



The Power of Professionalism

The Seven Mind-Sets That Drive Performance and Build Trust

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

When only 17 percent of employees believe their leaders have the organization's best interests at heart ... When only 18 percent of Americans trust lawyers completely ... When the Google search "Has U.S. business lost its way?" yields 159 million hits ... Something is very, very wrong. Is it any wonder that cynicism is at an all-time high and trust at an all-time low?

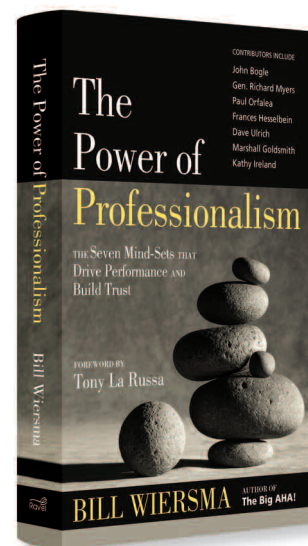
The solution? Professionalism. Professional ideals build trust. And trust is the foundation for both personal and organizational success. Better professionals — and more of them — is the antidote for much of what ails the business world.

In the tradition of business consultant Bill Wiersma's demonstrated ability to shift people's thinking in new and powerful ways, be prepared to think about what it means to be a professional in a whole new light.

In *The Power of Professionalism*, Wiersma outlines the seven key mind-sets of trusted professionals, offering a blueprint for both individuals and organizations interested in fostering a culture of professionalism.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why defining professionals through an occupational lens is not only antiquated, but counterproductive.
- Why a professional's mind-set is more important than his or her technical skills.
- Why people, despite the inherent responsibilities, willingly embrace the mantle that comes with being a professional.
- Why organizations whose members view themselves as professionals outperform, outsmart and outlast other organizations.



by Bill Wiersma

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: THE POWER OF PROFESSIONALISM

by Bill Wiersma

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Preface

Professional ideals, for both individuals and their organizations, have an inseparable correlation to success. Why? Because developing a culture centered on professional ideals, by default, builds trust.

To paraphrase Bill George, former chairman and CEO of Medtronic: We, in business, do not need more self-indulged people — whether revealed through financial shenanigans, power trips or appeasing one's ego. And we certainly don't need more laws. We need better professionals — and more of them — the great antidote for much of what ails business today.

If trust is the bedrock of personal and organizational success, then organizations should develop their people and culture with professional ideals as their cornerstone. Most organizations don't.

John Toland, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author, said, "It is human nature that repeats itself, not history." And it's the unproductive aspects of human nature that produce distrust.

Consider the 2008 meltdown of the U.S. financial markets. To paraphrase a popular political catchphrase: "It was about confidence, stupid." Unfortunately, stupid is as stupid does. Financial institutions took brazen risks, regulators were asleep at the wheel and consumers bit off more than they could chew. The result? Stakeholders lost trust — that increasingly rare trait that makes everything from financial markets to executive teams work! A 2002 Watson Wyatt study showed that high-trust organizations outperformed low-trust organizations by 286 percent in total return to shareholders (that is, stock price plus dividends).

Professionalism is unique; it's the ladder upon which all other organizational virtues mount. The greater the quality of professional ideals within an organization, the greater the likelihood stakeholders will have confidence in it. ●

PART I: WHY PROFESSIONALISM MATTERS

The Power Within

Three days after an explosion at a plant had killed two and caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage, the company's team reassembled at headquarters. Everyone was surprised to see Steve taking the lead at the press conference.

Recent events had been particularly bittersweet for Steve. His well-deserved promotion to division head had been announced only a few days before the accident, and the scheduled start for his new assignment, several states away, was eminent. But Andre, Steve's best friend, had been killed in the explosion.

Rumors surfaced that a gas leak was behind the explosion. Predictably, the aggressive construction schedule associated with the plant's expansion work came into question.

How could Steve face the media?

The press conference started out innocently enough, with the usual suspects asking the usual questions. Then one reporter dropped a bombshell, asking if Steve would like to comment on the impending grand jury investigation that had been announced just hours earlier.

The company's team had not been apprised of the investigation, which in and of itself was a bad omen.



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Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries (ISSN 0747-2196), 500 Old Forge Lane, Suite 501, Kennett Square, PA 19348 USA, a division of Concentrated Knowledge Corp. Published monthly. Subscriptions starting at \$99 per year. Copyright © 2011 by Soundview Executive Book Summaries.

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The grand jury would be investigating possible criminal negligence on the company's part along with probable malfeasance by company officials.

Holding It Together Under Difficult Circumstances

Steve had flawlessly and carefully addressed each reporter's questions. How he managed to hold it together under such difficult circumstances was a wonder to the entire staff. The latest question, however, was like a poke in the eye. Not only would the grand jury investigation challenge the actions and character of the exceptionally talented and dedicated staff, it would also threaten the future of the company, which had been a town fixture for more than 40 years.

Without wavering, Steve responded, "Clearly, many questions remain. But I do know that, as professionals, our people hold themselves to incredibly high standards. They would never knowingly compromise plant safety. In order to get to the bottom of this, I will personally be heading up our company's internal investigation."

Everyone's jaw dropped. Certainly Steve, as operations manager, was the most qualified to head up the investigation. But what about his promotion?

Despite the company advancement, Steve saw this unfortunate incident as vitally important unfinished business. It was something he could not walk away from. Steve postponed his long-awaited promotion indefinitely. His bosses understood and reluctantly supported his decision. Everyone marveled at the way Steve conducted himself. He distinguished himself and rose above the fray in a critical time of crisis.

People who conduct themselves as consummate professionals make everyone around them better. When your career is in its twilight, you'll look back fondly at the Steves you have known as having made the biggest difference. ●

It's a Bigger Tent Than You Realize

Professionals know what they're doing, both technically and in other tangible ways. However, as important as technical competence is, professionals are not typically defined by their competence. Technical competency is the *minimum* requirement when considering whether or not someone is a professional.

Tammy Farris, program manager at the University of Arizona's Eller School of Management MBA program, characterized it perfectly: "Education and training (that

The Power of Mind-Sets

First and foremost, the mind-set reflects who a person is, not what a person does. The seven mind-sets transcend temperament, social hierarchy and intellectual prowess. They are not techniques (that is, built from best practices or admired competencies, etc.) that work in one situation but not another. Rather, they're foundational or principle-centered.

However, they're just as applicable to savvy veterans as they are to brand-new hires, just as pertinent in an aggressive Wall Street firm as in a benevolent nonprofit, as helpful for the gregarious extrovert as for the reserved loner or as insightful for the Ph.D. boss as for the self-taught tradesman.

is, technical competence) are just paying one's greens fees — they enable you to get in the game."

Once in the game, professional competence enables individuals to demonstrate that they technically know what they're doing. If you can do that, people will trust your technical competence; they'll have confidence in you. For example, a surgeon with an ability to bring relief to a suffering patient will be regarded as a professional much easier than a colleague who possesses the same training but lacks the skill to apply that knowledge effectively.

Too often, however, people automatically equate *expert* with *professional*. That's a natural, but often inappropriate conclusion. Experts are not necessarily professional.

There Are Millions of Professionals

Beyond deserving nurses, paralegals, flight attendants and real estate agents, there are literally millions of people who (1) demonstrate mastery in their work and (2) conduct themselves in a way that engenders trust. You've met them. They're trusty auto mechanics, conscientious grocery store managers and invaluable executive assistants. Most of these people don't view themselves as professionals. This is unfortunate. If they thought of themselves as professionals, their performance and morale would jump up another notch. For those who don't quite measure up, the aspiration to become a professional becomes a springboard in raising their sights and performance.

People who view themselves as professionals have higher morale, better job satisfaction and more job longevity. Organizations whose members view

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themselves as professionals outperform, outsmart and outlast other organizations. There's plenty of room for everyone if you're willing to put up a bigger tent. ●

The Psychology of Being a Professional

The views we hold of ourselves are as important, if not more so, than the views we hold of others. Thus, it shouldn't come as a surprise that people who view themselves as professionals excel beyond those who don't.

The renowned psychologist Carl Rogers was a pioneer in his work on self-views. He actually referred to them as self-concepts. Whether you call them self-concepts, perceptions, views or self-views, identities or self-identities, it's really the same thing. These views define who we believe we are.

Aspirational Identities

Leadership expert John Maxwell noted, "It's how we perceive ourselves to be that determines who we are." But there really is (as Paul Harvey would say) more to the story.

For myriad reasons, self-perceptions can simply be wrong. And even if they're right, those perceptions are defining what is, not what's possible.

For those with fairly accurate assessments of their self-esteem, it is significantly, although not exclusively, influenced by what you *do* — in other words, conduct. Each of us has certain standards of conduct — regardless of whether those standards originated from civil or ethical sources — that we understand to be appropriate. And our worthiness, if we're being honest, is measured against those standards. Cheating on an exam, for example, should lower your self-esteem if you understand that cheating is inappropriate.

Current assessments are more like a report card or a snapshot; they do not reflect future possibilities.

Your Aspirational Identity Raises Your Sights

An aspirational identity, however, is primarily about who you are or wish to be — as opposed to what you do (which is defined by conduct). It's forward looking. It raises your sights. It suggests possibilities.

The way to master life's lessons in personal leadership (and, in the process, become a trusted professional) is to first aspire to be a leader.

Seeing yourself as a professional is one of the highest forms of motivation because it's intrinsic, internally driven.

The Professional Balance Approach

Scissors require two blades in order to function properly. Over-dependence on only one blade (for example, technical competence) proves to be ineffective. It's only when the second blade (how you go about your work) is added that the scissors become viable. Naturally, the sharper the blades, the better they function.

Most of us know from experience that when things go wrong, the root cause is frequently attributed to how the situation was handled. Such moments of examination are unprofessional because they make lasting bad impressions. People should be motivated to avoid these and, over time, they will come to a greater appreciation of how important the *how* really is. They will appreciate people who, armed with two blades, prove to be the sharpest tools in the shed.

In the workplace, professional is arguably the ultimate aspirational identity, transcending your title, vocation or educational pedigree. People who view themselves as professionals tend to excel beyond those who don't because they expect more of themselves. ●

Trust: The One Thing You Have to Get Right

Because of distrust, nations go to war, economies fail and cynicism breeds. In many ways, human history has been charted by the impacts of distrust. It's a game changer. With trust, people tend to be more confident, proactive and hopeful. Without trust, people tend to be more skeptical, withdrawn and pessimistic. Trust is to mental health what clean air and water are to physical health.

The most predictable and powerful way to demonstrate concern for the welfare of others is to prove one's trustworthiness with the things that are of greatest importance to others.

Trust is the emotional glue that supports one's priorities, protects one's self-interests and ensures respect for one's values. When someone is found to be untrustworthy, almost without fail, it is because of a violation of one of these three concerns. Taken collectively, what trust does for individuals also applies to organizations.

Three elements are needed in order to build trust: character, competence and judgment.

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Is anything else expected of someone to be considered trustworthy? Yes! In a word, *consistency*. There's an inseparable correlation between trust and consistency, especially when it comes to behavior. You can have consistency without trust, but you cannot have trust without consistency.

Without consistency, you don't know who or what you can count on. And it's that uncertainty that can become an insurmountable barrier in developing trust. Aspiring professionals must commit to consistently show up as a professional should, not merely when it suits their needs. There's nothing like a mixed message, a double standard or creative rationalizations to undermine one's credibility.

Whether it's a leader issuing an organizational edict, someone declaring his intention or an employee making a personal commitment, if one's words and deeds don't match up, they simply won't be credible. Ultimately, these people won't be found to be trustworthy. ●

The Big Picture

It's no wonder that we hear a lot about the need to return to homespun values, getting back to the basics and remembering what made us great as a country. It's about acting responsibly, being self-reliant, demonstrating loyalty, being industrious, exercising discipline and restraint, taking pride in one's work and having a reputation of being trustworthy.

What is the embodiment of homespun values? In a word, professionalism. Of course, that means being a professional. That's what this is all about — *being* something. *Being* honorable — something that characterizes professionals to a tee.

We need better professionals — and more of them — to be the great antidote for what ails business today. Trustworthiness provides an unshakable foundation for success, both individually and organizationally. But in order to leverage the power associated with professional ideals, people must understand them with some level of specificity and appreciate why it matters to them. ●

PART II: THE SEVEN MIND-SETS OF TRUSTED PROFESSIONALS

Mind-Set 1: Professionals Have a Bias for Results

This mind-set is not a bias for action. Nor is it a bias for execution or for success. It is a bias for results. It's the bottom line. But the results must be the *right* results.

Results based on illegal activities or unethical behavior are, even in the best light, unacceptable imitations of the real thing. Likewise, results based on convoluted business models, while legal, later prove to be not only unsustainable, but foolhardy. The 2008–2009 financial crisis that was caused, in part, by intricate and sophisticated financial engineering schemes is a striking example of delivering the wrong results.

Delivering results demonstrates trustworthiness. Without it, you'll ultimately be forced out of the game regardless of how high-minded your people are or how noble your cause.

Just as important is the need to deliver the right results in the right way — ensuring that the outcomes are sustainable and not just a flash in the pan. Anyone can hit the bull's-eye once, but it takes professionals to do it time after time!

Sustainable results are dependent on going about your business in the right way.

Don't Start Out in the Penalty Box

Getting results is much easier when you're passionate about what you're doing. When your work is stimulating, aligned with your values and complements your skill sets, you have a natural nexus for generating the right results.

But just being passionate about your work is not enough to produce results. Passion does not guarantee the right outcome.

What gets professionals to the starting line is their passion for positive results. What gets them to the finish line is — even when things are tough — is their professional will. ●

Mind-Set 2: Professionals Realize (and Act Like) They're Part of Something Bigger Than Themselves

Each of us, as professionals, has an inherent obligation to the organization (or client) we are a part of to put its interests ahead of our own. Consider the alternative: an organization full of people holding a me-first mind-set. It won't be long before the organization is out of business. And, of course, organizations don't lose, people do. In this instance, owners and employees alike.

Of course, putting the organization's and client's interests ahead of our own — in the extreme — can be self-defeating. You cannot be married to your work, and

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yet there isn't always a black-and-white distinction.

There's plenty of gray in these matters. So you've got to be prudent. You've got to be smart. But one thing is for sure, the individual who consistently looks out only for himself will quickly be shunned by conscientious colleagues and disdained by managers because he has proven himself to be untrustworthy. Those employees who prove themselves to be trustworthy do so because they have allowed their successes to be a byproduct of their organization's or client's success. As a professional they:

- Commit to the success of their firm, organization or client.
 - Realize success transcends their own parochial interests.
 - Collaborate as an effective team member. ●
-

Mind-Set 3: Professionals Know Things Get Better When They Get Better

Mind-set 3 — which builds off and is dependent on Mind-set 2 (Something Bigger) — has as its aim the need to satisfy something bigger than oneself. It's outward looking. Its aims are to advance the interests of someone (or something) other than self (which is consistent with Mind-set 2). This mind-set enables things to get better. But make no mistake, in the course of achieving something bigger, personal growth (and perhaps personal wealth) occurs. But that wasn't the principle objective or the professional's motivation. Growth happens as a natural and powerful byproduct of practicing Mind-set 3.

For instance, talk to anyone who has worked in a disaster relief effort (Hurricane Katrina, the 2010 earthquakes in Haiti and Chile and China, the islands recovering from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami). Aid workers come back changed for the better, but that change wasn't their original intention, aspiration or motive. Nevertheless, a profound change occurred as a byproduct of their selfless efforts.

Selfless Efforts in the For-Profit World

This phenomenon is not limited to individuals in the midst of such altruistic deeds. Similar changes occur in the lives of people in the for-profit world. You see this metamorphosis in the members of an especially high-performing team involved in bringing an important product to the market (such as Medtronic), people who are transforming an industry (such as Apple) and espe-

cially in such transformative times as recessions and economic recovery in the men and women devoted to revitalizing a brand (such as Ford). These experiences often mark some of the most dramatic professional growth of a person's career, but this isn't growth for the sake of growth. Growth comes as a byproduct of serving a higher purpose. ●

Mind-Set 4: Professionals Have Personal Standards That Often Transcend Organizational Ones

Best-selling author David McCullough, a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize, is a master of the art of narrative history. His books are considered masterpieces. Some of his best-known works are *Truman, 1776*, *The Path Between the Seas* and *John Adams*.

McCullough has had 40 years of bliss as an author. He loves what he does. He won't name any of his books as his favorite, however, he readily acknowledges that his happiest, most fulfilling years were those invested in writing *John Adams*: "It was a privilege to keep company with those people. They set such a high standard for us." McCullough speaks openly and generously of his admiration for Adams (plus Adams' wife, Abigail) noting, "Character is what counts, above all."

HBO ran *John Adams* — starring Paul Giamatti and Laura Linney — as an eight-part mini-series to rave reviews. What made this possible? It was the trust McCullough had in producer Tom Hanks. The standards he saw in Adams (the ones that drew McCullough so fervently to him) were the same ones that attracted him to Hanks.

Professionals Hold Themselves to Exacting Standards

Hanks is like so many trusted professionals who hold themselves to exacting standards. And while it helps that their organizations also have standards, these professionals aren't necessarily dependent on them to do a good job, to be responsible or to be respectful to others. Their standards are integral to their character. Professionals who hold this mind-set:

- Have personalized a core set of values.
- Do what's right over what's expedient by taking a long view.
- Rise above the fray, stay focused and avoid pointless drama.

For clarification, personal standards can mean a myriad

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of things. Used here, it means one's personal values, one's moral compass (one's definition of right and wrong) or one's core beliefs. ●

Mind-Set 5: Professionals Know That Personal Integrity Is All They Have

It has been said that integrity is the mother of many virtues. How true! For those holding this mind-set, it's much more about who they are as individuals and much less concerned with having to think about doing the right thing. In other words, people who hold this mind-set act naturally (and usually quickly) when faced with having to make a tough call. After all, it's who they are and it's consistent with their character.

There are three important underpinnings of integrity:

- Authenticity and honesty.
- Delivering on one's commitments (both explicit and implicit).
- Refusing to violate the trust others have extended to us.

Perhaps more than any other mind-set, the integrity mind-set has the greatest potential to inspire trust. ●

Mind-Set 6: Professionals Aspire to Be Masters of Their Emotions, Not Enslaved by Them

Mastery of one's emotions produces three especially important byproducts. Each is essential in inspiring trust in others:

- Professionals are respectful when it's difficult to be respectful.
- Professionals maintain their objectivity and keep their wits about them.
- Professionals manage their ego and resist the urge for immediate gratification.

Let's be clear, emotions aren't bad. After all, our emotions "wind us up and make us go." Trust is an emotion. Trust is a good emotion. Trust is emotional glue.

Emotional Consistency Is Important

Some would have you believe that professionals should be dispassionate. Please disregard that notion. The passion you have for your work, your values, your ideas and your people is wonderful. Keep these emotions alive. Feed them. But keep in mind that emotional consistency is important. People distrust those who exhibit emotional extremes.

As author C. Terry Warner noted, "One sign of the immature mind is the ease and frequency it feels offended." Emotions, as we have learned through sad experience, can trip us up and make smart people dumb.

Here are two important points: (1) Each of us is responsible for our emotional reactions to experiences and people, and (2) we, alone, are responsible for our external responses to those internal emotional reactions.

Emotions Are Self-Induced

Events trigger emotions. This is an automatic reaction — or that's what most people believe. But that's not really the way it works. Rather, emotions are determined by what we think about an event, not by the event itself. In other words, our interpretation of an event ultimately becomes the precursor to the emotion we experience. Simply put: Emotions are self-induced.

Thus, to master one's emotions is to master one's constructive thinking. As renowned psychologist Seymour Epstein said, "It is one thing to suppress the expression of an unwanted emotion or impulse and quite another not to have the emotion or impulse in the first place." Constructive thinking enables that level of mastery! This is what enables especially effective leaders to remain calm in a crisis while others are swept up in the moment. ●

Mind-Set 7: Professionals Aspire to Reveal Value in Others

Mind-set 7 is all about aspiring to reveal value in others. The word *aspire* is especially important and illustrative in understanding this particular mind-set. *Aspire* suggests intent, priority and, most importantly, proactivity. For those who possess this mind-set, what they do for people is not an afterthought, it's a long-term investment in people. Professionals with this mind-set find great pleasure in the growth and success of others. They're comfortable in their own skin. They aren't threatened by another's success.

Professionals who hold this mind-set:

- Readily extend trust.
- Recognize the value other professionals bring to the table.
- Aspire to lift others through their demeanor and actions.

The genesis of this mind-set can sometimes be traced to one's philosophy of life, sometimes to purely practical reasons and sometimes to altruistic values based on idealism. Or perhaps a combination of these. Regardless of

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the reason, Mind-set 7 has an undeniably positive impact on the recipient because it builds confidence and inspires trust. ●

PART III: UPGRADING THE CULTURE

Your Competitive Advantage Is Hiding in Plain Sight

Understanding the importance of trust is one thing; building it is quite another. Build professionals and, by default, you build trust. Trust is the one thing you must get right in order to achieve competitive advantage.

Culture is learned. The trick for leaders is to shape the environment in a way that is stimulating. Since people, especially professionals, motivate themselves, it's imperative that a leader creates the right environment, assignments, opportunities and sanctions for professionals to motivate themselves to get the job done. Leaders *can* shape their organization's DNA. David Lawrence, CEO of Kaiser Permanente, observed, "The winners do it less wrong."

Make Professional Standards the Foundation

Your ideal culture will be the one that delivers the results your organization demands. Regardless of the form your culture takes, it's imperative that its foundation is based on professional standards. Former Harvard Business School Professor David Maister said, "It is easier to find the discipline and motivation to behave professionally if everyone around you is doing the same." But not only does a culture of professionals provide superior competitive advantage, it uplifts and motivates more than any other culture.

While creating a professional environment is no easy task, it raises the bar and expectations. And great expectations are evidence of great respect, which is not lost on professionals. Given the never-ending waves of retirements in the years ahead, and the cultural teaching that goes with them, there's no better time than now to get the lesson plans right. ●

Professional Ideals: The Centerpiece of Success

Here are three things to consider implementing that constitute a digest of how to more effectively integrate professional values into your organization:

- **Start with Yourself.** The laws of credibility demand that we walk our talk. This prompts a thorough look in the mirror. Realize that this is not

about leading others; it's about leading yourself.

- **Leverage People's Natural Motivations.** Despite the apparent costs, people willingly embrace the mantle that comes with being a professional. It proves to be a free and often untapped source of motivation.
- **Be Persistent.** People are proud to associate with an organization they deem professional. Given the opportunity, they will welcome the prospect to make it so.

Build Your Culture

The priorities that are of the utmost importance to the leaders of virtually any organization are all driven by the degree of professionalism achieved by leaders, managers and employees. The higher the degree of professionalism, the better the attainment of priorities, all of which drives better results. This is the underpinning of my advice to every leader: Build your culture around professional ideals.

This is especially important because culture is to an organization what character is to an individual. And organizations whose culture encourages members to practice the seven professional mind-sets will have a competitive advantage over those who don't.

Clearly, leadership holds the biggest lever of all when it comes to driving professional ideals deep into an organization's culture.

The hope is that more people will begin to see themselves as professionals and start taking advantage of their many opportunities. Of course, they need to live up to the ideals associated with being a professional. But as they do, they will begin their own transformation and gain tremendous personal power.

The second hope is that leaders will embrace these professional ideals as the centerpiece of their cultures and instill the seven mind-sets in their people. It's in their interests to do so. An unprofessional environment repulses, frustrates and dispirits, but a professional environment attracts, challenges and uplifts. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Power of Professionalism*, you'll also like:

1. ***Executive Presence* by Harrison Monarth.** Monarth reveals how highly influential people leverage the power of perception in their favor.
2. ***Great Work, Great Career* by Stephen R. Covey and Jennifer Colosimo.** The most respected business thinker of our time, Dr. Stephen R. Covey, and change consultant Jennifer Colosimo offer a complete handbook for anyone seeking to build a truly great career.
3. ***The Truth About Leadership* by James Kouzes and Barry Posner.** Kouzes and Posner share 10 time-tested fundamental truths about leadership and becoming an effective leader.