



# Management By Shared Mindset

Leadership That Makes Work Meaningful and Profitable  
at the Same Time | Dave Ulrich & Wendy Ulrich

# Two leaders have just been notified of a crisis.

Their actions in the next few minutes, hours, and days reflect their assumptions and approaches to leadership. Their responses will be magnified and talked about for weeks, months, and years. Both have similar goals of overcoming the crisis, but they have different approaches to doing so.

Leader A takes time to reflect about who he is and what he has to do. He works to get settled and personally balanced so that he has the wherewithal to cope with the challenge. He believes that to respond effectively, he must be centered, demonstrating that he knows what to do and how to do it. To resolve this crisis, he plans to exercise good judgment by being authentic, emotionally balanced and ready to act out of his core values.

Leader B also takes time to reflect. But his first thoughts are about who is affected by this crisis. What will this crisis mean for employees? Customers? Investors? How will the choices he makes under this magnifying glass impact his key stakeholders, both short and long term? He then worries about how he can enlist others to help him respond to this crisis. While he is concerned about getting out of the crisis, he is also concerned about how others will feel about how the crisis is solved.

Both approaches to leadership are valid and important. Many leaders are taught to be Leader A, who seeks personal confidence. However, we believe that the outcomes of Leader B are more viable and sustainable. Leader A focuses on confidence in himself; leader B wants confidence to be embedded in those he leads. Leader A emphasizes action; leader B wants to instill meaning. When leader A leaves the room, the actions may dissipate. When Leader B leaves the room, others fill in around him.

In the last few years, leaders have been encouraged to be bold, confident, authentic and grounded so that they can make decisions that help get things done. In the economic recession, these leaders responded quickly and decisively. We admire leaders who lead. But, we suggest that coming out of the recession, leaders need to shift their approach to lead by becoming meaning makers.

Leaders who worked through the recession by being bold, aggressive and decisive may have found a false positive when employee surveys and retention stayed high. These employees may have had an attitude of gratitude, as they were grateful for their jobs—especially when they compared themselves with friends who were out of work.

But, memories outlast recessions. The economic recession may have led to an emotional recession at work. In this emotional recession, leaders need not only to make bold business decisions, they also need to be sensitive to the meaning that comes from how those decisions are made.

Two leader-based reality shows capture this evolution of leaders. In *The Apprentice* (started in 2004), the successful leader is the one who is not fired because he or she is the most competent at accomplishing tasks and earns the respect of his or her boss (Donald Trump). This show captured the image of the strident, forthright and self-confident leader who responds to a crisis with enormous personal capacity.

## Leaders need to shift their approach to lead by becoming meaning makers.

In 2010, another reality management show debuted—*The Undercover Boss*. In this show, leaders discovered what motivated their employees and worked to leverage that motivation to other employees throughout the company. These leaders were multipliers who wanted to make sure that their employees were competent and able to do their jobs at a high level. Leadership was not just about the last leader standing, but about all employees collectively standing and being grateful for the leader because he helped them secure a sense of their purpose through their work.

Apprentice leaders win the war of talent by competing to be better than someone else. Undercover Bosses establish a Marshal Plan for talent by figuring out how to engage all leaders in the pursuit of a common goal. Leadership shifts from an individual to a team game, from one person as the great leader to a collection of great leaders, and from a leader who starts with personal self-esteem to a leader who instills self-esteem in others.

We believe that when leaders are meaning makers, they not only capture the hearts of their employees, they help their company make money. When leaders create meaning at work, employees are more productive, customers purchase more, investors increase intangible value, and communities have stronger reputations. Making meaning makes sense and cents.

We have identified seven challenges and actions for leaders as meaning makers in our new book, *The Why of Work*. These seven challenges, questions and actions come from insights distilled from many disciplines that attempt to help people find meaning in their lives. When applied to the work setting, they redefine the role of a leader. Leaders who recognize these challenges, face these questions, and do these actions will redefine leadership.

In this emotional recession, leaders need not only to make bold business decisions, they also need to be sensitive to the meaning that comes from how those decisions are made.

## Leadership **Identity** Challenge

With rapid technological, demographic, political and social change, organizations scramble to align employee strengths into a coherent organization identity that responds to evolving customer and societal requirements. Great leaders help individuals align their personal strengths with the organization identity (or firm brand) and with customer expectations. These leaders answer for themselves and others the question “who am I?” so that employees can align their personal identity and strengths with the company. At Apple and Google, employees identify with the design and innovation that the company builds into its products. Leaders help employees define and align their identity with that of the company culture and brand.

### **How leaders build an identity:**

- Help employees become more aware of their signature strengths through assessment, conversation, observation and assignment.
- Define your organization’s required strengths (or capabilities) by doing a capability audit.
- Make sure that employees’ strengths serve the organizational capabilities they are hired to build.
- Define your key customers and investors and determine their expectations of you.
- Connect the identity of the individuals and organizations to the customers they serve, building on strengths that strengthen others.

Great leaders help individuals align their personal strengths with the organization identity ...

## Leadership **Purpose** Challenge

In a world of information overload and centrifugal goals, employees and organizations often spin away from their basic sense of purpose and direction. Great leaders recognize what motivates employees, match employee motivators to organization purposes, and help employees prioritize work that matters most. These leaders help employees answer the question “where am I going?” so that employees feel motivated by a purpose that is meaningful to them. Corporate vision-statements need to translate into personal missions that reflect what matters most to the employees. Employees at Disney theme parks find meaning in helping guests have a positive experience in the park. Selecting Disney employees who are more prone to being motivated by connecting with others helps those employees find their meaning by offering great guest services.

### **How leaders articulate a purpose:**

- Help employees recognize what motivates them (insight, achievement, connection, empowerment).
- Match the employees’ motivation with the organizational task they are assigned to perform.
- Create an organizational aspiration that declares a socially responsible agenda and translates that agenda to individual action.
- Help employees “satisfice” in those tasks that are worth only doing adequately, and prioritize tasks that are important to do well.

## Leadership **Relationship** Challenge

Despite increasingly competitive and isolating work settings and declining interpersonal skills, much work has to be accomplished with others and within teams. Great leaders help employees build skills for professional friendships between people and among teams. These leaders help employees deal with the question “whom do I travel with?” so that employees can have high relating teams that are also high performing teams. Talent matters, but teamwork matters more. In the Academy Awards, about 10% of the time, the Best Picture of the year also has the Best Actor or Actress. In the NBA, about 15% of the time, the team with the top scorer won the NBA championship (5% without Michael Jordan). And, when Michael Jordan led the league in scoring and his team did not win the NBA championship (4 times), he averaged 34.55 points per game. In the six years that he led the league in scoring and won the championship, he averaged 30.5 points per game. Teamwork wins. Leaders forge relationships into teams.

### **How leaders foster relationships and teams that work:**

- Develop good friendships at work and encourage others to do so too.
- Learn, teach, and model the skills of:
  - Making and receiving bids
  - Listening and self-disclosing
  - Navigating proximity
  - Resolving conflicts
  - Making amends
- Apply these skills to relationships between people and among teams.

## Leadership **Positive Work Environment** Challenge

Organizations develop unconscious patterns of how work is done that, left unattended, may lead to cynicism, disorganization, redundancy, or lethargy. Great leaders recognize and establish positive work environments that inspire employees, meet customer expectations, and give investors confidence. These leaders answer the question “what do we want our culture to be?” so that the culture affirms and supports rather than demeans and isolates. A positive work environment is evident when employees nurture and care for each other without the scrutiny of a leader. Accountability is not top down from the leader to employees, but side to side as employees look out for and care for each other.

### **How leaders create a positive work environment:**

- Pay attention to the work environment as patterns of how things are done.
- Regularly monitor those patterns.
- Pick two or three of the items from your diagnosis and focus on them.
- Ask newcomers to your work environment their impressions of what is positive and what is not.
- Make public statements about your commitment to shaping a positive work environment.

Great leaders help employees build skills  
for professional friendships ...



## Leadership **Customizing the Employee Deal** Challenge

Too often employees feel emotionally disconnected from the work they do; their work may capture their talents and time, but not their heart and soul. Great leaders personalize work conditions so that employees know how their work contributes to outcomes that matter to them. These leaders help employees answer the question “what challenges interest me?” so that the employee does work that is meaningful to him or her. Customizing work includes tailoring what work is done, where it is done, when it is done, and how it is done. Employees who find their work energizing and enjoyable will find more meaning from it. Employees will stay awake, enthused and excited about the work and will be more productive in doing it.

### **How leaders ensure personalized contributions to work by customizing work that is done:**

- Learn what outcomes matter to employees: How does this job relate to their identity, values, and purpose?
- Help employees articulate the line of sight between what they do and the outcomes they value.
- Help employees discover the intrinsic value of their work and what they enjoy in the work itself.
- Shape work conditions and match employees to conditions that appeal to them (where, when, with whom, and how they work).

## Leadership **Growth, Learning, and Resilience** Challenge

As changes compound and the risk of failure increases, people may fade, fail to adapt, and get demoralized, which leads to organizational stagnation. Great leaders relish change and help employees grow, learn, and be resilient to bring new life to their organizations. These leaders help answer the question “how do I respond to the realities of change?” so that employees are able to learn and be resilient in the face of change. As the pace of change inevitably increases, employees who have the capacity to respond to the change, who learn and grow to adapt to the change, and who are resilient in the face of disappointment will see change as an opportunity, not a threat. Fear of change will be replaced by enthusiasm for change.

### **How leaders facilitate growth, learning, and resilience in the face of change:**


- Have a positive attitude about change, that you can learn from it and be resilient when facing it.
- Learn how to generalize new ideas through:
  - Self-reflection
  - Experimenting
  - Boundary spanning
  - Continuous improvement
- Learn how to generalize, or share, new ideas by:
  - Moving talent across boundaries
  - Sharing information across boundaries
  - Building incentives to encourage shared behavior
- Become resilient in the face of change by:
  - Making the unspeakable speakable
  - Turning what you know into what you do
  - Changing events into patterns

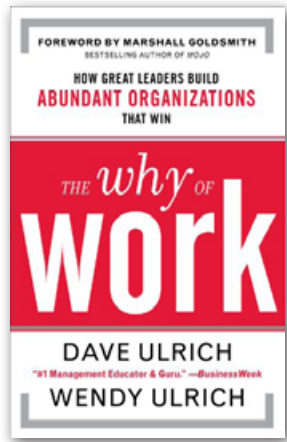
## Leadership **Delight** Challenge

Partisanship sometimes affects organizations where there is more hostility than civility and a we-they, win-lose, right-wrong, blame-and-shame mentality persists. Great leaders move away from hostility and intolerance toward multiculturalism through problem-solving, listening, curiosity, diversity and compassion, and by bringing creativity, pleasure, humor and delight into their organizations. These leaders answer for themselves and others the question “what delights me?” so that employees find pleasure, joy and fun at work.

### **How leaders foster delight:**

- See and test the connection between employee delight and customer loyalty.
- Find ways to delight yourself at work and encourage your employees to find delight through:
  - Creativity
  - Pleasure
  - Humor/playfulness
  - Civility

These seven challenges, questions and actions shift a leader from starting with a focus on himself to an understanding of what provides meaning to those he leads. Leaders who tap into meaning foster long-term sustainability and the leader will not have to constantly observe and audit what employees do. Management by objectives can be replaced with management by shared mindset. **Employees with meaning will be more productive, and that productivity will enhance customer experiences and investor confidence.** 



## BUY THE BOOK

Get more details or buy a copy of Dave & Wendy Ulrich's [The Why of Work](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dave Ulrich, Ph.D.**, is a professor of business at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan and co-founder of The RBL Group. He has written 23 books that cover topics in HR, leadership and organization, is currently on the Board of Directors for Herman Miller and the Board of Trustees of Southern Virginia University, and is a Fellow in the National Academy of Human Resources. **Wendy Ulrich, Ph.D., M.B.A.**, has been a practicing psychologist for over twenty years, and has authored two books on personal change. She is the founder of Sixteen Stones Center for Growth, which offers seminar-retreats on creating abundance and meaning. Learn more at [whyofwork.com](http://whyofwork.com).

## SEND THIS

[Pass along a copy](#) of this manifesto to others.

## SUBSCRIBE

[Sign up for our free e-newsletter](#) to learn about our latest manifestos as soon as they are available.

## BORN ON DATE

This document was created on June 2, 2010 and is based on the best information available at that time.

## ABOUT CHANGETHIS

[ChangeThis](#) is a vehicle, not a publisher. We make it easy for big ideas to spread. While the authors we work with are responsible for their own work, they don't necessarily agree with everything available in ChangeThis format. But you knew that already.

ChangeThis is supported by the love and tender care of 800-CEO-READ. Visit us at [800-CEO-READ](http://800-CEO-READ) or at our daily [blog](#).

## COPYRIGHT INFO

The copyright of this work belongs to the author, who is solely responsible for the content.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit [Creative Commons](http://Creative Commons) or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

Cover image from [Veer Marketplace](#).

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

You are given the unlimited right to print this manifesto and to distribute it electronically (via email, your website, or any other means). You can print out pages and put them in your favorite coffee shop's windows or your doctor's waiting room. You can transcribe the author's words onto the sidewalk, or you can hand out copies to everyone you meet. You may not alter this manifesto in any way, though, and you may not charge for it.