

MANAGEMENT
MESS

TO

LEADERSHIP
SUCCESS

MANAGEMENT MESS

TO LEADERSHIP SUCCESS

30 Challenges to Become the
Leader You Would Follow

SCOTT JEFFREY MILLER

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INTRODUCTION

I'm proud of you. You're bold—courageous, even. You're holding a book with the words "Management Mess" prominently featured on the cover. Never mind that people nearby—perhaps on a train or plane, standing in line at Starbucks, or your colleagues around the office—could see you holding this book and immediately associate you with the word "mess." You could have easily been showing off a different book with a different title: *The Burden of Perfection*; *The Genius's Guide to Leadership*; perhaps even *From Great to Greater*. People would definitely be impressed seeing you read a book like that. But that's not me, and I suspect that's not you either. I didn't attend an Ivy League school, and I don't peruse the heady academic tomes on the latest management theories. I came up through the leadership trenches. I had no idea what I was doing, but I had enough ambition and drive to keep at it, even when I failed—and I failed often.

I wrote this book for those who feel they weren't perfectly groomed for leadership—those with a bit of a "mess" in them, whether that comes from being an outsider, a lack of experience, a lack of training, or all of the above. There are likely people I know who think I'm the *last* person who should write a book like this, probably a few people reading it right now. So I'll get this next part out of the way:

I have an intense personality that's often turned up to 11. I've been mean, petty, selfish, and self-absorbed. I've made genuinely good people cry, no doubt caused talented associates to choose to leave the organization and, regrettably, used my position and temper to sometimes belittle, demean, and stifle the contributions of others. But I'm also known as the leader whose division you join if you want your career and skills to blossom. I'm a close friend to many, and I'm the guy you call at any hour to bail you out of jail, a bind, or any other emergency. I'm also the guy who keeps a chilled bottle of champagne ready to pour for impromptu houseguests. I am an honorable husband and a nurturing father; a champion, supporter, and mentor to countless people who have experienced extraordinary success in their careers. I have a handful of God-given abilities I work hard to use and magnify (humility is not one of them). I am, in short, a human being: I have flaws and talents; failures and triumphs.

If you're a fellow traveler along the leadership path, I've written this book for you. It's a reflection of my experiences, both messes and successes, run through the crucible of the real world—shaped, validated, and often corrected by the deep expertise and thought leadership of many colleagues, friends, and mentors at FranklinCovey. I was lucky to

have landed at FranklinCovey—a company that provides industrial-strength management and leadership advice to the Fortune 5000 and beyond, throughout the world. So, even as I careened and sometimes crashed through the ranks, I couldn't help but pick up on the principles and practices that the most successful leaders get right. These proven insights (many of which are included in this book) helped an admittedly imperfect leader rise to the C-suite.

I'll be one of the first to admit leadership isn't always rewarding. It can feel like a bottomless pit of problem solving and adult-sitting. Leadership is exhausting, repetitive, and requires a constant stretch of your emotional and intellectual skills. It demands an "always on" mentality, as you're expected to have all the right answers and make all the right decisions, often on the fly. Most days, candidly, I really don't enjoy it. But it doesn't mean leadership isn't important; on the contrary, often the things we struggle with yield the biggest return (nobody drinks a kale smoothie because it tastes good). It's okay if you admit that leadership can be hard and unenjoyable. We're travelers on this road together. But the benefits of being successful at it can be life-changing.

Maybe you're ambitious and bright, but leadership hasn't exactly felt like a calling from on high. Perhaps you're the first person in your family to attend college, let alone a board meeting. Or maybe you skipped college altogether. Maybe you're a woman rising to the top of a male-dominated industry or a veteran starting to make their way through the business world and drawing from a very different set of leadership styles and experiences. Maybe you're the person asked to lead the same people who, days earlier, were your peers, or perhaps you're the highly regarded MBA who has to lead someone like *me*. If so, this book is for you and anyone else who approaches leadership with a sense of unease, trepidation, or feeling like an outsider.

Of course, no single person is a complete "management mess," nor has anyone I've known been a total "leadership success." We are a bundle of varying talents and fears, expressed through the daily decisions we make. I wrote this book to broaden those talents, set aside limiting fears, and promote better leadership decisions. To accomplish this, you'll find 30 challenges, honed by FranklinCovey through years of research and development, tens of thousands of client implementations, and countless coaching engagements. I've referenced the various thought leaders and experts behind these challenges throughout, representing a collection of wisdom, expertise, and practical advice spanning more than four decades. I've also highlighted individuals who have impacted me as exemplars of a particular principle, and shared stories of people who fell into a management

mess—altering names and identities, unless I'm referencing myself (which my wife believes is way too often for a book of this size).

The challenges in this book will make you a better leader and are organized into three parts: "Lead Yourself" (Challenges 1–8), "Lead Others" (Challenges 9–21), and "Get Results" (Challenges 22–30). If you're not put off by examining how principles can collide with the real world, or how I've had to learn many leadership lessons the hard way, I invite you to take each of them to heart. You can read them from 1 to 30, or skip to topics that resonate the most in the moment. At the end of each challenge, you'll find prompts for moving from "mess to success." How you choose to implement these is up to you—pick one a day if you're feeling up to it, or one a week. Whatever the cadence, do your best to take the challenges off the pages of the book and into your real-world leadership roles.

So let your colleagues see you reading a book with "Management Mess" on the cover. Break it open at lunch and proudly sit across from your boss! Because inside, the principles and practices collected here come from some of the best leadership minds around. Use my experiences with them as a shortcut, a cautionary tale, or a skill worth adopting. I promise you, I won't be pulling any punches. And since you're only thirty practices away from having more successes (and fewer messes) in this adventure we call leadership, let's get to it.

PART 1

LEAD YOURSELF

<u>Day 1</u> Demonstrate Humility	<u>Day 2</u> Think Abundantly	<u>Day 3</u> Listen First	<u>Day 4</u> Declare Your Intent	<u>Day 5</u> Make and Keep Commitments
<u>Day 6</u> Carry Your Own Weather	<u>Day 7</u> Inspire Trust	<u>Day 8</u> Model Work/Life Balance	<u>Day 9</u> Place the Right People in the Right Roles	<u>Day 10</u> Make Time for Relationships
<u>Day 11</u> Check Your Paradigms	<u>Day 12</u> Lead Difficult Conversations	<u>Day 13</u> Talk Straight	<u>Day 14</u> Balance Courage and Consideration	<u>Day 15</u> Show Loyalty
<u>Day 16</u> Make It Safe to Tell the Truth	<u>Day 17</u> Right Wrongs	<u>Day 18</u> Coach Continuously	<u>Day 19</u> Protect Your Team Against Urgencies	<u>Day 20</u> Hold Regular 1-on-1s
<u>Day 21</u> Allow Others to Be Smart	<u>Day 22</u> Create Vision	<u>Day 23</u> Identify the Wildly Important Goals® (WIGs®)	<u>Day 24</u> Align Actions with the Wildly Important Goals	<u>Day 25</u> Ensure Your Systems Support Your Mission
<u>Day 26</u> Deliver Results	<u>Day 27</u> Celebrate Wins	<u>Day 28</u> Make High-Value Decisions	<u>Day 29</u> Lead Through Change	<u>Day 30</u> Get Better



CHALLENGE 1

DEMONSTRATE HUMILITY

Has your lack of humility ever limited your perspective or lessened your influence as a leader? Would you even know if it had?

It was an important two days in my early leadership career. After a successful four years as an independent salesperson, I had been recently promoted to lead a group of about ten peers. Most of them had preceded me on the team, invested in and developed their own sales skills, and in some ways were more talented than I was as a consultative sales representative.

I'd shown some leadership promise as the new leader and wanted to start it off memorably. (Stay tuned for that part, I promise not to disappoint in this opening challenge.) After securing the vice president's approval and funding, I planned a two-day sales-strategy meeting. I organized the conference room, secured the catering, and hired one of our internal performance consultants to facilitate a two-day training to ensure this team was up to date on our latest leadership solution.

The first morning arrived, and the consultant, Nancy Moore, and I both showed up around 7 a.m. for the 8 o'clock announced start. I remember it well. I was excited and likely amped after one too many cups of coffee. (In fact, one *was* too many in Provo, Utah.) Nancy was also very invested in the trainees' success and even brought a platter of beautifully arranged and freshly cut fruit for them (something she assembled herself, not one of those displays you buy ready-made from the grocery store). I was ready for my leadership debut. This was going to be epic. Team members began to stroll in around 8:15. We finally started around 8:30 when the last associate showed up.

I was incensed. I managed to open the meeting, introduced the consultant, and took my place at the U-shaped table. But I was consumed by the fact that on my first day as their leader, my team would disrespect both the consultant and me by being so cavalier with the start time. After all, we're experts at time management; how could they all show up late and not even apologize? It stewed in me, and like most issues that irritate me, it metastasized and took on a life of its own.

I went through the day fixated on the profound disrespect. The team knew I was annoyed because I made zero attempt to conceal it. The concept of self-regulation and managing my emotions was not even in my lexicon at the time.

It continued to agitate me into the evening and the next morning. On the way to the office, I stopped at the grocery store, not to buy fruit or croissants, but to buy ten copies of the *Salt Lake Tribune*. I had a plan, and it was going to be legendary. Leadership in action, people.

I entered the room at exactly 8:00 a.m., our starting time. To my sadistic delight, few were in their seats. Ten or so minutes passed before everyone was finally seated. I stood up, in what I thought would be one of my finest

leadership moments, and began to walk around the table. I pulled the classified ads out and tossed them in front of each person, announcing, "If you want a job from nine to five, Dillard's is hiring." And in case they didn't get the point, I passed out yellow markers so they could highlight any openings.

This was what being a successful leader was all about! I was making an important point and would be respected for my candor, boldness, and strength.

At least, it seemed like a great idea at the time.

Rather than acknowledging my leadership genius, people began getting up from their tables and leaving. Many shot me looks that ranged from confusion to sheer repugnance. Still others began telling me off, more than one threatening to quit on the spot. I did what any good leader would do under such circumstances: I doubled down. This was on them after all, not me.

Maybe not the best strategy. Nancy stood frozen, watching in disbelief. One colleague announced it was his last day. There was a general theme to the arguments against me: How could the team leader, the same one sponsoring a leadership-training session, so blatantly disregard the leadership principles being taught?

Calling that moment a leadership mess is probably kind. Because this was nearly twenty years ago, how we all managed to take a collective breath and salvage the moment is a bit fuzzy. I am sure it had more to do with them than me, but we somehow reassembled about an hour later and finished the day.

If you think I had a leadership *mea culpa* that morning, you'd be wrong. For days I privately insisted to Nancy that I was in the right. To her credit, she patiently listened to my absurd rationalization. A week or so later, she finally sat me down and helped me understand why my technique had not served me well. It was hard for me to see her point, but I trusted her to have my best interests in mind, and so took the lesson to heart. I did my best to make it up to the team and apologize for my actions.

You might be surprised to learn I'm friends with every person who was in the training room that day. Many of them came to my wedding a decade

LET'S JUST SAY I WASN'T
BORN WITH THE HUMILITY
GENE. I STRUGGLED WITH IT
AS A FIRST-TIME MANAGER,
AND I STRUGGLE WITH IT
NOW. I HAVE TO REALLY
WORK AT REMEMBERING ITS
VALUE IN MY RELATIONSHIPS,
ESPECIALLY AS A LEADER.

WHEN YOU LEARN TO EMBRACE HUMILITY, YOU FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE BECAUSE YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE. YOU CAN LET GO OF THE FEAR OF MAKING MISTAKES OR THE NEED TO NEVER SHOW WEAKNESS. TO QUOTE OUR COFOUNDER DR. STEPHEN R. COVEY, "HUMBLE LEADERS ARE MORE CONCERNED WITH WHAT IS RIGHT THAN BEING RIGHT."

later, and we laughed and cried at the absurdity of it all. In fact, several of them re-created the scene at my reception in front of my new wife of only 120 minutes. I'm sure she must have been worried that she'd just committed to a sociopath. In the end, we all marveled at my profound ignorance and arrogance.

Or said another way, my total lack of humility.

Let's just say I wasn't born with the humility gene. I struggled with it as a first-time manager, and I struggle with it now. I have to really work at remembering its value in my relationships, especially as a leader.

In my role as executive vice president for thought leadership at FranklinCovey, I am privileged to host several interview programs, both on the Internet and iHeartRadio. After interviewing more than a hundred bestselling authors, CEOs, and leadership experts, the one commonality they all share when defining a great leader is humility. They see humility as a strength, not a weakness. You might argue that the opposite of humility is arrogance.

Leaders who fail to demonstrate humility often find themselves leaning toward arrogance and seeking outside validation. They rarely listen to anyone but themselves, and thus miss opportunities to learn and course-correct. They often turn conversations into a competition and feel the need to "one-up" others and have the final say.

In FranklinCovey's bestselling book *Get Better: 15 Proven Practices to Building Effective Relationships at Work*, Todd Davis writes:

"Those who are humble have a secure sense of self—their validation doesn't come from something external, but is based on their true nature. To be humble means to shed one's ego, because the authentic self is much greater than looking good, needing to have all the answers, or being recognized by one's peers. As a result, those who have cultivated humility as an attribute have far greater energy to devote to others. They go from being consumed with themselves (an inner focus) to looking for ways to contribute and help others (an outer focus). Humility is the key to building solid character and strong, meaningful connections."

When you learn to embrace humility, you feel more comfortable because you know who you are. You can let go of the fear of making mistakes or the need to never show weakness. To quote our cofounder Dr. Stephen R. Covey, "Humble leaders are more concerned with what is right than being right."



FROM MESS TO SUCCESS:

DEMONSTRATE HUMILITY

- Pick an initiative you're leading or participating in.
- Identify someone whose perspective on the initiative is different from yours.
- Schedule time to listen to their perspective. When they differ substantially, exercise the patience and respect to not just understand, but to genuinely consider their point of view.
- What did you learn that might measurably improve the initiative? the relationship? your own leadership style?
- Become more comfortable, even confident, in not having all the answers yourself. This a strength, not a weakness.

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