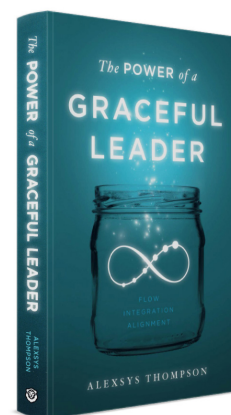


The Power of a Graceful Leader

by **Alexsys Thompson**



Contents

What Grace Is

Page 2

The Tenets of Graceful Leadership

Page 2

Why Gratitude is the Entry Point to Grace

Page 2

Grace In The Face Of Conflict

Page 3

How Grace Can Transform a Company's Culture

Page 4

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

This is an unprecedented time for leaders on all levels. The details and strategy being asked of leaders is intense, and graceful leadership has never been more paramount than right now in our modern world. When people hear the word grace, they often think of religion. While religion can play a role in grace for some leaders, grace, as defined here, is not about religion. Rather, grace is the practical expression of a loving, connected compassion with self and others. It is the ability to see yourself in the other.

Alexys Thompson, in *The Power of a Graceful Leader*, points out that every leader directly impacts at least twelve other humans through leadership. Graceful leadership is the most integrated form of leadership. It allows you to form a bridge between personal and professional, align yourself to your purpose, and adapt as required for each unique situation.

The epitome of a graceful leader is knowing where to be, when to be there, and how to be there. It's like having a playbook in football, where you know exactly where you're supposed to be on the field.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- To understand how to be graceful to yourself.
- To live your life with more alignment, integration, and flow.
- New tools for leading.
- How to create a graceful culture in your home and work environment.

What Grace Is

Grace is beauty and strength combined. It has a warrior energy to it. Grace does not equal doormat. Rather, a graceful leader has a power that is accountable. Graceful leadership offers a two-way street of connection: the graceful leader is felt and seen by the people, community, and organization they are leading, and those who experience the graceful leader are similarly left feeling seen and heard.

The Dance of a Graceful Leader

In the ballet of graceful leadership, the graceful leader pulls self back and others forward to do what is needed. When people talk about conscious leadership and servant leadership, they frequently talk about how the leader leads from behind. A leader who is always at the front, pulling their team along behind them, is not graceful. However, the humble, self-deprecating leader who is always at the back, out of the limelight, is not graceful either. A graceful leader recognizes that their role is fluid. Sometimes, yes, a leader needs to lead from behind. Other times, they need to be up front.

The graceful leader can pull to the back in one moment and then march forward to the front in the next, intuiting what the situation dictates. They swing back and forth as needed, never staying in either position for one nanosecond longer than needed. In a crisis, they move up front, taking the hits and clearing the way, and then as soon as the storm breaks, they hand command off to their lieutenants and fall back, letting their team take over.

The Tenets of Graceful Leadership

There are six tenets of graceful leadership: integrating, evolving, transparency, connecting, co-creating, and being compassionately powerful. These tenets are your guide to stepping into your grace, and working on any one of them will bring you closer to the graceful leader within you.

Grace in Action

Michael is an excellent example of what the tenets look like in practice. Michael ran the whole operations division for a Fortune 500 transportation company. It was a high-stress, high-responsibility role. He was frustrated by this inner knowing that who he said he was and how people were experiencing him weren't aligned. He felt a burning need to integrate his Christianity into his work life. He worried, though, about how he could do that without alienating his team, which was diverse, with a wide spread of religious beliefs.

Michael was on his way to being a graceful leader. How could he begin showing up as all of himself at work, while not crossing into inappropriate behavior? To reach a solution, he had to define what it meant to him to be Christian in terms of behaviors. He decided that for him it meant showing up with compassion, listening, and being more still so people could express themselves.

Then, Hurricane Harvey hit Houston hard, and Michael's new skills were put to the test in a major way. Many of the people who worked for Michael lost their homes and belongings. Since showing up with compassion was an integral part of being a Christian for Michael, he showed up with compassion in a big way. His response to the storm also epitomized the connecting and co-creating tenets of graceful leadership. He thought in terms of "we" instead of "I," and he acted according to his inner guidance system, demonstrating great empathy for his team. Together, he and his team raised money and got resources to the people who needed it. Regarding the co-creating tenet, he searched for and found innovative solutions to the hurricane's impact.

Though it put him out of his comfort zone, he reached across departments in his organization to form subcommittees to support the company's employees in the wake of the hurricane. With his example, the culture of the organization began to shift.

Fast-forward a year, and Michael's staff nominated him for a prestigious impact-in-leadership award. While he was the one receiving the award, it was just a formality so that he could bring it home and share it with the whole team. In this moment, all that he had set an intention to become as a leader was a part of him, and he felt it in every fiber of his being.

Why Gratitude is the Entry Point to Grace

Cultivating gratitude will help you shift your focus and see and appreciate all that is working in the many facets of your life. Gratitude reminds us that our challenges are usually not as big as we think they are.

A Gratitude Practice

A gratitude practice is simply about feeling and expressing gratitude for things in your life. Each person's gratitude practice tends to look a little bit different. The key is to find something that works for you.

Gratitude journals are designed to be used in the morning

and at night. In the morning, you start with a quote, pieces of gratitude, an intention for the day, and supporting behaviors for your intention. At night, you do a wrap-up, where you list a high-five to yourself, magical moments of your day, and the intention you want to take into sleep with you. Consistency matters here. Try to work on your gratitude practice at least once a day. Don't beat yourself up, though, if you miss days here and there—it happens to all of us.

Changed by Gratitude

When you start a gratitude practice, you start noticing more things to be grateful for. It's like the Baader–Meinhof effect, in which something that has recently come to your attention suddenly seems to appear with improbable frequency shortly afterward—maybe you just bought a red car, and you suddenly start seeing red cars everywhere. The things we spend our time thinking about are the things we tend to notice. It's a wonderful compounding loop: the more gratitude you express, the more you find to be grateful for.

Uniting Self And Soul

The distinction between self and soul can be tricky because both are part of you, and they are often intertwined. Another way to think about it is as the little self and the big Self—self, with a lowercase s, and Self, with a capital S. Your little self is your ego, the self you've constructed to get through life. It is created through your life experiences and your environment. Your ego is not “bad.” It guides you in how to interact with yourself, others, and the world. It is your human interface. Your big Self is your soul, the Self that comes with you into this world. Your soul is your essence, the truest expression of who you are. The big Self is immutable. It is pure, innocent, and agenda-free.

Alignment

We all exhibit a spectrum of behaviors. Sometimes we're quiet; other times we're loud and boisterous. Pay attention to the full range of your behavior. Notice when you're extending yourself to others more and when you're becoming more hermitlike. Become aware of your different ways of being and doing in the world. You can have an alignment of self and soul in a wide variety of ways. Whether you're joyous or sad or angry or peaceful, you can still be in alignment. Martin Luther King Jr., for instance, understood that righteous anger was a powerful tool to be utilized in pursuing and aligning to purpose. Being in alignment does not mean you must always be calm and peaceful, though that is one way of being in

alignment. Shifting into the awareness of alignment and misalignment is a gritty process. It asks of us great resolve and stillness as we do this inner mining. This process will bring into awareness limiting beliefs. Remember to be kind and graceful with yourself as you unwind some of your unconscious behaviors.

Use Grace To Distinguish Story From Fact

Rushing to judgment is a common sabotaging habit of all humans, not just leaders. Judgment is a self-protective instinct. We tend to move forward in situations as though our perception is truth. To break out of this never-ending finger-pointing game, we must learn to distinguish perception from truth, story from fact.

Curiosity

Curiosity and judgment cannot coexist. As soon as you stop and ask a question, you create space between your thought and the inquiry. In that space, you have a choice. You may end up choosing to judge. Until you make that choice, though, the judgment does not exist. You can't be judging while you're still choosing. If you slow everything down to ask, “Why would a good and decent person do that?” or “How did this come to happen?” or whatever the inquiry might be, it allows you to step outside of your story and consider other potential answers. That is curiosity doing its job.

Grace In The Face Of Conflict

Grace is a wonderful asset in navigating conflict. It prevents us from rushing to judgment and encourages us to consider situations from others' point of view. Grace leads to conversations instead of arguments.

Leaning into Conflict

Grace is power, and power holds its place. Accordingly, graceful leaders lean into conflict instead of avoiding it. With stillness, they are able to be inside the conflict. They are not positional or judgmental or poised for flight. They approach the conflict with heart, ears, and mind open. They recognize that people are not their behavior. While that makes them compassionate, it doesn't mean they tolerate bad behavior—the exact opposite. Graceful leaders have clear boundaries and believe in compassionate accountability. You can hold somebody responsible for their actions while holding compassion for them as a person.

How Grace Can Transform a Company's Culture

Graceful leadership is not just an internal adjustment. It is also concrete actions that change how you and those around you show up for work. A single graceful leader can set off a domino effect of grace within an organization.

The Power of Grace- Nadia

Like many leaders, Nadia struggled to shift from executing to influencing. She struggled to delegate. She was often out on the floor, looking in people's queues and completing tasks that were two layers below the level she wanted to be focusing on. When there were problems, she found it easier to fix it herself than to let her team figure it out.

Nadia grew brave enough to examine how she came across to others with different ages, backgrounds, and status in the organization. She realized that she sometimes exuded an intimidating intensity and often used body language that was unconsciously demeaning. Nadia started making changes. She began by extending grace to herself and then others.

She allowed a more holistic version of herself to show up at work. Her team had always liked her for her intelligence and effectiveness as a leader; now they loved her for the person she was, because she was finally allowing them the opportunity to know that person. As they witnessed her humor and vulnerability, they began to respond with the same.

Create Your Unique Path To Grateful Leadership

In *Find Your Why*, Simon Sinek says, "If we want to feel an undying passion for our work, if we want to feel we are

contributing to something bigger than ourselves, we all need to know our WHY." You will know when you've found your why through your intuition. It will simply feel right. It will leverage more of your strengths than weaknesses, and it will inspire you. Additionally, when you start to share it with others, it will feel right to them as well. There will be a resonance, an echoing that comes back, reinforcing that your why is true to you.

We need graceful leaders because graceful leadership triggers a domino effect of impact. Changing yourself allows you to change your organization. Changing your organization changes your community. Changing your community changes the world.



Alexsys Thompson offers this body of work as a testament to her own leadership journey, as well as the journey of hundreds of other leaders. For Alexsys, the tipping point came when she established her gratitude practice and spent a decade refining it. Today, developing a gratitude practice is a key element of her work as a board-certified executive coach. Alexsys also serves as adjunct staff for The Center for Creative Leadership and is a member of the Forbes Coaching Council. She authored *The Trybal Gratitude Journals*, curated a collection of short stories called *Gratitude 540*, and is building a sanctuary in Vermont that will be a "safe space for souls to show up."

The Power of a Graceful Leader by Alexsys Thompson. © 2021 by Alexsys Thompson. Summarized by permission of the publisher, Lioncrest Publishing. 258 pages, ISBN 978-1544504988. Summary copyright © 2021 by Soundview Book Summaries ®