

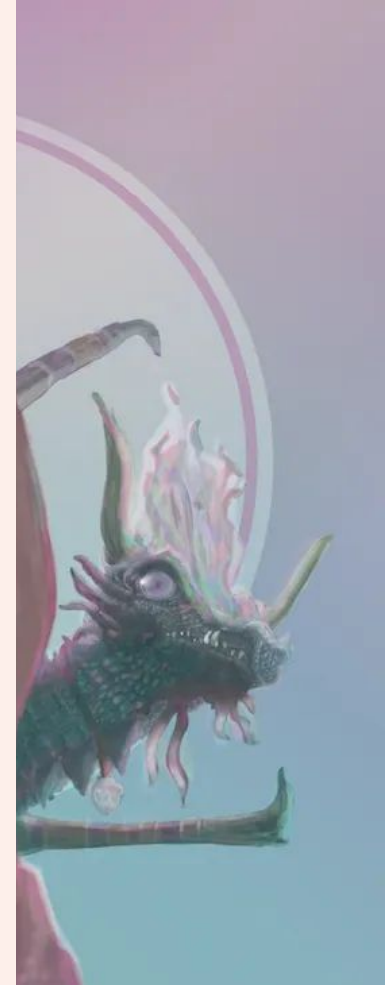
Warning: There Be Dragons Beyond

1. This is very much a work in progress; read: **EARLY DRAFT**
2. Things Needing Revision
 - a. Organization: group like concepts together
3. Things Still Missing
 - a. Possibly add annotation on what idea applies to career stage (e.g. first line, leader of leader, etc)
 - b. Esp for book, but possibly here, too: include my own personal journey to help ground this as “this is my view, YMMV”
 - c. Add compare and contrast without leadership styles

Goals of this Project

Nothing like a public declaration to hold myself accountable

1. Share these slides with RealSelf in 2020 Q3 time frame (assuming interest)
2. Convert some of these slides into articles to publish on LinkedIn, Medium, etc
3. Stretch Goal #1: Package this all in long-form book format and self-publish on Amazon. Bonus points if I found a publisher. Hire an editor regardless.
4. Stretch Goal #2: Go on TED and present this



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Lessons, Truths, Maths & Reads for People Leaders

Ward's Take on Leading People

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Preface

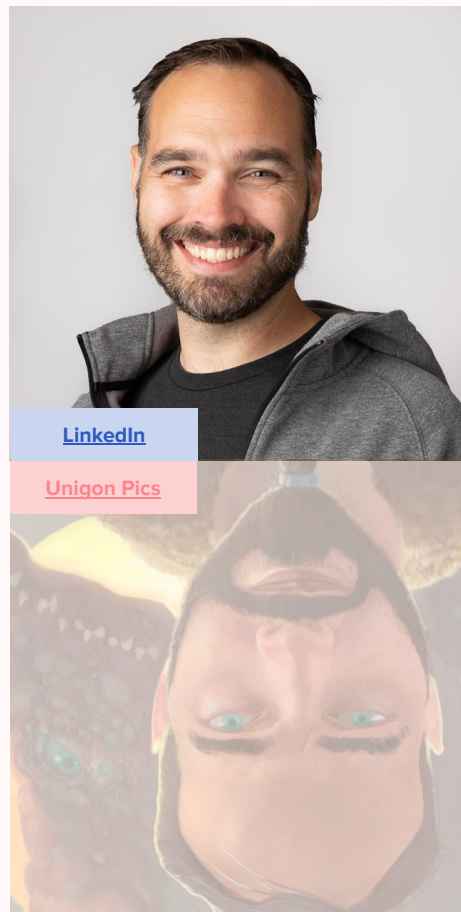


Intent

- **Help leaders**, with some emphasis or otherwise implicit **bias toward leaders in technology**
- Address what I believe is, at times, an **overly mechanistic approach to leadership** that often **leaves our shared humanity on the wayside**
- **Provide centralizing themes** that help bridge related disciplines of engineering, product, design, analytics and IT that require, in my experience, **deep cross-collaboration** for companies to succeed

About Me

- Informed by my years as a people leader and executive **overseeing 200-600 person companies**
- I've **3 advanced degrees in engineering, none of which makes me a better CTO** (or leader, in general)
- I've **autism** which doesn't disqualify me from leading people; if anything, in some ways it gives me **a unique perspective on interacting with others**
- I ascribe to the general tenets of **servant leader**



Sections

Lessons: I share a few personal life lessons, some personal and some work, that've shaped me

Truths: A collection of personal truths (or beliefs, if you prefer) that keep me grounded

- Personal
- Career
- Human Needs
- Leading People
- Grounding Myself as a Human

Maths: A collection of leadership maths I've found useful when trying to discriminate on the right course of action as a leader

- Ground Zero
- Bootstrapping Leadership
- Smarts vs Feels
- Accountability & Integrity
- Establishing Vision
- Effectively Communicating
- Working Together
- Delivering Results
- Growing Teams & Organizations
- Span & Control
- Common Failure Modes

Reads: Short section of books I've directly or indirectly related to understanding leadership, especially from a humanistic perspective

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Lessons



We All Have Our Own Story, This Is Mine

- The following life lessons are things that have shaped me and influenced how I think about and interact with others
- These life lessons are not meant to be universal, but they will give you a glimpse into parts of life that have shaped me as a person and as leader
- The vignettes shared on the right-hand side are personal - some are funny, some are poignant - if that makes you uncomfortable you can easily skip over as the left-hand side succinctly summarizes the takeaways from the stories
- YMMV

#1: Karma Sucks

Treat Others Like You'd Like to be Treated

... better yet, stretch goal: Treat Others How They'd Like to be Treated

Some lessons are best learned the hard way (story of my life)

As a small kid we spent summers at Hamlin New York State Park on the south shores of Ontario. I loved playing in the sand and water. It was summertime fun in all its 1980s imagined glory.

I thought it would be clever to bury a large rock under the sand in order to watch someone trip over it. I waited a long time, no one came.

In the spur of a new ideas, I got up to run elsewhere. I tripped on my own rock, and tore the nail from little toe. To this day that nail has never grown back correctly.

#2: Little Things Matter

We don't need to solve everything to solve something

Every little action can add up to have a profound impact over time

Fast forward to Hamlin park albeit I'm a bit older and a bit more worldly in my own estimation of my long 10 year lifespan.

As we were breaking camp, my father asked to help clean up. I begrudgingly put some of our belongings into the car. He asked me to pick up some of the cigarettes. No one in my immediate family smoked. I refused on this fact: we, and more specifically I, did not want to pick up after others.

... See speaker notes for complete story

#3: The One Thing Common to All Your Failures? You.

Be ruthless with yourself on who you and who you are not.

You cannot get there, wherever (or whoever) it is, without first knowing where (or who) you are

I've been married two other times in my life. Both I jokingly refer to as “starter marriages.”

My first marriage ended in a tragically funny story (for another time) that lasted approximately 18 months. I felt very much the victim based on how it ended.

My second marriage looked a heck of like the first. It went through the same phases and same duration. Almost to the month.

... See speaker notes for complete story

#4: All Things End

**You date, not marry, companies.
Half-life at a company is measured
in years, not decades.**

#5: It's Not You. It's Not Me. It's Us

**People grow apart. Its natural.
Embrace it. Encourage it.
Celebrate it.**

My first full-time job outside of finishing my graduate work was at The Boeing Company.

Given that I've lived in Japan multiple years and read, write and speak the language fluently at an engineering-level, I joined hoping to forge a career as a technical engineering liaison between them and Japanese aviation industry. It seemed like a match made in heaven.

... See speaker notes for complete story

#6: Be You, The Whole You and Nothing But You

You be you. Do not compromise.

#7: Find Your Tribe

No one is for everyone. Find your own tribe.

I worked at Xbox prior to and leading up to the launch of Xbox One. It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.

Intellectually, I was on fire in all the best of ways. I loved the problems and people I worked with directly. It was collaborative, engaging and fast-paced.

Emotionally, I was equally on fire but in the all-consuming, agonizing kind of way that makes you question your sanity.

... See speaker notes for complete story

#8: We're All The Right Wrong Person to Someone

See points #6 and #7. They're worth repeating

No company is perfect. They're all wrong in their own way. Only ever work for those with the right kind of wrong that you'll lean into as a leader.

We're all seeking that special person who is right for us. But if you've been through enough relationships, you begin to suspect there's no right person, just different flavors of wrong. Why is this? Because you yourself are wrong in some way, and you seek out partners who are wrong in some complementary way. But it takes a lot of living to grow fully into your own wrongness.

It isn't until you finally run up against your deepest demons, your unsolvable problems – the ones that make you truly who you are – that you're ready to find a life-long mate. Only then do you finally know what you're looking for. You're looking for the wrong person. But not just any wrong person: the right wrong person – someone you lovingly gaze upon and think, “This is the problem I want to have.”

Loving the Wrong Person by Andrew Body

#9: Nothing is Free in Life.

Everything you do, every decision you make, has a cost. Choose wisely what you spend your money, your time, and your energy on.

Education was strongly encouraged in our family, especially from my father who largely inspired and influenced my own career aspirations to become an engineer.

Growing up I was a fairly autodidact child. Unknownst to my parents at the time, I used to sneak onto a Greyhound bus to go into the nearby city of Syracuse to read physics and mathematics textbooks at the university library, along with endlessly perusing books at a large warehouse bookstore in the city.

WARD GOT DISTRACTED. SQUIRREL

... See speaker notes for complete story

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Truths



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Personal Truths



Ward's Beliefs

The below beliefs help shape who I am as a people leader

- We all have **three basic needs**:
 - **Direction:** We all want to take a journey to somewhere that matters to us.
 - **Community:** We all seek like-minded people to share the journey with.
 - **Purpose:** We all want to understand how we fit into our community, and how we can help move said community toward the direction we share in common
- People, especially thought-workers, **crave agency and autonomy** (this varies by degree, person, and level of career)

Freewill Is a Belief

- There is no way to **prove or disprove** your freewill
 - It's the ultimate belief in Self: what you do is either predetermined or it's not
- Everything we do **is a choice**
- Doing nothing **is a choice**
- Doing something, anything **is a choice**
- Deciding to undo something **is a choice**
- Do not hang onto your mistakes; make **a choice**, step in, **make it better**

All Things In Balance, All Things in Tension

- Whatever was **right for yesterday, may not be right** for today or tomorrow
- If the job was easy, **anyone could (and would) do it**
- Our job is to **constantly juggle between different priorities**
- **It's the ultimate juggling act**, in my opinion, as a professional
 - Needs of **your people vs** the needs of **the company**
 - Needs of **the company vs** the needs of **the customer**
 - Needs of **your family vs** the needs of **your work**

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Career Truths



Letting Go To Move Up

- Spent the large portion of my career actively **trying to become a people leader**
 - Early in my career it was for **all the wrong reasons**
- When I stopped focussing on my career but focussed on solving the needs of people around, **my career as a people leader took off**
 - Leading people is never about your needs, it's about your team's. Period. Full stop.
- People follow leaders who **lead for altruistic reasons**

Know Your Limits

Accept the Consequences

- **Contrary to popular opinion that executives cannot be effective and do 100% remote work, I've made my career as a people leader doing just that**
- **For the past seven years, I've unwavered on my limits**
 - I will not relocate my family for any reason or any job
 - I know I am effective in my role working remotely; I'm upfront with every career opportunity that this is non-negotiable
 - I do not waste their or my time trying to negotiate on my non-negotiables
 - Yes, I've had to pass on otherwise very interesting career opportunities

Be Careful What You Wish For Everyone Wants to be an Exec ‘till they are

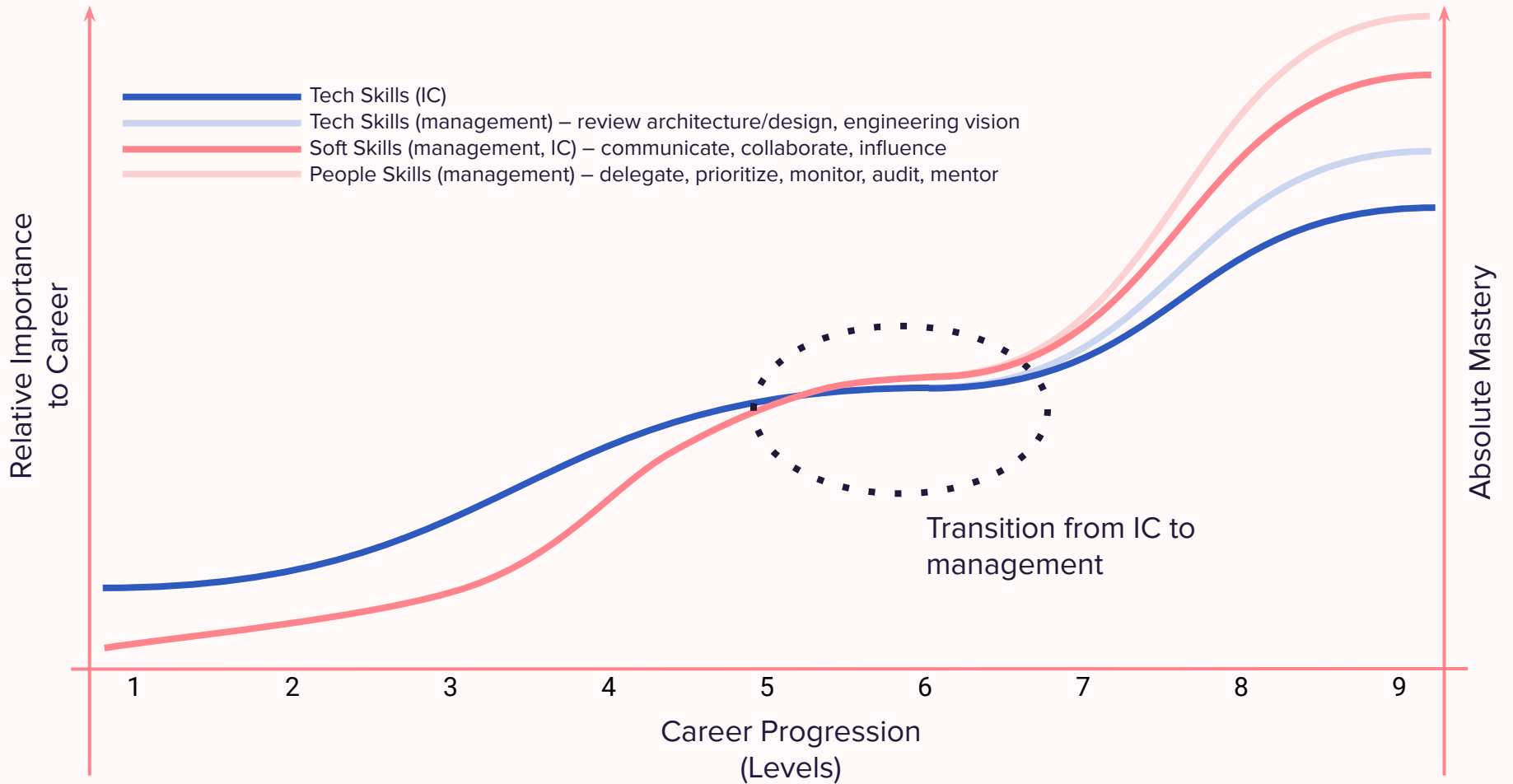
- Many people pursue people leadership for a lot of reasons; a lot of wrong reasons
 - More money, Prestige, Power ... all of these will lead to an early termination
- Leading people is not a career choice; it's a calling and vocation first
- The air only gets thinner the higher you go
 - At the highest levels (VP and above) there is little or no safety net
 - No one tells you what to do day to day ... you're responsible for being 100% self-directed
 - You are not allowed mistakes that at a lower level would be found acceptable

Unchecked Ignorance Determines Fate

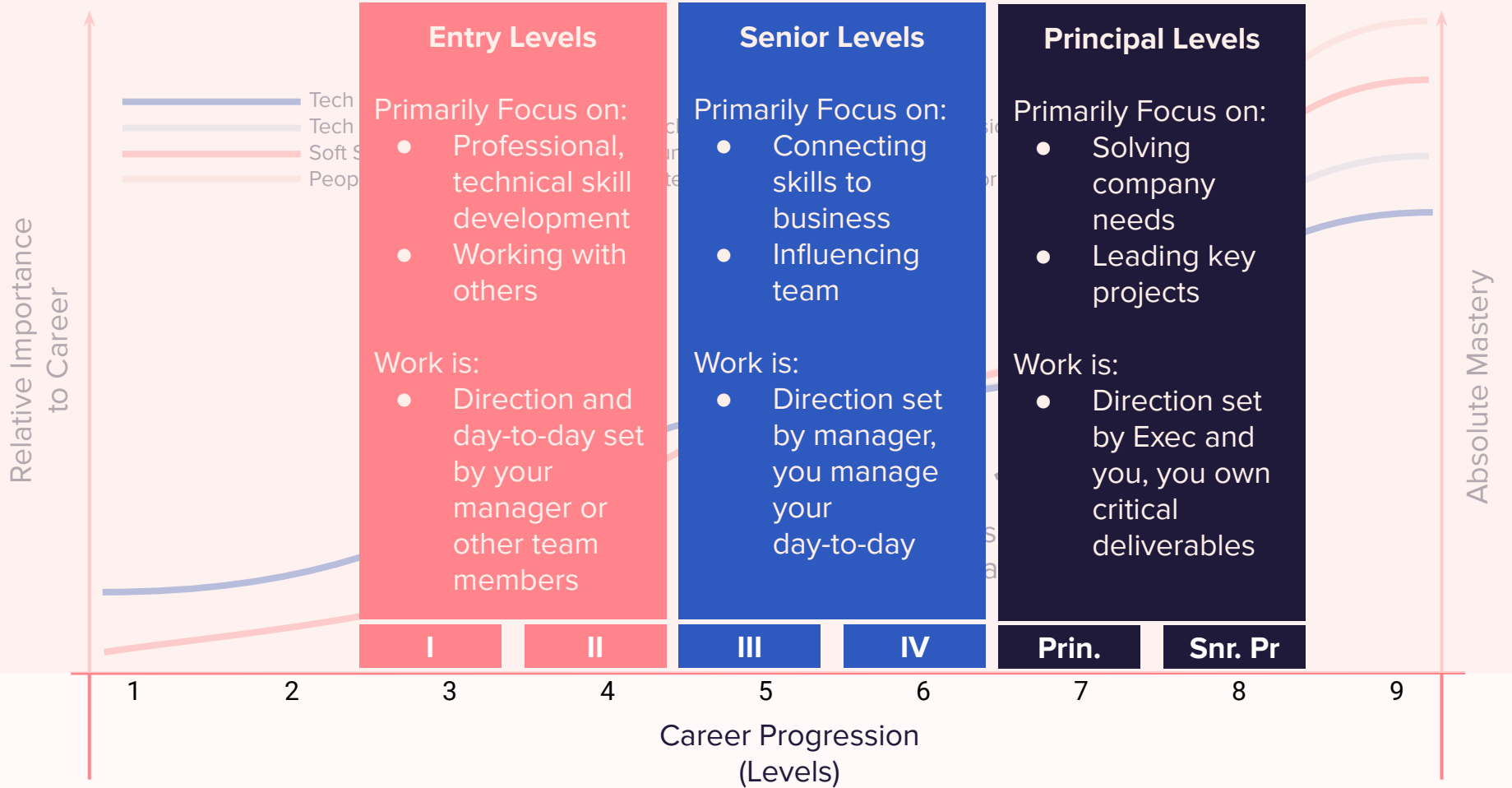
Shine a Light on the Darkness

	I Know	I Don't Know
I Know	I know what I know :: knowledge you've learned and remember	I know what I don't know :: knowledge you've elected to now learn
I Don't Know	I don't know what I know :: knowledge you've acquired then forgotten	I don't know what I don't know :: 99.9999999999% of the rest of human knowledge

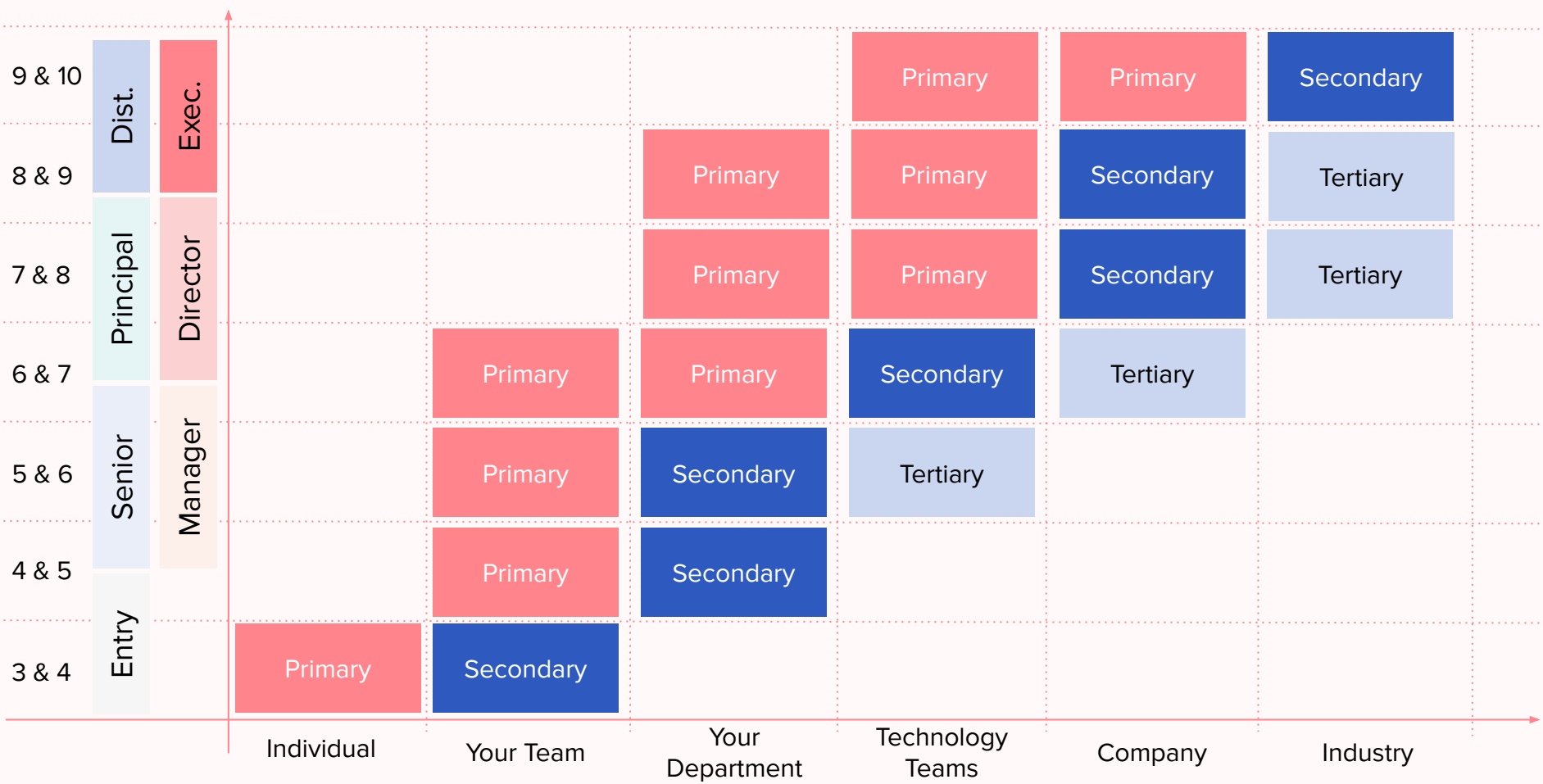
- Do not let Fate decide your or your team's destiny
- Your job, in order for your team and company to succeed, is **to fight your fate** by shining a light on **your collective ignorance**
- Do so every day **with courage, compassion, and humility**
- **Listen. Learn. Deeply. Always.**



Career Progression & What Matters Most Continued



Career Progression & What Matters Most Continued



Span of Influence & Responsibility

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Human Needs Truths



Maslow Hierarchy of Needs



Non Violent Communications

- **To communicate non-violently is to ensure neither you or the other person feels like they cannot be themselves ...** whenever we step away from who we are, or force another person to step away from who they are is an *act of violence*.
- **You be you. And I'll be me.** This is truly the foundation of non-violent communications.

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Leading People Truths



Stockdale Paradox

“You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.” – James Bond Stockdale

Too Much of Anything is Bad

- **Drink enough water and it can become toxic* to humans**
 - Too much of something can be just as harmful as too little of it
- **People, teams, and systems are more akin to breathing**
 - If you tried to only inhale you'd die
 - If you tried to only exhale you'd die
 - You need both in the right measure to live
- **As a people leader, you need change with the needs of your people**

People Leadership is Lonely

- Leading others is the **most rewarding thing** you will do professionally
 - There is nothing quite like helping someone achieve their professional goals
- Leading others is also often **the loneliest thing** you will do professionally
 - You may not be as transparent as you want in order to balance the needs of the greater good
 - You will never be able to make everyone happy
 - You ultimately make decisions and bear the burden of the consequences no matter the cost to you personally and professionally
- It only **gets lonelier the higher you rise** in your career

Leading People is a lot like Sailing a Ship

- Sailing ships, like your team, will **never go from here to there in a straight line**
- Like sailing, you'll have to **take into account the prevailing winds** and tack to port or tack to starboard
- Like sailing, you must always have one eye on the distant horizon or your “north star”; otherwise **you're apt to just go around in circles**
- Like sailing, you must always have the other eye on the immediate ship and crew; otherwise **you're apt to sink or capsize**

Be Careful, You May Get More than you Asked

- The more senior you become, the more weight your every word will carry
 - One stray comment can tear a person apart
 - One kind word can make difference between a horrible day and an amazing week
 - Choose your words wisely
- The more senior you become, the more likely people may do what you ask without question
 - Be careful what you ask of others; they may spend 10 hours getting you an answer to a question you only had a passing curiosity on

Working For You is more like Dating than Marrying

- Beyond life-long, monogamous marriage, nothing will last “till death do us part” especially work relationships ... and this is a-o-kay
- Everyone changes over-time; who we were and what we needed then may not be true now
 - People will outgrow your leadership or leadership style: do not resent them; let them move onto their next job with your full support
 - You or the company may outgrow a team member you hired years ago: we’re all made for different environments. We excel in some, and not in others. Be honest with someone on your team when they will find better success elsewhere

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Grounding Myself as a Human Truths



When Things Go Wrong, Stand in Front When Thing Go Right, Stand in Back

- The best leaders never take credit for the successes of their team; they stand in back and **let the team receive all the praise**
- The best leaders always own the mistakes of their team, no matter whose fault it is; they step in front and **absorb all the blame**

Unlike S**t, Kindness Doesn't Just Happen

- Everything we do, everything we are, even everything we are not, is a result of a choice we make
 - The greatest gift we can **give to others** is to **choose to be kind**
 - The greatest gift we can **give ourselves** is to **choose to be kind**
- Choose kindness every time

Own Your S**t

- We all make mistakes
 - You're no less immune as a leader than is your team
- When you make mistake immediately own it
 - If you make a mistake in front of a group, apologize to the group
 - If you make a mistake one on one, apologize directly to that person
- Don't agonize over the mistake. Own it. Learn from it. Move on.

We're All Human

We're All Works in Progress

- **Many people, leaders and individuals alike**, often think that the more senior someone is, the better (i.e. more put-together) they're as a human being
- A CTO is **no better a human being** than a recent graduate from university
 - We all have our failings; we're all learning how to be better versions of ourselves
 - Having a big title does not mean you're inherently a better human being
 - To wit, don't think your advancement in your career somehow means you have all the answers to life. It does not.
- **Stay humble**; forever be listening to others no matter their age or inexperience

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Maths



Math Primer

I lied. There is really no math found here-in. But I've always enjoyed abbreviating concepts into simple math-esque statements. Many of my abbreviations may be self-evident, but just in case they are not, here is how to interpret them:

- $X > Y$:: **X is more important than Y**; if nothing else focus on doing X
- $X \neq Y$:: **X is not the same thing as Y**; do not confuse X for Y or Y for X
- $X = \sim Y$:: **X is equivalent to Y**; if you do X you're also doing Y
- $X \Rightarrow Y$:: **Start with X before doing Y**; the order of operations matters
- $!X$:: **Negation or Absence of X**; implies that X is absent or missing

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Ground Zero Maths



Theory Z > Theory Y > Theory X

- **Theory X: believes there is an inherent bimodal distribution in people**
 - People who have self-discipline and drive to do good work
 - And everyone else
 - Leadership is part of the first group, everyone working for them is of the latter group ... Theory X mindset **is toxic**
- **Theory Z: believes everyone inherently wants to excel and contribute**
 - Leadership is here to support everyone by clearing obstacles and providing the best environment conducive to the needs of the company and everyone at the company

People > Technology

- **Technology is table stakes** - its interesting, fun and even challenging but its not the core value we as leaders need to focus on
- **What makes or breaks all companies is the ability to communicate and collaborate**; our job as leaders is to provide that bridge/glue

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Bootstrapping Leadership Maths



Step Toward > Leap Away

- Whenever you decide to change jobs or companies, always do so with a sense of purpose of stepping toward an opportunity
 - Many people, myself included, when overwhelmed by their current circumstances will want to leap away from where we're at to go anywhere else
- Most problems in life are co-located within you; going somewhere else just carries with it many of the problems you believe you're leaving behind
 - It can years, even decades, for people to stop this pattern and start taking ownership for themselves
- Leaders take ownership even when its not their fault

Follower ➤ Leader

- True leaders are not self-designated or self-elected
- The best leaders are born when there is one person willing to follow them
- If no one is willing to follow you then you are no leader, no matter your title says
 - The day people stop following you is the day you must resign

People Leadership != People Pleasing

- Many people turning to people leadership because they enjoy pleasing people ... these people very often make horrible people leaders
- We lead people because we care to see people grow to be the best version of themselves
- We lead people because we want the people around us to have a safe work environment where they are free of fear or reprisal for making a mistake
- We lead people because we want what's best for them, even when what is best for them is direct feedback that tastes like medicine but is necessary for them to grow to the next level

Problem + !Solution = Reality

- Recognize that any problem not accompanied a solution is just stating reality
 - Do not let yourself or your team complain about “the rain being wet”
- Never allow a team member to come to you with a list of problems unless they also come with a few suggested solutions
 - If you allow them to list problems without solutions, you are creating a learned sense of helplessness. It's the worst lesson you can possibly teach a team member.
- Focus only on what you can change, accept all else as just the reality you are in

What Happens != How We Respond

- We **rarely have control** over what happens to us
- What defines us is not what happens, **but how we respond to what happens to us**
- Best leaders are ones who **continuously step in and choose how they respond to everything** in their lives (not just at work)

Questions > Answers

- People leaders, especially early in their career, believe they need to have all the answers for their team
- Our job is to ask the right, best questions at the right, best opportunity
- The job of our team is find answers and then execute on them
- Even when you know the answer, ask your team the questions
 - This is how they learn to think more critically
 - This is how you learn a different way to do things when they come up with a better answer than your own (stay humble)

Lemonade > Lemons

- Life is a choice. **Everything we do is a choice.**
- Every situation is **an opportunity to find the lemonade in the lemons**
- True leadership is **hallmarked by what we do in the face adversity**
- **Make lemonade! Always.**

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Smarts vs Feels Maths



EQ > IQ

- More important than being smart (IQ) is our ability to **work collaboratively with other emotional beings (EQ)**
- Being smart is generally “table stakes” in that **everyone we work with is smart (IQ)**
- What sets us apart, especially later in our career, is our ability to healthily interact with others (EQ) to **help get the most from the people around us for the benefits of our customers and company**

High IQ \approx Faster Thinking

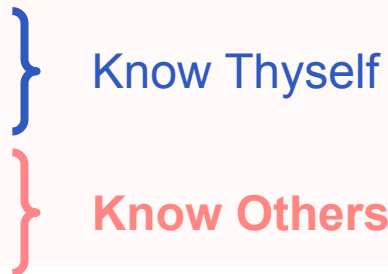
High IQ \neq Better Thinking

- We falsely believe that the higher IQ the clearer you see the world around you
- Higher IQ just means you can process patterns more quickly
 - Patterns are can be both real and perceived
 - Conspiracy theories abound with false pattern recognition
 - High IQ does not inoculate against conspiracy theories or seeing false patterns
- High IQ often just means you get to **faulty conclusions faster with greater misplaced conviction**

EQ != Emotional

Emotions are important! But ... do not conflate your feelings with your possessing meaningful insights that allow you to lead others.

- EQ is the ability to **identify and manage** your and other's emotions
- EQ can be broken down into **4 distinct pillars**:
 - Self Awareness
 - Self Management
 - **Social Awareness**
 - **Relationship Management**



Self Aware + Self Management

- **All the best leaders are very self-aware** (e.g. they know when they are having a bad day)
- They are also **exhibit self-control and can adjust their behavior in-situ to meet the needs of people around them** (e.g. adjust communications style)
- **The path to self-actualization requires both** self-awareness and self-management (see Maslow Hierarchy of Needs)

Compassion > Empathy

- **We are mediators, not necessarily sympathizers**
 - Our job is to listen and reflect without invalidating how someone feels (i.e. compassion)
 - There is a danger when we co-locate ourselves with the person speaking (e.g. feel what they feel) (i.e. empathy)

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Accountability & Integrity Maths



Say = ~ Do

- **Say what you'll do; Do what you'll say**
- You cannot demand accountability in others **until you first hold yourself accountable**
- Never promise anything **you cannot guarantee to deliver on**
 - Do not make promises you cannot keep or guarantee
- If you make a promise but have to break then **own it, apologize profusely for the mistake, and eat whatever the costs may be to you**
- The best leaders know the **buck stops with them**

Different > Better

- Most things in life, including you and the people you lead, are different, not better
- Company hierarchy infers an overly stated false sense of superiority
 - Yes, more senior leaders tend to have better pattern recognition
 - It makes them temporally better at a skill that in time the more junior leader will also acquire
 - There is nothing inherently better about you and your less experienced persons
- Don't let your title, or lack thereof, **rob you of your inherent value and differentness**

Veto = ~ Fail

- **We all reserve the right to veto decisions underneath us; however ...**
- **Everytime we veto a decision, we should conduct our own root cause analysis**
 - The root cause is inherently associated with our failure to communicate clearly, ahead of the decision, the information necessary so that person could have made the right decision in your absence

Liked \neq Respected

- **Your team is first and foremost your responsibility**; they are not necessarily your friends (bonus if they are, though)
- Your goal is help them **grow as professionals**
- Your goal is help them **work collectively together**
- You need to **earn their respect**

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Establishing Vision Maths



Equity > Annuity

- Equity can be thought of the total value of something over an infinite time series: equity takes the **long view on things**
- Annuity can be thought of the total value of something over a finite time series: annuities look at **near-term gains**
- Equity is just an expression of love
- Always take the **long-view on your people**
 - Be patient; Invest in them
 - Allow them time to grow into future leaders

Think Global + Act Local

- As a people leader, **never lose sight the of the bigger objectives and goals**
- Have a vision that is **big enough for everyone to share in success**
- Optimize for the **customer and company (global)**
- Work directly with your people to **make incremental improvements (local)**

Principles ➤ Pragmatism

- Know what your basic principles, as a leader, are at all times
 - These should guide you to make the right best decisions
 - Principles can help define both job-specific decisions, and people-related ones
- While you start from your principles, recognize that you will almost always have to make a set of trade-offs or compromises
 - Allow the most pragmatic decision, that is closest to your principles win

Why ⇨ What ⇨ How ⇨ Who ⇨ When

- There is **no How without first a What**
- There is **no What without first a Why**
- Start with **Why first**. Always.
- Your job is to focus on **defining, communicating** The Why and possibly The What
- Your job is **give space for your people to step in and own** The How

Optimism + Realism

- **Unbridled optimism can lead to indeterminism**
 - We just wait to see all the great things unfold; life is never so charitable or predictable
- **Unchecked pessimism can lead to fatalism**
 - We believe nothing will work out right so we just end up doing nothing waiting for the inevitable
- **Doing something does not guarantee success, but ...**
- **Doing nothing does guarantee failure**

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Effectively Communicati ng Maths



Explicit > Implicit

- **Never assume people understand or know something just because it's obvious to you**
 - I'm constantly reminded of this in my own failings as a leader
- **Set clear and explicit expectations**
 - What are the expected outcomes
 - What is the expected behavior
- **Also remember to set what are the boundaries**
 - What are not the expected outcomes
 - What is not the expected behavior

Message != Messaging != Messenger What != How != Who

- As a leader, you should care most about people hearing your message
- As a leader, you may not always be the best messenger of your own message
 - You may want to ask another, respected member of your team to deliver the messages
 - You may need to escalate to a leader above to help deliver the message
- As a leader, you may need to deliver the same message using different words depending of who you are addressing

Direct Feedback = ~ Love

- Many people leaders, especially early in their careers, **avoid direct feedback**
 - They want to be liked
 - They don't want to hurt someone's feelings
- It's **completely selfish and inexcusable** to avoid having hard conversations
- Its selfish because the lack of timely, direct feedback could lead to that person losing their job
- The best leaders never shy from giving direct feedback; it's how they show they love their people

And > But

- **Its a simple rule, but often an entire conversation can be pivoted from confrontation to collaborative by replacing a wayward “but” with an “and”**
- **But, while often grammatically correct, can convey a sense of contradiction**
- **And, while dubious as the best grammatically choice, better conveys a willingness to incorporate another person’s opinion.**
- **Buts can stop conversations**
- **And can help them continue till there is consensus**

Mediate != Arbitrate

Mediate > Arbitrate

- Mediate is to intervene a dispute two parties to help them reconcile
- Arbitrate is to provide an authoritative judgement or decision
- We people leaders, our primary job is to mediate, not arbitrate
 - we are often asked to mediate between members of our team
 - Avoid the temptation to arbitrate (solve for them) the issues with their working relationship
- Mediate? **Yes!**
- Arbitrate? **Avoid.**

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Working Together Maths



Influence > Decree

- **No one likes being told (decree) what to do; people do appreciate being explained (influence) why what they do matter**
 - Recall people desire for autonomy and agency
- **We should always be influencing others by communicating our vision**
 - Our goal is to create teams that own their destiny, and the more they understand why they are doing something, and why it matters (to our customers and company) the more they can step in and own as their own
- **You are neither king, queen, emperor or empress**
 - Keep decrees to House Lannister

Influence > Authority

- Many first time people leaders think: **“Finally, I have the authority to have others do things my way.”**
 - **Worst mistake ever**
- As you grow in your career, the **more skill you need to influence others, not less.**
- **The best leaders rely 100% on influence**, and never on their authority to motivate people to action

Collaboration > Cooperation

- Cooperation is tidy, neat and well orchestrated
 - Cooperation has clean, neat borders. You do your job. I'll do my job
 - Collaboration is messy, a bit chaotic, and exuberant
 - Collaboration has us leaning across the desk to each other's work, contributing our ideas in freeform
-
- Cooperation is a symphonic orchestra playing to still audience
 - Collaboration is a live jazz band playing to enthusiastic crowd

Process > People

- **When a mistake happens, always start with “where did our process fail our people?”**
- **People almost never intentionally or maliciously make mistakes**; its a failure of communicating process or inadequate tooling
- **Invest in improving your process and tooling as your first response**
- Only resort to **performance management as a last resort** if there is clear evidence of malintent

Observe + Reflect > Judge

- As leader, one of the greatest gifts we give our teams is the **act of observation and reflection**
 - It ensures that we keep our locus centered from our perspective, allowing others to have and retain their own sense of self. Recall non-violent communications. Reflecting back what you observe in others allows them to step in without losing their agency or self-worth
- Judging others is rarely if ever our role. Judging comes entangled with a heap of problematic assumptions about your rightness and even superiority.
- You and your role are **not superior to your team, merely different.**

Describe > Prescribe

- We work with other thought-workers who've spent years (decades even) perfecting their craft. **They know how to do their jobs; trust them to do it**
- Our job is to **help describe what success looks like**, and why that success is important to our customers and company.

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Delivering Results Maths



Less > More

- Resources will **always be limited**
- Time is the **most constrained** of all resources
- In everything you do, **be ruthless** about finding the quickest path forward
- The only time more is actually better than less is how many times you may need to communicate a key message
 - I've never regretted over-communicating to my team
 - I've often regretted not repeating myself enough

Right Work > Results

- More important results is **“Did we do the right work?”**
- There are **no guarantees** in life. Same is true with work.
- At times you will do all the right things and **still not win**
- If your team did all the right things, **gracefully accept any losses** and move on to the next thing
- Never punish your people for doing right work, **no matter the results**

Play to Win \neq Play to Not Lose

- **Nothing ventured, nothing gained**
- **Nothing is over faster than believing you cannot win**
 - The actual outcome of anything of life does not matter
 - What matters that up to the very last second we never lose belief in ourselves, our team and our collective ability to make a (damn) difference in the lives our customers and our company

Simple \neq Simplicity

- The best solutions are simple
- The best solutions are often not simplistic
- Making something simple is hard
- Something simple is not necessarily without its own complexity

Risk = ~ Reward

- Everything worth having is **hard to achieve**
- The greatest rewards in life, personal or work, **are inherently (by definition) are the riskiest**
- Do not be afraid of risk; **embrace them and then manage the downsides**

Effective \neq Efficient

Effective \Rightarrow Efficient

- **How effective** (how well did you accomplish your goals) is **separate from how efficient** (how few resources did you use to accomplish said goal)
- More important that being efficient is being effective
- Once you are effective, look to improve efficiencies
 - Focus on product-market fit before working about cost structure
 - Don't polish a turd

Adaptability \neq Agility

Adaptability \Rightarrow Agility

- Meeting the needs of the moment (adaptability) is not the same as going fast in the moment
- Very similar to being effective first, efficient second
- Don't let past patterns of success dominate your thinking; ensure you inspect the current situation on its merits

War > Battle

- Remember what you're fighting for the long-term
- Do not fight every battle with your team or others
 - Choose wisely when to fight and when to yield your team on a critical decision
 - There is value in letting your team go one way even when you know or believe its wrong
 - If it will not lose you the war, let them
 - Either you will be right, and your team will listen to you more the next time
 - Or you will be wrong, and you will learn a new way to do something (even old dogs can learn new tricks!)
- Remember: You can win every battle and still lose the war

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Growing Teams & Organizations Maths



Gardening > Carpentry

- Developing people **takes time**
- Being a people leader is **not something that can be designed and executed like a carpenter building a house**
- Instead, it's **more akin to gardening**
 - You'll plant a lot of seeds
 - You will prune
 - You will weed
 - You will water and give a ton of sunshine (love)
 - You will be thankful for the fruit your endeavors bear
 - You will be nourished

Coaching \neq Mentoring

- **Coaching** is helping someone to **learn *how* to do something**
- **Mentoring** is helping someone to **learn *what* to do**

- **Early in a person's career** they will require a ton of **coaching on top of mentoring**
- **The further along they are** in their career, the **less coaching should be expected**
- At some point, a **sufficiently senior person should expect zero coaching**

Behavior > Skill

Soft Skills > Hard Skills

- Your career advancement **won't be hallmarked** by your technical (i.e. hard) skills
 - This is just as true for individual contributors as it is for you as a people leader
- Your career advancement will be hallmarked by how you show up as a team member **through your people (i.e. soft) skills** no matter your role
 - Clearly communicate
 - Clearly set expectations
 - Work to ensure everyone wins
 - Put company and customer first above yourself

Skill \neq Talent or Aptitude

Skill $>$ Talent or Aptitude

- Talent or aptitude are just two sides of the same coin
 - we're all born with certain talents or aptitude that make us, out of the box, better than others who aren't
- Skill is acquired through **practice, patience and perseverance**
- Skill will always win out, with enough time, over talent and aptitude
- Everything, including leading people, is a skill

Sprint Teams > Agency Marines > Navy

- **Autonomy trumps all things**
- **Build your organize of teams into discrete, self-contained units that own, soup-to-nuts, their results (e.g. sprint team)**
- **Avoid creating a large organization that completes tasks pushed in by others departments (e.g. agency model)**

Generalization > Specialization

- **Some amount of specialization is okay, but generally speaking the more fungible your teams the better**
 - Engineering: full-stack, **partially** limit back-end, front-end and SRE/devops
 - Product: product managers, **severely** limit **program managers**
 - Design: UX designers, **severely** limit UI, UXR designers
 - QA: **do not hire** unless automated testing SDETS; zero manual testing should be allowed as a role. QA (*automated* testing) is a function of Engineering.

Hire for Company > Hire for Job

- **Never hire someone that you'd not want at the company for the long-term**
 - Hiring a person as a fit for the job at hand never ends well
- **Company-fit is the same as Culture-fit**
 - Every company is unique, just as is every individual
 - People who are great at one company, will fail at the same job at a different company

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Span & Control Maths



Trust + Verify

- As noted, we **trust people** to do their jobs; **however** ...
- You do not have time to look at all the work under you, especially as you grow as a leader with greater responsibility
- As a leader, in order for you to have greater span and control, you will need to **develop new skills that allow you verify** (i.e. audit) the work the people reporting to you

Delegation = ~ Opportunity

- As noted before, in order for you to scale as a leader you need to learn how to spend your limited time focussing on the right things
- Learning to delegate is an important first skill for every new leader; just because you do the work does not mean you should
- **Grow yourself:** Delegating to others gives you time to do the things only you can do
- **Grow others:** Delegating to others gives your team opportunity to learn new skills; they are your future leaders

Interface > Implementation

- **Interfaces ain't just for writing great APIs:** they are fun for the whole team!
- Every person, team, and department interaction can be **thought of as a set of interfaces or contracts**
- Well thought-out interfaces are the hallmark of the best inter-team and inter-department “working together”
 - What information does each side need to work collaboratively together
 - Do not worry how the other side will do their work (i.e. implementation); just focus on what you need from them to do yours (i.e. interface)

Quality (Depth) > Quantity (Breadth)

- It's better to **do a few things right** than do a lot of things sorta right
- **Prioritize ruthlessly and prune** your and your team's work to do only as much as you can do right
- Similarly, go deep when building experiences
 - Get one feature or user experience right end-to-end
 - Avoid trying to it all once broadly

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Common Failure Modes Maths



Unmet Needs ➤ Frustration + Anger

- Almost all frustration and anger, both personally and professionally, **stems from unmet needs**
 - Whenever you find yourself upset at work or with a team member, do not take it out on them; instead ...
- Ask yourself this: **“What are my unmet needs?”**
 - You’ll discover you have an implicit expectation that you didn’t make explicit or otherwise ensure was clear to them
 - Learn to communicate your expectations early and often
 - Neglecting to do so is to set them up for failure; this is the greatest failure of a leader

Explain != Excuse

- **Explaining why something happened does not excuse bad behavior or bad decisions**
 - This is especially important to remember **in yourself**
- **Example: You had a bad day so you yelled at a team member**
 - Explaining why you had a bad day helps them empathize with you as a human being
 - It does not excuse your behavior. Ever. Apologize

Hindsight != Foresight

- **All things, in hindsight, are 20/20**
 - Do not fall for this psychological bias when understanding what went wrong
 - Many (most?) mistakes, when looked at with hindsight, will seemingly blazingly obvious
 - The worst leaders constantly get upset for what was, at the time of the decision, was the right, best decision given the information at hand
 - The best leaders constantly turn hindsight into future foresight

Important != Urgent

- Something that is important may not necessarily be urgent
- Be sure to clarify, when making a request, if the ask is important or urgent
 - This can help your team better prioritize their time
 - If you do not, you can end up randomizing your team everytime you ask a question

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Technology & Process Maths



SOA > Monolith

Monolith \Rightarrow SOA

- Systems of systems thinking is critical for scaling overtime, both for computational performance but also team performance
- Starting with monolith can reduce complexity and help focus on the bigger unknowns that are largely conceptual

Logical > Physical
Logical \Rightarrow Physical

**Automation > Self-Service > Manual
Config As Code \approx Self-Service v1**

SDLC \approx CI/CD

DevOps + MLOps Engineering Ops + Data Science Ops

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Reads



Good Reads

Practical Advice for Every Leader

- [The Leadership Pipeline](#) :: great reference for every level of leadership. Read up to where you are in your career. Revisit when you are ready to pursue the next level.
- [Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High](#) :: tons of practical feedback on how to have hard conversations with co-workers
- [Radical Candor: Fully Revised & Updated Edition: Be a Kick-Ass Boss Without Losing Your Humanity](#) :: this can be hit and miss, and at times contradictory, but the underlying premise is solid: the unvarnished truth is always better than a sweet untruth

More Good Reads That'll Ground You as a Servant Leader

- [Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet The Japanese Challenge](#) :: I read as an early teen while my father pursued his MBA; I did not comprehend all of it at the time, but it left a lasting impression that had a huge impact on my formative thinking.
- [25 “Best Of” Books on Leadership](#) :: I've read or am familiar everyone of the books on this list. The top 5 I'd recommend first are: 1) The Lean Startup; 2) Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win; 3) Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Intelligence; 4) Thinking, Fast and Slow; and, 5) The Art of War

Even More Good Reads But Further Afield

- [Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life](#) :: A personally transformative book that can change not only how you work with others, but how you fundamentally live and interact with everyone, including yourself.
- [The Little Engine That Could](#) :: There is nothing more powerful than the belief you hold in yourself, and by extension as a leader, in your team. I read this obsessively as a child. I may have eaten a copy to fully internalize it when I was 4.
- [The Ender Quartet \(Ender's Game, Speaker of the Dead, ...\)](#) :: Separating for a moment the [politics of the author](#) which I abhor, it provides a narrative of a) how every problem is solvable with the right change in perspective; b) first impressions are often wrong; and, c) we always can choose a different path than the one we started on.
Good words to live and lead by.