

Preface

Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot,
nothing is going to get better. It's not.

—Dr. Seuss

Welcome to *Leadership Actually*. We're delighted you're here! The fact that you are shows that you're one of Dr. Seuss's "someones" who cares deeply about leadership and improving the way you practice it.

We at the Co-Creative Leadership Alliance share that passion, and it's our mission to improve the way leadership is practiced around the world—one leader, one team, and one organization at a time. With this goal in mind, we've distilled the very best of our collective experience into this book to help you lead with skill, confidence, and a deep sense of purpose.

Whether you're leading a team, teaching students, or guiding your family through the labyrinth of daily life, your influence is profound. It can literally help change and heal our troubled world.

WHY WE WROTE *LEADERSHIP ACTUALLY*

This book is a collective passion project inspired by our years of experience with thousands of leaders, many of whom have been misled or

misinformed about the true nature of leadership and how to practice it. Too often, people have been influenced, subtly and otherwise, to model themselves after the tough, stoic, predominantly male figures portrayed in the media, where the human element is routinely treated as an afterthought.

We take a different tack. We approach leadership as a professional craft whose primary purpose goes beyond wielding power or exerting control. Instead, leading others is about helping them unlock their full potential and become active agents in shaping their own futures.

Leadership doesn't happen in isolation; at its best, it's a co-creative process built on robust working relationships, shared experiences, and mutual growth. True leadership is about fostering an environment where people elevate one another—exchanging ideas, skills, and perspectives—to create something greater than any one person could achieve alone.

We'll return to these themes throughout the book, revisiting them from multiple perspectives. As the context shifts, their meaning will evolve and deepen. Each time, we'll uncover new insights and applications—revealing their ongoing relevance to your growth as a leader.

OUR PREMISE AND GOAL

The book's premise is that leadership has two sides—one illusory and one real (inspired by Joni Mitchell's song "Both Sides Now").

Too often, what many confuse with leadership is a performance rather than a practice, an illusion sustained by charisma, titles, and appearances. Illusory leadership substitutes rhetoric for substance, information for insight, and ego for service.

While this illusion might feel convincing in the moment, it inevitably erodes trust, growth, and collaboration. Beneath the surface, this

kind of leadership leaves teams, organizations, and communities fragmented, disoriented, and disillusioned.

Leadership Actually cuts through the fog of illusion to reveal what leadership truly is: a learnable craft that cultivates awareness, fosters agency, and treats the dynamics of teams as living systems, guiding them toward something real and shared. It's an invitation to look beyond the illusion and step into the lived reality of leadership—where responsibility is real, relationships matter, and impact endures.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

We've designed *Leadership Actually* to guide you through both the theory and practice of genuine leadership. But don't worry, we're practitioners, so we go light on theory and heavy on practical application.

We've divided the book into three sections, each featuring three pairs of chapters. Odd-numbered chapters provide leadership insights through the real-life experiences of our protagonist, Jack Barrett, while even-numbered ones delve into the principles behind these lessons, offering practical advice for applying them.

Part 1, "Setting the Stage to Lead," lays the groundwork by exploring the essential elements of leadership and the importance of mastering them so leadership becomes your craft. Part 2, "Laying the Foundation to Lead," delves into the fundamental skills and practices that, once mastered, will enhance your effectiveness as a leader. Part 3, "Doing the Doing of Leading," integrates insights from parts 1 and 2 and focuses on their application in real-world scenarios, covering often-overlooked core aspects of leadership such as managing team process, teaching and learning together, and co-creating with others.

Each chapter pair ends with an "Extras" section that includes a summary of the two chapters, suggests how you can apply their insights, and provides selected additional resources for deeper study if you're so

inclined as well as a related verse from the *Tao Te Ching* (one of the world's oldest leadership texts),¹ and a final word from us.

MEET JACK BARRETT

Jack Barrett is a former US Army captain, Airborne Ranger, and Vietnam veteran. His early career experiences are the foundation of the leadership lessons presented in the odd-numbered chapters of this book.

Leadership Actually, however, is not Jack's biography, nor is it a book about military leadership. Instead, it focuses on strengthening your leadership practice, equipping you with new insights, tools, and approaches to help you make differences that matter. Drawing from our experiences and Jack's stories, it explores the timeless, universal challenges—and triumphs—of leading others wherever you are.

You'll find that Jack's lessons—many of which were forged in the heat of battle—are highly relevant to the leadership challenges you face every day. The foundational knowledge and skills they highlight are applicable across time, place, and context.

As you read, we encourage you to reflect on your own journey: how you got your start leading, where you are at this moment, and, most importantly, where you're headed. The experiences you've had up to now, as well as those you'll have next, are worth exploring thoroughly, thinking about deeply, and recording conscientiously. One day, they're going to make great stories that you'll share with a new generation of leaders.

ABOUT US

We are the Co-Creative Leadership Alliance, a diverse group of multigenerational leaders and leadership development practitioners from around the world. Our experience covers every level of leadership from first-line managerial roles to the C-suite.

We share a deep belief in the power of being real and telling it like it is. Having learned from some of the foremost experts in our field and witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of effective leadership as it's actually practiced, we hope that *Leadership Actually* becomes a trusted companion on your own leadership journey.

A FINAL WORD

You are needed. There is no one else like you on the planet. Your leadership matters because how you lead influences not only your own team and organization but also the lives of everyone you touch.

In the midst of today's turbulent world, we can easily lose sight of the connection between genuine leadership and the achievement of some of life's most fundamental goals—well-being, happiness, and success for you and everyone around you.

We like the phrase “Nothing changes if nothing changes.” We encourage you to make one small change today—whether you decide to listen to a colleague or child more attentively, express appreciation more often, or engage more deeply with your team. Start small and start now.

Thank you for your interest in *Leadership Actually*. We're honored to be part of your leadership journey and look forward to walking this path with you.

PART 1

Setting the Stage to Lead

Part 1, “Setting the Stage to Lead,” gets straight to the heart of leadership, which is getting people to work together to pursue and achieve goals. This matters because your life and livelihood, as well as those of the people you lead, depend on it.

You can find tens of thousands of books with the word *leadership* in the title. If you read them all, you’d find they have one thing in common: each, in its own way, aims to inform you about *how to lead*. This book does too.

But what makes *Leadership Actually* different is right there in the title. It’s about how to actually do it. Leadership isn’t just about using special techniques and strategies but rather cultivating a mindset that illuminates your working relationships in new and more connected ways. You must also refine a core set of leadership skills and knowledge and hone your own unique ways of seeing and interacting with the people and world around you. These add up to what can—and by all means should—be your professional craft, one that’s worth committing to and mastering.

Let’s dive straight into making that a reality.

1 | Attention Must Be Paid

All you have to do is pay attention; the lessons
always arrive when you are *ready*.

—Paul Coelho

Tân Sơn Nhất Airbase, Republic of Vietnam. 1971.

The big jetliner shuddered as it descended through a bank of altocumulus clouds, waking newly promoted US Army Captain Jack Barrett and giving him his first glimpse of Vietnam.

As he surveyed the scene outside the plane's window, Jack thought, "Damn! This is real." Until this moment, the war had been an abstraction for him, shaped by nonstop TV news reports, antiwar music on his car radio, and the protests growing around the world.

Exhausted from the nearly twenty-four-hour flight from California, Jack was now fully awake, his adrenal glands working overtime. At just twenty-three years old and only two years out of university, he was completely unprepared for what lay ahead.

The moment the plane's door opened, a rush of hot, humid, tropical air flooded the cabin, overwhelming the air conditioning. Jack wondered if this was a metaphor for what awaited him. His thoughts were interrupted by a booming voice over the PA system.

“Welcome to the Republic of South Vietnam! There were mortar attacks on the airfield earlier, so we need to get you off the plane and onto the buses outside, pronto. Grab your gear and start making your way to the exit door up front, ASAP.”

Soldiers hurriedly exited the plane and boarded military buses waiting at the foot of the airstairs. Jack noticed his bus's windows were open and covered with heavy mesh screens. A nearby soldier quipped, “How big are the flies in this place that you need screens like that?”

The bus driver, overhearing the question, responded in a serious tone, “We’re traveling through an unfriendly village to get where we’re going. The screens are there to keep bad guys from pitching a hand grenade in and killing our asses.”

The mood on the bus turned somber as the new arrivals absorbed the gravity of the situation. The ride to the replacement station at Biên Hòa was uneventful. Tension hung thick in the air. Upon arrival, the soldiers disembarked, completed paperwork, underwent medical checks, and were issued jungle uniforms and combat gear.

During the equipment issue, one jumpy young soldier asked anxiously, “When will we get our M16s?”

“You’ll be issued weapons when you reach your units in the field,” came the terse reply. “That’s where you’ll need them.”

After the formalities, the soldiers went their separate ways—some to briefings, others to the dining hall, and many straight to their transit barracks to recover from the grueling flight.

Jack attended an orientation briefing for newly arrived officers. He learned about the current political and combat situations, as well as the rules of engagement—army directives outlining the actions soldiers could legally take on their own authority in a warzone.

The most unsettling part of the briefing was the announcement that a few weeks earlier someone had thrown a hand grenade into a nearby transit barracks, killing two American officers outright.

The base hadn't been infiltrated by Vietcong or North Vietnamese commandos; the perpetrator was a dangerously disaffected American soldier. Jack learned that soldiers had quickly coined a new word for such attacks—"fragging." But no matter the euphemism, he understood that fragging was cold-blooded murder, or attempted murder, of army leaders by their own troops using a fragmentation grenade.

Jack was unnerved by the thought of soldiers attacking their own leaders. It confirmed everything he'd suspected about the war. When the briefing concluded, he and a few fellow officers made their way to their sleeping quarters for the night, in the same barracks where the fatal attack had occurred.

Coupled with what he already knew about widespread drug use, racism, and indiscipline throughout Vietnam, the new information about fragging put Jack in a somber, introspective frame of mind.

Jack thought, "This is where I'm going to spend the next year—if I live that long. American soldiers throwing hand grenades at their leaders? This is a nightmare. How the hell am I going to get through it?"

The last thought he had before drifting into a fitful sleep was a cryptic one: "Attention must be paid, Jack. Attention must be paid."

As the war entered its final years, incidents of fragging multiplied. Leaders who were judged by their troops to be too gung-ho, too disciplinarian, or simply unpopular became targets. The situation became so alarming that some leaders, fearing attacks from within their own ranks, changed where they slept every night.

When Jack awoke from his restless sleep, his thoughts were still swirling around that mysterious phrase: "Attention must be paid." During his ruminations, he recalled a conversation he had eighteen months earlier with his commanding officer (CO) in Germany, Lieutenant Paul Lustig.

Paul had told him that their generation of officers was responsible for making positive changes in army leadership. "Otherwise," Paul had

said, “I’m afraid we’re headed to a very bad place. Remember, Jack, nothing changes if nothing changes.”

Despite whatever challenges lay ahead, Jack knew that he’d still be expected to do his job and lead. The question that troubled him was, Exactly how would he do that? His mind raced.

In a moment of clarity, Jack remembered something one of his military science professors at school, an infantry major, had to say about leadership: “Men, when you get to Vietnam, do you want to know why your soldiers will follow you?” After a pregnant pause, and with a smirk on his face, the major delivered his punchline, “Because you have the *f—g* map!”

Jack had laughed with the rest of his class then, but now, alone in his spartan barracks room, seven thousand miles from home, he saw things more clearly. Having the map didn’t seem like a sane basis for how to lead anyone anywhere—particularly when people’s lives were on the line. From there, he made the short step to the realization that he couldn’t rely on what he’d been taught at school.

He’d always known that leading soldiers in Vietnam wouldn’t be easy, but he hadn’t expected to feel so unprepared. The theories and tactics he’d spent so much time learning felt distant and disconnected from the reality he faced now.

Less than forty-eight hours after his arrival, the chaos around him was already eroding his confidence. And the challenges he anticipated in the field—where he would work with the soldiers whose lives depended on his leadership—only deepened his unease.

With no manual to guide him and no playbook for what lay ahead, Jack turned inward, reflecting on his own sense of right and wrong and the simple lessons he’d learned along his way to that moment: pay attention, care about people, and treat them with respect. As he did, the meaning of “Attention must be paid” became clear to him.

From these principles, Jack began to shape a new way of leading—one that centered on presence, empathy, and trust. He understood that

survival wouldn't come from barking orders or enforcing rigid discipline. It would come from working and leading *with* his team and building a bond strong enough to withstand the chaos to come.

Looking back, these changes weren't just the start of Jack's evolution as a leader. They became the foundation of a way of working together that served him—and others—well for the rest of his long career.

LEADERSHIP TODAY

Recently, the truth of Paul Coelho's epigraph from this chapter—"All you have to do is pay attention; the lessons always arrive when you are *ready*"—came sharply into focus for us once again. It was almost as though it had been waiting for the right moment. This headline caught our attention: "U.S. Employee Engagement Sinks to a 10-Year Low."¹

The article went on to identify three key factors behind this troubling trend:

- Most employees don't know what's expected of them at work.
- Just over one-third feel someone at work genuinely cares about them as a person.
- Less than one-third believe they are encouraged to grow and develop.

We can't go on like this. Leadership is as much about making connections as it is about giving directions. Chapter 2, "Unpacking Leadership," picks up from Jack's "Attention must be paid" story and looks more closely at what it takes to lead like your life and livelihood depend on it in today's world.

Adopting and adapting this approach might well be the most important leadership step you've taken to date. More are sure to follow.

Chapter 2 explores how you can begin to reverse this trend by unpacking and closely examining what it means to lead. This alternating

structure of pairing narratives of leadership lessons learned with analysis and explanation forms the foundation of the book.

As you read on, we invite you to reflect deeply, take stock boldly, and act decisively, keeping two things top of mind: leadership doesn't equate to having the metaphorical map, and nothing changes if nothing changes.

2 | Unpacking Leadership

Everything's connected
Everything's changing
So pay attention
This is what it's like right now
—Jason Molin

The Southwestern United States. 2022.

When Jack looks back on the entirety of his experience, he says his first few days in Vietnam were among the toughest of his career. In that short space of time, he had to accomplish two incredibly consequential tasks:

1. Set aside much of what he'd been taught about leading, crazy ideas such as soldiers following him because he had the map.
2. Replace these assumptions with an approach his heart told him would work but that his head thought was held together with bubble gum and baling wire.

Jack's heart was right. This chapter explores why this was the better option, starting with a side-by-side comparison of an idea that Jack

grasped intuitively but couldn’t—and wouldn’t be able to—articulate for years to come: the idea of illusory versus actual leadership.

ILLUSORY VERSUS ACTUAL LEADERSHIP

Table 2.1 reflects our own experiences as well as Jack’s. Over time, we’ve seen these patterns emerge again and again in leadership, both good and bad. As you read through this comparison, you might sense echoes of your own experiences in one column and a vision of the kind of leadership you aspire to and hope for in the other.

TABLE 2.1. ILLUSORY VERSUS ACTUAL LEADERSHIP

Illusory leadership	Actual leadership
Position authority of based on having the map	Earned and shared authority
Individualist approach: I, me, mine	Collective Mindset: We, us, ours
Command, control, and compliance-based working relationships	Collaborative, trust-based working relationships
Short-term focus, often driven by personal gain	Long-term focus, prioritizing shared goals
Top-down, task-oriented goals	Purpose-driven goals co-created with the team
Fleeting impact, dependent on hierarchical authority	Sustainable impact through developing people’s personal agency
“Fake it until you make it” mentality that prioritizes charisma over substance	Authentic, transparent leadership where there’s no right way to do a wrong thing
Development philosophy: Every person for themselves	Development philosophy: Continuous learning and growth for all

You might even try filling in your own table. What does illusory leadership look like in your world? How does actual leadership show up for you? At a minimum, filling in your own table can be a fun activity, and you might gain an insight or two along the way.

This comparison reminds us at the Co-Creative Leadership Alliance of an illuminating activity we once did as a team: we each counted the number of effective and ineffective leaders we'd worked under. The results were a sobering three-to-one ratio of ineffective to effective leaders. This realization turned out to be a key motivation for writing this book.

Consider these related questions:

- What do your own numbers look like?
- What do they reveal to you?

Our numbers underscored how the gap between illusory and actual leadership isn't theoretical. It directly impacts how teams function, grow, and ultimately succeed (or fail), raising the \$64,000 question: What is leadership?

DEFINING LEADERSHIP

In their book, *Executive Leadership*, Elliott Jaques and Stephen D. Clement define leadership as “a process you use to get others to move along together with you, and with each other, with competence and full commitment, to achieve a goal.”¹

The authors give a strong definition—the best we've found—but it offers precious little explanation or practical guidance on the how-to. That's where this book comes in. Let's dive in with a look at what we call the three pillars of leadership.

THE THREE PILLARS OF LEADERSHIP

As Jaques and Clement opine, leadership is a dynamic process. We build on their definition by emphasizing that, because individual leaders actively shape and experience this process, a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't apply. Nevertheless, the process rests on three interdependent mix-and-match pillars:

- Leadership mindset
- Skilled leadership knowledge
- Personal sensibilities of the leader

These pillars, shown in figure 2.1, aren't abstract concepts; they're the essential tools in your leadership toolkit. Like carpenters who use specialized tools to ply their craft, leaders rely on these pillars to build trust, overcome obstacles, and inspire action. Each pillar plays a distinct but interconnected role in how you lead. Let's explore them one by one.

LEADERSHIP MINDSET

Your mindset is the mental framework that shapes how you approach challenges, interact with others, and view your role. It's not just what you think but it's how you think as well.

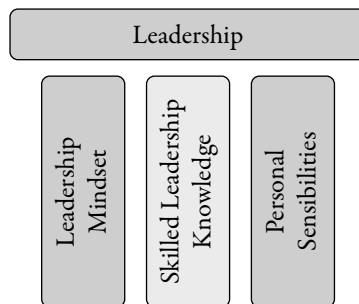


FIGURE 2.1. THE THREE PILLARS OF LEADERSHIP

Leaders with a strong mindset see challenges as opportunities, value feedback as a vehicle for growth, and approach problems with solutions in mind. This mindset not only influences how you lead but also sets an example for your team.

Stanford professor Carol Dweck's research into fixed and growth mindsets offers valuable insight.² Those with a fixed mindset see situations as static—"It is what it is." In contrast, those with a growth mindset believe in potential and change—"If you can think it, you can do it."

Mindsets often operate under the surface, shaping behavior in ways we may not realize. Exploring your mindset can be both enlightening and transformative. In this spirit, we've provided tools to help you assess and develop your leadership mindset:

- A simple mindset continuum to help you reflect on where you stand
- An informal leadership mindset self-assessment
- A deeper analysis of how mindset influences leadership

THE MINDSET CONTINUUM

Imagine Professor Dweck's concepts of fixed and growth mindsets mapped onto a continuum, from fixed mindsets on the left to growth mindsets on the right as shown in figure 2.2.

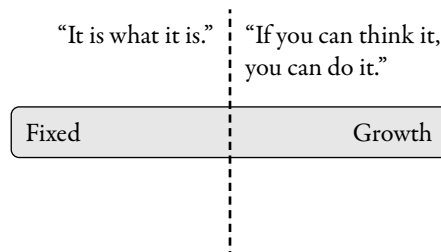


FIGURE 2.2. THE MINDSET CONTINUUM

Where would you place your current mindset? How do you think your team members, boss, or closest colleagues would describe your mindset?

While you reflect, let's dive deeper into the differences between fixed and growth mindsets.

Fixed versus Growth Leadership Mindsets

One of the first ways you can differentiate illusory and actual leadership is through leadership mindset. Leaders with fixed mindsets seek control, avoid challenges, and resist feedback. While they may appear strong, their resistance to change hinders their growth and limits their team's development. These leaders often prioritize short-term results over long-term innovation.

In contrast, growth-minded leaders believe leadership skills can be developed through continuous learning, effort, and perseverance. They embrace failure as an opportunity to improve and encourage their teams to take risks, innovate, and learn from setbacks. Growth-minded leaders focus on fostering autonomy, collaboration, and creative problem-solving, fostering a culture of continuous learning where failure becomes a stepping stone to success.

Leaders with growth mindsets also have the ability to shift focus from individual accomplishments to collective achievement. A historic example of this perspective is found in President John F. Kennedy's 1961 inaugural address: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man."³

President Kennedy's call to action encapsulated a growth mindset by prioritizing collective effort and long-term vision over personal gain. Similarly, as a leader, you can foster a mindset of collaboration and shared purpose within your team.

Reflect on your leadership approach: Are you fostering growth and collaboration, or are you focused on maintaining control and avoiding challenges? More importantly, what actions can you take today to strengthen or shift your mindset?

LEADERSHIP MINDSET SELF-ASSESSMENT

To explore your mindset further, take a moment to answer this quick, informal self-assessment:

1. How actively do you pay attention to team dynamics and interactions?
 - ☐ I pay attention when I need to.
 - ☐ I usually notice things.
 - ☐ I actively pay attention to these things.
2. How persistent are you with difficult problems requiring creativity?
 - ☐ I tend to give up too easily.
 - ☐ I'm able to stay with problems for a while.
 - ☐ I'm tenacious. I'm extremely persistent.
3. How open are you to feedback from your team or colleagues?
 - ☐ I'd rather not entertain feedback; it feels like criticism.
 - ☐ I'm willing to hear people out most of the time.
 - ☐ I encourage people to offer me feedback.
4. How often do you promote collaboration or working together?
 - ☐ I think people should compete. That's how you get the best work.
 - ☐ I suggest collaboration when the circumstances require it.
 - ☐ Everyone should collaborate all the time.

5. How committed are you to learning and teaching others?
 - ☐ I know all I want to, and others can make up their own minds.
 - ☐ I'm willing to learn and help others when it will do some good.
 - ☐ I'm all in on learning and teaching.
6. How willing are you to experiment with new leadership behaviors?
 - ☐ I'm not big on experiments.
 - ☐ Sometimes, I can be convinced to try new things.
 - ☐ I love trying out new things. I'm very willing.
7. How important are high standards and improving them to you?
 - ☐ I keep my standards high. They don't need to be improved.
 - ☐ I'll play the continuous improvement game when I need to.
 - ☐ My thinking is if you're not improving, you're falling behind.

After answering, step back and reflect on what the blend of your responses represents. Consider writing a short, descriptive paragraph entitled “My Leadership Mindset” to summarize your insights. What patterns emerge? How do they align with your leadership goals?

Five Behavioral Patterns of a Growth Mindset

Leadership mindsets often work behind the scenes, quietly shaping how you think and act. Understanding and assessing your mindset can help you harness its potential.

In our work with leaders, we've identified five key behavioral patterns associated with a growth leadership mindset shown in figure 2.3, attentiveness, commitment, communication, cooperation and collaboration, and craftsmanship.

Attentiveness

Attentiveness, or paying attention, means paying particular notice, taking heed, or concentrating on something.⁴ This behavior was the subject of the enigmatic and cautionary “attention must be paid” message that invaded Jack’s thoughts as he struggled to fall asleep his first night in Vietnam.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, professor emeritus of medicine at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, calls paying attention “mindfulness” and says, “It’s awareness that arises through paying attention, in the present moment.”⁵

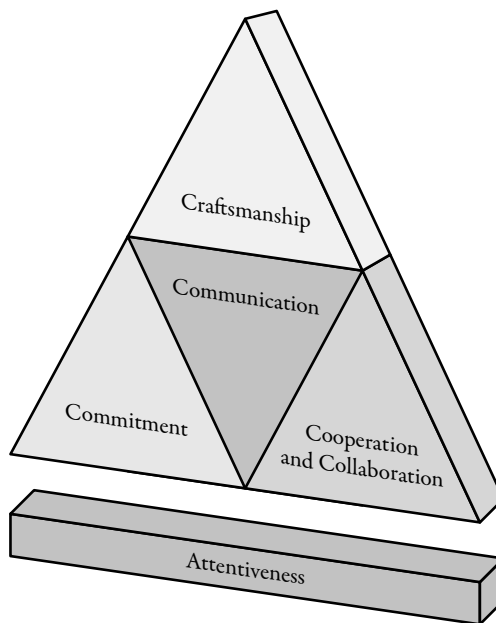


FIGURE 2.3. GROWTH LEADERSHIP MINDSET

Imagine Jack, just twenty-three years old, arriving in a warzone, realizing that his survival depended on his ability to notice the smallest details. An unusual sound, a fleeting expression on a teammate's face, a tree or bush that looked out of place—any of these details could be the difference between life and death. Attentiveness became not just a practice but a lifeline.

Commitment

Commitment is feeling internally compelled to act in a particular way.⁶ After his restless first night in Vietnam, Jack reached three conclusions—surviving the war required his full concentration, his ideas about leadership needed an immediate overhaul, and he needed to quickly come up with a new approach to doing things.

This was Jack's moment of decision, when he accepted that the well-being of the people he would lead was his responsibility. Their lives would be in his hands, and his would be in theirs. It was the moment he committed to becoming a leader.

Think of a moment in your life when everything changed—when a decision you made altered the course of your life or the lives of others. Commitment in leadership is like that. You come to the point of no return, where you decide that the stakes are too high to give your work anything less than your best.

Communication

Communication is the distinctly human and interpersonal process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to exchange information or express ideas, thoughts, and feelings to others.⁷ In the best of cases, communicating effectively is a crapshoot. That's because so many dependent and independent variables are in play:

- *Meaning*—Do the words you're trying to communicate carry the same meaning for those who receive them?
- *Social and cultural differences*—How do differences like gender, ethnicity, and cultural background affect your communication?
- *Values*—How do different values or value systems alter the situation?
- *Languages*—Is there any miscommunication over language differences?
- *Your surroundings*—Are you in a relatively quiet office, on a factory floor beside loud machinery, or in a moving vehicle?

You get the point. It's amazing any of us are able to form meaningful connections with others. But however difficult communicating on this level is, we have to keep trying. Genuine care for others, combined with decisive value-adding leadership, answers most of the questions a leader will face. Communicating effectively is the first step toward putting both into action.

Cooperation and Collaboration

Many people think that cooperation and collaboration are the same. They're not. Cooperation is working together toward a common goal while you maintain a certain level of independence. Collaboration requires a deeper, more interactive, and connected way of working together.

Reflect on a time when you were part of a truly collaborative effort—when everyone was in sync, and the sum turned out to be greater than the individual parts. For you as a leader, this translates to creating the conditions in which your team's collective effort outshines any one person's contributions.

Craftsmanship

The fifth behavioral pattern associated with an effective leadership mindset is craftsmanship. The days when craft was confined to skilled manual work, creating tangible objects or products, are over. The combination of craft and leadership is becoming widely relevant and accepted.

The primary reason is self-evident—craft consistently crushes clumsiness in everything, particularly in leadership because it affects people's lives. When it comes to your bosses, you'd prefer them to be masterful rather than merely going through the motions. The people who work around you feel the same way.

Craftsmanship in leadership is about more than just doing a job well; it's about adopting a leadership mindset that's focused on mastering the art of leading.

If leadership is to be treated as a craft, it follows that leaders should pursue it with the same level of intentional development found in other skilled professions. Here are some ways you can take action.

Ways to Level Up Your Leadership

The time has come for leaders like you to take a lesson from fields such as medicine, engineering, teaching, and others to figure out how you can inject more standards-based professionalism into your work. Doing so might involve one of these:

- Designing and developing organizationally based leadership apprenticeship programs
- Creating nationally or internationally organized leadership certification programs akin to Project Management Professional (PMP) certifications for project managers⁸
- Undertaking a wide-ranging, crowd-sourced project to establish standards for leadership craftspeople

- Establishing leadership residencies in partnership with universities
- Offering leadership craft masterclasses, workshops, and creating communities of practice

If any of these ideas send a pulse of energy through you, please reach out to us at www.ccla-co.com. We have so much to talk about. Who knows? We might end up changing the world!

In the meantime, having completed our review of what mindsets are, let's forge ahead and complete the last two parts of our overview of leadership mindset: why it matters and how you can enhance it.

Why Your Leadership Mindset Matters

Your mindset is the foundation of your leadership behavior. Without a strong, clear mindset, even the most skilled leader may struggle to inspire trust, foster collaboration, or guide a team through challenges.

A healthy, well-communicated leadership mindset instills confidence in your team. When your team members see you focused on the bigger picture, resilient in adversity and committed to their development, it fosters trust and collective effort. However, leadership mindsets don't develop by chance. They must be intentionally cultivated and practiced over time.

Tips to Help You Enhance Your Leadership Mindset

An effective leadership mindset grows through reflection, learning, and intentional practice. Here are a few practical strategies to help you enhance yours:

- *Develop self-awareness*—Regularly reflect on your thoughts, behaviors, and reactions. Ask yourself, “Am I focusing on

solutions or dwelling on problems?” and “Are my decisions driven by ego or the good of the team?”

- *Seek feedback*—Actively ask for input from your team and peers. Leaders with growth mindsets view feedback as fuel for improvement—not criticism.
- *Embrace challenges*—Reframe challenges as opportunities for growth instead of threats. Pushing yourself beyond your comfort zone builds resilience and adaptability.
- *Lead with optimism*—Root your leadership in optimism—not blind positivity, but the belief that progress is always possible. Practice reframing setbacks as chances to learn and grow.

Your leadership mindset requires ongoing attention, reflection, and renewal. Unlike a car, you don’t come equipped with an automatic system to alert you when you need a tune-up. Staying connected to your mindset is up to you, but the effort pays dividends.

With that in mind, let’s move on to the second pillar: your skilled leadership knowledge.

SKILLED LEADERSHIP KNOWLEDGE

You may not recognize the term *skilled knowledge*, but you encounter the concept daily. Skilled knowledge is the kind of know-how you use automatically—like tying your shoelaces, riding a bike, or driving a car.

Skilled leadership knowledge works the same way. It’s the practical application of leadership know-how: making quick decisions under pressure, managing productive meetings, resolving conflicts, and delegating effectively. Think of it as leadership muscle memory. With practice, leading becomes instinctive.

Skilled leadership knowledge also includes distinct competencies, strengths, and behaviors aligned with your leadership model. Whatever

model you follow, it should clearly define the skills required to master it. Without this clarity, proficiency is impossible.

You develop skilled leadership knowledge through experience, training, feedback, and consistent practice. Over time, you'll build a repertoire of leadership skills you can deploy effortlessly. Like a musician who practices even after mastering an instrument, leaders must continuously refine their abilities and expand their toolkit.

This book will guide you through ways to sharpen these skills and grow as a leader.

Why Skilled Leadership Knowledge Matters

A strong mindset sets the stage, but skilled leadership knowledge ensures you can act decisively, navigate complexity, and bring your vision to life.

Leaders without practical skills often feel stuck in a cycle of reacting to chaos, constantly putting out fires instead of proactively guiding their teams. This reactive approach creates a focus on short-term fixes over long-term success—a hallmark of illusory leadership.

Conversely, leaders with well-honed skills can pivot in real time during crises, provide clear direction to their teams, and maintain momentum. They don't just react, they anticipate, plan, and execute with precision, ensuring their teams thrive in both calm and turbulent times.

Tips to Help You Enhance Your Skilled Leadership Knowledge

Building skilled leadership knowledge is a gradual but essential process. These strategies can help you grow and refine your abilities:

- *Commit to continuous learning*—Leadership is ever evolving. Stay curious, read widely, and make learning a habit. Attend

workshops, seek advice from experienced leaders, and stay proactive in expanding your knowledge. The more you learn, the more adaptable and resourceful you become.

- *Sharpen core skills*—Identify key leadership tasks, such as setting goals, managing challenges, or improving self-awareness—and practice them deliberately. A skilled leadership coach can also provide valuable insights, helping you analyze difficult situations and develop alternative strategies.
- *Ask for and reflect on feedback*—Proactively seek feedback from your team, peers, and mentors. Ask specific questions, such as “What could I have done better?” and “How can I support you more effectively?”
- *Regularly explore what worked and what didn’t*—Some leaders hold weekly meetings to discuss lessons learned and adjust plans accordingly. This practice, inspired by leadership expert Marshall Goldsmith’s “feedforward” approach, uses insights about current operations to improve future performance.⁹
- *Prepare for the unexpected*—Good leaders anticipate surprises. Practice scenario planning by visualizing potential challenges and discussing what-if strategies with your team. Whether navigating crises or handling last-minute changes, leaders who rehearse alternative scenarios build confidence and readiness.
- *Streamline everyday tasks*—From running productive meetings to delegating efficiently, effective leaders turn routine activities into streamlined processes. Those who master these basics free up time and energy for higher-level strategy and problem-solving.

With these tips, you can continually improve your leadership expertise, ensuring you’re ready to meet any challenge. Next, we’ll explore the third and often-overlooked, but exceedingly important, pillar of leadership: your personal sensibilities.

PERSONAL SENSIBILITIES

As we noted in the preface, you are needed. There is no one else like you on the planet. Your leadership matters because how you lead influences not only your team and organization but also the lives of everyone you touch.

What makes this true? What sets your leadership apart? While many can develop a leadership mindset and skilled leadership knowledge, only you can lead the way you do. Your personal sensibilities—your unique combination of insight, intuition, and discernment—make your leadership distinctive.

Your personal sensibilities shape how you perceive and respond to situations, people, emotions—almost everything in your life. They do so by reflecting your preferences, values, and worldview, influencing how you experience art, music, literature, and even ethical dilemmas. Your sensibilities combine to create what's unique about you and how you lead.

Leadership works best when you embrace your individuality instead of trying to imitate others. Jack learned this lesson the hard way early in his army career when he tried in vain to copy the spit-and-polish style of a more senior officer when he gave presentations.

The first time Jack got an opportunity to give a briefing to his commanding general, he was so stiff and nervous, the general excused himself from the meeting. Jack had failed miserably, coming across like an automaton versus a real person with valuable information to impart. Once he decided to just be himself when he presented, meetings went much better, and he learned an important lesson.

Qualities of Personal Sensibilities

When you're yourself, your natural human levels of emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, and compassion shine through. Let's explore

how these qualities enhance your leadership and how you can develop them further.

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is your ability to recognize, understand, and manage emotions—both your own and those of others. Leaders with high emotional intelligence excel in navigating interpersonal dynamics with empathy and composure. They diffuse tension, build trust, and inspire loyalty.

Ask yourself, “How well do I read my own emotions, as well as those of my team? Do I show empathy, or do I default to logic at the expense of connection?”

Cultural Awareness

Cultural awareness involves recognizing and respecting differences in how individuals and groups communicate and make decisions. Every organization and team has its own culture, and understanding these nuances makes you a more effective leader.

Leaders with cultural awareness can read the room and adjust their approach to meet the unspoken needs of their team. They are attuned to team dynamics, fostering collaboration and inclusion.

Empathy and Compassion

While empathy and compassion are closely related, they are distinct. Empathy is understanding and sharing someone else’s feelings, stepping into their shoes to see the world from their perspective. Compassion, on the other hand, goes a step further by adding the desire to help.

Demonstrating both qualities helps you connect with your team on a deeper level. When team members feel understood and

supported, they perform not out of obligation but from a sense of trust and loyalty.

Why Personal Sensibilities Matter

Leadership is fundamentally about people—their emotions, needs, and motivations. Recognizing, understanding, and using your personal sensibilities sets you apart as an authentic leader who fosters genuine connections, as opposed to an illusory leader who is focused solely on managing tasks.

Leaders attuned to who they are create team environments that prioritize psychological safety—a space where people feel confident expressing ideas, concerns, and opinions without fear. In such environments, innovation, collaboration, and commitment thrive. Who you are is what your team will reflect back to you.

Tips to Enhance Your Personal Sensibilities

Like your mindset and leadership skills, your personal sensibilities can be intentionally developed. Here are actionable strategies to cultivate them:

- *Work on your self-awareness*—Ask yourself questions such as “How did I react?” “Why did I react that way?” “How did my reactions affect my behavior?” Understanding your emotional patterns helps you manage them and empathize with others more effectively.
- *Practice active listening*—Truly focus on what someone is saying instead of planning your response. Reflect back or paraphrase what they’ve said to confirm your understanding. This builds trust and ensures decisions are based on clear communication. Refer to the “Listening Ladder” tool in appendix A for more practical listening techniques.

- *Cultivate empathy*—Put yourself in your team’s shoes. Ask yourself, “What challenges are they facing? And how might they feel about their work and the team?” If you’re unsure, ask them directly in one-to-one conversations. When you understand others’ perspectives, it fosters rapport and builds trust.
- *Build trust through transparency*—Being open and honest about your intentions, decisions, and goals also builds trust. You will see the effect of operating transparently in chapter 3 when Jack meets his team for the first time.
- *Foster respect*—Respect begins with clear communication. Share the big picture. Talk about why the team is doing a certain task, what roles you expect them to play, and what kind of support they can expect from you throughout.

Follow through with small, consistent acts of respect, such as any of the following:

- Greeting people by name each day
- Saying “please” and “thank you”
- Acknowledging people’s perspectives
- Being on time for team meetings and taking responsibility for mistakes
- Giving credit where it’s due
- Talking to people directly instead of about them

These small actions build trust, confidence, and a willingness in your team to leave it all on the field when necessary.

Cultivating your personal sensibilities helps you lead authentically, build meaningful connections, and foster an environment of trust, collaboration, and humanity.

This completes our exploration of the three pillars of leadership, the foundation of what it takes to actually lead and be effective doing so—namely, your leadership mindset, the indispensable core of your skilled leadership knowledge, and your unique personal sensibilities.

When combined, these three pillars help you and your team move beyond common myths of illusory leadership, which include the belief that leaders are born and not developed, that they instinctively know what's best and that they always have the answers, and that they alone can empower their teams.

Grasping the three pillars is just the beginning. As you and your team come to understand them more deeply and use them more intentionally, they will take on even greater meaning and value. With this in mind, let's take a look at the three pillars from the perspective of a dynamic model that integrates them—the Leadership Actually Model.

THE LEADERSHIP ACTUALLY MODEL

Much like an x-ray reveals hidden structures, the Leadership Actually Model uncovers the interdependent relationships between the three pillars. It exposes the essential elements of leadership knowledge and skill unique to truly leading, including understanding content and process, becoming more self-aware, turning information into communication, managing team process, teaching and learning together, and co-creating with others.

As we progress through the book together, we'll shed new light on each of these elements from a perspective that's not only fresh but will also encourage you to reconsider what and how you think about leading. We'll also offer you practical strategies you can implement immediately to create a real and lasting impact for you and your team.

Figure 2.4 depicts a visual representation of the Leadership Actually Model, which is not a static framework but rather a tool designed to challenge your assumptions and invite you to see leadership as a dynamic, evolving interplay of skills, mindsets, and sensibilities.

As you study this graphic, notice how the three pillars are represented—leadership mindset anchors the entire model from its center, which is surrounded by the six interdependent elements of skilled

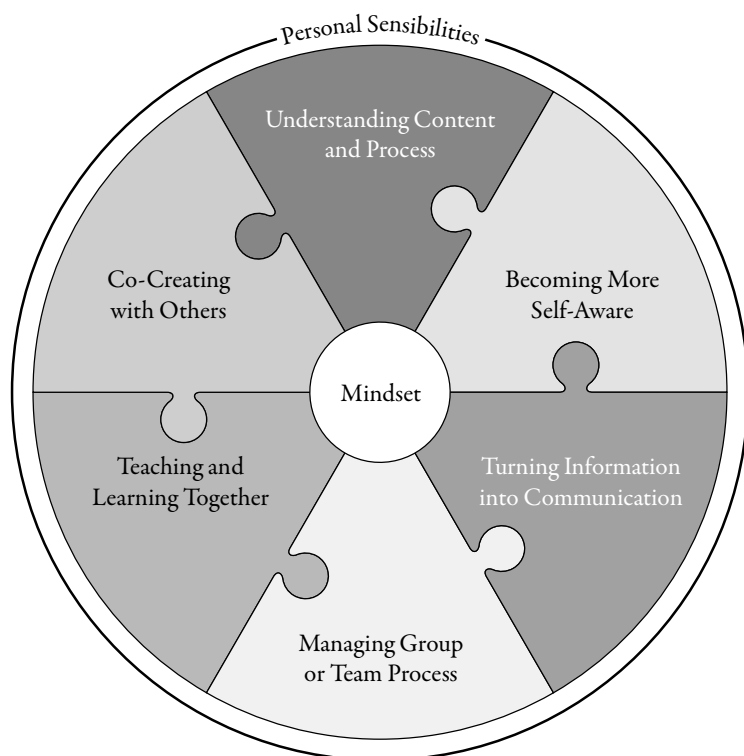


FIGURE 2.4. THE LEADERSHIP ACTUALLY MODEL

leadership knowledge. Personal sensibilities encircle the entire framework, where, much like how yeast transforms dough in the baking process, they subtly inform and influence everything you do.

This dynamic interplay between the parts of the model offers a fresh perspective on leadership today, and also foreshadows a tantalizing possibility for how it might evolve tomorrow. Here's how this can play out.

As a leader today, you're no stranger to navigating contradictions. How do you foster innovation without losing stability, or inspire individuality while maintaining shared purpose? These tensions aren't just challenges, they're part and parcel to your work. The Leadership Actually Model invites you to explore these and other paradoxes that have always characterized the nature of leading others and always will.

WHAT IF?

Bringing a future full of possibilities into focus will require a renaissance of intentionality on our parts to come together as leaders to redefine the professional purpose of our work.

What would we learn if we paused long enough to consider what we do every day, the numbers of people we interact with, and the influence we exert on their lives, for good or for bad? Would we see the unlimited potential—perhaps beyond that of any other line of work?

What would happen if we were to reimagine this profession of ours as being more than the roles we occupy or the set of tools we use?

What if we visualized our work as a professional craft, one that we dedicate ourselves to hone over years of practice, learning through experience and refinement and teaching others? Chapters 5 and 6 will explore this idea of leadership as a craft, helping you frame your own leadership journey as an ongoing practice—one where mastery is achieved through not perfection but commitment to continuous learning, adapting, and improving.

The journey to becoming a truly skilled leader is not a straight path; it's a process of discovery and growth. If you're bold enough to travel it, the road ahead can challenge and inspire you and the rest of us. Let's take this next step together.

EXTRAS: CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

- The original idea for *Leadership Actually* came from the true story of a young army officer's arrival in Vietnam in 1971 and how he and his team learned how to work together under the most challenging of circumstances.
- Effective leaders pay attention to the individuals around them, their teams collectively, and the circumstances in which they all work.

- Jack Barrett and his team survived a war by learning to pay attention and work together like their lives depended on it.
- Leadership is often described at the top line as either good or bad, effective or ineffective. This book slices it another way—as either illusory or actual—and offers a side-by-side comparison of the two.
- It also asks and answers the question What is leadership? We use the best and simplest definition of leadership we know: “Leadership is a process you use to get others to move along together with you, and with each other, with competence and full commitment, to achieve a goal,”¹⁰ which is true regardless of any approach you use.
- Leadership of any stripe comprises three essential pillars: a leadership mindset, skilled leadership knowledge, and the personal sensibilities of the leader.
 - Leadership mindset includes five behavioral patterns: attentiveness, commitment, communication, cooperation and collaboration, and craftsmanship.
 - Skilled leadership knowledge contained within the Leadership Actually Model includes understanding content and process, becoming more self-aware, turning information into communication, managing team process, teaching and learning together, and co-creating with others.
 - Personal sensibilities are a leader’s unique awareness of and responsiveness toward situations and people, particularly their emotions.
- You don’t need an advanced degree, special certification, or psychoanalysis to be an effective leader. Your basic humanity meets all the prerequisites.
- The Leadership Actually Model is like an x-ray:
 - It reveals structures invisible to the naked eye. It uncovers the interdependent relationships between the three pillars.

- It exposes the essential elements of leadership knowledge and skill unique to truly leading.
- It can foreshadow how leadership might evolve if we leaders embrace it as a professional craft of influence.¹¹

How to Use the Information in Chapters 1 and 2

The quote “Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together” from Vincent van Gogh highlights the significance of the small parts of leadership covered in the first two chapter pairs. Your leadership mindset is the most significant of these small parts, so it’s worth spending some time on. Here are a few ideas of steps you can take to strengthen it:

- Revisit the Leadership Mindset Self-Assessment in this chapter, and compose a paragraph describing your leadership mindset. How many of the five behavioral patterns of a growth-oriented leadership mindset (attentiveness, commitment, communication, cooperation and collaboration, and craftsmanship) does yours reflect?
- Ask yourself, “What changes in my mindset would I like to make? What’s preventing me from doing it? And what would it look like if I actively pursued these improvements?”
- Being bolder still, consider asking your team about their perceptions of your mindset and which behaviors they’d like to see more and less of from you. Below is an example of a Team Member Assessment about your leadership mindset that you can adapt and use.
- Compare what others perceive about your mindset with your own thoughts. How wide is the gap between them? If there’s a substantial difference, what, if anything, do you want to do to begin aligning the two? What’s your plan? Where will you start?

TEAM MEMBER ASSESSMENT OF [LEADER'S NAME] LEADERSHIP MINDSET

Fill in the blanks with the name of the person whose leadership mindset you're assessing and mark your responses to each question.

1. How much does _____ pay attention to what's going on around him/her, particularly with other people?
☐ Not at all ☐ A little ☐ A lot
2. How often is _____ willing to stay with a tough problem and find a solution?
☐ Rarely ☐ Sometimes ☐ Most of the time
3. How open is _____ to being influenced by you and your colleagues?
☐ Not at all ☐ A little ☐ A lot
4. How actively does _____ emphasize team collaboration and working together?
☐ Not at all ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very actively
5. How interested is _____ in both learning and sharing knowledge to help others grow?
☐ Not at all ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very interested committed
6. How committed is _____ to trying out or practicing new behaviors?
☐ Not at all ☐ Somewhat ☐ Very committed

7. How important are continuous improvement and high standards to _____?
- ☐ Not important ☐ Somewhat important ☐ Very important

Verse 17, Tao Te Ching

When great people rule,
subjects know little of their existence.

Rulers who are less great win
the affection and praise
of their subjects.

A common ruler is feared
by his subjects, and an unworthy ruler
is despised.

When a ruler lacks faith,
you may seek in vain for it
among his subjects.

How carefully a wise ruler chooses his words.
He performs deeds, and accumulates merit!

Under such a ruler
the people think they are ruling themselves.

Final Thoughts

Vietnam. 1971 and 1972.

In the chaos of Vietnam in 1971 and 1972, Jack Barrett experienced a profound shift in his understanding of leadership. Grappling with the cryptic phrase “attention must be paid,” he started to grasp the importance of observing the subtleties of human behavior—a lesson that

echoed something his mother was fond of saying: “There’s always more going on than meets the eye, Jack.”

This realization, coupled with his growing awareness of the limits of what he could control, opened new doors for his approach to leading. He became aware that his role wasn’t just about managing tasks; it was about paying attention to people—their emotions, motivations, and interactions—and managing those as well. Years later, Professor Robert E. Quinn would describe this awareness as “entering the fundamental state of leadership.”¹²

In chapter 3, you’ll see Jack putting these lessons into practice as he meets his new team. He begins to navigate the challenges ahead, laying the groundwork for cooperation, which will eventually evolve into full collaboration as the team learns to work together under pressure—and under fire.