

The
FOUR
VIRTUES
of a
LEADER

NAVIGATING THE HERO'S JOURNEY
THROUGH RISK TO RESULTS

ERIC KAUFMANN



sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments . . . ix

Introduction . . . 1

PART I Focus: What Am I Creating? . . . 7

CHAPTER 1 What Am I Creating? . . . 9

CHAPTER 2 Focused Intention . . . 19

CHAPTER 3 Personal Metaphor . . . 25

CHAPTER 4 The Co-Creative Loop . . . 33

CHAPTER 5 Focus Gobblers . . . 39

CHAPTER 6 Human Uniqueness . . . 46

CHAPTER 7 Fight or Flight? . . . 52

CHAPTER 8 What Do I Stand For? . . . 56

PART II Courage: What Am I Avoiding? . . . 63

CHAPTER 9 What Am I Avoiding? . . . 64

CHAPTER 10 Costs of Fear . . . 69

CHAPTER 11 Fear and Anxiety . . . 75

CHAPTER 12 Four Universal Fears . . . 79

CHAPTER 13 The Signs of Fear . . . 88

CHAPTER 14 Cultivating Courage . . . 103

CHAPTER 15 Courage and Self-Rescue . . . 114

CONTENTS

PART III	Grit: What Am I Sustaining? . . .	121
CHAPTER 16	What Am I Sustaining? . . .	122
CHAPTER 17	Self-Discipline . . .	128
CHAPTER 18	Perseverance and Its Barriers . . .	138
CHAPTER 19	Building Blocks of Perseverance . . .	153
CHAPTER 20	Partnering for Perseverance . . .	174
CHAPTER 21	How Do You Talk to Yourself? . . .	185
PART IV	Faith: What Am I Yielding? . . .	191
CHAPTER 22	What Am I Yielding? . . .	193
CHAPTER 23	Letting Go . . .	198
CHAPTER 24	Faith Is Surrender . . .	206
CHAPTER 25	How to Surrender . . .	210
CHAPTER 26	What Is Mindfulness? . . .	220
CHAPTER 27	Stilling the Mind . . .	225
CHAPTER 28	How Do You Renew and Grow? . . .	248
	Conclusion . . .	254
	References . . .	257
	About the Author . . .	263

INTRODUCTION

I have no intention of adding to the convoluted mythology of leaders as special creatures. Many of the common notions of being heroic, as it relates to the work of leading, end up limiting the ability of leaders to be effective. When I ask leaders to name a hero, Superman often comes up. Well, Superman is the antithesis of our discussion in this book. Superman has superhuman powers. He is a perfect being and knows no fear. By contrast, every leader I've met possesses no superhuman powers, is flawed and complex, and is caught in anxiety and fear at new turns (even the exciting ones). Over the past two decades, I have coached and consulted hundreds of leaders in for-profit, nonprofit, and government realms. I've worked with privately held and publicly traded company leaders, community and social leaders, and spiritual and religious leaders. None of them was exempt from flaws and anxiety. It is precisely because of our flawed and anxious nature that we can be heroic. A hero is someone who seeks a great prize (something difficult and rewarding), leaves the comfort zone, makes sacrifices, and, ultimately, gives back to the community. If you regularly strive for enormous reward, often find yourself in discomfort or danger, and aim to serve the greater good, then you are poised for the hero's journey.

We expect leaders to achieve results, through and with other people. To lead is to drive toward outcomes that would not happen if the group were left to its own; leaders create outcomes that don't happen organically. And because they are tasked with achieving results, we hold leaders accountable. They are the final stop for praise or blame regarding the results of their team. When you are on your hero's journey, you willingly place yourself at risk and in discomfort in order to advance your vision, tend to your followers, and achieve results.

Leaders get to employ a variety of tools and approaches to ensure that they achieve results. Their work falls into three broad actions: *inspire* a culture of aligned and collaborative teams, *institute* effective systems and structures that support execution and decision making, and *articulate* a strategy that brings the vision and mission to life. Decisions influence everything leaders do. Decisions contain a rational element, but they also result from a leader's presence, attitude, and character. In this book I describe four virtues leaders must embody in order to inhabit a heroic character: focus, courage, grit, and faith.

Understanding the Hero's Journey

This book, like the hero's journey, is for seekers. Your job is not just to do but to think; I've written this book to be thought-provoking. The journey you're embarking on with me is one of leadership philosophy and psychology, not just prescriptive formulas. I've long been inspired by Joseph Campbell, the scholar and explorer of consciousness who brought the hero's journey into popular awareness. He characterized the journey by three elements: (1) leaving the familiar in order to seek a valuable prize, (2) encountering challenges and risks that demand personal sacrifices, and (3) sharing the hard-earned prize with fellow men and women.

I wrote *Four Virtues of a Leader* for people who have a passion for their own journey of growth, passage, and change. This journey requires and begins at the separation from the comfortable, known world. It is an initiation into a new level of awareness, skill, and responsibility that culminates when you bring your hard-earned prize back home. Along the journey, you change and return a hero—a different person, a different leader. While the hero's journey is defined by ambition, risk, sacrifice, and service, it requires the completion of the successive stages of separation, initiation, and return for the leader to become a hero. To turn back at any stage is to reject the need to grow, to mature, and to evolve.

Every manager and executive I talk with eventually asks the question, "What does it take to evolve into a great leader?" The answer

is twofold: actions (things great leaders *do*) and attitudes (ways great leaders *are*). Actions manifest in competencies—skills and abilities—that include strategic thinking, team building, financial savvy, political acumen, operational excellence, recruiting and hiring, and coaching, among others.

Bring to mind the leaders you have followed passionately. It was more than their intelligent, educated, or skilled actions that compelled you to follow them. You gave your energy and effort to who they were—their beingness, their presence. You committed yourself to their vision and purpose because you believed in them; that's how great leaders inspire and engage us. Being adept at the required competencies is a baseline for entry into leadership. Climbing to the top of the ladder of commitment and engagement, however, results from a leader's personal energy and tone. Great leaders engage and inspire others to willingly commit themselves to their vision and purpose.

It's in this vein that we arrive at the distinctions of leadership as a hero's journey, a journey that unfolds on three levels: (1) results, (2) wisdom, and (3) spirituality. At the first level it is a journey of results. Your job as a leader, fundamentally, is to help usher a group of people from the state of the familiar and known through the unknown and unfamiliar to accomplish new outcomes and results.

At the next level, leadership is a journey of discovery. At this level, leaders commit themselves to experience and exploration, gain knowledge from lessons and trials, and, ultimately, discover new possibilities and innovate. This discovery leads to wisdom, which is the culmination of experience, learning, and experimentation.

The third level of leadership as a hero's journey is a spiritual one, the unfolding and expression of your authentic self. This means articulating and manifesting your unique gifts and contributions. This aspect of the journey is awakened by the prodding and shaping of leadership responsibilities; the spiritual level coaxes you to evolve into an authentic human being. In this state, you spend less energy defending yourself; rather than habitually focusing on survival, you become increasingly available and connected, engaged in expression and immersed in serving others' journeys.

I feel energized and inspired by the possibility of authentic expression and spiritual evolution through the practice of leading. Being authentic isn't a fixed condition; you don't wake up one morning and decide that you're authentic. Rather, it's a state of living in which anxiety, self-negation, and hiding behind protective strategies become less powerful than self-expression, curiosity, and genuine care for others.

A Journey through This Book

I've arranged this book in four parts, each addressing one of the four virtues of heroic leaders. Although each is complete unto itself, the heroic mind-set emerges at the intersection of these four interdependent virtues.

Focus sets direction and clarity for the journey.

Courage enables full engagement that is otherwise blocked by anxiety and fear.

Grit drives action forward in the face of fatigue and disheartenment.

Faith ensures agility and responsiveness in the place of rigidity and entrapment.

Part I, "Focus," answers the question, "What am I creating?" We are always creating something, either intentionally or unintentionally. Your responsibility as a leader is to be intentional and purposeful about what you, your team, and your organization are focused on creating. Your thoughts and beliefs and, by extension, the beliefs and thoughts of your team and organization, are reflected in your creation and behavior; what you focus on draws you and your organization toward results. Your power to intend, to deliberately reach for desired outcomes, pulls you away from the known and familiar

on a journey into the unfamiliar and unknown—a journey toward discovery, innovation, creation, and results. In this part, I examine the relationship between self-awareness and achievement, and I explain how thoughts are actually things (and that we become, in time, what we think about most).

In part II, I dive headlong into courage in order to help you learn to answer the question, “What am I avoiding?” One of your initial responsibilities as a leader is to set out to create something new and challenging. You do this, in part, by intending, stretching out toward a goal, and forming a gap between what you have and what you want. You fill that gap with two critical elements for achievement: potential and uncertainty. With uncertainty come anxiety and fear—we feel excitement in the presence of uncertainty, as uncertainty carries the potential for innovation and creation. We are also bound to know fear. In this part, I share why fear acts as the gatekeeper of power, and I also explain how to retake your power from the clutches of fear.

Part III asks, “What am I sustaining?” Answering this question helps you develop *grit*. Grit, more than any other factor, reliably predicts achievement. I doubt that you’re an overnight success; hardly anyone is. Your dedication and perseverance are the predictors of achievement, and focus takes passion and perseverance to sustain the choices and behaviors that turn potential into reality. Grit is how you overcome the addiction to comfort, an addiction that will pull you and your team right back into old patterns. In this part, I discuss how to persevere when your inspiration and motivation wane.

Part IV is about faith. Here we tackle the final challenge of awakening the heroic spirit, revealed by asking the question, “What am I yielding?” The label *hero* cannot be self-imposed; it is bestowed upon those who have made great contributions at some personal cost. When you sacrifice, you give up something of value to gain something greater. You sacrifice in order to serve, or to avoid calamity or evil. Effective leaders sacrifice daily; they give up time with family, personal time, recognition, and freedom from responsibility and scrutiny. But the most demanding leadership sacrifice is giving

up comfort. In this part, we explore how to sacrifice without feeling weak, and how to apply mindfulness meditation to embolden the heroic spirit of leadership.

An Invitation to the Journey

I didn't write this book to please, but to challenge and inspire. If you are a leader, then there are enough sycophants swirling around you. You don't need more stroking; rather, you need to sharpen your thinking and broaden your heart. I intended for the following chapters to be thought-provoking, accessible, and illustrated with anecdotes and metaphors. Reading this book will equip you to skillfully dive into the unknown, inspire your people to commit to you and your mission, and grow results. As Emerson wrote, "An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man." I offer you this book so you can take responsibility for the shadow you cast and its influence on organizational outcomes.



PART I

FOCUS

What Am I Creating?

I came across a powerfully illustrative quote from the prolific philosopher Anonymous (often mistakenly attributed to Buddha): “The thought manifests as the word; the word manifests as the deed; the deed develops into habit; and habit hardens into character. So watch the thought and its ways with care, and let it spring from love born out of concern for all beings.”

You are not a mere leaf floating on the wind, passively pushed along by circumstances. You actively shape your environment. As a leader, your job is more than arranging and directing resources; your job is to envision and create. Peter Drucker, the father of modern management discipline, said, “The best way to predict the future is to create it.” Our unique human abilities to envision and to create are the heart of part I.

Focus allows you to answer the question, “What am I creating?” Focus and vision shape your leadership journey, as well as the journey of those who follow you. You are always creating, whether you’re conscious of it or not, and by the end of this part you will become aware of it. You will recognize how your thoughts and beliefs play out in your role, relationships, team, and results, and you will be able to leverage this force of intention, attention, and expectation. Furthermore, you

will understand that a thought is a thing, that you are what you think, and that you become what you think about most.

We begin our journey by investigating leadership from the inside out. Our first part is intended to explain the quality and nature of thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations and discover how they shape our results and relationships.

WHAT AM I CREATING?

You are always creating. You are always responsible for your results, relationships, and life. Whichever aspect of your life you examine—your job, team, body, or mental state—you realize that you are responsible for its creation. You form your experience of reality with the choices you make, and your beliefs and assumptions drive your choices. This doesn't happen in a vacuum: genetics have a hand in who you are. Environment and circumstances shape your reality, too. And then there's chance—the luck of the draw. But even in the context of these multiple factors, like it or not, you remain responsible for what you create.

I didn't always know that I was responsible for my own reality. I wasn't aware, for example, that I was responsible for shaping my relationships. When I was twenty-six years old, I broke up with my girlfriend. This was a pattern. My girlfriends were fun and affectionate, but I found a fatal flaw in every one of them. Frustrated and clueless about how to upgrade my relationships, I turned to my mentor, Morris.

I still recall the conversation we had over dinner. We were talking about my love life, and I felt eager for Morris to reveal the secrets of selecting the perfect girlfriend. As Morris asked pointed questions about my relationships, I felt my hopes build as I was sufficiently frustrated with my romantic history that I was open to approaching the process differently.

Suddenly, the conversation turned. Morris stopped asking questions about my girlfriends and started inquiring about my thoughts, beliefs, and expectations about relationships and about women. I can still recall the strain of disappointment that gripped my gut as I realized that Morris wasn't about to reveal any magical steps to acquiring

a perfect girlfriend, but rather was impressing on me, once again, that my life is my responsibility. Morris insisted, as he did so many times, that beliefs precede behavior, and he worked diligently to expand my self-awareness.

Slowly and undeniably I realized that my relationship problems resulted from my beliefs, expectations, fantasies, and wishes about women. I was the common denominator in my frustrating experiences; I created, cocreated, and re-created the dynamics with my girlfriends. My responsibility was a bitter pill to swallow, especially as I'd hoped that Morris would reveal to me the secret of attracting the right woman. But he wanted me to reflect, grow in awareness, take responsibility, and recognize the beliefs that fueled and shaped my behaviors.

Finally, he asked me the question that unlocked my frozen pattern of unsatisfying relationships. It was a question that I proceeded to turn over and over in my mind for a decade, and that—when I finally answered in the affirmative—brought me together with my wife. Morris asked, “Are you the kind of man that would attract the kind of woman that you would want to be with?” Wait—don't rush on. Please read that question again.

The answer was no. I wasn't that kind of man. I was closed-hearted, self-centered, and needy. The kind of woman I wanted to be with didn't want to be with the man I was then. My girlfriends reflected me, just as your relationships mirror you; my self-centeredness attracted similar partners. My world is my reflection; just as your world is your reflection. You have to accept this paradigm as an act of maturity, responsibility, and power. If you don't, you disempower yourself and reduce your ability to effect change.

To lead you must take personal responsibility for what you create. To take responsibility you must develop self-awareness. Without awareness, how will you track and recognize your contribution to what you are creating? Leadership is a creative act. It is also a collaborative, relational, and risky endeavor—one accomplished with and through others. As a leader, your ability to navigate risk, collaborate with others, and establish trust and relationships fundamentally emanate from your beliefs and assumptions, from your focus. And the