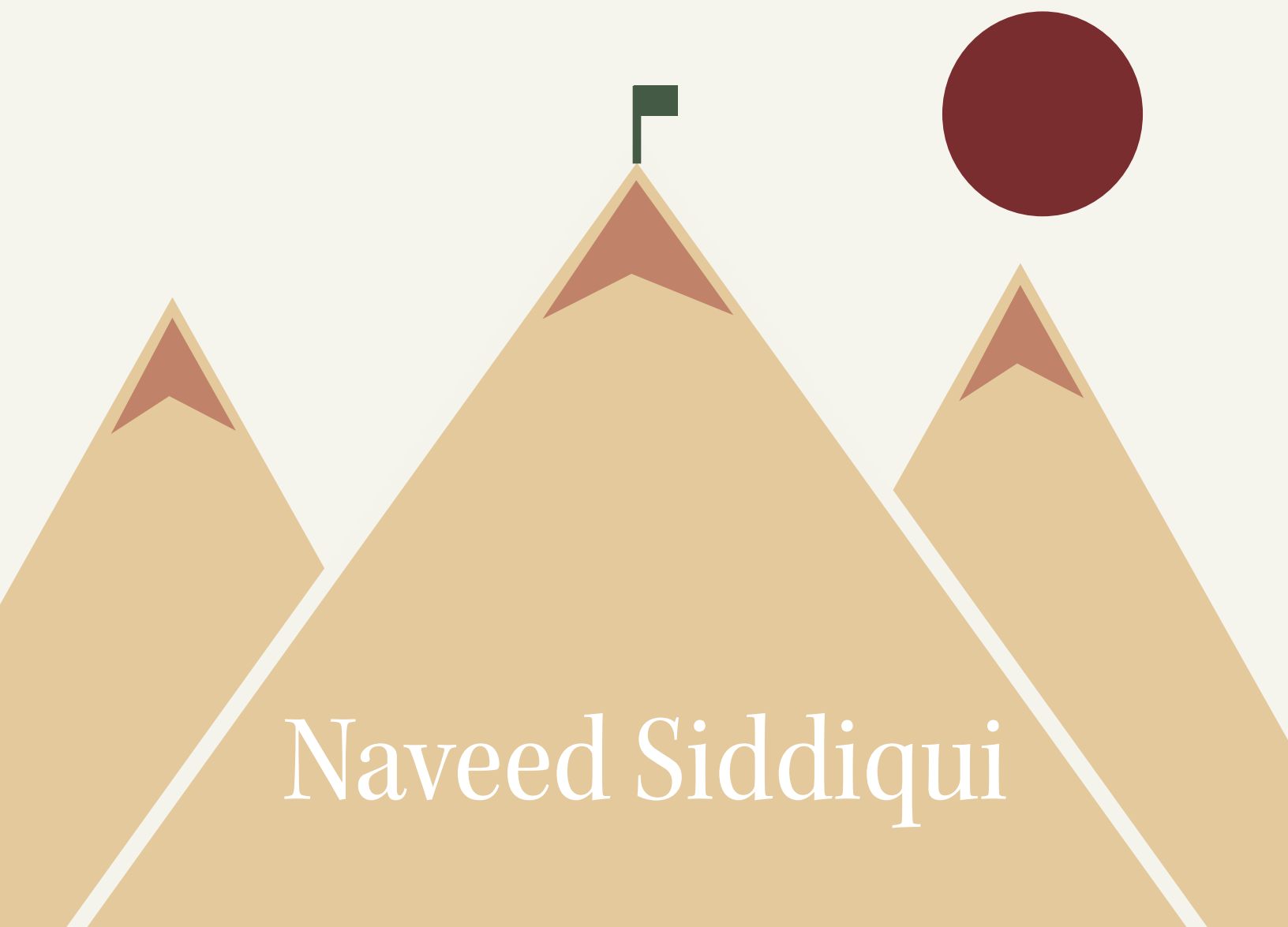




Leader Launch

*The companion guide for
a new generation of leaders*



Naveed Siddiqui

A person wearing a blue jacket with an orange hood and a backpack is walking away on a dirt path through a forest. The path is covered with fallen leaves, and the trees are tall and thin, with some evergreens and some deciduous trees without leaves. The lighting is soft, suggesting an overcast day.

“

*the journey of a
thousand miles begins
with a single step*

- Lao Tzu

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In case you're not familiar with me and my work, let's get acquainted! Here's what you need to know.

I am a leadership coach and future of work advisor. I partner with emerging and forward-thinking leaders who strive to show up authentically for themselves and elevate how they lead others.

I want to re-imagine the way we think about and approach work. From equitable systems to thoughtfully-crafted methods of collaboration, I believe the workplace stands to become more *human*. There is still ample room in our evolving world for ambition, professional growth and meaningful impact through our careers. If we're willing to adapt, to be more intentional about *how* we work, we can create organizations in which people feel trusted, empowered and purposeful. That's the transformation I hope to foster through my work.

Creating a more human workplace, though, means changing the way we lead. Leadership can no longer be driven by dominance, fear and ego as we so often see in organizations; instead, we will need to place qualities like trust, empathy and vulnerability front and center.

I hope my work inspires you to think differently about the way you work and the way you lead. You can find additional resources at naveedsiddiqui.com.

Dear Leader,

June 2020 was a tumultuous time in our collective consciousness. Many communities were still locked down as the world faced COVID-19. It was also the month we rose up in the fight for social equality as the gravity of systemic racism was put on display for the whole world to witness.

June 2020 was also the month I was promoted to first-time leader. I was reluctant to accept the assignment. Stepping into leadership is difficult even in the best of times. But the world was changing all around us and no one knew how to react. I could barely make sense of it all myself; suddenly, I was in a position in which I had to make it make sense for others.

I logged off on a Friday as an individual contributor; three days later, the Weight of Leadership was placed squarely on my shoulders. It took nine months for me to receive any formal leadership training. Reflecting on those early days, I think about how valuable it would have been to know what I was walking into, to have someone guide me on the good, bad and ugly of being a new leader. This book is an attempt at doing that.

I've grown suspicious of long-winded self-help and leadership books. This is not one of those. This is a practical primer, something I hope you can reference throughout your leadership, to celebrate the great moments and learn from the stumbles.

Every leader's situation is unique. There's going to be a lot of trial and error, a heavy dose of roll up your sleeves and get dirty. No book can prepare you for every scenario you'll encounter on your leadership journey. But what I hope this offers is a compass, a direction in which to take your first step.

While you may have only recently attained the title of "leader", your journey didn't begin when you got promoted. You've been leading throughout your career, whether by influencing without authority, being an expert at your craft or having the ability to successfully organize a team around a common goal. Whatever lies ahead, you'll be ready.

Congratulations on investing in your growth. Bearing the Weight of Leadership is one of the greatest professional honors you can have. It's not for the faint of heart, but the fact that you're reading this means that you care about your growth and how you can show up for yourself and those you're charged with leading.

Let's go on the journey together,
Naveed

Section One

Conducting the Orchestra





*You will fall many times.
The leadership will show
from your perseverance,
from your willingness to
get back up.*

Getting to know

The Disruptive Leader

Who is the Disruptive Leader?

They're a new brand of leader. Someone who is not afraid to cut through the comforts of convention, the BS of "This is the way we've always done it". They transcend a particular discipline or level in an organization: they are a marketing manager who trusts their team to own campaign strategy, a newly-promoted software engineering lead who defends their developers from bogus meetings, or an HR executive who creates a strategy to tie performance evaluation to organizational values.

They're the person who will shape how we get work done in the future.

The Disruptive Leader has many characteristics. On the following few pages, we'll unpack three of the most important:

- Self-trust
- Grounded confidence
- Courage

Self-Trust

In her book *Dare To Lead*, professor and researcher Brené Brown offers the 'BRAVING Inventory' as a framework for building an environment of trust. Below, let's walk through each element through the lens of self-trust as a leader.

B

Boundaries: Am I clear with myself and others about what's okay and what's not? How have these boundaries been tested recently? How did I respond in those situations?

R

Reliability: I follow through on commitments I make. This includes being honest with myself about my capabilities and limitations. I recognize when and how I work my best.

A

Accountability: How do I approach mistakes I make? Do I own them, apologize and learn from them? Or do I use my energy to find a scapegoat in others?

V

Vault: I safeguard information and vulnerability that others entrust in me, and I in turn honor my own personal information and experiences by recognizing who is worthy of sharing with.

I

Integrity: Do I live out my values, or are they just bumper stickers? When my values were tested, did I choose to do the right thing or did I opt for the fast, easy or less vulnerable path?

N

Non-judgment: How do I approach situations where I need help? Do I feel ashamed? Or do I recognize that asking for help can be a courageous act of strength and self-awareness?

G

Generosity: I exercise empathy by recognizing the humanity in myself and others, acknowledging that I am a constant work in progress. I recognize that I am a human before I am a leader.

Grounded Confidence

Grounded confidence means knowing my strengths, but also my limitations. It's being okay with sitting on a problem, and being intentional, methodical and inclusive with my approach to solving it. Grounded confidence is the security of not needing to be the first nor the loudest voice in the room. It's being deeply curious about what more I can learn, from myself, from the people I lead and from the world as a whole.

Grounded confidence is the self-awareness to know the value I bring to the table AND the humility and curiosity to always keep learning more.

(I set a high bar for anyone who calls themselves a leader because of the incredible responsibility it is to be entrusted with the well-being, livelihood and sense of self of others. But I have no time for leaders who conflate the Weight of Leadership with pride, ego or the arrogance to believe they and they alone need to have the answers. Let's not mistake arrogance for grounded confidence.)

Grounded confidence is the security of not needing to be the first nor the loudest voice in the room.

Courage

There's a passage from a March 2022 Microsoft article on the state of the workplace that stuck with me:

The past two years have taught us that culture will stand or fall with managers. But many managers feel stuck between leadership and new employee expectations, and they feel powerless to drive change for their team. Over half of managers (54%) feel leadership at their company is out of touch with employee expectations. And 74% say they don't have the influence or resources they need to make changes on behalf of their team

This signals two important misses:

1. A lack of trust from senior leaders for tactical leaders to make the decisions they see fit for their teams
2. An absence of courage from both senior leaders and tactical leaders to put their own comforts aside and do the hard things

Courage is choosing to do the hard thing, not the easy thing. It's speaking up for our values no matter how uncomfortable it makes us or those around us.

Courage is knowing that we put ourselves at risk by challenging the status quo but doing it anyway.

Courage is the pillow we rest our head on at night knowing that we put our self-interests aside and did right by those who count on our voice to represent them.

Why we need Disruptive Leaders now more than ever...

In the post-2020 workplace, we face a disconnect between the demands of the modern organization and those of the empowered employee. Lately, the consequences of this disconnect have shown themselves: a record rate of resignations, a severe distrust of today's organization from the newest generations (who represent half) of the U.S. workforce, and the largest crisis of work-related burnout in modern history.

Something's gotta give. Organizations will need to recalibrate how they design work and engage people to execute it. And leaders at every level must be the drivers of this evolution. Just as technology disrupts the way we live, we need leaders that disrupt the way we work.

This is where the Disruptive Leader will shine. By embodying the building blocks of self-trust, grounded confidence and courage, the Disruptive Leader will shake up our systems and create the balanced, inclusive and sustainable organizations we need for the future.

This book provides a practical framework for becoming a Disruptive Leader, the kind of leader who shows up authentically for themselves and elevates the way they show up for others.

The Weight of Leadership

The thing that concerns me the most about leadership in today's organizations is how much it's trivialized. That's evidenced by the statistic that more than half of new leaders never receive management training. Should I consider myself lucky that I actually did receive training...albeit nine months after becoming a leader?

We design talent pipelines around “promotability”. We highlight “high potential” people during talent reviews and put them on management tracks. And yet when we do promote them into their first leadership position, we toss them in the deep end and expect them to know how to swim. As if the ability to build trust, set a vision and thoughtfully steer a team are bolt-on skills that you can easily pick up through osmosis.

What if we reframed leadership, placing the appropriate weight, significance and honor on the title of “leader”? What if we recognized that saying yes to being a leader means signing a contract with yourself, your team and your organization, a contract of difficult obligations, high expectations, but also, most importantly, incredible reward?

Maybe this is a hot take, but I think leadership is both the simplest and most difficult obligation one can take on in an organization...

It's simple because, at the end of the day, all people are look-

ing for is their leader to care about them as humans, to steer their work by establishing a common vision and trust them to figure out how to get it done.

However, when the shit is hitting the fan and the organization is in the thick of dark and uncertain times, the responsibility of leaders to maintain this resolve becomes exponentially harder. It becomes tempting to, for example, dodge and withhold information from your team because even *you* don't know what's going on and you can't risk appearing lost. To demand more work from your subordinates instead of demanding better prioritization from your peers and superiors. It becomes easy to default to letting your ego and fear of shame dictate your actions rather than leaning on self-trust, grounded confidence and courage to guide you.

As a leader, your first and most important responsibility is to your subordinates: those people who look to you for organizational direction, career development and protection from unreasonable expectations. Disruptive leaders understand that people can't flip a switch and turn off their emotional side when they begin work each day. When they come to work, they bring their messy, brave and human selves with them. And these leaders recognize that they, too, in order to create trust, must reciprocate.

If all of that sounds hard to do, that's the point! Leadership takes work. It demands selflessness, patience and balance in a society that rewards the opposite. But when done well, leadership brings the best out in people, brings a disparate collection of humans closer together, and moves communities forward.

It is the most rewarding weight you can bear.

Leader Brand

*What kind of leader do I
want to be?*

Every leader has a brand (whether they know it or not). A leader's brand is a collection of skills, qualities, values and motivators that drive their behaviors, priorities and techniques. The more intentional you are with yourself about your identity as a leader, the stronger your Leader Brand becomes. It's also important to note that your brand is fluid: it evolves throughout your journey.

Below is a list of qualities and skills that characterize Disruptive Leaders. Choose up to 5 that you want to focus on as you start to build your Leader Brand. Feel free to create your own if needed. Then, on the next page, respond to the reflection questions to create accountability for yourself in translating your chosen qualities into everyday behaviors.

Time Management	Strategic Thinking
Organization	Execution
Delegation	Courage
Active Listening	Conflict Resolution
Presentation Skills	Managing Up
Coaching	Collaboration
Decision-Making	Resilience
Boundary-Setting	Toughness
Patience	Vulnerability
Problem-Solving	Building Relationships
Reading a Room	Adaptability
Self-Awareness	Motivating Others
Grounded Confidence	Preparedness
Accountability	Giving Feedback
Focus	Receiving Feedback
Celebrating Team Success	Crucial Conversations
Trust	

I will be a leader who exemplifies...

What drew you to select the specific qualities that you chose? What made them stand out to you?

What major themes or stories do your chosen qualities convey about who you are and what you value?

How might each of your chosen qualities show up in your daily life? What specific habits or behaviors can you build for each quality you chose?



Conducting the Orchestra

One of the most jarring adjustments new leaders can struggle to make is growing from being the person who **does** the work (e.g. writing code, creating models, sourcing vendors, etc.) to the person who **designs** the work. As their leader, your primary responsibility becomes creating the kind of environment in which your *team* does great work.

You transition from playing the instruments to conducting the orchestra.

What does conducting the orchestra look like?

- Clearly communicating your expectations to your team members, such as what “done” looks like for an assignment
- Setting the priority levels for your team’s goals, projects and tasks
- Looking out for your team members’ well-being (e.g. creating psychological safety, clearing obstacles, celebrating successes)

“

**As a leader, your value
is not found in the
quantity of work, but in
the **quality of thought****

- Pam Marmon





New Leader DO's

Ask a lot of questions

Ask for feedback

Ask for help when you need it

Give yourself grace

Be patient

Set clear expectations

Build trust



New Leader DON'Ts

Pretend like you know everything

Boss your team around

Micromanage your team

Make assumptions

Make decisions in a vacuum

Try to be perfect

Section Two

Building Community



*It takes a village
to build a
Disruptive
Leader*



I have struggled with imposter syndrome throughout my career.

One of the nasty ways imposter syndrome can show up is by making you feel weak for seeking help. It can pressure you to respond “Everything is fine!” when your boss asks you how things are going, when in reality you’re stuck and drowning. It can make you feel unworthy of leadership because you don’t have all the answers.

The truth is that asking for help is a display of courage and strength. Don’t let the glamorized stories of “self-made” people fool you, nobody becomes successful on their own. And this is especially true of leaders. You didn’t get to this point by yourself; there are people in your world who have helped you in the past and want to continue to help you in the future.

Now, you have the responsibility to pay it forward for your team and lean on the community around you to help you be the best leader you can be.

In this section, we’ll walk through the audiences you need to keep close to you and how you can build meaningful connections with each of them.

Audiences Map

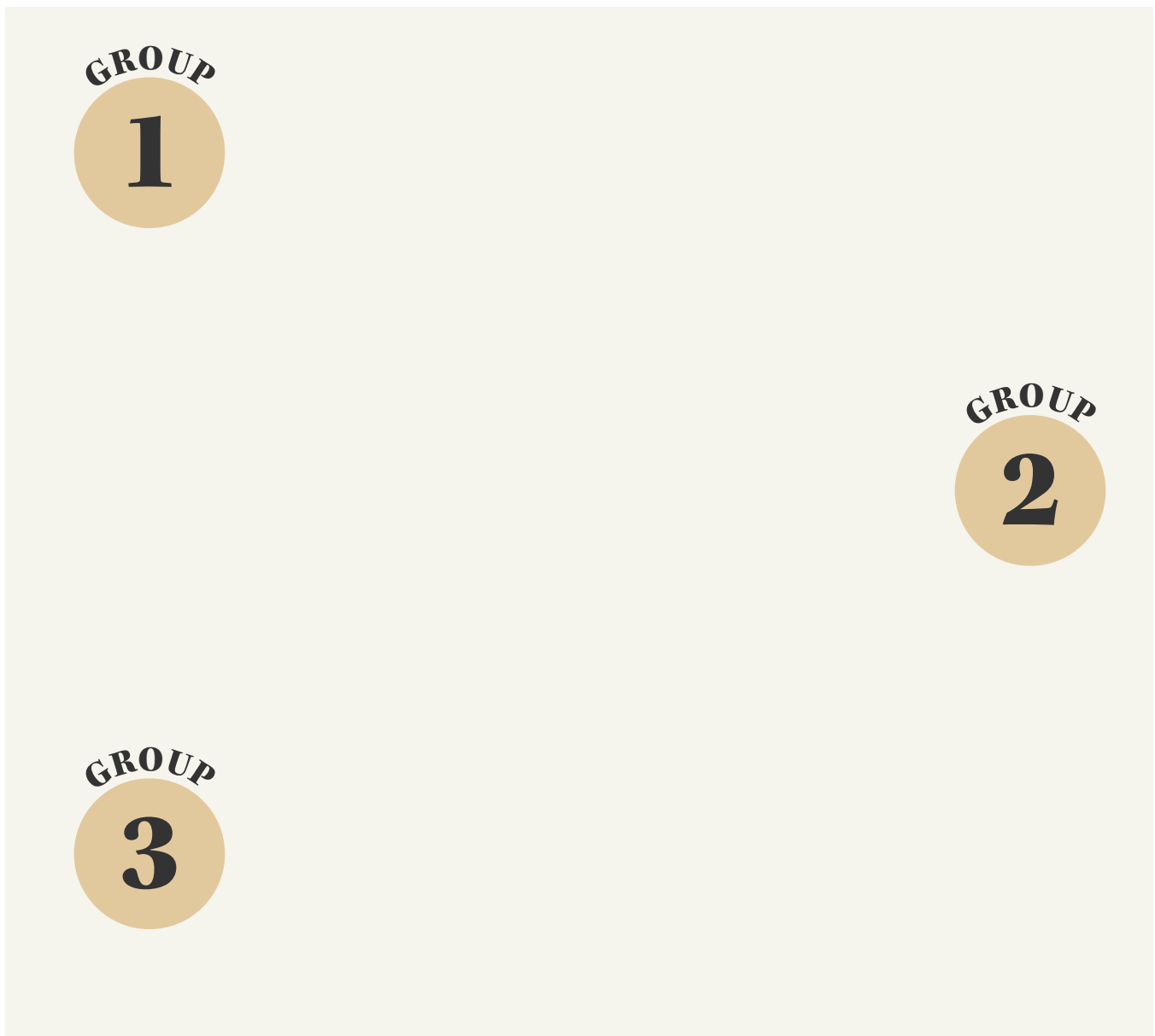
The audiences who can help you make the impact you want to as a leader can be divided into three primary groups:

Group 1: Your boss, senior leaders, executives

Group 2: Peer (or lateral) leaders, external contacts (e.g. suppliers, clients, trade groups)

Group 3: Direct reports, individual contributors

Using the map below, brainstorm a list of people in each group with whom you can connect regularly.



Your Boss

As a new leader, one of your most important relationships is between you and your own boss. They've likely been there done that with many of your early challenges and questions. As you find your footing and look to leave your mark, your boss can be your biggest advocate in helping you elevate your experience as a leader.

Whether you've worked with them before or they're brand new to you, it's critical to establish a healthy rapport with your boss early. Ensure that you have, at-minimum, a bi-weekly 1-on-1 conversation. If they haven't scheduled it already, talk to them about a cadence that you're *both* comfortable with and ask to put it on their calendar.

Talking points for the first 1-on-1 with your boss...

"Here's what's important for me in my early days as a leader..."

"Here's how I'll need your support as I settle into my role as a leader..."

"What's important for you to see from me in my role?"

Additional notes:

Your Team

The first several weeks as a leader should be about building trust with your team, getting to know the personal, human side of each team member and absorbing the team's knowledge and abilities. Resist any urge to make big decisions right away. Don't let your ego distract you from building a strong foundation with your team.

Early on, set 60-90 minute deep-dives with each of your direct reports to learn about their backgrounds, experiences, goals and work functions. Keep the conversation fluid: the extent of your agenda should be curiosity about their career development, work tasks and workload.

Holding regular 1-on-1's with each of your direct reports will be another crucial way to build trust and develop your people (see The Art of the 1-on-1 in Section Three for more). When I was a leader, I preferred to schedule all my team 1-on-1's on Thursdays as a way to wrap up the week, but go with what makes sense for your team and schedule. Just be consistent. Try not to ever cancel a 1-on-1 with a direct report. It sends a poor message. Instead, reschedule it to another time during that week.

Bring your team together from time to time as well for team-building, sharing important news and gathering feedback. Your demeanor should be confident, yet humble. Never arrogant. As you settle in, your message should be, "I might stumble early on, but I'm committed to figuring this out and creating a space where our team can thrive."

Don't let your ego distract you from building a strong foundation with your team.

Your Peers

You are likely not the only new leader or the only leader at your level in your organization. As a new leader, it's important that you build relationships with your peer leaders. Let's talk about why and how...

Why to build relationships with peer leaders:

Peers, and the teams they lead, can help you accelerate and amplify your goals

Peers offer a sounding board for ideas

Your peers are likely facing the same questions and challenges that you are. Building relationships with them offers a space to safely be vulnerable about shared experiences

How to build relationships with peer leaders:

Schedule 1-on-1 intro sessions with as many peer leaders in your network as possible

Create a space (e.g. digital group, meeting cadence) for peer leaders to regularly discuss team updates and challenges

Share regular updates about your team's projects, accomplishments, shout-outs and help needed

We go so much
further together
than we do alone



Showing Up

Disruptive Leaders don't lead in a vacuum. They're mindful of the people in their circle and how they need to show up for each of their audiences. "Showing up" means the approach, actions and mindset we bring to each relationship.

As we wrap up this section, use the space below to brainstorm ways you will show up for each of the audiences we highlighted.

I will show up for my boss by...

I will show up for my team by...

I will show up for my peers by...

Section Three

Disruptive Leader Toolkit



Conducting the Orchestra (Exercise)

In Section One, we talked about “conducting the orchestra”, the focus of a leader on designing the workflow and overseeing the team environment instead of tactical execution. Leaders create the workflow, teams do the work.

Now, we’ll put this idea into practice. Use the reflection questions on the following two pages to brainstorm ideas for your team’s ideal workflow and environment.

1. How can you guard your team members’ time so that they can maximize space for focused work?

2. How often will your team meet together? What will you try to accomplish during team meetings?

3. How will you celebrate team and individual accomplishments?

4. Which tools and techniques can help your team organize its work and have meaningful conversations about it (e.g. Agile, Kanban, Basecamp)?

Additional notes:

The Art of the 1-on-1

Goals

Building Trust

A 1-on-1 is a regular opportunity to get to know your direct reports, from what's important to them outside of work to what their career goals are. Building a genuine rapport creates the trust that fosters a high-performing culture.

Coaching

Coaching is one of your primary responsibilities as a leader, and a 1-on-1 is the best forum for it. Be curious about the challenges your direct reports are facing, listen intently and guide them to craft the best solution.

Development

Feedback is crucial for growth, and if you limit it to annual performance reviews only, you risk eroding trust and losing the rich, honest conversations required for growth. Use 1-on-1's to talk about the good and the bad, the past and the future.

Sample Prompts

“What went well this week?”

“What didn't go as expected?”

“What's a challenge you're facing?”

“What can I do to help you?”

“Here's where I think you are...”

1-on-1 Template

Name:

Date:

Reflection Questions

Complete these prior to conversation

What are the most important messages you need to share during the conversation?

What performance feedback will you share (positive + critical)?

1-on-1 Notes

What actions do you need to take following the 1-on-1?

**A
tree
can only
give shade
to others after
it has grown itself**

- Jay Shetty



Influencing Others

One of the most critical skills for leaders is the ability to influence others. You have goals for yourself, your team and your career, and you'll need support from others in order to accomplish them. Remember: Disruptive Leaders don't lead in a vacuum.

Influencing starts with building strong relationships. This is why the work you did in Section Two to identify your audiences is so important. Influencing also requires clear goals and tailoring your message.

Use the space on the following two pages to define a goal and create a gameplan for how you can influence others to help you accomplish it.

1. What is a goal you have in which you'll need help from others? Be as specific as possible here.

2. What does success look like for this goal?

3. Who will you need to influence in order to accomplish your goal?

4. What support will you need from others in order to accomplish your goal? Be as specific as possible.

For each person you have to influence (we'll call them 'teammate')...

1. What is the teammate motivated by? What will motivate them to help you?

2. If the teammate decides to help you, what's in it for them?

3. Who else in the teammate's circle can help you influence them?

4. What are the teammate's styles of thinking and communicating? (e.g. data-driven, vision over details, risk-averse, etc.)

5. How can you tailor your approach to appeal to the teammate's thinking and communication styles?

6. How can you hold the teammate accountable for following through?

Goal Setting

As you settle into your role as a leader, it will be important to define what you hope to accomplish, the specific steps you will take and how you will hold yourself accountable. Use the prompts below to create goals for your journey as a leader.

NOTE: I recommend waiting at least one month from starting your first leader role before solidifying your goals. It will take time to learn about your new working environment and consider the kind of leader you want to be (see: Leader Brand exercise)

Goal:

When do you want to accomplish this goal?

0-3 months

3-6 months

6-12 months

12+ months

What specific actions do you need to take to accomplish this goal?

How will you know you have accomplished this goal?

Weekly Summary

The orchestra conductor who can convey to each audience the story and the significance of the music being played will ensure that the group's performance is impactful. As such, being the leader who is transparent and communicates well across the organization can elevate the work and brand of your team.

One approach to transparency is sending a weekly summary to your key audiences, including your boss and even your peer leaders. This can include team milestones, upcoming events and any help needed. Below is a template to get you started.

What got done this week

Next week's activities and events

Risks + issues

Help needed

*Do your best
with what
you have*



Taking Back Time

One of my biggest workplace pet peeves is this statement: “I’m SO busy these days I don’t have time to do anything!” Our work culture glamorizes busyness: If your calendar is always full and your workload is overflowing, it must mean you’re pretty important, right? Wrong. That statement, particularly from leaders, signals poor prioritization. It translates as “This is not a priority for me.” At the end of the day, we vote with our time what we consider important.

As a new leader, you might find your calendar overwhelmed with new obligations like performance reviews, budget planning and team meetings. The bad news? Many of these responsibilities come with the territory of being a leader and will need your time and attention. The good news? Ultimately, *you* are in control of how you spend your time. With reflection, setting clear expectations and (ironically) time, you will be poised to give your time to what matters to you and your team.

Below is a breakdown of four categories of time as a leader. These are adapted from the book *One Minute Manager Meets the Monkey* by Hal Burrows, Ken Blanchard and William Oncken. The next two pages feature an exercise designed to help you understand where your time is being spent currently, along with reflection questions that can help you maximize time where you need to.

The Four Categories of Time

Boss Imposed

Time doing tasks delegated by, or in service of, your boss. This could include 1-on-1’s, staff meetings or performing research your boss asked you to.

Team Imposed

Similar to Boss Imposed, but in the other direction. Time directing, developing and supporting your team in their work.

System Imposed

Time within the processes, policies and systems of your organization. Examples include: completing expense reports, interviewing candidates and attending town halls.

Discretionary

Time spent doing the tasks you want to as a leader. This could include researching trends in your industry, optimizing your team’s workflow and setting future strategy.

In the table below, write down the activities you do in a typical week across the four categories of time. Include the minutes spent on each activity. Then, add up the total minutes for each category.

Ex: "Staff Meeting (60)", "Preparing Weekly Summary (30)", "Expense Report (90)"

Boss	Team	System	Discretionary

Total	Total	Total	Total

Section Four

Wrap-Up



***This will take time.
Trust yourself.
Keep going.***

I wrote these words on a sticky note and stuck the note to my desk soon after becoming a leader. From time to time, I would glance over at the words as a reminder that anything worth doing takes time, trust and a whole lot of tumbles. Leadership is one of those anythings. You will absolutely fall down. The growth and the leadership will show from your perseverance, from your willingness to get back up.

There are no shortcuts. In a world where AI can generate a lucid, articulate blog post in seconds, there are no hacks or quick tips that will make you a great leader right away. But if you stick with it, trust yourself and keep good people around you, you'll feel yourself growing in new ways. And you'll see the impact that you've made on a team that trusts you.

I hope this book has given you a foundation, that I was able to offer some good ideas, watch out's and beware's as you go on your journey. I encourage you to keep this book as a companion as you cultivate your Leader Brand.

Leadership is a journey in humility, not authority. An exercise in service, not dominance. It means letting go of "me" in service of "us". It's one of the most rewarding burdens someone can bear. I hope you can remind yourself of that in the tough moments.

Naveed Siddiqui

What's next?

Leadership is an ongoing journey, and it does not have to be traveled alone. Each of us is capable of leaving a lasting mark through our work by reflecting on the beliefs we hold, getting clear about the impact we strive to make, and seeking the guidance and help of our community.

I hope this book has empowered you to put meaningful thought to the imprint you want to leave as a leader. You learned that leadership means shifting your perspective to be the conductor of the orchestra, how to build community with the audiences around you, and how to use the tools in your Disruptive Leader toolkit to build a strong path forward for yourself and your team.

If you'd like to further grow your leadership skills by cultivating a strong Leader Brand and enlisting a thought partner to walk alongside you, check out my 1x1 coaching services. As your coach, I'll help you navigate the complex challenges you face as a leader and, together, we'll design solutions to help you make the impact you want to make.

By purchasing this book, you are eligible for a discounted coaching rate. To learn more about my coaching programs, check out naveedsiddiqui.com/work-with-me



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