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The Work of Leaders

How **Vision, Alignment,** and
Execution Will Change the
Way You Lead

Foreword by Dr. Bernard W. Franklin,
Executive Vice President/Chief Inclusion Officer, NCAA

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The Work of Leaders

 How Vision, Alignment,
and Execution Will Change
the Way You Lead

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Foreword

Communication, Collaboration, Accountability, Inclusion and Leadership. These are the five cornerstone beliefs of the National Collegiate Athletic Association that drive the work we do on behalf of the 360,000 student-athletes, coaches, and athletics administrators we serve on a daily basis. As Executive Vice President of Membership and Student-Athlete Affairs as well as Chief Inclusion Officer, I am often asked to speak about leadership, a subject that is fundamental to my job. To stay up-to-date, I continuously study the latest thinking and research and selectively employ new ideas that resonate with me in my leadership development work. When I was introduced to the elegant model described by authors Straw, Scullard, Kukkonen, and Davis in *The Work of Leaders*, I was delighted! I was immediately able to identify tools and strategies that will help me to assist others to drive innovation and leverage their unique talents.

Since 1996, the NCAA has been inviting exceptional student-athletes to attend leadership conferences and forums in which they learn about their own styles and how to build more effective relationships with others. I am proud to say that we often hear that the programs we offer are life-changing. Just this week, I received an email from a student-athlete who said, "Everything I've done with the NCAA and being a former student-athlete has proven to be invaluable professionally; I am eternally indebted to all of those who were a part of the process!" Recently, we introduced the three-part model of Vision, Alignment, and Execution (VAE) in the work we do with many of these student-athletes, as well as athletics professionals, administrators within higher education, and NCAA staff members.

If you spend time with this book and the VAE model, you will discover powerful tools to propel you and your teams forward. These three words—Vision, Alignment, and Execution—state a powerful truth. They are the foundation for this new playbook on leadership: one that promises to help us become more effective as we work to develop leaders who are positive agents of change. Because of what this book has taught me, I am better prepared to engage others in constructive and deliberative dialogue on more effectively developing successful leaders.

Dr. Bernard W. Franklin,
Executive Vice President/Chief Inclusion Officer, NCAA

Introduction

Learning to be a leader is like learning to be a great athlete, musician, or artist. It's a capability that develops over time, through trial and error, hard work, and practice. Leadership is learned by doing, not simply by taking notes in a classroom.

Stanford Graduate School of Business

Consider these two scenarios.

Scenario One: The CEO sends out an email announcing the company's ambitious new sales goals and then takes the afternoon off to go golfing. The employees are left with no clear process, no strategy, and no delegation of responsibilities. Without direction or rationale, everyone is worried about making mistakes. There are whisper-sessions along the rows of cubicles. When something goes wrong, the finger-pointing begins. Trust and morale are low—and this is reflected not only in their ability to execute, but also in interactions with their customers.

Scenario Two: At the quarterly all-company meeting, the CEO stands before a simple map of the company's strategy. "These are the three platforms that lead to our success," he says. "If your work isn't related to or supporting one of these things, then please stop what you're doing—because you're not working on the right stuff." Since clearly establishing this vision, the company has been aligned—from the CFO who tracks the top line, to the customer-facing people who work on the front lines. All are focused on what they need to do to execute the vision and all are invested in the process. They openly collaborate, challenge one another, and celebrate accomplishments as they reach milestones.

We're guessing that if you've worked in business long enough, it's likely that there's something familiar to you in both of these scenarios. In our case, the four of us have worked together for the last ten years at Inscape Publishing, the company described in both scenarios. Of course we feel incredibly fortunate to be the company in Scenario Two today; to work in a stimulating and rewarding environment, to have built strong relationships with our colleagues, and to benefit from the rewards of excellent leadership. But like most companies, the fortunes of our company have waxed and waned more than once in our nearly forty-year history.

Inscape was founded in 1974, and by the end of the 1980s we were firmly established as the pioneer of DiSC[®]-based corporate training and assessment solutions. We had built a global network of thousands of independent training and development consultants who used our assessments and related training programs. We grew rapidly through the 1990s, but by 2000 the company faced two challenges. First, it was becoming clear that our strategy for going to market, based on paper-based assessments, was outmoded and not sustainable. What our customers wanted and needed were more advanced assessments that harnessed the power of the internet. We were, in essence, resting on our laurels: building and selling variations of a successful product rather than partnering with our customers to understand how their businesses and processes worked and could be adapted to a changing world.

Second, the leadership style adopted by Inscape's senior executives was also outmoded. Leadership was "caretaking" rather than proactive, both at the level of business strategy and in how we worked together. The effects could be felt throughout the company.

Executives held the strategy and vision close to their vests, so employees had little sense of direction, investment, or motivation. Individuals and business areas

were in silos, which created uncoordinated efforts, not to mention internal competition for resources and rewards. We were a “meeting culture,” with sluggish processes and unclear responsibilities. It wasn’t pleasant or productive.

After the dot-com bubble burst in 2001, the company’s ownership knew it was in trouble and named Jeffrey Sugerman as the new CEO. Jeffrey launched the transformation of Inscape from the first scenario we described to the second. He led the effort to help us define a new vision for our company, one that embraced the changes in the marketplace and placed our valued customers (our Distributors) at the center of our efforts. Jeffrey brought a style of leadership to Inscape that demanded a clearly communicated vision that all could understand and own; ground rules and expectations of how we would conduct ourselves, both internally and with our customers and vendors; and a positive work environment built upon openness, collaboration, and rigor. The transformation was not always comfortable or easy, but its effect was felt throughout the company as the culture changed gradually from one of mistrust to trust, from silos to collaboration, from fatigue to execution.

In short, Inscape made its way back to relevance in the marketplace through an almost textbook example of exemplary leadership. Together, we have seen first-hand how crafting a vision, building alignment around that vision, and championing the execution of that vision can transform a culture and save a company. We have also seen how essential these principles are not only to our CEO, but to the work of every leader at Inscape.

In 2007 we began our own in-depth study of what leaders at other companies do to help their organizations succeed. And after more than five years of research and development, we had boiled that work down to the same three things Jeffrey brought to Inscape—a passion and

commitment to crafting a vision, building alignment, and championing execution.

In 2011, we began offering a leadership development program we call the Work of Leaders to help leaders at all levels, in all kinds of organizations, apply the simple concepts of vision, alignment, and execution (VAE) to their work. The program is available through our network of independent trainers and consultants, and the feedback we have received from them and their clients about the program has been overwhelmingly positive. The Work of Leaders is quickly becoming one of the most successful programs in the history of our company. With this book, our goal is to take the classroom experience that has been so valuable for thousands of leaders and introduce the VAE model to an even broader audience.

We are pleased to introduce *The Work of Leaders* to you and wish you success wherever you and your organization may be in your own leadership journey.

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