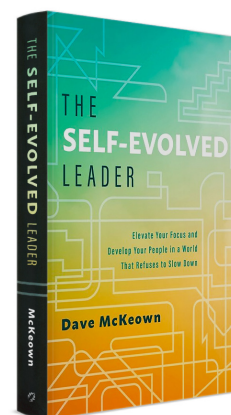


The Self-Evolved Leader

Elevate Your Focus and Develop Your People
in a World That Refuses to Slow Down

by **Dave McKeown**



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No Longer Enough

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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Leaders today are stuck between two worlds. On one hand, we're barely starting to move away from the old way of thinking about leadership and its relentless focus on top-down hierarchy and planning. On the other hand, we haven't fully developed our thoughts on what comes after the bureaucratic organization.

That's where *The Self-Evolved Leader* comes in. Dave McKeown has seen how failure to navigate the new world of leadership has created a rising tide of issues. Now, he's found a way to help leaders tackle these issues head-on by adopting a different perspective, a different approach, and a set of disciplines you may not be comfortable with at first. They require you to lay down the old ways of thinking about leadership and take a step towards becoming a self-evolved leader.

Rather than a list of leadership platitudes or philosophies, *The Self-Evolved Leader* is designed to be an instruction manual and playbook for getting the most out of yourself, your team, and your organization. Each skill builds on the one before, taking you a step further toward your journey to better leadership.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to stop managing from crisis to crisis and spend more time focusing on the long-term development of your people.
- How to lead in a way that gets better results from your team overall.
- How to dramatically increase the value you bring and the impact you have on your organization and community.

What Came Before is No Longer Enough

Each year we spend tens of billions of dollars on leadership training, books, workshops, webinars, coaches, and keynote speeches. Despite the colossal amount we invest in building better leaders, we're experiencing a more significant leadership gap than ever before.

Employee motivation is at an all-time low, turnover is up, and in survey after survey, the gulf between leaders' self-assessments of their effectiveness and the perception by those whom they lead is ever expanding.

This is important for two reasons. First, the world we live in isn't getting any less complex. We aren't going to return to a simpler time. Second, the problems faced by our organizations, communities, and species aren't going to get any easier. Climate change, rising income inequality, the polarization of political discourse, and the lens of tribalism through which we view the best way to tackle our most significant challenges all require a cadre of leaders who will rise to help us find a better way through—together. Never before have we needed a generation of leaders to step up and lead with authenticity, purpose, and effectiveness as urgently as we do now.

This book aims to provide a road map for leaders at any level of any organization to discover their authentic leadership calling, create a vision of a better world, and build the framework and structure needed to chart the course.

Break the Cycle of Mediocrity

Unfortunately, we as leaders have allowed a distorted image of what it means to lead our organizations, and it's causing a profound and dangerous knock-on effect on our teams. Let's call it the Cycle of Mediocrity.

Because it seems that decisions must always be made now, immediately, without delay, there's little time taken to consider the best course of action. This leads to leaders that take 'heroic' courses of action, plowing forward in an effort to 'lead.' But heroic leadership actually disempowers teams in the long run, putting the power of action entirely in your hands and stripping the power from your team members. This eventually leads them to feel helpless, disengaged, and unimportant. The result? You're required to take even more 'heroic' actions in the future.

Your goal should always be to elevate the things that are most important, not most urgent. Plenty of things are ur-

gent, demanding attention right away—an email request for information, for example. But they're not always important. The important things are those that have long-term ramifications for your organization.

Building shared accountability for these important things and focusing on developing your people moves your team towards excellence. This creates a cycle of excellence, in which important tasks are handled by your team, creating shared accountability, development, and empowerment.

Reset Your Perspective on Leadership

Every transformation starts from within, and the transformation into a self-evolved leader is no different. Before you can make a material impact on your team and organization, there are some internal characteristics that need to be nurtured. Some of these may come naturally, and some will take a bit more time to develop.

Here are some of the primary traits of self-evolved leaders:

- They push for growth.
- They pursue an objective understanding of their leadership effectiveness.
- They take responsibility for their development.
- They focus on practice and reflection.
- They demonstrate vulnerability.
- They practice empathy.
- They feel a sense of connectedness.
- They operate from the locus of their control.

Vision—Set a Shared Destination

Building a compelling vision is the first of three key elements to becoming a self-evolved leader. A compelling vision brings alignment, a shared purpose, and a North Star for decision making. It gives your team a rallying cry, a motivational tool when things get difficult or pace slows down.

What does a compelling vision look like? The best ones are clear, exciting, representative of your 'why,' and connected to your organization's larger, overarching vision. This ensures that you and your team are always working towards goals that keep you in line with the bigger picture, and that your team feels closely engaged with and important to your company's mission.

What's the key to sustaining your vision? A constant drumbeat of communication. Never assume that everyone is on the same page. Don't mention the vision once and then assume that it will be top-of-mind for your team going forward. Your vision should be reinforced daily, or even more often. It should integrate itself into nearly everything you do.

To start, bring your team together to explore their perspectives on your team vision. Have them create two or three candidates for you to wordsmith into a final statement. Once you've established the final vision, use every opportunity to share that vision with your team, including team meetings, celebrating it in action, and as part of your onboarding plan for new team members.

Pulse—Build an Implementation Rhythm

Having a powerful, inspiring, and compelling vision for your team helps align people around a common goal. On its own, however, a vision isn't sufficient for success. You'll find that there are a few people for whom understanding the vantage point of where you're going is enough for them to understand how to deliver on the day-to-day.

The majority of your team will require a series of linkages that helps break that high-level vision into a series of actions. Your goal as a self-evolved leader is to help provide that clarity for everyone, regardless of which vantage they feel most comfortable operating at.

The challenge, then, is to start showing the connections between the 50,000-foot level and the runway level. This involves building a set of repeatable interactions across a number of vantage points, which allows you to set and review your team's progress in a proactive rather than reactive fashion.

Building an implementation pulse is a proactive way to wall off your team's time to focus on the important rather than get dragged into the urgent. Each vantage point provides its unique perspective on the progress of your team, and there should be a clear link between each of the interactions and achieving your overarching team vision. In fact, your implementation pulse should have a ruthless focus on execution.

Discipline—Develop the Key Practices

Creating a compelling vision is the most powerful way to call your team to a higher purpose, and your implementation pulse provides you with the drumbeat to get there. But when the weather changes and you go off course, you'll have no way to redirect yourself and your team without the discipline to overcome these challenging moments.

Discipline can be broken down into six 'micro-disciplines,' each of which can be drawn upon to help an individual or your team as a whole refocus and avoid losing momentum. They include:

- Take a pause.
- Exist in the present.
- Set context.
- Be intentional.
- Listen first, talk second.
- Push for clarity.

These are all learned behaviors, independent of personality, leadership style, emotional palette, or circumstances. If you and your team put in the hard work to adopt them in your day-to-day leadership, over time you'll see the positive impact they can have.

Reclaim Your Attention

The people in a room whose focus is on what's happening in the room consistently make better decisions, get more buy-in from their teams, and get better results. Multitasking is not a leadership skill. Managing your attention to devote full focus on the task, person, or project at hand is. Self-evolved leaders who get good at this and even master it are able to achieve a shift in focus to what matters, more achievement in a shorter period of time, increased creativity, and more control.

Facilitate Team Flow

Have you ever experienced the feeling of getting lost in an activity or task? You become so engrossed in what you're doing that hours go by. Psychologists describe this as a state of 'flow,' and when you operate in this state, you find a fine balance where the challenge of the task stretches your skills and spurs you to improve but not so much that it feels overwhelming. Flow is the middle ground between anxiety and boredom, and those who experience it regularly are usually happier, more productive, and have reduced stress levels. Although most of the research and modern perspectives on flow have applied to the individual, self-evolved leaders facilitate a sense of flow within their entire team.

Aim to delegate everything except those things that only you can bring value to, which will increase the chances of your team entering a flow state while collaborating together to solve problems. In almost every case, time spent showing

someone how to do a task or project is worth the investment. Once you've taught, step back and let them learn further themselves. Effective delegation will empower your people and free up your time to spend working on their long-term areas of development.

Support High Performance

Your goal as a self-evolved leader is to remove any chance of learned helplessness and help your people feel supported and empowered to find appropriate solutions to their challenges. Specifically, you should move from the perspective of managing high performance to supporting it.

When you try to manage high performance, you put the onus on you and your leadership skills, removing the sense of control your people have. When you support high performance, you provide the environment from which performance emerges—you push your team to assess their challenges themselves, to weigh their options and take action. The advice and guidance you give is sparing and only used to help them unlock a difficult situation.

Have Symbiotic Conversations

One of the key tenets of the self-evolved leader is the belief and understanding that the relationships and interactions between and among their team are growing ever more connected. The impact of one team member's decisions, actions, emotions, thoughts, and behaviors have a sustained impact on the rest of the team. A great day for one can lead to an even better day for the team, a kind word can increase morale, and a toxic person can poison the culture almost beyond repair.

At some point, you'll have to have a behavioral or performance-related conversation. These conversations work best when they're symbiotic conversations, or conversations that acknowledge the interdependence of the group and provides an opportunity for further growth among its members. Such a conversation can be centered on a positive event, for example, a team meeting that celebrates the individual contributions of a team member. Usually, however, the conversation is centered around a negative event, like a conversation with an underperforming team member.

Before engaging in a difficult conversation, start by assuming positive intent and mapping out what success looks like for you. Start the conversation by letting a team member know that the feedback is not criticism and ultimately, they have a choice of how to act on the information. Share data and examples, state the issue clearly, and know that you're not responsible for their reaction. Finally, put the next steps in their hands.

Build Shared Accountability

Building shared accountability within your team helps you move from pulling your team uphill to working with your team to push it together. Accountability and ownership cannot be taught; all you can do is provide the environment for your team to want to take it. Meanwhile, building shared accountability is a natural outflow of setting a clear vision, building an implementation pulse, and mastering the key disciplines.



Dave McKeown is the CEO of Outfield Leadership where he speaks, coaches, and trains on building leadership excellence at every level of an organization. He has a wealth of experience in connecting individual and team performance to improved business results with a particular focus on fast-growing, complex organizations.

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