an ineffective leader is often to withdraw from him or her and build relational barriers. Fight that urge. If you make your leader your adversary, you will create a no-win situation. Instead, build a relational bridge. Try to get to know him, find common ground, and build a

solid professional relationship. And in that process, reaffirm your commitment to the mission of the organization. Doing those things will put you on the same team.

2. IDENTIFY AND APPRECIATE YOUR LEADER'S STRENGTHS

Everybody has strengths—even an ineffective leader. Work to find them in the person you work for. Maybe it won't be easy. Maybe his strengths aren't qualities you value or admire. That doesn't matter. Find them, and then think about how they might be assets to the organization.

3. COMMIT YOURSELF TO ADDING VALUE TO YOUR LEADER'S STRENGTHS

The pathway to success in your career lies in maximizing your strengths. That is also true for your leader. Once you have discerned what your leader's strengths are and how those characteristics can be an asset to the organization, look for ways to help leverage those strengths.

4. GET PERMISSION TO DEVELOP A GAME PLAN TO COMPLEMENT YOUR LEADER'S WEAKNESSES

Besides leveraging your strengths, one of the other secrets to job success is to staff your weaknesses. As a leader, you would be wise to empower some people who work for you to fill in your talent gaps. For example, if you are not good at details, then hire someone who is and have them work closely with you.

You can play that same gap-filling role with your leader. You must be very careful, however, in the way you approach this subject. Don't offer your opinion on her weaknesses unless she asks, and even then, be tactful. If she identifies one of her weaknesses to you, privately ask if she would be willing to let you carry the ball in that area. The idea is to do what she can't do so that she can do what she does best.

5. EXPOSE YOUR LEADER TO GOOD LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

If you are working to improve your leadership skills, then you've probably discovered many good leadership resources, such as books, CDs, or DVDs. Share those with your leader. Once again, the approach you take is very important. Rather than saying, "Boy, do you need this!" say something like, "I just got through with this book, and I thought you might enjoy it too." Or if you find

some kind of a connection or hook that you think might appeal to him, say, "I was reading this wonderful book, and I thought of you; the author and you have a similar background. I think you might like it." And then give him a copy of his own. If that resource is well received, you might try following up with others.

6. PUBLICLY AFFIRM YOUR LEADER

Some people fear that if they say positive things about an ineffective leader they work for, they will be misleading others. Or they worry that others will think they have poor judgment. But other people are aware of an ineffective leader's limitations, and as long as your affirmation is truthful and focuses on your leader's strengths, it won't reflect badly on you. In fact, it will engender others' respect. Your affirmation for your leader will help him develop confidence, not only in himself but also in you.

It's hard to find a downside to adding value to your leader and organization, especially if you maintain a long view. In time, people will recognize your talent. Others will value your contribution. They will admire your ability to succeed and to help others—even those less talented than you—succeed. You just can't allow yourself to give in to the short-term frustration you feel. If you do find that the frustration is getting the better of you, it might be time to change jobs.

Challenge #3

THE MULTI-HAT CHALLENGE:

One Head . . . Many Hats

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE MULTI-HAT CHALLENGE:

Knowing what hat to put on and then enjoying the challenge.

I held my first leadership position in 1969, but it wasn't until 1974 that I hired my first employee, Stan Toler. I was delighted to have someone working with me, because I realized that I could not do my job alone. I hired Stan as my assistant pastor. That probably sounds simple enough, but if you were to talk to Stan, his side of the story would be a little different. I've heard him describe that job as choir director, youth pastor, senior-adult pastor, Sunday school director, Vacation Bible School director, bus-ministry pastor, custodian, and general gofer (including picking up my dry cleaning and gassing up my Ford Pinto). If ever there was a leader in the middle who had to deal with the Multi-Hat Challenge, it was Stan!

THE PRESSURE OF WEARING MANY HATS

The predicament Stan faced isn't unusual for most leaders in the middle of an organization. While it's true that people at every level of an organization have strong demands placed on them, leaders in the middle who desire to practice 360-Degree Leadership experience pressures that others don't. Here's what I mean:

PEOPLE AT THE BOTTOM OF AN ORGANIZATION

When people are first starting out at the bottom of an organization, they usually perform a limited number of tasks that are assigned to them. Those tasks may be challenging. They may be physically or mentally demanding. They may require great skill. But most of the time, they require only one "hat." For example, thanks to Henry Ford, people on the production line were given one task to do, and they performed it over and over, though some companies now try to give workers some relief from endless repetition.

Cooks working on the line in a restaurant, such as the grill station, have a very narrow set of responsibilities: they get their stations ready before service, they grill food to order during service, and they clean their stations when they're done. Theirs are not jobs everyone can do—they require speed, skill, and stamina. But working a station on the line requires one set of skills. Likewise, representatives in a call center do one main thing—they talk to customers and either sell products, make appointments, or solve problems. Once again, it's not something everyone can excel at, but it is a responsibility that is very focused.

People who know their jobs and perform them well can become world-class practitioners of their craft. They can be content in their work and achieve success. But if they can do only one thing—or are willing to do only one thing—they will probably not "move up" as leaders. Leadership requires the ability to do many things well. To use a sports analogy, it's less like trying to win a single race and more like trying to compete in the decathlon.

PEOPLE AT THE TOP OF AN ORGANIZATION

Leaders at the top of an organization have their own sets of challenges. For example, they feel the weight of success or failure for the entire organization—no doubt about it. But they also have a luxury that leaders in the middle don't—they can choose what to do. They can determine their priorities, focus on their strengths, and direct their time and energy to only those things that give the organization the greatest return. Anything else they can either delegate or dismiss.

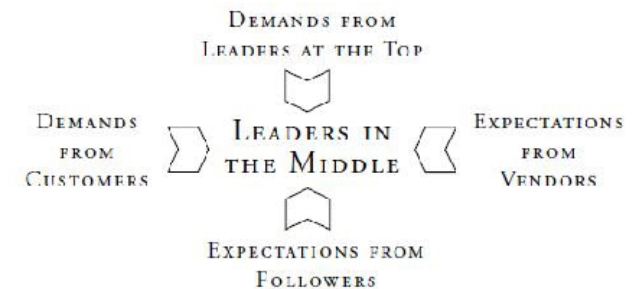
It's ironic that to become leaders, people must be able to do many things well, but in order to become leaders at the top, they must do fewer things with great excellence. In fact, successful leaders figure this out as they move from the middle to the top of an organization. I've never met a successful CEO yet who isn't focused and who doesn't limit himself to the one, two, or three things he does best.

PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ORGANIZATION

Leaders in the middle, on the other hand, usually experience the Multi-Hat Challenge on a daily basis. They must perform tasks and have knowledge beyond their personal experience. And they often are forced to deal with multiple shifting priorities, often with limited time and resources. My friend Douglas Randlett calls this the "handyman syndrome."

Leaders in the middle usually experience the Multi-Hat Challenge on a daily basis.

The following diagram illustrates the dynamic that most leaders in the middle of an organization have to deal with:



Take, for example, a grill cook who decides to move up and become a sous-chef (the person who usually runs the kitchen in a restaurant). When he was a cook, he had to please only one person, the sous-chef, and he took orders only from him or her. But when he becomes the sous-chef, his world changes because he is now the person who runs the kitchen day-to-day. As the sous-chef, there are specific things he must do during service. As each order comes into the kitchen, he must tell the cooks at every station what to cook. It's his job to coordinate all of the various cooks' efforts so that the food they are cooking on the different stations is ready at the same time for a table's order. He is also responsible for interacting with the waiters, helping them satisfy the customers, and solving their problems. When the waiters are under pressure and feeling the demands of the customers, the sous-chef feels it.

But those aren't the only pressures the sous-chef experiences. Every cook in the kitchen is looking to him for leadership. During service, he determines how the kitchen is run and sets the standard for how the food is prepared. He also schedules their work, makes sure they get paid, and mediates the disputes that always occur.

When he's not actually on the line during service, the sous-chef also has the responsibility of ordering food and supplies from vendors. His priorities are quality and price, but each vendor has expectations of him. They want his business and his time.

Of course, the sous-chef is also accountable to the chef de cuisine or the owner of the restaurant, who wants a business that is well run and profitable. When he was a cook working at the grill station, he wore only one hat. He was insulated from the customers. He rarely had to interact with the owner. He didn't have to work with vendors. And he had no staff to lead. Life was much simpler as a cook. In fact, dealing with the Multi-Hat Challenge is one of the things that keep people from moving up in an organization. Many workers decide they would rather not have all the headaches of leadership and stay where they are, doing just a few things and not wearing a lot of hats.

HOW TO HANDLE THE MULTI-HAT CHALLENGE

Billy Hornsby, cofounder of ARC and director for EQUIP's European leadership development initiative, said that being in the middle of an organization is like being the middle child in a family. These leaders have to learn to get along with everybody around them and survive the various "family" dynamics—following, leading, cajoling, appeasing, and partnering as needed. It's not an easy task.

"Being in the middle of an organization is like being the middle child in a family."
—BILLY HORNSBY

So what are leaders in the middle of an organization to do when they are required to wear many hats but have only one head? Here are my suggestions:

1. REMEMBER THAT THE HAT SETS THE CONTEXT WHEN INTERACTING WITH OTHERS

Every role or "hat" you are asked to wear has its own responsibilities and objectives. If you change hats, keep in mind that the context changes. You wouldn't interact in the same way with your spouse, your children, your boss, and your employees, would you? The goal often determines the role and the approach to take.

2. DON'T USE ONE HAT TO ACCOMPLISH A TASK REQUIRED FOR ANOTHER HAT

In her capacity as my assistant, Linda Eggers constantly attends meetings of my organization's top leaders when I am traveling. She does that so that she can keep me up to date on strategy and important changes that are occurring. When she is working in that capacity, Linda never abuses her "communication link" hat to get her own way, nor does she put on her "speaking for John" hat to preemptively stop leaders from taking action by saying something like, "John wouldn't want that." She is very cognizant that her words carry great weight.

Likewise, after Linda attends those types of meetings and she fills me in on what happened, she is also careful to represent the people in the meeting fairly and accurately. She will give her opinions, but she works not to "color" what has been said or done.

Linda, like many assistants, wears many hats. She has become an expert at knowing what hat to wear in any given situation, and she can change hats in an instant. She has a very powerful position, but she never uses one hat to accomplish tasks that may be required of her in another capacity. She takes the time to cultivate each working relationship on its own terms, and acts accordingly. It's often a balancing act, but it's one she does exceptionally well.

3. WHEN YOU CHANGE HATS, DON'T CHANGE YOUR PERSONALITY

I mentioned that you shouldn't treat your spouse the same way you treat your employees. That's just common sense. That doesn't mean, however, that you should change your personality according to who you're with. Your attitude and behavior should be consistent and predictable with everyone. Otherwise, you won't be trustworthy in the eyes of anyone you work with.

4. DON'T NEGLECT ANY HAT YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE TO WEAR

Before Rod Loy became a top leader, he served as an executive in a large organization. For six months during a leadership shortage, he also functioned

as the interim leader of two different additional departments. To make sure he didn't drop any balls, he literally set up three offices. He would spend five hours a day in the executive office and work on only those responsibilities there. He would then go to one of the other department's office for two hours to do those duties, and finally to the third office for two hours to perform those duties.

Why did he do that? He discovered that if he neglected the duties of any hat for a day, he fell behind. The physical separation of the three offices helped him make the mental jump needed to keep all his responsibilities moving forward. You may not need or want to go to such lengths. However, if you are being asked to wear many hats by people in your organization, then you must be sure not to neglect any one of them.

5. REMAIN FLEXIBLE

The key to taking on the Multi-Hat Challenge is knowing what hat to put on at any time and enjoying the challenge it offers. How does one do that? The secret is to remain flexible. Because there are so many demands on leaders in the middle of an organization, they can't afford to be rigid; they need to be able to turn on a dime or change hats at a moment's notice.

Some people love a new challenge and thrive on the rapidly changing demands and nature of leadership in the middle of an organization. It energizes them. Others find it less appealing. But it's something all 360-Degree Leaders must learn to navigate if they want to be successful and influence others from wherever they are in the organization.

Challenge #4

THE EGO CHALLENGE: You're Often Hidden in the Middle

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE EGO CHALLENGE:

*Remember that consistently good leadership
does get noticed.*

Every now and then when I'm teaching a daylong leadership conference, an attendee will come up during the break, look at me, and say, "Wow, what a great job. I want to do what you do!"

My job is wonderful, and I'll admit that. But then I'll say to the person, "Yes, but do you want to do what I did to be able to do what I do?" People who meet me today see only the good stuff, the fruit of thirty years of work. They look at the well-lit platform, the large audiences, and the kind, warm reception I often get, and they see that other people do a lot of work to get things ready, while all I have to do is teach.

But it's naive for anyone to think it's always been this way. When I first started teaching leadership, I drove to engagements in my Pinto. I taught to groups of about a dozen people, and I didn't get paid to do it. I taught people just because I wanted to help them. As my reputation grew, so did people's requests for me to speak. Usually that meant finding a way to fit travel into an already packed schedule with long flights, unhealthy food, and long hours. In my early leadership conferences, for the price of admission, I taught about thirty hours of material over five days.

When I became "popular," my wife, Margaret, often had to travel with me, meaning that now two of us had to work to get the job done instead of one.

(And we had to pay babysitters to take care of the kids.) We spent hours packing boxes of supplies, notebooks, and books, which we had to load into our trunk or lug onto planes. The few hours I spent on a stool teaching probably looked pretty glamorous to some people. The days spent preparing the lesson and dozens of hours of logistics and travel were not.

Successful leaders are like icebergs. When you look at an iceberg, you see only about 10 percent of it, and the rest of it is hidden under the water. When you look at successful leaders, you see only a fraction of their lives. You see the part that looks really good, but there's usually a lot that remains hidden that's neither exciting nor glamorous. Tennis star Arthur Ashe said, "True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever the cost." True leadership is the same.

"True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever the cost."

—ARTHUR ASHE

HOW TO HANDLE THE EGO CHALLENGE

It's normal for any person to want recognition, and leaders are the same. The fact that leaders in the middle of the pack are often hidden—and as a result they don't get the credit or recognition they desire and often deserve—can be a real ego buster. The challenge is to be a team player and remain content while contributing. Here's how to do that:

1. CONCENTRATE MORE ON YOUR DUTIES THAN YOUR DREAMS

Noted composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein was once asked which instrument he considered to be the most difficult to play. After a moment he responded, "Second fiddle. I can get plenty of first violinists, but to find one who can play second fiddle with enthusiasm—that's a problem." We can often become so focused on our dreams and goals that we lose sight of the responsibilities right in front of us.

We can often become so focused on our dreams and goals that we lose sight of the responsibilities right in front of us.

Effective leaders pay more attention to production than to promotion. They get the job done. Poet Walt Whitman wrote:

There is a man in the world who never gets turned down,
wherever he chances to stray;
He gets the glad hand in the populous town,
or out where the farmers make hay;
He is greeted with pleasure on deserts of sand,
and deep in the aisles of the woods;
Wherever he goes there is a welcoming hand—
he's the man who delivers the goods.

If you consistently deliver the goods, you will be noticed. And more importantly, you will be content with the job you do even at those times when others don't recognize your efforts.

2. APPRECIATE THE VALUE OF YOUR POSITION

Not everyone will understand or appreciate the work you do. So it's important that you do. A cute anecdote from Nobel Prize-winner Charles H. Townes illustrates this well. Townes commented, "It's like the beaver told the rabbit as they stared up at the immense wall of Hoover Dam, 'No, I didn't actually build it myself. But it was based on an idea of mine.'"

Every position has value, but too often we don't value that position. You make it important by valuing it. If we despise the position we have, it may be because of what I call "destination disease," which can also be called the greener grass syndrome. If we focus on being some other place because we think it's better, then we will neither enjoy where we are nor do what we must to succeed.

3. FIND SATISFACTION IN KNOWING THE REAL REASON FOR THE SUCCESS OF A PROJECT

In his book, *Good to Great* (Harper Business, 2001), Jim Collins writes about "level five" leaders. He says that these leaders, who led their organizations quietly and humbly, were much more effective than flashy, charismatic, high-profile leaders. One of the reasons I believe that's true is that good leaders understand they don't really deserve all the credit for the success of an organization. Success comes from the people who get the work done—especially the leaders in the middle of the organization.

If we focus on being some other place because we think it's better, then we will neither enjoy where we are nor do what we must to succeed.

When you do a job well, and you know the impact of the work you did, that should give you great satisfaction, and it should also motivate you. When you know you're making a significant contribution, you need less external motivation. The definition of high morale is: "I make a difference."

4. EMBRACE THE COMPLIMENTS OF OTHERS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PACK

There is no higher compliment than acknowledgment and appreciation from someone whose circumstances, position, or experience is similar to yours. Isn't that true? A musician may enjoy a compliment from a fan, but praise from another musician means more. When an entrepreneur says someone is good at spotting an opportunity, you believe her. Likewise, when someone else who is leading from the middle of the organization tells you, "Well done," take it to heart.

Novelist Mark Twain said, "One compliment can keep me going for a whole month." Based on his comment, I've come up with a scale that measures the power of a compliment and what I suspect is its lasting impact based on who says it.

SOURCE OF THE COMPLIMENT	DURATION
Those who've done your work	a year
Those who've seen your work	a month
Those who know of your work	a week
Those who think they know your work	a day
Those who don't know your work	an hour
Those who don't work	a minute

Everyone enjoys kind words from the boss, and many seek them out. But the praise of a colleague who's walked in your shoes really does mean more.

5. UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SELF-PROMOTION AND SELFLESS PROMOTION

Sir Isaac Newton discovered the laws of gravity in the 1600s. When he introduced those laws to the scientific world, it revolutionized astronomical studies. But if it weren't for Edmund Halley, few people are likely to have learned about Newton's ideas.

Halley was a sounding board for Newton's ideas, he challenged Newton's assumptions, he corrected Newton's mathematical calculations when they were off, and he even drafted geometric diagrams to support Newton's work. When Newton was hesitant to publish his ideas, Halley first convinced him to write the manuscript, then edited it and supervised its publication. Halley even financed the printing of it, even though he had fewer financial resources than Newton. The final work, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*, made Newton one of the most highly regarded thinkers in history.

Halley understood the difference between self-promotion and selfless promotion. It was more important to him to see Newton's ideas shared than to receive personal recognition for helping him. He knew how important those ideas were, and he wanted to get them out into the world.

That's what people do who understand selfless promotion. Take a look at the difference between the two kinds of promotion:

SELF-PROMOTION	VS.	SELFLESS PROMOTION
Me first		Others first
Move up		Build up
Guard information		Share information
Take credit		Give credit
Hog the ball (star)		Pass the ball
Dodge the ball (blame)		Share the ball
Manipulate others		Motivate others

Self-promotion says, "If you don't toot your own horn, no one will toot it for you." Selfless promotion says, "I just want to help the team make beautiful music!"

Tim Sanders, author of *Love Is the Killer App* (Crown Business, 2002), talks about the abundance mind-set, an idea promoted by Stephen Covey a decade earlier. He says there are plenty of resources, credit, and opportunities to go around. In fact, he believes that a scarcity mind-set is at the root of most conflict. Leaders that excel in the middle of the pack have an abundance mind-set. And if you lead well from the middle of an organization, you won't stay there forever. Good leadership always gets noticed. Legendary Green Bay Packer football

coach Vince Lombardi said, "Some of us will do our jobs well, and some will not. But we will all be judged by only one thing—the result." Good leaders get results—and they get noticed.

Challenge #5

THE FULFILLMENT CHALLENGE: Leaders Like the Front More Than the Middle

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE FULFILLMENT CHALLENGE:

*Leadership is more disposition than position
—influence others from wherever you are.*

Since you are reading this book, I assume that you either possess a natural leadership bent or have developed a desire to lead others. If that is true, then you probably want to be leading from “out front” or “on the top.” Perhaps you’ve heard the old saying about the view from the middle of the pack. It’s said that when you’re the lead dog, your view always changes. If you’re not the lead dog, your view always stays the same—and that view is not exactly what one would call “scenic.” I enjoy that joke, and I’ve told it in conferences. But the truth of the matter is that the dog in front of the pack isn’t the leader. The person driving the sled is—and that individual is actually in the back.

Wherever people find themselves in life, they usually possess the natural desire to move up. They want greater recognition. They want to make more money. They want to live in a better home. They want to advance and improve. Leaders are no different. They want to move up rather than stay put. They want to make a greater impact. They want to be at the front of a pack or the top of an organization, especially early in their lives and careers. But is being out front really all that it’s cracked up to be? I think the answer is yes and no.

WHY LEADERS LIKE THE FRONT

There are advantages to being in front or on top of an organization. But the same things that can benefit leaders can also make leadership difficult. It is almost always a double-edged sword, and anyone who sees only the positives without recognizing the negatives is either naive or inexperienced. I think you will agree with my perspective as you read these observations about why leaders like to be out front.

1. THE FRONT IS THE MOST RECOGNIZED POSITION FOR A LEADER

Romanian essayist E. M. Cioran stated, “If each of us were to confess his most secret desire, the one that inspires all his plans, all his actions, he would say, ‘I want to be praised.’” Isn’t that true? Everyone enjoys praise and recognition. And since leaders, who are usually most visible, often receive the credit when a job is well done, many people desire to become leaders.

“If each of us were to confess his most secret desire, the one that inspires all his plans, all his actions, he would say, ‘I want to be praised.’”
—E. M. CIORAN

Recognition is a double-edged sword. When things go wrong, the person recognized as responsible is also the leader. When the football team has a losing season, the quarterback gets the blame. When the baseball team keeps losing games, the manager gets fired. When the big account doesn’t sign on with the company, the person who led the effort is held responsible. Yes, being in front can be good for your ego, but it can also cost you your job.

2. THE VIEW IS BETTER FROM THE FRONT

I once saw an interview that a newscaster conducted with an accomplished mountain climber. The journalist asked, “Why do you climb mountains? What is it that causes you to go through all the preparation, the training, the risk, and the pain?”

The mountain climber looked at the newsmen and said, “It’s obvious that you’ve never been to the top of a mountain.” Isn’t it true that the view from the top of a mountain is incredible? It’s thrilling. The perspective is incredible. It must be even more exciting if it’s a peak that can only be reached by climbing.

Tom Mullins, the former football coach I mentioned earlier who now leads a large organization in Palm Beach, Florida, said, “It’s often hard to read the

scoreboard from the middle of the pack. It’s much easier to see it when you’re at the top of the organization.” There is a perspective one has from the front (or top) of an organization that cannot be had from anywhere else. But I believe responsibility comes with that perspective. If you see problems that threaten to derail the organization, harm employees, or cheat customers, you have a responsibility to try to resolve them—no matter how messy, costly, or difficult it is. Leaders at the front don’t have the freedom to neglect what their position allows them to see.

Leaders at the front don’t have the freedom to neglect what their position allows them to see.

3. LEADERS IN FRONT GET TO DETERMINE THE DIRECTION

When I first began leading, I thought that the leader in front could control many things in an organization. The longer I lead, the more I discover how little the leader controls. (The only people who have total control in their lives are those who don’t lead anything. They are accountable only to themselves, not others.) Good leaders of organizations get to control mainly two things: direction and timing. Unfortunately, if they aren’t leading well and people aren’t following them, they can’t even control those two things.

4. LEADERS CAN SET THE PACE

Leaders love progress. It’s one of their primary motivations. That’s why explorer David Livingstone said, “I will go anywhere provided it is forward.” As a leader, you probably love moving forward, and the faster the better. But that also can work against you. If you are running so far ahead that your people can’t follow, then your organization won’t succeed. Achievers often cross the finish line first, but leaders rarely do. A leader’s success comes from bringing others across the finish line with them.

In *Winning with People*, the Patience Principle states that the journey with others is slower than the journey alone. That’s true in every area of life where you are trying to lead. A trip to the grocery store is much faster alone than it is if you have to take your children. A business trip with a group of colleagues is never as fast as one by yourself. (Doesn’t it take thirty minutes just to get everyone to agree on a place to eat?) A single golfer can play a course in nearly half the time it takes a foursome.

As a leader, you may be able to model the behavior you desire in others, but you will not be able to go as quickly as you want. Too many people seem to share the attitude of humorous poet Ogden Nash, who wrote, “Progress might have been all right once, but it’s been going on entirely too long.” The only people who will fight for progress the way you do, and move as quickly, will probably be other leaders.

5. LEADERS ENJOY BEING IN ON THE ACTION

Because leaders like to make things happen, they always enjoy being where the action is. But many times that is not at the top or in front of an organization. Major decisions are made in those places, but often the action really occurs in the middle of an organization. That’s where most of the exciting activity is. Doug Carter, who is vice president of EQUIP—the nonprofit organization I founded to teach leadership overseas—is a great example of a leader who loves the action. Doug could be the number one leader at dozens of first-rate organizations. In fact, he used to lead another outstanding nonprofit organization. But the vision and mission of EQUIP captivated him, and instead of being the top guy, he has chosen to be the number two person at EQUIP. Doug is making an impact internationally from that position. I cannot imagine the team without him.

HOW TO BE FULFILLED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PACK: SEE THE BIG PICTURE

Education pioneer Henrietta Mears said, “The person who keeps busy helping the one who is below him won’t have time to envy the person above him.” The right attitude is absolutely essential to contentment in the middle of an organization. Truly, leadership is more disposition than position. With the right attitude and the right skills, you can influence others from wherever you are in an organization.

So how do you develop an attitude of contentment and fulfillment right where you are? Start by doing the following five things:

1. DEVELOP STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH KEY PEOPLE

A *Peanuts* cartoon by Charles Schulz shows Lucy telling Snoopy, “There are times when you really bug me, but I must admit there are also times when I feel like giving you a big hug.” In reply, Snoopy thinks, *That’s the way I am . . . huggable and bug-gable*. I think that’s true of just about everybody—including

myself. There are good and bad things about everybody. The key to fulfillment isn’t making every interaction with others go smoothly; it comes from developing strong relationships with them.

“The person who keeps busy helping the one who is below him won’t have time to envy the person above him.”
—HENRIETTA MEARS

It’s more important to get along with people than to get ahead of them. If you make it your goal to reach out to others and build relationships with them, you will derive fulfillment wherever you are. And whatever you do, don’t give up too easily on others if you at first don’t like them or easily connect with them. You may be surprised by how, over time, a potential adversary can become an ally.

2. DEFINE A WIN IN TERMS OF TEAMWORK

Legendary basketball coach John Wooden said, “The main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team.” In other words, teamwork is what creates success, and we shouldn’t lose sight of that. One player may be crucial to a team, but one player cannot make a team. That is also true of leaders. One leader, no matter how good, does not make a team.

When I think of someone who created a win using teamwork and led others from the middle, I think of Bob Christian, former fullback for the Atlanta Falcons. Christian was called “the most complete fullback in football.”¹ Dan Reeves, an NFL veteran coach with several Super Bowl rings said of Christian that he was the “best blocker I’ve ever seen.”² More than once he was named player of the game strictly because of his blocking. Many people have never heard of Christian, even if they are football fans. His stats for runs, catches, and touchdowns may not have set any records, but he was fulfilled—and successful—as a ball player. Anyone who values teamwork and saw Christian play remembers him.

3. ENGAGE IN CONTINUAL COMMUNICATION

One of the frustrations of leaders who aren’t in front or on top is that they are several steps removed from the source of the organization’s vision. And since the vision is constantly being shaped and formed, it’s important to engage

in continual communication. If you’re “in” on the vision and continually keeping up-to-date, then you won’t be blindsided by changes or demoralized by being out of the loop.

As a leader in the middle of an organization, being the recipient of communication is important, but equally or more important is communicating up. And that takes great effort because it doesn’t occur naturally. It takes effort and intentionality. As you interact with your leaders, let them know how you are advancing the vision. Get their feedback and ask questions to find out if there are other things you should know to more effectively pass on the vision to others. The more you effectively fulfill your role as a leader in the middle, the more fulfilled you will be.

4. GAIN EXPERIENCE AND MATURITY

In *The Autobiography of Harry Golden*, the author wrote, “The arrogance of the young is a direct result of not having known enough consequences. The turkey that every day greedily approaches the farmer who tosses him grain is not wrong. It is just that no one ever told him about Thanksgiving.”

Maturity doesn’t come automatically. My friend Ed Cole often said, “Maturity doesn’t come with age. It begins with the acceptance of responsibility.” When you begin looking at your life and work with more experience and a longer view, being in front doesn’t seem as important. Focusing on the responsibilities with which you are entrusted wherever you are and completing them with excellence brings greater fulfillment than the position, title, or prestige one gets from being on top.

The more you effectively fulfill your role as a leader in the middle, the more fulfilled you will be.

With maturity often comes patience. (Patience, however, often gets the credit that belongs to fatigue!) Patience gives you time to learn, network, and gain wisdom. Humorist Arnold Glasow said, “The key to everything is patience. You get the chicken by hatching the egg—not smashing it.”

5. PUT THE TEAM ABOVE YOUR PERSONAL SUCCESS

When the stakes are high, good team members put the success of the team ahead of their own personal gains. An excellent example of this can be seen in the actions of two high-profile leaders of the British government during World War II—Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee. Two leaders could not have

been more different. Churchill was a member of the conservative party, Attlee of the labor party. Churchill was fierce, fiery, and proud; Attlee, quiet and unassuming. Churchill is quoted as saying of Attlee: "He is a modest man with much to be modest about." Yet the two men served together admirably during the war for the sake of England. When Churchill was made prime minister of England in 1940, he chose Attlee as a member of his war cabinet, eventually naming him deputy prime minister. In fact, Attlee was the only other person besides Churchill to serve in the war cabinet for the entire war.³

One of the keys to England's winning the war was that both leaders put the country's best interest above their own political ambitions. The depth of the two men's differences concerning leadership and government became more obvious after the war in 1945, when the two opposed each other in the election for prime minister, and Churchill was defeated by Attlee.

These two leaders did what they thought was right, both during the war and after it. They put the nation ahead of their personal gain. As a result, the people of Great Britain won. That's what leadership is really all about—it's about helping others to win. That's much more important than where you are in the organizational chart.

Challenge #6

THE VISION CHALLENGE:

Championing the Vision Is More Difficult When You Didn't Create It

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE VISION CHALLENGE:

The more you invest in the vision, the more it becomes your own.

What would you rather do? See your own vision put into action and come to fruition? Or help others fulfill theirs? For people who want to lead, the answer is usually the former. Leaders see possibilities, and they want to seize them. Most of the time they would rather work to fulfill their own vision than someone else's—unless that other leader's vision is really compelling and captivating. Leading from the middle, however, means that you will be asked to become a champion for a vision other than your own. In fact, the reality is that all the people in an organization other than the top leader are going to be asked to fulfill a vision they didn't generate.

HOW PEOPLE RESPOND TO THE VISION CHALLENGE

So the natural question is: How are you going to respond to the Vision Challenge? Even though your own vision may excite you more than someone else's, to get the opportunity to pursue your own dreams, you will almost certainly have to succeed in achieving the dreams of others.

There are a number of ways people respond when leaders cast vision and attempt to enlist them. The following responses represent a progression, from most negative to most positive.

I. ATTACK IT—CRITICIZE AND SABOTAGE THE VISION

Not everyone is going to buy into the vision of an organization, even if it is compelling, and even if the leader does a fantastic job of communicating it. That's just a fact, and it isn't always because the people are bad followers. Take a look at the most common reasons people fail to adopt a worthy vision:

THEY DIDN'T HELP CREATE IT. Let's face it. Most people don't like change, and whenever someone begins casting a new vision, change is inevitable. I used to think that leaders liked change and followers didn't. But as I've gained maturity, I've come to realize that leaders don't like change any more than followers do—unless, of course, it's their idea!

People's attitudes toward change are different when they help create it. Participation increases ownership. When you're an owner, you see things differently. You step up. You take better care of whatever it is. If you doubt that, answer this question: When was the last time you waxed a rental car? It just doesn't happen. People are up on things that they're in on.

Leaders don't like change any more than followers do—unless, of course, it's their idea!

THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND IT. People don't buy into a vision that they don't understand. It just doesn't happen. And just because leaders have cast a vision in a clear and compelling manner, doesn't mean that their people really understand it. Different kinds and styles of communication don't connect equally for everybody.

Ken Blanchard once asked Max DePree, author of *Leadership Is an Art*, what he thought the leader's role was in an organization. DePree said, "You have to act like a third-grade teacher. You have to repeat the vision over and over and over again until the people get it." And if a leader is really wise, she communicates it in many ways, in many settings, using many methods.

THEY DON'T AGREE WITH IT. Some people react negatively to a vision because they think it's impossible to achieve. Others—though it happens much less often—because they think it's too small. Still others balk because the vision has changed since the time they originally signed on. But more often than not, the

real issue has more to do with the leader. If people disagree with the vision, it's often because they have a problem with the person who cast it.

If people disagree with the vision, it's often because they have a problem with the person who cast it.

The Law of Buy-In found in *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* says that people buy into the leader, then the vision. If they believe in leaders, then they embrace what those leaders believe in. Even when their leaders promote a vision that isn't compelling, the people who have already bought into them continue to support them. However, this variation on the Law of Buy-In is also true: No matter how good the vision is, if people don't believe in the leader, they will have problems buying in to the vision.

THEY DON'T KNOW THE VISION. When it comes to results, there is absolutely no difference between people not knowing an organization's vision and the organization not having a vision at all. The inevitable result is dissatisfaction and discouragement.

If you have brought new people into an organization since the last time vision was cast, then you have people who don't know your vision. I apologize if this sounds painfully obvious, but this is an issue all the time in organizations. Growing businesses often hire new employees but have nothing in place to make sure that they know and embrace the vision. Every organization needs a built-in process for passing on the vision.

But even if you make sure that every person who becomes a part of your organization hears the vision, that doesn't mean they all know it. Vision leaks. It needs to be communicated clearly, creatively, and continually.

Imagine that every person in your organization has a tank where they keep the vision. Now assume that there is a crack or small hole in that tank. Because everybody is human (and therefore flawed), you can't eliminate these leaks. The best you can do is keep refilling the tanks. Some leaders don't like to keep repeating themselves, but there really is no alternative if you want everyone to know the vision.

Vision leaks. It needs to be communicated clearly, creatively, and continually.

THEY FEEL UNNEEDED TO ACHIEVE IT. There are three different kinds of attitudes when it comes to enlisting people to help fulfill a vision. The first one says, "We're going to do this with or without you." The second says, "We sure

would like you to help us do this.” The third says, “We can’t do this without you.” You can guess which one inspires and motivates people to participate and give their best.

Old-style autocratic leaders may have been able to get away with the first type of attitude, but that doesn’t fly with people today, at least not in nations where people are free. The second approach sometimes works, but neither is as effective as the third. People who understand how important their part is are motivated to persevere and work with excellence, even in the face of obstacles and problems.

A good example of this occurred during World War II in a parachute factory. Workers made parachutes by the thousands for the war effort, but it was a painfully tedious job. They spent long hours at a sewing machine stitching miles of plain white fabric. Every morning workers were reminded that every stitch was part of a lifesaving operation. Their husbands, brothers, or sons might wear the parachute they sewed that day. Those lives could not be saved without their efforts. The fact that the vision was continually before them and they knew that it would not be completed without them kept them going.

THEY AREN’T READY FOR IT. I love this cartoon by the late Jeff MacNelly, Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist and creator of the comic strip *Shoe*:

SHOE by JEFF MACNELLY



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It may be sad to say, but some people are not ready—emotionally, intellectually, or professionally—to step up, embrace the vision, and help to make it happen. If they are willing but unable, then they can be trained and developed. If they are neither willing nor able, then there may not be much you can do to help them.

360-Degree Leaders are informational conduits that connect the top and the bottom of the organization. When any one of these six issues is a problem—the people didn’t help create it, the people don’t understand it, the people don’t

agree with it, the people don’t know the vision, the people feel unneeded to achieve it, or the people aren’t ready for it—then the conduit becomes clogged, and the vision cannot flow from the leaders at the top to the people who actually accomplish the work. If the vision fails to connect with the workers, it will never come to fruition.

2. IGNORE IT—DO THEIR OWN THING

Some people may not attack the vision, but they don’t support it either. Instead, they pretend it doesn’t exist and do their own thing. Leaders cannot do this and still maintain their integrity and effectiveness. One leader I spoke to, who for many years worked in the middle of an organization, said that he remembers a time when his boss wanted him to confront an employee on a dress code issue. The problem for this leader was that he didn’t agree with the policy. But he believed in the larger vision of the organization and wanted to support his leader, so he followed through with the confrontation. It turned out to be especially difficult because the employee thought the rule was petty. But the midlevel leader firmly supported his leader. The employee never knew that this leader actually agreed with the employee, not with his boss.

3. ABANDON IT—LEAVE THE ORGANIZATION

If the vision violates your principles or doesn’t speak to what you value deep down, leaving the organization may be the appropriate action. Sometimes that is the best option—leaving with honor. That way the leader in the middle is neither undermining the vision, nor is he endorsing something with which he cannot agree. I must mention one caution, however. If a leader in the middle of the organization bails out for the wrong reasons, he may find himself in a similar situation again in another organization. If you find yourself in a situation where you are considering leaving an organization, make sure you’re not doing it because of selfishness or ego.

4. ADAPT TO IT—FIND A WAY TO ALIGN WITH THE VISION

At the very least, a good employee finds a way to align himself with the vision of his organization. David Branker told me the story of Bret, a middle manager whose job was to provide computer support and data tracking for an organization’s training department. Bret was frustrated because he didn’t think the job he was asked to do was contributing significantly to the company’s vision.

Instead of sulking or complaining, he approached his leader to talk about the issue. Together, they discovered how his department might add greater value to the organization by creating systems that used technology to make training faster, more efficient, and more cost-effective. By aligning himself with the vision, Bret not only furthered the mission, added value to the organization, and improved the bottom line, but he also found greater personal fulfillment.

Douglas Randlett, who works with former football coach Pastor Tom Mullins, did his doctoral dissertation on the issue of leading from the middle of an organization. He said that when the vision of the leader in the middle doesn’t align with that of the top leadership, low job satisfaction is always the result. When those two factors do align, satisfaction is high, and so is success.

5. CHAMPION IT—TAKE THE LEADER’S VISION AND MAKE IT A REALITY

Vision may begin with one person, but it is accomplished only through the efforts of many people. Taking the leader’s vision and working to fulfill it should be the response of 360-Degree Leaders. They should strive to take the vision from *me* to *we*.

John W. Gardner said, “The prospects never looked brighter and the problems never looked tougher. Anyone who isn’t stirred by both of those statements is too tired to be of much use to us in the days ahead.”

Vision begins with one person, but it is only accomplished by many people.

During the thirty-five years that I’ve led organizations, I have always worked hard to transfer the vision I possessed to my staff. Some people embraced it; others didn’t.

THOSE WHO CHAMPIONED THE VISION

Placed the organization’s needs first
Kept the vision before the people
Represented me well to others
Understood their roles

THOSE WHO DID NOT

Placed their own needs first
Kept themselves before the people
Represented themselves well to others
Misunderstood their roles

The people who didn’t accept the vision neither championed it nor transferred it to their followers. As a result, the people they led often didn’t contribute to the overall success of the organization.

6. ADD VALUE TO IT

The most positive response to a leader's vision is to go beyond championing it and to actually add value to it. At that point, the vision becomes something more. It has greater value to the leader, greater value to the recipients of the vision, and greater value to the person who contributed to it.

Not everyone gets the opportunity to add value to the vision. There is a prerequisite for getting the opportunity to do it, and that is championing the vision as it already exists. But here's the great thing: Once you have begun to add value to the vision, then you have eliminated the Vision Challenge, because you're no longer championing someone else's vision; you are championing a vision to which you have contributed.

Nobody champions a vision and adds value to it like my team at EQUIP, the faith-based nonprofit organization I founded in 1996. From the very beginning, our mission was to train leaders. Initially, our strategy was to work in three distinct areas: in academia, in urban areas, and internationally. In 2001 we narrowed our focus and refined our vision, deciding to turn every bit of our attention to training leaders overseas. Everyone on the EQUIP team was a vision champion from the start, but key leaders did even more than champion the vision. They were instrumental in helping us recognize the need to focus our attention and try to do one thing with total excellence, not three things merely well.

What emerged was the Million Leaders Mandate, our attempt to train one million spiritual leaders around the world. As I write this, more than 700,000 leaders are in training. By January 2006, when this book goes to print, we will be training on every continent except Antarctica, and we will have reached our goal of training more than one million leaders. Already we are looking toward the goal of training a *second* million leaders!

Every day members of the EQUIP team champion the vision—with the leaders we want to train at no cost, with the associate trainers who donate their money and time to train leaders across the globe, and to the donors, whose every dollar goes to underwriting the project. They are partners championing the vision that we created together. And for that, my gratitude knows no bounds.

Challenge #7

THE INFLUENCE CHALLENGE:

Leading Others Beyond Your Position Is Not Easy

THE KEY TO SUCCESSFULLY NAVIGATING THE INFLUENCE CHALLENGE:

Think influence, not position.

As you have read about the previous six challenges, perhaps you have felt that their impact on you is minimal. If so, you can consider yourself fortunate. Nobody, however, escapes the Influence Challenge, no matter how wonderful an organization you work for or how great your boss is. Leading others beyond your position is not easy. If real leadership were easy, anybody would do it, and everyone could excel at it.

Most good leaders believe in themselves and their leadership. They are confident that if others would follow them, then the team would benefit and accomplish its goals. So why doesn't that always happen? Why don't people who report to them line up to follow? Because they don't have to! Leadership is influence. If you have neither position nor influence, people will not follow you. And the further outside your position they are, the less likely they are to let you lead them. That's why 360-Degree Leaders work to change their thinking from *I want a position that will make people follow me to, I want to become a person whom people will want to follow.*

PEOPLE FOLLOW LEADERS . . .

It's a fallacy to believe that people would automatically follow you if you were the positional leader. Leaders who have actually been on top know that it doesn't

work that way. Do people follow you now? If they follow you today, then they will follow you tomorrow when you have a better position. But if people don't follow you where you are currently, then they won't follow you where you're going either.

360-Degree Leaders work to change their thinking from, I want a position that will make people follow me to, I want to become a person whom people will want to follow.

The only solution to the Influence Challenge is to become the kind of leader other people want to follow. And what kind of leader would that be?

PEOPLE FOLLOW LEADERS THEY KNOW—LEADERS WHO CARE

Many people try to move others by criticizing them or trying to "power up" on them. People generally respond by becoming defensive, behaving combatively, or isolating themselves. Protestant reformer John Knox said, "You cannot antagonize and influence at the same time."

On the other hand, if leaders care about each individual as a person, then people respond well to them. The greater the depth of their concern, the broader and longer lasting their influence. Bo Schembechler, former head coach of the University of Michigan football team, remarked, "Deep down, your players must know you care about them. This is the most important thing. I could never get away with what I do if the players felt I didn't care. They know, in the long run, I'm in their corner."

People can sense how you feel about them. They can tell the difference between leaders who are using them for their own gain and those who want to help them succeed. People warm up to warm people. They get to know the heart of someone who cares, and they respond well to them. I think of it this way: second-mile leaders produce second-mile followers. If you go out of your way to care about others and help them, then they will go out of their way to help you when you ask them to.

PEOPLE FOLLOW LEADERS THEY TRUST—LEADERS WITH CHARACTER

Political theorist Thomas Paine said, "I love the man that can smile in trouble, that can gather strength from distress, and grow brave by reflection." 'Tis the business of little minds to shrink, but he whose heart is firm, and whose

conscience approves his conduct, will pursue his principles unto death." What gives a leader the strength to exhibit such admirable qualities? The answer is *character*.

"You cannot antagonize and influence at the same time."
—JOHN KNOX

We tend to put a lot of emphasis on intelligence and skill in this country. And while those things are important, they cannot substitute for strong character. As I teach in *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, trust is the foundation of leadership. A leader who understands all too well how character issues impact leadership is Chuck Colson, the former Nixon aide who was imprisoned in the wake of the Watergate scandal. Colson turned his life around after that ordeal and now lectures on leadership and faith issues. He said: "As you go through life, whether it's in the military, in your business, in the church, or whatever walk of life (and certainly in your family), someone is going to depend on your character more than upon your IQ."

Most people would acknowledge that trustworthiness is important in a leader. What some people don't recognize is the importance of trustworthiness in would-be leaders. Rod Loy, who leads a large organization in Little Rock, Arkansas, said:

Too many middle leaders say, "When I become the leader, I'll change the way I live." I meet with so many people who are second in command who don't live according to the character code of top leadership. Their thought is, *I don't have to live by that until I become the visible leader.* My belief is, if I don't live by those high standards, I'll never become the leader. I choose to limit my freedoms—because I understand the sacrifices of the position I one day desire to possess.

If you desire to overcome the influence challenge, then develop and exhibit the kind of character that you would find admirable in a top leader. That will pave the way for relationships with others today and prepare you for nonpositional leadership for tomorrow.

PEOPLE FOLLOW LEADERS THEY RESPECT—LEADERS WHO ARE COMPETENT

Respect is almost always gained on difficult ground. A leadership position will help a leader only until difficulties arise. Then the leader must arise to meet those difficulties. Leaders who are incapable of meeting challenges may desire

respect from their followers and peers, but they rarely get it. They may be liked if they possess good character and care for others, but they won't be highly respected. People may treat them kindly, but they won't listen to them. Everyone may have the right to speak, but not everyone has earned the right to be heard.

While poor leaders demand respect, competent leaders command respect.

While poor leaders demand respect, competent leaders command respect. Being able to do a job well brings a leader credibility. If you think you can do a job—that's confidence. If you actually can do it—that's competence. And there is no substitute for it.

PEOPLE FOLLOW LEADERS THEY CAN APPROACH—LEADERS WHO ARE CONSISTENT

One middle leader I interviewed while working on this book, whom I will call Fred, told me he once had a very moody leader as his boss. He never knew whether the "good boss" or the "evil boss" would show up at the office on any given day. But Fred learned how to deal with the issue after following the advice of a fellow staff member.

If Fred had a problem at work that would need the attention of the moody boss, he would add that to a running list he kept and took to their weekly staff meeting. Fred was always very careful never to sit next to his boss during the meeting. That way, he had a chance to observe how he treated others as discussion went from person to person around the table. After the boss talked to two or three employees, Fred could gauge what kind of mood the boss was in that day. If his boss was in a bad mood, Fred would keep his list to himself and save it for another day. But if the boss was in a positive and helpful mood, Fred asked every question on his list and got a good answer for every one. Fred often ended up holding his list for five or six weeks until the boss's mood was right. The bad news was that there was often a delay in resolving some important issues, but the good news was that his moody leader rarely bushwhacked Fred.

A Yiddish proverb states, "If you act like an ass, don't get insulted if people ride you." I guess you could say that is what Fred had to do to get along with his inconsistent leader. Consistency isn't easy for anybody. In fact, writer Aldous Huxley said, "Consistency is contrary to nature, contrary to life. The only completely consistent people are the dead."

If you want to be the kind of leader others want to follow—a 360-Degree Leader—then plan to fight the good fight to be consistent so that you are approachable. Even if you care for people, are honest with them, and can perform your job well, unless you are consistent, people will not depend on you, and they will not trust you.

PEOPLE FOLLOW LEADERS THEY ADMIRE—LEADERS WITH COMMITMENT

I love the story of the farmer who had experienced several bad years and went to see the manager of his bank. "I've got some good news and some bad news to tell you," he told the banker. "Which would you like first?"

"Why don't you tell me the bad news first and get it over with?" the bank manager replied.

"Okay. With the bad drought and inflation and all, I won't be able to pay anything on my mortgage this year; either on the principal or the interest."

"Well, that is pretty bad," responded the banker.

"It gets worse. I also won't be able to pay anything on the loan for all that machinery I bought—not on the principal or interest."

"Wow, that's really bad!"

"It's worse than that," continued the farmer. "You remember I also borrowed to buy seeds and fertilizer and other supplies? Well, I can't pay anything on that either—principal or interest."

"That's awful—and that's enough! Tell me what the good news is," the banker pleaded.

"The good news," replied the farmer with a smile, "is that I intend to keep on doing business with you."¹

The joke is corny, but it is true that people admire people who exhibit great commitment. Think of some of the great leaders you admire. When I think of people like Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King Jr., and John Wesley, one of the first qualities that comes to mind is their commitment. They gave everything they had to leading according to their principles.

Several years ago, I coauthored a book called *Becoming a Person of Influence* with Jim Dornan. Many people tell me that of all my books, it is their favorite. Why is that? I believe it's because it's a book on leadership for people without leadership positions. It's especially popular among people involved in network marketing, because their business is entirely influence based. The book is based on an acrostic that I will give you now, because it describes the qualities of an influencer and is easy to remember.

INTEGRITY—builds relationships on trust
NURTURING—cares about people as individuals
FAITH—believes in people
LISTENING—values what others have to say
UNDERSTANDING—sees from their point of view
ENLARGING—helps others become bigger
NAVIGATING—assists others through difficulties
CONNECTING—initiates positive relationships
EMPOWERING—gives them the power to lead

If you work hard to do all of these things with the people in your organization, you will overcome the Influence Challenge. The whole secret is to think *influence*, not *position*. That's what leadership is all about. If you begin to practice the qualities of influence, you will be ready to take on one of the toughest tasks of 360-Degree Leaders: leading up. That's the subject of the next section of this book.

Section II Review

The Challenges 360-Degree Leaders Face

Here is a brief review of the challenges every leader in the middle faces:

1. The Tension Challenge: The Pressure of Being “Caught in the Middle”
2. The Frustration Challenge: Following an Ineffective Leader
3. The Multi-Hat Challenge: One Head . . . Many Hats
4. The Ego Challenge: You’re Often Hidden in the Middle
5. The Fulfillment Challenge: Leaders Like the Front More Than the Middle
6. The Vision Challenge: Championing the Vision Is More Difficult When You Didn’t Create It
7. The Influence Challenge: Leading Others Beyond Your Position Is Not Easy

If these challenges resonate with you, then you know you need to lead better from the middle in order to handle them most effectively. How well do you do that now? One way to measure your ability is to take the 360-Degree Leadership assessment, offered free of charge to people who have purchased this book. Go to 360DegreeLeader.com for more information.