NINE LIES ABOUT WORK
A Freethinking Leader's Guide to the Real World

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INTRODUCTION

- "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure, that just ain't so." -Mark Twain
- This paradox led to the core idea and audience of the book.
  - The idea is this: the world of work today is overflowing with systems, processes, tools, and assumptions that are deeply flawed and that push directly against our ability to express what is unique about each of us in the work we do every day.

LIE #1: PEOPLE CARE WHICH COMPANY THEY WORK FOR

Truth: While people might care which company they join, they don't care which company they work for. The truth is that, once there, people care which team they're on.

- Culture matters, according to the voluminous literature on the topic, because it has three powerful contributions to make.
  - #1: First, it tells you who you are at work.
    - If you're at Patagonia, you'd rather be surfing. You work in beautiful Oxnard, California, and your onboarding consists of a day-long beach party where you are gifted the CEO's autobiography—Let My People Go Surfing—and where your first meeting takes place around a campfire.
  - #2: Second, culture has come to be how we choose to explain success.
    - What is a win for the company? What do you celebrate?
  - #3: And third, culture is now a watchword for where we want our company to go.
    - Almost overnight, a big part of the job description of senior corporate leaders has become to create a specific sort of culture, a culture of "performance," perhaps, or a culture of "feedback," or a culture of "inclusion," or a culture of "innovation";

to shape the direction of the company they lead by infusing it with particular traits that govern how people behave. Beyond explaining the now, culture has become our handle on the next.

- The best performing teams possess these 8 qualities.
  - #1: I am really enthusiastic about the mission of my company.
  - #2: At work, I clearly understand what is expected of me.
  - #3: In my team, I am surrounded by people who share my values.
  - #4: I have the chance to use my strengths every day at work.
  - #5: My teammates have my back.
  - #6: I know I will be recognized for excellent work.
  - #7: I have great confidence in my company's future.
  - #8: In my work, I am always challenged to grow.
- What we, as team members, want from you, our team leader, is
  - #1: firstly that you make us feel part of something bigger, that you show us how what we are doing together is important and meaningful; and
  - #2: secondly, that you make us feel that you can see us, and connect to us, and care about us, and challenge us, in a way that recognizes who we are as individuals. We ask you to give us this sense of universality—all of us together—and at the same time to recognize our own uniqueness; to magnify what we all share, and to lift up what is special about each of us.
- When we push on the data, and examine closely its patterns and variations, we arrive at this conclusion: while people might care which company they join, they don't care which company they work for. The truth is that, once there, people care which team they're on.
- Teams simplify: they help us see where to focus and what to do. Culture doesn't do this, funnily enough, because it's too abstract. Teams make work real: they ground us in the day-to-day, both in terms of the content of our work and the colleagues with whom we do it. Culture doesn't.
- There are three things for you to do as a leader of a team.
  - #1: First, you should know the answers to the eight questions for your team, all the time. There are technologies available to help you do this, but the easiest place to start is to ask your team members, one person at a time. Whatever their answers are, you'll always be smarter because of them, and you'll always know you're paying attention to something that matters.
  - #2: Second, read on to understand more clearly how to build a great team, and how the lies you'll encounter get in the way of that. Your role as team leader is the most important role in any company. And who your company chooses to make team leader is the most important decision it ever makes. You have by far the greatest influence on the distinctive local experience of your team. This is a weighty responsibility, but at least it's yours. We want to help you step into it.

- #3: And third, when you're next looking to join a company, don't bother asking if it has a great culture—no one can tell you that in any real way.

LIE #2: THE BEST PLAN WINS

Truth: It's not true that the best plan wins. It is true that the best intelligence wins.

- When you are asked to be a team leader, often the first thing you are asked to do is create a plan.
- Our tendency...have a big plan up top, then those plans cascade down through the company.
- Sure, planning is exciting in the beginning, but the more you sit in all these planning meetings, the more a feeling of futility creeps in. While it all looks great on paper, tidy and perfect, you sense it's never really going to play out like this, and that as a result you'll soon be back in yet another planning meeting. You'll leave this one with the broad contours of your plan sketched out, and you'll agree on the next steps necessary to refine those contours into something specific and actionable, and then the meeting to make things actionable will get postponed for a bit, and then, when it finally happens, it will drift off in another direction. And then, when your team finally gets around to nailing the details, some new idea or thought or realization will emerge that leads you to rethink what you started off with.
- And even if you do weave together the most carefully agreed upon plan, your people inevitably chafe at being told what to do in the context of something so static, so conceptual, and potentially so out of touch with the real world they face.
- So, though you are told that the best plan wins, the reality is quite different. Many plans, particularly those created in large organizations, are overly generalized, quickly obsolete, and frustrating to those asked to execute them. It's far better to coordinate your team's efforts in real time, relying heavily on the informed, detailed intelligence of each unique team member.
- <u>When we understand the characteristics of an intelligence system, as distinct from a planning system—accurate, real-time data, distributed broadly and quickly, and presented in detail so that team members can see and react to patterns in deciding for themselves what to do—we begin to see them everywhere.</u>
- Their underlying assumption is that people are wise, and that if you can present them with accurate, real-time, reliable data about the real world in front of them, they'll invariably make smart decisions.
- <u>It's not true that the best plan wins. It is true that the best intelligence wins.</u>
- What can you do as a team leader to create such an intelligence system for your team?
  - #1: First, liberate as much information as you possibly can.
    - Think about all the sources of information you have, and make as many of them as possible available to your team, on demand.

- ○ #2: Second, watch carefully to see which data your people find useful.

- ○ #3: Third, trust your people to make sense of the data.
- A pretty good way to ruin someone's day is to fill it with meetings. Meetings, for most of us, are a way of taking time that could be put to good use in doing real work, and instead using that time to hear presentations of varying relevance to our immediate challenges, or to discuss topics that might appear important in the grand scheme of things, but that hardly seem urgent on any given day. And while countless meeting "best practices" (have a written agenda, document follow-up items, and so on) at least ensure some degree of utility, <u>the fact remains that most meetings contain one or more people thinking to themselves that they could be doing something useful, if only they weren't doing this.</u>
- Which makes what General McChrystal came up with in Iraq all the more remarkable, and all the more counterintuitive. Because what he did was to create a meeting, and moreover a meeting that took place six days a week, for two hours a day. For two thousand people.
  - ○ The meeting was called the O&I—the Operations and Intelligence meeting. Every day, at 9:00 a.m. Washington time, 4:00 p.m. Iraq time, McChrystal's entire command—and, ultimately, anyone from any other agency with an interest in understanding what was happening—would join, via video from wherever they were in the world, what amounted to a two-hour information-sharing session. The time was filled with brief updates, each a minute long, from anyone who had something pertinent to share, followed by four minutes of Q&A from the leadership team, or from anyone else who wanted to know more. The O&I had existed before McChrystal, but in a very different form. It had been shorter, and more exclusive, limited to those who had a "need to know" any particular piece of information—it was part of a quintessential planning system. McChrystal's O&I was a very different beast. It was open to anyone who wanted to learn or share information. It was democratic, in the sense that giving updates and asking questions could be done by anyone, not just senior officers. It was spontaneous, in that updates were not required to be polished or vetted, only brief. And it was frequent. <u>His system embodied these few truths: that information grows stale fast, and must therefore be shared fast; that the best way to enable coordinated action on the ground is to coordinate not actions themselves, but rather the information the ground needs right now; that the best judges of what information is and isn't valuable are the end users of that information; and, critically, that the best people to make sense of information are the users of that information.</u> And finally, that the best way to make sense of it was together.
  - ○ And while this is an example of an intelligence system at huge scale, if you study the best team leaders you'll discover that many of them share a similarly frequent sense-making ritual—not with two thousand people, but with two. It's called a check-in, and in simple terms it's a frequent, one-on-one conversation about near-term future work between a team leader and a team member. How frequent? Every week. These

leaders understand that goals set at the beginning of the year have become irrelevant by the third week of the year, and that a year is not a marathon, planned out in detail long in advance, but is instead a series of fifty-two little sprints, each informed by the changing state of the world. They realize that the key role of a team leader is to ensure that Sprint Number Thirty-Six is as focused and as energizing as was Sprint Number One. So, each and every week these leaders have a brief check-in with each team member, during which they ask two simple questions: What are your priorities this week? How can I help?

- They are not looking for a to-do list from the team member. They simply want to discuss the team member's priorities, obstacles, and solutions in real time, while the work itself is ongoing. Making sense of it together can happen only in the now. The generalizations that emerge once the passage of time has blurred the details are not the stuff of good sense making. So, doing a check-in once every six weeks or even once a month is useless, because you'll wind up talking in generalities. <u>Actually, the data reveals that checking in with your team members once a month is literally worse than useless.</u> While team leaders who check in once a week see, on average, a 13 percent increase in team engagement, those who check in only once a month see a 5 percent decrease in engagement.5 It's as if team members are saying to you, "I'd rather you not waste my time if all we're going to do is talk generalities. Either get into the nitty-gritty of my work and how you can help right now, or leave me alone."

- <u>This leads us to one of the most important insights shared by the best team leaders: frequency trumps quality.</u>
- Now, you, the team leader, might think, Well, I would love to check in with my people every week, but I can't. I've simply got too many people! If that's you, then yes—you have too many people.
- If you can check in with eight people, but you can't fit nine into your schedule, your span of control is eight. If you can find a way to check in with twenty people, then your span of control is twenty.
- This is the work of leading. If you don't like this, if the idea of weekly check-ins bores or frustrates you or you think that once a week is just "too much," that's fine—but, for the love of Hugh Dowding, don't be a leader. In the previous chapter we saw how critical it was for team members to come to trust their team leader. Frequent sense making together—whether in McChrystal's O&I meeting, or your weekly check-ins—can help with this since it leads not only to better decisions but also to the building of trust.
- The best, most effective way to create clarity of expectations is to figure out how to let your people figure it out for themselves. This isn't a question of removing complexity, but is rather one of locating it in the right place—not hidden from view as the input for a grand plan, but rather shared for all to see. To do this, give your people as much accurate data as you can, as often as you can—a real-time view of what's going on right now—and then a way to make sense of it, together. Trust the intelligence of your team.

LIE #3: THE BEST COMPANIES CASCADE GOALS

Truth: The best companies don't cascade goals, they cascade meaning.

- Goals, at their best, enable to take what we value most and by adding detail and timelines, chunk these values into a describable outcome. If they did this in the corporate world, they would be very useful.
- We have come to believe that the best companies cascade goals. Big goals set up top, then cascade down to the individual.
- In fact, the weight of evidence suggests that cascaded goals do the opposite: they limit performance. They slow your boat down. NY cab example. On rainy days, when you need a cab the most, you can't find one. Why? They have daily quotas they are trying to hit, and when they hit them, they stop. So they hit them sooner on rainy days, and hence, there are fewer cabs. Same thing happens with other quotas and targets.
- But these sales goals don't beget more sales; they just anticipate what the sales will be. Sales goals are for performance prediction, not performance creation.
- The truth is that progress towards goals are not linear. Example...marathon. You can train all the way up to the marathon, but until you run the marathon and finish it, are you really 25% complete? 50% complete? You are really 0% complete until you cross that finish line...
- And this in turn means that the only criterion for what makes a good goal is that the person working toward it must set it for him- or herself, voluntarily. The only way a goal has any use at all is if it comes out of you as an expression of what you deem valuable. It doesn't have to be SMART, or big, hairy, and audacious. It doesn't need to contain key performance indicators or be built from objectives and key results. If a goal is going to be useful, if it is going to help you contribute more, then the only criterion is that you must set it for yourself, voluntarily. Any goal imposed upon you from above is an un-goal.
- This doesn't mean, though, that there is nothing we should cascade in our organizations. Since goals, done properly, are only and always an expression of what a person finds most meaningful, then to create alignment in our company we should do everything we can to ensure that everyone in the company understands what matters most. And so the truth: <u>The best companies don't cascade goals; the best companies cascade meaning.</u>
- Whereas cascaded goals are a control mechanism, cascaded meaning is a release mechanism. It brings to life the context within which everyone works, but it leaves the locus of control—for choosing, deciding, prioritizing, goal setting—where it truly resides, and where understanding of the world and the ability to do something about it intersect: with the team member.
- Zuckerberg: You may not see the distinction, but he does, and so today—just as he's done every six months for the last ten years—he's intent on announcing another distinction to the world and, more importantly, to all of the people who work for him. This is what Zuckerberg does. He takes his values so seriously that with each new insight of his, he tweaks and course

corrections and tweaks and learns and tweaks again, and then with great weight and import he announces the tweak to the world.

- Look on the walls, and you'll see another Facebook oddity: posters. Physical, printed posters. Outside, on the conference-room walls, behind the reception desk; posters next to posters next to yet more posters. Each one is an announcement of something someone is passionate about, some hobby, event, or activity—underwater skateboarding, Time's Up, Black Lives Matter, or the local tiddlywinks group. Why would something as old-economy as a poster proliferate at a high-tech digital-media company? It's all part of Facebook's stated mission to facilitate and reinforce real human connection. If you want people to connect with other people, then you have to be curious about what each person is interested in and passionate about, and then find ways to surface and celebrate these passions. Just as we draw on our cave's wall, so we put up our posters. And in this way we learn about one another.

- To be specific, here are the three levers they used to such great effect. The first is expressed values: what you write on the walls. We don't mean that you should literally write out your "values." Many leaders and many companies set about doing this and wind up with a list of generic values such as integrity, innovation, or, God forbid, teamwork—which are about as meaningful as Muzak—and then wonder why the whole exercise doesn't seem to have made much difference. Instead, apply some creativity to how you want to bring your meaning to life for your people. Don't tell them what you value, show them. What do you actually want them to see and to bump into at work? Facebook's Sun Microsystems logos, its love of posters, and the "Hacker Company" signage are all vivid examples of this. What are your expressed values? What have you written on your walls? What do your people encounter when they walk in through the door. What do they see when they turn to the left? And what do those things tell them about who you are? A second way to cascade meaning is through rituals. Facebook has their famous bimonthly hack-a-thon; Chick-fil-A stops work on Sundays. Sam Walton, founder of Walmart and Sam's Club, had a ritual he practiced every single Friday until he was physically unable to do it anymore: he would pick a store, move the merchandise around on a particular end-cap display, and come back on Saturday to see what had sold. It was his own version of QMI, or quick market intelligence, and what it signaled, to his employees, was his deep belief that no one, not even the boss, knows the brain of the customer better than the customer. You already have rituals, whether they are conscious or unconscious, and these rituals—the things you do repeatedly—communicate to your people what is meaningful to you. If we followed you around for a week, we'd see them. Let's say you have a meeting: What time do you show up? Are you five minutes early, or five minutes late? What are you wearing? Do you catch up with your team members about their personal lives or do you launch right into business? Who talks first? Do you allow your team members to speak, or do you cut them off? Does the meeting go long? Do you hold people back to finish things up? These are all aspects of your rituals, and we, your team, see them, make sense of them, and draw our conclusions—whether you want us to or not. The question, then, isn't whether you have rituals or not. The question is whether

or not you are deliberate about what your rituals communicate. To see the power of a ritual to vividly

communicate a leader's meaning, juxtapose Facebook's rituals with Steve Jobs's. At the end of every week, either Zuckerberg or Sandberg goes to Facebook's largest cafeteria and holds an all-hands meeting during which any employee can ask any question that he or she wants to, and the two top leaders commit to answering each question as best they can. The purpose of these meetings is contained not so much in the actual substance of the answers as it is in the reinforcement that Facebook values transparency and openness so much that they will dedicate a significant chunk of top leaders' time to it each week.

- The third lever is stories. Chick-fil-A makes an art of its storytelling through the operator profiles during Seminar. The company dedicates time to going out to each operator's store, taking photos, and learning about his or her family and community, precisely so it can share these stories with the rest of the company.
- Goals set by others imprison us. When we create our own, we find freedom.

LIE #4: THE BEST PEOPLE ARE WELL ROUNDED

Truth: Diversity makes the team great.

- "Something you are good at" is not a strength; it is an ability. And, yes, you will be able to demonstrate high ability—albeit briefly—at quite a few things that bring you no joy whatsoever. A strength, on the other hand, is an "activity that makes you feel strong." This sort of activity possesses for you certain definable qualities. Before you do it, you find yourself actively looking forward to doing it. While you are doing it, time seems to speed up, one moment blurring into the next. And after you've done it, while you may be tired and not quite ready to suit up and tackle it again, you nonetheless feel filled up, proud. It is this combination of three distinct feelings—positive anticipation beforehand, flow during, and fulfillment afterward—that makes a certain activity a strength. And it is this combination of feelings that produces in you the yearning to do the activity again and again, to practice it over and over, to thrill to the chance to do it just one more time. A strength is far more appetite than ability, and indeed it is the appetite ingredient that feeds the desire to keep working on it and that, in the end, produces the skill improvement necessary for excellent performance.
- Yet the data does not lie. Of the eight conditions that are the signature of the highest-performing teams, there is one in particular that stands out—in study after study, irrespective of industry and irrespective of nationality—as the single most powerful predictor of a team's productivity. It is each team member's sense that "I have the chance to use my strengths every day at work."

- This is the lie that underpins the tyranny of competencies, and it is persistent and pervasive. But to see the truth, we need only to understand two particular facts.

  - First, competencies are impossible to measure. Take "strategic thinking" as an example. Is this a state, something that is variable and subject to flux? Or is it a trait, something that is inherent and relatively stable over time? In the field of psychometrics we measure these two phenomena quite differently.
    - States change over time.
    - Traits are inherent in a person. Extrovert, introvert, etc.
  - Again, no. Which brings us to the second fact: the research into high performance in any profession or endeavor reveals that excellence is idiosyncratic. The well-rounded high performer is a creature of theory world. In the real world each high performer is unique and distinct, and excels precisely because that person has understood his or her uniqueness and cultivated it intelligently.

- In the real world, each of us, imperfect as we are, strives to make the most of the unique mix of traits and skills with which we've been blessed. Those of us who do this best—who find what we love what we do, and cultivate this love with intelligence and discipline—are the ones who contribute most. The best people are not well-rounded, finding fulfillment in their uniform ability. Quite the opposite, in fact—the best people are spiky, and in their lovingly honed spikiness they find their biggest contribution, their fastest growth, and, ultimately, their greatest joy.

- And the great shame in all of this is that the very systems that we might hope would be aimed at discovering and unleashing each person's unique talents have, in fact, the effect of inhibiting those talents, and denying what makes each one of us unique. They don't, in the end, help performance. They hinder it.

- The first strategy is this: Get into the outcomes business. A team leader at one of the early Silicon Valley startups faced an unusual situation. He had assigned a new hire to work with one of his experienced engineers, and now the experienced engineer was complaining. The new hire was arrogant and prickly, he said, but worse than this, he had awful body odor—the team leader should fire him. But the team leader saw something in his unusual employee, and worked out a different solution. He figured that the two could work together as long as they weren't in the office at the same time, and instead passed work back and forth. And so, in the early days of Atari, Steve Jobs worked nights.7

- You can do the same. Define the outcomes you want from your team and its members, and then look for each person's strength signs to figure out how each person can reach those outcomes most efficiently, most amazingly, most creatively, and most joyfully. The moment you realize you're in the outcomes business is the moment you turn each person's uniqueness from a bug into a feature. And what you will be doing, when you step back and look, is fitting the role to the person—which leads us to the second strategy: Define the adjustable seat.

- Hence the third strategy: Use team technology. To help you address everything that needs to be addressed, the real world has devised a supremely effective technology for integrating people's wonderfully imperfect capabilities in the service of a given objective. It's called a team, and the essential magic of a team is that it makes weirdness useful. You are weird. You don't

- seem weird to you because you are with you all the time. But you are weird, to everyone else, and they are weird to you: gloriously, beautifully weird. It's weird that others don't get a kick out of the same things that we do. It's weird that some people love doing things we find excruciating. And when we see someone do something better than we ever imagined possible, it can be confounding, perplexing, astonishing—and also, of course, a source of relief. Thank goodness that woman there loves to confront people. Thank goodness that man there loves thorny political situations. Thank goodness that woman there is so impatient for action. If the people around us were not wired to be weird, then we'd have to spend all of our time scrambling to find someone who actually stood out. Instead, we can partner them up, and wire their weirdness together into a team.
- We need to partner with people whose strengths—whose weirdness, whose spikiness—is different from ours if we are to achieve results that demand more abilities than any of us has alone. And this means, in turn, that the more different we are from one another, the more we need one another. The more different we are, the more we rely on understanding and appreciating the strengths of others, and on building a shared understanding of purpose, and an atmosphere of safety and trust, so that those strengths can be most usefully put to work. Well-roundedness is a misguided and futile objective when it comes to individual people; but when it comes to teams, it's an absolute necessity. The more diverse the team members, the more weird, spiky, and idiosyncratic they are, the more well-rounded the team.

LIE #5: PEOPLE NEED FEEDBACK

Truth: people need attention—and when you give it to us in a safe and nonjudgmental environment, we will come and stay and play and work.

- People leave teams, not companies, as we've seen. That said, it does seem that Bridgewater has more than its fair share of teams that people want to leave. But while Ray Dalio and Bridgewater may be outliers, they are at the same time clearly part of the established consensus that people need feedback, and that the best companies and the most effective team leaders must figure out how to give it to them.
- One of the inconvenient truths about humans is that we have poor theories of others, and these theories lead us, among other things, to design our working world to remedy or to insulate against failings that we see in others but don't see in ourselves.*
- Snapchat: disappears, no feedback, move on to the next thing. Extremely popular.

- The Snapchat growth story is only the most recent addition to a large body of evidence about the human need for uncritical attention.
- More recently, epidemiologists, psychometricians, and statisticians have shown that by far the best predictor of heart disease, depression, and suicide is loneliness—if you deprive us of the attention of others, we wither.

- It took awhile to figure out what was going on, but the consensus that ultimately emerged from the Hawthorne experiments has had a profound effect on the science of work. The conclusion was not that workers craved a brighter workplace or a tidier one, or, for that matter, a darker one or a messier one. Instead, what the workers were responding to was attention. Each of these interventions demonstrated to the workers that management was interested in them and their experience, and they liked that. And thus liking their work a little more, they worked a little better, and a little faster, and by the end of the day produced a lot more. The truth, then, is that people need attention—and when you give it to us in a safe and nonjudgmental environment, we will come and stay and play and work.
- Positive attention, in other words, is thirty times more powerful than negative attention in creating high performance on a team. (It's also, if you're keeping score, twelve hundred times more powerful than ignoring people, but we haven't yet come across a management theory that advocates ignoring people.) So while we may occasionally have to help people get better at something that's holding them back, if paying attention to what people can't do is our default setting as team leaders, and if all our efforts are directed at giving and receiving negative feedback more often and more efficiently, then we're leaving enormous potential on the table. People don't need feedback. They need attention, and moreover, attention to what they do the best. And they become more engaged and therefore more productive when we give it to them.
- Negative feedback doesn't enable learning. It systematically inhibits it and is, neurologically speaking, how to create impairment.
- In the students who received attention focused on their dreams and how they might go about achieving them, however, the sympathetic nervous system was not activated. Instead it was the parasympathetic nervous system that lit up. This is sometimes referred to as the "rest and digest" system. To quote the researchers again: "[T]he Parasympathetic Nervous System . . . stimulates adult neurogenesis (i.e., growth of new neurons) . . . , a sense of well being, better immune system functioning, and cognitive, emotional, and perceptual openness."
- There's one thing you can start to do immediately: get into the conscious habit of looking for what's going well for each of your team members. The pull to look at the negative is a very strong one—the Berkeley psychologist Rick Hanson sums up the research memorably when he says, "the brain is like Velcro for negative experiences, but Teflon for positive ones"—which is why making this a conscious habit is so important. important.8 It might not come naturally or easily for you, but with such a payoff in terms of performance, engagement, and growth, it'll be worth practicing it.

- So, when it comes to your people, what should be your high-priority interrupt? If what you want is improvement, then it should be whenever someone on your team does something that really works. The goal is to consciously spend your days alert for those times when someone on your team does something so easily and effectively that
- It is not about praise per se, it is about allowing the brain to be in a state where learning takes place.

- The trick to doing this is not just to tell the person how well she's performed, or how good she is. While simple praise is by no means a bad thing, it captures a moment in the past rather than creating the possibility of more such moments in the future. Instead, what you'll want to do is tell the person what you experienced when that moment of excellence caught your attention—your instantaneous reaction to what worked
- To conjure excellence from your team requires a different focus for your attention. If you see somebody doing something that really works, stopping them and replaying it to them isn't only a high-priority interrupt, it is arguably your highest-priority interrupt. Get into this habit and you'll be far more likely to lead a high-performing team.
- What do you do when someone asks you for feedback?
  - First, as we saw earlier in the chapter, your brain is wired uniquely, such that the world you see and the sense you make of it, the things in it that draw you in, or repel you, or drain you, or light you up, and the insights these things spark in your mind—all these are utterly different from everyone else's, and become even more different as you grow. As a result, the advice given to you by a leader who is not you will not necessarily work for you. The best team leaders know this: They realize that, for example, if you are struggling with public speaking, they cannot just advise you to organize your flow, practice your stories, and nail your ending, because what you mean by flow and story and nail the ending are going to be utterly different from what they mean by those very same words. They understand that the path you will take to your best performance will be unpredictably different from theirs.
  - The second thing that great team leaders know, and that brain scientists have shown, is that an "insight" is brain food. These scientists aren't yet sure whether this is because insights come with a nice shot of dopamine or some other neurochemical transmitter, but what they do know is that the brain is built such that a new insight—"a feeling of knowing generated from within," to use their phrasing—feels good. Perhaps you have felt this. Perhaps you have noticed it in others when you've tried repeatedly to teach and advise but seen performance leap only when your team member has combined this advice with her own raw material to create a flash of new understanding. This insight then becomes her sense maker, her lens through which to view the challenge in front of her, her guide as she navigates her way forward. This insight is learning, and while it can be nudged from without, it is only ever generated from within.

- Start with the present. If your team member approaches you with a problem, he is in it now. He is feeling weak, broken, or challenged, and you have to address that. He is feeling weak, broken, or challenged, and you have to address that. But rather than dealing with it head-on, ask your colleague to tell you three things that are working for him right now. These "things that are working" might be related to the situation, or they might be completely separate from it. They might be significant or trivial. It doesn't matter. Just ask for three "things that are working." In doing that, you're priming his mind with oxytocin—what we sometimes call the "love drug," but which here is better thought of as the "creativity" drug. By getting him to think about some

specific things that are going right, you are deliberately altering his brain chemistry so that he can be open to new solutions, and new ways of thinking or acting. (By the way, you can be totally up-front with him about what you are doing—the evidence suggests that the more active a participant he is in this, the more effective the technique.13) Next, go to the past. Ask him, "When you had a problem like this in the past, what did you do that worked?" Much of our lives are lived through patterns, so it's highly likely that he has encountered this problem before and found himself similarly stuck. But on one of these occasions he will almost certainly have found some way forward, some action or insight or connection that worked for him and enabled him to move out of the mess. Get him thinking about that, and seeing it in his mind's eye: what he actually felt and did, and what happened next. Finally, turn to the future. Ask your team member, "What do you already know you need to do? What do you already know works in this situation?" In a sense you're operating under the assumption that he's already made his decision—you're just helping him find it. At this point, by all means offer up one or two of your own paintings, to see if they might clarify his own. But above all keep asking him to describe what he already sees, and what he already knows works for him.

LIE #6: PEOPLE CAN RELIABLY RATE OTHER PEOPLE

Truth: People can't rate others, but they can reliably rate their own experience.

- It is going to bother you greatly to learn, then, that in the real world, none of this works. None of the mechanisms and meetings—not the models, not the consensus sessions, not the exhaustive competencies, not the carefully calibrated rating scales—none of them will ensure that the truth of you emerges in the room, because all of them are based on the belief that people can reliably rate other people. And they can't.
- People have rating patterns. The more complex the system, the more these patterns play a part.
- So we get bad data. We know that good data has three characteristics: 1) It is reliable; 2) it is variable; 3) and it is valid.
    - Reliable: We are confident it is measuring what it says it is measuring.

- - Variable: It shows the natural range that exists in the real world.
    - Valid: The data relates to what we are trying to measure. High scores on performance correlate to high performance in the field.
  - Have to start with reliability.
  - People can't rate others, but they can reliably rate their own experience.
    - Likewise, if we ask you to rate one of your teams on "growth potential," then your rating is unreliable—because what is growth potential, and how can you be the judge of it? But if we ask if you plan to promote her today, your answer is reliable. While you may not be able to project into her psyche and accurately perceive her growth potential, you are able

      to ask yourself if you plan to promote her today, and the answer you get back will be a reliable one.
    - <u>So as a general rule, if you're after good data, be on the lookout for questions that ask only that you rate your own experience, or intended actions.</u>

LIE #7: PEOPLE HAVE POTENTIAL

Truth: It is not about whether people have potential, it is about how much momentum they have.

- Our evaluation of people often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. We label someone as having "high potential" and that label sticks. They get more resources, more opportunities, and more benefit of the doubt. We label someone as low potential, the reverse occurs.
- In chapter 4 we drew the distinction between traits, which are inherent in a person, and states, which are changeable in the person. Using this framing, potential is clearly something we think of as a trait—it is inherent in the person, some people have more of it than others, and those who do take it everywhere with them.*
- Assuming it is a trait...can we really measure it?
- Evidence for the existence of general potential is nonexistent. Instead the evidence points in exactly the opposite direction. We know that each person's brain grows by adding more synaptic connections, that each person's synaptic pattern is unique, and that therefore each person's brain grows uniquely. Therefore we know a) that the ability to learn exists in us all, b) that it shows up differently in each of us, and c) that while we can all get better at anything, none of us will ever be able to rewire our brains to excel at everything. More simply, we can all get better, and we will all get better at different things, in different ways, and at different speeds.
- Think in terms of "momentum" rather than potential
  - #1: Who are they as a person?
    - What do they love about their job?
    - What fires them up?

- - ■ Why do they do what they do?
    - ○ #2: How have they progressed through the world thus far?
        - ■ Past performance.
        - ■ Experience and skill.
- Reject the concept of high potential and low potential. Think in terms of momentum...everyone has momentum and the question is how much do you have right now?
- Convey to the person that their momentum, the speed and trajectory of that momentum, are a) knowable; b) changeable; c) within their control.
- Andy is a team leader at Cisco, and a little while ago he set out to help each of his team members see what their futures could look like. He started by asking them to imagine their

dream jobs—in other words, to reflect on their aspirations—and then to make this practical by searching on LinkedIn. The task he set them was to split into pairs, and then to spend two hours searching on LinkedIn for jobs that came close to their ideal—with no limit on which company, or industry, or line of work these jobs were in. He asked them to work with their partner to narrow down the list to the one or two roles that excited them the most. And then he asked them to analyze these jobs in terms of the skills and experiences and qualifications they drew on, and then to compare those lists with the skills and experiences and qualifications that each of them already had, and to figure out which new ones they wanted to go after. He wasn't, in other words, evaluating them on their potential, and sorting them into those who could grow in some way and those who couldn't. Instead, he was helping each of them to get clear on who they were and where they wanted to go (again, mass), and on the measurable skills and experiences they had and wanted to acquire (again, velocity). His presumption was that everyone had momentum, and that it was his job to help them figure out how to direct it. "I think there's a lot of energy within our teams that isn't being used," he told us, "and I have a lot of people who, given the right circumstances, the right engagements, the right customer—whatever it is, we can find what enables them to share that energy, to bring it out."

LIE #8: WORK-LIFE BALANCE MATTERS MOST

Truth: Love-in-work matters most.

- If we've learned anything about what we want from our world of work, it's that we crave work with meaning and purpose.
- In theory then, the people with jobs that have deep meaning and purpose (possibly doctors) should feel the most rewarded from their work. It's not the case. Quite the opposite in fact. High levels of stress in this profession. Lots of burnout. And this is the case for most professions.

- So we try to balance this stress out with something else. With life.
- So there 's this sort of assumption that work is bad, life is good, balance work out with life.
- The first problem is the concept of "balance". Comes from Greek physicians that believed each of us contained four humors...black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm...and that we had to keep them all in balance. Lack of balance caused sickness.
- We have applied this to other areas of life since then. And it doesn't work. We need to change how we think about this concept.
- You are one such process. Neither you nor your life are in balance, nor will you ever be. Instead you are a unique creature who takes inputs from the world, metabolizes them in some way, produces something useful, and does so in such a way that you can keep doing it. At least, you

- are when you're healthy, when you're at your best, when you are contributing all that your talents allow you to. When you're flourishing you are acting on the world and it on you. Your world offers up to you raw material—activities, situations, outcomes—outcomes—in all parts of your life, and some of this raw material invigorates you and gives you energy. You are at your healthiest when you find this particular kind of raw material, draw it in, allow it to feed you, and use it to contribute something—and when that contribution actually seems to leave you with more energy, not less. This state, not balance, is what we should strive for. What should we call it? The Greeks called it eudaimonia, which sounds like a cleaning product but which actually means "the fullest and purest expression of you in your most elevated state."
- outcomes—in all parts of your life, and some of this raw material invigorates you and gives you energy. You are at your healthiest when you find this particular kind of raw material, draw it in, allow it to feed you, and use it to contribute something—and when that contribution actually seems to leave you with more energy, not less. This state, not balance, is what we should strive for. What should we call it? The Greeks called it eudaimonia, which sounds like a cleaning product but which actually means "the fullest and purest expression of you in your most elevated state."
- When you are in love, you are a different person. It lifts you up. You feel like your best self. But you don't get there by writing these concepts down. You get them if you create them.
- Organizations are not powerless, but their power (and their name) comes from their ability to organize what is already there in plain view. Your organization, if it is careless, can crush your spirit, can diminish or ignore your daimon. But only you can animate it. Only you can bring love into your world at work.
- How much of your day is spent doing the part of your job that you love the most? Less than 20%? Burnout is on the way.
- Do you get to play to your strengths every day? Do you have freedom?
- Twice a year, spend a week in love with your work. Select a regular week at work and take a pad around with you for the entire week. Down the middle of this pad draw a vertical line to make two columns, and write "Loved It" at the top of one column and "Loathed It" at the top of the other.* During the week, any time you find yourself feeling one of the signs of love—before you do something, you actively look forward to it; while you're doing it, time speeds up and you

find yourself in flow; after you've done it, there's part of you looking forward to when you can do it again—scribble down exactly what that something was in the "Loved It" column.

- Should you work fifteen hours a day? Should you have three kids before the age of thirty? Should you devote all your time to your career until you can afford the day care you will need? Should you take six weeks of vacation a year, or none? Should you quit your job and go surfing or van-ing? These are all choices that only you can make, and the only way to make them wisely is to honor the truth that your life will give you strength if you can but pay attention to your emotional reactions to the events and activities and responsibilities you choose to fill it with.

- Maximize your strengths, the things you are in love with, that get you in flow, and incorporate the "loathed it" stuff as little as possible into your life.

LIE #9: LEADERSHIP IS A THING

Truth: Followership is a thing. And people follow "spikes", those who stand out from the crowd and are have certain highly developed qualities rather than a set of well rounded qualities.

- We agree that certain people exhibit a definable, consistent, and meaningful quality called leadership.
- But it is a vague concept. There are some things that we know are true. Being inspirational. Being able to create and articulate a vision. Vulnerability is good up until the point that it causes doubt in the leader's certainty of direction.
- Thoughts:
    - #1: The ability to lead is rare.
    - #2: Leaders have shortcomings like everyone else.
        - So there is not a list of essential qualities of a leader.
        - Many great leaders lacked key qualities that you would consider necessary for leadership.
- Simply put...a leader is someone who has followers.
    - So the question may be better put as "why do we follow certain people?"
    - We want to feel part of something bigger than ourselves.

- - There is not a set of qualities for a leader, but rather a list of feelings of a follower.
- Your goal as a leader is to take people's fear of the unknown and turn it into spiritedness. Turn it into action.
- We follow people that are really good at something that matters to us.
- The truth that no two leaders do the same job in the same way.
- The truth that as much as we follow the spikes, they can also antagonize us.
- The truth that no leader is perfect— and that the best of them have learned how to work around their imperfections.
- The truth that leaders are frustrating— they don't have all the abilities we'd like them to have.

- The truth that following is in part an act of forgiveness— it is to give our attention and efforts to someone despite what we can see of their flaws.
- The truth that not everyone should be, or wants to be, a leader— the world needs followers, and great followers at that.
- The truth that a person who might be a great leader for me might not be a great leader for you.
- The truth that a person who might be a great leader for one team, or team of teams, or company, might not be a great leader for another.
- The truth that leaders are not necessarily a force for good in the world— they are simply people with followers. They aren't saints, and sometimes their having followers leads to hubris and arrogance, or worse.
- The truth that leaders are not good or bad— they are just people who have figured out how to be their most defined selves in the world, and who do so in such a way that they inspire genuine confidence in their followers. This isn't necessarily good or bad. It just is.
- The truth that leading isn't a set of characteristics but a series of experiences seen through the eyes of the followers.
- The truth that, despite all this, we reserve a special place in our world for those who make our experience of it better and more hopeful. And the truth that, through it all, we follow your spikes.