Robert E. Quinn

Building the Bridge As You Walk On It

A Guide for Leading Change

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Praise for *Building the Bridge As You Walk On It*

"Prepare yourself for a journey into intellectual, emotional, and spiritual integrity—a journey that will span the remaining course of one's life."

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"Bob Quinn makes exquisite use of real-life experiences in such a way that his book is engaging as well as profound. It speaks to me directly."

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"This book is not about superheroes, but about how each one of us has the power to create positive change—if only we are willing to see and step into our own capabilities."

—Sim B. Sitkin, director, Fuqua-Coach K Center on Leadership and Ethics, Duke University

"For someone who has struggled for twenty-five years with change, personally and professionally—as an internal change agent, external consultant, and academic—*Building the Bridge As You Walk On It* provides a profound integration of the self/other/organizational contexts and a timely reminder that all change is self-change."

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"I picked up *Building the Bridge* on a gray, rainy California morning thinking I would peruse a few pages before a nap. I laid the manuscript down only when the last page had been turned many hours later. No nap! Instead a bright awakening to insight and wisdom regarding leadership that Robert Quinn lucidly structures through stories carefully paired with precise conceptualization."

—André L. Delbecq, Thomas J. and Kathleen L. McCarthy University Professor, Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University

"Quinn details the practices to follow in the journey towards the fundamental state of leadership. Leaders of corporations, governments, nonprofits, community action, families, academic departments—all find resonance with this book!"

—Laurie N. DiPadova-Stocks, founding director, Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement, Northern Kentucky University

"This book provides a guide for change that leaders at all levels of the organization can understand and use. More important, it will help them become people who really like themselves. Because they live and act from principle, they will not have to worry about the craziness of organizations and life."

—Lloyd Baird, director, the Leadership Institute, Boston University

"With more and more people reading this book, the notion of resistance to change may gradually fade. Quinn's attractive concept of positive deviancy is not only an antidote to resistance but a way of thinking and acting that embraces change."

—W. Warner Burke, Edward Lee Thorndike Professor of Psychology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

"Effective leadership is crucial for successful organizational change, but the person as leader is often ignored in discussions of change. This wonderful book places the person of the leader front and center. It invites, encourages, and inspires its readers to find in themselves the leadership of which they are capable."

—Jean M. Bartunek, professor of organization studies, Boston College

"This book highlighted for me that leadership is an endogenous development, not an exogenous event. The most effective leaders are those whose who remain coachable themselves, and focus on developing themselves."

—Bert Whitehead, author, *Facing Financial Dysfunction: Why Smart People Do Stupid Things With Money*

"If you or your family or your organization are in pain, and you want the pain to stop but it won't, read this moving, action-oriented book."

—Bill Torbert, author, *Action Inquiry: The Secret of Timely and Transforming Leadership*

"Robert Quinn's book is fascinating, I wish its valuable insights had been available to me when I led a major bank. It is so easy to glide along in your comfort zone. I was particularly taken by the quote 'real leadership is about moving forward in faith, and doing so requires both head and heart.'"

—Jack Hoag, director, First Hawaiian Bank and BancWest Corp.

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Preface

A book emerges as an author attempts to meet the challenges of life. This book takes root in many contextual patterns but two are of particular note. The first concerns my experiences at the University of Michigan.

During the past few years at the Michigan Business School, I have been involved in a movement. My colleagues Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton, and Gretchen Spreitzer and I have been facilitating the emergence of a new field that we call positive organizational scholarship. This field brings together scholars who focus their research on that which is unusually positive in organizational life. They seek to understand not ordinary patterns of organizing but patterns of positive deviance, that is, behavior at the far right of the normal curve. It is behavior of extraordinary positive impact.

The Positive Organizational Scholarship group meets regularly to discuss key questions, and we participate in research presentations and in larger conferences. Recently we finished the first book on the topic (Cameron, Dutton, and Quinn, 2003). We have also organized a research center. In all of this activity, we have been focused on the question, What gives rise to extraordinary patterns of positive organizing? The question consumes my interest.

During this time, another contextual pattern was also unfolding. For thirty years, I have maintained one foot in the world of research and one foot in the world of action. During this time, I have been trying to both study and create more positive patterns of organizing, and as I have done so, it has become clear that some notions are more important than others.

One key notion is the fact that entropy—the dissipation of energy, slow death—operates on both the human ego and the organizational culture. Individuals and organizations are continually pulled toward entropy. This happens while individuals and organizations deny that their decisions are taking them individually and collectively toward

slow death. Denial takes place because people are terrified of remedy. The remedy is to make deep change. No one ever wants to make deep change because that means letting go of control. This book is about how real people find the courage to make deep change.

This book is the third in a trilogy on the process of helping individuals and organizations to make deep change. The first book was *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (1996). The second book was *Change the World: How Ordinary People Can Accomplish Extraordinary Results* (2000). When I published *Deep Change,* the book started slowly and then took off. It very gradually became one of the publisher's all-time best-sellers. This meant that *Deep Change* was a word-of-mouth book: people read it and then recommended it to others. Some of the readers wrote to me. They liked the book because it helped them in engaging in the very difficult process of making personal and organizational change. They told me how they used the concepts to navigate a personal crisis or to lead the transformation of their organization. These were usually potent episodes. The publication of *Change the World* in 2000 stimulated still more readers to share their reactions.

In 2002, the publisher asked me to update and revise *Deep Change.* I agreed and began the revision project. Then a surprise occurred: the revision became an entirely new book. The new book emerged because I ended up listening to some very special people. I contacted the people who had written me those original letters, and I asked them to write a full account of what happened when they used *Deep Change* to make deep change. They shared cases ranging from very personal transformations to the transformation of major organizations. Every case was intimate, candid, rich, inspiring, and instructive.

Each person spoke of significant outcomes. One example comes from a man you will meet later. For four years, he worked at the head of his organization and thought of himself as a leader. Then he experienced a crisis that led him to make a deep personal change. Afterward he wrote of the impact on his organization: "I have a critical mass of individuals from both the staff and board who are willing to look at our challenges in a new way and work on solutions together. At our meetings, new energy is present. What previously seemed unimaginable now seems to happen with ease. I sometimes wonder why it seems so easy, why we now have such a positive culture."

He wonders why his organization that was once quite ordinary is now extraordinary. Then he goes on to answer his own question. The

answer defies what is written in almost all textbooks on management and leadership. It defies common understanding and practice. It is a promising answer in that it suggests that every one of us has the capacity to transform our organizations into more positive, productive communities like his. Yet it is a painful answer that almost no one wants to hear. That is why it is not in the books on management and leadership. Painful answers have no market. The man states: "I know it all happened because I confronted my own insecurity, selfishness, and lack of courage."

In that seemingly illogical and impossible sentence is the essence of this book. From the many people who read and applied *Deep Change,* we learned many lessons, but this one is most central. We can transform our organizations by transforming ourselves. This is one of the central answers to the question asked among my colleagues: What gives rise to patterns of positive organizing?

A NEW APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP

This book provides an approach to leadership that is derived from the reports of people like the man I referred to. The central argument is that most of us, no matter how high or low our position, spend most of our time in the normal life state. In this state, we tend to be comfort centered, externally driven, self-focused, and internally closed. Yet it is possible for anyone, no matter how high or low their position, to enter the extraordinary state which I call the fundamental state of leadership. In this state, we become results centered, internally directed, other-focused, and externally open.

When we enter the fundamental state of leadership, we become a distortion to the social system in which we reside. We are a new signal to which others must respond. In this sense, we become creators of a new order. We become a stimulant of positive organizing or the emergence of a more productive community. The man who thought he was a leader captures the phenomenon. He entered the fundamental state of leadership, and his organization changed. It was at that point that he became a leader indeed.

His personal transformation gave rise to positive organizing, to a more productive community. He suddenly had a critical mass of people who saw things in a new way. They were more willing to join together and produce innovative initiatives. They were more energized. Seemingly impossible accomplishments began to happen in an

effortless way. Leading suddenly became easy. That effortless accomplishment was born of agonizing change. In this book, you will learn how to enter the fundamental state of leadership.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book presents a radical, inductive, and applied theory of leadership. *Radical* means returning to the root or foundations of a thing. The foundation of leadership is not thinking, behavior, competencies, techniques, or position. The foundation of leadership is who we are—our identity or foundational state. When people alter their interior world, they also alter their exterior world. As we come to understand this fundamental framework, our understanding of leadership is radically altered.

Inductive means we build the theory not from abstract numbers but from the actual observation of people who are transforming. These are not normal people living in the middle of the normal curve. These are people who are temporarily at the far right end of the curve. These are positive deviants. A theory derived from such observation will not be a normal theory of leadership but a unique theory that does not derive from the identification of normal patterns.

Applied means we are focusing on the how. We are providing an approach that tells people what they can do if they want to radically alter and improve the groups within which they reside.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One introduces the stories of some of the people who read *Deep Change* and then made deep change themselves. The stories are intimate, compelling, and transformational. To read them is to be inspired. Across the stories, we see important patterns. The stories help us to come to an alternative view of leadership. I thank these incredible people for their marvelous contributions.

In Part Two, we journey even further from the realm of normal leadership thinking and move to a more dynamic and complex view of leadership. In doing so, we explore eight unusual concepts that are presented as practices that can help us enter the fundamental state of leadership. To illustrate the eight disciplines, I have drawn cases from *Change the World: How Ordinary People Can Achieve Extraordinary Results* and *Letters to Garrett: Stories of Change Power and Possibility.* In this sense, this book contains the best of three books.

In Part Three, we turn from the emphasis on changing ourselves to how we can best learn to help others change. We approach the question from the point of view of helping others that we associate with entering the fundamental state of leadership. We then approach the question from the point of view of education and training. How do we teach people in a classroom to enter the fundamental state of leadership?

At the end of each chapter are a variety of tools, including sets of questions that can be used for reflection or discussion, designed to help readers make progress. It is my hope that they will help readers to construct a radically more positive world.

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Many people have helped along the way with this book. John Bergez has been extraordinary as a developmental editor, and Kathe Sweeney has been a most supportive editor. Pauline Farmer has worked tirelessly on the manuscript. Many colleagues, students, and family members have contributed opinions. Horst Abraham, Susan Ashford, Kim Cameron, Jeff DeGraff, Jane Dutton, Bill Leigh, Ryan Quinn, Shauri Quinn, Shawn Quinn, Gretchen Spreitzer, Anjan Thakor, Karl Weick, and many others have made contributions that have shaped my thinking. I am particularly grateful to those wonderful people who have made deep change and then had the courage to share their own stories. Those stories are gifts to help each of us more frequently enter the fundamental state of leadership.

Ann Arbor, Michigan
February 2004

Robert E. Quinn

Dedicated to Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton, and Gretchen Spreitzer. Thank you for spending so much time in the fundamental state of leadership. You have thus made it possible for me to live in the flourishing of a productive community.

PART ONE

An Invitation to the Fundamental State of Leadership

> *"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."*
> —Ralph Waldo Emerson

In 1996, I published a book entitled *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within.* The premise of the book was that anyone can be a leader of change, but to do so requires the transformation of self. Some readers shared their reactions and described how the book helped them in their own journeys into deep change. They usually also described the profound impact those journeys had on their own lives, the lives of the people around them, and the systems and organizations of which they were a part.

In reading their stories, I began to notice some shared characteristics. Analyzing these characteristics led me to develop new model of leadership. I began to think of leadership not as behaviors and techniques but as a state of being. Leadership is first about what we are. I call the new model the fundamental state of leadership.

Seeing leadership in this new fashion also helped me to conceptualize practices that can help people more frequently enter the fundamental

state of leadership. These practices, in turn, led to radically new proposals for how we can develop leadership in ourselves and others. These three notions—what the fundamental state of leadership is, the practices that can help us enter that state, and the implications for leadership development—are, respectively, the subjects of the three parts of this book.

As the book unfolds, the fundamental state of leadership will take on increasingly precise meaning. We begin, however, where my own journey began—with the stories of people who have had the courage to embrace deep change. Each of these stories illustrates a facet of the fundamental state of leadership and its impact. Read these stories attentively and receptively. Each of them is about someone who has entered the creative state. Each is a story that illustrates the truth of Emerson's statement: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

CHAPTER ONE

Building the Bridge As You Walk On It

> *"I decided to acknowledge my fears and close off my exits. Suddenly, my workplace became a place filled with people doing their best to either avoid deeper dilemmas or face them and grow. The previous importance of titles and roles began to melt away before my eyes. . . . My own change of perspective led me to see a new organization without having changed anyone but myself."*
>
> —Jeremy Fish

How do we create extraordinarily positive organizations? This is the central question that integrates the research of my colleagues at the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship.

The organizations we study tend to excel in two areas. They do very well at accomplishing their central, instrumental task, like making quality products, educating people, or providing health care. And they also excel in a second domain. The people who work in them tend to flourish. They are deeply connected to the objective, and they are deeply committed to one another. As a result, the organization can do things that other organizations cannot do.

I usually refer to such organizations as *productive communities.* They are not only highly productive but highly nurturing places. They are places where people live by the highest of human values, extending themselves for the instrumental purpose and for one another.

Recently my colleagues and I visited such an organization. We went with the director of nursing at a large hospital to visit one of her outstanding units. As always happens when we visit these kinds of settings, we were inspired by deeply committed human beings performing well beyond normal expectations.

We asked some questions about their culture of success, and they spent a half-hour describing the innovative practices that had developed in the units. These practices were unique and very impressive. It would have been tempting to believe that they were the explanation. Eventually the director of nursing shook her head. She said, "Don't be fooled by these practices. They are important, but they are a consequence, not the cause."

The other people in the room nodded. They all knew what she was talking about. One of them began to speak of the woman who had run this wonderful unit for over a decade. They spoke of her in reverent tones. We posed probing questions, asking them to describe specific incidents. Some of the respondents spoke in tears as they shared the ways this woman had changed their organization and their lives.

Afterward the director told us that of her sixty managers, she has five or six like the woman we just heard about. No matter where she assigns them, they build units that achieve extraordinary performance.

One of my colleagues asked, "What do they do?" There was a long silence. Finally the director said, "That is the wrong question. It is not what they do, because each one of them is unique in how they pull it off. It is not about what they do; it is about who they are."

> *"It is not what they do, because each one of them is unique in how they pull it off. It is not about what they do; it is about who they are."*

In that last sentence is a key to positive organizing and productive community. Management and leadership books are naturally preoccupied with the search for behaviors, tools, techniques, and practices that can be exported and imitated elsewhere. It may be that they are telling us about the wrong thing. Organizational excellence tends not

to be a function of imitation. It tends to be a function of origination. It begins with one person—the one in ten who has the capacity to create productive community. In this hospital, five or six out of sixty supervisors fit this category. If we examine one hundred plant managers or one thousand CEOs, we tend to find the same pattern. The majority are normal. And a few are extraordinary in that they know how to enter a creative personal state that gives rise to a creative collective state. I call that personal state the *fundamental state of leadership.* The collective state is productive community, which emerges as someone in the fundamental state of leadership attracts others into the process I refer to as "building the bridge as you walk on it."

THE ORIGINS OF THIS BOOK

As I noted in the introduction to Part One, this book originated in the messages I received from readers of my book *Deep Change.* The people who wrote to me usually told me how they had used the book's concepts to navigate a personal crisis or lead the transformation of their organization. Later, I contacted them and asked them to write a full account of what had happened. They shared cases ranging from very personal transformations to the transformation of major organizations. As I read those cases, I began to have new insights about the process of deep change. Eventually I began to formulate a new concept: the fundamental state of leadership.

In this book, you will meet some of these people. You will discover what the fundamental state of leadership is and what practices are likely to help you enter it. As preparation and background, let's do a quick review of the notion of deep change.

THE BACKGROUND

An anchor on a ship is a device attached by a rope or cable that is cast overboard. The anchor digs into the bottom and holds the ship in place. The anchor is thus a useful tool that keeps the ship from aimless drifting.

In a dynamic world, the tools that we usually see as assets can turn into liabilities. I remember, for example, watching a movie about a ship caught in a sudden storm. As the storm grew in ferocity, the sailors realized that they had to cut away the anchor. They chopped madly at the rope so they could avoid being swamped. Their only

hope was to ride out the storm on the tumultuous sea. They needed to be free from what was normally a useful source of stability. Their lives depended on it.

Over time, it is natural for both individuals and for organizations to develop anchors. Individuals, for example, develop a system of beliefs about how they can best cope in a world of scarce resources. This system becomes a personal identity. We sometimes refer to this anchor as an ego. Organizations also develop systems of belief about identity and coping. We refer to this anchor as the organizational culture. The individual ego and the organizational culture are normally valuable sources of stability.

Yet like ships, individuals and organizations are often confronted by storms. As individuals, we may need to cope with physical illness, the death of a loved one, divorce, abusive treatment, burnout, job loss, or other life demands. In organizations, we may need to cope with recession, new competitors, regulatory changes, evolving customer preferences, and many other such challenges.

These storms are usually preceded by dark clouds and other signals of danger. While the signals often call for a transformation, or what I call deep change, we tend to resist. When our old habits of thought and action seem to be ever less effective in the face of the change, we are slow to abandon them in favor of learning our way into a transformed state. To cut away our anchors and move forward into the storm of real-time learning is no easy decision.

In fact, rather than accepting the need for deep change, most of us practice denial. We rationalize away the signals that call us to courage and growth. We work very hard to preserve our current ego or culture. To give them up is to give up control. Normally we work hard to avoid the surrender of control. Instead, we strive to stay in our zone of comfort and control. Given the choice between deep change or slow death, we tend to choose slow death.

Yet nature tends to have its way with us. The path to slow death still ends at death. For individuals, it can be the death of the ego or the body. For corporations, it can be the death of a particular set of assets or the overall enterprise. As we progress down the path of denial, our agony grows. The growing pain tends to force us to do what we do not want to do. We make deep change.

When we make deep change, we enter the fundamental state of leadership. This central concept will be developed and defined over the next several chapters. Here we meet some people who have learned

to make deep change. Their stories provide a first look at what it means to enter the fundamental state of leadership. From these stories, we can also specify the objectives of this book.

OBJECTIVE ONE: HELPING PEOPLE WHO ARE ASSIGNED TO LEAD CHANGE

Jeremy Fish is a physician and an executive who was in charge of a transformation at a regional medical center in California. He found this task most challenging. In fact, he describes his feelings as the "emotions of a patient facing cancer." As he moved forward in the transformational process, he felt a combination of fear, hope, and dread.

Most managers charged with leading a transformation have such feelings. As they move forward, they become increasingly aware of the political dangers. They begin to feel more and more insecure. While trying to convey confidence, they find themselves contemplating escape strategies that will minimize the political damage to their careers. As they do this, they deny that they are doing it. Integrity decays, and insecurity grows. While verbally they continue to call for the commitment of others, they implicitly, but clearly, communicate their hypocrisy. In response, people espouse commitment while actually withholding commitment. Frustration, distrust, and conflict expand. The leader becomes even more insecure and intensifies the effort, which makes everything worse. The vicious cycle then continues to expand, sucking the leader and the project into the vortex of failure, the very thing the leader feared in the first place.

Jeremy reports reading *Deep Change* and how he came to recognize his self-deception. In his words, "My fear of being fired, ridiculed, or marginalized at work was impairing my ability to lead. I also saw how my 'exit strategy' of leaving if things got uncomfortable rather than face my fears and discomfort was impairing my ability to commit fully to leadership."

Jeremy was an executive, yet he was no different than most first-line employees. It is normal for all people in organizations, from the janitor to the CEO, to live in fear. It is normal for people in organizations to say one thing while believing another. This means that hypocrisy is normal. The recognition of his hypocrisy led Jeremy to make a decision that was not normal. Since the decision was exceptional, the results were exceptional as well. He reports:

> I decided to acknowledge my fears and close off my exits. Suddenly, my workplace became a place filled with people doing their best to either avoid deeper dilemmas or face them and grow. The previous importance of titles and roles began to melt away before my eyes. Feared organizational figures became less menacing. . . . My own change of perspective led me to see a new organization without having changed anyone but myself. I brought my new perspective to my role.

Although Jeremy made a fundamental commitment, he still did not know exactly how to get where he wanted to go. In a transformation, we never do. Nor did it put him in control of the process of transformation. During a transformation, we cannot be in control. So what good was the commitment? The commitment moved Jeremy to a new state, or way of being: the fundamental state of leadership. In this state, we see ourselves differently, more positively. We therefore see others differently, more positively. What were once constraining problems are suddenly seen as rich opportunities. When we enter the fundamental state of leadership, we tap new sources of power and, as the next case shows, attract others to join us on the transformational journey.

In this illustration, we find the first objective of this book: to help people who are in charge of change efforts to enter the fundamental state of leadership. As we will see, when this happens, a unique set of behaviors, tools, and techniques will naturally arise to facilitate the emergence of a more productive community.

OBJECTIVE TWO: PROVIDING A NEW LANGUAGE FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE ALREADY ENGAGED IN TRANSFORMATION

Mike Alvis is a retired military officer who now works as a consultant. He spent much of his time with General Eric Shinseki, former chief of staff of the army. Shinseki's vision for the transformation of the army was one of the most ambitious undertakings of any chief of staff since General George Marshall. The vision called for a dramatic shift to a lighter and faster army.

The concept was simple, but the amount of change involved was staggering. Although Shinseki had a vision, he did not have a map telling him how to negotiate his way through all the required changes. No visionary ever does. When we commit to a vision to do something that has never been done before, there is no way to know how to get

there. We simply have to build the bridge as we walk on it. I sometimes refer to this process as "walking naked into the land of uncertainty" or "learning how to walk through hell effectively."

> *When we commit to a vision to do something that has never been done before, there is no way to know how to get there. We simply have to build the bridge as we walk on it.*

The early years of army transformation were very difficult. Shinseki did what he had to do. He pushed on, taking one step at a time. Shinseki's role became punishing. He experienced many dark nights of the soul. With each big, symbolic move, he came under intense criticism. He was privately criticized by those on the inside and publicly attacked by the media. What was particularly remarkable about Shinseki is that he never displayed any ego needs. Unlike Jeremy, who was initially afraid of what might happen to him, Shinseki was fearless. He was not concerned about looking good. And although his critics questioned the wisdom of his every move, they never questioned his motive. It was clear that he was doing what he thought was best for the army. So he just kept doing what he thought was right, absorbed the pain, and pushed on.

Mike Alvis had an inside view of each move that Shinseki made. Watching the chief of staff had a major impact on Mike. His own level of commitment began to deepen. As this happened, Mike, like Jeremy, began to see his world differently and to relate to people in a new way. He stopped seeing the resisters as "the enemy." He says, "I started to meet people where they were." And as he started to see them differently, he began to work with them differently.

Mike shares another interesting point about the transformation of the army. Outsiders assume the army changes when a commander gives an order. As with all other organizations, when the army culture is threatened, people resist. In fact, it is often the people at very high levels who become the invisible resisters. As result, an organizational transformation never follows a clean, top-down process. It is, instead, a social movement in which commitment spreads.

In this case, commitment spread from the chief of staff to people like Mike and then to larger and larger groups, including some of the people who were initially very resistant. Eventually the army

transformation reached the point of "irreversible momentum." The process was still unfolding when Shinseki finished his term of office in 2003. It will continue to unfold for decades into the future.

While most people responsible for a transformation are like Jeremy Fish, a very few are like Eric Shinseki. They set aside their natural concern for their own self-preservation. They choose to put their own welfare second to the good of the vision. As they do so, they become increasingly passionate about the vision. Then they make a terrible discovery.

Since they are taking the organization where no one has been before, no one can know how to get there. No one has the necessary expertise. Furthermore, without the normal assumptions of equilibrium and expertise, the traditional principles of good management no longer work. Since there is no safe path, no way to be in control, they are forced to move forward one blind step at a time. They are forced to build the bridge as they walk on it. They then experience exponential learning about self, others, and the organization.

Yet when people ask such leaders to explain what is happening, they usually struggle. Like the exceptional people in the outstanding nursing units, they point to creative practices that have emerged. The leaders themselves struggle to explain what they have done. Because we lead transformation does not mean we can explain transformation. Normal models are not useful. The necessary language is not readily available. A second objective of this book therefore is to provide a new language, one that turns our attention not to behaviors and techniques but to who we are. It provides a language to talk about and change who we are.

OBJECTIVE THREE: HELPING INDIVIDUALS TO TRANSFORM THEMSELVES AND OTHERS

We often confuse leadership with position. Another of the lessons provided by those who have experienced deep change is that any of us has the power to transform the organizations and systems of which we are a part. Meet Roman Walley.

Roman Walley is a middle manager in a global oil company. He indicates that he has always had an inclination not to make waves. Roman then tells of experiencing some formidable trigger events in his life. They included the death of two loved ones. Afterward, he in-

dicates, "I felt as if I was moving through life as a spectator. I was watching a play that I didn't like, but I had no power to change the script."

At this point, Roman was becoming attentive to signals that something needed to change, but he did not yet know what that something might be. Then he attended a workshop in which he was challenged to examine the principles of deep change and how he was living his life. He found himself wanting. He concluded that his life was too externally driven and that *he* had to change. In particular, he had always been reticent to ask hard questions of those in authority. Now he felt that for the good of the company, he had to begin doing exactly that. He says he determined to put "my integrity and self-respect first." For the first time, he began to confront senior people on important corporate issues.

Instead of getting fired, as we might expect, Roman began to flourish. He says that senior managers began to see him in a new way. They began to invite him to consult on more complex, strategic issues. Roman goes on to describe a group of middle managers who were simply going through the motions on a key assignment. Roman boldly challenged the group, telling them they were acting like victims and that they had the choice to pursue a more creative path. Again there was a surprise: instead of rebelling, the people changed. Roman, a man who had been afraid to make waves, seemed to gain power. This once passive middle-level professional ended up leading deep change up, down, and across the system. He challenged people, and they responded.

Roman was not a senior executive in charge of a transformational process. He was a middle-level professional whose influence stemmed from his own process of self-change.

Our usual ways of thinking and talking about leadership do not account for stories like those of Jeremy Fish, General Shinseki, Mike Alvis, and Roman Walley. Nor do they account for the stories of the other people we will meet in this book—people who leave behind normal ways of being and enter the fundamental state of leadership.

No one remains in the fundamental state of leadership continuously, but it is possible to learn how to enter it more and more frequently. To do so requires a commitment to deep change and a willingness to embrace uncertainty—to build the bridge as we walk on it. Understanding that leadership is a temporary, dynamic state brings us to a radical redefinition of how we think about, enact, and develop leadership.

We come to discover that most of the time, most of us—including CEOs, presidents, and prime ministers—are not in the fundamental state of leadership. By the same token, we discover that any of us can be a leader who attracts others to join us in the process of deep change. We find that there are practices or disciplines that can help us enter the fundamental state of leadership more frequently. Finally, we discover that we must rethink how we develop leadership in ourselves and in others.

The rest of this book develops these themes. In the next chapter, we continue our journey by exploring more deeply what it means to say that leadership is a state.

PREPARATION FOR ENTERING THE FUNDAMENTAL STATE OF LEADERSHIP

Choose a quiet time when you can reflect on the meaning this chapter has for you. Strive to be as honest as you can.

Questions for Reflection

1. What did the director of nursing mean when she indicated that to understand the managers who tend to build productive communities, we must focus not on their behaviors and techniques but on who they are? What are the implications of this statement?
2. What are the positive and negative functions of the ego and the organizational culture? How do we normally deal with the negative functions?
3. Why is it natural for people and organizations to deny the signals for deep change? Think of an example, and indicate what you learned from it.
4. Why are individuals and organizations eventually driven to deep change? Think of an example, and indicate what you learned from it.
5. Do you agree that fear and hypocrisy are normal in organizations? Why might this be true? If it is true, what are the implications for change leaders?