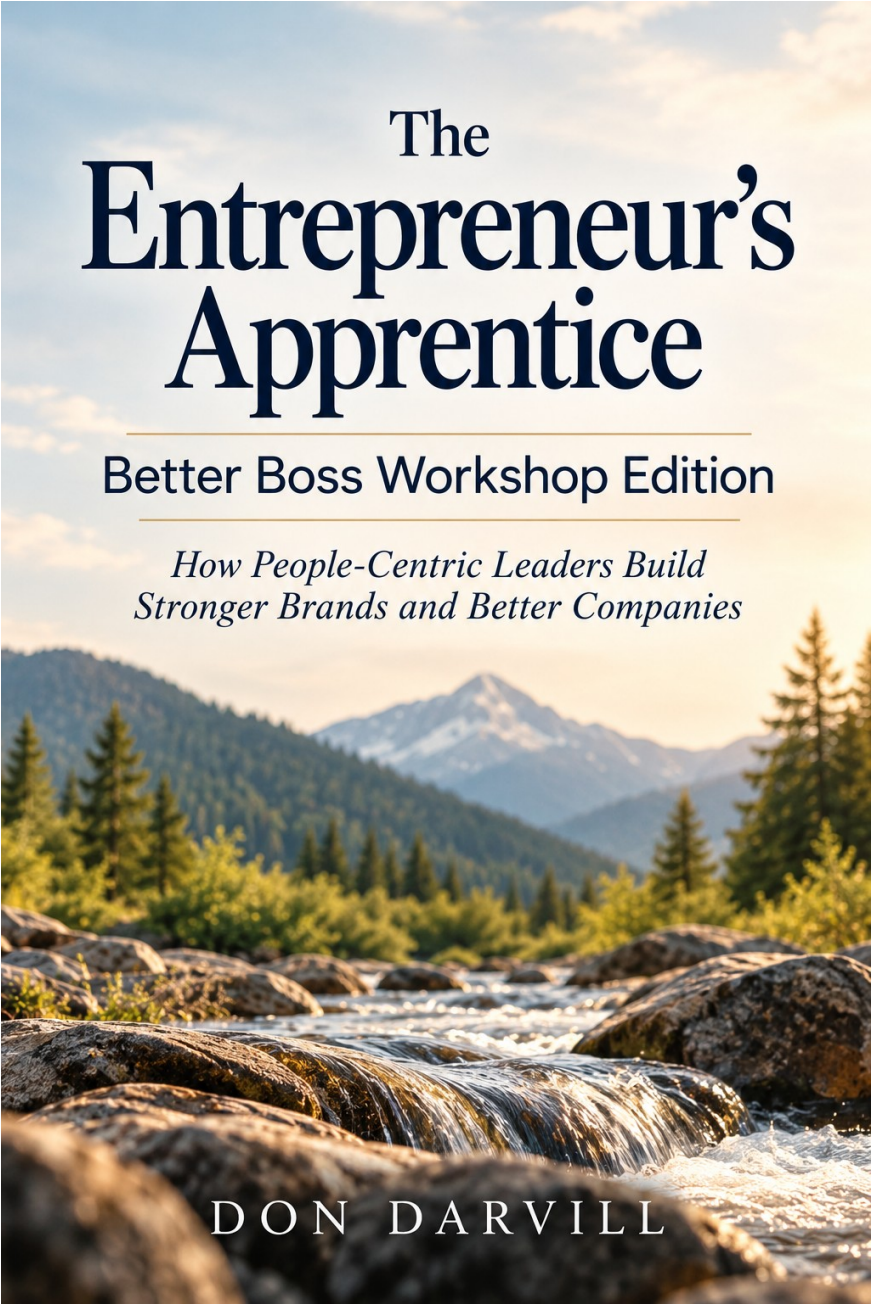




The Entrepreneur's Apprentice

Better Boss Workshop Edition

*How People-Centric Leaders Build
Stronger Brands and Better Companies*

DON DARVILL

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Prologue

When I originally set out to explore a new way of leading, I relied heavily on my experience as the Director of Employee Development for McDonald's restaurants. Later, as an Owner/Operator of three independent restaurants of my own, I would be free to implement a different approach to leading a group of people. It took the better part of a year to finally develop what I would later refer to as the Quadrant Leadership Model. By the time I was ready to retire from McDonald's, I was certain that my transition into the role of a people-centric leader had been the right choice for me.

The principles that lie at the heart of Quadrant Leadership are driven by one simple premise: ‘*The more your people know, the more they can contribute.*’ While the idea of providing enriched development to improve employee performance is hardly an original concept, it is the things we share in Quadrant Leadership, and the way we go about sharing them, that allow us to achieve such extraordinary results.

Writing *The Entrepreneur's Apprentice* gave me the opportunity to share my personal experience with other small business owners trying to build a credible brand and a successful small business. Following that, the natural next step was to create a workshop where participants could sign up and learn more about the role that people-centric leaders and Quadrant Leadership can play in building a stronger brand and a far better company.

I should also disclose that I had a second motive for writing my book. Having read many books on leadership, I have never come across one where the author was forced to deal with the challenges of a mental illness. In my case, I feel that it would have been virtually impossible for me to achieve the kind of results I would require to find success without the help of an excellent support team. I was determined to never let my diagnosis affect my beliefs in Quadrant Leadership or my mission to make a full transition into this new way of running my business.

In the first edition of my book, I included personal stories of the challenges I faced every day, trying to balance the ever-present demands of running a small business while dealing with my disorder. In the Better Boss Workshop Edition, the stories that I have included are the ones that directly support my role as a people-centric leader. Anyone who is interested in reading the complete book can download it directly from my website.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly for this particular edition, I would like to address some consistent feedback that I received in my early workshops. While addressing the importance of building a strong brand, many people thought that this did not apply to me because I was already associated with one of the strongest brands in the world. While their rationale was true, I explained that each McDonald's success story was built on the very same core values and guiding principles that every brand must live up to. As the Operations Manager for the city of Vancouver area, I knew that each restaurant's market share was to-

tally tied to the performance of the restaurant itself. In other words, not every McDonald's restaurant enjoyed the same level of success.

When I became an Owner/Operator with three independent restaurants, choosing to make a full commitment to the role of a people-centric leader allowed my restaurants to outperform their counterparts significantly. So much so that my sales increase outpaced the majority of other McDonald's locations on a consistent basis. In essence, my approach allowed me to take my contributions to the McDonald's brand to an even higher level.

In the end, it will be up to you to decide whether this approach to running a small business is right for you.

PART ONE

RISK AND REWARD

*“A coffee shop is just another
coffee shop until it isn’t.”*

— Don Darvill



Chapter One

Four Indisputable Facts About Business

When I was the Director of Training for McDonald's restaurants, I would often speak to small groups of entrepreneurs about the challenges that every business, no matter how big or small, must face, each and every day. Later on, as an independent Owner/Operator with three restaurants of my own, I would always make sure to keep a copy of these four facts in plain sight to remind me, as well as my employees, that the road to success is never guaranteed and a business's worst enemy is complacency.

**Every day, entrepreneurs must compete for market share.
The most effective way to grow your business is to take
market share away from someone else.**

The core values and guiding principles that are the hallmark of every successful small business brand are not a wish list; they are a "must list."

The three most overused yet seldom achieved words in the business vernacular are "total customer satisfaction."

Nothing will be more important to the long-term success of your business than your ability to create brand loyalty.

It does not matter whether your business is a traditional storefront, or virtual, or a combination of both. These four statements are unavoidable realities.

Your ability to create a credible brand that not only represents your core values, but delivers consistently on the promises that every customer has come to expect. In the highly competitive world of free enterprise, holding on to and growing your market share is a constant uphill battle. Without the help of a strong and proficient support team, the task becomes far more difficult to achieve.

Chapter Two

Entrepreneurs

I have the greatest respect for entrepreneurs. These are the risk-takers and innovators, visionaries and dreamers, who contribute to the health and welfare of every small town and big city in a very substantial way. Through their vast network of small and mid-sized businesses, they create more jobs than all of big business and the government combined. These incredibly diverse, multi-faceted, free enterprise super engines are without question the lifeblood of the North American economy.

Several years ago, I was invited to speak at a symposium for start-up companies hosted by the Business Development Bank of Canada. At the time, I was head of Training and Employee Development for McDonald's Restaurants, Western Canada. The conference room was abuzz with entrepreneurs from every walk of life, young and old alike, eager to learn everything they could about what it takes to run a successful small business. As the final speaker of the day, I began my presentation with a piece I had written several years earlier entitled "Ode to the Entrepreneur." As all eyes descended upon the content of a single page, excited chatter quickly gave way to total silence.

Ode to the Entrepreneur

The Unsung Heroes of Our Economy

Whether your front door opens onto a busy street or your business exists on a screen, the challenges of entrepreneurship remain remarkably similar. The tools may have changed, but the risks, responsibilities, and rewards of ownership have not.

Financing the Dream

Brick-and-mortar: Your banker, investors, or personal savings helped turn an idea into a physical business - and the financial obligations continue long after the doors open.

Online: Your savings, investors, or other financing helped turn an idea into a digital business - and growth continues to demand investment in technology, marketing, and infrastructure.

Keeping the Doors Open

Brick-and-mortar: Rent, utilities, insurance, maintenance, inventory, and countless other expenses arrive whether business is good or bad.

Online: Websites, software, platforms, payment processing, fulfillment, advertising, and other digital expenses continue whether sales are good or bad.

Winning and Keeping Customers

Brick-and-mortar: Customers have choices. They expect value, service, and a reason to return. Their loyalty must be earned every day.

Online: Customers have almost unlimited choices, often only a click away. Their trust, attention, and loyalty must be earned every day.

Leading the People Behind the Business

Brick-and-mortar: Your employees can become your greatest competitive advantage - or one of your greatest challenges.

Online: Employees, contractors, freelancers, and business partners can become your greatest competitive advantage - or one of your greatest challenges.

Competing for Attention

Brick-and-mortar: Your competitors may be across the street, across town, or part of a national chain competing for the same customer.

Online: Your competitors may be anywhere in the world, competing for the same customer at the very same moment.

Depending on Things You Cannot Control

Brick-and-mortar: Interest rates, suppliers, landlords, construction, weather, regulations, and changing neighbourhoods can affect your business overnight.

Online: Algorithms, platforms, search rankings, technology, advertising costs, and service providers can affect your business overnight.

Whether the business operates from a storefront, an office, a workshop, a kitchen table, or a laptop, one reality remains unchanged: Every day, entrepreneurs put something of their own on the line. Their money. Their reputation. Their time. Their ideas. Their relationships. And often, their peace of mind.

The price they pay for the privilege of ownership is considerable. Proprietors of their own destiny, every day they walk a tightrope between risk and reward. They are the unsung heroes of our economy.

When I originally wrote the piece, it was intended as an homage to the entrepreneurial spirit. For this particular group, just beginning their journey, it served as a sober reminder that the road ahead would be anything but easy.

In preparing for my presentation, I made the conscious decision to focus my comments on the real challenges that lay ahead for the majority of these entrepreneurs. While it was not my intention to cause alarm, I knew that based on statistics alone, there would be many casualties along the way. I felt it incumbent upon myself to offer insight on the things that I believed would help them to assess the health of their business at any given time.

I surprised my fellow presenters by opening with bankruptcy statistics and the limited amount of time that any new business—whether brick-and-mortar or online—has to become established. I made it clear that without positive cash flow, a business would quickly find itself in trouble. I talked about having realistic sales goals and the relationship between the top and bottom line. In addressing the profit and loss statement, I targeted the controllable section in particular, emphasizing the importance of minimizing the impact of fixed costs while effectively managing every single variable cost that the business incurred.

When I stopped to take a sip of water, it was clear that I had captured their undivided attention. The room was so quiet I could actually hear myself swallow. As a presenter, I am not used to standing behind a podium. I find it seriously limits my ability to communicate. Since I was about to deliver my most important message of the day, I freed the mic from the dais and stepped off the stage and into the crowd. I wanted to make direct eye contact with as many of these entrepreneurs as possible.

It was important that they listened carefully to what I was about to say next. I prefaced my comments by saying, “If you take nothing else away from what I have shared with you today, please remember this: Whether customers enter through your front door or discover you online, nothing will play a greater role in the long-term success of your business than your ability to create your own unique brand identity. The core values and

guiding principles that define your brand are not a wish list; they are a must list.”

I paused just long enough to let my words sink in and then I repeated them before carrying on. “Your brand identity is who you are and what you stand for. It is your footprint, your signature, and your calling card. It is what your reputation will be built upon—through every personal interaction and every online experience. Most importantly, your brand is what distinguishes you from your competitors in the eyes of your customers.”

As heads began to nod, I could feel the connection being made. “Advertising campaigns and marketing strategies will help to build brand awareness for your business, but it is your ability to deliver the goods, what we call your brand integrity, that will ultimately determine your success. If you are able to live up consistently to the promises of your brand, you will earn the kind of customer loyalty that is critical to building long-term market share.”

“Every small business owner must look at themselves as the steward of their brand. In the end, it’s not your words that will make the difference, but what you do with them.”

As I was drawing to a close, I could see many tired faces. I had no doubt that many of these entrepreneurs were already putting in an enormous number of hours. The risk of burnout was very real, and so my final comments were centred on the importance of building a solid team. I reminded them of what I had said in Ode to the Entrepreneur about their employees: ‘Even though

they do not share your burden or your worries, they are the key to your success.’

As I turned to take my seat, I received the first standing ovation of the day. It took me by complete surprise, considering the content of my presentation. Our host returned to the podium and thanked all four presenters for a fantastic day. We stood in unison as the audience rose once more to show their appreciation.

As the other presenters were leaving the stage, I began to return notes to my briefcase. Before I could finish, I found myself surrounded. As I contemplated the best way to handle the situation, our host came to my rescue and requested that everyone take a seat. It took a few seconds for me to realize that the majority of the audience had remained behind.

Over the next hour and a half, I fielded numerous questions until finally the banquet manager requested we wrap things up so that his people could prepare the room for an evening event. On my drive home, I began to reflect on the events of the day. I was satisfied that I had done a credible job of addressing the majority of their questions, but it was obvious that we had barely begun to scratch the surface.

PART TWO

PEOPLE-CENTRIC LEADERS

“The more your people know, the more they can contribute.”

— Don Darvill



Chapter One

The Taxman Cometh

Vancouver, British Columbia
November 4th, 4:45 a.m.

My God, what a storm. In all the years I've lived on the West Coast, I can honestly say I have never encountered anything like this. Gale-force winds spun far out in the Pacific Ocean have slammed head-on into heavy rainfall. The result is a weather phenomenon that is far more powerful than anything we have experienced in decades. Several municipalities are reporting power outages, and for the first time in many years, the Fraser River is on flood alert.

As morning commuters wake to the latest news, law enforcement and city officials plead with the public to stay off the roads. I would like nothing more than to oblige, but there are circumstances in play that make it imperative that I get to Vancouver. My sense of urgency can be summed up in two unsettling words: Revenue Canada.

Several weeks ago, a registered letter arrived from the federal government informing me that my business had been 'selected for review.' Last Monday, I received a follow-up phone call to confirm the date and time. We may be in the midst of one of the biggest storms on record, but it does nothing to alter the fact that the taxman is on his way.

As I enter the freeway, I am under siege. With the strength of a supersonic car wash hyped up on steroids, the assault is intense. Powerful crosswinds shake my car so violently that the vibrations cause my teeth to chatter. The wall of water that engulfs my windshield is unforgiving and quickly overwhelms my wipers. For my safety, I have no choice but to reduce my speed and turn my full attention to the iridescent road reflectors that will be my only guide. For the life of me, I can't understand why he chose to start this thing so damned early.

As I enter the perimeter of the city, the storm shows no sign of abating. A quick glance at the time confirms that nearly an hour has passed. I slow down to catch the rhythm of the traffic lights and sail uncontested through the empty streets. With a little luck, I will be a few minutes early. What a relief.

As I turn the corner and enter the parking lot, my eyes are immediately drawn to the silhouette of a dark sedan. Headlights on. Engine idling. Wipers on intermittent. I wonder how long he has been waiting.

June 11, 1970

A week from today I will turn sixteen. As I stand in the garden of our little house on 59th Street, I am deep in thought. For as long as I can remember, I have always been interested in landscape design. Today I have decided that I will add a fishpond to the front yard. I am just about to draw out a rough sketch when I

hear my mother call. Perfect timing! I will ask for a couple of koi for my birthday present.

I am about to make my request when she hands me a copy of the local paper folded to an inside page.

“What?” I ask.

“There on the right, near the bottom.”

My eyes scan down to a brief article, the headline caption in bold letters: *McDonald's Restaurants to Hire Twenty New Crew*

In 1970, McDonald's is in its infancy in Canada. Barely three years old, the first restaurants are concentrated in a handful of cities spread out across the country. The majority of Canadians have yet to experience their first taste of a Big Mac. In Vancouver, there are only two locations, units as we called them back then, with five in total in the Lower Mainland. The first restaurant in the country opened in Richmond, British Columbia, in June of 1967.

These early locations have little seating. With just a handful of outside patio tables, most customers eat in their cars. The building design is unique and immediately draws your attention. A prominent feature of the architecture is a set of large neon arches that rise high above the roofline. At night, they glow a bright yellow and are clearly visible in the distance. The term “Golden Arches” will soon become part of the Canadian vernacular. Parking spaces hug the building envelope. It will be another decade before the first drive-thrus appear on the scene. Adver-

tising is primarily a local affair, mostly radio spots supported by a handful of national television commercials.

These early productions might be considered primitive by today's standards, but they quickly find an audience and are long remembered for their iconic jingles. "You deserve a break today, so get up and get away to McDonald's," is a classic of the early 1970s. It's also important to note that this is a time long before mega-malls and big box stores. Steady work for a young teenager is not easy to come by. Grocery store baggers, gas station and theatre attendants, newspaper delivery boys, and the odd job cleaning up a lumberyard account for the majority of part-time employment options.

"Why are you showing me this?" I ask, hoping to sound confused.

"You need to get a job, and this sounds like the perfect opportunity."

To tell the truth, I'm not the least bit surprised. Part-time employment has become a regular topic around our dinner table. My parents, now deceased, were wonderful people. Hardworking, salt-of-the-earth type folk who set the bar high when it came to work ethic.

Hoping to derail the discussion, or, at least, put it off for another day, I say, "Mom, I'm only fifteen. I thought you needed to be at least sixteen years old and have one of those social insurance

cards before you could apply for a job.” My hope is that a recitation of the facts will end the discussion.

“This is true,” she counters. “Fortunately for us, you will be sixteen in just a few days. As far as the other matter goes, I have some more good news. Two months ago, I sent away for your very own card, and it arrived yesterday. It would appear that you have everything you need.”

Before I have a chance to react, she reaches into her purse and presents me with a white, wallet-sized plastic card. Prominently displayed on the front are a series of embossed letters, my name in full, and a nine-digit number.

“Now put that in your wallet for safekeeping. You will need it next week when you fill out your application.”

I feel numb. My mind is racing as I struggle to understand what is happening here.

“Donny,” she repeats for the third time. “Are you okay?”

Realizing the impact her words have had on me, she steps forward and gives me a reassuring hug. She strokes my hair before continuing in a softer tone.

“You knew this day was coming, son. Truth be told, everybody has to start somewhere. Besides, I have a hunch you’re going to like earning your own money.”

That catches my attention.

“I have to admit, that part does sound pretty good.”

“Of course, we can’t get too far ahead of ourselves. First you have to get the job. Filling out the application will be the easy part. The important thing is impressing the interviewer when it’s your turn in the hot seat. I’ll tell you what, starting tonight, your Dad and I will help you practice.”

“Dad?”

“Well okay, I’ll help you practice, and your Dad can add in his two cents when he feels like it.”

With the employment discussion concluded, she turns the conversation to my upcoming birthday.

“Now, have you given any thought to what you would like for your present this year?”

“A six-month reprieve from this job hunting thing sounds like a pretty good gift right about now.”

Clearly not impressed with my answer, she says, “Why don’t you try that again?”

“Okay then, how about fish?”

“I’m sorry, did you say fish?”

I nod. “Yes, I’d like a couple of really big koi.”

“Aren’t those outdoor fish?”

Before I answer, I glance at the wall clock. Today’s conversation has put a serious wrench into my summer plans.

“They sure are. Now if you don’t mind, Mom, I need to get going.”

Still puzzled, she looks for clarification. “Where do you plan to keep these fish?”

“In the pond.”

“What pond are you talking about?”

“Exactly!”

Before she has a chance to ask any more questions, I am off to the garden shed. As I turn the corner, I hear her say, “Well, if it’s fish that the boy wants, it’s fish he shall have.” I smile to myself and yell, “Thanks, Mom!”

On July 3rd, 1970, I officially became the newest member of the Southwest Marine Drive McDonald’s Crew, Unit # 8002. The final digit signified the second restaurant built in Canada. Ironically, that day would be the first and only time I would ever use my social insurance card to apply for a job for the next thirty-two years. I could never have imagined then that McDonald’s would become my lifelong career, or that the company would enter into the most explosive growth period in its history. It was an extraordinary time that would ultimately afford me many unique opportunities and experiences. I would make many mistakes along the way, but I would also stumble upon something quite remarkable

As I step out of my car, I get my first real sense of the sheer intensity of the storm. In the distance, I hear the crackle of power lines and wonder if today's meeting is all for naught. Approaching the other vehicle, I tap my keys lightly on the driver's side window. The man inside jumps, startled by the abrupt interruption. I try to suppress a smile. This may be the only time today that I will find anything remotely amusing. According to the digital display on his dashboard, it is now 5:56 a.m. He turns off his interior light and returns files to his briefcase, paperwork no doubt for today's inquisition.

Opening his door, he rises quickly, and we exchange a perfunctory handshake. Official introductions will have to wait as we race to escape the onslaught of the storm.

The entrance to the building has a small overhang that will serve as our temporary refuge. As he waits for me to unlock the door, I scan the entire length of the dining room for any sign of movement. With no one in sight, I bang the palm of my hand firmly on the glass door. From the corner of my eye, I see his head snap to attention.

With genuine confusion, he asks, "Why don't you just use your key?"

I turn to face him before I reply. "Because I don't have one."

"You mean you forgot it?" he suggests, looking for clarification.

"No, I mean I don't have a key."

As he carefully considers my response, a prominent worry line begins to form across his brow. Before he has an opportunity to ask any further questions, I return to the task at hand. With both fists clenched tight, I vigorously assault the solid metal door frame. It makes such a racket that I am convinced that it can't be ignored.

As we stand in awkward silence, I close my eyes and concentrate on the haunting cadence of the wind. It has a hypnotic quality that sets my mind to wander. As I consider the bizarre events of the day so far, I can't help but reflect on the decision that brought me to this moment.

Fall, 1993

It is late October, and the lingering Indian summer is now on borrowed time. I'm about to begin my tour of our restaurants on the North Shore when my phone rings. It is my secretary and, judging from the tone of her voice, something is up.

"They're looking for you." They're the vice president and the executive vice president of the company.

"Can you tell them that I should be able to get back to the office in about twenty minutes?"

I turn on my ignition and enter the flow of traffic that will lead me to the Second Narrows Bridge. At this time of day, it will be the fastest route back. Rolling down my window, I enjoy the warm breeze as it flows gently across my face. I need to remain

calm and concentrate on taking deep breaths. This sudden bout of anxiety is precipitated by the fact that I know exactly why I have been summoned. It appears that they have finally made their decision.

As the operations manager for the Greater Vancouver Area, I am responsible for the sales, profits, and employee development of thirty-four restaurants. My patch has a complement of five supervisors, one hundred and forty-eight full-time managers, and a crew roster numbering more than three thousand restaurant employees. With two more restaurants slated to open in December, this has been an exceptionally busy and demanding year.

In July, I celebrated my twenty-third year with McDonald's Restaurants of Canada. It seems hard to believe when you consider that I am only thirty-nine years old. I have literally grown up with this company. As I settle into the drive, I begin to reflect on the journey that has brought me this far. For the most part, the experience has been extremely gratifying. Of course, there have been incidents I wish I had dealt with differently, and a few decisions I truly regret, but overall I feel content. I have given my all, and I feel ready for a change.

In August, I requested a meeting and expressed a strong desire to move on to a new chapter in my life. I stated my case and hoped that they would seriously consider my request. I was told that I would be notified when a decision had been reached. I'm nervous as I enter the parking lot, but it feels good. I tell myself that no matter what happens, I will survive. Beads of sweat roll

down my back as I take one more deep breath. Reaching for my briefcase, I step out of my car.

I will not dwell on the details. In truth, it all happened so quickly that I barely remember who said what. What I do recall with great clarity is that I received the news I had longed to hear. My request would be granted. On January 1, 1994, I would officially become a McDonald's owner/operator, with my very own restaurant in Vancouver.

The days that followed became a crash course in preparing for life as a private entrepreneur. I would need a good lawyer, a good accountant and, of course, every penny I owned. The next few years would be lean, but I didn't care. I was so excited to get the chance to run my own company.

The time had come to implement critical changes in my leadership style. I knew there was a better way, and I was about to find out if I was up to the challenge. There would be no excuses, and no one else to blame should I fail. After all, I now owned the joint.¹

I am drawn from my reverie by the sound of his voice.

"There's someone coming," he shouts excitedly.

As the door swings open, we scramble inside.

"Good morning, Teddy! How are you managing to cope with the storm of the century?"

“Other than a few flickering lights, I’d say we are doing pretty well. Are you okay? I heard this terrible noise and thought the wind might have shattered a window.”

“I’m fine. I’m afraid the racket was all me. I was trying to grab your attention.”

He chuckles and nods with a smile. “You definitely did that. Is there anything else you need before I get back to work?”

“No, we’re good. I can take it from here. Thanks for coming to our rescue.”

As Teddy walks away, I turn my attention back to the man who is responsible for today’s meeting. He is tall and slender, with broad shoulders and jet-black hair. With his dark-framed glasses in place, he bears a striking resemblance to Clark Kent, Superman’s alter ego. As he hands me the last of his rain-soaked gear, I invite him to take a seat.

“Would you care for a cup of coffee?” I ask?

“Yes, please, that would be great.”

“Let me get these things hung up, and I will meet you back here in a few minutes. Please make yourself comfortable.”

The expression ‘I own the joint’ was one that I would use on specific occasions. When faced with an unruly customer whose conduct or verbal diatribe was completely unacceptable, I often employed the phrase. These disgruntled patrons would usually argue that I had no right to ask them to leave. In response, I

would always say, “I am afraid that is where you are dead wrong. You see, I own the joint.”

I am on my way back up the stairs when I spot one of my two regular breakfast staff.

“Hey, Noralyn. Glad to see you made it in one piece. Can you believe this weather? It reminds me of that scene in The Wizard of Oz.”

“I know what you mean. That wind is totally insane. I had to ditch my umbrella and run the whole way.”

She pauses momentarily when she suddenly realizes who she is talking to. “What on earth are you doing here at this hour?”

Instead of answering her question, I make a request.

“Could you please fire up the coffee machine for me?”

“Sure, but you don’t drink coffee.”

“Oh, it’s not for me; it’s for my guest in the lobby.”

“There’s someone sitting in the dining room? At this hour? Are you kidding me?”

“I wish I were. Listen, I promise to tell you all about it later. Right now, we need to make coffee.”

“I’ll get right on it. It should only take a couple of minutes. By the way, have you walked past a mirror lately? You look like a drowned rat.”

I attempt to catch a glimpse of myself in the stainless steel on the side of the shake machine, but the image is blurred. Probably a good thing.

“Don’t worry,” I tell her. “I’ll pretty up before we open.”

Just then, I spot Jinky setting up the front counter area. As I catch her attention, she waves, and I realize something is off. I wave back and then turn to Noralyn.

“Hey, where’s Robyn?”

“Oh, she had to give her husband a ride to work. Apparently, he was not able to get his car started this morning. Something about the distributor cap being too wet. She should be here by 6:30. I was able to get Jinky to cover for her.

I pause and smile. “Now that’s funny.”

“What is?”

“What you just said.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t follow. “

“Think about it. If the motto of the postal service is ‘neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night can keep the postman from delivering the mail,’ then why is it that my breakfast manager has to deliver the postman to the post office?”

“Oh brother, is that the best you’ve got?”

“It is at six in the morning.”

I turn my attention back to the work at hand.

“Will you guys be okay?”

“Sure, Jinky and I have everything covered. Robyn will have plenty of time to get caught up.

“Sounds good to me.”

Glancing over at the coffee machine, I see that the brew cycle has finished.

“Would you please deliver an extra-large cup out to our friend and let him know that I will be along shortly? Right now, I need to make a phone call.”

On the seventh ring, I hang up. Mike, my restaurant manager, has obviously assessed the situation and decided to head in early. Now that the rush hour is underway, his commute is likely to be much worse than mine. I just hope he’s okay. Nothing is worth risking your personal safety for, least of all a government audit. When I return to the lobby, my guest is systematically laying out an array of paperwork. My eyes widen as I contemplate the ordeal that lies ahead. As I approach, he turns, and we finally have an opportunity to exchange proper introductions. He thanks me for agreeing to meet him so early. Agreeing? I didn’t realize I had a choice

It turns out that he and his wife are scheduled to leave for a long overdue Hawaiian vacation later this afternoon. His goal is to have the audit completed well before the noon hour. I assure him that we will do everything in our power to get him out of here on time. As I look out the window, I wonder if it has oc-

curred to him that the airport is likely closed. Maybe he'll get lucky, and things will clear up. Right now, that is a big maybe. I decide not to bring it to his attention.

The plan for today has been in place for several weeks. My job is to break the ice and get an idea of what to expect. Judging from the stack of paperwork, I would say a hell of a lot. Mike and Raheesh, one of my second assistant managers, will work directly with the auditor. They are both expected to arrive around seven o'clock. Fortunately, Raheesh lives close by and should have no trouble getting here. We will have to wait and see how Mike fares.

My first McDonald's restaurant is located on the east side of the city at the corner of Main Street and 29th Avenue. It is one of only a handful of leased sites. When I was the head of the Training Department for Western Canada, one of my favourite responsibilities was to speak on behalf of the corporation at various functions. Many people were surprised to learn that McDonald's is one of the largest holders of commercial real estate in the world.

The principle of acquiring the land and then constructing a restaurant on it can be traced back to McDonald's early days in the United States. The practice is credited to Harry Sonneborn, who became the company's first president. He was one of the early pioneers recruited by Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald's Restaurants, to rapidly expand the company. Sonneborn's fran-

chising strategy is considered a critical cornerstone in the McDonald's success story.

Unlike many competitors, who are beholden to landlord demands and escalating lease costs, McDonald's is primarily exempt from these issues by maintaining ownership of the majority of its properties.

My location on Main Street is an exception to the rule and initially opened as a Safeway before becoming a McDonald's. As part of my purchase agreement, the restaurant underwent a major renovation. With two hundred and forty seats and a full-size kids' playroom, it is one of the largest non-drive-through locations in the city.

"How's the coffee?" I ask.

"Incredibly good."

"You seem surprised."

"Ah, well, you know, I mean no offence, but it's McDonald's coffee."

"You might be interested in learning that McDonald's quality standards require that our suppliers use only the finest coffee beans available to produce a custom blend that is comparable to anything you will find in any of the upscale restaurants in the city."

"You're kidding, right?"

"Would I lie to you?"

“I am not sure that is a question you want to ask an auditor.”

“Good point. I guess you’ll just have to take my word for it. I have no idea what time you got up this morning, but I suspect that you are starting to get hungry. Once we are ready to open for business, I’ll have my staff prepare you some breakfast. In case you were wondering, the answer is real eggs, and yes, they are grade A.”

He smiles and says, “I suppose I had that one coming. I will say this: if it is half as good as this coffee, I look forward to it.” A quick glance at his watch and his attention returns back to the task at hand.

“My goodness, look at the time. We really need to get going.”

“No problem,” I say. “I have assigned two of my managers to take part in the audit today. I expect them to arrive any minute now.”

“That’s not a problem, but I don’t want to risk falling behind so how about if we get started, and they can join us as soon as they get here?”

It is clear that I cannot stall him any longer.

“All right then, where would you like to begin?”

“Well, since you are still closed, I think a good place to start would be with your safe controls. Where is your safe located?”

He waits for me to lead the way, but instead I head toward the front doors. As I peer out into the driving rain, I hear him approach.

“Are you expecting someone else?”

“Yes, my breakfast manager, Robyn.”

“Is she one of the managers who will be joining us on the audit this morning?”

“No, but we can’t open the safe without her.”

He pauses momentarily, wondering if he has heard me correctly.

“Come again?”

“We need Robyn to open the safe. “

“Are you trying to tell me that you do not know the combination to your own safe?”

“I’m afraid so.”

His face takes on a pained expression as he places his paperwork on a nearby table. Removing his glasses, he pinches the bridge of his nose. When he speaks, there is a noticeable shift in his tone.

“Let me see if I’ve got this straight. First you tell me that you have no keys to open the front door, leaving the two of us stranded in the pouring rain. Now you are telling me that you have no idea what the combination to the safe is. Have I got that right?

At this point, my instincts tell me to let him vent so I remain silent and simply nod. As he continues, his voice begins to rise slowly with each measured syllable.

“This is your business, is it not? I mean, you are the owner of this McDonald’s restaurant, are you not?”

Again, I nod. He is now shaking his head in total dismay and can no longer contain his frustration.

“I am at a total loss here. I really don’t understand what is going on. All I can say is that this is one hell of a way to run a business.”

I want to reassure him that his concerns are for naught, but instead, I continue to elevate his exasperation when I say, “Did you know that Albert Einstein never knew his own phone number? He believed that you should keep your mind free to concentrate on matters of real importance, rather than on the kinds of things that are easily accessible through other means.”

“What on earth has that got to do with having a set of keys or a safe combination?”

“Nothing, I suppose.” I pause. “And yet, everything.”

He stares at me in total bewilderment. I am about to attempt an explanation when I detect movement in the background. Without any warning, I simply shout, “Reprieve,” releasing a sea of pent-up tension.

My outburst startles him, and he takes a step backward, tripping over several chairs. Fortunately, I am able to grab his arm,

avoiding a full-on fall. He regains his composure as I nod in the direction of the front doors.

“It would seem our safe problem is solved. My breakfast manager has just arrived.” I smile as Robyn approaches.

“Good morning. I see you managed to deliver the postman safely to his destination.”

“I can tell that you’ve been talking to Noralyn. We had no idea his car wouldn’t start.”

“No worries, they’ve got you covered.”

She stares at the pile of paperwork spread out before her and says, “Wow, it looks like you guys have got a ton of work to do. How’s it going so far?”

Before I respond, I check my peripheral vision. I can see that the auditor is looking directly at me. With a broad smile on my face, I turn and say, “Well, we just got started, but I would say it’s going great.”

His eyes widen, but before he can say a word, I turn my attention back to Robyn.

“Listen, would you do me a favour and open the safe? We need to count the contents before the tills go up this morning.”

“Sure, I’ll do it right now.”

As Robyn makes her way towards the kitchen, I turn my attention back to the auditor and simply say, “Well, shall we get started?”

Our first task is barely underway when I hear two familiar voices. It appears both of my salaried managers have arrived safe and sound. I feel a genuine sense of relief. They are comparing horror stories about the weather that I have no doubt will be told several times today. Right now, however, we have more important matters to attend to. As they wave in my direction, I wave back and point towards the lobby. I turn to the auditor and say, “I know you’re anxious to get this thing started, but I would appreciate it if we could have a very short meeting, now that the rest of my team has arrived.”

Reluctantly, he agrees but makes me promise to keep it brief. I assure him that will not be a problem.

With everyone seated, I take the opportunity to introduce my managers and give the auditor some background on each of them. I explain the time constraints we are under and ask the guys to be prepared to expedite any requests as quickly and efficiently as possible. This last comment draws his attention, and he says, “You make it sound like you won’t be joining us.”

“That’s because I won’t be joining you.”

Before he can object, I continue. “I want you to know that both of these gentlemen are extremely knowledgeable and have access to all of the information you will require to complete your audit. If there is something that requires my attention, I will be right here working with the rest of my staff.”

He is clearly unimpressed, and his body language makes no effort to hide his dissatisfaction. Resigning himself to the task, he slowly rises, and the three of them make their way toward the safe. At least, I have managed to keep his mind off the fact that there likely will be no flight to Hawaii today.

I would love to set him at ease, but a little piece of me is enjoying this immensely. Usually, it is the poor guy being audited who is doing the squirming. It is nice to see the shoe on the other foot for a change. I decided to let him discover on his own what I already know.

I won't bore you with the details of the audit. Suffice to say that when he approached me at 11:15 to review his findings, he had a genuine smile on his face.

Who knows why some memories stand out in our minds? For me, the events of that day remain crystal clear. The storm certainly added drama to the day, but it was his closing comments on the last page of the report that clearly captured the essence of Quadrant Leadership. Here is what was written, verbatim.

“The business practices of Steter Enterprises are exemplary. This is a very well-run company that owes its success to a very competent staff. How that came to be remains a total mystery to me. The one thing I can say with certainty is that Mr. Darvill is fortunate to have such a talented team of people working for him.”

Years later, when I was finally permitted to throw out the mountains of paperwork that one acquires as part of operating a small business, I mistakenly destroyed the only copy I had of that audit. When I began writing this story, I knew I would have no trouble recalling those words. Whenever I would find myself struggling with some aspect of this new approach to leadership, I would remember his words. They never failed to reassure me or to make me smile.

I would never suggest that I have all of the answers, and no approach to running a business is perfect. If my experience has taught me anything, it is that when you dedicate your time to the ongoing development of your people, amazing things begin to happen. The more they know, the more they truly can contribute. A highly skilled and empowered workforce is a formidable entity that is not easily defeated. The primary reason is simple: their pride of ownership will never let it happen.

Chapter Two

Driven

I admire great leaders. They are steadfast in their pursuit of excellence. They innovate while staying true to core values. They influence through clarity of purpose and stand on the front lines of accountability. There is an air of confidence about them, a sense of total connection with what is real. They are the gatekeepers of all standards and practices, and will accept nothing less. They are the problem solvers, and more often than not, the final approval. They do not watch clocks and seldom work a forty-hour work week. Most of all, they are driven to succeed.

For the first twenty years of my career, this is exactly how I would have defined a great leader, and it is the kind of leader I strived to be. I was most definitely driven, and I set the bar high for myself and for my people. I had little tolerance for poor work ethic and was never afraid to address the issue. I could be a tough boss, particularly when it came to maintaining standards

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The importance of never compromising on the most important core values is something I learned early on in my career. When I was a young man, I had the good fortune to meet Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's Restaurants. The exchange, while brief, was one that I will never forget. That day I got the opportunity to watch a true master at work. I witnessed firsthand his relent-

less passion for the company he had built, and I listened carefully to his message.

For anyone interested in reading more about this extraordinary man, I recommend *Grinding It Out: The Making of McDonald's*, a fascinating read written in collaboration with Robert Anderson.

Ray came up to Vancouver to begin his tour of the McDonald's restaurants in Western Canada. Part of his first day would be to visit the restaurants in the Greater Vancouver area. One of the restaurants high on his priority list was the brand new location in the city of Richmond, just outside of Vancouver. This was the site of the first McDonald's restaurant ever built in Canada and a classic example of the original iconic design.

Ray would often describe it to our young managers as “this funky little red and white building.” With sleek lines, a reflection of the Art Deco period, it was a combination of tall glass windows, shiny red and white tiles, and two large neon arches that soared high above the roofline. The famous Golden Arches. To complete the design, an atrium-inspired enclosure called the ‘winter front’ housed a handful of portable tables and chairs and protected the cash registers from inclement weather.

By comparison, the new restaurant that replaced the original was enormous and featured a brick facade that wrapped around the entire building. At nearly five times the size of the original red and white, the interior included two separate dining rooms, with enough seating for more than three hundred customers.

This was in stark contrast to the original structure, where the handful of seats that had once occupied valuable real estate in the winter front had been removed to make way for the sheer volume of customers who visited the tiny red and white restaurant every day.

As impressive as the inside of the new restaurant was, the real showstopper was the amazing outdoor kids' play park. The building design called for floor-to-ceiling sliding doors off the west side dining room that could be opened to allow for full access to the park. Parents could sit in the comfort of the dining room while their children played out on the rock mountain or any one of the many McDonald's character rides. The craftsmanship of the mountain and rides was extraordinary. There was nothing else like it anywhere in the Greater Vancouver Area.

For a few brief weeks following the completion of the new restaurant, the two buildings stood side by side for the public to view. It was a symbol of just how far McDonald's Restaurants had come in such a short time in Canada. I happened to be working at the little red and white during this transition period. Despite all of the headaches typically associated with a large construction project, we managed to keep the original restaurant open and operating at full capacity until the day of transition.

I think many of the local residents in Richmond were feeling the nostalgia as well. Our final dinner hour was incredibly busy, and sales remained well above the norm right up until closing time.

It was a special night for those of us who had been there from the beginning of the construction period. With the last customer served, we began the task of transferring the remaining food and operating supplies over to the new building in preparation for the first day of operations.

Ray Kroc's visit occurred a few weeks after the new location was up and running. He arrived at the restaurant surrounded by a large contingent of office personnel. Everyone, of course, was anxious to get his feedback on the design of the building and the new kids' play park.

Ray was obsessed with outstanding restaurant operations. He would describe it in a simple equation that consisted of just three letters: QSC. It stood for outstanding Quality, Service, and Cleanliness. In later years, the company would add a V to the equation to represent Value. He answered their questions by asking a few of his own. How were we going to maintain the cleanliness standards in a building this large with a playground of that size? He asked how a kitchen this size could be as efficient as the smaller, more streamlined version.

I remember him turning to the group of office people and saying, "I want to talk to someone who runs this place." At the time, our restaurant manager was addressing a customer inquiry pertaining to our new playground. No one was prepared to keep Ray waiting, so they turned to me. Fortunately, I was familiar with running the new restaurant and had just completed a training session for our staff.

The entire time I spoke, I remember that his eyes never left mine. As I addressed each of his concerns, he would nod, and when I was done, he thanked me for my input. He then proceeded to give his opinion of the new restaurant. I am of course paraphrasing here, but his message was clear.

While addressing everyone, he looked directly at me. “This is truly a beautiful building, son, that everyone involved in creating it should be very proud of. Just remember that nothing is more important than QSC. If you always remember that, you will never fail. The minute you let other things get in the way, you will lose your advantage. Don’t ever let the fancy stuff distract you from the things that really matter. Nothing, and I mean nothing, is more important than outstanding QSC.”

No matter how often Ray Kroc spoke about McDonald’s, his core message was always the same: QSC. He never grew tired of talking about it, and he firmly believed that for McDonald’s to retain its edge and be successful in the future, we must never compromise our standards. Outstanding Quality, Service, and Cleanliness must always come before everything else. One of his favourite sayings was, “None of us is as good as all of us.” That day I understood why Ray Kroc was considered an iconic figure and a true leader in the industry. He refused to let anyone or anything get in the way of his message. The advice he gave me that day would stay with me for the rest of my life.

Finding success is one thing, but maintaining it is quite another. It is an enormous task that no one can accomplish on their own.

Most bosses who embrace the traditional style of leadership surround themselves with a core team of people who play a critical role in the overall success of the company. These top performers are typically in positions of authority with the task of supervising or managing other employees.

It can be an effective way to run a company, provided that your key players remain in place and maintain the level of excellence expected of them. Because this style of leadership relies so heavily on a highly developed core team, any disruption to the makeup or performance of that team can have immediate implications. These individuals are usually the driving force behind achieving the goals of the company. When any of them is missing or underperforming, it becomes a greater challenge to maintain excellence.

By the time I was ready to take on a restaurant of my own, I had an idea for an entirely different way to lead, one that would challenge every employee to contribute more. Rather than relying on a small group of outstanding performers to carry the weight of accountability, this approach would focus on providing each employee with the kind of development that would capitalize on their potential to contribute more to the overall success of the company.

I had the great pleasure of working in the McDonald's Training Department for the better part of four years. It was a truly rewarding experience, and it gave me the opportunity to hone my skills as an effective communicator. The material we taught was

first-rate, and it provided our managers with the knowledge and tools to become great leaders in their own right.

Around this time, I began to ponder a concept that I would later come to call Quadrant Leadership. McDonald's is world-renowned for the quality of its training programs. These programs play an integral role in the company's enormous success. Topics like exploring the dynamics of winning teams and critical thinking for effective decision-making were instrumental in the development of our managers.

I began to wonder what would happen if we were able to provide a higher level of personal development for every employee in the organization. Would it be worth the effort? Would the time invested lead to better employees? Would they, in turn, be inclined to contribute more to the success of the company? I had no idea what the answers were, but at the very least, it was an intriguing idea that I felt was worth pursuing. That experience would ultimately lead to the development of the Quadrant Leadership Model and subsequently the creation of the Better Boss Workshops.

Chapter Three

In Good Company

“God has given us our talents, not to copy the talents of others, but rather to use our brains and imagination in order to obtain the revelation of true beauty.”

— *Louis Comfort Tiffany*

When I first set out to explore the merits of Quadrant Leadership, I remembered a biography I had once read on Louis Comfort Tiffany. Most historians consider Tiffany to be the greatest artisan of the modern era. His name is synonymous with a level of quality that is beyond compare.

Tiffany was a genius and a great visionary; he was also an extraordinary teacher. No matter how famous he became or how big his company grew, he never abandoned his principal role as a master craftsman. His creative mind allowed him to experiment in many different mediums, and he never grew tired of sharing his knowledge and insight with the talented men and women whose own works would carry his family's namesake.

Through his personal creations, he established a benchmark for what is possible when people strive to do their best. Throughout his life, he never lost sight of what made him successful, and he continued to show the way until the end. As Tiffany's empire

grew, it would have been easy for him to turn over this very important role to one of his most trusted artisans. Instead, he chose to remain on the front lines, inspiring others to hold themselves accountable to the same standards of excellence to which he aspired.

By never losing sight of the core values that solidified the status of his company, he established an extraordinary brand that has stood the test of time. Nearly a century after his death, Louis Comfort Tiffany's legacy lives on. If you have ever watched an episode of "Antiques Road Show", you will know that owning a vintage piece of Tiffany can be a very good investment.

If I learned one important lesson from his story, it is never to lose sight of the fundamentals that define your brand. Every day, companies must battle for market share. Some will win, and some will lose. With Quadrant Leadership, our goal is to create an entire army of extraordinary brand builders dedicated to bringing the core values of our business to life in a very significant way. By demonstrating their true abilities, our employees inspire us to mould and to shape our business in ways we never imagined possible.

Five Distinctive Differences Between Traditional Leaders and People-Centric Leaders

1. Traditional leaders manage performance. People-centric leaders develop potential.

Traditional leaders tend to focus on how well people are performing against the requirements of their jobs. People-centric leaders look beyond current performance and concentrate on developing what each person is capable of becoming.

2. Traditional leaders provide direction. People-centric leaders create understanding.

Traditional leaders make sure people know what they are expected to do. People-centric leaders go further by helping people understand why it matters, how their contribution fits into the bigger picture, and how their decisions affect the business.

3. Traditional leaders rely on accountability. People-centric leaders build ownership.

Traditional leaders hold people accountable for assigned responsibilities. People-centric leaders develop the self-initiative and personal responsibility that encourage people to take ownership of results rather than simply comply with expectations.

4. Traditional leaders solve problems. People-centric leaders develop problem solvers.

Traditional leaders often use their experience and authority to provide answers. People-centric leaders use problems as opportunities to develop the judgment, confidence, and decision-making abilities of their people.

5. Traditional leaders build strong teams. People-centric leaders build stronger individuals who create stronger teams.

Traditional leaders recognize the importance of teamwork. People-centric leaders understand that the strength of any team ultimately depends upon the capability, confidence, and contribution of the individuals within it.

PART THREE

THE BRAND BUILDERS

“Your brand is not what you say it is. It is what your customers believe it is.”

— Don Darvill



Chapter One

Untapped Potential

The principles that lie at the heart of Quadrant Leadership are driven by one simple premise: the more people know, the more they can contribute. This is a philosophy of leadership that is firmly rooted in the power of human potential.

While the idea of providing enhanced development to improve employee performance is hardly an original concept, it is the things we share in Quadrant Leadership, and the way we go about sharing them, that allows us to achieve such extraordinary results.

There are many reasons to consider Quadrant Leadership. Here are four of the best:

- It offers a highly effective, results-driven alternative to the way you currently run your business.
- It provides every employee in the company with the kind of business education that will prepare them to contribute in a far more significant way.
- It promotes an environment where healthy, productive working relationships are formed based on mutual trust and respect.

It maintains focus on the core objectives of your business that will yield the greatest return on investment.

We are about to explore the parts of the Brand Identity Model. Your ability to address both the Brand Integrity and the Brand

Recognition components will ultimately determine the degree of success you are likely to achieve. Both sides of the model will require the support of a highly skilled team that will be charged with the task of meeting the expectations of your customers on a daily basis. The more you people know, the more they contribute is not just a slogan; it is a vital component of your success story.

THE BRAND IDENTITY MODEL

Brand Integrity

Principles and Values

The guiding principles and core values that the company's business model is built upon

Expectations

Set of pledges, commitments and promises that a company makes to its customers

Execution

The company's ability to deliver on promises made

Brand Recognition

Awareness

The immediate connection between a company's name, logo or website and the goods and services it provides

Reach

The size of the trading area where the brand enjoys a high degree of recognition

Reputation

Consumer perception that drives brand loyalty

Brand Equity

The good will value of the brand based on the company's performance over a sustained period of time

PART FOUR

THE QUADRANT LEADERSHIP MODEL

“Leadership is not about having all the answers. It’s about knowing what your people need to excel and optimize their potential.”

— Don Darvill

The Quadrant Leadership Model



Each quadrant approaches employee development from a different perspective. The right choice depends on what the person needs to learn, understand, practise, or work through. The purpose remains the same: to build knowledge, confidence, and the ability to contribute. That applies whether your team serves customers across a counter, fulfils orders from a warehouse, or supports an online store from several locations.

Quadrant Leadership goes beyond showing someone how to complete a task. We share the reasoning behind our standards and give people the tools to put that knowledge to work. Before expecting independent performance, we make sure the employee understands the job, has access to the right resources, and has had a fair opportunity to practise.

My background in employee development helped me bring the model to life, but you do not need a training department to begin. A clear checklist, a short demonstration, a useful reference guide, and a thoughtful conversation can take you a long way. Digital learning resources can help, provided you review their quality and adapt them to your own business. The responsibility for making learning meaningful still rests with you.

Let's look briefly at the purpose of each quadrant. Later in the book, we will explore each one in greater detail.

The Trainer/Expert quadrant builds the skills and technical knowledge needed to do the job well. In a store, that might in-

volve product knowledge, point-of-sale procedures, merchandising, or handling a return. Online, it might involve maintaining product information, processing orders, managing inventory, or answering customer enquiries. Your subject matter experts demonstrate the work, supervise practice, and verify that the employee can perform it consistently.

The Teacher/Philosopher quadrant explores the reasons behind the work. Through two-way conversation, employees connect everyday decisions to your values and brand promises. Why does an accurate product description matter? Why must a refund be handled with care? What does a good handoff look like between the sales floor and the fulfilment team? Understanding the reasons helps people use sound judgement when a checklist does not cover the situation.

The Observer/Coach quadrant turns knowledge into independent judgement. Coaching requires you to watch, listen, and ask questions before supplying an answer. You might observe a customer interaction, review an order handoff, or discuss how someone resolved an online service issue. The objective is to help employees assess their choices, learn from the results, and take responsibility for their next steps. Step in when necessary to protect people or customers, then return to the learning conversation.

The Mentor/Advisor quadrant depends on a relationship of trust and mutual respect. It creates room for an employee to reflect on goals, confidence, or obstacles affecting their growth. Men-

torship should be welcomed, never imposed. Keep the conversation within your competence, respect the employee's boundaries, and avoid treating personal disclosure as a condition of advancement.

As you become familiar with the model, choosing a quadrant becomes more natural. New employees, and experienced employees taking on new responsibilities, will often progress through the first three quadrants: learning the task, understanding its purpose, and demonstrating sound judgement in practice. Certification recognises that achievement. People may revisit a quadrant whenever their work changes or a learning gap becomes clear.

Preparation depends on your experience and the employee's needs. Choose one useful objective, gather relevant examples, and decide how the employee will demonstrate understanding. A session on handling a dissatisfied customer can draw on a conversation at the counter or an exchange by email. As your experience grows, you will develop a practical collection of resources. Keep reviewing it as products, systems, and customer expectations change.

Quadrant Leadership is a development model. Employees need to experience it as an investment in their capability, rather than a disguised inspection. You will still need clear performance expectations and fair accountability. The model helps people acquire the knowledge and judgement to meet those expectations and strengthen your brand through their work.

Leadership Tool

Optimizing Pareto's Law

Pareto's law explores the unique relationship between cause and effect. Based on the research of Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, it suggests that some of the things we do for our business contribute far more to our success than others. It is more commonly referred to as the 80/20 rule. Pareto discovered that in many cases, eighty percent of the effects, or the results you are hoping to achieve, can be attributed to just twenty percent of the causes. The key is to identify the primary activities that make up that twenty percent. It makes no difference whether you call them principles, values, objectives, initiatives, activities, or beliefs; the bottom line is that these are the core activities that define the essence of your brand.

When I was an operations manager, responsible for the performance of 32 restaurants, I did not have direct contact with every employee, so I had to stay focused on the message. The key to McDonald's success lies in executing the core values of the McDonald's brand, or as Ray Kroc would have said, outstanding QSC.

As an owner/operator with Quadrant Leadership at my disposal, I had a distinct advantage. I could be far more specific when determining which elements would yield the highest return based on the cause-and-effect equation. While running an outstanding restaurant would always be the goal, the key to my success would rest with my employees. In short, they were my twenty

percent. It was obvious to me that their ability to deliver superior QSC meant that I would be optimizing the 80/20 rule.

The secret to finding success with Pareto's Law lies in two elements that are not specifically expressed in the formula. Each is critical to optimizing the cause and effect principle. Those two elements are commitment and focus.

To illustrate my point, all we need to do is look at Pareto's Law in reverse. The other side of the equation suggests that a full eighty percent of the things that tend to keep us busy will contribute very little to the overall success of our business. I call these distractions busywork, and they have the potential to take valuable time and resources away from the core activities that get results.

A more accurate version of Pareto's Law for a business might look like this:

$$20 \cdot 80 \cdot 80 \cdot 20$$

Expressed in words it might read: The core values and guiding principles that are the cornerstone of your brand identity will generate eighty percent of your long-term market share, provided you are prepared to commit eighty percent of your time, fully vested in executing those same brand values.

As the boss, you are continually confronted by the eighty percent of things that do little to advance your business. During the transition phase, your primary goal will be to create what we will refer to as free and flexible time. As part of that process,

you will be required to take a hard look at your ability to place trust in others.

You may remember that in the Taxman Cometh, the auditor who visited my restaurant could not believe that I would turn over responsibility for conducting such an important task to my managers. What he failed to understand was that I had personally trained them in all of the administrative aspects of the business. I knew they were more than capable of taking my place and, more importantly, I had other priorities where my time would be better spent. The outstanding results that followed only served to add to his total bewilderment.

The transition phase is all about creating the free and flexible time that will be needed to bring the model to life. To make that happen, many of the things that currently form part of your job description will no longer be your responsibility. This will lead to changes in the job descriptions of some of your key employees. The bottom line is that you will be wiping the slate clean, redefining not only your role in the company but also the roles of other people in current positions of authority.

Before we go any further, let me say this: Quadrant Leadership is a unique and richly rewarding leadership style, but it is not for everyone. I have encountered two specific types of bosses who are unlikely to make a successful transition.

The first are those who are compelled to hold on to control of every aspect of their business. They tend to be micro-managers who are unable to let go of many of the things that would free

up their time. They often have trust issues, and because they cannot turn over important tasks to others, they will never find enough time to commit fully to the implementation of the Quadrant Leadership Model.

The second type is the boss that derives no pleasure what so ever from developing people. The opportunity to share knowledge does not motivate them. They would rather hire talent than create it. They tend to be impatient, which is not a good quality for a teacher. They prefer to spend as little time as possible interacting with their employees and often hide behind closed doors. They would rather do paperwork, attend meetings, talk on the telephone, or do any one of the myriad of other activities that fall under the busy-work umbrella. They see employee development as a job that is best delegated to others.

In the transition material that follows, we will tackle the whole time commitment issue. For now, think about it as time spent promoting the core values of your brand. If you say you have the best service in town, then you had better be able to prove it, day in and day out.

Much of your day deals with making countless decisions. The goal of Quadrant Leadership is to raise the expectation we have for our employees and increase the accountability level that they are required to bring to the table. One of your primary objectives is to make them far more accountable for the decisions they make on behalf of the company.

In the end, the time commitment issue will work itself out naturally. When you see what the model can do for your business, it will be all the motivation you will require. Personally, I never grew tired of the process and was constantly amazed at how much more my employees were capable of when given the opportunity to exercise their true potential.

Look to the 80/20 rule to help you determine where to use effectively your time. Every development opportunity that you take on has the potential to improve your business in some way. The key is to try to identify the opportunities where you are likely to realize the greatest return for the time invested.

Preparing to Transition

80% of My Time. Really?

For many small business owners, spending eighty percent of their time on employee development sounds unrealistic. That figure reflects the commitment I made in my own business; it is not a fixed requirement for every owner. Your starting point will depend on the size of your team, the stage of your business, and the responsibilities you can delegate. The principle is to make development a substantial, protected part of your work. In a physical store, consistency may show up in helpful service and a well-run sales floor. Online, it may show up in accurate information, reliable fulfilment, and thoughtful responses. Across

both, capable people turn your promises into an experience customers can trust.

A competitor can copy a promotion or a product range more easily than the knowledge, judgement, and relationships of a strong team. Consistent execution gives customers reasons to return. Investing in your people helps you build that consistency, although it does not remove the need to keep improving your products, systems, and commercial decisions.

The Transition Journal

Before creating free and flexible time, find out where your time actually goes. Most of us can describe a busy day, but that does not mean we can account for it accurately. A Transition Journal gives you evidence to work with.

Record your time for a month, or for a period long enough to capture a normal operating cycle. Include busy days, quieter days, routine deadlines, and unexpected interruptions. A notebook, spreadsheet, or simple time log will do. Brief, consistent entries are more useful than an elaborate system you stop using after three days.

Record customer-facing work too, then distinguish it from the four categories below. For a store owner, it might include helping customers or improving the shopping experience. For an online owner, it might include reviewing product information, resolving a service issue, or improving fulfilment. This provides a

complete picture and helps you see which activities truly need your personal involvement.

For each entry, note the task, time spent, reason it arose, and whether someone else could handle it with the right preparation. Use the following categories to organise the work. Where categories overlap, choose the main reason for the activity so you do not count the same time twice.

1. Time-Sensitive Critical Tasks

These are tasks with a deadline or an immediate consequence if they are missed. Examples include payroll, staffing schedules, supplier orders, banking, and dispatch commitments. Online operations may also involve resolving failed payments or correcting an urgent inventory mismatch. Record the tasks you perform personally and the consequence of delay.

2. Time-Tolerant Relevant Tasks

These are important tasks that can be planned within a reasonable window. Examples include reviewing merchandising, refreshing product pages, comparing suppliers, preparing a campaign, or organising a planned maintenance visit. A task with a firm deadline belongs in the first category. The question here is which useful work can be scheduled and assigned, rather than continually returning to your desk.

3. Busy-work

The 80/20 principle is a useful prompt to look for the activities that absorb attention without producing much value. Use your journal to find the pattern in your own business; do not assume that an exact ratio will apply.

Much busy-work comes from avoidable repetition: correcting the same order errors, chasing incomplete handoffs, approving routine decisions, or entering the same information in several places. An urgent customer problem still deserves attention. The opportunity is to prevent the recurring problem that keeps creating the interruption.

Quadrant Leadership can help by improving skill, judgement, and ownership. Employees who understand both the task and its purpose are better equipped to handle routine decisions and recognise when they need help. Pair that development with clear procedures and workable systems. Training alone will not repair an unreliable process.

Other demands arrive from outside your immediate workflow. Your journal will show which requests deserve attention, which can wait, and which need a clearer boundary.

Phone calls, messages, email, platform alerts, and meetings can all interrupt focused work. For an online store, some of these tools are the main route to customers, so the tool itself is not the problem. Ask whether the particular interruption required your attention at that moment and whether it helped the business move forward.

Being reactive does not automatically make work unproductive. Responding to a payment failure, customer complaint, or damaged delivery may be essential. Look for avoidable repetition, unclear ownership, unnecessary approval, and activity that could be simplified without weakening service.

4. Employee Issues

Record time spent addressing attendance problems, unresolved conflict, unclear responsibilities, and recurring performance concerns. Include issues affecting remote work, such as missed handoffs or confusion about availability. Describe the situation factually and keep sensitive details out of a shared journal.

An uncovered shift or unattended customer-service queue creates an immediate operational problem. Once it is covered, look at the underlying cause. Was the expectation clear? Did the employee have adequate training, tools, and support? Development may be part of the answer, but so may workload, scheduling, or the way the job has been designed.

Choose your first development group where there is a clear learning need and a realistic opportunity to improve. Include willing employees who can help establish the process. People currently struggling may benefit greatly, but they should not be labelled or treated as a test of a mathematical rule. Base your decisions on evidence and give each person a fair opportunity.

Creating Free and Flexible Time

1. Time-Sensitive Critical Tasks

Definition: Tasks with a deadline or an immediate operational consequence if left undone.

Your transition depends partly on the support around you. Identify which recurring tasks a capable team member can take over, then plan the handoff rather than simply announcing it. Explain the expected result, provide training and access, agree on decision limits, and set a review date. A small online business may rely on a fulfilment lead or a specialist provider; a physical store may rely on a manager or shift leader. In either case, assign one clear owner and a backup. The following example shows the structure of a Critical Task Action Plan. Adapt the tasks and timing to your business.

Critical task	Owner / backup	Training and verification	Handoff date
Daily banking and reconciliation	Carol / John	Three weeks; verify reconciliations	March 15
Inventory and supplier orders	Ryan / John	One month; verify stock and order accuracy	March 26

Payroll preparation	Carol / Ryan	One month; supervised complete cycle	March 26
Staffing and service coverage	John / Carol	One month; test shift and queue coverage	March 26
Order fulfilment and exceptions	Ryan / John	Two months; verify dispatch and escalation	April 15

Some tasks involve financial records, customer information, or important account access. Delegation needs more than a feeling of confidence. Give people the access required for their role, agree on approval limits, and arrange proportionate checks. Make sure a backup can act when the task owner is unavailable.

Trust is central to Quadrant Leadership. So is clarity. Employees should know what they can decide, what needs approval, and when to raise a concern. In an online business, that may mean separate user accounts and defined permissions. In a physical store, it may mean limits for refunds, purchasing, or cash handling. These arrangements help good people do their jobs confidently.

The first level of trust is untested trust. It begins before you have much shared experience. Give a new employee a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate reliability through tasks they are prepared to handle. Avoid using gut feeling as the only basis for granting access or responsibility.

In the second quadrant, we discuss what it means to climb the trust ladder. Trust grows through reliable work, honest communication, and follow-through. It also moves in both directions: employees need to know that you keep your commitments, apply standards fairly, and respond constructively when they ask for help.

The second level is earned trust. As an employee demonstrates competence and judgement, their independence can grow. Agree on the next responsibility and the support available. When something goes wrong, understand the cause before deciding what needs to change. A mistake is an opportunity to learn; hiding one is a different concern.

At the top of my ladder is what I have called unconditional trust: deep confidence in a person's integrity, built over time. That confidence does not mean unlimited authority or the removal of normal safeguards. A highly trusted employee can take on important responsibilities within clearly agreed boundaries.

A personal example involved signing authority for my company. When I was a McDonald's owner/operator, many other owners and their spouses were the only people authorised to sign cheques. I remember calling my accountant, Jerry Miachika, to tell him I was giving Mike, my restaurant manager, signing authority up to \$100,000. You can imagine his reaction.

I respected Jerry's concerns. I also knew that administrative work would take time away from developing my people, and Mike had earned my confidence through years of working to-

gether. That was a decision in the circumstances of my own business, rather than a spending limit I would suggest to another owner. Your arrangements should reflect your operation and the advice of the people who help you oversee it.

Mike Trask was an excellent manager and a man of great integrity. I was fortunate to work alongside him throughout my years as an owner. His contribution showed me how much a trusted colleague can make possible.

Some owners find delegation difficult even when an employee has demonstrated loyalty and competence. Start with a responsibility you can define clearly, provide the preparation it requires, and review the result. Confidence can grow through experience rather than through a single leap.

Much of my personal success has come from placing trust in others. I have a line that speaks to this: “Surround yourself with experts that you truly trust, and then let them do their jobs.” Clear expectations make that philosophy practical.

When I asked friends for support as I dealt with my illness, I trusted them to keep my confidence. They did. That experience reinforced the value of integrity and dependable relationships. In the workplace, respect an employee’s privacy and let them decide what personal information they wish to share.

Administration remains important. The objective is to give it a capable owner and an effective process so that you can invest

more of your time in developing people and improving the customer experience.

Responsibility can be empowering when people have the preparation, authority, and support to succeed. Show your confidence by allowing them to act within the boundaries you have agreed. Remain available for questions without taking every decision back into your own hands.

For each task in your Critical Task Action Plan, confirm the owner, backup, training, access, handoff date, and review arrangements. Delegation is complete when the task can be carried out reliably without your routine intervention. You still retain responsibility for oversight and for the decisions that belong to the owner.

2. Time-Tolerant Relevant Tasks

Definition: Important work that can be scheduled within a reasonable window rather than handled immediately.

Use a similar action plan for relevant tasks. Assign work such as updating displays, improving product descriptions, reviewing supplier performance, or preparing a seasonal campaign. Agree on an outcome and a due date, then let the person plan the work. Suitable software or specialist support may simplify the task, but someone still needs to own its quality and completion.

In *The Taxman Cometh*, I described an auditor's surprise that I did not carry keys to my business or know the combination to the safe. My people knew what to do because their responsibili-

ties were clear. Your version may involve store-opening routines or access to the systems that run your online shop. The lesson is to build reliable ownership while keeping appropriate backup arrangements.

3. Busy-work

Your journal will help you notice work that consumes attention without improving results. You may find repeated interruptions, duplicated updates, unnecessary status meetings, or decisions that return to you because nobody knows who owns them. Address the pattern rather than blaming the communication tool.

For each activity, ask: What useful result did this produce? Did it require my involvement? Could we prevent it, simplify it, or give it a clearer owner? Include preparation and follow-up time when judging its cost.

The nature of the business matters. A customer enquiry by live chat may be as central to an online store as a conversation at the counter is to a physical shop. Both deserve skilled attention. Look for ways to help the team respond well without requiring the owner to handle every interaction.

Meetings can be useful when they lead to a decision, solve a problem, or support learning. They become costly when the purpose is unclear or the same information could be shared more simply. In Power Briefings, we will look at a focused alternative. For now, record which meetings earn their place and which need a different approach.

Common sources of avoidable busy-work

- Messages and alerts that interrupt focused work without requiring an immediate response. Agree on a route for urgent issues and reasonable response windows for everything else.
- Calls or chats that repeatedly seek approval for routine decisions. Clarify decision limits and make answers to common questions easy to find.
- Meetings without a clear purpose, the right participants, or an outcome. Replace routine updates with a brief written summary when discussion adds little value.
- Repeated corrections to orders, inventory records, product listings, or customer handoffs. Fix the source of the error, then verify that the improvement holds.
- Conflicting requests from managers, partners, suppliers, or service providers. Agree on priorities so employees do not have to guess which request matters most.
- Duplicate entry, repeated report preparation, and checking information without acting on it. Simplify the workflow before adding another tool or automating it.

Do not confuse necessary support work with waste. Accurate records, reliable systems, careful planning, and useful communication all contribute to the customer experience, even when a customer never sees them.

An immediate sale is not the only useful return on time. Preventing an error, helping a colleague learn, or resolving an issue before it grows can also be valuable. Judge the activity by its purpose and outcome, rather than by whether it puts money in the register that day.

Protect your time and your team's time. Remove work that serves little purpose, improve work that is necessary, and reserve space for development. Reducing busy-work should make the operation stronger, rather than leave essential work undone.

There is no fixed transition timetable. Around six weeks may be a useful checkpoint, but readiness matters more than the date. Review the following milestones before moving ahead:

- A clear picture of how you use your time, based on your Transition Journal.
- Critical tasks with named owners, appropriate access, training, and backup arrangements; handoffs tested before they become routine.
- An action plan for relevant tasks, with agreed outcomes and realistic dates.
- A shorter list of avoidable interruptions and repeated work, with practical changes already underway.
- A first development group chosen for clear learning needs and a fair opportunity to succeed.

- A focused discussion with your core team about their responsibilities and the support they need.
- A plan to introduce the model to everyone, including employees on different shifts or working remotely.

The journal should reveal both where your time goes and why. Use those findings to make a few meaningful changes first. A reliable handoff or a better decision process is worth more than an ambitious plan that nobody can sustain.

As people develop, some recurring problems may decline. Other problems will point to systems, workload, or unclear expectations that need attention. Review both. The objective is to build capacity throughout the business.

Your action plans create room for that work. Protect a realistic amount of development time in your calendar, adjust it as you learn, and keep your core team involved. The next step is to agree on how you will make the transition together.

Leadership Tool

Power Briefings

A useful power briefing helps people understand what matters, decide what needs to happen, and leave knowing who will do it. That purpose applies whether the team serves customers in a restaurant, runs a shop, fulfils online orders, or works from several locations.

As your employees take on more responsibility, you need a reliable way to stay informed without taking every decision back into your own hands. Your people need the same clarity: what has changed, what they can decide, where support is required, and what the customer has been promised.

The medium may be a conversation beside the sales floor, a short video call, or a structured written exchange. What makes it a power briefing is the quality of the communication and the action that follows.

Before looking at how to use the approach today, I want to return to the experience that gave me the idea.

Fall, 1992

Today marks the beginning of the budget process, and every department head is hard at work crunching numbers. Later this morning, I will meet with each of my five supervisors to review their preliminary sales and profit projections for the new year.

It's just after eight when I hear a familiar voice call my name. It's Ken B., head of human resources for Western Canada.

Since my return to the company, Ken has been incredibly supportive. He's the only person besides Ron and Arnie who knows anything about my condition. While I have been able to manage my worst episodes by discreetly fading out of the public eye, I have sought Ken's counsel on many occasions, and his advice has proven invaluable.

His mission this morning is to inform every department head that there will be an important meeting in the main boardroom starting at noon. He asks that I take a good look at my calendar for the upcoming week and get ready to reschedule any commitments that are already in place. He inquires about the boys and suggests that next week I make arrangements to have my parents pick them up on Friday and keep them for the weekend since my return home will likely be delayed until late Sunday afternoon.

Return home from where? Where are we going? Before I have a chance to ask any questions, he is off. While our conversation has piqued my curiosity, I am quickly brought back to the task at hand as my first supervisor arrives to get things underway.

I am just finishing up with the second budget discussion as the noon hour approaches. As I make my way towards the boardroom, I suddenly remember that I have yet to do anything about next week's schedule. I decide to wait until I have a better idea of what is going on.

As I enter the room, I am met by two strangers who shake my hand and invite me to take a seat. As other department heads begin to file in, I take the opportunity to get a closer look at our visitors. Both men are tall and impeccably dressed. Their custom suits are of a high quality, cut to accentuate their broad shoulders and trim waistlines. Standing there, they remind me of a couple of sports commentators preparing to deliver their post-game analysis. Instead of formal introductions, the meeting

begins with both men walking around the boardroom, presenting each of us with a small index card and requesting that we take a few moments to read it over carefully.

As I stare at the card, the first thing that catches my attention is the heading. It reads ‘Indemnity Waiver’ in bold print. There is dead silence for about thirty seconds until a lone voice cries out, “Gee Ken, I’ve heard of going to extreme lengths to fire a guy, but how can you call it a termination if the body is never found?”

The room erupts with laughter, but many of us are nervous. A quick review of the card suggests that the aforementioned company cannot be held liable for injuries resulting from physical activities that may include, but are not limited to, rappelling off a mountain cliff, traversing a steep ravine by zip-line, or long periods of exposure to inclement weather.

Before Ken makes his formal introductions, he attempts to lighten the mood by suggesting that there are several ways for a company to downsize in tough economic times, and this just happens to be one of the more creative ones

The two men who stand before us have impressive credentials and confirm my suspicion. They are former professional athletes who also happen to hold master’s degrees in clinical and behavioural psychology. Their company works specifically with corporations, specializing in team synergy and relationship building in highly competitive environments. All of the workshops

they conduct take place outdoors in remote areas. They call their program A Walk in the Woods. The sessions last one full week, and everyone will be together twenty-four hours a day.

We are asked to meet in the office parking lot next Monday morning at 5:30 a.m. From there, we will be taken to an undisclosed location where there will be no phones or any other contact with anyone in the outside world unless a real emergency arises. We are told that we will be spending every waking hour outdoors, regardless of weather conditions. We will not be permitted to return to the home base until every daily task has been fully completed, no matter the hour. Each exercise is designed to test our ability to work effectively as a team, and to raise the stakes even higher; most tasks will involve some element of danger.

As the meeting draws to a close, we are handed a list of the things to bring with us. We are cautioned not to add anything to the list since all bags will be checked, and any unauthorized items will be confiscated.

When I was the head of the training department, I did a lot of research on corporate bonding exercises. The only conclusion I was able to draw from my reading was that the jury is still out as to how effective these experiences really are. In a company full of alpha personalities, this was going to be very interesting.

I am on my way back to my desk when Ken approaches and asks me to rejoin him in the boardroom. He tells me that he has a bit of a dilemma in that the conditions of the contract call for

full disclosure of any medical conditions that could place a participant at risk. He asks me what I'd like to do about it, and I tell him that I'm not sure. As I leave, I promise to give him an answer before the day is out.

The whole thing makes me nervous, but after some serious self-reflection, I realize that my absence would not go unnoticed by my peer group. I know in my heart that despite the risk, this is going to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, so I opt to participate.

The next day we meet with the two psychologists, and I do my best to give them a general overview of my symptoms and what a typical episode is like for me. They assure me of total discretion and promise to remove me from the environment if I give them any indication that things are not right.

It turned out to be an incredible week with fond memories that have stayed with me ever since. I suffered no episodes and was able to partake in every challenge. The first exercise was one of the most memorable because it illustrated just how counterproductive highly competitive people can be when they fail to work together to find a solution. We were divided into two groups with no assigned leader or instructions other than to complete the task.

Our objective was to retrieve a raw egg from a tree stump that was partitioned by well-marked boundaries that we were not permitted to cross. The only materials at our disposal were a ball of string and a half dozen paper clips.

To say there was a serious lack of synergy would be an understatement. It was every man for himself, and each was determined to outperform the other. In the end, neither team was able to recover the egg without breaking it.

When the exercise was over, we were gathered together for our first power debriefing. The objective was to have a free-flowing discussion of what went wrong, what we learned from the experience, and what we needed to do to prepare for our next challenge. Every member of the team was required to participate, without exception.

I should point out that these sessions always took place outdoors at the end of the day. The bitter cold and howling winds were brutal. No matter how bad things got, we were never permitted to leave until every issue had been addressed to the satisfaction of our coaches. That meant that individuals were forced to confront one another, which usually led to other issues that were often far more personal in nature.

These were contentious sessions because of the competitive nature of the group, and the complex dynamic of each relationship. With the temperature rapidly dropping, we would huddle together like a herd of musk oxen, using each other's body heat to try to keep ourselves warm. Despite the bone-chilling conditions, no session was ever cut short.

I remember one exchange in particular. It took place high up on the mountainside. We were perched on a cliff between two walls of solid granite. The winds were so loud, the only way you

could be heard was to shout. This was one of our most challenging sessions that lasted well past dark. In the end, with flashlights in hand, we were able to successfully resolve some very tough issues.

Over the course of the week, we learned how to conduct a highly effective communication session by staying focused on what was really important, and by holding every person in attendance responsible for being part of the solution. By the time we were doing our last two power debriefings, everyone knew what would be expected of them, and we were able to tackle some tough issues and find real solutions in a fraction of the time it took to complete our earlier sessions.

From the Woods to the Workplace

When I returned home, I took the lesson about focused communication and adapted it for my business. The conditions of that week were extraordinary. Cold, exhaustion, forced confrontation, and physical risk are not conditions I would recommend reproducing in a workplace. The useful lesson was the discipline of examining what happened, hearing the people involved, and agreeing on what to do next.

A power briefing should make it easier for employees to raise a concern. It should never require them to defend themselves in front of colleagues or disclose personal matters. Individual performance concerns and sensitive issues belong in an appropriate private conversation.

Meetings That Earn Their Place

My experience made me question the value of many conventional meetings. Today, I would ask the same question about a video call, a long message thread, or a stream of updates that nobody has time to read. Does the communication help the people involved make a decision, solve a problem, coordinate their work, or learn something useful?

Some discussions need time. Coaching, planning, relationship building, and a complex disagreement cannot always be resolved in a few minutes. Choose the format that suits the purpose. A power briefing is particularly useful when people need a common understanding and a clear next action.

Consider the cost of bringing people together. Include their time, preparation, and the work that must be covered while they participate. Then consider the result. Did you prevent an error, resolve a delay, clarify responsibility, or help someone learn? A useful return is not always an immediate sale, and it cannot always be expressed as a precise financial calculation.

If the only purpose is to share an uncomplicated update, a short written note may be enough. If the facts are unclear or people must work through a decision together, arrange a conversation. The aim is to use everyone's time well.

The 20/80 Communication Rule

I describe the discipline of concise communication as the 20/80 rule: try to express in twenty words what you once needed eighty words to say. It is a practical reminder, rather than a fixed word limit or a statistical claim about how people communicate.

Get to the point, but include the information needed to understand it. A message that is short and ambiguous may create more work than a slightly longer explanation. Distinguish what you know from what you think, identify the consequence for the business or customer, and be clear about the help or decision you need.

For example: “Six orders are waiting for stock confirmation. Customer service needs an answer by noon so we can give customers an accurate delivery date.”

That statement gives the team a situation, a consequence, and a deadline. It opens the way to a useful decision.

Before the Briefing

Start with a clear purpose. “Agree on today's response to delayed orders” is more useful than “Discuss fulfilment.” Invite the people who can contribute to the decision or carry it out. People who simply need the result can receive the summary afterwards.

Share essential facts in advance when time allows. In a store, this might be a short note on the staff board or in the team's usu-

al communication channel. For a distributed online business, it might be a shared document with the affected orders, the known cause, and the questions to resolve. Keep customer details within the systems and access arrangements approved for that work.

Choose a sensible time and setting. Provide coverage for employees serving customers, and arrange participation during scheduled working time. A remote team needs clear expectations about response windows and an agreed route for urgent matters. A briefing should not create an expectation that people monitor messages continuously when they are off duty.

Make it clear who will lead the discussion and who has authority to make the final decision. Participation matters, but it does not mean every decision requires unanimous agreement.

During the Briefing

Open with the purpose and the essential facts. Ask each relevant person what they know, what stands in the way, and what they recommend. Give quieter participants room to contribute. A question, a correction, or a useful written comment is participation; people do not need to speak simply to prove they are paying attention.

Keep the conversation centred on the issue. If another important matter emerges, give it an owner and arrange a separate discussion. Do not dismiss a concern just because it was not on the agenda, especially when it affects the decision in front of you.

Challenge assumptions without turning the conversation into a contest. “What information supports that?” is more useful than “Who made this mistake?” First understand the situation. Then decide what must happen and what the team can learn from it.

A good power briefing is concise and respectful. Its purpose is clarity, rather than speed for its own sake.

At the end, confirm the decision, the person responsible for each action, the completion time, and how everyone will know it is done. Check that the people taking responsibility have the information, authority, and capacity to deliver.

A Storefront Example

Imagine that customers collecting online orders from a shop are waiting while employees search for items. The sales-floor lead, the person preparing orders, and the colleague maintaining the stock records hold a short briefing before the busy period.

The team establishes that some orders are being marked ready before the items have been checked and placed in the collection area. They agree that the person preparing the order will confirm both steps before the collection message is sent. A named backup will handle exceptions when that person is unavailable.

The shift leader will check the next ten collections and review the result with the team. Anyone who encounters a missing item will use an agreed route to get help rather than send the customer from one employee to another.

The briefing has produced a workable change, clear ownership, and a way to see whether the improvement holds. It has also connected the digital promise with the experience at the counter.

An Online Business Example

Now imagine an online retailer receiving repeated enquiries about delayed deliveries. Customer service, fulfilment, and the person who manages product availability work from different locations.

They share the relevant facts in a short document, then hold a video briefing to resolve conflicting information. They agree which delivery estimates need updating, which affected customers need a personal message, and who will contact the supplier. Each action has an owner and a completion time.

The decisions are recorded in the team's agreed location. Colleagues who could not attend receive the summary and a clear route to ask questions. The next review checks whether customers are receiving consistent information and whether the backlog has reduced.

If the facts had been straightforward and no discussion were needed, the same decision might have been reached through a structured written exchange. The choice of channel should serve the work.

Across Shifts and Time Zones

When people cannot all participate at once, a written briefing can be useful. State the purpose, the facts, the proposed action, and the time by which input is needed. Identify who will decide after considering the responses. Do not leave the discussion open indefinitely.

Make the final decision easy to find. A long chat thread is a poor substitute for a clear summary. Keep one current record and update it if the decision changes. Employees starting a later shift should not have to reconstruct what happened from fragments of conversation.

For an urgent issue, use the agreed escalation route. A message posted in a routine channel cannot be assumed to have been seen by everyone immediately.

Repeated briefings may be needed for different shifts. Use the same core information and carry new facts into the shared summary. The purpose is consistent understanding, with room for each group to raise what the others may have missed.

From Briefing to Follow-Through

A briefing is not complete simply because the conversation has ended. Someone must carry out the action, and the result must be reviewed.

A useful summary answers five questions:

- What did we decide?
- Who is responsible for each action?
- When must it be completed?
- What help or authority is required?
- How and when will we review the result?

At the agreed review point, ask whether the action happened and whether it addressed the problem. If not, establish why. The answer may involve unclear instructions, inadequate resources, an incorrect assumption, or an action that did not work as expected.

Use that information to improve the process. Follow-through should build accountability and understanding rather than create another round of repetitive direction.

A Practical Tool for Quadrant Leadership

Power briefings can help you stay connected to the operation as your people grow more capable. A manager who can explain the situation, propose an action, and identify a decision that genuinely needs your involvement is doing far more than reporting activity.

That is development in action. Employees learn to distinguish facts from assumptions, consider how their work affects others, and accept responsibility for an outcome. The boss learns where

support is needed without becoming the answer to every question.

A briefing can reveal a need for training, teaching, coaching, or mentoring. It does not replace those conversations. Use the relevant quadrant when a person needs more than an operational decision.

Whether your business operates across a counter, through a website, or through both, the standard is the same: useful information, respectful participation, clear decisions, and dependable follow-through. Your people should leave knowing what matters and what they are responsible for doing next.

Integrating Your Core Team into Quadrant Leadership

Your core team may include managers, shift leaders, customer-service leads, fulfillment staff, or the person who maintains your online store. In a small business, one person may fill several of these roles. What matters is that the people responsible for daily operations understand the model and help shape its implementation. Listen to their concerns before the launch, especially where new responsibilities affect their workload.

The transition deserves a focused discussion. The principles behind Power Briefings can help you keep it useful: a clear purpose, prepared participants, and decisions that lead to action.

Keep the agenda centred on introducing Quadrant Leadership. Share the material in advance so participants can think about how it applies to their work. Meet in person, by video, or through a combination that gives everyone a fair chance to contribute.

Topic: Introducing Quadrant Leadership

- What the model is intended to achieve for our people, customers, and business.
- The four quadrants and how they support skills, judgement, accountability, and growth.
- What the Transition Journal tells us about the owner's current use of time.
- Recurring interruptions and process problems we can reduce.
- Critical task handoffs: owners, training, authority, access, and backups.
- Relevant task handoffs: outcomes, resources, and completion dates.
- The first development group, the reasons for selecting it, and how progress will be reviewed.
- The launch plan and access for employees across locations, shifts, and working arrangements.

Give each item enough time for a useful decision. Send a short summary afterwards with responsibilities, dates, and open ques-

tions. If the team works remotely, leave a clear route for follow-up so that decisions do not disappear into a chat thread.

Ask participants to read the overview of the model and the relevant sections of this book before the discussion. Share the diagram and a few practical examples from your own operation. Preparation should give everyone a common starting point without turning into another major assignment.

Open by answering three questions: Why are we doing this? What will change? How will we know it is helping? Choose a small set of indicators, such as demonstrated skills, fewer repeated errors, more reliable handoffs, or better resolution of customer concerns. Use the findings to improve development rather than rank people publicly.

Walk through the quadrant templates and explain the certification process. Discuss who is qualified to train particular tasks. Expertise on the sales floor does not automatically make someone an expert in your order-management system, and the reverse is also true. Match training responsibility to demonstrated competence.

Explain how self-initiative attributes help employees take ownership and work well together. Use a situation that crosses roles: a customer buys online and collects in store, an item is out of stock, or a return needs both service and inventory updates. Team-thinking first means understanding how one person's decision affects the next person and the customer.

Show your managers how better development can reduce repeated direction and help them lead more effectively. Explain that mentorship depends on a trusted relationship and may develop gradually. It should never become a compulsory personal conversation.

Discuss the journal findings that affect the team's responsibilities. Share patterns and practical priorities, while keeping private employee information confidential. Invite your managers to point out workload or process problems that your own log may have missed.

Review recurring problems from the customer's perspective and from the team's experience. A customer may see a late order; the team may see unclear ownership or a stock record that nobody trusts. Identify the cause before deciding whether the answer is training, a process change, or both.

Agree on the Critical and Relevant Task action plans. Confirm that each person has enough time, knowledge, and authority to take on the work. Set a handoff date and a review point. Avoid adding responsibilities without removing something else or providing the resources to manage them.

Trust becomes practical when people know where they stand. Explain what success looks like, what they can decide independently, and when you want to be consulted. Once those boundaries are clear, support their decisions and review results fairly.

Choose the first development group together. Consider the learning need, the potential benefit, available training support, and the employee's readiness. A mixed group can establish the process without making participation feel like a penalty. Plan how everyone else will gain access over time.

Do not describe participants as underperformers. Respectful language is only the beginning: employees should see fair standards, consistent support, and opportunities based on learning needs. Managers must demonstrate the same conduct you expect throughout the model.

Create a launch plan with a clear sequence, named responsibilities, and realistic dates. Decide how employees will participate, where they will find the material afterwards, and how questions will be answered. A multi-shift store or distributed online team may need more than one session.

After the discussion, check in with each member of your core team. Ask what they are ready to own and where they need support. Their involvement should continue well beyond the launch. A team that understands both the purpose and the practical arrangements is far better prepared to make the transition work.

The Main Event

Introducing Quadrant Leadership is your opportunity to share a direction for the business and explain what employees can expect. Your enthusiasm matters, but so does their confidence that

the programme will be useful, fair, and supported by time to participate.

Scale the launch to your operation. A small team may need a straightforward conversation and demonstration. A larger or distributed team may need several sessions with a common set of materials. Give people the same essential message wherever and whenever they work.

A useful launch has five elements:

- Practical material connected to everyday work.
- A clear and accessible way to share it.
- A realistic plan with enough time for discussion.
- Active participation and room for questions.
- A simple summary and a clear next step.

Here are some ways to bring those elements together.

1. Build interest before the session.

Share a few questions that connect the model to real work: What makes a customer trust us? When should you make a decision yourself? What makes a handoff reliable? Use a noticeboard, staff message, or shared workspace according to how your team communicates. Avoid adding noise across every channel.

2. Make the learning engaging.

Give small groups a customer situation to work through. For example, an online order is ready for collection but an item is

missing, or a customer's return arrives without the information needed to process it. Mix roles where possible so people can see each other's contribution. In a video session, use small discussion groups or a shared document. If you use my jigsaw method in person, each employee receives a piece of a picture and finds the colleagues whose pieces complete it. Choose an activity everyone can comfortably join.

3. Make it a conversation.

Keep your opening brief, then let employees apply the ideas to their work. Ask what helps them succeed and what currently gets in the way. Include voices from the sales floor, customer service, fulfilment, and online operations. Where those roles are held by the same people, explore how they move between them. Give participants time to think and contribute without rewarding only the quickest speakers.

4. Welcome questions.

Explain how people can raise a concern during the session or afterwards. Some will speak freely; others may prefer a written question or a private conversation. If you cannot answer something, say so and arrange a follow-up. Asking for clarification should be treated as participation, rather than resistance.

5. Rehearse the session.

Test the timing, examples, and materials with your core team. Check the room, sound, screen, and any video connection you will use. For remote participants, make sure the material can be

accessed without being in the room. Give every presenter a chance to practise and confirm who will handle questions.

Scepticism is understandable. Employees may have seen earlier initiatives arrive with enthusiasm and fade away. Explain what will be different in practical terms: time for learning, prepared trainers, clear standards, and regular follow-through. Then demonstrate those commitments.

Look for early evidence that people are learning and contributing more confidently. Recognise progress without turning individuals into public examples of past difficulty. An employee who now handles a customer problem well, or a team that completes a reliable handoff, gives everyone a concrete reason to take the model seriously.

Fairness matters throughout the process. Check who receives training, attention, recognition, and new responsibility. Employees on less visible shifts or working remotely should have a fair opportunity too. Use clear criteria and listen when someone believes they have been overlooked. Keeping personal favourites quiet is not enough; your decisions must be fair.

The launch begins the work. Provide a concise summary, explain the first sessions, and tell employees where to find help. Revisit the message for anyone who could not attend. Consistent follow-through will matter more than the polish of a single event.

Quadrant Leadership gives you a practical way to lead through knowledge, insight, and influence. Adapt the sessions to your people and your business, review what is working, and improve what is not. A storefront team and an online team may use different tools, but both need clear expectations, reliable relationships, and room to grow. Protect the time for that work. The more your people know, the more they can contribute.

PART FIVE

The Four Quadrants

*“Different people need different things
from their boss at different times.”*

— Don Darvill

Quadrant 1 Trainer / Expert

*An exceptional skills and technical trainer is like a gifted artist.
Both are capable of doing extraordinary work with a blank canvas.*

**Management Skills Training
for Critical and Non Critical
Tasks**

**Three Levels of Certification
for Every Job**

**Personal Development
Through Trainer Certification**

**People Acquire Knowledge in
Different Ways
Detailed Thinkers Versus
Concept Thinkers**

“No one learns as much about a subject as the one who is forced to teach it.”

Chapter One

The Road to Certification

The first quadrant is all about skills and technical training. Most companies have a solid training program in place that does not need to be reinvented to work with Quadrant Leadership. The majority of skills training is conducted by top performers who are very good at what they do. They are the subject matter experts who are more than capable of demonstrating the technical aspects of the job proficiently. Many businesses have a set of dedicated trainers who take care of all of the basic training for their company.

With Quadrant Leadership, we take a slightly different approach by including Trainer Certification as one of the levels of personal development. The three levels of certification are introduced on day one, and every new employee understands that their goal is to become certified at every level.

Our first objective is to exceed every new employee's expectations.

With Quadrant Leadership, the calibre of employee development that is the hallmark of the model is established in the first quadrant. Your Certified Skills Trainers lay a solid foundation by setting the bar extremely high. By the time your new employee is ready to move on to the second quadrant, they are

more than ready to enter the next phase in their development journey.

You do not need to change any of the material you currently use for skills training. All you need to do is to add the certification process into your current program. If you already have a solid certification process in place, then you should work with that. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

There are three levels of certification, and each has specific requirements. I never worried about fixed time frames when it came to certification. Getting it right is far more important than being able to check something off a to-do list. Some people learn at a much faster pace than others. This is perfectly fine, providing they do not miss important details that are critical to doing an excellent job. Traditional training programs tend to allocate the same amount of training time for every employee. One of the advantages of having free and flexible time is that it gives you the latitude to take a step back and revisit some of the basic training if you feel there is a need for it.

The best way to establish the importance of certification is to make it hard to earn. Giving someone a free pass for the sake of moving them on only serves to diminish your credibility and that of the certification process.

Certification serves many important purposes. It represents the level of proficiency that the employee has achieved. It allows us to celebrate their success. It suggests a minimum expectation for future performance. Higher levels of certification increase an

employee's credibility and allow for more earned autonomy. It signals to their peer group that they have climbed higher up the trust ladder.

Visible certification allows the employee to proudly display their accomplishments. Attractively colored pins that can be worn on a lapel or collar celebrate the level of certification that the employee has achieved. Whether you choose to incorporate a visual aspect or not, the certification process plays a very important role in acknowledging progressive development.

The first goal for every new employee is to reach their first level of certification. The time frame to get there will vary, but speed is not the priority. The objective is to get it right. When an employee does earn their certification, it signals that they have reached a significant plateau in their development. Consistency is an important factor to earning certification. The employee does not need to be a superstar, but they do need to perform to the best of their ability on a regular basis.

Certification is celebrated every time it occurs. It really is a big deal. In the case of new employees, this is your first opportunity to recognize their accomplishment in front of their peer group. The pride they feel in achieving their first level of certification will inspire them to keep going. Their success is your team's success, so encourage everyone to offer their congratulations. The new employee will quickly learn that their future success will depend on the kinds of relationships they forge with their fellow employees.

The foundation for certification begins in Quadrant I. It continues in the next two quadrants where Self-Initiative Attributes are incorporated into the development process. In our review of the second and third quadrants, we will explore many different basic and advanced self-initiative attributes that, when combined with skills training, significantly raise the employee's level of proficiency.

Requirements for Certification Level I

The employee has acquired the skills to execute the fundamentals of their job description at a high level of proficiency. Verified in Quadrant I by a

Certified Trainer

The employee demonstrates how to incorporate 'Basic Self Initiative Attributes' on a consistent basis. Verified in Quadrants II + III

An employee who has earned their second level of certification is considered to be highly skilled. They have demonstrated the ability to contribute consistently to the company in a significant way. This is an important achievement that deserves your praise and that of your management team. If you have chosen to incorporate a form of visual certification into your model, your employee will now have the privilege of displaying their well-earned recognition.

The next challenge for an employee who has been certified at level II is to become a certified trainer. One of the real strengths of Quadrant Leadership is that it challenges potential, rather than the requirements of a specific job. In doing so, we free ourselves from the confines of predetermined outcomes and established expectations.

Certification at level II represents a lot of hard work and a job well done. When you run into a situation where an employee has a level II certification and begins to underperform, you need to address the situation quickly. The ideal place to do this will be the fourth quadrant, but only if all of the elements of the mentor relationship are in place. The thing you know for certain is that this is not a developmental issue. The employee is underperforming for reasons that have nothing to do with their capability.

Situations like this must be addressed as soon as possible. If you can get your employee to open up, you have a good chance of turning the situation around. They have already given your company so much, so it is up to you to give them your best effort.

Requirements for Certification Level II

The employee demonstrates an ability to carry out the fundamentals of their job description at the level of a subject matter expert. Verified in Quadrant I by a

Certified Trainer

The employee demonstrates an ability to work effectively in a team environment by successfully incorporating all of their Advanced Self Initiative Attributes into their scope of work to achieve optimum results. Verified in Quadrants II and III

Certified Trainers are incredibly valuable employees. Not only do they perform consistently at a high level, but they also set an outstanding example for how to do it right. The opportunities within your company will determine where these employees go next in their development journey. In the meantime, the role they currently play is critical to the success of Quadrant Leadership.

In the next chapter, we will explore something that most companies do not even consider when they begin the training process. It has to do with the way people learn. By taking into account the natural way that an individual processes information, we can create a training session that will work in tandem with how they absorb the new material. For an employee to reach their third level of certification, they must be able to grasp this very important concept and demonstrate how to use it to carry out a highly productive training session. This is just one more example of how we use Quadrant Leadership to its fullest potential. Even without your direct involvement, the training that your new employee is receiving from a Certified Skills Trainer far exceeds the norm.

Requirements for Certification Level III

Certified Trainer

The employee has demonstrated the ability to perform all of the requirements of the second level of certification at an outstanding level

The employee is a role model, skillfully using 'Advance Self Initiative Attributes' to lead by example. Verified in Quadrants II + III

The employee is capable of incorporating the Detailed Thinker versus Concept Think exercise into their training sessions to enhance the overall learning experience. Verified in Quadrants II + III

Chapter Two

Detailed Thinkers versus Concept Thinkers

One of my least favourite quotations suggests that “those who can, do, and those who can’t, teach.” I couldn’t disagree more. Some of the most famous athletes in the world, Olympians and professionals alike, owe a great deal of their success to a dedicated team of coaches and trainers. Our school system is full of extraordinary teachers who inspire students to reach for the stars.

One of the reasons that I feel so strongly about Quadrant Leadership is because it delivers on so many levels. It demonstrates that you can be successful in business (I certainly was) by using the power of knowledge and insight to create an extraordinary team of extremely talented and highly proficient employees.

I think a better line might be,

“Those who can, do, and those who are willing to share their knowledge, do so much more.”

Great trainers, like great teachers, play a vital role in the development of your employees. Your Certified Skills Trainers lay the foundation for everything that will follow. To achieve level III certification, a trainer cannot just be good at their job. There are millions of people who are good at what they do, but they are not good at showing someone else how to do it. A great trainer needs to be an excellent communicator and a good listener. By knowing a little about how a person thinks, a trainer

can put together a far more productive training session. To achieve trainer certification, the employee must be able to grasp this concept and use it to their advantage when training new employees. This skill requires a clear understanding of the concept, and a great deal of practice to effectively integrate it into the training process. Despite the degree of difficulty, in the Quadrant Leadership, every employee is expected to work towards their trainer certification. Some might feel that this is an unrealistic expectation. I hope you never permit yourself to think that way. Setting extraordinary expectations is one of the reasons why Quadrant Leadership is so effective. Will everyone get there? Probably not. The better question is, are they better off for trying? The answer is; absolutely!

After years of observation, I have concluded that the way people learn has a lot to do with the way they approach life in general. In other words, how they think and process information in their everyday lives is exactly how they learn. For the most part, people can be divided into two groups, the detailed thinkers, and the concept thinkers. I recognize that this might be considered over-simplification, but it can be useful when determining how to approach a training session.

Let's look at two different lists. The first examines the positive attributes of each type of thinker, the qualities that help them do their jobs well. The second explores attributes that are potential areas of opportunity for each type of thinker. This exercise can

offer valuable insight when it comes to determining where to place emphasis during a training session.

None of this is absolute. In fact, everybody has some of the attributes common to both lists. There are, however, dominant attributes, and they tend to influence the way we approach situations.

How do you know what kind of thinker your new employee is? Start by showing them the list that displays the strengths common to both types of thinkers and ask them which list more closely aligns with the way they think and process information. It's not necessary to show them the opportunity list. You do not want your employee feeling that there is something wrong with the way they think. The trainer will utilize the second list to watch for potential areas of opportunity that may need to be addressed. Never assume that an employee has to display any of these attributes. You can download copies of both lists by visiting www.darvillconsulting.com.

Let's have a look at them now. It's important to remember that both types of thinkers have the potential to be great employees.

Detailed Thinker Strengths

- Their attention to details is excellent
- Methodical step by step approach to problem solving
- Strong ability to focus
 - Follow instructions very well
- Use checklist and to do list effectively
 - Function well in a structured environment
- Even keeled demeanor
 - Tend to stay calm under pressure
- Not easily distracted from the task at hand

Concept Thinker Strengths

- Instinctively look for a quicker or more efficient way to do things
 - Have an uncanny ability to see the bigger picture without the need for all of the details
 - Free thinkers.
- Constantly on the look for creative solutions
- Would rather lead than follow. High energy level
 - Not afraid to make decisions that rely on gut instinct
- Accepts risk as a reality of decision making

Detailed Thinker Opportunities

- Can be so focused on details that they miss the obvious
- Can become rattled in a crisis situation
- Do not like to make snap decisions. Can sit on the fence for too long
- Are uncomfortable relying on their gut instinct
- Prefer to follow rules than work outside of them
 - Multi-tasking unrelated tasks is not their strongest suit
- Take longer to place trust in others

Concept Thinker Opportunities

- Can easily miss details that are crucial to problem solving
- Often act before they think, following instructions is not their strongest suit
- Can be blindsided by a lack of preparation
- Can jump to conclusions far too quickly
- Lack of focus can cause chaos
- Can be excitable and lose their calm in a crisis situation
- Lack of active listening skills can lead to missing crucial information

You can see how having this kind of information gives a trainer a better idea of how a particular individual receives and processes information. Taking into account the way people learn is just one more example of the quality of training that takes place in the Trainer / Expert Quadrant.

Imagine for a moment a terrible snowstorm. Two men have important jobs at the airport authority. One is an air traffic controller while the other is in charge of customer relations for the entire airport. Now imagine that it is late at night. Several flights have been cancelled, and several incoming flights are trying to land. There are hundreds of unhappy travellers who are tired and frustrated.

Both men are very capable and extremely good at their jobs. Can you see how their natural approach to gathering information made each of them an excellent candidate for a particular job? An air traffic controller must follow detailed protocol to ensure the safety of every takeoff and landing. A customer service rep must be able to think outside of the box to do whatever it takes to make the best of a bad situation. Based on the strengths exercise, it is easy to figure out which thinker would be better suited for each job. Let's not lose sight of the fact that despite their obvious strengths, each type of thinker has areas of opportunity that need to be addressed to become excellent at what they do.

With new employees, it might seem obvious to focus on their strengths to create a good training session, but the trainer may want to take a different approach. Their strengths will likely shine through without much encouragement on the part of the trainer. We need to go back to our good friend Pareto and the 80/20 rule. Look for the elements that are likely to yield the highest return for the time invested. By focusing on the areas

where opportunity exists, a certified trainer can make the greatest contribution to the employee's development. It should go without saying that we should also be praising their strengths at every opportunity.

Do you have an idea what camp I was born and raised in? Let's think about it. I hate having to fuss over details, and I have been known to step so far out of the box that I can no longer see it. The reality is, to reach the highest levels of proficiency, you must accept that you need to work on the areas that are not your strengths to grow and be successful.

When I first trained my managers on the administrative side of the business, I needed to be a subject matter expert and have first-hand knowledge of every detailed aspect of the accounting principles to which all businesses must adhere. Without that expertise, I could never have shared that information with my managers, and the audit that occurred that fateful rainy day would have been a total disaster. Even though detail is not my favourite thing, I can no more escape it than anyone else.

The bottom line is that we need both types of thinkers to make a business successful, and each can learn a great deal from the other.

Quadrant 2 Teacher / Philosopher

<i>The discovery of what is true, and the practice of that which is good, are the two most important objectives of philosophy. — Voltaire</i>	
Self Initiative Attributes	Character Traits Common to Highly Successful People
Cell Phones and Busy Work	Universal Truths of Employment
Business and the Bottom Line	

“The secret to bringing out the best in others is to start with yourself.”

The Teacher / Philosopher Quadrant marks the beginning of the second phase of employee development. This is the quadrant of two-way communications. Some of the discussions that take place here are serious in nature, beginning with the Ten Princi-

ples of a Strong Working Relationship. This is such an important topic because it provides the new employee with a reality check of what it means to take on the responsibilities associated with being employed. Other sessions are far more relaxed, allowing for a free-flowing exchange of thoughts and ideas. Philosophy plays an important role in the second quadrant. As Voltaire suggests, philosophical discussions take us on a journey to seek out that which is true and to identify the things that are good for both the employee and for the business. Personally, I loved these highly entertaining exchanges of thoughts and ideas. I learned never to underestimate an individual's contribution based solely on their age. Some of my favorite memories are of spirited philosophical debates with sixteen-yearold employees.

This quadrant continues the layering of knowledge that the model was designed to deliver. Your employees have received some excellent skills training in the first quadrant. Now they will begin to explore some concepts and principles that are less tangible, but equally as important to their development. Your quest to build an army of highly proficient brand builders has just begun.

For many of your employees, this transition period marks the first time they become fully engaged in a personal one-to-one session with you. This is a new experience for both of you, and there are bound to be some challenges along the way. Newer employees will adapt quickly. Their opinions of you and the company they work for are in flux. Most of your new hires will

view this kind of personal attention favorably, and they will look forward to what lies ahead. Make sure to let them know what they can expect when the two of you move to the third quadrant. The full cycle of development that takes place in the first three quadrants will allow your employees to earn their certification. This is a time for great celebration and praise. Your employee gets to experience first-hand the sense of pride that comes from real accomplishment. As more of your employees complete their first certification, you will start to see extraordinary changes begin to take place in your company.

For your more experienced employees, a lot will depend on the relationship that currently exists between you. Some of the under-performers will be wary of your motives. Other longer-term employees may have opinions of you that leave them less than excited at the prospect of spending more time together. Do not be discouraged by these views. You must have faith in the power of Quadrant Leadership to do its job.

As long as you are fully committed to providing every employee equal quality development time, then you will have met your commitment. The rest will be left up to the employee. Since the second quadrant is where we encourage open discussion, any doubts or misgivings that exist should be addressed right away. Make it clear that your goal is to see every employee achieve their true potential in your company. As long as they are prepared to meet you halfway, you look forward to watching them succeed.

For me, these were my greatest victories. Turning around an employee who was headed in the wrong direction and seeing them make a significant contribution to the company made the failures so much easier to take. Each time I witnessed this kind of turnaround, it would strengthen my belief in Quadrant Leadership and its powerful mission statement: Leading through the power of knowledge, rather than managing through the drone of repetitive direction.

The effort you put into these first sessions will be critical to your future success with the rest of your employees. For total buy-in to take place, these first employees must see some real value in the time you invest in them. They must believe that you genuinely want them to succeed. If you have done your job well, it will not be long before they are singing the praises of Quadrant Leadership.

Chapter One

Ten Principles of a Strong Working Relationship

A strong working relationship depends on both sides. Employees bring honesty, effort, and accountability. Employers provide clear expectations, fair treatment, and the support people need to succeed.

1. Consistent contribution builds trust. Your education, qualifications, and experience may open the door. What you contribute over time builds confidence in your work. Employers

have a responsibility to make expectations clear and help you meet them.

2. Growth comes through learning and demonstrated capability. People begin their careers at different levels. Wherever you start, learn the business, develop your skills, and show that you are ready for greater responsibility. Advancement also depends on fair decisions and available opportunities.

3. Every role should contribute to the health of the business. A business needs financial strength to continue serving customers and employing people. Your contribution may come through sales, service, quality, safety, efficiency, or protecting customer trust. Understanding that connection gives your work purpose.

4. Respect every job and the people who do it. Essential work deserves respect, regardless of title. Be willing to help within your capabilities and agreed responsibilities. If your role no longer fits your abilities or goals, discuss your next step constructively.

5. Integrity is essential. Treat company property, money, information, and customer trust with care. Taking or using something without permission damages trust. If you are unsure what is permitted, ask.

6. Take ownership of your performance and development. Understand the standard expected of you, seek feedback, and use opportunities to improve. If advancement matters to you,

ask what readiness looks like and discuss a realistic path with your employer.

7. Part-time work makes a meaningful contribution. Fewer hours do not make your work less important. Bring care and reliability to the hours and responsibilities you have agreed to. Employers should give part-time employees the respect and support needed to contribute well.

8. Be honest and dependable in your commitments. Honour agreed schedules, deadlines, and responsibilities. When illness, an emergency, or another difficulty affects your work, communicate as promptly as circumstances allow. Employers should respond fairly and respectfully.

9. Pay should fairly recognize the work and contribution involved. Greater responsibility may justify greater compensation. So may stronger skills, better results, improved efficiency, or changed market conditions. Employees and employers should be able to discuss pay openly, with clear expectations.

10. Good leadership and employee initiative strengthen one another. Seek leaders who treat people fairly and help them develop. When you have opportunities to learn, take an active part. A strong working relationship allows both sides to contribute, raise concerns, and grow.

Chapter Two

Self-Initiative Attributes

Discussions that address self-initiative attributes are approached in an entirely different manner to skills training. This deals with concepts and principles rather than clear, tangible actions. It is important that every employee is able to integrate self-initiative attributes into their job description to function at a higher level of proficiency. By reviewing the attributes you consider the most important for your business with your employee, you are taking the first step towards promoting independent thinking. Concepts as fundamental as personal accountability and proactive decisionmaking are extremely important and play a critical role in future development. Finger pointing is not an acceptable practice in Quadrant Leadership. Once they take full accountability for their actions, they will see that making a poor decision is still better than making no decision at all.

Your first one-to-one session on this subject will begin by introducing each of the basic self-initiative attributes to your employee and discussing their importance. As they demonstrate their ability to integrate these skills effectively into their job description, you move on to the more advanced initiatives. This second group of attributes explore the power of team synergy. They offer the employee some very important insight into how much more can be accomplished by a high functioning, well connected team working together to achieve common goals.

In the third quadrant, we encourage our employees to exercise their self-initiative attributes to make important decisions. The model is not theory-driven. Quadrant Leadership uses real world situations to test these attributes, recognizing that mistakes are likely to happen. As long as your employee shows a willingness to learn from their personal experiences, each mistake they make will ultimately serve to strengthen their future performance.

Incorporating basic self-initiative attributes into the employee's job description is the next step in the continuous development process that takes place in Quadrant Leadership. While these concepts and principles will come naturally to some employees, others will struggle with making the kinds of decisions that allow them to earn your trust and their future independence. The flexibility built into the model allows you to approach development opportunities from virtually any quadrant. If you have successfully guarded the time you will need to implement the model; you will have the freedom to extend any session you deem necessary. If you truly believe the time you invest in your employees will ultimately pay off, you will never watch the clock when doing so.

The majority of traditional training models do not allow for this kind of flexibility. Information tends to travel in one direction and in most cases, there is a finite amount of time for the employee to absorb the content and demonstrate their ability to execute. In the Quadrant Leadership Model, we work alongside

our employees and the dialogue continues to flow freely. Our primary goal is to make certain that the employee has a firm grasp of the material, and how it will help them to do their job extremely well.

There will be times when you start a session in the second quadrant, only to realize that the employee is more than ready to show what they are capable of. When shifting into the third quadrant you will be using coaching techniques that are intended to support your employee as they attempt to demonstrate their ability to perform at a significantly higher level of proficiency. The term ‘real-time observation’ refers to a collective set of highly effective coaching strategies that are used in real world situations to support your employee’s development. These sessions have nothing to do with inspecting or critiquing. The third quadrant invests whatever amount of time is necessary for the employee to integrate the things they have learned in the first two quadrants into their job description.

In this case, the employee has been successful in blending basic self-initiative attributes with their skills expertise. This accomplishment will move them one step closer to achieving their first level of certification. One of the most important considerations in awarding certification is the employee’s ability to perform consistently at this new level of proficiency. We are not looking for moments of brilliance. Consistency is an extremely important part of the development equation.

Let's take a look at some examples of basic self-initiative attributes. This list is far from definitive, but acts as an example of the kinds of things you may include on your list.

Basic Self-Initiative Attributes for

Level One Certification

11. Personal Accountability - Full acceptance that the decisions we make, as well as those we fail to make, are of our own volition. In Quadrant Leadership, we make it clear that finger-pointing is not an acceptable option for relieving one's self from accountability. Meaningful growth cannot occur until we are prepared to take full ownership for our actions.

12. Scope of Work - For the basic level, the employee's accountability is tied to their personal job description. The employee clearly understands that they will be responsible for implementing the self-initiative attributes that enhance their personal scope of work.

13. Short-Term Decision Making - Taking the initiative to make quick decisions that will effectively address immediate situations before they rise to a crisis level, without the need for direct supervision.

14. Long-Term Decision Making - Anticipating barriers and issues through experience and knowledge. Looking for and applying longer-term solutions to situations that occur within the employee's personal scope of work.

15. Multi-Tasking - Assessing and executing tasks that can be done in tandem to optimize efficiency.

16. Time-Planning and Prioritizing - Clear understanding of how preparation and execution work to make the best use of time. Demonstrating the ability to prioritize tasks and activities based on importance within the scope of work.

17. Personal Work Ethic - The level of intensity applied to execute the job at a high level of proficiency. The effort put forth should correspond directly with the urgency of the situation, without the need for direct supervision.

The nature of your own business will determine which specific self-initiative attributes are essential to support the core values of your brand. Keep in mind that your employees are not mindreaders. So many of the problems that occur in the workplace come from misunderstanding what is expected. Do not fall into the trap of saying that something should be obvious or common sense. I can tell you from experience that one person's version of common sense does not necessarily match someone else's. Stop assuming that something is a given. Make sure you are both on the same page. You can accomplish this by ensuring that your list of self-initiative attributes reflects all of your expectations.

Advanced Self-Initiative Attributes require the employee to have a greater understanding of the whole operation and how

teamwork benefits the entire company. Many of the philosophical discussions that take place in the second quadrant are designed to help the employee gain a clearer understanding of the big picture and their role in it.

Team synergy requires the use of advanced self-initiative attributes. Before that can happen your employee must have a strong grasp of the basic self-initiative attributes that fall within their scope of work and can demonstrate their ability to integrate them successfully into their job description.

In the next chapter, I will introduce you to something I call team thinking first. In essence, it refers to the role that team synergy plays in creating outstanding brand identity. For your employee to earn their second level of certification, they must be able to demonstrate their ability to implement successfully advance self-initiative attributes that support the team as a whole.

Quadrant Leadership works extremely well in a team environment. The flexibility that is built into the model allows you to switch from a one-to-one session to a team session with ease. Remember that as a philosophy of business Quadrant Leadership is based on real world, here and now situations. If a team opportunity arises, then you should take full advantage of it.

Part of the challenge for your managers will be finding the right balance between when to provide specific direction, and when to allow each employee the opportunity to use their self-initiative attributes to address a situation. It can be frustrating for an

employee when they attempt to take action, only to be redirected by a manager.

During your many discussions in the second quadrant, you must make sure that your employee clearly understands the role that management plays in your company. There will be many times when the employee will be required to follow a manager's direction, even when they feel that they would have made a better decision on their own. The overall goal of your management team is to serve the best interests of every customer. There will always be a need for a final decision maker and your employees must be able to respect that.

Earlier, we discussed how the role management plays will begin to shift as more employees move through the certification process. If your employees are doing an excellent job, and effectively using their self-initiative attributes, there is no need for excessive supervision. Until that happens, your managers will struggle to find the right balance. There are likely to be some bumps along the way, but take heart in knowing that it will get much better as more of your employees move through the model.

Chapter Three

Cell Phones and Busy Work

These are extraordinary times for advancements in technology. A business today has many new tools at its disposal to help manage costs, promote goods and services, and improve market

share. Even brick and mortar companies have recognized the benefit of having a strong presence on the Internet.

Electronic messaging instruments like email and text messaging, together with social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, have transformed the way we stay connected. There are some obvious advantages to being able to send information anywhere in the world with the click of a button. Ironically, it is the simplicity of the medium, and the way we have become accustomed to reacting to it, that has created a new set of challenges for business. In many ways, electronic messaging has become the modern version of Pavlov's dog. More commonly referred to as conditioned response, it is the net result that occurs when a conditioned stimulus is paired with an unconditioned response.

The behavior was first studied by Ivan Pavlov who observed that when he held a piece of meat in front of a dog, it would immediately begin to salivate. He then began to ring a bell at the same time as he tempted the dog with the savory treat. It was not long before the sound of the bell alone could cause the dog to salivate.

In today's world, Pavlov's bell has been replaced by the familiar chirp or buzz that emanates from our cell phone each time a new text message or email arrives. For many people, the unconscious response is to reach immediately for their phone. In the blink of an eye, their focus shifts from the task at hand to the incoming message. Like Pavlov's dog, whose senses were stim-

ulated by the sound of the bell, our need to know who sent us a message, and the content of the message, is so compelling that our focus immediately shifts.

This may be perfectly acceptable in our private lives, but for business, it can be counterproductive and highly disruptive. No other form of communication can shift our behavior so quickly. The fundamental key to success in business lies in our ability to stay focused on our core objectives. The ease at which electronic messaging can redirect an employee's attention away from the task at hand to something completely off topic is why I consider electronic messaging to be the godfather of all busy-work.

To prepare for your transition into Quadrant Leadership, you were asked to complete a daily journal over the period of an entire month. The purpose was to track how you are currently spending your time. You may have been surprised to discover how much of your time was taken by this medium.

At first glance, these messages might appear to be justified, given that many of them deal directly with some aspect of your business. To determine if they have had a positive or negative effect, ask yourself this simple but important question: Did these messages, and the time required to address them, support the core objectives of my business, or did they shift my focus to activities that were more aligned with someone else's priorities or some form of busy-work? Let me be clear here; both email and text messaging can be highly effective forms of communication for business, when used properly. Messages that assist

your employee in delivering a better experience to the customer are a very good thing. To ensure a successful transition into Quadrant Leadership, it is imperative that you address the challenges that electronic messaging can present for your company.

Clearly, there are tremendous advantages to being able to get important information out quickly. As long as the medium maintains focus rather than creating distractions, it can be an outstanding tool for any business.

Three Things to Consider Before You Write

Your Next Email or Send Your Next Text

- The subject matter should support the core objectives of your business. The content of the message will not shift the employee's focus away from the priorities of their job to some form of busy-work.
- The message should follow the same principles as a good power briefing by using easy to read bullet points that get straight to the point. A succinct recap page should be attached to any email that carries a lot of information. The reader can quickly determine if they should read the email in its entirety now, or if it can be left to be read when it's more convenient.
- The email or text message should only go to the employees that will directly benefit from the content. Unless otherwise specified, copying others who need to be kept informed should be limited to the bullet point recap page only.

Types of E-Communications to Look Out For

- Any internal text messages or email that clearly shifts your employee's attention away from their primary responsibilities.
- Any message from an outside source that is likely to infringe upon your time or your employee's time should be carefully scrutinized. There is no doubt that the sender considers their message to be important. The question is, important for whom? If it does not support the core initiatives of your business, then it falls under the busy-work umbrella. Steps should be taken to eliminate or reduce the number of these kinds of messages that reach your people.
- Micro-managing through emails and text messages does not support the Quadrant Leadership philosophy of leading through knowledge, rather than managing through constant direction. The objective of the model is to provide your employees with the business education and the tools they need to perform independently at a high level of proficiency. One of the key objectives of Quadrant Leadership is to encourage your employees to use their self-initiative attributes to make sound decisions without the need for excessive supervision. As the majority of your employees move through the model, the last person they need to encounter is a micro-manager.
- Watch for employees who avoid direct contact with other employees and use emails and text messages as their primary form of communication. Quadrant Leadership is all about mutu-

al respect and team thinking first. It's extremely important that these kinds of situations are identified and resolved as quickly as possible.

- People issues of any kind should never be addressed through text messages or emails. There is no guarantee that any of this information will remain confidential.

Chapter Four

Business and the Bottom Line

My approach to implementing the Quadrant Leadership Model was far less structured than you might think. Early on, I learned never to plan too far ahead. The fact that you are out there on a daily basis sharing the kind of knowledge that supports the growth and development of all of your employees is what gives the model its power. With Quadrant Leadership, we lead through knowledge rather than manage through direction. This is not a program, and you must do everything in your power to make sure it never becomes one. It is true that there is an administrative aspect, but try to resist the temptation to bury yourself in paperwork.

Whenever I was getting ready for a session that would cover a lot of information, I would prepare in exactly the same way as I would for a good power briefing. Short bullet points that are clear and concise will help you to organize your thoughts. Resist the temptation to build detailed development files on each employee. The purpose for your note-taking should be to give you

a framework to continue your work. If you do find yourself spending a substantial amount of time on the paperwork side of Quadrant Leadership, you need to take a step back. The power of the model comes from the time spent with each employee. No amount of time allocated to paperwork will ever replace the time invested in a good productive session.

I always looked at it from the perspective of the customer. They could care less what words sit on a piece of paper in a filing cabinet. What is important to them is that you are fully committed to executing the promises of your brand. So many businesses are drowning in bureaucratic paperwork. Customers are not interested in performance evaluations. Their opinion is formed by their personal experience. If it was a positive experience, then in their minds, your employee did a good job. The twenty percent of things that really matter happen in the now. What happened yesterday and what will happen tomorrow are simply not your customer's concern.

The free and flexible time that you create for yourself will provide you with the freedom to resist over-structuring the model. There will be times when the subject matter you are dealing with is so important that the last thing you want to do is cut the session off simply because time is up. One of the things that makes Quadrant Leadership such a powerful development tool is the flexibility you give yourself to deal with any situation, working from any quadrant, regardless of the time it takes.

Not all subjects or developmental needs are created equal. Some of the things that you will cover are far more important than others. The time invested in these particular topics will pay higher dividends simply because the decisions that are required carry far greater consequences.

One example is the subject of profitability, and in particular, your employees' role in contributing to the bottom line. The approach I took to tackling this incredibly important topic was drawn from the lessons I learned while conducting those small business workshops many years earlier.

I knew that if I wanted my employees to make the kinds of decisions that would protect and grow the profitability of my restaurants, they needed to know a lot more about what goes into running a small business. The Quadrant Leadership Model gives us the perfect platform to prepare our employees for their role in creating a healthy bottom line.

In the Ten Principles of a Strong Working Relationship, they are reminded that making money for the company is an integral part of their job. No business can hope to survive if it is losing money. I never missed an opportunity to tie some form of cost management into an employee session. The time invested in these types of discussions has the potential to return enormous dividends I am not suggesting that you are sharing your actual profit and loss statement, or any other financial document, with your employees. Generic examples will work just fine. The objective

is to show them just how many different costs go into making a small business function.

How much or how little of this side of the business you are willing to share with your employees is completely up to you. My experience taught me that the more eyes I had looking out for profit opportunities, the better the bottom line. Since the controllable section of the profit and loss statement is where your employees can make the greatest impact, it only makes sense that this is where you concentrate your effort.

The categories listed on a profit and loss statement can vary widely, depending on the industry and the nature of the business. Despite the many differences, most of the costs in the controllable section of the statement can be identified as either being fixed or variable.

Since fixed costs by definition cannot be improved upon, we focus on the fixed cost percentage instead. I used a simple exercise to demonstrate the important relationship between the fixed cost percentage and top line sales.

There are many more opportunities to improve profitability on the variable side of the equation, but I would always begin with the fixed cost discussion because it reinforced how important increasing market share is to optimizing profitability. This simple exercise illustrates how significantly the fixed cost percentage can be affected by rising or falling top line sales. Shrinking the fixed cost percentage is the first way our employees help us create a healthy bottom line.

Sales scenario	Sales	Fixed costs	Fixed cost %
Current sales	\$100,000.00	\$23,000.00	23.0%
5% growth in	\$105,000.00	\$23,000.00	21.90%
5% decline in	\$95,000.00	\$23,000.00	24.21%

Most profit discussions will begin in the second quadrant. When addressing the fixed cost percentage, we talk about the employee's role in building sales. By executing the core values of your brand to the very best of their ability, they pave the way for the kind of market share growth that will minimize the impact that fixed costs have on the business. The more committed they are to creating outstanding brand identity, the more likely we are to see our top line grow and our fixed cost percentage shrink.

Variable costs, by definition, can be affected by several factors. The most common mistake many bosses make when it comes to addressing variable cost opportunities is that they limit their discussions to the really big ones. While Pareto's Law supports focusing first on the costs where the greatest savings can be achieved, there will come a time when those costs will be well under control. At that point, you should be looking for other opportunities. That is why it's important that your employees are familiar with all variable costs that can be found on the profit and loss statement.

For the restaurant industry, the food and beverage line items represent the single biggest variable expense and would logically be the first place to start. Food cost control is a delicate bal-

ance between raw food cost, portion control, waste management, and shrinkage while providing the customer with a quality finished product at a competitive price. It can be a challenge to maintain that balance when the restaurant is busy, and that is why it is so important that every employee understands what's at stake.

A huge part of maintaining excellent results is to make sure your employees are constantly kept informed about how the business is doing. The more information you can share with them that will validate a job well done, or target areas of opportunity, the more likely you are to achieve excellent results on a regular basis.

By listing and identifying all your variable costs on a generic profit and loss statement, you accomplish some important objectives. When your employees see how many different controllable costs go into running your business, they will quickly realize that the raw cost of an item is just one component of the costs that a business incurs. If you are able to make the important connection between employee decision-making and profitability, you will be well on your way to building a healthy bottom line.

You want your employees thinking about how their decisions affect all variable costs, not just the largest ones. The old adage 'a penny saved is a penny earned' was never truer than when it comes to effectively controlling variable costs. I have a great

story that relates to one of my own employees who took the initiative to tackle a cost opportunity.

In the location where she worked, the dining room was surrounded by tall windows on three sides. On sunny days, the room was very bright, and on occasion, customers would complain about the glare. Having so many windows also meant that on the hottest days of the year, the air conditioning units would be working at full capacity.

One day she approached me after having done some extensive research. She told me she believed she had found a way to make the dining room more pleasant on a sunny day while improving energy efficiency. She had located a company that sold a high-quality UV film that could be fitted to any window. Not only did the manufacturer guarantee that it would eliminate glare, but they also claimed that it could repel heat and cut energy costs. They even suggested that many of their customers had seen their utility bill decrease by as much as twenty percent.

She put together a proposal that included the upfront costs to purchase the material and to have it professionally installed. She then calculated the time it would take to recoup the initial costs if we were able to achieve just a five percent savings on our overall utility bill during the hot summer months. She even projected future savings once the initial investment had been paid off. To say that I was impressed would be an understatement. I gave her permission to work with her manager to have the product installed.

I wish I could tell you that this story was an absolute home run, but like many things that sound a bit too good to be true, it was. That's not to say it was a mistake. The glare problem was eliminated completely, and many customers commented on how much nicer the dining room was on a sunny day. As far as the energy savings were concerned, we averaged about a two and a half percent reduction in costs during the summer months, a far cry from the potential twenty percent boldly suggested by the manufacturer.

It took a little longer to recoup the initial investment, and the long-term savings were minimal, but they were savings nonetheless. From my perspective, this was still a success story. Thanks to one eighteen-year-old employee, we were able to reduce a variable cost while improving the customer experience. Even though she felt she had failed, I assured her that this was not only a success, it was a total win/win.

The praise she received for her effort was well deserved, and it served to inspire other employees to come up with unique and interesting ways to reduce costs. My challenge was to explain why a particular idea was not likely to work without discouraging the employee from continuing to think outside the box. After all, they had a boss who spent half of his life outside the box.

The lesson here is simple. Your employees play an integral role in reducing your fixed cost percentage simply by protecting your brand and building market share. They are also the same people who are more than capable of managing all of your vari-

able costs. The more they understand about the inner workings of a small business, the more they are able to contribute to creating a healthy bottom line.

Chapter Five

Character and Self-Reflection

Many years ago, I met a man who would leave a lasting impression on my life. It has been nearly a decade since his passing, but his memory lives on. Brian Midgley was a gentleman, a humorist, and a compassionate human being. He left an extraordinary legacy on how to do things right.

I first met Brian and his wife Beryl through my former sister in law, Linda. She was soon to be engaged to the couple's only son, Russ. This was a family that was easy to like, and while I truly enjoyed Beryl's company, there was something about Brian that I immediately gravitated to. He had a way of making you feel like you were the most important person in the room. His ability to engage you in a conversation was like no one else I had ever met. With Brian, you always got the impression that he was genuinely interested in everything you had to say. He relished a good debate and was fascinated by different points of view. As far as Brian was concerned, differing opinions were to be expected, and each commanded the other's respect.

You never left a conversation with Brian that did not make you think. The welcoming sound of his voice and the easiness of his demeanor were his calling card. He saw no value in conflict and

would often remind me that confrontation can only take place when there are two willing participants. To watch Brian in action was like witnessing a master class in the art of extraordinary people practices.

Brian was a banker by trade, and the contributions he made to his branch were significant. When I think of how much the banking industry has changed since his passing, I am reminded how the autonomy that a branch manager and a loans officer once enjoyed has been severely restricted. The tight controls and regulations that the entire industry subscribes to today pay lip service to customer loyalty and the whole notion of enduring relationships. The great irony is that these were the very qualities that made Brian such a successful businessman. His clients were genuinely happy with the way they were treated, and they knew he valued their business. In turn, they would share their experience with their family and friends, and the bank would be the beneficiary. This is the same institution that no longer allows their managers the autonomy to find creative solutions. I truly believe that Brian would have had no choice but to move on to a new vocation. His talents would have demanded it of him.

Many people attended his funeral. In addition, to family and friends, many former coworkers and even some of his competitors in the banking industry came to pay their respects. Several people spoke, and the theme was universal. This was a man of great integrity who was admired by so many people, for so many reasons.

Long after my divorce, we continued to talk on a regular basis. He was always interested in what I was up to, and I would often share with him a particular problem or a situation I was confronted with. Always the good listener, Brian would somehow manage to bring the conversation back around to the importance of respect in finding common ground. I never forgot his words, and I made it my mission to make sure that the Quadrant Leadership Model would rest on a foundation of mutual respect.

Positive character attributes can play such an important role in finding success in every aspect of our lives. For so many businesses, the only time the subject of character is addressed is when some aspect of an employee's character is affecting their performance in a negative way.

There is no doubt in my mind that as a youth, I would have benefited enormously from conversations that explored the positive character attributes that can enrich our lives. In the second quadrant, we tackle the subject head on. We talk about people who have positively influenced our employee's life. We ask them to tell us why they admire this person. What is their approach to addressing confrontation and challenging situations? Do others share your view on this person, and why? We explore positive character traits that are common to people who have the ability to influence outcomes. Why are they so successful? What is it that makes them so different?

Over the years, I had these kinds of discussions with many employees. While I would not have qualified any particular con-

versation as life changing, I can tell you that they got my people thinking about the role character can play in achieving success in every aspect of their lives. Despite spending the majority of my life working with youth, it is my profound belief that every employee, in any business, regardless of their age, can benefit from these types of discussion.

External dialogue is important, but the internal dialogue that takes place in the back of our minds is what makes these exchanges so unique. At some point in the conversation, we begin a natural progression towards self-reflection. We begin to question our character and how we might be viewed by others. While our outward appearance will not likely betray our thoughts, the value of these discussions is that they get us thinking.

Self-reflection, while personal, is a healthy exercise that each of us, at some point in our lives, must undertake if we truly want to grow and develop. As I was heading home from Brian's funeral that day, I could not help but wonder what people might say about me after I am gone. Would I be respected? Would I be celebrated as a decent human being? Would I make a positive impact on other people's lives? Would I be admired? I had no idea what the answers were, but there was one thing I did know for sure. Whether I was prepared to admit it to myself or not, it mattered.

The best thing about self-reflection is that it happens naturally without any need for provocation. Whether we are discussing

personal integrity or credibility or the value of our word, or any other positive character attribute, the key is to allow our employees the opportunity to self-reflect and decide for themselves what is important.

It is easy to recognize good character qualities, but it is another matter to act upon them. As human beings, we are innately flawed. Each of us is unique, made up of a kaleidoscope of character traits. Not every aspect of our character is created equal. For most of us, there are elements of our character that are not necessarily our best qualities. Only we can decide what role these attributes will play in our future.

In the second quadrant, our discussions focus solely on positive character traits. There is no need to call an employee's character into question. Not only is it unwise, it is incredibly counter-productive. It would be viewed as a personal attack, and the credibility that you are attempting to build with your employee would be severely damaged

In the Mentor Quadrant, we have an opportunity to address specific character attributes that hinder the employee's ability to reach their full potential. Before we can go there, the unique qualities that this kind of relationship demands must be in place. Not every employee will participate in this quadrant, and you must learn to accept that.

You need to be able to exercise extraordinary patience when it comes to dealing with the complexities associated with a person's character. For those who are ready and willing to let you

into their inner sanctum, there is much to gain. Until then, stay focused on discussions that reinforce the value of positive character attributes and make sure you continue to keep the dialogue alive.

In Quadrant Leadership, we frequently remind our employees that there is no room for finger-pointing. With real growth comes a greater sense of personal accountability. Character building involves a willingness to take full responsibility for our actions, including all aspects of our behavior. I would often remind my employees that no one is perfect, and most of us will make some blunders in our lifetime. As long as we are prepared to accept the consequences of our actions and make amends for our mistakes, there will always be an opportunity to redeem ourselves and redefine who we are and what we stand for.

Quadrant 3

Coach / Observer

<i>“Potential” — noun</i> <i>Latent qualities or abilities that may be developed and lead to future success:</i>	
Praising Without Conditions	Team Thinking First
The Search for a More Efficient Company	The Art of Coaching

Welcome to the busiest quadrant of them all. In your role as the Observer / Coach, you have more freedom to decide how you will spend your time. What might begin as a one-on-one session can grow to include several employees. A critical part of every employee’s development involves their ability to contribute in an effective way to the team dynamic. Group sessions help to illustrate how one employee’s decision-making can affect the entire team. The free and flexible time that you enjoy in Quadrant Leadership allows you the latitude to use any situation as a platform for employee development.

When you first begin to work in this quadrant, your challenge will be to avoid the temptation to manage. You must stay committed to employee development. In situations where the operation begins to unravel, you must resist every urge to step in and fix it. Addressing the current problem will undoubtedly improve the immediate operations, but it does nothing to change future outcomes. Your goal is to create a team of highly skilled and extremely proficient employees who will be armed with the tools to address any situation.

Keep in mind that many of your employees are coming into Quadrant Leadership very skeptical of the whole process. They will be looking to see if you will keep the promises you made when you introduced the model. Their personal development must be your priority. Your most challenging sessions will occur at the beginning, since old habits sometimes die hard. As you become more comfortable with the model, each session will get better. As you allow yourself to relax and focus on your delivery, you will be able to witness first-hand as extraordinary changes start to take place in your company.

No matter how much your employees improve, there will always be a need for someone to be in charge. For now, the only role that has significantly changed is yours. As far as your managers or charge staff are concerned, it's business as usual. They will continue to be responsible for keeping the operation running smoothly. As your employees begin to accept more personal accountability and take full ownership for their actions, the

need for strong supervision significantly diminishes. Eventually, your managers will shift from a hands-on directional style of leadership to being a coordinator of events and activities.

Chapter One

The Art of Coaching

Every employee is told on day one that their priority is to become certified. In the first quadrant, our focus was on skills training. In the second, we introduced less tangible concepts and principles and placed an emphasis on self-initiative attributes. By the time your employees are ready for their first session in the Observer / Coach Quadrant, they have amassed a wealth of information that is about to be tested. It's time for you to implement some effective coaching strategies that will challenge your employees' ability to put the knowledge they have acquired into action.

The art of coaching uses disciplined techniques that require a great deal of practice. Many of these techniques can be difficult to master, and for the majority of us, they do not come naturally. I recommend that before you attempt your first session with an employee in the third quadrant, you do your homework. Make certain that you are comfortable with the subtle but distinct differences between teaching and coaching.

I had the opportunity to hone my coaching skills while working in the training department for McDonald's. I know first-hand how effective coaching can be when done properly. By focusing

on the employee's potential rather than a specific standard of excellence, a good coach is able to bring out the best in them.

An experienced coach can make the process look very easy, but I can assure you that it's a skill that takes time to master. There are many great books that discuss good coaching strategies, and I encourage you to do your research before you begin.

As you make your transition into Quadrant Leadership, you are likely to stumble a few times. Never be discouraged by a few sessions that did not turn out quite as you had hoped. Like most things that we eventually become good at, it takes a lot of practice, and with practice comes valuable experience. I'd like to share with you some of the coaching strategies that I found to be highly effective.

Five Game-Changing Strategies

1. Use open-ended questions when communicating with your employees 90% of the time.

Answering a question with a question is an effective coaching technique. Your goal in this quadrant is to get the employee to demonstrate independent thinking. Asking nothing but open-ended questions will set that in motion. It will not take long for your employee to realize that you have no intention of providing them with any answers. The time for show-and-tell is over. It's time to call upon what they know and put it into practice.

The most challenging part of this coaching technique is staying with it. Using open-ended questions as your primary form of

communication and having it come across as natural and unrehearsed takes a great deal of practice. Try not to sound patronizing or condescending in asking your questions. You want your employee to feel engaged, and your questions should support your belief in their ability to work their way through the situation at hand.

The goal for every employee is to demonstrate that they are ready to be certified. By asking open-ended questions, we validate that they have the knowledge. We then look for them to act upon what they know to make good, solid decisions that will ultimately lead to consistent performance at a higher level of proficiency.

While things will be far from perfect in the beginning, each subsequent session in the third quadrant will get progressively better. Your employees will begin to trust in what they have learned, and your job will be to use a variety of effective coaching strategies to draw upon their newfound knowledge.

2. Sometimes you must let things get worse before they get better.

For most bosses, this one can be tough to accept. Your natural instinct is to fix problems. The idea of letting something you have already identified as an issue get even worse may not sit well with you. You must look at these situations as learning opportunities that will ultimately make the company stronger. In Quadrant Leadership, we operate in the real world, not an artificial environment. If you are going to let your employee draw

upon their resources to find an acceptable solution, then you must resist any temptation to intervene when things get rough. You will be right there at their side offering encouragement and support. No matter how uncomfortable things might feel, you must resist any impulse to direct them towards a solution.

Rely instead on your ability to use effective open-ended questions to point them in the right direction. It may take time to resolve the situation, but as your employee works their way through the process, they begin to find confidence in their abilities. Quadrant Leadership is all about progressive improvement and each time an employee can make a good decision, they are making significant progress.

Some of the development opportunities that have the potential to get even worse involve direct contact with the customer. Even in these situations, you must avoid the temptation to take charge. I suggest you include the customer in the process and share with them what is taking place. Ask for their indulgence and support. If handled properly, the customer feels that somehow they have a vested interest in the outcome, and many are happy to play their role. Of course, you always have the option to compensate the customer for a less than favorable experience as a way to thank them for their contribution and to minimize the damage. Either way, your employee is allowed to draw on their resources to work through a real world situation and find an acceptable solution.

3. The secret to successful coaching is extraordinary patience.

In a world driven by deadlines and time commitments, this may be the most valuable coaching strategy of them all. I can only speak for myself, but I found this one to be incredibly difficult to master. The free and flexible time that you have created for yourself has the potential to be tested in a big way during some of these sessions.

Not every one of your employees is going to develop at the same pace. The more complicated a concept is, the more challenging it can be for some employees to process and enact.

I learned this important lesson about the value of patience. If you find yourself in a situation where the employee is struggling, and you are about to pull the plug, remind yourself that you have plenty of time to help them find success, and then carry on. The extra time you invest in this one session may be a critical turning point for the employee. It will become clear to them that you are going beyond what could reasonably be expected.

You will end up garnering a great deal of respect from them. If there was ever a doubt that your commitment to their personal development was genuine, that doubt no longer exists. Experience taught me that many of these employees go on to become some of the best contributors to your company.

Every time I was faced with one of these challenging sessions, I would ask myself two simple questions. Do I believe the employee has the skills and the knowledge to work their way through this problem? Are they putting in a genuine effort? If the answer to both questions was yes, then I owed them my time and attention, and most of all, my patience. I learned first-hand why they say patience is a virtue. I can only tell you that I never considered myself to be a good coach until I learned how to exercise exceptional patience.

4. Take the time to debrief every teachable moment.

Don't let important moments pass without a full review of what has just transpired. While things are still fresh in everyone's mind, talk it through. This is a great opportunity to reinforce the notion that when faced with scenarios where tough decisions are necessary, there is often more than one solution. It's important to debrief before moving on because these are real-world situations that the employee is likely to encounter again. We can learn as much from a good debriefing session as we did during the actual event. If you have a point you need to drive home, now is the time to do it. Allow your employee the opportunity to share with you what they believe they did well, and where they feel they could have done better. The first step to fixing a problem is to recognize that it exists.

In this quadrant, our most important job is to listen for understanding. If you find yourself doing the majority of the talking, something is wrong. I guarantee that you are no longer asking

only open-ended questions. In a coaching session, your job is to ask the question, and then patiently wait for your employee to give you an acceptable answer.

If you jump in too quickly and ask a follow-up question without having the first question answered satisfactorily, you have let the employee off the hook, and they quickly learn that if they simply wait, you will move on. Silence is a powerful tool, so use it wisely.

In the third quadrant, our job is not to critique, inspect, or evaluate. We are there to support our employee as they attempt to draw upon their resources to find viable solutions to real-world problems. While some of our questions can be challenging, they are not meant to frustrate the employee. Using good, open-ended questions will force them to think things through. While we patiently wait for an answer, it is important that our body language and facial expressions reflect a positive demeanour. At no time should we show frustration or appear to be judgmental. No matter how much the employee appears to be struggling, we will do them no favours if we simply spoon-feed them the answer.

By the time your employee is ready for their second session in the third quadrant, they will have a much better idea of what to expect. They will come into the session knowing that they will not be able to rely on you for any of the answers. I guarantee they will put a greater effort in preparing themselves for the ses-

sion. It will be up to them to demonstrate to you what they are truly capable of.

5. Celebrate progress.

Quadrant Leadership is all about continuous improvement, and it should be celebrated at every opportunity. As long as the accomplishment warrants legitimate praise, it is up to us to make sure that we recognize a job well done. Nothing reinforces repeat behavior better than positive reinforcement. In the next chapter, I will go into praising in more detail. For now, I'll just emphasize that when your employee is able to demonstrate real progress, you should take the opportunity to praise their performance. If it happens to occur in a group setting, then you should encourage every team member to take part in the celebration.

Praising is such a powerful coaching tool requiring two conditions. The first is that the accomplishment warrants the praise. The second is that the employee acted on their own, independent of specific direction from anyone else.

These are just a few of the coaching strategies that I have found to be effective for employee development. I suggest that when you first begin to coach, you make a list of any of the strategies you intend to use and keep it close at hand.

Your first few sessions might feel forced and even unnatural because this is not the way you would normally communicate with your employees. Just keep in mind that for your employee to

become fully certified, they must be able to make sound decisions without any direct input from you or any member of your team.

By the time your employee is fully certified, they have clearly demonstrated an ability to perform consistently at a high level. This is now the new norm for what will be considered acceptable performance in the future.

Chapter Two

Praising Without Conditions

Praising never grows old, no matter how old we grow.

Over time, you will look to many resources to build your library of development material. Never underestimate what you already bring to the table. Your personal experience is an excellent starting point. There is no need to use a lot of fancy language to teach the things you know to be important. Share your personal insight, particularly when it comes to the vision you have for your brand.

The years that I spent working in the training department definitely gave me a solid foundation to work from, but today you have far more resources at your disposal than I ever did. Whether you are looking for information on effective decision-making, team building, time planning, prioritizing, or a host of other topics, all you need do is turn on your computer and start searching. The key is to slowly build your portfolio as you work

your way through the model. Use some of your free and flexible time to search for good material that will help you to tap into each employee's full potential.

Until you have conducted a number of sessions in each quadrant, you may want to bring along some notes. Just use them sparingly. The key to a productive one-on-one session is the interaction that takes place between you and your employee. The more you are able to engage them in a healthy exchange of thoughts and ideas, the better the outcome is likely to be.

Over the years, I was constantly on the lookout for good material that could help me in my quest to create a team of highly skilled employees. One source of information was a book written in the 1980s by Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson called *The One Minute Manager*. It is full of great concepts and ideas.

One of my favourite takeaways from *The One Minute Manager* was the idea of catching people doing things approximately right and praising their effort, rather than waiting for perfection. Many bosses feel that praising a performance that is less than perfect does not make sense. They are concerned that it will send the wrong message to the employee. This is why the most common form of praise used in business is what we call conditional praise.

Let's take a look at a couple of good examples of conditional praise.

Example 1

“Your smile was genuine, and the customer was impressed, but you forgot to mention the promotion.”

Example 2

“You took great initiative, and I can tell that you worked hard on this. If only you had asked me about the color scheme first, you could have avoided so many problems.”

Employees who are routinely treated to conditional praising will tell you that they do not have a positive view of this kind of communication. They know that any good feeling they get from the first part of your comments will quickly be replaced with what they did wrong, or something they need to improve.

Legitimate praising has no conditions attached. The objective of praising is to allow the employee to feel good about themselves and enjoy a sense of pride in a job well done. It should be given time to manifest, and the employee should be able to experience the feelings that come from being genuinely appreciated.

In Quadrant Leadership, our objective is to take the condition right out of the praise. To accomplish this, we need to adjust the approach we take. It takes a little getting used to because you have to catch yourself before you deliver the condition. Once you see how much you can accomplish by making this simple change, my hope is that you will abandon conditional praising altogether.

The first step is to legitimize the praise by letting it stand on its own. To do this, we sever the conditional praise in half and sep-

arate the two components by time and circumstance. Let me clarify what I mean by using the same two examples as before.

“You have a great smile, and the customer was impressed with the way you presented yourself. It is that kind of service that sets us apart from our competitors. Great effort!”

Here you allow the employee time to experience that feel-good sensation that comes with positive recognition. Praising can be the least expensive, yet most effective way to raise an employee’s performance level. Recognizing their positive behavior, ensures that it will be repeated. This is such an important tool, yet most of the time the benefit is lost when the positive comment is immediately squashed by criticism in the form of a conditional praise.

The key to finding success with this approach is to make sure that there is a clear break between the actual praise and what needs to be improved upon. The easiest way to accomplish this is to change the subject entirely. We need to have a healthy separation between the two parts of the conditional praise.

Each situation will be a little different, but you will sense when the time is right to address other matters such as the importance of customers knowing about current promotions. Your employee will still be feeling the positive halo effect of the praise and is likely to be far more receptive to your feedback. Your goal should be to have them make the connection between what they did well, and what would have made it even better. You can ac-

comply with this without the need to criticize the missed opportunity.

The exchange should end with your employee making a commitment to inform all their customers about current promotions. If you are able to make this important adjustment to the way you approach these types of situations, you will have successfully addressed the issue at hand, and your employee will leave the exchange with their positive mindset still intact.

“You took great initiative, and I can see that you put in a lot of hard work on this. I am really impressed. Great job!”

Praise must always be legitimate and warranted. It is all relative to where each employee is in their development. What can be a big deal for one employee may be nothing more than routine for another.

In the second example, we take the same approach and make sure that we have a clean break from the behavior that earned the praise and the behavior that needs to be corrected. After an adequate amount of time has passed, you can now address the area of opportunity.

“I noticed that you changed the color scheme on the project. Do you feel it will create any challenges for the rest of the team?”

The praise you bestowed upon them earlier was indeed legitimate and well-deserved, but clearly they made an error in not considering their choice of color. The positive mindset they are

operating out of should make them far more receptive to your question. The key is to get the employee to recognize the error on their own, and take responsibility for the fact that their decision has created other problems. Your comments should focus on the issue rather than calling into question the employee's decision-making skills.

“When you are preparing to do a big project like this can you see how important it is that you have all the information you need before you proceed?”

Sometimes a boss has nothing good to say at all and still tries to use a conditional praise to soften the blow. The problem is that the praise is so disingenuous that it has no credibility, making the situation even worse. In a case like this, you are better off simply to address the issue at hand and get it over with, rather than trying to sugarcoat it with false praise.

Whether you make the decision to transition to Quadrant Leadership or not, you should seriously consider getting rid of conditional praising. I am convinced that if you make the effort, you will soon realize the benefits that can be derived from this simple technique. It will lead to a lot more stand alone praising, which could prove to be a challenge for some. It really depends on how you view praising in general.

Some bosses believe that too much praising leads to complacency. In all of the years that I worked in the Quadrant Leadership Model, I never found this to be true. It is a simple fact that people who work in a positive environment are more inclined to

give more of themselves than those who feel their effort is never appreciated.

Chapter Three

Team Thinking First

So far, my primary focus has been on conducting individual employee sessions. Most companies require the collaborative effort of many employees to meet the expectations of their customers. How much or how little your employees are dependent on one another will have a lot to do with the nature of your business. One of the things that makes the Quadrant Leadership Model such a powerful development tool is how well it works in a group setting.

Whether you are conducting a skills training exercise in the first quadrant, introducing a brand new set of employees to the Ten Principles of a Strong Working Relationship in the second, or assessing team synergy in the third, the model has the ability to take on the development needs of virtually any size group. Team Thinking First is an exercise that takes place many times over in the third quadrant. The objective of these sessions is always the same. You are continually assessing the team's ability to apply advanced self-initiative attributes effectively.

Similar to the basic attributes, the advanced initiatives focus on the employee's role in the team dynamic. Remember that this is merely a base template that you are encouraged to expand upon to meet the needs of your business.

Advance Self-Initiative Attributes

Team Accountability - A willingness to look at the bigger picture and share responsibility for the actions of the entire team. This includes sharing accountability for decisions made collectively, or by other employees on behalf of the team.

Scope of Work- Communicating, connecting and coordinating the individual roles of each employee to come together as one unit. Utilizing team synergy to do everything within the power of the group to meet or exceed customer expectations. Through experience and knowledge, each employee demonstrates a willingness to accept the responsibilities of the team as their own.

Short-Term Decision Making - Making critical decisions that directly affect the performance of the team in a positive way.

Long-Term Decision Making - Anticipating potential issues and barriers based on experience and knowledge. Implementing longterm solutions through collective team input to address recurring issues.

Multi-Tasking - Setting the example by looking for every opportunity to coordinate tasks with other members of your team.

Time Planning and Prioritizing - Effective use of time management to prioritize specific elements of your job that strengthen the efficiency of the team.

Personal Work Ethic - Rising to the level of intensity necessary to support team initiatives. A willingness to take on more re-

sponsibility for group decisions for the entire operation to function at a higher level.

Team Thinking First is all about placing the best interests of the team ahead of self-interests.

Beginning in the second quadrant and carrying over into the third, we spend a great deal of time exploring behaviors common to well-connected, highly functional teams. What makes them so different from every other team? What does it mean to be a part of a team that has achieved this status? What role do leaders play within a team dynamic of this nature? Does a highly proficient team even need a traditional leader?

These and many other questions are addressed as your employees examine the fundamentals that are required to take a team to the next level. One of the most important lessons that you hope every employee will take away from working in a highly productive team environment is that really good leaders have an ability to recognize when their talents are required to lead the charge and when they are better suited to a supporting role.

Highly competitive people tend to struggle with the concept of team equality. The idea of having to take direction from one of their peers does not sit well with those who need to prove that they are better than others. They tend to gravitate towards self-interests, often missing the point behind team synergy. They define success by what they bring to the table and are far more comfortable in a competitive environment where being the best confirms that they have proven their self-worth.

Team Thinking First sessions are specifically designed to demonstrate how much stronger a unified, well-connected team is than a group of individuals serving self-interests. Most leaders who have enjoyed a long and successful career will tell you that the real secret lies in having the ability to get the most you possibly can out of every person you are working with. The positive character attributes that these leaders display plays a critical role in their ability to develop a winning team.

Dominant personalities who fail to learn these important lessons often go on to become competent micro-managers. Their need to stay in control of every situation in order to manage the outcome means they miss a tremendous opportunity to see what team synergy is capable of delivering. Team synergy works because we take advantage of every bit of talent at our disposal. The role the entire team plays in making it to the championship game is just as important as the guy who scores the winning goal. To function at the top of their game, each member of the team must be prepared to set aside personal self-serving interests in favor of doing their part for the greater good.

Through the many team exercises you will put your employees through, the objective is to get them to embrace their advance selfinitative attributes. By placing team interests ahead of self-interest, they are demonstrating specific qualities that are found in successful leaders. To lead a winning team, you must first understand what makes one work. The way they conduct themselves within the group dynamic demonstrates a level of under-

standing that is an essential ingredient in creating a winning team.

From your perspective, the more time you can spend in group sessions, the more opportunities there will be to practice the use of advanced self-initiative attributes. Creating teams that function at this level takes extraordinary patience and a whole lot of practice. It may take some time, but in the end, it will be well worth the effort.

Even alpha-type personalities cannot ignore the benefits of being a part of a highly proficient team that takes full advantage of the entire pool of talent. High functioning teams are a thing of beauty. The vibe they give off is infectious, and it has the ability to motivate others to join the club. I cannot predict when this will happen for you, given that there is no fixed time schedule for the progress that your employees will make within the model. What I can tell you is this: when it does happen, you will have reached a significant milestone in your quest to create extraordinary brand identity.

Quadrant 4
Mentor / Advisor

<i>At the cross roads of the highest levels of trust and respect, there is a place for self reflection and new beginnings.</i>	
The Principle of Influence	It's Okay, It's Not Okay, It's Never Okay
Trust Is a Two Way Street	Creating an Environment Where Mentorship Can Serve to Influence Meaningful Outcomes

“There is a significant difference between possessing a strong will to win and the need to win at all cost.”

Chapter One
The Principle of Influence

Change is seldom easy, sometimes disruptive, and often hard to accept. For most of us, it is in our nature to resist change. We tend to be creatures of habit and routine, enjoying a certain comfort level in knowing what lies ahead. Most people are

highly suspicious when it comes to change, particularly if they believe it to be unnecessary. What's the motivation behind the change? Whose decision was it? Is it really going to make a difference? While most of us are prepared to accept that some change is inevitable, too much, too quickly, can be disastrous.

There are many ways to enact change. Governments legislate it; companies impose it, and both see it as their right to do so. Change can result from circumstances outside of anyone's control, such as a natural disaster that wipes out a way of life, or a downturn in the economy that results in job losses and business closures. For most people, the word change can be unsettling.

While change is indeed inevitable, buy-in is not. Governments, of course, have the right to impose penalties and fines for failing to adhere to new rules and regulations, and companies can invoke any number of consequences on employees who fail to follow changes in policies and procedures. While enforcement may work to varying degrees, it's hardly the answer.

Businesses are required to make changes all the time, and it is certainly their prerogative to do so. Whether to streamline operations to protect the bottom line, or to improve the overall customer experience, the need for change to stay one step ahead of the competition will always be necessary. The key is to be able to implement change that is embraced by your employees rather than forced upon them. How do you accomplish such a feat? The answer lies in your ability to influence the way your employees deal with change.

One of the many reasons why the Quadrant Leadership Model is such an effective development tool is that it fully subscribes to the Principle of Influence. By definition, Influence is the capacity or power to have an effect on someone else. Influence is a powerful attribute that can be used for good and evil. The principle of influence is based on a well-established and proven formula that is stated as follows:

Respect $\times$ Trust = Influence. When both of these important character attributes are in place, the sphere of influence can be significant.

The Quadrant Leadership Model rests on a foundation of mutual respect. In the second quadrant, we talk about the positive character attributes that are common to successful people. Most people who are admired for their accomplishments are also highly respected. For many of these people, the respect they have earned is equal to, or greater than, all of their achievements.

While we spend little time discussing negative character attributes in Quadrant Leadership, we make it clear that showing disrespect for another employee is simply unacceptable. Our objective in the second quadrant is to focus on the positive attributes that will help our employees achieve their goals. At the top of that list is earning the respect of the people they work with.

It's important that your employees can distinguish the difference between being respected and being liked. While it would be nice for both to exist, a working relationship is not a popularity con-

test. Using common courtesy, engaging in meaningful dialogue that includes eye contact and active listening skills, as well as demonstrating team thinking first, are all excellent examples of showing respect for your fellow employee. If two people do not socialize with each other outside of work, that is their choice. What matters is the way they conduct themselves while representing your company.

Early on, we teach the importance of climbing the trust ladder. Trust plays such an important role when it comes to earning independence. Your employees know that if they want to be granted the freedom to make decisions on their own without the need for direct supervision, then they must earn your trust as well as that of your managers. In Quadrant Leadership, we spend a great deal of time emphasizing the importance of earning both trust and respect. The most important thing we can do is walk the talk every day. The way we conduct ourselves within the model will play a critical role in our ability to influence future outcomes. As the majority of your employees successfully earn their first full certification, the sphere of influence you now enjoy will grant you extraordinary access to a rich resource of potential as they eagerly await their next challenge.

Chapter Two

A Matter of Trust

While the Mentor Quadrant has the potential to contribute a great deal to the ongoing development of your employees, it

will not be for everyone. The parameters that define the mentor relationship are specific and unforgiving. Any attempt to implement the fourth quadrant without the proper elements in place will fail.

The dictionary defines a mentor as an experienced and trusted advisor. While the level of experience you bring to the table is important, it makes no difference what position you hold in your company. The catalyst that cements the mentor relationship is the level of trust that exists between you and your employee. The idea that we choose to mentor is at best an illusion. Despite any declaration on our part, the level of mentorship that you will achieve will be chosen for you by those who actively seek out your guidance.

When I first set out to implement the Quadrant Leadership Model, I devoted the majority of my time to the certification process. I knew that I would have to earn my credentials before I could ever consider introducing the Mentor Quadrant into the development process. One of the most difficult things for me to accept was that despite my best efforts to earn every employee's trust, it did not happen. The reasons were as varied as the circumstances. If a relationship has been compromised prior to your transition into Quadrant Leadership, the feelings that linger are likely to carry over, making it virtually impossible to wipe the slate entirely clean.

Some of the employees who are clearly underperforming will forfeit the opportunity to start over and will remain highly skep-

tical of your motives. You will also encounter employees who have trust issues that have nothing to do with anyone in particular. They simply cannot bring themselves to place the kind of trust in anyone that would open the doors for them to participate in the *Mentor Quadrant*.

No matter the reasons, any attempt on your part to force the issue would be a mistake. Your only true recourse is to keep the lines of communication open and make sure that every employee knows that you are always available to talk.

I should point out that not every employee requires the kind of additional support that the fourth quadrant can provide. Some of your employees will do just fine without it. Your relationship with them is likely already on solid ground. If they feel the need for some advice, they will have no problem seeking you out.

Try to avoid overthinking the Mentor Quadrant. If you allow your relationships to progress in a natural way and stay committed to the four principle strategies that drive the philosophy behind Quadrant Leadership, you will have no trouble earning the kind of trust and respect that will open the doors to the fourth quadrant. Let's look at these strategies from the perspective of building trust.

Strategy 1. (The Development Roadmap)

Establish the Quadrant Leadership Model as the pre-eminent tool for employee development. Ensure that the quality of execution and the calibre of material substantially raise employee performance.

Nothing builds credibility faster than impressive results. By fully engaging the Quadrant Leadership Model, you are providing your employees with the kind of personal development that will substantially improve their odds for success. Every underperformer that you are able to turn around will be a major boost to your credibility. Consider each of your one-on-one sessions as an opportunity to improve your relationship. You will find that if you let things evolve at their own pace, the Mentor Quadrant will become a natural part of the development process.

Once you establish your rhythm and learn to relax, your employees will too, and they will begin to enjoy the time you spend together. Demeanour is so important because it sets the tone for the session. Having the ability to put people at ease can be a critical first step toward fully engaging the learning process.

Finally, if you are able to avoid falling back into old management habits every time something goes wrong, your employees will learn to trust you when you say that their personal development is truly your top priority.

Strategy 2. (A Clear Understanding)

Commit to creating healthy working partnerships that are based on mutual respect and reciprocal trust.

The word ‘partnership’ suggests a mutual understanding that we are in this together. In every good partnership, there is an element of give and take. Both parties expect the other to bring something of value to the table. In Quadrant Leadership, the value you bring is your promise to provide every employee with the highest caliber of ongoing personal development you can. In return, you fully expect that they will be prepared to take full accountability for the decisions they make, and for the decisions that are made as part of a collective team.

This is an important discussion that must take place early in the relationship. Your employees must recognize that trust is a two-way street. As hard as you are working to earn their trust, they must also be making the same effort to earn yours. If they hope to enjoy the freedom that comes with working independent of direct supervision, then they must first earn the privilege. There must be no doubt as to what each party expects from the other.

It is this understanding against which all future progress will be measured. As your employee continues to develop and take on new responsibilities, there is a clear expectation that the level of accountability will grow exponentially.

Strategy 3. (The Validation Platform)

Invoke a strong sense of ownership and accountability by coaching potential that builds both confidence and personal commitment.

The third quadrant is where all of the hard work really begins. Your role is to challenge your employees to put into practice everything that they have been taught. The time for show and tell is over, and while your coaching strategies will sometimes push the boundaries of emotion from frustration to elation, your top priority will be to make sure that your employee has all of the knowledge and skills they require to be extremely successful in your company. The sense of pride they will experience when they have proven their ability to make significant contributions to your business will strengthen your relationship and make the path to the Mentor Quadrant a natural progression.

Strategy 4. (Everyone is Welcome)

Create an environment in which open and honest communication free of judgment and criticism can lead to meaningful change.

A great deal of the dialogue that takes place in the Mentor Quadrant is extremely personal. Your employee will be holding you to the strictest of confidence. Your role in this quadrant is first to listen for understanding and then offer valuable insight. Despite the challenges associated with self-inflicted inappropri-

ate behavior, your employee will be counting on you not to give up on them. For you to make progress in this quadrant, they must believe that you are their advocate and not their adversary.

Always remember that your employee must initiate the Mentor Quadrant. Until that time comes, take every opportunity to let them know that the door is always open. Use your one-on-one sessions as an opportunity to ask them if there is anything else they would like to talk about. Remain calm and relaxed and allow them as much time as they need to reflect. If the climate is right, they will begin to talk, and the door to the Mentor Quadrant will open.

I must caution that you need to decide early on in the process whether you intend to restrict the mentor relationship to workplace issues. If you open up the dialogue to any topic, you must be prepared to accept the fact that your counsel may be sought on issues of a far more personal nature. For me, this was never a problem, but some may feel that this takes things too far. In the end, only you can decide. Whatever discussions you engage in, you will be expected to keep their confidence. I can see no circumstance short of an illegal act or imminent danger where it would be acceptable to break that confidence. If you ever do, you will never regain their trust and your reputation with other employees could be severely compromised.

This is such an important quadrant because it offers a way to confront some of the most challenging performance issues, free of conflict and confrontation. In any other environment, ad-

addressing matters of a personal nature often puts the employee on the defensive, and the lines of communication tend to shut down completely.

In the Mentor Quadrant, your employee is looking for help, not criticism. By removing contentious issues from the public eye and addressing them in a private setting, free of judgment, there is a good chance that they can be resolved. Some of the most challenging issues that we have to deal with involve inappropriate behaviour. My experience has been that ignoring or marginalizing conduct that negatively affects other employees will come back to haunt you in a big way. Our goal in the Mentor Quadrant is to address these types of issues long before they have an opportunity to manifest into something far more damaging. Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the Mentor Quadrant is that it gives you a legitimate platform to deal effectively with highly contentious issues and find viable solutions.

Chapter Three

Understanding Behaviour and Setting Boundaries

It's Okay, It's Not Okay, It's Never Okay

Every company, regardless of the product or service it provides, is in the business of people. Wherever people work together, differences are inevitable. Strong opinions, competing priorities, tight deadlines, and misunderstandings can all create friction. The way we respond will determine whether those differences

lead to greater understanding or damage the relationships on which the business depends.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned through Quadrant Leadership was the importance of self-awareness. Once I committed myself to the Mentor Quadrant, I began to approach inappropriate behaviour differently. I became more interested in understanding what had happened before deciding how to address it.

That did not mean lowering expectations. It meant learning to listen carefully, ask better questions, and distinguish between understanding someone's behaviour and accepting it.

The strength of the Mentor Quadrant lies in the quality of the dialogue. When employees believe they can speak honestly without being humiliated or dismissed, they are more likely to explain their perspective. That gives the leader a better opportunity to understand the situation and help the employee move forward.

Trust makes a difficult conversation possible. Clear boundaries give it direction.

Understanding the Behaviour

When something goes wrong between people, it can be tempting to reach a quick conclusion.

“They have a bad attitude.”

“They are selfish.”

“That is just the way they are.”

Those descriptions may express our frustration, but they tell us very little about what actually happened. They can also make it harder to find a solution.

A more useful starting point is to describe the behaviour.

An employee interrupted a colleague repeatedly. Someone withheld information that another person needed to finish a task. A supervisor criticized an employee in front of customers. A dismissive message appeared in the team’s group chat.

These are actions we can discuss. We can establish what occurred, consider its impact, and make the expectation for the future clear.

The reasons behind behaviour will vary. A person may be acting out of habit, reacting to pressure, misunderstanding an expectation, or responding poorly to an unresolved disagreement. Workplace conditions may also be contributing. Unclear responsibilities, inconsistent decisions, and unreasonable demands can create tension that a leader needs to address.

Understanding those circumstances helps us respond intelligently. It does not make harmful conduct acceptable.

Nor does understanding require an employee to explain their upbringing or disclose private experiences. If they choose to share something personal, listen respectfully. Keep the conversation focused on what is relevant to the working relationship and the support needed to improve it.

Feelings and Behaviour Are Different

People will sometimes feel angry, disappointed, jealous, anxious, or distrustful. Having a difficult feeling does not automatically mean someone has behaved improperly.

An employee can be frustrated and still communicate respectfully. They can disagree with a decision and still carry out their responsibilities. They can question their boss without attacking the boss personally.

The important question is how those feelings are expressed.

This distinction matters because we want employees to raise concerns. A person who points out a mistake, questions an unsafe practice, or challenges an unrealistic deadline may be making an important contribution.

As leaders, we must be prepared to hear things we would rather not hear. Respectful disagreement deserves the same consideration whether it is directed at a colleague, a manager, or the owner.

Three Boundaries That Matter

It's Okay

It is okay to disagree.

It is okay to express disappointment, ask for clarification, request help, or explain that a commitment has not been met. It is

also okay to raise a concern about the way you have been treated.

Consider an employee whose work has been delayed because someone else did not complete an agreed task.

“I was relying on having those figures yesterday. Without them, I could not finish the report. Can we agree on how to prevent that next time?”

The concern is clear. The employee has described the problem and its effect without making a judgment about the other person’s character.

This is a skill worth developing. It allows people to address difficult situations while keeping the conversation focused on a solution.

It’s Not Okay

It is not okay to turn a work problem into a personal attack.

Put-downs, dismissive responses, humiliating sarcasm, and deliberate exclusion from information undermine working relationships. Calling someone lazy or incompetent rarely helps them understand what needs to change.

“I was only joking” does not settle the matter. A comment intended as humour may still embarrass or belittle another person. Intent deserves consideration, but so does impact.

A single incident may require attention. A repeated pattern increases the concern. The leader’s responsibility is to respond

early and proportionately, rather than wait until resentment becomes entrenched.

It's Never Okay

Threats, intimidation, harassment, discrimination, deliberate sabotage, and retaliation against someone for raising a concern have no place in a respectful workplace.

These standards apply to everyone. A strong sales record, long service, or a position of authority does not excuse harmful conduct.

A serious incident requires prompt attention through the appropriate workplace process. Depending on the situation, that may include immediate protective measures, an investigation, and corrective or disciplinary action.

A mentoring conversation can support someone's development. It cannot replace the steps needed to protect people and respond fairly to serious misconduct.

A Four-Step Approach

Step One: Establish What Happened

Begin with specific observations or reported concerns. Avoid treating an allegation as a settled fact before the relevant accounts have been heard.

“In today’s briefing, I heard you call Jordan incompetent in front of the team. I want to understand what happened from your perspective.”

If the concern has been reported by someone else, make that distinction clear.

“I have received a concern about an exchange in yesterday’s briefing. I need to understand what was said and hear the relevant accounts before reaching a conclusion.”

Listen carefully. Ask questions that help clarify events rather than questions designed to force agreement with your first impression.

Where there is an immediate risk of harm, address that risk promptly. A full understanding may take time; necessary protective action should not wait.

Step Two: Understand the Context and Clarify the Boundary

Once the facts are sufficiently clear, explore what contributed to the situation.

What expectation was misunderstood? What happened beforehand? Was an earlier concern ignored? Did something in the way the work was organized contribute to the problem?

The leader must be willing to examine their own part as well.

If the employee describes being provoked, a useful response might be:

“What happened beforehand matters, and I will take it seriously. We also need to examine your response. Understanding the circumstances helps us address the whole problem; it does not remove anyone’s responsibility for their conduct.”

Make the boundary specific.

“You can raise concerns about missed commitments. You cannot address those concerns by making personal attacks.”

The goal is a clear understanding of what is expected at work. It is not necessary for two people to agree on every personal belief before they can treat one another respectfully.

Step Three: Agree on Responsibility and Next Steps

“Improve your attitude” is not an action plan.

The employee needs to understand what must change, what support is available, and how progress will be assessed.

A practical agreement might include raising concerns privately, describing the task rather than judging the person, sharing necessary information promptly, or requesting a pause when a discussion becomes heated.

“Next time a deadline is missed, explain what you needed, how the delay affected the work, and what you are asking for now. If you cannot resolve it together, bring the issue to me before it becomes a personal argument.”

Where harm has occurred, consider appropriate repair. An honest apology may be part of that process once responsibility has been established. It should acknowledge the conduct and its impact.

“I called you incompetent in front of the team. That was disrespectful. I should have addressed the missed deadline without attacking you personally. I am sorry.”

The person affected should not be pressured to accept an apology, meet with the other person, or restore trust immediately. Their needs and preferences matter too.

Step Four: Follow Through

A commitment to change is a beginning. Consistent behaviour is the evidence that follows.

Agree on when you will review progress. Notice improvements, address setbacks, and check whether the behaviour has actually stopped.

Support the employee making the change, while remaining attentive to the people affected. The issue is not resolved merely because the person responsible feels ready to move on.

“You can take responsibility, make appropriate amends, and demonstrate change. You cannot require someone to forgive you or restore trust on your timetable.”

Where harmful behaviour continues, encouragement alone is insufficient. The leader must follow through on the agreed expectations and the appropriate consequences.

The Same Standards in Every Workplace

These principles apply whether people work in a restaurant, a workshop, an office, or an online business.

A personal attack in a group message can undermine someone just as an attack in a staff meeting can. Withholding access to a shared file may prevent a colleague from doing their work. Excluding someone from essential communication can create problems even when the people involved have never met in person.

Written communication also leaves room for misunderstanding. When meaning is unclear, seek clarification before assuming intent. When the conduct is clearly harmful, address it directly.

The setting may change. The responsibility to treat people respectfully remains.

The Leader’s Responsibility

Employees watch how their boss handles disagreement, pressure, and mistakes. If we expect people to listen, we must listen.

If we expect accountability, we must acknowledge our own errors. If we insist that personal attacks are unacceptable, we cannot use them ourselves.

The Mentor Quadrant gives us an opportunity to help people develop the awareness and judgment needed to handle difficult situations more effectively.

Some conversations will lead to quick improvement. Others will require patience, practice, and additional support. There will also be situations in which mentoring is not sufficient.

Our responsibility is to recognize the difference, respond fairly, and protect the standards on which a healthy working relationship depends.

Understanding people and setting boundaries are both essential parts of people-centric leadership.

PART SIX

How Social Media and AI Are Likely to Change the Business Landscape

“Everyone in the boat has an oar.”

— Don Darvill



Chapter One

New Tools, Greater Expectations

Every small business owner knows that change is part of the price of ownership. Customer expectations change. Competitors change. The tools available to us change. The challenge is to recognize which developments deserve our attention and then decide how to use them to strengthen the business.

Social media and artificial intelligence are two developments that every entrepreneur should take seriously. Social media has changed how businesses are discovered, discussed, and judged. AI is beginning to change how work gets done, how information is used, and how customers receive service. Together, they are likely to create opportunities that once required resources beyond the reach of many small businesses. They will also create new pressures.

The pace of change will vary from one industry to another. No one can tell an entrepreneur exactly what their business will look like ten years from now. But we can examine the direction of travel and ask what it means for the principles discussed throughout this book.

In my view, those principles become even more relevant as the tools grow more powerful. Your brand still needs a clear identity. Your customers still expect you to deliver on your promises. And your people still need the knowledge and support that allow them to contribute.

The Customer Has a Public Voice

Word of mouth has always influenced the fortunes of a small business. A satisfied customer could recommend you to a friend. A disappointed customer could warn someone to stay away. Social media gives those conversations a public stage and the potential to reach people well beyond the original encounter.

A business can describe itself as friendly, dependable, and committed to quality. Customers can then offer their own account of whether that description is true. A photograph or a short video may tell a story that is very different from the one the owner intended to tell.

For a business that consistently delivers the goods, this creates an opportunity. Customers and employees can help others understand what makes the company worth choosing. A useful demonstration, an honest explanation, or a genuine recommendation can give a small business visibility it would otherwise struggle to achieve.

The same exposure can reveal weaknesses. A promotion may attract new customers, but if the operation is unprepared, the resulting delays and disappointments may become the next public conversation.

Imagine a coffee shop posting a video of a new breakfast item. Interest builds, and more customers arrive. If the team is ready, that attention may lead to repeat business. If supplies run out,

service slows, and employees cannot explain the offer, the promotion has created expectations the business cannot meet.

The lesson is familiar. Brand awareness creates an opportunity. Brand integrity determines what you do with it.

Attention Must Lead Somewhere

Social media makes certain numbers easy to follow: views, likes, followers, and comments. These measures can help show whether people noticed a message. They cannot, on their own, tell you whether the business is earning loyalty or improving its financial health.

The questions that matter to an entrepreneur go further. Did the campaign attract customers we can serve well? Did they return? What did it cost to win their business? After advertising, discounts, and additional labour, did the sales make a worthwhile contribution?

A large audience is useful only when it supports the objectives of the business. A smaller group of interested customers may be far more valuable than thousands of people who enjoy a video but have no reason to buy.

As more businesses compete for attention, I expect the pressure to demonstrate real value will grow. Owners will need to connect their online activity with the experience they can provide. Publishing more material will not automatically make that experience better.

Artificial Intelligence Enters the Small Business

Artificial intelligence is a broad term for computer systems that perform tasks such as recognizing patterns, making predictions, or generating material in response to instructions. The form attracting much of the current attention is generative AI, which can produce text, images, and other content.

For an entrepreneur, the practical question is what these capabilities can do for the business. An AI tool might help prepare a first draft of a product description, organize notes, suggest questions for an employee training exercise, or summarize customer feedback. Other kinds of AI may help identify patterns in sales or support inventory planning.

These uses are already being explored by smaller companies. The OECD's 2025 report on generative AI and the small-business workforce, based on a survey in seven countries including Canada, found that marketing and sales were the most common business support activities in which surveyed AI users applied the technology.[1]

That does not mean every application will be worthwhile. A tool's usefulness depends on the task, the information it receives, and the care taken with its output. Generative AI can produce convincing statements that are inaccurate. A polished answer still requires someone who knows enough to check it.

If a system drafts a product description, someone must verify the specifications. If it proposes a customer response, someone

must confirm that the response reflects the company's actual policy. If it summarizes sales information, someone must understand the records well enough to recognize a misleading conclusion.

The business remains responsible for what it publishes and what it promises.

When Social Media and AI Work Together

The connection between social media and AI is likely to be particularly significant for small businesses. AI can help develop ideas, prepare variations of a message, and organize recurring themes in customer comments. Work that once demanded considerable time may become easier to begin.

A neighbourhood restaurant, for example, could use AI to draft several versions of a message announcing a seasonal menu. The owner and employees could select the wording that suits the restaurant, check every detail, and replace generic language with something that reflects the actual business.

That is a useful application when it improves the message and saves time. It becomes a problem if the system invents an ingredient, promises an unavailable service, or produces an image that misrepresents what will arrive on the plate.

There is a broader implication. If more companies can produce professional-looking material quickly, presentation alone may become less distinctive. Customers may encounter more mes-

sages competing for their attention and have more difficulty deciding which deserve their confidence.

My expectation is that credible evidence will become increasingly valuable: accurate demonstrations, real customer experiences, and employees who can answer questions with authority. A business will need to show that there is substance behind its polished presentation.

The ability to say the right thing may become easier to acquire. The ability to deliver it consistently will still have to be earned.

Customer Service Will Face Greater Expectations

AI can help a business respond to routine questions, locate information, and support employees handling customer enquiries. Used well, it may reduce waiting and make answers more consistent.

Research on the introduction of an AI assistant in one customer-support operation found productivity improvements, with greater benefits among less experienced workers.[2] That is encouraging evidence for a particular use. It is not a guarantee that another business will achieve the same result.

A customer asking about opening hours may welcome an immediate automated answer. A customer dealing with a missing order, a repeated mistake, or an unusual problem may need someone who can exercise judgement and take responsibility.

The business must make that transition possible. An automated service that repeatedly gives an irrelevant answer can turn a minor problem into a serious frustration. Employees need a clear way to take over, access the relevant information, and resolve the issue.

As these tools become more familiar, customers may come to expect faster answers. That makes the quality of those answers more important. A quick response that creates confusion has achieved very little.

The More Your People Know

For the people-centric leader, AI raises a fundamental question: how can we use it to develop people's ability to contribute?

A system may help an employee find information, rehearse a difficult conversation, or prepare a first draft. But receiving an answer and understanding an answer are different things. If the employee cannot explain why the answer is appropriate, the learning is incomplete.

Consider a new supervisor preparing to handle a customer complaint. AI could suggest several possible responses. The development opportunity comes when the supervisor and the boss discuss those responses, compare them with the company's values, and decide what should actually happen.

Why is one response more suitable? What facts are missing? What authority does the supervisor have? When should the matter be referred to someone else?

These questions build judgement. They also reveal where more instruction is needed.

Employees should be involved in deciding where new tools will help. They often know which tasks cause unnecessary repetition, where customers become confused, and where inaccurate information could create trouble. Their experience belongs in the discussion before a system is introduced.

The principle at the heart of Quadrant Leadership remains relevant: the more your people know, the more they can contribute. Access to information can support that principle when it is accompanied by understanding, practice, and accountability.

Time Saved Must Be Put to Work

AI may help reduce some administrative work. For the entrepreneur who struggles to find free and flexible time, that possibility deserves attention.

But saving time is only the beginning. What will you do with it?

If an owner spends less time preparing routine material and uses that time to coach an employee, improve an operating standard, or understand a recurring customer problem, the business may gain twice: through greater efficiency and through better leadership.

If the time is simply absorbed by producing more posts, more reports, and more activity without a clear purpose, the benefit may be far smaller.

This is where the thinking behind Pareto's Law becomes useful. Which activities contribute most to the strength of the brand? Which tasks can be reduced so that more attention can be given to those priorities?

A faster way to perform busywork can still leave you busy. The goal is to create room for work that improves the business.

Jobs, Trust, and Responsibility

AI will change some tasks and may change the number or type of people a business needs. Some work may be automated, while other work will require new skills. Owners should be candid about that possibility rather than promise that nothing will change.

People will have understandable questions. Will their responsibilities be different? What training will they receive? How will their performance be assessed? An employee who fears an unexplained change is unlikely to contribute as openly as someone who understands the purpose and has a meaningful role in the process.

Trust also matters in the handling of information. Before employees use customer records or confidential business material in an AI tool, the company should establish which tools are approved and what information may be shared. Convenient access is not sufficient reason to enter sensitive material into a service whose handling of it has not been checked.

The same integrity applies to public communication. Invented reviews, misleading product images, and endorsements that conceal a paid relationship can damage the credibility the business is trying to build. AI-generated material should be checked for accuracy and used in a way that allows customers to understand what they are seeing.

The owner remains the steward of the brand. That responsibility extends to the systems acting on the company's behalf.

Start with a Problem Worth Solving

Every new tool competes for limited time and money. Start by identifying a real problem. Perhaps employees spend too long searching for information. Perhaps customer questions go unanswered during busy periods. Perhaps preparing useful promotional material has become an obstacle.

Choose a manageable test and decide in advance what success would mean. Include the time spent checking outputs, correcting mistakes, training employees, and maintaining the information the system uses. A low subscription price does not tell you the full cost.

Ask the people involved what improved and what became more difficult. Measure whether the change helped the customer, the employee, and the business. Expand what works and discontinue what does not.

Social media also brings dependence on platforms whose rules and reach can change. A business should give customers reliable

ways to find it again, including an accurate website and direct contact options. AI tools and social platforms should support relationships that the company is capable of sustaining.

The Brand Promise Still Has to Be Kept

Social media and AI are likely to make some business capabilities more accessible while raising expectations about speed, convenience, and communication. They may help small companies compete in areas where larger organizations once held a substantial advantage. They will also make it easier for competitors to improve their own capabilities.

The opportunity for the people-centric leader is to connect those tools with a clear purpose: helping a capable team deliver a better customer experience.

Your business may be discovered in a new way. Some of its work may be completed differently. Your employees may have access to resources that would once have been difficult to imagine.

What customers will want to know is whether they can trust you to do what you said you would do.

That answer will be found in the quality of the product, the reliability of the service, and the people who stand behind both. The tools will continue to change. Your brand promise will still have to be kept.

Sources for Part Six

[1] OECD (2025), Generative AI and the SME Workforce: New Survey Evidence. Based on a 2024 survey of more than 5,000 SMEs in seven countries. The finding cited concerns business support activities among SMEs using generative AI, not all small businesses.

https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/generative-ai-and-the-sme-workforce_2d08b99d-en/full-report/component-4.html

[2] Erik Brynjolfsson, Danielle Li, and Lindsey Raymond, Generative AI at Work, NBER Working Paper 31161 (2023). Findings concern one customer-support setting and should not be generalized as a promised result for other businesses.

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