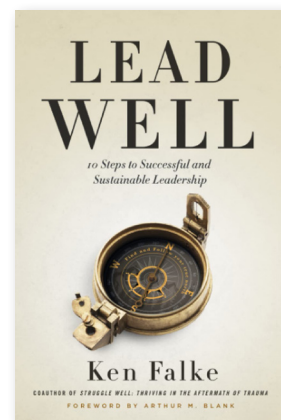


# Lead Well

10 Steps to Successful and Sustainable Leadership

by **Ken Falke**



## Contents

Introduction

Page 2

Lead Yourself First

Page 2

Listen Well

Page 2

Lead with Kindness

Page 3

Hold Yourself and Others Accountable

Page 3

Lead with Courage

Page 4

Conclusion

Page 4

## THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Whether you've led for years or are new to the role, being a leader is a responsibility that doesn't come with instructions. Many leadership books focus strictly on tips for the business world. Others offer analysis but lack strategy, while most are confounding and complicated. To be a leader in today's world, whether in your personal or professional life, you need a simple philosophy—one with proven results.

In *Lead Well*, leadership consultant and serial entrepreneur Ken Falke introduces you to the ten principles you need to become an impactful leader. With tactics that are easy to understand and even easier to implement, this book is packed with Ken's insight from more than four decades in business, nonprofit, and military leadership. You'll learn how to be the best version of yourself before inspiring others to contribute ideas and accomplish goals. Good leaders know that character and morals matter as much as profit and loss. *Lead Well* is your practical guide for understanding the leader within and becoming the person you need and want to be.

## IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to master yourself before leading others.
- How to communicate your vision, and achieve goals that align with that vision.
- How to listen well, lead with kindness, and create a culture where people want to spend time.
- How to lead with courage and give back often, and why it matters.

## Introduction

Despite the fact that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of books on the subject of leadership, the truth is that good leaders remain far too rare. I have had the opportunity to work for a few great leaders and, unfortunately, many more toxic ones. A key reason why leadership proves so challenging for so many is that we overcomplicate things. Over the decades, I have developed a leadership philosophy that is simple, effective, and easy to understand and implement. Given how badly our country and world need good leaders, I feel it's time to share my philosophy in the hope that it will help you lead well, effectively supporting and guiding those you influence.

In the book *The Cathedral Within*, Bill Shore said the definition of leadership is simple: helping others get to a place they can't get to on their own. Leadership is a verb, not a noun, and requires action—lots of action. Leadership starts at home, with learning how to lead yourself first, and then applying a strategy this book presents to lead others. Great leadership is authentic, deeply personal, and sustainable.

The key to leading well comes down to ten timeless principles—The Lead Well 10.

## Lead Yourself First

The daily news is filled with stories of leaders who inflict their lack of wellness on others through inappropriate behavior. The consequences of their behavior can and do cripple the people and organizations they're leading. Unfortunately, I can tell you dozens of stories of unwell leaders I've encountered that prove the point. That's why I begin the Lead Well 10 with this: To lead others well, you have to be well.

I believe that the first key to successful leadership is self-awareness, which leads to self mastery. You must lead by example, not by living the life of “do as I say, not as I do.” Unwell leaders let their egos get the best of them and adopt an egocentric, smarter- and holier-than-thou attitude that ultimately leads to a failure to treat others fairly.

No one is perfect; I understand that. But by leading yourself first and ensuring that you are the best role model possible—then owning your mistakes and failures—those you lead will be inspired to follow your example.

## Create and Clearly Communicate Your Vision

People want and need to feel fulfilled in their work. People take satisfaction in knowing that they're working toward a shared purpose. If they're simply showing up to collect a paycheck, your organization can't succeed. It's the leader's responsibility to prevent that—and that begins with defining and conveying your vision.

And that's the second principle to leadership. Speak it, write it, draw it. Keep it simple and make sure it's understood. Repeat it frequently.

Everyone on your team must know where they are going and why. And I'm not suggesting that your vision is something on a tablet you hand down from on high. A good leader is curious, a teacher and a student, a constant learner—and that begins with how they go about developing a vision for their organization.

## Set and Achieve Goals that Align with Your Vision

If you want to lose fifty pounds, don't try to lose fifty pounds. That's your destination, your vision for wellness. Try to lose two pounds a week instead—that's your initial goal. Once you achieve it, then set a new goal: lose two more pounds the next week too.

If you don't set personal goals, you'll end up living the life of the proverbial dog wagged by its tail. The same is true of your organization. If you regularly set goals, you will also join some rarified air; only 3 percent of people in the world regularly set goals, and they are light-years more successful than their counterparts in the 97 percent. So that's Lead Well #3: Set and achieve goals that align with your vision.

As a leader, the vision you develop with your team defines where you're going as an organization. The goals you develop next define how you're going to get there and should be focused on results. They clarify the steps you need to take to establish the momentum that can carry you to your objectives as an organization.

## Listen Well

Leaders who are unwell and lack self-awareness are prone to a dangerous assumption. They think they're the smartest person in the room. That could be true—but if it was

always so in the past, it certainly is not anymore. Technology has leveled the playing field when it comes to knowledge. There is much more knowledge in your cellphone than anyone can hold in their brain. Today the most junior person in the room has access to information that enables them to get answers to questions instantly.

Leaders who lack self-awareness are also prone to the belief that they can solve all problems. No one can. I'm sixty years old now, with a pretty vast background in leading others, and there are lots of things I'm not an expert in. I love cars, and always have. That doesn't mean I'm a mechanic. I can recommend a great mechanic, but I'm not the guy to fix your car. Effective leaders don't begin with answers. They begin with listening and they do it well.

---

## Lead with Kindness

If you feel that every time you bring a problem or concern to an authority figure—your parents, your boss—the answer is going to be no, then you tend not to bring things forward. When we don't have the opportunity to engage with our leaders and seek support and guidance, small problems and concerns fester and become big problems. Chaos and frustration ensue.

But when you work for people who are open to these discussions and are good listeners, the opposite is true. You want to bring your questions and concerns to them, before issues get out of hand, so your organization thrives, and your people do too. When people see that their leader brings passion to the cause and shows kindness toward others, it sets a positive, infectious tone.

I mean “infectious” in a very positive and concrete way. For most humans, we become the product of our training in life, beginning in early childhood at the hands of parents, teachers, relatives, and friends. The learning never stops. If you're spending time with people who are kind, that tends to rub off. Kindness ripples from person to person in any environment, including the workplace. The same is true of spending time with toxic people.

---

## Hire Quality People

At Harvard Business School, where I studied executive leadership, we learned a simple concept: hire for attitude, train for skills. When recruiting, elite military units turn the same concept into three questions.

- Can they do the job?
- Will they do the job?
- Are they a good fit?

The first of these questions relates to things like technical expertise and physical abilities. Obviously, you need fine motor skills to be in the bomb disposal business. If your hands shake, no amount of motivation can qualify you for this work.

But the second question is all about motivation. Does this person have the motivation required to understand, learn, and do the job? Will they come to work every day with the fortitude required to complete the tasks they're given? It's all about will, and not everyone has it.

The third question is about culture, which in organizational terms, I define culture as how we get things done. Leaders establish culture, and to succeed on a team, its members need to be cultural fits.

---

## Create a Culture of Loyalty and Satisfaction

Building a culture of loyalty and satisfaction is an incredibly fragile process—but one that's absolutely essential as a leader, even in the strongest organization, to cultivate continuously. The work never ends. The more you know the people who work for you, the more you know how to work with them. It goes back to this book's definition of leadership: helping people get to a place they can't get to on their own.

Your leadership activity should be focused on developing and guiding your employees to the place where they're great employees. Great employees make a great company, not the other way around. Success begins with fostering a culture defined by great employees.

---

## Hold Yourself and Others Accountable

In 1989, I was severely injured in a parachute jump in Puerto Rico. We were not supposed to jump in winds higher than eight knots unless it was a combat situation. They put us out that day in gusts over thirty-five knots. I hit the ground hard—feet, ass, and head instead of feet-side-shoulder—and broke my back, dislocated my shoulder, and got a severe concussion. The following week a good friend of mine died in another parachute jump. He had been among the guys out drinking heavily the night before. His main chute failed, and

by the time he realized he needed to pull his reserve chute, he was on top of the trees. It was too late.

The nature of the two incidents is different. But together they illustrate the importance of Lead Well #8: Hold yourself and others accountable. As leaders, when we fail to learn from our mistakes, to hold ourselves and others accountable for actions and their results, the consequences spread like a virus. Poor performance and even destructive behavior become the norm. Doing the wrong thing is okay. The results can cripple your organization

## Lead with Courage

The definition of courage is not the absence of fear. In fact, the definition of courage is the opposite: the ability to do something that frightens you. To lead with courage, you have to have the confidence to stare your fears in the face—from something as simple as speaking in public to crawling on your hands and knees to clear a minefield. Courage is the characteristic that separates good leaders from great leaders. Courage is also one of the hardest skills to teach in a book because courage requires experience and failures!

As a bomb disposal person, you're so highly trained that it tends to minimize the fear. The fear rises when you're faced with something you weren't trained to do—but it's still the training and experience that enables you to face it. Clearing a minefield in daylight with the proper equipment where the location of the mines is clearly identifiable is much different than lying on your belly in darkness, wearing night vision goggles, with no clue how the minefield might have been laid and working as quickly as you can because there are people behind you who need to get somewhere fast. You couldn't do either of these tasks without the training.



**Ken Falke** spent twenty-one years in the US Navy as a bomb disposal specialist, leading troops on thousands of high-risk missions. After retiring from the Navy in 2002, Ken started his first company, A-T Solutions, a counter-terrorism company, and in 2008 sold the business. In 2011, Ken started his second company, Shoulder 2 Shoulder, and sold his stock to his business partner in 2017. In addition to Ken's two for-profit companies, he founded two nonprofit organizations, beginning with the EOD Warrior Foundation to support the families of severely wounded military bomb disposal personnel.

*Lead Well: 10 Steps to Successful and Sustainable Leadership* by Ken Falke. © 2021 by Ken Falke. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Lioncrest Publishing. 132 pages, ISBN 9978-1544524160. Summary copyright © 2022 by Soundview Book Summaries ®

## Give Back

The Navy reinforces the idea of giving back with its own giving campaigns and the message its best leaders sent: find a passion and a cause greater than yourself and embrace it. When I was stationed in Maryland, we prepared Thanksgiving dinners for civilian families living just outside the base; while stationed in Scotland, I played for a hockey team that raised money for a local hospice.

I tell these stories to illustrate Lead Well #10: Give back. When you engage in these activities, performing acts of kindness, you gain perspective on what really matters in life—and at least in a small way, make the world a better place, too. I believe it's a central element of leading from spiritual wellness.

## Conclusion

One Navy Chief had a saying, “When you leave the Navy, it's like putting your hand in a bucket of water and pulling it out. After the water settles, nobody knows that you were ever there.” But this is a cynical attitude toward leadership.

Great leaders aren't cynical and don't think of themselves as a hand in a bucket of water. They know they can have a lasting impact, for better or for worse. They know we all have the opportunity to contribute and grow. Today, the world needs great leadership as much as ever, if not more. May you be the leader, and may you lead well.