

Introduction

Expressing the DNA for Greatness

WHEN YOU SHOW UP at work every day, you're there to handle issues, events, and circumstances specific to your own company. But what you are really doing is what every other top-level executive does: creating growth, value, and profitability in the face of change.

Whether it's a strategic shift in the marketplace, a merger or acquisition, unexpected customer demands, loss or gain of key employees or accounts, product obsolescence, additional competitors, unstable suppliers, industry contraction, or added government regulation, change is reflected in the crises and opportunities that show up in your in-box. How you react to these shifts determines whether your company will contract into a defensive posture, or move deftly and deliver knockout punches. You, and your organization, have a choice: will you stagnate or will you grow?

The DNA of Leadership is your user manual for capitalizing on change by creating environments where people can thrive and express their DNA for greatness. In the Chinese culture, the word for change is "opportunity." This book shows you step-by-step how to discard outmoded leadership thinking, conversations, and practices that exacerbate fear and cause everyone to run for cover. Fearful conversations "suppress our DNA" while vital conversations enable us to "express our DNA." Instead of resorting to the old top-down management approach, and trying to control the circumstances, the conversations, and the employees, *The DNA of Leadership*

THE DNA OF LEADERSHIP

demonstrates how to create environments—*defined by vital conversations*—that enable our individual and collective greatness to emerge. Through these empowering conversations, everyone connects in the spirit of co-creation to create environments designed to express our instincts for greatness. Vital conversations *crack the code* on culture change—and when we communicate with a powerful awareness of how our conversations trigger instincts, we collectively harness the power of our organizational DNA.

Wielding the dictatorial power that comes with a leadership position is seductive because it gets some immediate results. Someone is in charge; there is the appearance of stability. And sometimes you do have to apply a tourniquet to stop a hemorrhage. However, if you don't release the pressure at some point, harmful consequences, though delayed, will result.

The relationship between power and leadership is a given. *The DNA of Leadership* redefines it, by providing case studies of real leaders whose companies thrive in the face of daunting challenges. Rather than being threatened by change, these extraordinary leaders understand what kind of psychological environments (conversations and relationships) are necessary to trigger instincts—and they intentionally shape their conversations for leadership DNA to emerge.

They know that it's their job to create stability in the midst of flux. They know a deeper wisdom—which is the key to their success. *They know that everything happens through conversation.* Through conversations we trigger life. Conversations can be life affirming—or life negating. Those leaders, who know this wisdom—in the face of any crisis or opportunity—have the power to shape the future. Cultures and companies that operate this way evolve dynamically rather than struggle for survival. Their leaders recognize their dual role of growing the business and growing their people. Successful leaders in the twenty-first century invest in both, and in doing so grow stronger, grow smarter, and grow profitably as a result.

You could not reach a high position of leadership, or stay there very long, without innate talent and skill. That's the DNA you were

born with and it is hardwired in you. *The DNA of Leadership* is not about the skills, training, and experience necessary for successful leadership. It's about discovering how to create conversational environments that enable the growth and expression of each person's unique DNA. It addresses the most important responsibility of leadership—creating environments that allow leadership greatness to emerge.

Which is more powerful: nature or nurture? The age-old debate for explaining evolution has been settled by recent science: it's both. It turns out that nature is nurtured; evolution is dependent upon inbred characteristics and outside influences. Psychological environments shape who we are and how we work, and leaders shape environments through conversations.

Nature and Nurture work hand in hand as allies to express DNA. This book adopts the rich metaphors embedded in the world of genetics. Yet, as you read, it goes beyond metaphors. Geneticists are discovering, just like the fact that there is a gene for “a belief in God” (see Dean H. Hamer's book, *The God Gene: How Faith Is Hardwired into Our Genes*) and that there is a gene for “Laziness” (as seen in a twelve-year study by Professor Bouchard's team at the Pennington Biomedical Research Centre in Louisiana), I believe we will discover that there are genes for greatness and genes for leadership. How you lead—most importantly, the conversations you have with others—creates the result you see. You can be a dominant, autocratic leader who imposes your will on others, or you can be conscious of creating an environment where the collective power of your organizational DNA emerges. For example, to achieve a goal, you could tell someone how to do it, or you could ask that same person how it could be done. The goal could be reached either way, but the long-term ramifications for the individual, and your organization, will be dramatically different depending on which approach you take.

Let's unfold this metaphor further. DNA carries the genetic information of cells, and is capable of replication. It consists of two strands of coded instructions and determines individual hereditary characteristics. Each strand is made up of genes linked together, and

two strands combine when a gene in one strand bonds to its companion in the other strand, forming a double helix.

The premise of this book is that organizations, too, have their own “DNA.” Organizational DNA is built on two strands that define its characteristics. One strand contains seven distinct leadership conversational practices. The other strand represents seven corresponding organizational practices embedded into the corporate culture. Corporate culture is the result of these two intertwined strands: your leadership conversations and the organizational practices.

Now let’s develop this concept further by discussing the choices you can make as a leader. Each leadership gene can be expressed in one of two ways: to release or express growth, or to suppress it. The critical issue that spans this book is that how you lead—the quality of your leadership conversations and leadership practices—makes all the difference in the type of culture you create. Are you communicating through a commanding point of view from an ensconced bunker behind the lines, or do you get in the trenches with your troops and connect? Do you harp on deficiencies and failures, or do you acknowledge and get the most out of the strengths of others? Do you threaten, or do you instill hope? Do you protect turf, or cross-pollinate? Do you stagnate, or innovate? Do you stifle, or stimulate? Do you shut down, or turn on? What you do as a leader, and how you communicate, will either release the energy of your organizational DNA or suppress it.

There are myriad leadership styles: this book isn’t about that. It’s about the wisdom that underlies leadership. It’s about your leadership genes expressed through conversations and practices (rituals)—which translates into how you treat individuals, how you foster teamwork, how you inspire others, how you communicate, how you bring out creativity, how you steer the ship, and how you maintain morale. All of this happens through conversations. Your conversational practices contribute to, and in many cases determine your corporate culture. In today’s business climate, *The DNA of Leadership* is essential because how you and others in your

organization express your genes determines whether you thrive, or even survive.

With this book as your guide, you'll be better able to:

1. **Discover and shape your brand:** Your brand is an anchor when the seas of the marketplace are turbulent. You'll define and realize your vision more clearly and meaningfully by creating conversations that tap the dynamics of collective collaboration in your organization. Your vision and brand are defined and lived through conversations that shape them.
2. **Live your brand:** Brands are more than products and services; they're the energy, ingenuity, and wisdom of your company's people and values. Instead of just spewing empty platitudes about your mission and goals, you'll use your conversations to stamp a real identity on your company that employees, vendors, and customers—each an integral part of WE—will recognize and associate with.
3. **Foster a dynamic corporate culture:** You won't have to demand "buy-in" from employees, nor worry about who's "onboard." Everyone will come to work excited and motivated because your conversations will inspire them to reach for greatness.
4. **Reshape the culture as circumstances dictate:** Instead of paralysis caused by rigid policies and procedures, you'll inspire a dynamism that makes your organization a living, breathing entity.
5. **Capitalize on change:** Instead of being blindsided by change and forced to "take a hit," you'll anticipate it and—through healthy vital conversations—take proactive measures to gain a competitive edge.

Leadership is integrally connected to brand and culture. Brand is what others see—the outside view of the organization; culture is the