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Lift

The Fundamental State of Leadership



Ryan W. Quinn and Robert E. Quinn



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THE FUNDAMENTAL STATE OF LEADERSHIP

Second Edition

RYAN W. QUINN
and **ROBERT E. QUINN**



BK

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
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*To Jane Dutton and Kim Cameron,
two pioneers in the scholarship of the
positive who have lifted us to higher
and more meaningful levels of life.*

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INTRODUCTION

HARNESSING THE POWER OF LIFT

On August 18, 1941, officer John Gillespie Magee Jr. of the Royal Canadian Air Force took a new airplane, the Spitfire Mk I, on a test flight.¹ Magee had just received his wings as a pilot. As he flew the Spitfire to new heights he felt inspired to write a poem that is now the official poem of the Royal Canadian Air Force and the British Royal Air Force. The poem has inspired short films, songs, inscriptions on headstones, presidential addresses, museum displays, and eulogies. Some have even used this poem as a prayer.

High Flight

Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds—and done a hundred things
You have not done—wheeled and soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of air.
Up, up the long, delirious blue
I've topped the windswept heights with easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew.
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod
The high, untrampled sanctity of space,
Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

It is hard to read this poem without feeling at least a bit of the exhilaration that Magee must have felt.² His momentary thoughts and feelings inspired words that continue to move others generations after his death. Magee's experience, and the poem it generated, have "slipped the surly bonds of earth" and "done a hundred things" because Magee "trod the high, untrespassed sanctity of space" with a "lifting mind." If Magee's experience had this kind of impact, what impact might we have if we slip the surly bonds of earth with a lifting mind?

This is a book about how we can do just that: slip the surly bonds of earth by lifting our hearts and minds, and in the process lift other people as well. Like Orville and Wilbur Wright, who used physical science and practical experience to build the first airplane, thus making it possible later for Magee to rise above the bonds of earth, we can use social science and practical experience to learn to rise above the constraints of life and lift others around us. The tool that the Wright brothers developed to help people harness the aerodynamic force of lift was the airplane; the tool that we have developed to help people harness the social and psychological forces that "lift"—or exert a positive influence upon—themselves and others is called the fundamental state of leadership.

The fundamental state of leadership is a psychological state: a temporary pattern of thoughts and feelings in which we are (1) purpose-centered (the results we want are not weighed down by needless expectations); (2) internally directed (our personal values guide our actions); (3) other-focused (we feel empathy for the feelings and needs of others); and (4) externally open (we believe that we can improve at whatever it is we are trying to do). When we experience these thoughts and feelings, we feel uplifted and, consequently, lift others around us.

In aerodynamics, *lift* is the name for the force that pushes an airplane (or a boat, or any object traveling in a liquid or a gas) upward. We use the metaphor of *lift*, and of heavier-than-air *flight*, to frame our discussion of the fundamental state of leadership. There are many parallels between how airplanes harness "lift" and how the fundamental

state of leadership helps people to harness their potential to lift themselves and others to greater heights of achievement, integrity, learning, and love.³

The fundamental state of leadership lifts us and others, but daily living often drags us into more normal states. In normal states we (1) seek comfort, (2) react to situations automatically, (3) focus on our own wants, and (4) believe that there is little we can do to improve. In a normal state, our leadership is less positive and it can be hard to change.

We offer four questions that anyone can use to experience the fundamental state of leadership, and we use scientific research to explain how people who ask themselves these questions tend to lift themselves and the people around them:

1. What result do I want to create?
2. What would my story be if I were living the values I expect of others?
3. How do others feel about this situation?
4. What are three or more strategies I could try in learning how to achieve my purpose?

These questions are simple, but their power is in their simplicity. We considered each word carefully, comparing it against scientific research. For example, the question “How do others feel about this situation?” may seem like it is simply repeating the old adage, “Walk a mile in another person’s shoes,” which encourages people to consider other people’s perspectives. As we will discuss in chapter 8, however, simply considering others’ perspectives is often not enough; we must understand the feelings behind those perspectives. And research suggests that including such words as *others* and leaving out such questions as “How would I feel?” are also important for different reasons.

Scientific research gives us insight into why the fundamental state of leadership is important, what its characteristics are, how it influences others, and how to formulate questions that can help us experience it.

These questions are, however, not the only means for experiencing the fundamental state of leadership. When we teach people about the fundamental state of leadership, most people can remember times when they have experienced it, often in moments of crisis. Questions derived from science enable us to experience the fundamental state of leadership intentionally, and we offer other potential questions as well.

This book is rich in scientific detail, but it is not possible to include every detail. We try to make the research that we share as practical and as engaging as possible. Therefore, in addition to using science to explain the fundamental state of leadership, we provide practical illustrations: stories from our own lives and from the lives of people we know.⁴ We take you into corporate offices where executives make decisions that affect the lives of thousands of people, and into our living rooms where we make decisions that affect our families. We take you into community organizations where people work to help others, and into the library where we study alone. We take you onto the basketball court and into neighborhoods; on television shows and into classrooms; into the marketplace and onto the front lawn. We take you to all of these places to illustrate how leadership matters in most situations. We have also included exercises for personal application at the end of chapters 1, 4, 6, 8, and 10; these exercises contain lists of practical ideas. We want the book to be interesting and useful to people who want to lead, whatever their circumstances may be.

Chasing the Shouting Wind Along; Or, Writing the Second Edition

Kendara, an MBA student, was taking Ryan's class on leadership. As part of the class study, she had to read the first edition of this book and had to pick specific times to practice leadership every week. (We describe this learning process in chapter 12.) By the time Kendara got to the penultimate week, she said that she had only applied the leadership principles to "some simple issue, never really using it on something

‘serious,’” and she had no intention to do so. She had a serious matter weighing on her mind when she sat down to complete that week’s reading assignment, however: she needed to let her boss know that her workload exceeded her capacity. She had a meeting scheduled to discuss it, but Kendara had spent the entire morning wondering if her boss would think that she was incompetent and her career would be ruined.

As Kendara read her assignment from the book that morning, she said that it was like a lightbulb had turned on. She focused on her boss’s concerns instead of her own, had a clear intuition about what she should say, and walked into the meeting with confidence. She laid out her points. In turn, Kendara’s boss said she was impressed, and that it took a big person to admit being in over her head. Because Kendara had been honest with her, the boss now felt more comfortable trusting her. Kendara, in turn, left the meeting energized, relieved, and confident about her career prospects.

Kendara’s story illustrates why we wrote a new edition of this book and is itself a metaphor for this second edition. Kendara’s story is a story of second chances. Other students in her class had used the first edition of *Lift* to address serious leadership challenges and had benefited from doing so. Kendara did not mention any negative feelings toward the book and its principles, but when she gave the book a second chance, this helped her approach her class assignments more productively. In turn, her boss gave her a second chance, and everyone involved was better off for these second chances.

For the past six years, people have read and used this book, and we have used this book in our teaching and consulting, and many of the reports we have received suggest that it has had a positive effect. At the same time we have also learned many things about the book, and about teaching these principles, that suggest that if we give this book its own second chance we can enhance the positive impact it has upon the world. As Kendara’s story and many others suggest, we have been pleased with the book’s impact. But we do think that we

can further enhance the book and its impact; hence this second edition.

The changes we have made are threefold. First, we have made hundreds of little revisions throughout the book: we clarified a point of research here, explained a story more fully there, and otherwise used six years of feedback to improve little things about the book in every way we could. Second, we added two new chapters. Chapter 12 provides a description of a method for teaching leadership that we have developed, refined, and digitized in the years since the first edition was published. We are seeing all kinds of exciting possibilities open up with regard to this learning method, and we wanted to share it with readers. In the new chapter 13 we have described some of our own personal learning that has occurred since the first edition was published. This has been one of the most delightful things about the first edition: how much learning it has created in us and in others.

The third major change was to clarify throughout that this is a book about leadership. To do this, we changed the subtitle, changed language, and even added icons to the chapters to help readers stay clear about the overall purpose of the book even when they are reading detailed chapter accounts. In the first edition we used the word *influence* more than *leadership* because we were worried that some people might not think of themselves as leaders, and therefore might not see the book as relevant. In this second edition we have decided to focus more squarely on leadership because we do in fact use this book to train and develop leaders, we offer a new and unique perspective on leadership, and we want everyone to rise to the call of leadership, whether it be in the boardroom or on the factory floor, in the company or in the home, on the sports field or in the backyard. As the subtitle of the first edition suggested, we want to help anyone and everyone to be a positive force in any situation. As the subtitle of this new edition suggests, we want people to realize that the choice to be a positive influence is a choice to lead.

THE FUNDAMENTAL STATE OF LEADERSHIP

Ron, a colleague of ours, became a bit of a legend in his company after only a few months of working there. Like many of the executives in his company, Ron got projects done well and on time. Unlike many of these executives, Ron's employees loved working together and were excited about their projects, even if they began the projects disagreeing with each other. Some executives managed to push their projects through in spite of problems and disagreements; some executives managed to work well with people but did not accomplish quite as much. In contrast, Ron's leadership always increased harmony while bringing exceptional results. He became one of the most influential people in his company.

One day Ron walked out of a staffing meeting and said something that surprised his coworkers. The meeting had occurred in a stuffy, windowless room at the end of a long week; Ron and everyone else in the group had felt grumpy. They had discussed whether or not people from other units in the business should be moved into Ron's department. He did not want anyone else transferred in, so Ron argued his point and won; it seemed like a normal business meeting. Yet when Ron walked out, he told his coworkers, "I have given away my power."

Ron's coworkers did not believe him. He was one of the most influential people in the company, and he had gotten what he wanted out of the staffing meeting. How could he have given his power away? Even Ron could not answer this question, but he could tell that something had changed and that his ability to lead had changed as a result.

A Different Kind of Power

When Ron was one of the most influential people in his company, his leadership did not depend on a position of authority. And when he “lost his power” his formal authority had not changed. Leadership may be exercised by a CEO who is trying to implement a strategic change in a multinational corporation, but it could also be exercised by a player on a soccer team who inspires his teammates to play less selfishly, a teacher who motivates the children in her class to exceed all standards of academic proficiency, a father who stirs a desire in his children to cooperate with each other, or an employee who convinces her boss to change a policy that impedes her colleagues from giving their best performance.

Many scholars agree that leadership does not depend on position. They define leadership as a process of social influence that involves determining collective goals, motivating goal pursuit, and developing or maintaining the group and culture.¹ We agree that leadership is a process of social influence and that it often involves setting goals and motivating people to pursue those goals. However, we also propose one implicit difference and one explicit difference from this definition. Implicitly, this definition of leadership suggests that leadership is intentional. In this book we show how leadership also involves motivating people without intending to, and sometimes even involves motivating them to do things that we never intended to motivate them to do. Sometimes our leadership is intentional, but it may not always be so. For example, Ron sometimes took action in which he intended to create productivity and harmony, but other times the people he inspired came up with ideas of their own that were much better than what Ron thought they would do.

We also propose an explicit difference from the standard definition of leadership. In particular, we propose that leadership occurs when people *choose to follow* someone who *deviates* from at least one accepted

cultural norm or social convention. If a person complies with accepted norms, that person is not blazing a new trail but is simply following convention. And even if the person breaks cultural norms, if no one follows that person there is no leadership. Leadership challenges convention *and* inspires others to follow. The impact of such leadership is most positive and effective when cultural deviations inspire people to enhance their ethical contributions and the welfare of the people who hold a stake in the situation. We often saw this in Ron—before the grumpy staffing meeting—when he would take action that defied what people accepted as possible, appropriate, or real. Defying accepted conventions can offend or alienate others, but when people understood the intentions and effects of Ron’s actions, they often contributed to his efforts, rather than feel offended or alienated.

Most of us, when we want to lead, use rational arguments, appeals to duty, rewards, punishments, or any number of other tactics to try to persuade others.² Sometimes these approaches succeed, and if they succeed we often feel satisfied. But most of us have also experienced moments of exceptional leadership—moments such as Ron’s—even if these moments were fleeting. And because of these experiences our intuition tells us that more is possible even if it feels elusive. This elusiveness is the feeling Ron experienced at the end of the staffing meeting.

Ron got what he wanted in the staffing meeting, but he did not feel satisfied. He struggled to explain his feelings. The tactics he used in the staffing meeting worked, but he also began to see that he had created “collateral damage.” In contrast with his usual experience in the company, at the end of the staffing meeting people felt hurt and relationships had suffered. People felt weighed down rather than lifted up, and because they did not feel committed to the decisions made in the meeting, the same problems may reemerge. Although Ron had wielded influence successfully, he wanted to be a leader again. He wanted the kind of social influence that comes from challenging a cultural norm in a way that inspires others to want to participate in pursuing a meaningful,

collective good. He could tell that he had “lost” the ability to do this because something had changed inside him, but he could not explain why. All he could think to say was that he “was in a different place.”

Psychological States

Ron learned later that the different place he was in was a different psychological state. A *psychological state* is a current, temporary condition of our mind. It is the pattern of thoughts and feelings we experience at a given point in time.

A person’s psychological state can be simple or complex. A simple psychological state, for example, could be described by a single emotion, such as “happy” or “sad.” A complex psychological state can include many thoughts and emotions at the same time. For example, if a teenager receives an invitation to take the last spot on the school soccer team but received the invitation because a good friend was kicked off the team, then that teenager’s psychological state might involve a complex blend of happiness about the good news, a resolve to succeed, concern for her friend’s feelings, fear of the challenge, and guilt for accepting the position.

Scientists who study psychological states seek to understand what kind of states people experience, what leads people to experience particular states, and how these particular states influence other people. This last question is particularly important; as researchers come to understand the answers to it, they are discovering that our psychological states can influence other people in surprising and sometimes even dramatic ways.

Bill, a colleague of ours, told us a personal story that is a good example of this. Bill and his mother did not get along, let alone enjoy each other’s company. It had been this way for a long time. In any situation Bill knew what his mother would say, he knew how he would respond, and he knew how the argument would unfold. He hated it, but he could not stop himself.

Bill went to a retreat and ended up working with a counselor. The goal was to improve his relationship with his mother. After much effort he began to feel more positively toward his mother. By the end of the retreat he was anxious to see her. He reports the following experience:

I took a deep breath and walked into the kitchen. I saw her before she saw me. I thought about the sacrifices she made and how much I loved her. She turned and looked at me. She opened her mouth. My stomach tightened and I thought, “Here it comes.” She paused and smiled. Then she went on with what she was doing. I was stunned. That was not what she was supposed to do. I was different and now she was different. From then on the relationship totally changed. I had not said a word, but I was different, and somehow she sensed it.³

Bill’s relationship with his mother changed without his saying a word because Bill was in a different psychological state. At the retreat he had worked hard to consciously appreciate her positive characteristics and the sacrifices she had made over many years. This less angry and more loving orientation was probably communicated in his facial expression, his posture, and other nonverbal ways. These nonverbal signals of love and appreciation provided Bill’s mother with a new set of cues to interpret. When people receive unexpected cues from others—particularly unexpected emotional cues—they have to make sense of them in new ways.⁴ Thus, without saying a word to his mother, Bill had begun to construct a new relationship. The change in his relationship began with a change in his psychological state.

Our psychological states, whether they influence others positively or negatively, do so in at least four ways:

1. Our facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice send new and unexpected cues that people interpret and react to in new and different ways.

2. The emotions that are part of our psychological states are contagious. In other words, people often unconsciously mimic and then adopt our feelings.⁵
3. Psychological states sometimes lead us to make different decisions or act in different ways than we would if we had been in a different psychological state, and other people are influenced by these decisions and actions.⁶
4. When we take different actions and perform them in different ways, we also generate different results—results that may be more or less effective, creative, or beneficial. People pay attention to and try to make sense of unusual results.⁷

Ron's leadership exhibited all of these forms of influence. For example, when Ron felt positive, his coworkers had to make sense of his positive feelings—especially when Ron was positive during difficult times. The energy he brought to his activities was contagious, and it lifted others. Because of how he felt toward others, he might listen carefully in situations where others would feel compelled to argue their points. And because he achieved exceptional results, people wanted to learn from him or be a part of his team.

Our psychological states influence other people, and their psychological states influence us; we are relational beings.⁸ Our psychological states are the sum of who we are at a given moment as we play out the stories of our lives in relation to others. Therefore, who we are at any time depends on who the people around us are, and who they are depends on who we are. The psychological state that Ron experienced in the staffing meeting affected how he experienced himself and acted as a manager, a coworker, and a friend. It also affected how positively other people experienced themselves in similar roles.

Typically, the influence that we exert upon each other tends to reinforce the conventions and norms to which we are already accustomed. However, if we experience a positive psychological state that defies some

convention or norm, we may lead people into entirely new ways of relating and performing.

Our purpose in this book is to propose a specific psychological state that can make us a positive influence upon those around us in any situation. We call this the *fundamental state of leadership*. When we experience the fundamental state of leadership, we tend to lift both ourselves and those around us.

Learning to Lift with Mason

When people experience the fundamental state of leadership, they are purpose-centered, internally directed, other-focused, and externally open. To understand each of these characteristics, we share a story about Ryan and his son Mason that illustrates both what the fundamental state of leadership is and what it is not. Ryan begins this story in a normal psychological state. A normal psychological state is not bad; it is simply common. Sometimes a normal state leads to negative influence, and sometimes it does not, but it does not achieve the same type of influence that comes from the fundamental state of leadership. In this story Ryan experiences a change from the normal state to the fundamental state of leadership.

Ryan: Shortly before Mason turned six years old he and I fell into an unhealthy pattern. Mason would do something wrong, such as provoke his sister or refuse to clean up. In response, I would tell him that I would put him in a time-out. He would scream, “I hate you! I wish you weren’t part of our family! Go away and never come back!” I would then try to calm him down and explain why he should clean up or leave his sister alone and why the time-out was the consequence. In spite of this, Mason would scream more and sometimes even hit me. Often I would have to pick him up and take him to his bedroom kicking and screaming. I had no idea how to break out of this pattern.

One reason Mason and I were unable to break out of this pattern was that I was treating Mason’s behavior as a problem; I did not like Mason’s tantrums and I wanted him to behave the way he had before. His old

behaviors were comfortable for me: I was *comfort-centered*. This desire to stay comfortable is a characteristic of a normal psychological state. In my desire for comfort I never considered that perhaps Mason was behaving differently because of changes that had happened in his life, such as starting kindergarten. If his circumstances were different, that meant that my circumstances were different as well. Trying to make people behave the same way under new circumstances is often not the most appropriate way to influence them.

Eventually, I decided to become more *purpose-centered* with Mason. This focus on purpose is one characteristic of the fundamental state of leadership. Instead of trying to make Mason behave as he had before, I asked myself what result I wanted to create. I decided that my purpose was to help Mason learn how to make responsible choices of his own volition. Once I made this decision, I was no longer interested in whether he was behaving in a way with which I was comfortable. Instead, I was wondering how I could help Mason learn to make responsible choices.

As I thought about this I realized that Mason was already making many responsible choices. He often made responsible choices, for example, when he was clear about what the consequences of his choices were in advance. He was also better at making these choices when my wife Amy or I had spent quality time with him that day. Based on these insights, I changed the way I interacted with Mason. I tried to anticipate opportunities for Mason to make decisions—such as when bedtime was approaching or when it was time to clean up—and I made a point of helping him understand his options and the consequences of each option in advance. Then I would let him make his own decisions. I also made an explicit effort to spend more quality time with him.

My efforts to help Mason understand his choices and consequences and to spend more time with him improved the situation somewhat. He appreciated the time I spent with him, and in some cases made better choices. But, there were still times when I was not able to anticipate decisions ahead of time, when he made poor choices even when he understood the consequences, or when I was not able to spend as much time with him as I would have liked. In situations such as these he threw tantrums when he had to do many of the things I asked him to do.

Another change came to my psychological state one day when Mason started to badger me about something while I was changing his little sister's diaper. I was fully occupied and told him to wait. Suddenly, it

occurred to me that I was not willing to let him interrupt me, and yet when he was doing something, I had no problem telling him to stop what he was doing. Sometimes this was legitimate, but often there was no reason why I had to insist that he stop what he was doing at that moment. It became clear to me that my impatience was the cause of many of his tantrums. This lack of patience and respect was a sign that I was *externally directed*. External direction is a characteristic of a normal psychological state. When people are externally directed, they let circumstances (such as the drive to interrupt Mason to get him to do what I want) drive their behavior instead of their values (such as patience and respect).

When I realized that I was being externally directed, I decided that I would become *internally directed*. Internal direction is a characteristic of the fundamental state of leadership in which people experience the dignity and integrity that comes with exercising the self-control necessary to live up to the values that they expect of others. In Mason's case I became internally directed by showing him and his activities the same respect that I wanted from him. For example, when it came to interrupting one of his activities, I would ask him how much time he needed to finish what he was doing, and then ask him to do the chore that I wanted him to do after he had completed the activity. As I showed Mason increased patience and respect, his tantrums decreased significantly.

One day while I was making dinner for Mason and his sister Katie, I offered to read him a book while he ate. Mason was excited. When I put the meal on the table, though, Mason started hoarding the food, leaving Katie with none. Katie started to cry. I asked him why he was hoarding the food; I tried to help him understand his choices and the consequences that would result from each choice. Even so, he just screamed at me, saying that he would not be my friend anymore. I was shocked by the intensity of his reaction. I was planning to spend time with him; I was trying to help him see his choices and consequences; I was trying to show him patience and respect. I did not know what to do. In spite of all of my efforts, Mason was screaming again. Bewildered and exasperated, I almost told Mason to stop immediately or I would put him in a time-out.

When I was about to threaten Mason with the time-out I felt *self-focused* and *internally closed*. Focusing on ourselves and closing ourselves off to feedback are characteristics of a normal psychological

state. When we are self-focused, we are concerned only with our own needs, feelings, and wants. We see other people as objects that either help us or impede us in our goals. In my case, Mason was an object that was preventing me from my goal of showing that I was a good father.

When we are internally closed we ignore and deny feedback, such as the feedback that I was getting from Mason that said all my efforts to show that I was a good dad were not working. We ignore or deny feedback out of fear that the feedback says something about our worth as human beings. Because of this fear, and the frustration I felt, my first instinct was to get angry.

In my anger I was about to threaten Mason with a time-out. Before I did, however, I remembered my purpose: to teach Mason how to make responsible choices. I also remembered that in my previous efforts with Mason I thought I was doing the right thing and yet I was not showing him the respect I wanted him to show me. I had been at least somewhat wrong in those situations, and I could be wrong here as well. So, just as I was about to react, I caught myself and considered the possibility that I might be wrong here as well. And as I opened myself to that possibility, I also opened myself up to what Mason was feeling, and to what his needs might be. I became *other-focused*.

A focus on others' needs and feelings is another characteristic of the fundamental state of leadership. When we focus on others we feel empathy and desire to be compassionate. When I focused on Mason, I realized that Mason's screaming was rather extreme. He must be hurting, I felt, to have such an extreme reaction. Maybe his lashing out was the only way he knew to deal with some pain he felt inside, and if Mason was hurting inside I wanted to know why. I was no longer interested in proving I was a good father. Instead I wanted to understand why Mason might be hurting. And once I realized this, my desire to avoid feedback disappeared; I wanted feedback so that I could learn why Mason was feeling this way. Instead of being *internally closed*, I became *externally open*.

Openness to external cues—to feedback—is the final characteristic of the fundamental state of leadership. When we are open to these cues we learn, grow, and adapt ourselves to the situation unfolding before us. In my experience with Mason, my focus on purpose, my commitment to act respectfully, my empathy, and my desire to learn from feedback created an entirely new situation. And because I was in a new situation, paying attention to new cues, the unconscious, automatic part of my brain

began noticing new patterns in those cues and coming up with new responses faster than the controlled, conscious part of my brain. In other words, I began to have a feeling—an intuition—about what I should do.⁹ The intuition I felt was to read to Mason anyway.

My conscious reaction to this unconscious intuition was to think that reading to Mason was a crazy idea. Why would I want to reinforce his bad behavior? Somehow, though, it felt like the right thing to do, so I took a chance. I sat down and asked Mason if he would still like me to read to him.

My question to Mason was honest. It was not an attempt to bribe him into letting Katie have her share of the food. I could make more food for Katie or find another way to make her happy if I needed to. If Mason said yes and listened to the story without sharing the food, I would have found another solution for Katie. I was acting on how I genuinely felt at that moment.

When I offered to read the story to Mason he melted. He found a piece of paper and a crayon and wrote, “I AM SORY. I AM YOUR FREND. I WANT TO BE YOUR FREND.” He handed me the paper. I told him that of course we were friends. Mason threw his arms around my neck and burst into tears. Then he let Katie have her share of the food. I read him the book while they ate their dinner.

I am not sure why he responded the way he did; I suspect that Mason, who was not even six years old at the time, could not have explained it himself. Perhaps he felt guilty because he knew what he was doing was wrong but he was scared to admit it. Perhaps he wanted to feel he had control over his own life, and once he knew he had control he no longer felt a need to exert it. Perhaps he simply needed to feel loved. Maybe it was all of the above.

Based on the scientific research that we will discuss throughout this book, I believe that Mason wanted to change because I connected with his deepest feelings and helped him work through those feelings in a purposeful, respectful way—even if neither of us could put those feelings into words. What I know for sure is that in a normal psychological state, my intuition was to punish Mason, but when I experienced the fundamental state of leadership, my intuition was to read to him. By acting on that intuition, I changed my relationship with my son. Offering to read to him was only a part of what inspired Mason to change. Offering to read a book, or to do any nice thing, may not inspire any change in another situation. In fact, in a different situation I might have had an

intuition to punish Mason for his behavior. The intuition was less about what I *did*, and more about who I *was*.

In the weeks following this event, Mason's tantrums ended almost completely. Sometimes he still did things that I wished he would not do, but his behavior improved and so did mine. I still sometimes act in ways that are comfort-centered, externally driven, self-focused, or internally closed, but I am learning how to experience the fundamental state of leadership more often. When I do, Mason tends to be lifted by my efforts, as do I.

The fundamental state of leadership, as illustrated in the story of Ryan's relationship with Mason, is a psychological state in which a person is (1) centered on purpose, (2) directed by internal values, (3) focused on the feelings and needs of others, and (4) open to external cues that make learning, growth, and adaptation possible. We named this book *Lift* because this is what happens when people experience the fundamental state of leadership: they lift their own thoughts, feelings, actions, and outcomes and, in turn, those of others. Lifting ourselves and lifting others are interrelated experiences. We are unlikely to lift others without lifting ourselves, and we are unlikely to lift ourselves without lifting others.

The changes we need to make in order to experience the fundamental state of leadership depend upon our current situation. We may experience the state and lift others in one situation, but then the situation changes and we, like Ron, suddenly discover that we are no longer experiencing it. New circumstances often pull us into more normal psychological states, where we focus on problems rather than purpose, react to our circumstances rather than use our values to drive our behaviors, dwell on our own agendas rather than empathize with others, and avoid the feedback that could enable us to learn and grow. When we do, we weigh people down rather than lift them up. The circumstances of everyday life create strong pressure to fall back into normal states, even after the most uplifting of experiences. Even so, scientific

research and practical experience teach us how to lift ourselves and others once again. Based on this research, we offer four questions that we each can use to lift ourselves and others, becoming a positive force in any situation.

The Four Questions

Ron struggled to explain his claim that he had given his power away, but he was unable to do so. He knew things intuitively that he could not explicitly explain. A few weeks after the meeting Ron attended a training program for business executives titled “Leading the Positive Organization.” In this program he learned about an area of research called positive organizational scholarship that examines the best of organizations and the best of human behavior in organizations.¹⁰ It is similar to positive psychology, in which researchers seek to understand positive emotions, strengths, and virtues and how human strengths can contribute to better communities.¹¹ The professors and participants in the training program that Ron attended discussed topics such as how to create a culture that helps organizations and their people to thrive, tools for fostering high-quality relationships in the workplace, ways to energize the organization, and new ways to think about positive leadership. Ron learned about the fundamental state of leadership in this program.

The fundamental state of leadership drew Ron’s attention because he recognized it in his own experience: such a state of leadership was the “place” that he was no longer in, and was the “power” that he had given up. He also recognized that the reason he had experienced the fundamental state of leadership so often in his work prior to the staffing meeting was that a series of difficult life events had pushed him to rise to the occasion and be his best self. This worried him; what if he could only experience the fundamental state of leadership when critical circumstances called him to do so? What about the rest of his work and life? Given this concern, Ron felt empowered when he learned four

questions, developed from scientific research, that could help him experience the fundamental state of leadership in any situation:

1. **What result do I want to create?** When people answer this question they become less comfort-centered and more purpose-centered.
2. **What would my story be if I were living the values I expect of others?** When people answer this question they become less externally directed and more internally directed.
3. **How do others feel about this situation?** When people answer this question they become less self-focused and more other-focused.
4. **What are three or more strategies I could try in learning how to accomplish my purpose?** When people answer this question they become less internally closed and more externally open.

These are not magic questions. There are other questions, methods, or circumstances that can also help you experience the fundamental state of leadership. We offer examples of such questions in table 1.1. But we use these four questions throughout this book because they are carefully worded to reflect the scientific understanding we have of this psychological state. Our purpose for writing this book is to give you these questions. When people ask and answer them, they tend to move out of a normal psychological state and into the fundamental state of leadership, lifting themselves and others.

When Ron learned that he could experience the fundamental state of leadership by answering the four questions, he began using them to experience the state as often as possible. For example, after the training, Ron was supposed to attend a meeting in which he and his coworkers would make decisions about employee pay. These decisions were more complicated than usual because Ron's company had just been acquired by another company. The two companies had different forms and procedures for paying people, but there were no directions about

TABLE 1.1***Alternate Questions for Experiencing the Fundamental State of Leadership*****Becoming Purpose-Centered**

What result do I want to create?
 What is my highest purpose for this situation?
 What goal would be the most challenging and engaging?
 What outcome would be most meaningful to me?
 What would be the most ambitious and exciting goal I could pursue?

Becoming Internally Directed

What would my story be if I were living up to the values I expect of others?
 What would I do if I had 10% more integrity than I have right now?
 How can I live my core values in this situation?
 What could I do right now to be more authentic?
 If I were not worried about negative consequences, what would be the right thing to do?

Becoming Other-Focused

How do others feel about this situation?
 What might be the deepest, unmet needs of those who care about this situation?
 How could I explain others' behavior if I assume that they think they are good people?
 How would I feel about others if I could empathize with their truest selves?
 How and what could I sacrifice for the common good?

Becoming Externally Open

What are three or more strategies I could try in learning how to accomplish my purpose?
 What would I do differently if I were heeding all of the relevant feedback for this situation?
 How would I act if I were not concerned about my role, expertise, or need for control?
 How might I approach this situation if I saw it as an opportunity to learn?
 How might I approach this situation if I saw it as an adventure with challenges to overcome?
 How could I reframe negative outcomes as feedback from which I should learn?

how to handle the different forms and procedures. In fact, these forms and procedures were just one of many problems caused by the acquisition of Ron's company. There were no instructions for dealing with any of these problems, and Ron's boss—who was their contact with the parent company—was afraid to ask for directions. Ron worried that all these problems would make the compensation meeting a frustrating waste of time.

Ron prepared himself for the meeting by asking himself the four questions. The agenda for the meeting was to decide how to pay

employees, but this agenda was problem-focused given the companies' conflicting procedures and lack of direction. When Ron asked himself the first question, he decided that the result he wanted to create was to come up with an approach for working with the new company regarding how to pay employees that people in both companies could stand behind and work on together.

Ron then asked himself the second question, determined not to react automatically and get frustrated with people while he was in the meeting. When he did he realized that the value that he expected from his boss was candor: he wanted his boss to have a straight conversation with the people in the other company so that they could find out what they needed to know. As a result, he decided that he should speak to his boss with as much candor as he expected the boss to speak with when he met with people in the parent company.

When Ron asked himself the third question he stopped seeing his boss (and others in the meeting) as either tools to help him achieve his goals or as obstacles preventing him from doing so. Instead he empathized with the pressure that his boss probably felt in approaching the people in the company that had just acquired theirs. Because of this empathy he wanted to support his boss as well as to be frank with him.

When Ron asked the fourth question, he stopped worrying about what feedback he might get for taking initiative in the meeting, or what feedback he and his coworkers might receive from the other company. Instead he was open to using many different strategies for developing new approaches to paying employees and was eager to learn which approach might be the best.

When Ron entered the meeting, his boss began to work through his agenda. He suggested that the group should make the best decisions they could with the information they had. Ron asked if he could stop the meeting. He asked if the group could discuss what they needed to achieve that afternoon. He suggested that the group try to come up with an approach for paying employees that would work out well for both

companies and their employees in the long run. As they did this, Ron's boss remembered new and relevant information that he learned from the parent company but had forgotten to share. This helped the group to more clearly adapt and specify what additional information it needed to move forward. Once the group was clear about what it needed, Ron's boss agreed to ask the managers in the parent company for more information. When he talked to the managers from the acquiring company, the conversation went well. They were impressed by the boss's clarity and objectives.

Before Ron's boss brought their questions to the managers in the other company, Ron and his colleagues had believed that the managers from the acquiring company displayed a demeaning attitude toward them. After Ron's boss talked to these managers, however, the feeling changed. Employees from the acquiring company began to invite people from Ron's company to give input and to help them design the integration of the two companies.

Ron was thrilled by this experience and others like it. He now uses the four questions on a regular basis. He is increasingly purpose-centered, internally directed, other-focused, and externally open, lifting himself, his coworkers, and his organization.

Anyone can do what Ron did. Social science and practical experiences help us understand how people can lift themselves and others, how people can experience this more often, why asking these four questions can change a person's psychological state, and how one person's psychological state influences that of other people. Our first step in learning the answers to these questions begins with a description of the metaphor behind the science we present and an explanation for why the four characteristics are all necessary for a person to lift themselves and others. This step of the journey occurs in chapter 2.

FUNDAMENTAL STATE OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Sometimes during the swirl of daily life people struggle to pause and ask themselves the four questions or to remember what they are. Here are some suggestions that people have used to deal with these challenges:

- 1. Identify critical activities and schedule a preparation time.** One of our colleagues decided that he wanted to be a positive leader in his meetings at work. On his calendar he scheduled ten minutes before every meeting to ask himself the four questions. We can use the same principle in any recurring activity. You can also do this using the Breakthrough tool on Lift Exchange (<http://www.liftexchange.com/breakthrough>). This tool enables you to join either a public and free or private and paid community of people who practice the fundamental state of leadership, to make plans, to report on your efforts, and learn from others' reports.
- 2. Put a coin in your shoe.** Another way to remember to pause and ask the four questions is to create a spontaneous reminder. You could put a coin in your shoe and ask the four questions whenever you feel the coin move. You could also wear a bracelet, a ring, or tie a string around your finger.
- 3. Pay attention to tense emotions.** If we feel strong, tense emotions like anger or fear, and we are not facing any physical danger, then there is a good chance that our influence in that situation will not be positive. Strong, tense emotions are often a good signal for telling us when we should stop and ask the four questions.
- 4. Print the four questions on an index card.** If you have trouble remembering the questions, you can print them out on a card. Carry it with you in a wallet or purse, or tape it to your computer or your refrigerator.
- 5. Give other people permission to call you out.** If it is hard to be a positive influence in particular types of situations, and there are people you trust who are often involved in those situations, tell them about your desire to be a more positive influence. Give them permission to ask you to pause if they think you are in that type of situation and you are not being a positive influence. This technique not only has the advantage of helping you to pause but can also help you to be more accountable for the influence you have on others. It can help other people feel like it is okay to learn from mistakes because of the example you are setting.

6. Use a mnemonic. You can also use a LIFT mnemonic to remember the questions, such as:

List strategies: "What are three or more strategies I could try in learning how to accomplish my purpose?"

Increase integrity: "What would my story be if I were living the values I expect of others?"

Feel empathy: "How do others feel about this situation?"

Think of results: "What result do I want to create?"

Legacy: "What result do I want to create?"

If . . . : "What would my story be if I were living the values I expect of others?"

Feelings: "How do others feel about this situation?"

Tactics: "What are three or more strategies I could try in learning how to accomplish my purpose?"

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