

N E X T G E N E R A T I O N L E A D E R

F I V E E S S E N T I A L S F O R T H O S E
W H O W I L L S H A P E T H E F U T U R E



A N D Y S T A N L E Y

**NEXT
GENERATION LEADER**

N E X T
GENERATION
LEADER

FIVE ESSENTIALS FOR THOSE
WHO WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE

ANDY STANLEY

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For my children,
ANDREW, GARRETT, AND ALLIE.

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SECTION TWO

COURAGE

COURAGE ESTABLISHES LEADERSHIP

FIRST IN

Only those leaders
who act boldly in times of crisis and
change are willingly followed.

[Jim Kouzes]

Leaders love progress. Progress is what keeps them coming back to the task. Nothing is more discouraging to a leader than the prospect of being stranded in an environment where progress is impossible. If we can't move things forward, then it's time to move on.

Progress requires change. If an organization, ministry, business, or relationship is going to make progress, it must change. That is, over time it must evolve into something different. It must become better, more relevant, more disciplined, better aligned, more strategic.

But organizations, like people, resist change. As the authors of *The Leadership Challenge* point out, "Leaders must challenge the process precisely because any system will unconsciously conspire to maintain the status quo and prevent change."⁹ Organizations seek an equilibrium. People in organizations seek stability. Both can be deterrents to progress because progress requires change and change is viewed as the antithesis of stability.

Keep in mind that everything you loathe about your

current environment or organization was originally somebody's good idea. At the time it might have even been considered revolutionary. To suggest change is to suggest that your predecessors lacked insight. Or worse, that your current supervisor doesn't get it! Consequently, it is easier to leave things as they are, to accept the status quo and learn to live with it.

While that may be easier, it is not an option for a leader. Accepting the status quo is the equivalent of accepting a death sentence. Where there's no progress, there's no growth. If there's no growth, there's no life. Environments void of change are eventually void of life. So leaders find themselves in the precarious and often career-jeopardizing position of being the one to draw attention to the need for change. Consequently, courage is a nonnegotiable quality for the next generation leader.

Leaders challenge what is for the sake of what could and should be. That's the job of the leader. But challenging what has always been and what has always worked before requires guts. Simply recognizing the need for change does not define leadership. The leader is the one who has the courage to act on what he sees.

Within every church, business, or nonprofit organization in need of change, there is a group of insiders who are keenly aware of the transformations that need to take place. They go home every night and gripe to their spouses. They gather in the break room and complain to each other. But day after day they go about their work resigned to the notion that nothing will change. They are convinced that to try to introduce change would be a costly—and potentially hazardous—waste of time. So they keep their mouths shut

and watch the clock. They don't lack insight into what needs to happen; they simply lack the courage to do anything about it.

A leader is someone who has the courage to say publicly what everybody else is whispering privately. It is not his insight that sets the leader apart from the crowd. It is his courage to act on what he sees, to speak up when everyone else is silent. Next generation leaders are those who would rather challenge what needs to change and pay the price than remain silent and die on the inside.

As we will see in the next chapter, simply speaking up has the potential to transform an individual from a mere organizational ornament to an influencer—a leader.

Courage is essential to leadership because the first person to step out in a new direction is viewed as the leader. And being the first to step out requires courage. In this way, *courage establishes leadership*.

We saw this principle at work when we were children. Remember standing around with your friends, daring each other to do something? Then suddenly, somebody went first and everybody followed. The person who goes first is generally viewed as the leader. Courage to act defines the leader, and in turn the leader's initiative gives those around him courage to follow.

There is some question as to whose idea it originally was to put a computer on every desktop. But there is no question about who for years was the leader in the PC industry. The folks at IBM were the first to risk the resources necessary to implement an idea that changed the computer industry forever.

Beyond the need to challenge what should be changed, leaders have been given the assignment to take people places they've never been before.

Leaders provide a mental picture of a preferred future and then ask people to follow them there. Leaders require those around them to abandon the known and embrace the unknown—with no guarantee of success. As leaders we are asking men and women not only to follow us to a place *they* have never been before; we are asking them to follow us to a place *we* have never been before either. That takes guts. That takes nerve. That takes courage.

We all know the fear associated with walking into a dark room or traversing an unlit path. Leading into the future conjures up many of the same feelings. Leadership requires the courage to walk in the dark. The darkness is the uncertainty that always accompanies change. The mystery of whether or not a new enterprise will pan out. The reservation everyone initially feels when a new idea is introduced. The risk of being wrong.

When my children retreat from the darkness of their rooms or the basement, I am quick to remind them that although they are afraid, they are not in danger. As true as that might be, it never helps. Fear defies logic. Information only goes so far. Even when armed with all the reasons why we should not be afraid, the fear remains.

For this reason it is the dark that provides the leader with his greatest opportunities. It is your response to the dark that determines in large part whether or not you will be called on to lead. For the darkness is what keeps the average person from stepping outside the security of what has always been.

Yet many who lack the courage to forge ahead alone yearn for someone to take the first step, to go first, to show the way. It could be argued that the dark provides the optimal context for leadership. After all, if the pathway to the future were well lit, it would be crowded.

Leaders are not always the first to *see* an opportunity. They are simply the first to *seize* an opportunity. It is the person who seizes the opportunity who emerges as the leader. But fear has kept many would-be leaders on the sidelines, while good opportunities paraded by. They didn't lack insight. They lacked courage.

Leaders are not always the first to see the need for change, but they are the first to act. And once they move away from the pack, they are positioned to lead.

Think for a moment about some of the life experiences you would have missed out on if you had given in to your fear. Chances are you would never have learned to swim or ride a bicycle. You would never have asked anyone out on a date. Most of us men would never have gotten married. We would have cancelled all our job interviews. None of us would be able to ski. Many of us would not have driver's licenses. Unbridled fear results in missed opportunities.

This is a lesson I have rehearsed repeatedly with my children: "If you don't conquer your fear, you are going to miss out on some great things in life."

Often I find myself basically forcing them to try things they would not attempt on their own. Afterwards, we sit down and talk through the dynamic of what took place. In

most cases they find that things that began with a lot of fear ended up being a lot of fun.

We have been through this so many times that now they look at me and say, “Is this one of those things we’ll be glad we did after it’s over?”

Our first white-water rafting trip is a case in point. We were in North Carolina with several other dads and their children. After the outfitter equipped us with life jackets and paddles, he proceeded to go over the dangers of white-water rafting. After about twenty minutes of “What to do in case,” my boys were looking at me with that “I’m not so sure about this” look. When he finished, we all packed into the shuttle and headed up the mountain.

The road leading to the spot where we put in ran parallel to the river. Andrew, who was nine at the time, couldn’t take his eyes off the rapids. I could tell he was nervous. About fifteen minutes into the trip he turned to me and said, “Dad, I know I’m not going to want to get in the raft when we get there. Just make me do it anyway.” I put my arm around him and assured him I would.

“Doing it anyway” is really the only way to ensure that fear doesn’t rob you of an opportunity. “Doing it anyway” is the essence of courage. Courage is the willingness to move in a direction in spite of the emotions and thoughts that bid you to do otherwise.

Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage assumes fear. If we had waited for our fear to subside before we took that first plunge off of the high-dive, we would all still be standing there waiting. We just jumped anyway. Courage is the willingness to strap on your fear and move ahead.

The leader who refuses to move until the fear is gone will never move. Consequently, he will never lead. There is always uncertainty associated with the future. Uncertainty presupposes risk. Leadership is about moving boldly into the future in spite of uncertainty and risk. Without courage we will simply accumulate a collection of good ideas and regrets. What could be and should be will not be...at least not under our watch. Eventually somebody else will come along and seize the opportunity we passed up.

Ask veteran leaders about their risk-tolerance and they will all tell you the same thing: "I wish I had taken more risks." In other words, they wish they had not allowed their fear of the unknown to bridle their aspirations. Max De Pree made this observation: "An unwillingness to accept risk has swamped more leaders than anything I can think of."¹⁰

Seasoned leaders rarely regret having taken risks. Even the risks that didn't pay off directly are viewed as a necessary part of the journey. A leader's regrets generally revolve around missed opportunities, not risks taken. Many of those missed opportunities would not have been missed had they been willing to push through their fear and embrace what could be. Fear, not a lack of good ideas, is usually what keeps a man or woman standing on the sidelines.

Fear of failure is common to man. But leaders view failure differently. Consequently, they don't fear failure in the same way the average individual does.

Here's the difference: *Eventually a leader's lust for progress overwhelms his reluctance to take risks.* In other words, failure to move things forward is the type of failure most feared by the leader. For the leader, failure is defined in terms of missed opportunities rather than failed enterprises.

Failure in any particular enterprise is something a leader can live with. Even laugh about. An unsuccessful enterprise is simply a lesson in things not to repeat. Leaders can much more easily live with the prospects of having tried and failed than not having tried at all. Leaders fear missed opportunity more than they fear an unsuccessful enterprise.

Failure is a part of success. Veteran leaders view failure as simply a necessary chapter in their story: lessons learned, lessons that are essential to future success. Leaders know that failure looks and feels completely different in the rearview mirror than it does when it is staring at us through the windshield.

Ask a successful leader how he overcame his fear of failure, and chances are he won't give you a good answer. Why? Because he has never thought about it. So to the common man, leaders appear to be fearless. The truth is that leaders simply don't fear what other men fear.

Leaders know that the best way to ensure success is to take chances. While the average man or woman fears *stepping out* into a new opportunity, the leader fears *missing out* on a new opportunity. Being overly cautious leads to failure because caution can lead to missed opportunities.

Tom Watson Sr., founder of IBM, understood this principle. A junior executive with the company once managed to lose over \$10 million in a venture that was considered risky even by company insiders. When Watson found out about the disaster, he called the young man to his office. Upon entering, the young man blurted out, "I guess you want my resignation?" Watson allegedly responded, "You can't be serious. We've just spent \$10 million educating you."¹¹

You can't lead without taking risk. You won't take risk without courage. Courage is essential to leadership.