

READY TO BE A THOUGHT LEADER?

Foreword by
**GUY
KAWASAKI**

How to Increase Your
Influence, Impact, and Success

DENISE BROSSEAU

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More praise for *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?*

“Denise Brosseau’s ground-breaking book teaches us how to make our careers matter, changing ourselves and others for the better. If you are ready to live your life to its full potential, I highly recommend *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?*”

—Sheryle Bolton, CEO, Sally Ride Science, Inc.

“At 85 Broads, we help smart women develop the leadership skills they need to dramatically increase the lifetime return on the investment they make in their careers. To do that, they need to know how to build a network of dedicated followers around their game-changing ideas. *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?* is just the kind of savvy, inspirational, and engaging guide to help anyone break out of the pack and stand out for all the right reasons.”

—Janet Hanson, founder, 85 Broads

“As a long-time technology executive who has experienced several career transitions, I have learned the importance of thought leadership to raise my own profile within the industry and open the door to new opportunities for myself and others. *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?* offers just the sort of practical advice that I could have used along the way. I highly recommend this book for every executive.”

—Beth Devin, chief information officer, Silicon Valley Bank

“To climb the corporate ladder, you not only have to know where you are going, but you have to bring people along with you. Denise Brosseau teaches you how to enhance your credibility and find encouragement from a broad constituency supporting you.”

—Lydia I. Beebe, corporate secretary and chief governance officer,
Chevron Corporation

“Whether you’re an entrepreneur, an executive, or running a nonprofit, *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?* will help you establish your credibility within and outside your organization and create a tribe of dedicated followers.”

—Sheryl O’Loughlin, executive director, Center of Entrepreneurial Studies,
Graduate School of Business, Stanford University; cofounder and former
CEO, Plum, Inc.; and former CEO, Clif Bar and Company

“As the CEO of a large nonprofit, I know the importance of finding and engaging with a passionate set of people who believe in and will engage with our work, and one way for me to do that is by establishing myself as a thought leader. *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?* provides the strategies and resources entrepreneurs need to have their ideas not only heard, but acted on. I recommend it as a must-read.”

—Telle Whitney, president and CEO, Anita Borg Institute

“*Ready to Be a Thought Leader?* provides tips, tools, and resources that will help you articulate your passion, demonstrate your leadership, and engage others in accelerating new and creative initiatives. Denise provides a step-by-step process to gain strategic visibility for your ideas and your work and in turn the vital contribution you make to improving the world. A must-read for anyone who wants to be more strategic and systematic in their work as a change agent.”

—Ellen Snee, EdD, vice president, leadership programs, VMware

“Is it time to stand out from the crowd and gain more recognition for your achievements? *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?* will open your eyes to new possibilities for increasing your visibility and credibility within any organization — just what every savvy executive needs to get ahead.”

—Miranda Lin, senior vice president, Bank of America

“To rise above the noise, you need to stand out as a trusted and reliable resource for your customers. Denise Brosseau’s timely and engaging new book, *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?*, shows just what it takes for executives and CEOs to become that go-to guru. Her strategies will ensure that customers flock to your door.”

—Mike Gill, vice president, US Sales and Customer Care,
Medtronic Diabetes

“As a Silicon Valley executive talent agent, Denise Brosseau has a front-row seat on what it really takes to stand out from the crowd. In *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?*, she shares that know-how in an easy-to-read, down-to-earth, and approachable style.”

—Kit Yarrow, consumer psychologist; coauthor, *Gen BuY*; and professor,
Golden Gate University

“Whether you’re an up-and-coming entrepreneur or an established executive, Denise Brosseau will provide you specific guidance and invaluable insights to help you take control of your business and career. Denise’s stories, examples, templates, and tools have—to quote one of her case studies—the ‘strong smell of reality.’ She’s been there, done that, and helped hundreds of clients get to where you want to go.”

—David Newman, author, *Do It! Marketing*

“If you’re ready to break out as the ‘go-to’ person in your niche, *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?* will cut ten years off your learning curve. With actionable advice, a step-by-step execution plan, and inspirational stories of leaders, this book will help you put your career on overdrive!”

—Dan Schawbel, author, *Me 2.0* and *Promote Yourself*

“Denise Brosseau’s Thought Leadership Lab is helping leaders break out of the pack. In *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?*, she shares the stories of executives and entrepreneurs who went from complete obscurity to national prominence, and provides you with the game plan to do the same.”

—Hajime Tada, vice president and assistant general counsel,
Agilent Technologies, Inc.

“Thought leadership is an essential weapon for standing out in today’s time-starved, always-connected economy. *Ready to Be a Thought Leader?* is a must-read for executives who want the kind of career insurance that expedites amazing opportunities.”

—Adrian C. Ott, author, *The 24-Hour Customer*, and CEO, Exponential
Edge, Inc.

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*I dedicate this book to my mother and my mastermind team.
Without them this book would not have been possible.*

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FOREWORD

GUY KAWASAKI

People use the term “thought leader” as if all you have to do to become one is set up a Twitter account and start tweeting. This is hardly the case. True thought leaders have expertise, passion, and a track record of changing the world. They become thought leaders when they rise above themselves by sharing their knowledge so that others can change the world, too. Perhaps most importantly, they are recognized by their peers—they do not declare themselves. It is only through a sincere commitment to share the path forward to a better future that they earn the right to be called a thought leader.

Achieving the status of thought leader—while it will not happen overnight—is absolutely worth the effort. You’ll gain a seat at the table and the credibility you need to build a more successful company or catapult your career to the next level.

If you want to know how to become this kind of go-to guy or gal in your industry, community, or profession, I suggest that you read this book. Denise Brosseau explains just what it takes to achieve this lofty status. If you have a world-changing idea with the potential to make a real difference, she’ll show you the steps to take to get recognized and respected for the work you’ve done, and how to get others to adopt and evangelize on behalf of that big idea.

I first met Denise in 1998 when I was starting Garage.com. I invited her and her team at the Forum for Women Entrepreneurs to camp out in our offices because I observed that Denise was just as committed as I was to helping start-up companies succeed. Since then, Denise has helped hundreds of entrepreneurs and

executives build bigger businesses and more successful careers as the cofounder of the Springboard Venture Forums, the Invent Your Future Conference, and the founder of Thought Leadership Lab. She has also become a respected voice and go-to expert in leadership and entrepreneurship, becoming a true thought leader herself in the process.

If you're ready to break out of the pack, read this book—not for just yourself but for your team and for anyone else that you can inspire.

Guy Kawasaki is a special advisor to the Motorola business unit of Google. He is also the author of *APE*, *What the Plus!*, *Enchantment*, and nine other books. Previously, he was the chief evangelist of Apple. Kawasaki has a BA from Stanford University and an MBA from UCLA, as well as an honorary doctorate from Babson College.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE KNOWN FOR?

The first time she called me for some career advice, Van Ton-Quinlivan was finishing a one-year stint as the chief of staff to the chairman of one of the largest utilities in the United States. As we sat down that weekend at the kitchen table in her Bay Area home, Van laid out a few professional options she was considering. We agreed that one of them clearly gave her an opportunity to make a lasting impact in an arena that really mattered to her: workforce development.

That afternoon we created a detailed plan, and over the next four years I served as Van's advisor and sounding board as she advanced from being the founding director of workforce development at her company to testifying in front of the U.S. Senate on workforce issues. This was followed by recognition from the White House for her company's best practices in workforce development, and then by an appointment from the governor of California to oversee workforce development and career technical education for the state's community college system—one of the largest in the world.

Along the way, Van went from being completely unknown in the workforce development world to becoming a recognized thought leader who impacts legislation; serves on national boards, committees, and commissions; and has been quoted at length by Thomas Friedman in his Sunday column in the *New York Times*. Her programs have been replicated; she has promulgated concepts

that have become industry norms; and now—harkening back to that old E. F. Hutton commercial—when Van talks, people listen.

Today I have the privilege of advising lots of leaders like Van—including start-up CEOs and Fortune 500 executives—on how to make their own transition from leader to thought leader. At Thought Leadership Lab we work with clients who want to be more successful but not only as measured by the dollars in their bank accounts. Our role is to push them to think beyond their wallets to the *influence* they can wield for positive change, the *impact* they can have in arenas that matter to them, and the *legacy* they can leave behind after they move on.

WHAT IS A THOUGHT LEADER?

Do you want to become someone who can move and inspire others with your innovative ideas, turn those ideas into reality, and then create a dedicated group of friends, fans, and followers to help you replicate and scale those ideas into sustainable change?

This is the work of a thought leader.

Some thought leaders start an initiative, program, company, or movement. Others convene or lead an advisory committee, task force, or industry professional association. Some develop a product, platform, service, or training model. Others push for new legislation or modifications to existing regulations. Many create or put into practice their own framework or methodology and share it widely.

Regardless of the form of their engagement, they do not simply pontificate on what needs to be done; they actively engage in bringing to life new, first-of-their-kind projects, programs, and creative initiatives. It is those actions that influence and inspire others to get on board.

Getting others on board is critical. A thought leader is defined by her or his ability to galvanize others to think new thoughts, modify the way they have always done things, and embark on new behaviors, new paths, and new actions to transform the world.

Thought leaders are all around us. In Boston, Robin Chase, the cofounder of the car-sharing company Zipcar, has built on her credibility from that role to encourage audiences of thousands to think about how their individual actions can have a direct impact on global climate change.¹ In Chicago, Nina Nashif, the founder of the start-up incubator Healthbox, is building a platform as a healthcare innovator—speaking and blogging and writing her first book.² And in Los Angeles, there’s artist and designer Ron Finley, the cofounder of the charity L.A. Green Grounds, who styles himself as the “Gangsta Gardener” in order to encourage Angelenos to cultivate vegetable and fruit gardens in vacant lots within deprived neighborhoods.³

In big towns and small, you will find attorneys, executives, consultants, bankers, social entrepreneurs, and people from every walk of life who have stepped into the role of thought leader in order to move their agenda forward.

I admire thought leaders like Robin and Nina and Ron, who change the world in meaningful ways and engage others to join their efforts. They create evolutionary and even revolutionary advancements in their fields, not just by urging others to be open to new ways of thinking but when they create a blueprint for people to follow—a method, process, guidelines, or a set of best practices. Thought leaders who codify the steps necessary for following in their path assure that others will align with and build on their success. This guarantees that they, as leaders, are not confined to making small tweaks around the edges but instead create a foundation for others to build on or a movement for others to join.

WHY BECOME A THOUGHT LEADER?

This is all well and good, you might be thinking. But why should I make the transition from leader to thought leader?

What I have witnessed over and over is that thought leadership is the key that unlocks a whole new level of professional

accomplishment and achievement as well as career and personal satisfaction.

If you'd like to increase your *strategic visibility*—by which I mean your visibility and standing with the people who matter—then thought leadership is one of the easiest paths to achieve that. I've seen thought leaders become *rainmakers* who attract customers for their products, clients for their services, partners for their companies, followership for their blogs, readership for their books, and funders for projects they have under way.

Thought leadership leads to *exposure for your ideas* both inside and outside your company, particularly with journalists, analysts, event organizers, and conference hosts. It will give you *access* to people who can help you *make things happen*—leaders in your organization or community; innovators in your profession or industry; or influencers in government or regulatory circles.

As a recognized thought leader you will have the *power* to persuade, the *status and authority* to move things in a new direction, and the *clout* to implement real progress and widespread innovation. People want to affiliate with those who are well known and in the know. Thus, thought leadership also leads to invitations to join corporate boards, serve on government commissions, and participate in industry-wide committees—opportunities to *raise your profile* from the local to the national to the international stage.

Thought leadership is not about being known; it is about being known *for making a difference*. A thought leader is seen as a *credible, reliable authority*, an “honest broker,” someone whom others can safely look to for guidance, valuable insights, and a plan for what to do next. That credibility is essentially based on *trust*, trust that you, as a thought leader, know (or will find) a way to do things better, cheaper, faster, or more efficiently. Trust that you will help people solve their problems, their community's problems, or the intractable problems faced by their friends and families. Trust that you will take the risk to put your ideas and opinions forward, to speak out even when you might be wrong (and correct yourself

when you are), to be a *role model* and set an example by your actions, which others can emulate.

Yes, to become a recognized and respected thought leader takes time—usually several years—and there are some risks: you will be in the spotlight, which means you may take some pretty painful arrows. But being in the spotlight can also bring about a *promotion* or a better job, an *award* or an unexpected accolade, a portrait on the cover of the *Wall Street Journal* or a story in an industry magazine that engages your community to finally unite around the fundamental transformation you have been advocating. More likely than not, it will lead to an *unexpected invitation* to open a new door to an opportunity that you never thought was possible, including the chance to encourage and support others to become thought leaders in their own right.

And perhaps most importantly, for many it can answer the deeper questions: Why am I here? What is the meaning in my work? What will I leave behind? As your influence and platform grow, so will your opportunities to *create a significant impact* on a larger and larger scale, to *inspire* and bring about *meaningful change* that can last long after you're gone. As a thought leader, you will *leave a lasting legacy*: transformed teams, communities, industries, systems, or governments.

Obviously, not everyone chooses to be a thought leader—to put themselves out in front of their field. Most follow the traditional career advice we were all taught was the path to success: keep your head down, work hard, and take each step, one by one, up the ladder. If you're lucky, and I hope you are, this route will routinely pay off for you with promotions, salary raises, and job security.

But that's not always the case, is it? What I've witnessed all too frequently (especially through the economic downturns that seem to follow one after another) is that if you take the traditional route, there comes a point in time when things no longer go your way. Your champion retires or leaves the company; your company is sold or merged; or your industry moves off in an entirely new direction.

Technologies evolve, funding dries up, or customers revise their preferences overnight. Your path to the next job, to a partnership position, or to full tenure is blocked; your party is now out of power or your boss falls out of favor.

The result? That long sought-after career goal, the one you may have worked towards for years, may no longer be attainable or anywhere near as desirable.

The good news? *Thought leadership is the very best career insurance around.*

As the best-connected, most-respected, and most highly valued people in their organizations or industries, thought leaders, I've found, are usually the last to find themselves without a role or opportunity when things go awry. Their supporters and followers often become their allies, able to help them identify new paths forward after an unexpected company acquisition, reorganization, or downturn. Their wide network of connections, communities, and constituencies makes them much more likely to find the next place to land without any significant difficulty or detour along the way.

THOUGHT LEADERS NEEDED

The fact is that the world needs a lot more people who will step beyond traditional leadership roles into the role of thought leader.

One person who understands this is Katie Orenstein, CEO of the OpEd Project. Her organization offers programs in companies, universities, and in public settings, which teach people to think about what they know, why it matters, and how they can use their knowledge and expertise to change the world. She believes that “thought leadership is like citizenship, that having a voice is like having a vote—having a say in what goes on in the world.”⁴ I couldn't agree more. I am on a mission to encourage everyone to add their voice to the conversation in their community, industry, and at the national level. More people with an informed point of view speaking up and speaking out will make a difference for us all.

Another perspective comes from Erika Brown Ekiel, former *Forbes* journalist and founder of Storyboard, a company that helps individual thought leaders get their stories out into the world. Erika has found that “people don’t care what companies do, they care what leaders do.” She advises her clients, “Editors are no longer the arbiters of what is genius or cool or worth hearing. But, on the other side of the coin, with fewer journalists spending less time on any individual story, editors also need more content. They need content particularly from credible sources. This provides a win-win for thought leaders with a unique story to tell.”⁵

So why aren’t more people stepping up to thought leadership?

In five years of working with aspiring thought leaders, I’ve found that what often stops people is inside their own heads—what one of my clients calls the “itty bitty shitty committee,” those negative voices that tell us we can’t possibly achieve our dreams or that no one wants to hear what we have to say. I admit I have them too, and sometimes they can be *very* loud. So we procrastinate, find myriad excuses, or create distractions that hold us back, instead of surrounding ourselves with allies and supporters who can help us make our dreams a reality.

Throughout the book, we’ll look at what to do when you get stopped and explore how to overcome the roadblocks you might encounter (personal responsibilities, a difficult boss, your age, your background, even your reticence to take center stage). We’ll talk about how to build new skills, form new attitudes, and find a new path when naysayers, credit-stealers, or backbiters block the first (because sadly those folks *are* out there).

The path to thought leadership is not always easy—I wish I could say it was—but it is possible. *And it is important.*

The key is to realize how important. Whatever issue you are tackling, whatever problem you are working to solve, whatever arena you choose to educate and inspire and engage others in—it needs *your* voice. To stay on the sidelines or keep silent or not value your own participation will mean not only that you will

lose the opportunity to make a difference but that the rest of us will lose too. We will lose your passion, your commitment, and your dedication to making a difference. We will lose your good ideas and your vision of a better future. We will lose your unique story and your ability to have a meaningful impact on the issues you care about.

I want to empower and equip more people to become thought leaders, including executives, entrepreneurs, service professionals, and community leaders. I also want to inspire those who are traditionally overlooked—by the mainstream media, by the leaders of corporations mired in old thinking, and by elected officials—to believe that their voices do, indeed, matter. I believe we need more people who have the skills and motivation to create a clear direction, goal, and meaningful plan of action—people who are ready to create, and help the world create, evolutionary and revolutionary change more quickly, intentionally, and effectively. That’s why I wrote this book.

When I began my own evolution from leader to thought leader, I could have used a book like this, a simple how-to guide that would help me find my way and motivate me to keep going.

MY JOURNEY TO THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Let me tell you a little bit about my own thought leadership journey. In three years, from 1998 through early 2001, I went from being a relatively unknown leader of a small nonprofit in Silicon Valley to being quoted in the *New York Times*, recognized as one of the Top 25 Women on the Web, feted as a Woman of Influence, and featured in *Inc. Magazine*, *Fast Company*, and on the cover of the technology industry magazine *Upside*. I was invited to share my ideas at major universities; to speak at local, national, and even international conferences; and to participate at the White House in coalitions to advance women’s entrepreneurship nationally.

During that time, the organization I cofounded, the Forum for Women Entrepreneurs, expanded from one city to seven,

and investors, associations, and prestigious foundations began to seek us out, eager to replicate our model nationwide and offering collaboration and funding. This allowed us to expand our membership from 250 to 1,200 and to grow our budget to be among the top 5 percent of nonprofits in the United States. In 1999, I also had the opportunity to cofound Springboard, the first venture conference for women entrepreneurs, which has since led to over \$6 billion (and counting!) in increased investment in women-founded and women-led businesses.⁶

And then, in the spring of 2001, the heady whirlwind all came to a screeching halt, virtually overnight.

The dot-com crash brought an end to the hot IPO market and the funding frenzy that not only had allowed so many women entrepreneurs for the first time to secure venture funding for their companies, but had also allowed an executive from a small nonprofit to unexpectedly gain the national spotlight. Instead of seventy-five new members signing up to join our organization every month, the phones were all but silent. Instead of people clamoring to be a part of every event we hosted, we were struggling to fill even small event venues. And our bank account quickly went from flush to fumes as our sponsors—the major banks, accounting firms, and law firms who had supported us—ran for cover.

There had been little warning, although looking back, I suppose I should have known it couldn't last. But no one wants to think that way when they have the opportunity to take an all-expenses-paid trip to be one of the judges for the first international business-plan contest in Scotland. When the press is calling you regularly, you have a book deal on the table, and you're the first person in your extended family to get invited to the White House, you want to hold on tight and hope it lasts forever.

But it doesn't. At least it didn't for me.

That's another reason I wrote this book. When I look back, could I have predicted my meteoric rise from obscurity to national prominence? Never. Could I have enjoyed it more? I'm not sure.

Could I have been better prepared and done more to leverage my newfound celebrity in order to have a bigger impact in my niche and expand my access to the next job or opportunity? To that question I would answer a very resounding yes. And that's why I do what I do today.

After I left the nonprofit world, I started an executive talent agency in Silicon Valley, which I now call Thought Leadership Lab. Running the Lab gives me a unique window on the world. My clients are start-up CEOs and executives of some of the largest and best-known companies, organizations, academic institutions, and nonprofits in the world. By most any measure, they have achieved a lot of success in their lives. But when I first meet them at cocktail parties, conferences, or while serving together on a board, they tell me the same thing: "I'm not 'there' yet. I want more."

They describe what they want as a promotion, more clients, or better pay. Sometimes they seek a new (and better) job. Sometimes they want to get the word out about what they are doing, to bring more attention to the efforts they have under way. But what I hear, underlying their words, is "I want more recognition, I want more influence, I want to have a bigger impact on the world—and I don't know how to go to the next level."

That's where I come in.

At Thought Leadership Lab, we help our clients figure out all the essential elements for success—like personal brand, how to identify their niche, and how to craft their key messages. We help them think through how to align and engage their stakeholders and sponsors and how to get on the right boards, committees, or commissions so that they can make a difference. We help them to define a process, system, or methodology they can call their own and identify the opportunities that will get the word out about their expertise.

What I love about this work is the opportunity to serve as a sounding board, to cheer my clients' successes, and warn them of potential obstacles ahead. My clients amaze me with their unique ways of seeing the world; as we craft a strategic plan and

strategize how to overcome setbacks, we move their ideas from the sidelines into the mainstream conversation. As they become better known, we figure out how to parlay their newfound “fame” into opportunities to have an ever greater impact—in their niche and in the world. It is meaningful and rewarding work, and I feel lucky every day to do what I do.

SEVEN STEPS TO THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Over the years, I have developed a time-tested, seven-step process to help individuals successfully transition from leader to thought leader. In this book, I will share that process with you. If you follow this step-by-step guide through the chapters, you’ll learn how to bring your own ideas to the world, have an impact on an issue you care about, and leave a meaningful legacy of which you can be proud. Here’s what it takes:



Step 1: Find Your Driving Passion

Thought leadership starts with focus and passion. You will be far more effective if you identify the one arena where your interests, expertise, credibility, and commitment align—your “thought leadership intersection point.” Next you will craft a clear *What If?* future, a possible future that you are committed to bring about. When you identify and align to key trends, you will gain momentum and be well on your way to make a significant difference, not only in your company or community but across your industry or niche.



Step 2: Build Your Ripples of Influence

To build your first ripples of change, you’ll test your ideas and opinions (often not yet fully baked) with knowledgeable stakeholders—colleagues, mentors, and friends—gather their input, and continually refine your thinking. By listening to what resonates, you will distill many different points of view into the kernel of a transformative idea that will bring about the *What If?*

future you envision. Those conversations will also inform you how to position and leverage your message to tell a bigger story that gets your first followers on board.



Step 3: Activate Your Advocates

To expand your influence beyond your existing team or organization will require that you attract supporters and well-connected advocates—community leaders, industry spokespeople, analysts, journalists, research groups, or national partners—who can champion your product, program, initiative, or idea to a much broader set of audiences. In this chapter, you’ll learn to articulate what’s in it for them and to create real momentum for change as well as how to move your message out of the reach of naysayers, the people determined to stop any transformation in its tracks.



Step 4: Put Your “I” on the Line

To build sustainable momentum for a new idea requires someone to show the way, someone willing to step into the limelight and say “follow me.” We’ll explore how you can “put your ‘I’ on the line”—overcoming any self-imposed limits to standing front and center and risking your reputation to espouse a new direction or vision of the future, often long before others agree with your point of view.



Step 5: Codify Your Lessons Learned

The essential difference between leaders and thought leaders is often the latter’s ability to distill their know-how into a replicable model so that others can be inspired and empowered to expand on what those leaders have accomplished. This chapter will give you the tools to codify, test, and refine a repeatable and scalable blueprint for others who want to follow in your footsteps.



Step 6: Put Yourself on S.H.O.U.T.

To increase your credibility, strategic visibility, and reputation and gain recognition as a thought leader, you will have to get the word