

## SECTION 1

### THE MYTHS OF LEADING FROM THE MIDDLE OF AN ORGANIZATION

These are classic pictures of leadership: William Wallace leading the charge of his warriors against the army that would oppress his people and him. Winston Churchill defying the Nazi threat as much of Europe collapsed. Mahatma Gandhi leading the two-hundred-mile march to the sea to protest the Salt Act. Mary Kay Ash going off on her own to create a world-class organization. Martin Luther King Jr. standing before the Lincoln Memorial challenging the nation with his dream of reconciliation.

Each of these people was a great leader and impacted hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people. Yet these pictures can also be misleading. The reality is that 99 percent of all leadership occurs not from the top but from the middle of an organization. Usually, an organization has only one person who is *the* leader. So what do you do if you are not that one person?

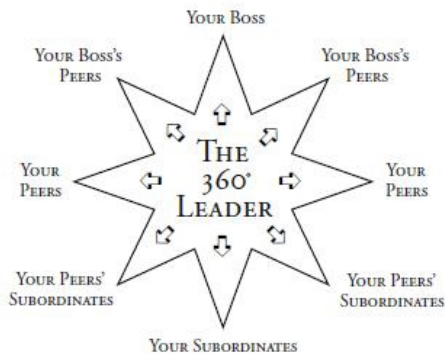
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*Ninety-nine percent of all leadership occurs not from the top but from the middle of an organization.*

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I've taught leadership for nearly thirty years. And in just about every conference I've taught, someone has come up to me and said something such as, "I like what you teach about leadership, but I can't apply it. I'm not the main leader. And the person I work under is, *at best*, average."

Is that where you live? Are you working somewhere in the middle of your organization? You may not be a follower at the lowest level of the organization, but you're not the top dog either—yet you still want to lead, to make things happen, to make a contribution.



You do not have to be held hostage to your circumstances or position. You do not have to be the CEO to lead effectively. And you can learn to make an impact through your leadership even if you report to someone who is not a good leader. What's the secret? You learn to develop your influence from wherever you are in the organization by becoming a 360-Degree Leader. You learn to lead up, lead across, and lead down.

Not everyone understands what it means to influence others in every direction—those you work for, the people who are on the same level with you, and those who work for you. Some people are good at leading the members of their own team, but they seem to alienate the leaders in other departments of the organization. Other individuals excel at building a great relationship with their boss, but they have no influence with anyone below them in the organization. A few people can get along with just about anybody, but they never seem to get any work done. On the other hand, some people are productive, but they can't get along with anybody. But 360-Degree Leaders are different. Only 360-Degree Leaders influence people at every level of the organization. By helping others, they help themselves.

At this point, you may be saying, "Leading in every direction—that's easier said than done!" That's true, but it's not impossible. In fact, becoming a 360-Degree Leader is within the reach of anyone who possesses average or better leadership skills and is willing to work at it. So even if you would rate yourself as only a five or six on a scale of one to ten, you can improve your leadership

and develop influence with the people all around you in an organization—and you can do it from anywhere in the organization.

Leading in all directions will require you to learn three different sets of leadership skills. You may already possess an intuitive sense of how well you lead up, across, and down. I want to help you make a more accurate assessment of those skills because it will help you to know how to direct your personal leadership growth. For that reason, I have arranged for you to be able to go to [www.360DegreeLeader.com](http://www.360DegreeLeader.com) and take a free assessment of their 360-Degree Leadership skills. What's offered is a simple, straightforward on-line questionnaire that will ask you to rate yourself on issues related to leadership in each of the three areas. The assessment will take only about fifteen minutes, and when you're done, you will be able to download a lengthy report with your results.

When you go to <http://www.360DegreeLeader.com>, you'll see a box asking for your passcode. In previous editions of the book, this passcode was provided on the dust jacket or inside the back cover. Now, though, you can retrieve your passcode by clicking "Register Here" just below the box. You'll fill out some basic information and receive an email with the passcode you need to take the assessment. This simple, free questionnaire will help you know where you are in your 360 Degree Leadership journey.

I recommend that you complete the assessment before reading the rest of the book. That way, you'll know where your strengths and weaknesses are as you learn about each skill set. However, before we get into those, we need to address other issues, starting with seven myths believed by many people who lead from the middle of organizations. That is the subject of this first section of the book.

## Myth #1

### THE POSITION MYTH:

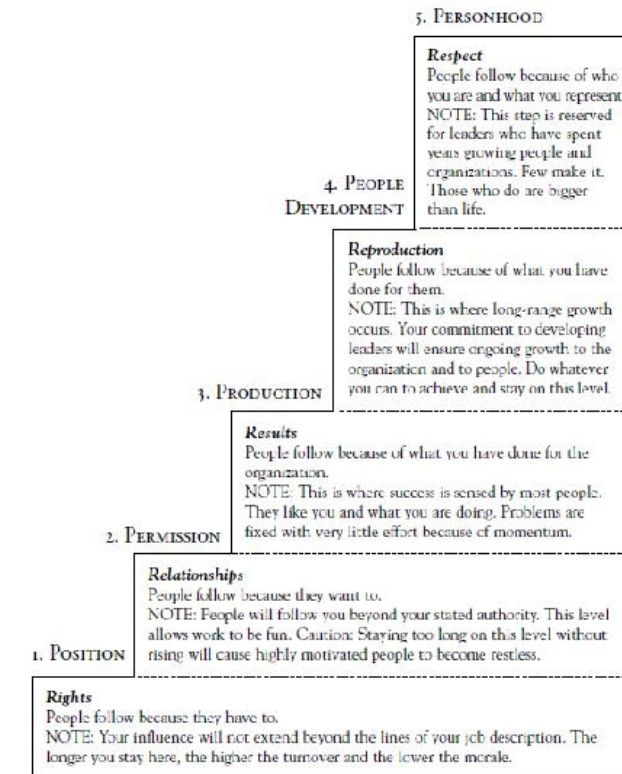
*"I can't lead if I am not at the top."*

If I had to identify the number one misconception people have about leadership, it would be the belief that leadership comes simply from having a position or title. But nothing could be further from the truth. You don't need to possess a position at the top of your group, department, division, or organization in order to lead. If you think you do, then you have bought into the position myth.

A place at the top will not automatically make anyone a leader. The Law of Influence in *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* states it clearly: "The true measure of leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less."

Because I have led volunteer organizations most of my life, I have watched many people become tied up by the position myth. When people who buy into this myth are identified as potential leaders and put on a team, they are very uncomfortable if they have not been given some kind of title or position that labels them as leaders in the eyes of other team members. Instead of working to build relationships with others on the team and to gain influence naturally, they wait for the positional leader to invest them with authority and give them a title. After a while, they become more and more unhappy, until they finally decide to try another team, another leader, or another organization.

People who follow this pattern don't understand how effective leadership develops. If you've read some of my other leadership books, you might be aware of a leadership identification tool I call "The Five Levels of Leadership," which I introduce in *Developing the Leader Within You*. It captures the dynamics of leadership development as well as anything I know. Just in case you're not familiar with it, I'll explain it briefly here.



Leadership is dynamic, and the right to lead must be earned individually with each person you meet. Where you are on the "staircase of leadership" depends on your history with that person. And with everyone, we start at the bottom of the five steps or levels.

That bottom (or first) level is position. You can only start from the position you have been given, whatever it is: production-line worker, administrative

assistant, salesperson, foreman, pastor, assistant manager, and so forth. Your position is whatever it is. From that place, you have certain rights that come with your title. But if you lead people using only your position, and you do nothing else to try to increase your influence, then people will follow you only because they have to. They will follow only within the boundaries of your job description. The lower your stated position, the less positional authority you possess. The good news is that you can increase your influence beyond your title and position. You can "move up" the staircase of leadership to higher levels.

If you move to level two, you begin to lead beyond your position because you have built relationships with the people you desire to lead. You treat them with dignity and respect. You value them as human beings. You care about them, not just the job they can do for you or the organization. Because you care about them, they begin to trust you more. As a result, they give you permission to lead them. In other words, they begin to follow you because they want to.

The third level is the production level. You move to this phase of leadership with others because of the results you achieve on the job. If the people you lead succeed in getting the job done because of your contribution to the team, then they will look to you more and more to lead the way. They follow you because of what you've done for the organization.

To reach the fourth level of leadership, you must focus on developing others. Accordingly, this is called the people-development level of leadership. Your agenda is to pour yourself into the individuals you lead—mentor them, help them develop their skills, and sharpen their leadership ability. What you are doing, in essence, is leadership reproduction. You value them, add value to them, and make them more valuable. At this level, they follow you because of what you've done for them.

The fifth and final level is the personhood level, but it is not a level one can strive to reach, because reaching it is outside of your control. Only others can put you there, and they do so because you have excelled in leading them from the first four levels for a long period of time. You have earned the reputation of a level-five leader.

### DISPOSITION MORE THAN POSITION

When potential leaders understand the dynamics of gaining influence with people using the Five Levels of Leadership, they come to realize that position has little to do with genuine leadership. Do individuals have to be at the top of the organizational chart to develop relationships with others and get them to like working with them? Do they need to possess the top title to achieve results

and help others become productive? Do they have to be president or CEO to teach the people who report to them to see, think, and work like leaders? Of course not. Influencing others is a matter of disposition, not position.

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*Leadership is a choice you make, not a place you sit.*

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You can lead others from anywhere in an organization. And when you do, you make the organization better. David Branker, a leader who has influenced others from the middle of organizations for years and who currently serves as an executive director in a large church, said, “To do nothing in the middle is to create more weight for the top leader to move. For some leaders—it might even feel like dead weight. Leaders in the middle can have a profound effect on an organization.”

Every level of an organization depends on leadership from someone. The bottom line is this: Leadership is a choice you make, not a place you sit. Anyone can choose to become a leader wherever he is. You can make a difference no matter where you are.

## Myth #2

### THE DESTINATION MYTH:

*“When I get to the top, then I’ll learn to lead.”*

In 2003, Charlie Wetzel, my writer, decided he wanted to tackle a goal he had held for more than a decade. He was determined to run a marathon. If you were to meet Charlie, you’d never guess that he is a runner. The articles in running magazines say that at five feet ten inches tall, a distance runner should weigh 165 pounds or less. Charlie weighs more like 205. But he was a regular runner who averaged twelve to twenty miles a week and ran two or three 10K races every year, so he picked the Chicago marathon and decided to go for it.

Do you think Charlie just showed up at the starting line in downtown Chicago on race day and said, “Okay, I guess it’s time to figure out how to run a marathon”? Of course not. He started doing his homework a year in advance. He read reviews of marathons held around the United States and learned that the Chicago marathon—held in October—enjoys great weather most years. It utilizes a fast, flat race course. It has a reputation for having the best fan support of any marathon in the nation. It was the perfect place for a first-time marathoner.

He also started learning how to train for a marathon. He read articles. He searched Web sites. He talked to marathon runners. He even recruited a friend who had run two marathons to race with him in Chicago on October 12. And, of course, he trained. He started the process in mid-April, increasing his mileage every week and eventually working his way up to two training runs of twenty miles each in addition to his other sessions. When race day came around, he was ready—and he completed the race.

Leadership is very similar. If you want to succeed, you need to learn as much as you can about leadership before you have a leadership position. When I meet people in social settings and they ask me what I do for a living, some of them are intrigued when I say I write books and speak. And they often ask what I

write about. When I say leadership, the response that makes me chuckle most goes something like this: “Oh. Well, when I become a leader, I’ll read some of your books!” What I don’t say (but want to) is: “If you’d read some of my books, maybe you’d become a leader.”

Good leadership is learned in the trenches. Leading as well as they can wherever they are is what prepares leaders for more and greater responsibility. Becoming a good leader is a lifelong learning process. If you don’t try out your leadership skills and decision-making process when the stakes are small and the risks are low, you’re likely to get into trouble at higher levels when the cost of mistakes is high, the impact is far reaching, and the exposure is greater. Mistakes made on a small scale can be easily overcome. Mistakes made when you’re at the top cost the organization greatly, and they damage a leader’s credibility.

How do you become the person you desire to be? You start now to adopt the thinking, learn the skills, and develop the habits of the person you wish to be. It’s a mistake to daydream about “one day when you’ll be on top” instead of handling today so that it prepares you for tomorrow. As Hall of Fame basketball coach John Wooden said, “When opportunity comes, it’s too late to prepare.” If you want to be a successful leader, learn to lead before you have a leadership position.



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*You may be able to grant someone a position, but you cannot grant him real leadership. Influence must be earned.*

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### Myth #3

#### THE INFLUENCE MYTH:

*“If I were on top, then people would follow me.”*

Once read that President Woodrow Wilson had a housekeeper who constantly lamented that she and her husband didn't possess more prestigious positions in life. One day the lady approached the president after she heard that the secretary of labor had resigned from the administration.

“President Wilson,” she said, “my husband is perfect for his vacant position. He is a laboring man, knows what labor is, and understands laboring people. Please consider him when you appoint the new secretary of labor.”

“I appreciate your recommendation,” answered Wilson, “but you must remember, the secretary of labor is an important position. It requires an influential person.”

“But,” the housekeeper said, “if you made my husband the secretary of labor, he would be an influential person!”

People who have no leadership experience have a tendency to overestimate the importance of a leadership title. That was the case for President Wilson's housekeeper. She thought that leadership was a reward that someone of importance could grant. But influence doesn't work that way. You may be able to grant someone a position, but you cannot grant him real leadership. Influence must be earned.

A position gives you a chance. It gives you the opportunity to try out your leadership. It asks people to give you the benefit of the doubt for a while. But given some time, you will earn your level of influence—for better or worse. Good leaders will gain in influence beyond their stated position. Bad leaders will shrink their influence down so that it is actually less than what originally came with the position. Remember, a position doesn't make a leader, but a leader can make the position.

## Myth #4

### THE INEXPERIENCE MYTH:

*“When I get to the top, I’ll be in control.”*

Have you ever found yourself saying something like, “You know, if I were in charge, we wouldn’t have done this, and we wouldn’t have done that. Things sure would be different around here if I were the boss”? If so, let me tell you that there’s good news and bad news. The good news is that the desire to improve an organization and the belief that you’re capable of doing it are often the marks of a leader. Andy Stanley said, “If you’re a leader and leaders work for you, they think they can do a better job than you. They just do (just like you do). And that’s not wrong; that’s just leadership.”<sup>1</sup> The desires to innovate, to improve, to create, and to find a better way are all leadership characteristics.

Now here’s the bad news. Without experience being the top person in an organization, you would likely overestimate the amount of control you have at the top. The higher you go—and the larger the organization—the more you realize that many factors control the organization. More than ever, when you are at the top, you need every bit of influence you can muster. Your position does not give you total control—or protect you.

As I write this, a story has broken in the business news that provides a good illustration of this fact. Perhaps you are familiar with the name Carly Fiorina. She is considered one of the top business executives in the nation, and in 1998, *Fortune* magazine named her the most powerful woman executive in the United States. At that time she was the president of Lucent Technologies’ Global Service Provider Business, but soon afterward she became CEO of Hewlett-Packard, the eleventh largest company in the nation at the time.<sup>2</sup>

In 2002, Fiorina made a bold move that she hoped would pay off big for her organization. She orchestrated a merger of Hewlett-Packard and Compaq in an effort to become more competitive with chief rival Dell. Unfortunately, revenues and earnings didn’t meet expectations during the two years after the merger,

but even as late as December of 2004, Fiorina was upbeat about her future. When asked about the rumor that she might transition her career into politics, she responded, “I am the CEO of Hewlett-Packard. I love the company. I love the job—and I’m not finished.”<sup>3</sup> Two months later she was finished. Hewlett-Packard’s board of directors asked for her resignation.

To think that life “at the top” is easier is to think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Being at the top has its own set of problems and challenges. In leadership—no matter where you are in an organization—the bottom line is always influence.

## Myth #5

### THE FREEDOM MYTH:

*"When I get to the top, I'll no longer be limited."*

Sometimes I think people get the wrong idea about leadership. Many people hope that it's a ticket to freedom. It will provide a solution to their professional and career problems. But being at the top is not a cure-all.

Have you entertained the idea that being in charge will change your life? Have thoughts such as these come to mind from time to time?

*When I get to the top, I'll have it made.*

*When I finally finish climbing the corporate ladder, I'll have time to rest.*

*When I own the company, I'll be able to do whatever I want.*

*When I'm in charge, the sky will be the limit.*

Anybody who has owned a company or been the top leader in an organization knows that those ideas are little more than fantasies. Being the top leader doesn't mean you have no limits. It doesn't remove the lid from your potential. It doesn't matter what job you do or what position you obtain; you will have limits. That's just the way life is.

When you move up in an organization, the weight of your responsibility increases. In many organizations, as you move up the ladder, you may even find that the amount of responsibility you take on increases faster than the amount of authority you receive. When you go higher, more is expected of you, the pressure is greater, and the impact of your decisions weighs more heavily. You must take these things into account.

To see how this can play out, let's say, for example, that you have a position in sales, and you're really good at it. You make sales, work well with clients, and bring \$5 million in revenue for your company every year. As a salesperson, you may have a lot of freedom. Maybe you can work your schedule however you

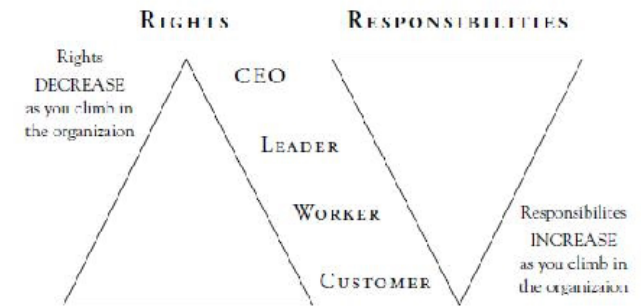
want. As many salespeople do, you may work from home. It doesn't matter if you want to work at 5 a.m. or 10 p.m., as long as you serve your clients and company well. You can do things in your own style, and if you drop a ball, you can probably recover pretty easily.

*In many organizations, as you move up the ladder, you may even find that the amount of responsibility you take on increases faster than the amount of authority you receive.*

But let's say you become a sales manager over half a dozen people who do what you used to do. You are now more limited than you were before. You can't arrange your schedule however you want anymore because you have to work around the schedules of your six employees, who have to work with their clients. And if you're a good leader, you will encourage the members of your team to work using their own style to maximize their potential, making it that much more difficult for you. Add to that the increased financial pressures that the position brings since you would be responsible for maybe \$25 million in revenue for your company.

If you move up again, let's say to the level of a division manager, then the demands on you increase yet again. And you may now have to work with a number of different departments, each with its own problems, skill sets, and cultures. Good leaders go to their people, connect, find common ground, and empower them to succeed. So in some ways, leaders have less freedom as they move up, not more.

When I teach leadership, I often use the following diagram to help potential leaders realize that as they rise up in the organization, their rights actually decrease instead of increase:



Customers have great freedom and can do almost anything they want. They have no real responsibility to the organization. Workers have more obligations. Leaders have even more, and because of that, they become more limited in terms of their freedom. It is a limitation they choose willingly, but they are limited just the same. If you want to push the limits of your effectiveness, there is a better solution. Learning to lead will blow the lid off of your potential.

## Myth #6

### THE POTENTIAL MYTH:

*"I can't reach my potential if I'm not the top leader."*

How many kids say, "Someday I want to grow up to be vice president of the United States"? Probably none. If a child has political aspirations, he wants to be president. If she has a bent toward business, she wants to be a company owner or CEO. Few people aspire to reach the middle. In fact, several years ago, [Monster.com](#), an online job search service, poked fun at this idea by running a television ad showing children saying things such as, "When I grow up, I want to file all day long" and, "I want to claw my way up to middle management."

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Yet the reality is that most people will never be the top leader in an organization. They will spend their careers somewhere in the middle. Is that okay? Or should everybody play career "king of the hill" and try to reach the top?

I believe that people should strive for the top of their game, not the top of the organization. Each of us should work to reach our potential, not necessarily the corner office. Sometimes you can make the greatest impact from somewhere other than first place. An excellent example of that is Vice President Dick Cheney. He has enjoyed a remarkable career in politics: White House chief of staff to President Gerald Ford, six-term congressman from Wyoming, secretary of defense to President George H. W. Bush, and vice president to the second President Bush. He possesses all the credentials one would need to run for president of the United States. Yet he knows that the top position is not his best role. An article in *Time* magazine described Cheney this way:

When Richard Bruce Cheney was a student at Natrona County High School in Casper, Wyo., he was a solid football player, senior-class president and an above-average student. But he wasn't the star . . . Inconspicuous, off to the side, backing up a flashier partner, putting out fires when called upon—it's a role Dick Cheney has played his entire life. Throughout his remarkable career . . . Cheney's success has derived from his unparalleled skill at serving as the discreet, effective, loyal adviser to higher-profile leaders. He did once flirt with the idea of twirling the flaming baton himself, considering a 1996 run for president. But the idea of putting himself on that stage . . . would have required a rewiring of Cheney's political DNA. Instead he took an offer in business, figuring he would retire in the job and then do a lot of hunting and fishing. But George W. Bush had a different plan, one that returned Cheney to the role he plays best. As Lynne Cheney told *Time*, her husband "never thought that this would be his job. But if you look back over his whole career, it's been preparation for this."<sup>1</sup>

Cheney has reached his potential in the position of vice president, a position few would set as a lifetime career goal. He is highly effective, and he seems to be content. Mary Kay Hill, a longtime aide to former Wyoming senator Alan Simpson, who worked with Cheney on Capitol Hill, said, "You plug him in, and he works anywhere. He just has a real good way of fitting in and working his environment." Cheney appears to be an excellent example of a 360-Degree Leader, someone who knows how to influence others from whatever position he finds himself in.



## Myth #7

### THE ALL-OR-NOTHING MYTH:

*"If I can't get to the top, then I won't try to lead."*

What are the prospects for your getting to the top of your organization, of someday becoming *the* leader? The reality for most people is that they will never be the CEO. Does that mean they should just give up leading altogether?

That's what some people do. They look at an organization, recognize they will not be able to make it to the top, and give up. Their attitude is, "If I can't be the captain of the team, then I'll take my ball and go home."

Others enter the process of leadership but then become frustrated by their position in an organization. Why? Because they define *success* as being "on top." As a result, they believe that if they are not on top, they are not successful. If that frustration lasts long enough, they can become disillusioned, bitter, and cynical. If it gets to that point, instead of being a help to themselves and their organization, they become a hindrance.

But what good can people do if they sit on the sidelines?

Consider the case of six men who were featured in *Fortune* magazine in August of 2005. In the article, they are hailed as unsung heroes of the civil rights movement, yet there is no evidence that they ever marched or sat in at a lunch counter. Their contributions—and their battles—occurred in corporate America. They led their way into the executive suite of companies such as Exxon, Phillip Morris, Marriott, and General Foods.

Clifton Wharton, who became the first black CEO of a large company (TIAA-CREF) says, "Gordon Parks has this great expression, 'choice of weapons.' In terms of fighting, you always have a choice of weapons. Some of us chose to do our fighting on the inside."<sup>1</sup>

When Wharton and fellow pioneers Darwin Davis, James Avery, Lee Archer, James "Bud" Ward, and George Lewis entered corporate America in the 1950s and '60s, what chance did they think they had to become CEO of their organi-

zations: Equitable, Exxon, General Foods, Marriott, and Phillip Morris? Not much! When Avery started with Esso (now Exxon), he couldn't even use the same restroom or water fountain as other citizens. Yet it was his goal to lead. That desire was part of his first career choice: teaching. And it prompted him to change careers in 1956 when an Esso executive approached him.

"I loved being a teacher," Avery says. "But if I could wear a shirt and tie and work for a major corporation? Doing that was much more important."<sup>2</sup> Avery succeeded as a leader despite incredible obstacles and prejudice, and rose to the post of senior vice president. He retired in 1986.

Bud Ward, who retired as senior vice president at Marriott, has a similar story. When he was hired by Bill Marriott, Ward became the hotel industry's first black vice president. During his twenty years of leadership at Marriott, he opened 350 hotels, helped to develop the Courtyard by Marriott chain, and oversaw the company's infotech team.

Ward is aware of the impact he made. "It was a two-pronged thing," he says. "You do the marching and the raising hell and whatnot, but you've got to have somebody on the inside to interpret that to the individuals that you're trying to reach. I saw that as my role."<sup>3</sup>

What these men—and many others—did has made a lasting impact. In the same issue of *Fortune* was a special section called "The Diversity List." It profiled the most influential African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans in the country. Most people on the list are CEOs, presidents, chairmen, or founders of their organizations, positions that it would have been more difficult to attain had others not gone before them and led well.

You do not need to be the top dog to make a difference. Leadership is not meant to be an all-or-nothing proposition. If being someplace other than the top has caused you great frustration, please don't throw in the towel. Why? Because you can make an impact from wherever you are in an organization, even if you face additional obstacles, as these six men did.

Being a leader stuck in the middle brings many challenges. You can learn to navigate them. Becoming an effective 360-Degree Leader requires principles and skills to lead the people above, beside, and below you in the organization. You can learn them.

I believe that individuals can become better leaders wherever they are. Improve your leadership, and you can impact your organization. You can change people's lives. You can be someone who adds value. You can learn to influence people at every level of the organization—even if you never get to the top. By helping others, you can help yourself.

The first place to start is by learning to overcome the challenges that every 360-Degree Leader faces. So turn the page and let's get started.

### Section I Review

## *The Myths of Leading from the Middle of an Organization*

Here is a brief review of the 7 Myths every leader in the middle faces:

MYTH #1 The Position Myth: "I can't lead if I am not at the top."

MYTH #2 The Destination Myth: "When I get to the top, then I'll learn to lead."

MYTH #3 The Influence Myth: "If I were on top, then people would follow me."

MYTH #4 The Inexperience Myth: "When I get to the top, I'll be in control."

MYTH #5 The Freedom Myth: "When I get to the top, I'll no longer be limited."

MYTH #6 The Potential Myth: "I can't reach my potential if I'm not the top leader."

MYTH #7 The All-or-Nothing Myth: "If I can't get to the top, then I won't try to lead."

How well are you doing overcoming these seven myths? If you're not sure, take the 360-Degree Leadership assessment offered free of charge to people who have purchased this book. Visit [360DegreeLeader.com](http://360DegreeLeader.com) for more information.