

THE OTHER EVEREST

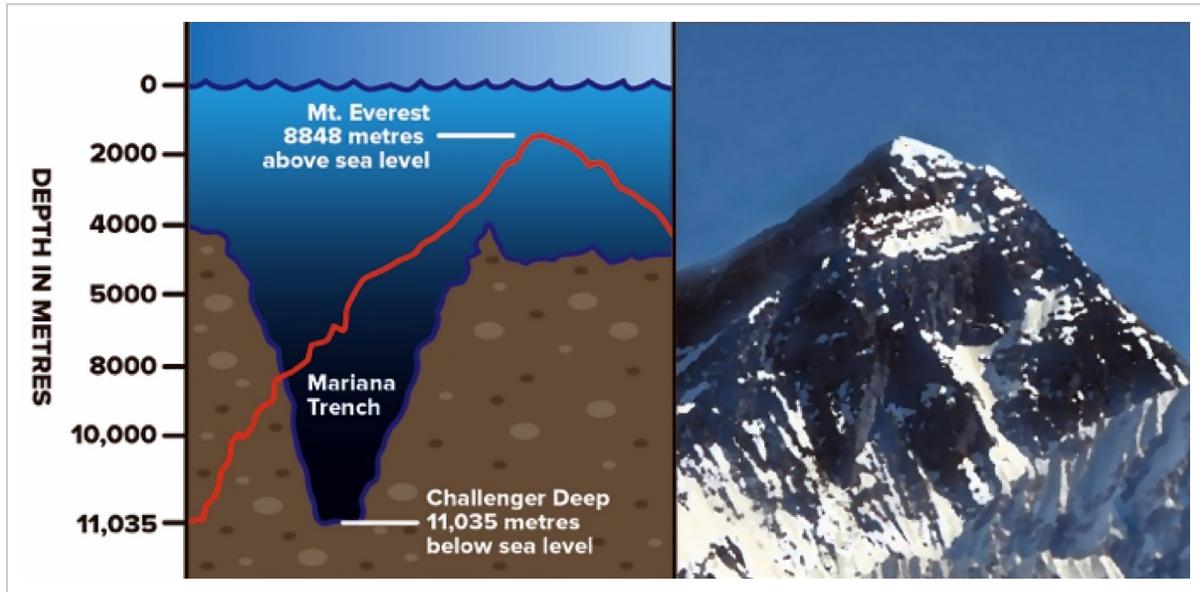
Navigating
the Pathway
to Authentic
Leadership

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the leader's navigator

The Other Everest

Navigating the Path to Authentic Leadership

One of the profound mysteries of the world is the inherent duality of nature found both in the physical world and within ourselves.



The earth's highest peak is Mount Everest, rising more than 8,000 meters above sea level. Far lesser known, is that the Earth's deepest point is found in the Mariana Trench, a crescent-shaped scar in the Earth's crust located in the western Pacific Ocean, which virtually equals an inverted Everest at more than 8,000 meters *below* sea level.

In today's fast-paced, rapidly evolving business and professional environment, a high value is placed on looking outward and striving for the next summit. As successful people, we tend to look upward to the achievements we hope to realize.

But success isn't just about height. It's also about depth.

There is an inner, equally valid journey that each of us must take if we are to reach our full potential in our lives and careers, families and communities, businesses and organizations. It is the journey that I call *The Other Everest*.

Leadership is fueled by a voyage that takes us inward and downward, toward the hardest realities of our lives. The best leadership comes from people who have penetrated their inner darkness, men and women who can teach, lead or coach the rest of us to a place of authenticity that is hidden from what the world sees, who have been there and know the *way*, and in so doing, know the *why*. This includes working with the “shadow side,” which is hidden in all of us. Facing what we tend to avoid becomes critical if we want to be a guide to others.

My approach to leadership development is built on a simple premise: Leadership cannot

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be reduced to techniques or tools or titles. Leadership capacity – the ability to inspire, influence, and impact others - comes from the identity and integrity of the leader. Leadership, ultimately, is about PRESENCE, not position.

Since my brother's death, I have been working on a project I call my “Wall of Influence.” These are the twenty-five most influential people in my life, people who have deeply influenced and shaped me into the person I am today. I have been collecting their

photographs and will be mounting them on the wall of my study. This is why I call it my “Wall of Influence.” While many of these individuals have passed on, I have contacted those who are alive to express my gratitude and appreciation for what they have given me over the years and the ways they made an impact.

While some of these people would be called “successful” by the world’s standards, many are virtually unknown. What they all share is a depth of wisdom, a depth of perspective, and a depth of love that enables them to influence the world through a PRESENCE that has virtually nothing to do with their positions.

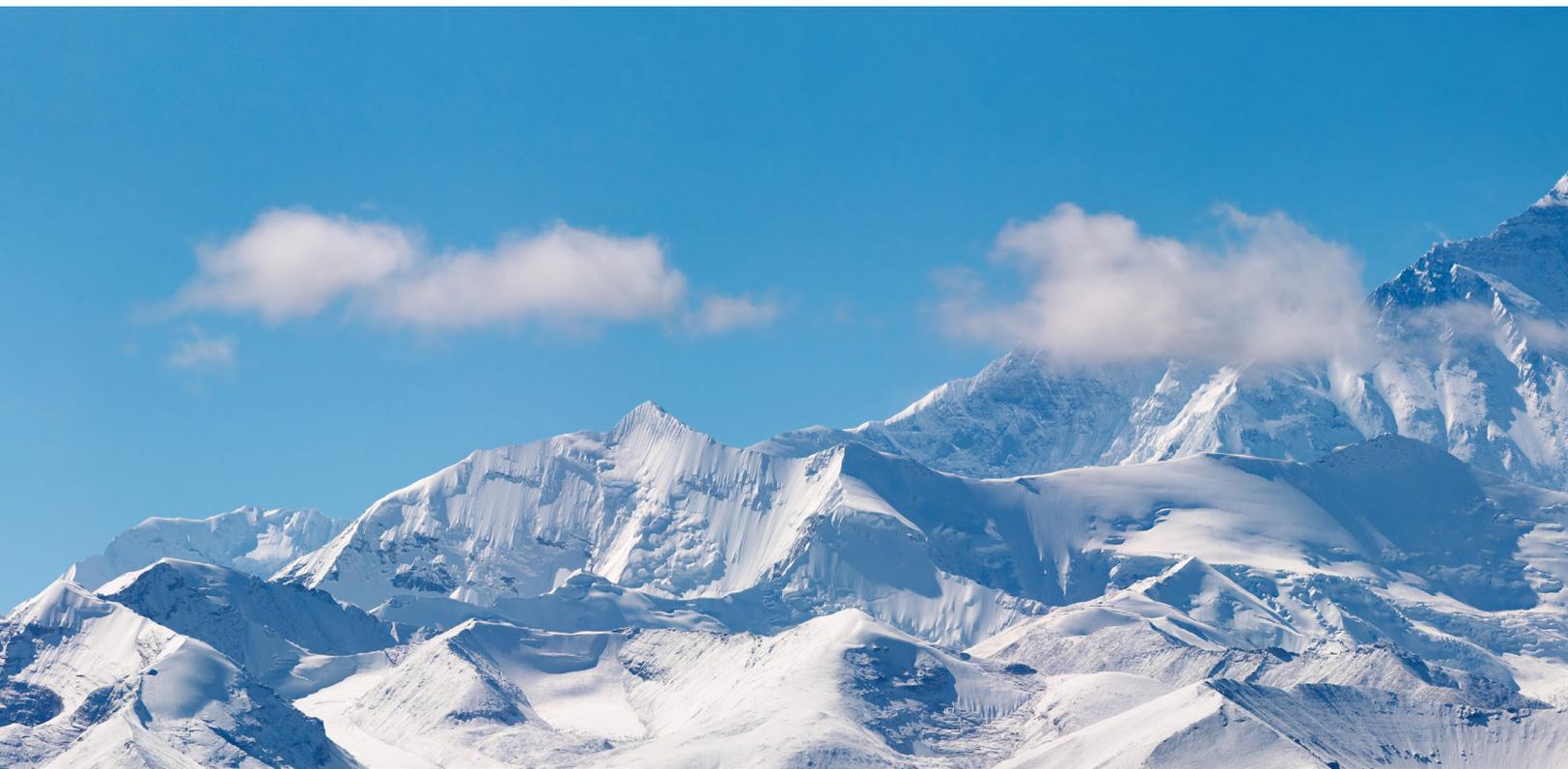
Just how did these people and other great leaders who have made a difference in the world develop this capacity? What was it that enabled them to be such prominent leaders in someone’s life? Where did this leadership presence come from? What were the defining moments that made them who they are? How did they become the kind of person it took to be such an influence?

In my study of thousands of leaders I’ve come to understand that each leader took, in their own unique way, an inner journey to become the kind of person that earned the right to be viewed as a leader. They all took this “other Everest” journey, this inner journey to their hearts. For some it was coming to grips with a life-threatening illness. For others it was going inward to face an addiction or the death of a loved one or a divorce or a bankruptcy. For still others it was the rigorous daily practice of developing and expressing a musical or artistic gift, consistently showing up as a parent or loved one, or simply turning off the noise of the world and taking time to go within.

The Other Everest is as vast and formidable as any physical peak. It is just as important to our personal development and to the attainment of our own definitions of success as any outward pathway we may pursue.

It's a journey that requires leaving our comfort zone at the surface and diving far within ourselves, often facing up to difficult questions and hard truths. But ultimately, it's an adventure that is rich in rewards, providing invaluable insights and guideposts toward becoming real, developing our leadership presence and amplifying our impact – three key components to harnessing the power of authentic leadership.

Over my long career of connecting and communicating with CEOs, senior executives, entrepreneurs, companies, and organizations, I have come to the conclusion that the process of developing authentic leadership – aligning who you are with how you lead – has never been more relevant to sustained success, growth, and continual improvement than it is today. The more we explore and develop our capacity for authentic leadership, the better we are for our families and communities, and the better equipped we are as



leaders to help ourselves and our organizations adapt, innovate, and thrive in the face of ongoing change and new challenges.

Whether a CEO entrusted with an entire company, a supervisor committed to building a great team, a middle manager who oversees a division, a front-line healthcare professional, an entrepreneur, a parent, a coach, a teacher, a community volunteer, or a citizen dedicated to making a difference, we all have the potential to lead in our own unique ways and develop our authentic leadership capacity.

Anyone who has been to a leadership training course probably left with good tools. However, what I'm passionate about is the tool user – the PRESENCE below the surface of the practices. Along my journey I have come to know that true leadership is about *presence*, not position. It's about character, and it's about authenticity. Ultimately, authentic leadership is synonymous with being comfortable with being oneself. It's that simple, and it's also that difficult.





For thirty-five years, my brother was a rural doctor in a small community in Western Canada. In 2013, he was nominated by his peers and awarded Alberta's Family Physician of the Year. In November of that year he was in Vancouver to receive his award. Three nights before his award ceremony with his colleagues from across the country, he collapsed in the arms of his loving wife. Five days later he was given the grave diagnosis: Grade III, Anaplastic Astrocytoma. A brain tumor that eventually took his life three years later.

Hal's dying changed my living. Spending time with him during the last months of his life not only provided moments of deep intimacy and self-reflection but had the effect of s-l-o-w-i-n-g me down – deepening my relationship, not only with Hal but with the present moment, providing a rest note of peace and wisdom in the allegro of my life. The time with Hal heightened my profound and precious realization that the life we have today won't last forever, paradoxically enabling us to appreciate it and to live it more deeply. Embracing our challenges, and more importantly, the wisdom and teachings they provide, allows us to better know our true selves and what is important to us – opening up our potential to lead lives of meaning and fulfillment.

By looking within ourselves to identify our authentic values, passions, and strengths, we open the door to our greatest potential for meaning, fulfillment, and true success.

While there are many paths to diving more deeply within yourself, for developing and strengthening a stronger presence that will amplify your impact in the world, I offer three strategies:

#1. S-L-O-W D-O-W-N

As I design and deliver leadership development programs for organizations, a common theme in everyone's life is the word busy. Everyone is busy. When I ask, "How are you today?" the reply is always, "I'm busy!" Busy has become a badge of honour. If, for some reason, you aren't "busy," it implies that, somehow, you are less than capable. You aren't in demand. There is something wrong with you.

My response is, "So... is it a *good* busy?"

Then comes a pause. We intuitively know there is a difference between good busy and bad busy, but without time to stop and reflect on the question, it's not possible to answer it.

It's an old and ironic habit of human beings to run faster when we have lost our way.

Peter Drucker, the esteemed management guru, said once "... There is nothing so useless as doing something efficiently that should not be done at all."

Amid the tyranny of the urgency of the demands of the world, how do we know if we are doing something efficiently that "should not be done at all?"

I see conscious leaders today struggling between having confidence in their capacity to live a life of purpose and yielding to the daily demands of others. By too easily yielding to what is pressing, practical and popular, we have sacrificed the pursuit of what is in our hearts.

I know from research and my more than thirty years of experience in the leadership development field, that the world is in need of leaders who are committed to **substance** over *superficial*, **character** over *charisma*, and service over self-interest. In short, we need leaders who are authentic – people whose inner compass guides their daily actions and who inspire trust by being honest and real.



2. TAKE A TECHNOLOGY SABBATICAL

We live in a technologically intoxicated world, bombarded with technological stimuli and hungry for human contact and civility. Everyone communicates, but very few are connected. It's an appropriate time to be checking our technological pulse in an age when most everyone is wired with devices.

Here is a partial list of symptoms of high-tech intoxication: we worship technology



and can't live without it; we blur the distinction between real and fabricated; we accept violence as normal; and we live our lives distanced and distracted.

If you want a test to see just how addicted we are to technology and you have teenagers in your life, take their phones away for a day and observe the response. But you don't need teenagers in your life to assess our level of attachment to technology. Try living just one day without a device in your life and see for yourself the withdrawal symptoms you experience.

Addiction literature tells us that without limits there is no freedom. If you don't have boundaries, if you can't say no to anything - from alcohol to gambling to the people in our lives that we love - then the irresistible urges devour our energy, rob us of our sovereignty and take over our lives as we become slaves to their impulses.

I'm not here to make a judgement of whether there is too much technology and too little human contact in your life. What I'm inviting you to do is to take a look in the mirror and assess this honestly for yourself.

What I recommend is designating times during the day, the week, and the year when you unplug your computers and devices and practice being connected to family, to friends, to colleagues, to nature, and to yourself. If you are raising children you know that they, like all of us, need time away from the intoxication of technology. Whether around the supper table, in the bedroom, in the middle of a conversation, or on vacation, parents have to model freedom from the compulsion to be on our phones 24/7.

Whatever you decide the right boundaries are for you, let's personally and collectively decide to do our part to make the world a little more human.

#3. BE WHO YOU ARE

My early years were filled with my father's passion for sports and his love for the outdoors. Dad was a nationally ranked gymnast, and when I was in elementary school he would take me every Saturday morning to the old YMCA in our community, and we would work, just him and me alone on the parallel bars, tumbling mats, and climbing ropes. Harlie has been gone since 1986, but to this day I can feel the strength of his shoulders and thighs as he would gently lift me up on the bars. In adolescence, he was my track coach and scoutmaster, and we would canoe, camp, and hike together. While being able to walk around the house on his hands, my father's ability to impact my life and reach my heart came through his journey to the "Other Everest" through the darkness of depression and mental illness. Following an extended time in a psychiatric hospital, he confided in me, "At the time it looked like a breakdown. I know now it was a *breakthrough*."

To come to a place of impact and influence requires slowing down, going inside, and developing a relationship with an interior self. It's about finding one's voice – away from the voices of the world. To attain the capacity to influence in today's changing and demanding world, along with the depth to lead with a strong authentic presence requires this inner journey, a journey to one's heart, a journey to the "Other Everest."

When we slow down, recalibrate the compass of our heart's attention away from the cravings and desires of the grasping mind and instead attend carefully and regularly to cultivating the simple practices of kindness, deep listening to who we are, and courage to be okay with being ourselves, then we are able to amplify our impact on the world and



make a deep difference to those we love and serve.

A parable from the Sufi tradition illustrates the nature of authentic leadership. A pregnant tigress comes upon a flock of goats, and, being hungry, pounces upon them and brings on the birth of her little one – as well as her own death.

After returning to their grazing place the goats found the just-born little tiger and his dead mother. With strong parental instincts, they adopted the little guy, who grew up amid the flock. Surrounded by goats as his only models, he began to believe he was one. He learned to bleat and eat grass, even if the grass, with all its cellulose, was very hard on

his digestive system. As a vegetarian tiger with only the capacity to say *Maaaaa*, he was a pretty miserable specimen of his species.

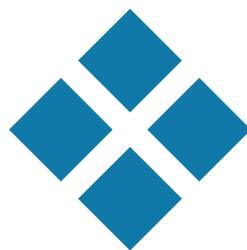
One day a male tiger came upon the flock, and as he chased them, they scattered, leaving only the young tiger to stand helplessly and bleat.

“What are you doing living with these goats?” the elder tiger asked this skinny little feline.

The little tiger responded with, *Maaaaa*, and started nibbling grass in a kind of embarrassed way. The big fellow was mortified and swatted him back and forth a few times as the little tiger continued to bleat and eat grass. Then he took him by the neck and carried him to a still pond and for the first time in his young life, the little tiger saw his own face.

As the young tiger looked into the water, the big fellow gave a roar. In response to the elder’s request to roar, the young tiger only blurted out, *Maaaaa*. And the older tiger responded, “No, you have to roar like a true tiger!” as he again showed him how.

After several attempts, the young fellow was able to open his throat and roar fully with



the sound of a tiger. That deep, dark roar, is what the Sufis would say is equal to one human being who discovers his true nature.

As leaders, we have a basic decision in life. Do we want to live like goats or do we want to live the lives we are destined for? The decision to live like a tiger involves the deepening of consciousness, the transcending of all denial to find out who is it that we really are. Then, through the strength and courage of this presence, gently guide those we serve to the water where their true nature is reflected and remembered. This is the real work of authentic leadership.

Each of us has within us a calling. While the outside world pushes us, something within *pulls* us. Let your deepest desires lead you so you can lead others to their deepest desires.

And remember: whenever you are in doubt, resist the natural human tendency to go *faster*, and instead, choose to go *deeper*.



To learn more about David Irvine, visit his website:

www.davidirvine.com

For additional complimentary resources to
support your leadership go to:

www.davidirvine.com/resources

For a complimentary consultation and assessment of how David
might support navigating your authentic leadership, or for
information on his upcoming *The Other Everest*
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