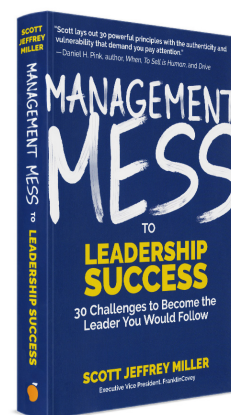


Management Mess to Leadership Success

30 Challenges to Become the Leader You Would Follow

by **Scott Jeffrey Miller**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Millions have read the all-time global best-seller *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey. Both leaders and individuals have been inspired and transformed by its universal principles of effectiveness, including Scott Jeffrey Miller, the new voice of FranklinCovey leadership.

In *Management Mess to Leadership Success*, Miller offers 30 leadership challenges you can apply now. When applied, these challenges can change the way you manage yourself, lead others, and produce results. The challenges will teach you to lead difficult conversations and celebrate success; inspire trust, actively listen, and challenge paradigms; put the right people in the right roles; create a clear and actionable vision for your team; and much more.

The wisdom in this book was learned through hard knocks and was honed by the FranklinCovey team through years of research and corporate training experience. With *Management Mess to Leadership Success*, your leadership skills are about to change. Get ready to become the leader you would follow.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The 30 challenges and how to apply them to your leadership.
- Why humility, trust, and listening are key parts of leading yourself.
- To build relationships, loyalty, straight talk, and coach continuously.
- To get results by identifying Wildly Important Goals® and aligning actions to meet them.

Introduction

Leadership isn't always rewarding. It is exhausting, repetitive, and requires a constant stretch of your emotional and intellectual skills. It demands an "always on" mentality, as you're expected to have all the right answers and make all the right decisions, often on the fly.

Yet, often the things we struggle with yield the biggest return. It's okay if you admit that leadership can be hard and unenjoyable. But the benefits of being successful at it can be life-changing.

Maybe you're ambitious and bright, but leadership hasn't exactly felt like a calling from on high. Perhaps you're the first person in your family to attend college, let alone a board meeting. Or maybe you skipped college altogether. Maybe you're a woman rising to the top of a male-dominated industry or a veteran starting to make their way through the business world and drawing from a very different set of leadership styles and experiences.

If so, consider the following 30 challenges, honed by FranklinCovey through years of research and development, tens of thousands of client implementations, and countless coaching engagements. The challenges will make you a better leader, and are organized into three parts: "Lead Yourself" (Challenges 1–8), "Lead Others" (Challenges 9–21), and "Get Results" (Challenges 22–30).

Part I: Lead Yourself

Challenge 1: Demonstrate Humility

In FranklinCovey's best-selling book *Get Better: 15 Proven Practices to Building Effective Relationships at Work*, Todd Davis writes, "Those who are humble have a secure sense of self—their validation doesn't come from something external but is based on their true nature. To be humble means to shed one's ego, because the authentic self is much greater than looking good, needing to have all the answers, or being recognized by one's peers. As a result, those who have cultivated humility as an attribute have far greater energy to devote to others. They go from being consumed with themselves (an inner focus) to looking for ways to contribute and help others (an outer focus). Humility is the key to building solid character and strong, meaningful connections."

Pick an initiative you're leading or participating in. Identify someone whose perspective on the initiative is different from yours. Schedule time to listen to their perspective. When

they differ substantially, exercise the patience and respect to not just understand but to genuinely consider their point of view. What did you learn that might measurably improve the initiative? The relationship? Your own leadership style?

Challenge 2: Think Abundantly

You've probably had occasion to dine at a buffet. There are two schools of thought when approaching the line: First, there's only a finite amount of food, so grab everything you want before someone else does. On the other hand, you might believe that there's plenty of food to go around, more than anyone could possibly finish, so you can let the elderly man with the oxygen tank go ahead. This is the difference between a Scarcity Mentality (get yours before it's gone) and an Abundance Mentality (there's plenty to go around for everyone). Remember that you'll never have enough until you define how much is enough.

Address areas of your life where scarcity thinking could be limiting you and your ability to lift others up. Envision the impact of having an Abundance Mentality throughout your life.

Challenge 3: Listen First

Listening is one of the most undervalued communication skills, and it's rarely taught to leaders. Instead, we're instructed to clarify our messages, communicate with confidence and persuasion, and master the words we use. To really listen requires discipline, self-control, and a genuine desire to understand the other person's point of view. Listening requires you to care, perhaps even more than you may want.

When someone else is talking, purposely close your mouth and focus on the physical sensation of your lips being pressed together (your own lips, not yours to theirs). And when the other person has paused, count to 7 before responding. Doing so will increase the likelihood that they'll continue, often sharing crucial details about their point of view or situation.

Challenge 4: Declare Your Intent

Absent real facts, people make stuff up. Declaring our intent in conversations, especially in adversarial or high-stakes conversations, is crucial to creating mutual understanding, if not mutual agreement. We spend much of our attention and energy discerning people's intent and working through how we'll respond. But declaring one's intent cuts through much of the noise and mental static that impedes true listening.

Take stock of how often you begin conversations by declaring your intent—are you clear about your goals, or are you leaving people to guess? Early on, ask others to con-

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firm they are clear on your intent. Consider how you make it safe (or unsafe) for others to declare their intent. What should you stop doing, do more of, or do differently?

Challenge 5: Make and Keep Commitments

It's rare to see companies or individuals say no to business if it comes at the expense of delivering their best to previous commitments. How many of us have done the opposite and said yes, compromising not only our current commitments but also the ones we just took on? To quote Roger Merrill, Dr. Covey's co-author on the book *First Things First*, "When you make a commitment, you build hope; when you keep it, you build trust."

Inventory your current commitments. Realistically determine whether you need to unwind some of them. Your greatest gift may be to back out before you fail them and further violate expectations.

Challenge 6: Carry Your Own Weather

When we're triggered emotionally, it's easy to forget we have a choice as to how we will respond. Central to Habit 1: Be Proactive®, from *The 7 Habits*, is the concept that between what happens to us and how we react exists a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response.

This is where the choice of carrying your own weather manifests itself. To carry your own weather, define your personal and professional values (from which your behaviors will be exhibited in both good and rough weather). When faced with a situation that threatens to hijack your emotions, stop. Take a breath and think carefully about the response you won't have to apologize for and that leaves people whole. Consciously calibrate your response to avoid a regretful revisit later. Recognize that most flash responses won't represent how you feel an hour (let alone a day) later.

Challenge 7: Inspire Trust

Trust is one of the most written-about and talked-about topics in the business world today. Ask yourself, "Am I more inclined to trust or distrust others?" Is your natural tendency to be suspicious of others, or are you able to

extend trust even to those who have not yet fully "earned it"? As Abraham Lincoln famously said, "If you trust, you will be disappointed occasionally, but if you mistrust, you will be miserable all the time."

List all the people in your life who extended trust to you. To the side of their name, jot down a note that reminds you what their trust meant to you. Then, list the names of people on your team, in your division, organization, family, community, etc. Beside their name, write out what extending trust to them might look like—something you've not yet done. Jot down some actions, ideas, or projects that, with trust from you, they could potentially excel at. Be specific. Now, extend trust to them.

Challenge 8: Model Work/Life Balance

Without the energizing and renewing activities that take place outside the office, you can't be "whole" or fulfilled. And if you're not fulfilled in multiple areas of your life, you likely won't be as productive at work. When leaders themselves don't have a life, they not only look pitiful in the eyes of their teams, they also set a very low standard for how others behave, consciously or unconsciously. If you truly want your people to live balanced lives that allow them a sense of renewal, purpose, and increased productivity in the workplace, you have to model it yourself.

Recognize that the most influential people live balanced lives. Make a list of easy-to-implement things you could do to bring better balance. Discuss openly with your team the real pressures everyone faces to grow their careers and enjoy their lives. Make it safe for everyone to take the time they need to do both. Take time off to renew, and encourage team members to do the same.

Part II: Lead Others

Challenge 9: Place the Right People in the Right Roles

Business author and leadership expert Jim Collins famously wrote in *Good to Great*, "Get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in

the right seats.” The challenge for leaders is that there’s no shortcut to guarantee you’ve got the right people in the right roles. This isn’t a skill you’re born with—there’s no workshop or list of absolute best practices to follow. It’s an art, not a science—you earn it by learning and living it.

Identify someone’s true passions and strengths so you can align those to your business needs. Seek others’ ideas about your observations and opinions. Have courageous conversations to address situations around personality, emotional maturity, self-awareness, etc. Exercise the courage to remedy any misalignments.

Challenge 10: Make Time for Relationships

As Dr. Covey liked to say, “With people, slow is fast and fast is slow.” Real relationships require us to slow down, even when everything around us is demanding we go faster. Our effectiveness as leaders requires us to take the time to get it right.

Ask yourself, is your default setting “fast”? If yes, is that shortchanging you and others? Is your efficiency mindset undercutting a more beneficial effectiveness mindset? Understand that there’s no such thing as developing a relationship “efficiently.” Trust, respect, and rapport take time and investment. Intentionally slow down and connect with others in ways they prefer. Commit to ask a team member or colleague how he or she is doing, and really listen to their response. When appropriate, sincerely explore their answer.

Challenge 11: Check Your Paradigms

Dr. Covey popularized the term “paradigm,” which comes from the Greek root “paradigma,” meaning a pattern, model, or representation of something. Our paradigms are the perceptions, frames of reference, worldviews, value systems, or lenses through which we see everyone and everything, including ourselves. They add meaning, true or false, to the world around us and affect the way we interpret what we see and experience, and how we interact and relate with others. Our paradigms are perhaps the most powerful tools we have in how we interact with others. It’s worth serious introspection to check why we view others the way we do and to correct any misperceptions or outdated beliefs.

Make a list of all the people who report to you. One by one, reflect on your current paradigm of them as a professional or their promotability. Are you willing to challenge its accuracy? Could it be incomplete?

Challenge 12: Lead Difficult Conversations

Having to fire someone is a difficult conversation. Giving

tough feedback is a difficult conversation. Yet, if you really want to be a leader (and it’s okay if you decide you don’t), leading difficult conversations is not something you can neglect, even if you’re convinced you can work around them or they’re not that important, given your long to-do list.

The skill of leading difficult conversations comes with practice. And lots of awkward attempts and outright failures. You have to practice, role-play, and rehearse these conversations repeatedly. You’ll get better over time, and it won’t be so awful. But here’s the part you probably didn’t expect: there’s a strong possibility you’ll provide someone the kind of insight nobody has ever offered them before.

Identify a difficult conversation you need to hold. If you’ve been delaying it, have an honest conversation with yourself about why. Pinpoint the root cause and address that first. Identify a more seasoned leader with whom you can role-play the conversation. Take a moment and challenge your paradigm—are you viewing the issue holistically? Have you gathered all the relevant facts? Have you considered the other person’s point of view, and are you open-minded about the path forward?

Challenge 13: Talk Straight

In his book *The Speed of Trust*, Stephen M.R. Covey characterized talking straight as “honesty in action,” expressed as telling the truth and leaving the right impression. He wrote that effective leaders use straight talk that is “tempered by skill, tact, and good judgment.” Leaders who talk straight call things by their right names, using common, plain language; don’t spin or position for the sake of posturing; tell the truth in diplomatic yet clear language; and don’t try to sound more intelligent than they are.

Think about where or with whom you tend to “spin” or even withhold the truth. Identify possible reasons you are avoiding straight talk. Next time you notice yourself “spinning,” pause; then find a more accurate and tempered way to tell the whole truth.

Challenge 14: Balance Courage and Consideration

The best leaders assess their balance of courage and consideration intentionally and repeatedly. How do leaders find this balance while accommodating the diverse needs, preferences, and traits of our team members? By demonstrating courage in sharing opinions, tactfully calling out mistakes (including our own), and diplomatically challenging one’s direction while simultaneously accounting for people’s feelings, insecurities, and cultural norms.

Find a colleague whom you trust. Ask for specific examples of when they've seen you out of balance. Ask, "When do you feel I'm being overly nice or too considerate? When have you seen me be too tough, abrasive, or "in your face" with others?" Be mindful of triggers that may push you to overdo consideration or courage. These could be specific people, situations, or topics. Have the courage to ask *and* act.

Challenge 15: Show Loyalty

Dr. Covey said, "When you defend those who are absent, you retain the trust of those present." Showing loyalty to others is a simple but profound leadership competency. Stephen M.R. Covey deemed this principle so vital that he included it as one of his 13 Behaviors® of High-Trust Leaders.

Live by the Platinum Rule. Beyond treating people how you'd like to be treated (the Golden Rule), treat them how they'd like to be treated (the Platinum Rule). When someone is absent, speak about them as if they were actually standing there right beside you. Assume your email will be forwarded to the person you're writing about. When composing an email about another person, write as if you know the person will eventually read it. Finally, assume good intent, and presume every private conversation is confidential unless/until you can verify that it's not.

Challenge 16: Make It Safe to Tell the Truth

This is about you, the leader, owning the responsibility to make it safe for others to be truthful. As a leader, you should want to hear the truth for many reasons: to really know how others perceive you, to understand what it's like to be in a relationship (personal or professional) with you, to know your blind spots so you can address them, to assess whether your communication skills lift or diminish others, and so forth.

Here's how to help make it safe for others to be truthful in your presence: Show sincerity in wanting to know their truth. Build their confidence that there is zero downside to speaking up. Convey that you respect their point of view and will be vulnerable. Prove through continued experience that you won't dispute or challenge their position, defend your behavior, or dismiss their feedback out of hand. Perhaps most important, show through your new behavior that you value their risk-taking enough to improve.

Challenge 17: Right Wrongs

The best leaders know how to right wrongs. Righting wrongs starts from a place of humility and is communicated through personal responsibility. When righting wrongs, it's

remarkably disarming to take full responsibility. Nothing neutralizes anger more than a sincere, excuse-free apology and an action to correct the situation.

Consider some version of the following when you find yourself having wronged someone: "I want to tell you something very important. I'm truly sorry for the way I behaved. I was wrong. I own it. I'm sorry. I hope you can forgive me, and I intend to make a sincere effort to ensure I don't ever do that to you again or to anyone else. I have learned a hard and valuable lesson, sadly at your expense, and I want you to know how seriously I am taking it. Furthermore, I intend to take [fill in the blank] action to make it right between us. Is that something you would value, or do you have a better suggestion I should consider?"

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anger more than a sincere,
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Challenge 18: Coach Continuously

Fortunately, increasingly rare are the days of the annual, mandated performance appraisal, where you're force-ranked against your colleagues to watch the lowest fed to the lions and the precious bonus pool allocated to the lucky few at the top. The antidote to this is coaching.

Coaching continuously requires a lot of engagement. Consider these behaviors: Be aware of what's happening with the team you lead. Who's struggling and why? Are they properly trained? Aligned? Delivering solid results but perhaps working on the wrong initiatives? Have you clarified what success looks like? Are deliverables clear and goals translated into actions and daily behaviors? These previous points are mainly your responsibility. Recognize the different ways team members want and need coaching. Balance your critical feedback with specific reinforcing praise. Ask how you can help. Ensure that everyone has the resources and tools to complete their work and help others. Add "coaching" to your daily task list.

Challenge 19: Protect Your Team Against Urgencies

It's vital to reduce the tension between the important and the urgent. Finding harmony between the two is often a delicate balancing act. As leaders, we can help protect our teams against urgencies by identifying and rewarding the specific behaviors that lead to achieving our goals. But first, we need to ensure we haven't modeled or reinforced a culture that rewards firefighting more than fire prevention. It's your responsibility to focus your team members on the "wildly important" (important and proactive efforts) and not the wildfires—even the ones you set!

Recognize that you may well be the source of many team urgencies. How do they show up? How will you plan better or say "no" to more? Ask yourself if your need for validation or excitement is undermining the focus of your team. Assign reasonable due dates to future initiatives. Reward proactive and preventative efforts, not just heroic firefighting.

Challenge 20: Hold Regular 1-On-1s

In the long run, nothing is more important than the people you lead (and knowing how to lead them), and you know it. But how you show that importance can be radically different from how they perceive it. As a leader, you know how many "invisible" hours you've dedicated to the success of your team. But what they need from you is time. They need 1-on-1s, to be specific, so they can bring up issues hindering their progress, get feedback and coaching, create a development plan, and problem-solve with you.

If you struggle with holding 1-on-1s, commit to starting slow. Declare your intent with your team. Before the 1-on-1, keep in mind that your team member will "own" the agenda. During the 1-on-1, commit to do no more than 30 percent of the talking. Find out what you can do to support your team member. Remember, coach, don't tell. Seek and give feedback as appropriate. Devote time to development planning and career-path discussions.

Challenge 21: Allow Others to Be Smart

In Liz Wiseman's profound leadership book *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*, she invites leaders to assess several key questions: Are you the genius or the genius maker? Are you a Multiplier (someone who uses their intelligence to bring out the best in others) or a Diminisher (the "smartest person in the room" who shuts everyone else down)?

Here are three skills you can use to empower and engage others to showcase their creativity, experience, and perspectives: Consider the percentage of time you spend talking versus listening. Listening is not just hearing but understanding and caring about what is said. Decide when to be the expert with the "right" answer and when to allow your team to work through the process of coming up with it themselves. Finally, step back from being the driver of the discussion. Ask someone on your team to take the lead.

Part III: Get Results

Challenge 22: Create Vision

Leaders *create* vision until it's shared by their teams and colleagues. They depict a vision so clear and aligned to the organizational mission and goals that anyone could communicate it in 30 seconds or less. Whether you use PowerPoint, pictures, models, or storyboards, creating vision requires others to see it. And because you can't climb into someone's head and know if they see (and understand) your vision, you must ensure that people can articulate it.

Draft a team vision by answering these questions: What contributions can our team make to the organization's mission and vision? If our team could make one extraordinary contribution over the next one to five years, what would it be? Take a moment to remember an inspiring vision that resonated with you. What about it made it personally motivating and powerful? Create a vision for your team by articulating not only the "why" and the "what" but the "how." The "how" may well be the key that brings it to success.

Challenge 23: Identify the Wildly Important Goals (WIGs)

The temptation to say yes to more of the great (even good) ideas that come our way might be the biggest trap leaders fall into. But more is not better; better is better. Wildly Important Goals are the few, highly important goals that must be achieved, or no other goal matters. How do you identify the WIGs for your team? As more fully outlined in *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, the best-selling book by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling, ask, "If every other area of our operation remained at its current level of performance, what is the one area where change would have the greatest impact?"

Determine a starting line, finish line, and deadline for each WIG. Align the WIGs with your organization's vision, mission, and strategy.

People like to win but not “fake” win. Your team wants to work for it. But they don’t want the finish line moved and they don’t want to kill themselves in the process.

Challenge 24: Align Actions With the Wildly Important Goals

This challenge focuses on actually getting the WIGs accomplished. For leaders, aligning to WIGs means everyone involved needs to change behaviors. Meaningful change comes from the inside out. It has to start with you as the leader, committing to and then enacting new behaviors. To further ensure your team has aligned the right actions to the WIGs, meet and brainstorm the specific behaviors you need from each other.

Focus your finest efforts on the one or two goals that will make the greatest impact. Choose the battles that win the war. Focus your attention on the critical items that will get you the victory. Veto but don’t dictate. Allow your leaders and team members to define the actions that will support your WIGs. Your role is to bring clarity; the leaders below you will bring engagement (if you allow them to). Have a finish line in the form of “From X to Y by When.”

Challenge 25: Ensure Your Systems Support Your Mission

In organizations, we settle into acceptable patterns, especially around areas of the business that seem fine. “Good enough” becomes “better left alone.” We often step back and allow systems to just do their thing, even when they’re not perfectly aligned to our mission and goals. Organizational systems are everyone’s responsibility. Not just to complain about but to understand, support, and help improve.

Think about this in terms of your own team—do your systems support your mission? Have you engaged the patience and due diligence to understand how your systems align or misalign to your strategies, your WIGs, and your client needs? How about your employees’ needs? Consider the following systems-alignment questions: Are the right people with the right skills doing the right work? Are the right roles and responsibilities in place for people to work well together? Are people recognized and rewarded in the right way? Are the right resources available to succeed? Are the right decisions being made by the people closest to the work? Do we have the right processes in place to get the most important work done?

Challenge 26: Deliver Results

It’s not enough to get results; leaders must get the *right* results in the *right* way. “Right results” means what you’re accomplishing is the right priority for the organization. It requires constantly recalibrating and checking in with your leader to make sure what you’re working on is aligned to what your organization needs. And “right way” means getting the results in a way that won’t burn out, injure, or demotivate your team. Leadership isn’t about just running the current marathon; it’s about that marathon and the next 30 and beyond.

Take the initiative and proactively check in with your leader to ensure you’re properly aligned and focused on the right priorities. Goals shift, and you may not always be aware of that in real time. Don’t hesitate to seek a reality check about your performance. Don’t assume your results speak for themselves; you may need to highlight them or course-correct, based on the feedback you receive. Thoughtfully calibrate the pressure you place on your teams to ensure you are achieving results now in ways that will allow you to achieve them again in the future.

Challenge 27: Celebrate Wins

As a leader, remember that people like to win but not “fake” win. Your team wants to work for it. But they don’t want the finish line moved, and they don’t want to kill themselves in the process. And when it’s over, they want to celebrate the victory. Don’t hold back celebrating wins for just “very special days.” On the flip side, don’t celebrate every accomplishment, because you’ll lose credibility and nothing becomes noteworthy. Find legitimate reasons to celebrate, and be generous with your “stuff.” If you have a discretionary budget, spend it. Most important of all, use the time you have to invest in recognizing your team’s accomplishments.

Plan your team’s next celebration. What contributions should be recognized? Outline what you intend to say about each team member. Be specific.

Challenge 28: Make High-Value Decisions

As a leader, your reputation is, in essence, the sum of your collective decisions. Basically, you’re paid to decide—it’s that

simple. Leaders decide who to hire and fire, what to elevate as a priority and what to push aside, what to celebrate and what to ignore, and what gets funded and what gets starved.

In *The 5 Choices: The Path to Extraordinary Productivity*, the authors write that high-value decisions result from working on the important, not the urgent—going for the extraordinary, not the ordinary; focusing one’s attention on the right things—how leaders prioritize and manage their time; having sustained energy. Leaders who burn out and don’t renew their energy won’t have the capacity to recognize and drive high-value decisions to completion. In addition, making high-value decisions requires first admitting that it’s okay if you don’t have the answer. Help build the kind of trust with your leader that allows you to share what you’re working on and get input on how to organize and prioritize your time.

Challenge 29: Lead Through Change

According to Alan Deutschman in *Change or Die*, 88 percent of us take on a pessimistic outlook with change. The emotional impact organizational change has on your team must not be underestimated. Consider these practices for leading through change: Recognize how the change impacts you. How you relate to and experience it will impact how you communicate it to others. Ask as many questions as possible to ensure you can shape the context for your own team. The more you know and understand, the better you can lead them through the process.

Be intentional about what you disclose to ensure your team can process the change at the speed they need to. People can generally handle tough news. What they won’t tolerate is the wrong news or no news. Decide what your commu-

nication style will be during the change. You may need to balance your own mixed feelings while honoring your professional responsibility.

Challenge 30: Get Better

This challenge isn’t about making incremental improvements in your professional development, relevance, or competencies. Be fearless about your own professional development and learning. Make quantum leaps. *The Speed of Trust* offers these tips for getting better: Commit to continuous improvement. Increase your capabilities. Be a constant learner. Develop feedback systems. Act upon the feedback you receive.

Now go out there, jump into the leadership arena, and put the 30 challenges into practice. Don’t be embarrassed by the bumps and bruises along the way, and engage in that most noble, life-changing, and potentially world-changing endeavor: to be a leader.

IF YOU LIKED THIS SUMMARY, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE:

- *Leading Loyalty: Cracking the Code to Customer Devotion* by Sandy Rogers, Leena Rinne, and Shawn Moon
- *Get Better: 15 Proven Practices to Build Effective Relationships at Work* by Todd Davis



Entering his 23rd year with FranklinCovey, Scott Miller serves as the Executive Vice President of Thought Leadership. Miller leads the strategy, development, and publication of FranklinCovey’s best-selling books and thought leadership, which provide the framework for the company’s world-renowned content and solutions. In his previous roles as Executive Vice President of Business Development and Chief Marketing Officer, Scott led the global transformation of FranklinCovey’s brand.

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