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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

WILEY

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

Julie Straw

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WILEY

Cover design by Wiley
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Published by Wiley
One Montgomery Street, Suite 1200, San Francisco, CA 94104-4594
www.wiley.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Straw, Julie

The work of leaders : how vision, alignment, and execution will change the way you lead / Julie Straw, Mark Scullard, Susie Kukkonen, Barry Davis. – First edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-118-63653-4 (cloth); ISBN 978-1-118-66351-6 (ebk.);

ISBN 978-1-118-66341-7 (ebk.); ISBN 978-1-118-66352-3 (ebk.)

1. Leadership. 2. Management. I. Title.

HD57.7.S78155 2013

658.4'092–dc23

2013005850

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To the 1,800 members of the Inscape Network who give so generously of your time and talents to us and to your clients. Your partnership adds immeasurable value and helps make our work more meaningful.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Foreword</i> by Dr. Bernard W. Franklin	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xvii</i>

1 Welcome to the Work of Leaders	1
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VISION 11



2 Introduction to Crafting a Vision	13
3 Crafting a Vision Through Exploration	23
4 Crafting a Vision Through Boldness	33
5 Crafting a Vision Through Testing Assumptions	43
6 Summary of Crafting a Vision	53

A ALIGNMENT 59


7	Introduction to Building Alignment	61
8	Building Alignment Through Clarity	69
9	Building Alignment Through Dialogue	79
10	Building Alignment Through Inspiration	89
11	Summary of Building Alignment	99

E EXECUTION 105

12	Introduction to Championing Execution	107
13	Championing Execution Through Momentum	113
14	Championing Execution Through Structure	125
15	Championing Execution Through Feedback	135
16	Summary of Championing Execution	147

<i>Afterword: Using VAE in Your Organization</i>	153
<i>Appendix A: The Development of the Work of Leaders</i>	
<i>VAE Model</i>	161
<i>Appendix B: Feedback Outtakes</i>	189
<i>References</i>	193
<i>Resources</i>	197
<i>About Inscape Publishing</i>	201
<i>About the Authors</i>	203
<i>Index</i>	207

Acknowledgments



First and foremost, this book exists because of our relationships with a vast network of outstanding professional trainers, coaches, and consultants—the best of the best in the field of training and development. They have been our mentors and teachers, as well as our customers and business partners. Several Inscape Distributors were particularly generous in reviewing the manuscript for this book under tight timelines. In particular, Sue Hammond went above and beyond by providing us with astute developmental editing. We also want to thank Sue Bowlby, Jean Campana, Steve Dion, Chris Ewing, Sharon Ferraro, Joleen Goronkin, Murray Janewski, Sarah Kalicki-Nakamura, Lynne Kaplan, Janice Maffei, Jill McGillen, Leilani Poland, Cindy Sakai, Joanne Spigner, Rick Stamm, and Sal Silvester for taking the time to

read the manuscript and provide helpful feedback. In addition, several of our Distributors shared client stories with us, including Carol Horner, Lisa Satawa, and Deb Terry. Finally, we are grateful to Keith Ayers, Anne Minton, Barb Stennes, and Roger Wenschlag for all the conversations that helped give context to this work.

We are also indebted to the clients of Distributors who used *Work of Leaders* and shared their experiences with us. Nathaniel Conn and Jeff Dahms were especially generous with their time, and their reflections on the VAE model helped bring our story to life. Indirectly, thousands of classroom learners supported our efforts by choosing to participate in our research after completing one of our assessments. Without them, we'd still be collecting data!

The authors are also lucky enough to work in an organization with talented individuals and high-functioning teams, and this project would not have been possible without everyone at Inscape Publishing. Special thanks to Rachel Broviak for facing the perils of putting our early ideas on paper, as well as for her flair with research and finding the right quotes. Jidana James helped us gather compelling stories and insightful feedback from many Inscape Distributors and their clients. Laurie Diethelm, Tracy LaChance, and Jeff Rauchbauer were willing to drop what they were doing to get the pieces that we needed when we needed them. The Inscape IT team, especially Don Hudson and Brad Meyer, made it possible for us to collect and retrieve the invaluable research data we use throughout the book. And our fearless leader, Jeffrey Sugerman, encouraged us to take on this challenge.

Special thanks to John Capecci for lending his expertise in effective storytelling. His thoughtful influence is woven

throughout the book. We also are indebted to Emma Wilhelm, who created early drafts of our Work of Leaders story. Her work reviewing and consolidating all of the literature laid the groundwork for this book. And thanks to Aaron Rosell, who tackled the task of sorting and analyzing tens of thousands of comments with courage and humor.

We also want to thank our friends and colleagues at Wiley, especially Lisa Shannon and Cedric Crocker, whose efforts brought Inscape into the Wiley fold and allowed us to benefit from the resources of this well-respected, high-quality publisher. Matt Davis, our editor, has helped us navigate the path from concept to completion, and his flexibility and optimism have been much appreciated.

Finally, each of the authors would like to acknowledge other people in our lives who have made this project possible.

Julie would like to thank Jim Straw for his unwavering love and his support for her career ambitions, and Krystl, Kim, and Andy, for always understanding the balance of career and family. She also recognizes that, without the support of her Inscape team, especially Clare McInerney Stephenson, she would not have been able to pursue her passion for this book project.


Mark would like to thank his loving wife and feisty best friend, both of whom are Jill Scullard. His parents Julie and Mike Scullard also deserve an award for ensuring that he survived his adolescence. Thank you, guys. Finally, he needs to thank his daughter Eowyn, whose smile brings him joy and awe each and every morning.

Susie would like to thank Jukka Kukkonen for his love, encouragement, and good humor, and especially for getting up at 4:30 in the morning to help her draft a particularly difficult paragraph. She also owes a debt of gratitude to Barry

Davis and Ruth Walbon for lunchtime runs that helped to keep her on an even keel. Finally, thanks to Sonja and Henri for reminding her to laugh.

Barry would like to thank Shari Davis for being his true companion and showing him love every day. He thanks Carly, Noah, and Sydney for signing up to be his kids. And finally, he thanks all of his colleagues at Inscape and his friends and teachers in the Inscape Network. Without you, this work that he loves would not be possible.

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


The Work of Leaders

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.

Julie Straw

Mark Scullard, Ph.D.

Susie Kukkonen

Barry Davis

1

Vision

Alignment

Execution

Welcome to the Work of Leaders

Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality.

—WARREN BENNIS

Across from our Minneapolis office is a restaurant called The Super Moon Buffet. The word “super,” however, is an almost coquettish understatement. *It is massive.* The theme is technically Chinese, but the ambition here goes way beyond what any single country could dream up. They’ve got sushi, French fries, ham, fresh fruit, roast duck, dim sum, apple pie, barbecued spare ribs, stir-fried frog legs, baby octopus, pork chitterlings. It’s overwhelming. Each person has to come to