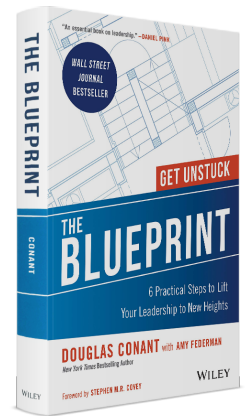


The Blueprint

6 Practical Steps to Lift Your Leadership to New Heights

by **Douglas R. Conant with Amy Federman**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In 1984, Doug Conant was fired without warning and with barely an explanation. He felt hopeless and stuck, but surprisingly, this defeating turn of events turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to him. Embarking on a journey of self-reflection and discovery, he forged a path to revolutionize his leadership and transform his career trajectory. Ultimately, Conant was able to condense his remarkable leadership story into six practical steps.

Part leadership manifesto, part practical manual, *The Blueprint* teaches leaders how to work through the same six steps that Conant used to transform his journey. The steps are manageable and incremental, designed to fit practically within the pace of busy modern life.

The prospect of change can be daunting, so *The Blueprint* arms readers with exercises and practices to realistically bring their foundation to life in every situation. Today's leaders who feel stuck and overwhelmed finally have a blueprint for lifting their leadership to make meaningful change in their organizations and in the world.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The six steps for building your foundation of leadership.
- To plan your unique leadership model.
- To adopt a growth mindset that allows you to constantly improve.
- The 10 key building blocks to leadership that works.

Introduction: The Raw Materials of Change Are Already Within You

You already have the raw materials to change your leadership life. But today's leaders don't have the time to figure it out on their own. The pace of life has accelerated rapidly; technology has ushered in a tacit expectation that we be "on" and reachable 100 percent of the time. The number of texts and emails we receive has tripled in recent years. Expectations are higher. Companies want more, better, faster.

Leaders both seasoned and aspiring don't have to muddle through figuring it out on their own anymore. By following six steps, you can fulfill your potential and deliver ever-improving results in a demanding, confusing, and time-starved world—and actually enjoy yourself along the way.

These steps teach you about yourself and help you build a customized framework for reaching your goals, in a way that works uniquely for you, with your own leadership voice and style. All you have to do is follow the practical steps in earnest. Each step is small and manageable; nothing ever has to be "perfect" or "complete." Because that's not the way life works.

There is one small catch: You must enter into this journey understanding that it is ongoing. While you'll be making measurable progress right out of the gate, noticing changes, and achieving goals, you won't ever truly be "finished." Once you embark on this journey, it never ends.

Part I guides you through the practical six-step process of self-reflection and study, to build the foundation for your leadership success. You'll learn how to use small steps to meet big goals.

In Part II: Manifesto, you'll get anchored in foundational leadership lessons. Your greatest support in the realization of your special leadership dreams will be a deep understanding of what leadership is and the timeless principles that make leadership work, no matter the practitioner.

PART I: BLUEPRINT: GET UNSTUCK

In the world at large, a blueprint is a tool for bringing to life the dreams of an architect. Here, the Blueprint is a tool for bringing to life the dreams of leaders. Rather than building a structure, you are building your future; while the output is not as tangible as concrete, steel, or glass, it can be just as magnificent as the most dazzling skyscraper.

If you ask any good structural engineer, they'll tell you that the trick to building a soaring skyscraper is laying a deep foundation. The taller the structure you want to build, the stronger and deeper the foundation you'll need.

The same thing is true in leadership. The leaders who succeed have a sturdy and secure foundation. That foundation tethers them to their beliefs and values, keeps them connected to their unique personality, characteristics, and temperament, and allows them to put their skill set to work in the most productive way.

That's what your journey through the six-step Blueprint will be focused on: designing the foundation that allows you to build a personal leadership approach that can withstand almost anything.

Step 1: ENVISION: The Power of Intention and Purpose

The first step in the Blueprint is to Envision your leadership future, to reach high and set an anchoring intention for your journey. To lead effectively, you must focus on being just a little more intentional every day.

The first step to *being* intentional in your leadership is *having* an anchoring intention. In the following exercises, you'll do the necessary reflection to uncover a working draft of your purpose.

To begin to arrive at your crisp statement of purpose, you will answer three questions—the first and most important questions of leadership. This is your opportunity to envision what your boldest dreams of success and fulfillment might look like.

Question 1: Why do I choose leadership? How can we begin to Envision what we want our leadership to look like if we don't understand why we are doing it to begin with? Why have you made the choice to lead people? What will be the greater meaning behind that choice that will help you to continue to choose it, enthusiastically, throughout the course of your life?

How do you want to spend your leadership life? What is the work you feel called to do? What is your dream? How do you want to leverage your special gifts and interests to make the world a better place? What does "improving the world" look like to you?

Question 2: What is my promise? This question adds texture to your reason for leading because it helps you con-

What have you learned from big wins or successes in your career? What successes were you able to replicate time and again?

nect with your promise: what you can deliver. What makes you different? How do you stand apart from your contemporaries and colleagues? What qualities are you not willing to compromise on? What parts of your personality do you leverage most in your leadership?

Question 3: What are my values? To gain a better understanding of your purpose—and to begin to work toward fulfilling that purpose with integrity, you'll need to identify a set of values. Your values are related to the principles you hold most dear; they are the qualities, ideals, or precepts you expect from others and strive to embody with your own behavior. In short, they are your standards. It is important to get rooted in your values early in the Blueprint process because they will be reflected throughout every other component of your entire Foundation.

To diagnose your values, you have to think back on your life and career thus far. Can you think of times where you took a principled stance even though it might have been risky, inconvenient, or even damaging to your career?

Can you think of times you feel certain you behaved with integrity even when it was very challenging to do so: examples in which you went against the grain, had an uncomfortably candid conversation, or defended an unpopular decision?

Now take a stab at a rough draft of a purpose statement that hits all three of those cylinders in some fashion. You won't get it right on the first try. But you'll be in a good position to make it better. Use the words "My Purpose Is" to guide your thinking.

Step 2: REFLECT: Dig Deep

Using the thinking you did in Step 1 as a springboard, you will be challenged to travel deeper within yourself to learn what life experiences have influenced your beliefs about leadership. You will begin to understand how you can inspire and motivate people to do better.

Question 1: What motivates people to give their best? To understand how to motivate others, first think

about what has motivated you on your own journey. When were you most driven in your life and/or career? Was it when you were chasing a bonus or raise, when you were seeking the respect of a mentor or superior, or perhaps when you were perplexed by an intricate problem that needed solving?

You will find that what motivates you may not always be what motivates other people. So, now, expand your reflection to the people around you. What motivates the people closest to you in your life—your friends, family, closest colleagues?

Keep a list of things that stand out. Notice how and when there are points of synergy between what you find motivating and the values you brainstormed in Step 1.

Question 2: How do you influence people to deliver consistently high performance in an inconsistent world? This question asks you to think about successful practices and tactics for influencing others. It drills down on specifics and gets more into the nitty-gritty.

What have you learned from big wins or successes in your career? What successes were you able to replicate time and again? Which ones felt more like one-offs? Were you ever part of a team that felt so in sync and so productive that good results came repeatedly and organically? If so, what created the magic?

Thinking of the above prompts, identify four to six specific practices or actions that brought about desired results or superior performance throughout your career.

An important part of graduating from the Reflect step is to compile your leadership vocabulary. Building on the work you did in Step 1 to think about your values, beliefs, and leadership purpose, here you will add shape and structure to the words that are meaningful to you.

What are the words you will use to find strength and to describe what is most important to you? What words hold the key to the person and leader you would like to become?

Now, take a stab at a preliminary list of your leadership beliefs. Use your values and your leadership vocabulary as a reference point. For example, if one of the words in your

leadership vocabulary is “integrity,” a leadership core belief that brings that word to life might be “Always be true to your word,” or it could be as literal and on-the-nose as “I believe a true leader leads with integrity.”

Step 3: STUDY: Lay Your Groundwork

In the Study step, you will be challenged to look beyond your own lived experience to gain deeper insights from the world around you through reading, observing, practicing, and studying.

The first concept in the Study step is the idea of building a network. People tend to think of networking as a way to advance their career and build professional relationships. And it is, but it’s much more than that.

The other concept in the Study step is more in keeping with a traditional definition of studying: the idea of doing your homework. This requires reading about leadership, studying leaders past and present whom you admire, consulting with executive coaches, seeking out mentors, and more.

The Entourage of Excellence™ gives you a framework for evaluating what you admire in other leaders. And it equips you with an on-demand advisory board that can assist you in your thorniest moments. First, choose, two people from your professional life (past or present); two people from your personal life (past or present); two leaders from history who have inspired you. For each person you choose, write down their name, the qualities you admire about them (e.g., teamwork, mental toughness, EQ); and a brief story or anecdote (two or three sentences) about why you are adding them to your entourage.

Anytime you need guidance, you will simply do a quick mental accounting of your entourage, choose the right person for the job, and ask, “What would _____ do?” “What would they recommend?” “How would they challenge you?” When you develop this as a habit, you too can more confidently choose the best path forward, with excellence—at a moment’s notice.

Leadership dos and don’ts. Keeping in mind the qualities that make the members of your entourage so exceptional, and the tactics you came up with when you answered “What makes people give the very best of themselves?” you will list the “greatest hits” from all your reflections thus far: five to 10 of the very best things that good leaders do. These should be tangible and specific practices

that bring key qualities to life, as they will become crucial components in the leadership plan you create in the next step in the Blueprint.

For example, if your reflections have revealed that “Recognition” or “Earning Trust” is a cornerstone of your idea of good leadership, a practice that brings that to life might be “writes handwritten thank-you notes.”

As important as it is to be explicit about what you should do, it’s equally important to be definitive about what you should not do. So start one more list for don’ts. Brainstorm the five to 10 things that good leaders definitely do not do. These should be specific things to avoid like “doesn’t give feedback,” “breaks commitments,” “lies,” “boasts,” or “always casts blame on others.”

Step 4: PLAN: Design Your Leadership Model

Most leaders have a plan for the key business initiatives they want to accomplish: a plan for talent acquisition, a plan for business development, a plan for increasing sales, and so on. Planning is woven into the fabric of the corporate world for a reason. To get things done, you need a path to follow.

This step is about equipping you with a plan for bringing your leadership to life in the real world. First, you’ll create a prototype, and then you’ll refine your work in the next step.

A leadership model is a representation of a system, composed of concepts and practices, which you use to help people—including you—know and understand your approach to leadership. Ultimately, with the creation of your leadership model, you will create a succinct encapsulation of how you intend to lead. Once you have developed your model, as part of your overall Foundation, you have a resource that helps you to be consistent in your behavior.

Everybody’s model is and should be different. That said, there are some broad guidelines about what your model should capture.

Guiding question. How will you advance your leadership purpose and honor your leadership beliefs? Advancing your purpose is about how effective you will be. Honoring your beliefs is about how authentic you will be.

Two basics. Two basic things you should strive to capture in your model are performance and people. You can find your way through just about any workplace culture or

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challenge, even in the most volatile environments, if you both perform and take care of people. The same is true of your leadership model.

Clusters. No matter what shape or framework you land on, your model will also have key practice areas. Now is the time to extract a few words, ideas, or thoughts to use for your clusters. Do this by looking back now on the exercises you have already completed. Reflect on the process briefly and extract at least a few key insights, words, or ideas. What revelations have been especially resonant? Is there an issue or idea that has occurred to you repeatedly?

Grouping. Spread out all of your notes in front of you. Which words or ideas seem to go together? Which components seem to speak to your leadership purpose? Which components seem to speak to your leadership beliefs? Start to organize your notes into clusters. Don't worry about it being "right" or "wrong." You will notice that distinct themes will emerge.

Taking shape. Now comes the fun part. Take a stab at organizing your clusters into a shape or framework that speaks to you. The possibilities for your unique design are endless.

Step 5: PRACTICE: Build Your Leadership Profile

To excel at leading, just like any art form, you must treat it as a craft: honed with intention, practiced mindfully, and improved constantly.

Deliberate practice requires dedication and smart application. To do it, you have to consistently adapt your approach; it requires calculation and careful thought but can also be broken down into small manageable steps. It means working through occasional discomfort and persevering when you're tempted to quit.

In keeping with the small step ethos, you will now do two incremental things: refine the key practice areas of your leadership model and identify just one practice for each area in your model that brings the concept to life.

To start, refer to the work you've already done in the previous steps. First, look at the Entourage of Excellence and "Dos and Don'ts" exercises you completed in the Study step. The dos and don'ts you already identified *are* practices you can use as inspiration now. Looking at those practices, you already have a stable of actions you might consider for your practice treasury.

Key practice areas are the finalized guiding themes of your leadership model; they are what your clusters should evolve into. They define what is most important to your plan for success in your leadership, outline what matters most to you as a leader, and embody your standards for conduct.

Compare your dos and don'ts to the rough draft of your leadership model. What practices fit with which clusters? How can you narrow your clusters down or expand them based on the practices you will use to bring them to life? Based on your looking at it with fresh eyes, what are the key elements you want to include?

Now pick one practice for each key practice area in your model. For each practice you choose, make sure it is specific, repeatable, requires focus, and iterative (subject to feedback).

For example, Nancy Killefer, a retired senior consultant at McKinsey, has had an illustrious career in consulting and government. She's an extrovert who found in the past that she had a tendency to steamroll or take up too much space in conversations. Wanting to practice the skill of better listening, she developed a practice that helps: She sits on her hands. Knowing that she talks with her hands, she practices restricting their movement so that she becomes aware of whenever she has the urge to interject (because the urge naturally begins in her hands). Then, she pauses and instead allows the other party to fill the silence and guide the conversation as needed.

If one of your areas is "Relationships" or "Relationship Building," a practice in service to that might be holding informal meetings outside the office. If one of your areas is "Communication," your practice might be explicitly stating your expectations in a manageable way.

Step 6: IMPROVE: Reinforce Your Foundation

The rapidly changing business environment is competitive and unforgiving. What is tried and true today may be obsolete tomorrow. What is innovative this week may be passé the next. That's why the best leaders, and organizations, understand that they must either grow or die. It's a Darwinian world. The competition is fierce and unrelenting. The pressures are unceasing. How can you keep up? If you are not constantly evolving, you are withering toward obsolescence.

Since the demands of the marketplace require agility, we must engineer ongoing growth into our leadership DNA. That's what this step is designed to help you do. Embracing a continuous improvement mindset helps you adapt, grow, and ensure you are best suited to juggle the changes you will encounter in today's world.

The Growth Mindset

First, you must internalize the growth mindset. This is a phrase coined by researcher and psychologist Carol Dweck. In simple terms, people with a growth mindset believe that intelligence can be developed and improved. It's a fundamental belief in the ability to get better.

To make the lessons in this step real and to internalize the growth mindset, you have to keep this one urgent question at the top of your mind: How can I do better? This is the same question everyone who has ever excelled in their field has used as their North Star, from Beethoven to Botticelli to Beyoncé.

As a first step toward improvement, go back through your first five steps of the Blueprint and see if they hold up to scrutiny at a high level. Are there better ways to answer the first five questions? Have you unearthed all the insights you can? Does your emerging approach make sense? What can you change or rework? What needs tinkering?

Now you will identify specific areas for growth and make a plan for improving in those areas. Pick three areas that play to your strengths, that you will be able to pursue with the joy that comes from doing the things you are good at, rather than the things that leave you feeling frustrated or depleted.

Think—what inspires you? Thinking back on your first step in the Blueprint, what did your boldest dreams of leadership success look like? Holding that vision in your mind, contemplate: What do you have to improve to get there? Maybe it's that you want to apply your skill set in a new way by pursuing board governance, or maybe it's that you want to enhance

your cultural fluency with an international assignment. Perhaps you want to deepen your already rich relationship-building abilities and you want to create an action plan for that.

Write down three areas in which you want to improve and one action you will take over the next 30 days in service to that improvement initiative.

For example, if you want to strengthen team morale, the action might be this: Over the next 30 days, commit to holding at least one to three meetings in a more informal setting, whether an off-site or a walk-and-talk outdoors.

PART II: MANIFESTO: MAXIMIZE YOUR IMPACT

Thus far, *The Blueprint* has helped you discover a way of leading that is uniquely yours, to anchor you in a strong Foundation so you can freely adapt to the challenges you will encounter in a way that is authentic to you. But alone that is insufficient. Your greatest support in the realization of your leadership dreams will be a deep understanding of what leadership is—and the timeless principles that enhance leadership effectiveness—no matter the practitioner.

What Is Leadership?

Leadership is the art and science of influencing others in a specific direction. To influence people effectively and create an evolved leadership approach, you must first learn how to leverage enduring leadership principles: the basic building blocks. Once you're better steeped in the fundamentals, you can more ably deploy innovative, high-impact leadership practices that capture the spirit of your Foundation. The more you ground yourself in these principles now, the more enduring your leadership legacy will be tomorrow.

There are 10 key building blocks to “leadership that works”: high performance, abundance, inspire trust, purpose, courage, integrity, growth or die mindset, humility, how can I help, and have fun. Attending to them in a manageable way offers your best chance at delivering enduring results in the marketplace, creating a legacy of contribution, delivering consistent value for all stakeholders, and, most importantly, charting a course to professional joy and fulfillment.

There is a “higher truth” about leadership that knits together the 10 tenets in this manifesto: Leadership is all about the people. Leaders need followers. Followers are earned; they're not guaranteed on the merit of your title alone.

To earn the confidence of your constituents and spread your influence, all of your actions must be tethered to a

Trust is not a soft, social virtue—it's a hard, economic driver for every organization.

commitment to honoring people. This is the single most important thing for leaders to understand. Let's now discuss three of these tenets.

Inspire Trust

Trust is not a soft, social virtue—it's a hard, economic driver for every organization. Trust comprises two-thirds of the criteria for *Fortune's* esteemed "100 Best Companies to Work For" list because their research shows that "trust between managers and employees is the primary defining characteristic of the very best workplaces." These companies beat "the average annualized returns of the S&P 500 by a factor of three."

Trust starts small and gets big. It's not a nice-to-have; it's a must-have. Without it, every part of your organization can fall, literally, into disrepair. This could mean something more abstract like losing profits or market share in a corporate context, or something as vital and grave as losing more lives in combat zones.

Conversely, with trust, all things are possible—from the most ambitious strategic goals in a corporate context to the most valorous victories won on the world stage in a military milieu. It's clear that as you work to develop your leadership craft, you must inspire trust at every step along the way. You really have no choice. Your entire suite of leadership behaviors depends on it.

Luckily, trust, like most leadership behaviors, is a skill that can be learned and built. To inspire trust, you must

- Honor all stakeholders.
- Declare yourself and do what you say you are going to do.
- Develop and display character and competence—consistently.
- Uphold high ethical standards.
- Model the behavior you expect from others.
- Acknowledge mistakes.
- Consistently meet performance expectations.

A theme that runs throughout the suite of behaviors listed in the bullets above is the importance of demonstrating respect. A recent *Harvard Business Review* article found that employees value the feeling of being respected by their leaders more than anything else, even more than explicit recognition, visionary leadership, or learning and development. These findings link closely with the overarching theme of all effective leadership: honoring people.

Integrity

We all know leaders who have a bias for action, who have little patience for words and only value results. These leaders say indignantly, "It doesn't matter what you say, it's what you do that counts!" It's a popular idea.

The truth is that both what you say and what you do matter; they matter a great deal and in equal measure. To demonstrate integrity you have to say how you will act, then do what you say. You have to say what matters and then do what matters. You must tell people where you're going to take the organization, then actually lead them there.

Yes, your actions are crucial. But without words to measure your actions against, they are less powerful; absent any criteria from you about what you believe and how you will act, it is harder to gauge whether you are behaving with integrity or not.

Declaring Yourself

Declaring yourself gives people a criterion for measuring your trustworthiness, to lay the groundwork for building productive working relationships, and to model the behavior you want to see reflected throughout the organization.

Declaring Yourself works in two important ways. First, it spreads trust from the inside out. As you model the practice of being forthright and transparent, people can approach their work demands with that same transparency. And they can proceed with all the necessary information to work smoothly alongside you. It is a relationship accelerant that dissolves mystery and enhances understanding between co-workers.

Second, it creates accountability for you to adhere to the commitments you make when you declare yourself.

What types of things should you include when you declare yourself? Anything you deem pertinent.

A “Declaring Yourself” document can include what is important to you, what kind of leader you’re trying to be, what you value in an organization, what you seek in direct reports, how you believe your industry operates, your planning philosophy, operating style, and so forth.

Humility

Often when we think of humility, we consider its most surface level meaning: that it refers to how modest a person acts. Sometimes, leaders even misunderstand it to mean holding themselves in low esteem, or assume it requires publicly denigrating oneself so as not to appear cocky or brash.

Humility in a leadership context has two crucial overarching components. The first part of humility involves putting your ego aside to let people know a more personal, less-rehearsed version of who you really are. Instead of only showing people the best version of ourselves all the time, it means coming down to earth to show a few cracks, too.

It requires shedding your armor a bit, and doing the necessary work to delve deeper in your understanding of yourself so you can share your leadership story and gifts more freely with others.

The second part of humility requires that we look beyond our own abilities and perceptions to learn from others; it means fully recognizing we are not the smartest person in

the room and learning to listen—to really listen—to the people around us.

Learning to be alert to the abundant wisdom that exists in the world around us and within the other people in our organization is a skill that will serve us well on our leadership journey. We can do this by mastering the art of listening, reading more, becoming more open-minded, and learning to give credit to others more generously.

These two components boil down to two essential elements: connecting and listening.

Your life story is your leadership story. Only you can write it. Only you can chart your course. The six steps have helped you connect more deeply with your unique talents, insights, experiences, goals, and dreams. There isn’t another soul alive who can replicate your exact Blueprint, who possesses your one-of-a-kind Foundation. Cherish that knowledge. Your contribution is special.

People are waiting for you to make a difference. The time is now. Go forth and lead!

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by Douglas Conant, Mette Norgaard
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Douglas R. Conant is the only former Fortune 500 CEO who is a *New York Times* best-selling author, a Top 50 Leadership Innovator, a Top 100 Leadership Speaker, and one of the 100 Most Influential Authors in the World. He is founder and CEO of ConantLeadership, former president and CEO of Campbell Soup Company, former president of Nabisco Foods, and former chairman of Avon Products. Amy Federman is a highly experienced writer, passionate marketer, fastidious editor, and voracious reader with a track record of success in corporate and digital communications, business writing, and publishing.

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