



## The Fearless Front Line

### The Key to Liberating Leaders to Improve and Grow Their Business

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

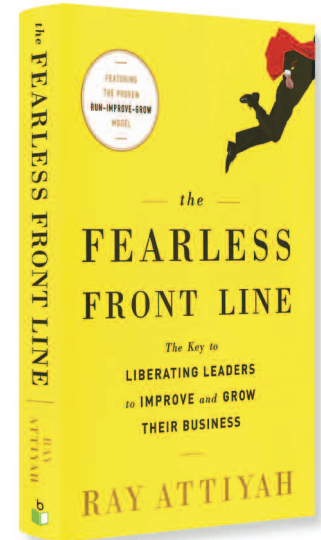
Leaders are committed to improving and growing their businesses, but all too often they find themselves mired in operational details and daily issues, leaving no time to pursue bold visions. *The Fearless Front Line* is a call to action for these leaders to set a standard of fearlessness where frontline workers have an “I run this place!” mindset that reflects pride and ownership of their critical role. This, in turn, liberates leadership to focus on the big-picture, bold strategies to improve and grow the business.

Featuring author Ray Attiyah’s Run-Improve-Grow (RIG) model — a perpetual model for continuous improvement that stimulates a culture of consistent growth and constant innovation — organizations can master the Run, begin to Improve, and through bold leadership watch themselves Grow.

*The Fearless Front Line* is designed to help organizations move from a place of slogging through (mediocrity) to a place of joy and engagement (excellence). Attiyah provides readers with critical processes and tools to create responsive, innovative and nimble organizations and inspired, accountable and confident teams. It is a must-read for any manager who is looking for ways to invest in human assets and frontline supervision.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to benefit from a proven program to drive perpetual and transformational improvement and growth.
- How to think about improvement and growth by focusing on core processes and supervision.
- How to ask the right questions to move your frontline workers from their current state to world class.
- How to add meaningful value to your business.



by Ray Attiyah

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE FEARLESS FRONT LINE

by Ray Attiyah

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## Introduction

While managers are stuck in the front line, they're not leading or pursuing activities that propel growth and innovation. The precondition for liberating managers is having a front line that can operate reliably, excellently and independently day in and day out every day of every week of every year. The front line needs to feel powerful, not powerless. It needs to be trusted, encouraged and accountable to itself. It needs to be emboldened.

Run-Improve-Grow can get you and your organization to fearless. Run-Improve-Grow is a perpetual model that approaches improvement as a continuously moving system that stimulates a culture of consistent relevancy, new growth and constant innovation. Run-Improve-Grow is based on fundamental principles that are universally true for every system and collection of people. The principles work for any organization.

## PART I — RUN: CREATING A FEARLESS FRONT LINE

### Meet the Marathon Manager: Running All the Time

Business is inherently complex, but all too often we make running a business more complex than it needs to be. Too many people involved in too many processes. It only takes one or two moving parts falling out of synchronization to cause systems and processes to become unreliable. Over time, the inherent complexity that

comes with running a business seems too difficult to overcome. How do we let that happen?

Our goal is to return business to its simplest state by removing negative complexity. To do that, we first need to look at how we got here in the first place.

### The Run

The concept of Run-Improve-Grow can be explained by drawing a triangle and dividing it horizontally into three sections. At the base of the triangle is the Run, or the day-to-day activities necessary to produce your products or deliver your service, which includes securing orders of existing products and services from customers in existing markets and in existing geographies. When the Run can't function reliably and independently of management involvement, it strains resources by pulling managers away from their most value-added functions.

When leaders can't delegate, they're stuck in the Run, so they can't innovate. Without new and innovative ideas, products and services, organizations can't grow. Without innovation and growth, organizations don't have capital to invest in the future, so managers don't attempt growth initiatives. And the cycle continues. So the ability to Improve and to Grow starts with a rock-solid, reliable Run.

Having a solidified Run led by an organization's front line is crucial to Run-Improve-Grow sustainability. Most mid-level and top leaders spend time in the Run out of necessity because they are doing whatever it takes to get product out the door. Without a solidified Run led by the front line, managers get dragged down in the Run, preventing them from working in areas where



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they can add the most value to their organization and its customers — in the Improve and Grow functions.

### A Run-Centric Culture

A Run-centric culture is actually the opposite of what a business needs to be successful. It is a lack of thought that can foster a Run-centric culture in which too many people who shouldn't be are involved in the Run.

Running around is not the Run. Remember that the Run consists of the day-to-day operations of the organization that sustain the organization's existence. Needless meetings, extra emails and layered processes do not sustain an organization's existence.

When managers enable this Run-centric culture through their involvement in the daily operations, the managers themselves become part of the dysfunctional Run system — they become institutionalized. Institutionalized managers are constantly Running — I like to call them marathon managers. Marathon managers who don't change their frontline systems end up becoming part of the frontline system itself. Work gets done through them.

As marathon managers become firmly embedded in the Run, a vacuum intensifies in the Improve. The company now lacks the right level of focus on the Improve, and that inattention either prevents the Grow or creates chaos and lower profitability when the Grow comes. The Run is, in effect, disconnected from the Grow and, therefore, from long-term organizational relevance. ●

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### Develop a Fearless Culture: 'I Run This Place'

Before the front line can really start flawlessly executing the Run in accordance with specified performance standards, the organization needs to clean up its processes and clear out the clutter that's clogging up its systems. And that's why the first order of business in a Run-Improve-Grow implementation is identifying and making reactive improvements that simplify the Run.

With so many superfluous systems clouding the view of a defined performance standard, how can leaders identify and prioritize the systems and processes that need simplification? The first step involves going down to the most fundamental level. Ask,

- What is the basic deliverable our customer wants?
- What does our customer do with our deliverable?
- How can we give that customer what he or she wants in the fewest steps possible?

### Simplify the Run

Imagine you are a one-person company and you have to do it all — take the orders, buy the materials, make the product or deliver the service, collect payment. You would probably figure out the fewest steps, or the purest process, to get all of that done. That's simplification. Companies with more than one employee find a way over time to add layers to that purest process.

In Run-Improve-Grow, you want to get back to that pure process. So identify those basic elements, and then ask yourself why you're doing anything else — and when you started doing all those extras. This is an opportunity to understand how the organization has evolved. (You need to know how that evolution has occurred because later in the process, you're going to need to justify why you're eliminating steps.)

The organization needs to throw all its clutter on the floor, empty all its metaphorical drawers, cupboards and closets, and really see how much junk it has. Only when you see the entirety of what you're dealing with will you be able to identify the essential elements for making the organization run at peak performance and recognize those superfluous systems, process and practices that are impeding progress and performance.

### Why Getting to Fearless Matters

Eliminating the need for marathon managers of any type is critical to your organization's overall success and long-term health. It's the only way to get to fearless. Relationships of trust create positive dividends throughout the organization. In a trusting environment, employees are more likely to bring up ideas or share some other information that could be vitally important to future strategic and operational decision making. That willingness to bring up new ideas reflects courage. ●

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### Empower the Front Line to Lead: Move Over, Management

Surmounting the impediments to creating a fearless culture in the Run isn't as difficult as you might be thinking. There are three very practical ways to shape the leadership culture you want to pervade the Run:

- Raise the bar of excellence by investing in top performers and removing obstacles that frustrate them.
- Foster quick-win success by removing frustrations and making meaningful changes quickly to bolster team confidence, enthusiasm and trust.
- Implement daily huddles to foster a positive "what went well" environment, communicate your standards

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of performance, and create a simple touch point for communicating the status of reactive improvements.

### Raise the Bar of Excellence

Recall that leadership is an interpersonal development of trust that inspires a higher standard of performance. So, to foster a fearless front line, leaders need to shift from spending too much time with the wrong people, the organization's worst and neediest employees, to the right people, the organization's top performers. Frontline leaders can rekindle the motivation of disenchanted top performers with a simple shift of attention and simple actions like pursuing their suggestions and publicly giving them credit for their ideas.

One of the most successful methods of raising the bar of excellence is enlisting top performers to share their techniques, processes and best practices with the entire team.

### Foster Quick-Win Success

Sometimes, finding an improvement area that galvanizes the team is not so easy. The key to positioning talent with the right skills, strengths and behaviors is identifying a uniform objective toward which everyone can work. A team-building exercise called a *quick win* is one such uniform objective.

Quick wins solve problems rapidly to remove chronic frustrations. They are initiatives intended to spark confidence and trust by tackling obstacles that have become institutionalized. The most successful quick wins are those that resolve the problems people have been managing around on a daily basis.

### Implement Daily Huddles

Quick-win projects form the connective tissue between management and leadership. Management involves refining the organization's systems and processes to an efficient perfection. A project that satisfies the quick-win criteria will inherently involve system and process improvement. Yet instead of marathon managers implementing the solutions, the employees themselves do the heavy lifting — that's where leadership and management connect.

Leadership and management also connect in the daily huddle, a forum where leaders can change the type of conversation they have with their employees. Every day at a set time, all members of the frontline team, including the frontline leader, congregate in the same location to openly discuss daily Run topics, daily general Run performance objectives, and reactive improvement suggestions and plans.

Daily huddles produce three outcomes:

- Behavior modeling

- Communication in a common language
- Raised bar of excellence

These three outcomes occur in the process of identifying and executing quick-win projects. Huddles should provide more than enough quick-win opportunities as long as frontline leaders (and top performers) ask the right questions and gather the right data. ●

## PART II — IMPROVE: LIBERATING LEADERS TO DO THEIR BEST WORK

### Transfer the Winning Momentum: Ignite the Spark

Nothing builds team camaraderie more quickly and effectively than winning momentum.

After a successful quick-win project, a leader's challenge is to keep energy in the system so that employees stay engaged, and the new behaviors become unconscious and establish the new baseline performance standards. Now that you've had this success from the quick win, you have a very narrow window of opportunity to make bold changes. If you wait for complete across-the-board buy-in before capitalizing on the quick win, the energy you've created will dissipate. That's because waiting for everyone to be on board with a change is unrealistic. You might as well not do anything.

But you must.

### Changing Gears to Lower RPMs

Once one team, department or division is fired up and energized by a quick win, it's time to quickly transfer that momentum. The goal is to drive transformational change across the operation, and that starts by driving it across the entire front line and continues across departments, functions and the entire organization.

In the Run-Improve-Grow system, what drives that change in vision, attitude and momentum is a spark. At the individual level, the spark is engagement and ownership of a new function. On a team level, it is a quick win. On the frontline level, the spark can come from seeing the impact Run-Improve-Grow practices make.

### Mutual Accountability, Ownership and Engagement

In the context of Run-Improve-Grow, genuine sparks are produced from interaction between mutual accountability, ownership and engagement of all frontline employees across all Run functions:

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- **Accountability:** having enough confidence in yourself and others that you are willing to be responsible for flawlessly executing functions where you maximize your value to the organization. Accountability is a function of ownership and engagement. Autonomy is a benefit of accountability.

- **Ownership:** when an individual performs because it is part of his or her DNA. A person who owns a function takes pride in it and persists despite any obstacles. Commitment is the essence of ownership.

- **Engagement:** when a person's motivation is aligned to a function's purpose. People feel engaged when their individual purpose is connected to a team's purpose. When a function is more than just "work," a person will be engaged when approaching that function.

When those three behavioral elements bond together, powerful energy is released on the front line. ●

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### Upgrade Management Systems: A Liberated Manager Emerges

Even as you enjoy the positive effects of the changes happening around the organization — frontline employees taking complete responsibility of the Run and daily reactive improvement and mid-level leaders fueling proactive improvements to support newer, bolder initiatives — you need to think of the scaffolding that supports and reinforces these new behaviors. That scaffolding is an organization's management systems. This is where most improvement efforts collapse. The management systems and processes used prior to Run-Improve-Grow will be insufficient to support enthusiastic, empowered employees. In fact, using the old scaffolding may cause your organization to revert to its old ways.

A good way to visualize the point is by thinking about dieting. Say you lose 25 pounds by exercising with consistent vigor for several months. You run, swim, bike or hike, but you don't change your eating habits. If you stop exercising because you've met your goal, it won't be long before some or all of those 25 pounds come back, and you are right back where you started. Your system of eating is flawed even as you lose weight, so once your temporary exercise system breaks down, there is no backstop to prevent your old behaviors from destroying your progress.

But let's say that the exercise routines that helped you lose 25 pounds spurred you toward a greater goal, such as a marathon or a triathlon. To support such a rigorous goal, you would have to adhere to strict training and eating routines. You would turn your old, less-organized

fitness routines into a new, more complete system tailored to your future goal, right? Doing so would make returning to your old lifestyle impossible, even unattractive, as long as you stay committed to your goal and find new purpose in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and being fit.

The process and rationale for continuously improving management systems in our organizations are very similar. After frontline employees come to own the Run, and marathon managers stop running the operations, management systems need to be tailored to align those new behavioral standards. Because Run-Improve-Grow is a model that creates a process for perpetual improvements, your management systems will need to constantly evolve to meet your new behavioral standards and growth goals.

### Setting New Priorities

A key part of adapting management systems is redefining priorities and therefore the questions you ask. What should employees be focusing on now that's different from what they focused on before? Our questions say a lot about our priorities. We ask about topics that we believe are important or confusing. The more questions we ask, the more involved we are, and the more those around us can see our increased involvement.

One of the best ways to establish new priorities is by changing the questions you ask. In the Improve phase, employees need to continue to expand their thinking to come up with and act upon creative ideas and solutions. And the best tool for getting employees to think and act more broadly on a daily basis is the question.

### Asking Better Questions

The question "How is everything running today?" is a wonderful question for a marathon manager but not suitable for a Run-Improve-Grow organization. That's because the question is phrased to keep everything and everyone laser focused only on the Run and not what the Run means to the organization.

Let's say that, instead of just getting product out the door, an organization's management team wants its frontline leaders to spend more time listening to their people, soliciting improvements, and then taking the initiative to drive the improvement efforts. In that situation, the question "How's everything running?" has to change. Consider these options to drive the intended frontline behaviors:

- What are the two or three improvements your team put in place this week that came out of last week's huddles?

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- Which employees did you recognize for the ideas that they brought up last month, and how did they respond to your recognition?
- What changes have you made to get improvements implemented more quickly?

For organizations that strive to raise the bar of excellence, leaders must be committed to asking questions that spark confidence and influence peak performance behaviors. ●

### Fuel Proactive Improvements: A Play-to-Win Culture Emerges

With a reliable Run in place, a front line initiating improvements every day as part of their routine work habits, and redesigned management systems, you might assume you should jump right into your new Grow phase without giving another thought to Improve. But first, you need to build on the more concrete aspects of improvement and cast your view toward more forward-thinking measures.

There are two main reasons that drive people to begin using the Run-Improve-Grow system in general and to focus on making reactive improvements in particular:

- Increased complexity in their operations: They either launched a new offering, landed new customers who have higher and more complex requirements, ventured into a new market and/or surged in volume in a short period of time.
- New leadership has higher expectations: Leaders who have experienced higher standards of excellence and performance and are hired or promoted tend to see more problems than their colleagues who, over the years, have simply adapted to the environment.

#### Optimized Run-Improve-Grow Systems

Optimized Run-Improve-Grow systems combine proactive improvements with reactive improvements. Reactive improvement makes the Run more reliable and predictable, and that keeps daily work simple. Proactive improvement fuels the new Grow initiatives by enabling the team to offer high standards and bolder promises to current and new customers. Both reactive and proactive improvements are vital to the health and relevance of an organization.

Frontline team members must implement reactive improvements to solve the urgent problems brought on by lack of reliability. Quickly meeting these needs creates relief and buy-in among other departments and develops confidence. Once reactive improvements are

part of the front line's DNA, so to speak, management can more confidently pursue bold proactive improvements through a deliberate and purposeful process.

The transition to proactive thinking energizes those who have a vision of excellence and encourages them to think creatively about the entire organization without the constraints of reacting to day-to-day problems — and doing so without compromising long-term success for short-term results. And that's what you need for the Grow. The foundation for a successful Grow phase requires you to fuel proactive improvements.

#### How Do Proactive Improvements Differ from Reactive Improvements?

Before you commit solidly to proactive improvement (PI), you really need to be able to distinguish reactive from proactive improvements. Reactive improvements help ensure consistent performance of current standards by solving immediate problems that are causing inconsistent Run execution. Rarely do organizations not have some form of a reactive improvement process. Most companies refer to that as “continuous improvement.”

The goal for you in the Improve phase is to empower the front line to make reactive improvements as they're needed so that non-frontline leaders and their staff can focus primarily on proactive improvements. ●

### PART III — GROW: BLAZING A TRAIL FOR GROWTH

### Make (Then Keep) Bold Promises: Confidence in Flawless Execution

Once you've got your Run locked into place (R1) and your management systems focused on the Improve (I1), the next step is to move into Grow mode. But how do you spark your organization to that Grow level? What gets you to G1 to begin with?

The spark is making and keeping bold promises. For example, Mike Neary, a builder of luxury log homes in the Pacific Northwest, embraces a philosophy of always saying yes to customer requests. When Walt Disney was planning to build its Fort Wilderness Lodge in Orlando, the company recruited four contractors who would be given a preliminary trial of 10 percent of the overall project. Time and again during discussions, the Disney architects would ask, “Can you do this? Can you do that?” Mike would reply, “Yes, we can do that.” At one point, the architects asked, “Can you bend logs?” Neary said, “Sure,” even though his team had never bent logs before.

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Bending logs is a pretty bold promise. Some might have said it was impossible to keep. Not Neary. Instead of responding reflexively “we can’t do that and here’s why,” Neary’s response is more representative of a culture focusing on what it will take to accomplish the most demanding requests. He and his team invented a warehouse-sized steam cabinet for logs. Logs would steam for days, and when they came out, they were like gigantic spaghetti strands that could be shaped into place. Problem solved. Bent logs shipped to Orlando. Promise fulfilled. Neary went on to win the contract to complete the construction of Disney’s Wilderness Lodge. Without having said yes to a demanding request — one that many contractors might have deemed impossible — Neary would not have created his next level of competitive advantage and growth.

To launch your organization up to the level of Grow, you need to make and keep bold promises, just like Neary did. So, what’s keeping you from doing just that?

### **Bold Promises Propel the Grow**

Bold promises not only matter to the Grow; they propel it. Making and keeping promises is not necessarily transformational. If you promise the expected, the standard or the conventional and then deliver the expected, the standard and the conventional, your organization will not generate any excitement or energy — either internally or externally. Bold promises, however, allow a company to Grow in new and different ways, to develop new capabilities (bent logs) and to perfect its legacy capabilities. ●

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## **Place (and Win) Bold Bets: Fail Fast, Then Go Big**

To survive and thrive in business in today’s markets, Run-Improve-Grow organizations need to be able to pivot from their internal culture transformation based on execution to an external transformation based on innovation and relevance. Organizations that don’t innovate or scale are quickly lapped by those that do. Even organizations that execute perfectly based on aging standards of performance soon find that perfection of an old metric puts them on the fast track to irrelevance.

### **Relevance and Survival**

Growth requires staying relevant to the market — whatever that market is for your organization. If customers don’t see your offerings as relevant, you’re bound to wither. It might not happen overnight, but when you’re not considered relevant, withering will def-

initely happen over time. So placing big, sure bets matters to your organization’s long-term survival and sustainability as well.

Similarly, placing and winning the biggest, surest bets play a role in your organization’s financial strength. You have a more focused and deliberate use of resources. Instead of dribbling resources on every seemingly interesting idea or opportunity that comes your way, you have a process for vetting possibilities and investing in the best, most promising ones. It might seem like an oxymoron to suggest you invest in bold, sure things as a way to increase growth and increase your organization’s financial strength. Can a sure thing be bold at the same time? It can. Think about iPhones and iPads, Swiffer and Chipotle. Those might be extreme, but they weren’t random gambles on fly-by-night ideas. They were calculated bets by Apple, Procter & Gamble and McDonald’s on bold opportunities, and each bet increased the financial strength of its organization.

### **Organizational Health and Purpose**

Placing bets on the biggest and surest opportunities is the essence of relevance. Converting those bets into success is the essence of growth and organizational transformation. By that I mean that beyond boosting metrics related to financial strength and market values, making bold, sure bets matters for the health of the overall organization. Engagement, purpose and the culture all benefit from going after bold possibilities and making them a reality.

Bold bets that become bold road maps to new growth stimulate most everyone in the organization, especially top performers. New opportunities create a new medium through which the excitement and confidence of top performers can continue to expand.

Bolder bets and road maps also give your organization an opportunity to align with your existing suppliers — and potentially new and better suppliers — under a common language with common objectives. In essence, incorporating suppliers into the new road map built around bold bets enables your organization to spread your Run-Improve-Grow experience to your supplier organizations. The benefits to your organization are significant. You have lower costs, increased predictability and new opportunities for collaborating on bold initiatives with partners you trust.

The key ingredient in that engagement is purpose. People engage with others, with ideas and with organizations when they find meaning and purpose in them. ●

### Scout (Then Place) Talent: Building Your Grow Team

Attracting talent can be less difficult for world-class organizations because they set the industry standard for innovation and boldness. As a result, people and organizations vie for positions in and partnerships with the company.

Remember, when an organization has a reputation for raising the bar of excellence, more people want to be a part of it. To assemble a talent fleet, you've got to up your game, identify what you need, and scout for specific skills and complementary talents.

#### Up Your Game

Top performers always want to win, so they join the organizations that provide an opportunity for success. Talented individuals like to know that they are going to be a part of greatness; they look for more than just stability and a paycheck.

Professional sports teams of all kinds know the value of talent. Why doesn't business? Whether an organization needs a few key talents or a partnership or acquisition, scouting is critical.

The level and speed of play propels your organization to talent magnet status. Keep in mind that the depth of your organization's talent fleet determines the power with which it can grow.

#### Identify What You Need

Not all organizations understand exactly what they need in terms of talent. This is particularly true if an organization's leaders don't have a clear vision of growth. Without this vision, it's difficult to know what skills support a new, bold road map. Not knowing undermines confidence in both any investment in scouting talent and the talent's confidence in their ability to be successful. Managers don't look for the next talented individual because they don't currently have a need for his or her expertise or skills. But how are you to know what you need before you need it? By visualizing what you need to get started and finding people to talk to about what it will take. That means being curious and asking questions.

Anticipating a more comprehensive list of future needs requires the ability to imagine both wild success and significant challenges.

#### Scout for Skills

Leaders should always be scouting for talent so that when the need for a certain skill arises, they can select

bold people with that skill. In the Run-Improve-Grow system, scouting is being aware of, listening to and watching out for talented top performers wherever they are. Those performers may — or may not — actively be seeking new opportunities. An essential part of talent scouting is looking for passive candidates as well as active ones. Your most compelling scouting resource should be your organization's new, bold road map. Share it with people; share it with customers; share it with suppliers. As talented people catch wind of your organization's innovative journey, they'll want to be part of it.

As you share your story, ask your network questions specifically related to scouting:

- Who do you know who has picked the proverbial high-hanging fruit?
- We are seeking to innovate and expand in the following areas: \_\_, \_\_ and \_\_. Who would know talented people who have the passion to explore with us?
- We're always looking for outstanding talent to challenge how we are doing business and going to market. Can you help me identify any top performers who would thrive on this challenge?

Potential top performers with initiative add value to Grow teams. They understand current conditions in the marketplace, proactively engage existing and potential customers with solutions, and trigger demand. Very often, top performers will stand out over the masses because they are confident in their problem-solving abilities and have empathy for others.

Talent is the linchpin for transformational growth. No organization can Grow beyond where it is without involving talented people who can help it achieve ever-higher levels of excellence. Your job as a leader is to be constantly scouting talent both inside and outside the organization. ●

#### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Fearless Front Line*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Hands-Off Manager* by Duane Black, Steve Chandler.** The hands-off approach allows you to learn to take your power back and live in a world of quiet action and nonjudgment.
2. ***Leadership and the Art of Struggle* by Steven Snyder.** Snyder shows how to navigate intense challenges to achieve personal growth and organizational success. He details strategies for embracing struggle.
3. ***Care to Dare* by George Kohlrieser, Susan Goldsworthy, Duncan Coombe.** The authors explain how to become an effective secure base leader and tap into your own secure bases and also become a secure base for others.