

THE OTHER EVEREST

Navigating the Pathway
to Authentic Leadership

By David Irvine



THE OTHER EVEREST

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Praise for *David Irvine*

“‘Know thyself’ is the most ancient and wise tenant of human psychology and an essential element of true authentic leadership. In ‘The Other Everest’ David Irvine has provided the most complete and comprehensive road-map for life and leadership that I have ever read in over fifty years on my own personal growth journey. Highly, highly recommended!”

— Jim Reger, Past President, The David Foster Foundation
(providing financial and emotional support across Canada
for families of children who require organ transplants)

“Join David Irvine on his travels through life toward authenticity. Take a journey toward your true self by accompanying others on their journeys. Their experiences will hearten and inform you.”

— Geoff Bellman, Consultant and Author of *Your Signature Path* and
Getting Things Done When You Are Not in Charge

“The true essence of leadership is service and moral courage. Both service and moral courage are enhanced by authenticity. David Irvine has greatly facilitated our understanding of how to empower and synergize our collective productivity with The Authentic Leader.”

— Dr. Len Marrella, Founder and President, Center for Leadership
and Ethics, and Author of *In Search of Ethics*

“David’s works have meant a tremendous amount to me, both professionally and personally, as I manage my way through life as a father, husband, and leader in one of the most incredible and diverse industries imaginable. I recommend David highly to anyone who believes they are a student of life and career.”

— Sean Durfy, Former President and CEO, WestJet

“When I heard David Irvine say that leadership is a personal choice, I had a hunch that his messages would resonate with Farm Credit Canada’s leadership team. I was right... David’s messages about authenticity, accountability, and balance are both practical and profound. In today’s world where change is the norm and leaders are needed at every level in organizations, David’s messages are powerful.”

— Greg Stewart, Board of Directors
of the Bank of Canada

“You can do all you want in an organization about team building and training, but accountability and authenticity can only start with the individual. An individual’s values, knowing who you are, need to be in sync with the values of their organization. This is David’s strength—helping us get the internal alignment.”

— Ed Rodenburg, Former President &
CEO, Lilydale Inc.

“David helps illuminate the difference between capriciously floating along and intentionally navigating a more satisfying course through life.”

— Vincent Deberry, Executive Director,
University of Oklahoma,
Center for Public Management

“David’s work has always resonated with me, particularly his insights into authentic leadership. Leadership starts with knowing deeply who we are; our beliefs, strengths, and talents, as well as our weaknesses and shortcomings. It’s only through deep self-awareness that we can begin the journey to true leadership and be the kind of leader that people are willing to follow. David has impacted my life through his work and through his friendship.”

— Tim O’Connor, CEO,
Results Canada Inc.

“The concepts underpinning ‘The Other Everest’ are simple, practical, actionable, and will provide immense support to an emerging breed of leaders who want to deliver incredible outcomes for their staff, shareholders, consumers, and the greater community. Those prepared to go deep and explore their authentic selves will scale their own Everest and can look forward to supporting and celebrating the successes that will come!”

— Adam Siegel, Executive Director, Visage Invest
Active Investment and Scaling Up Advisory,
Melbourne, Australia

“Organizations are at the forefront of our efforts to manage the resources available to us and the life-supporting environment that sustains them. And never before have we so desperately needed the authentic organizational leadership that David describes to make sure management succeeds in this effort. This book couldn’t have come at a better time.”

— Allan Savory, Founder and President, Savory Institute,
African Centre for Holistic Management

“*The Other Everest* is a very thoughtful and delightful read. Dave’s a highly experienced coach helping readers find and energize their authentic self toward deeper and more lasting leadership. His unique blend of stories, frameworks, and practical how-to tips make this a highly inspiring and useful guide to finding your pathway.”

— Jim Clemmer, Leadership Author, Speaker,
and Workshop/Retreat Leader

“This book will make you actually do what it advises: slow down, reflect, and reach inside yourself to clarify what you were put on this earth to do. As you move through its pages, you cannot help but reflect David’s many stories back on yourself to draw insights from your own experience, to light the path ahead.”

— Dr. Lauryn Oates, Professor, School of Humanitarian
Studies, Royal Roads University and Programs Director,
Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan

To all those who have the courage to take the inner journey.

*“If we knew what was there we wouldn’t have to go,
so we need to go to find out what’s there.”*

JACQUES COUSTEAU

*“You can sail around and around on the ocean for years,
But it is only when you dive in that you know the beauty of the sea.”*

R. SHARATH JOIS

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It's not the mountain we conquer but ourselves.

EDMUND HILLARY

Preface

Author's Note

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. But there is also an inner journey that each of us must take if we are to reach our full potential with our lives and careers, families, communities, businesses, and organizations.

After more than thirty years of experience and research in the leadership development field, I have come to the conclusion 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 inspire trust by being honest and real.

To come to this 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 an *inner* journey, a journey to one's heart, a journey to what I call the "*Other Everest*."

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 wish to 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 is an adventure that is rich in rewards, providing us with 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—of 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 as people 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 you are 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 to develop our authentic leadership capacity. Along my own 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 oneself. It's that simple, and it's also that difficult.

I have dedicated my professional life to helping people and teams navigate the pathway of authentic leadership. *The Other Everest* is a milestone book in my career for business leaders and anyone committed to their own personal growth, providing a synopsis of what I have learned. It draws upon the concepts, insights, and stories from all of my previous books, supplemented with fresh learnings and perspectives. It is designed as a down-to-earth, usable guide to help you develop and improve your authentic leadership approach. While I hope you find inspiration and opportunities for valuable self-reflection, this book also features a wealth of practical insights and approaches for business leaders and others committed to shaping better organizations, building better teams, developing better people, and getting better results.

The teachings and examples in this book will help you learn the essentials of authentic leadership, including insights and tools to assess and strengthen your authentic leadership approach. It will also help you develop ways to strengthen your presence and influence, by tapping into deeper levels of learning and self-awareness beyond mere methodology. Finally, it will help you maximize your potential by understanding and learning how to master six core accountabilities as a leader.

Perhaps most important, *The Other Everest* recognizes that the pathway to authentic leadership is a journey, not a destination. This book will provide you with a framework and the tools for lifelong improvement that you can come back to time and again ... to help you reach continually greater summits of success.

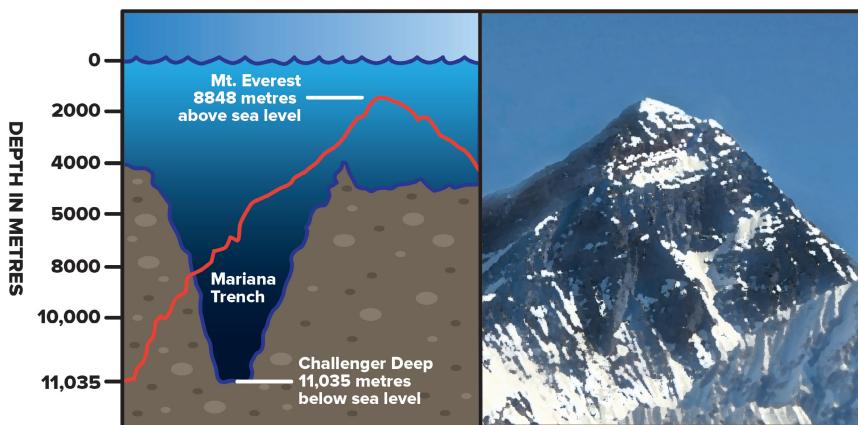
I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I enjoyed writing it, often reminiscing with warmth and gratitude on the many people, experiences, and learnings that have immeasurably enriched my own journey over the years.



— DAVID IRVINE

Dualities

*To reach our greatest outward potential,
we must first look deep within...*



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 8,848 meters above sea level.

Far lesser known, 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.

The deepest part of the trench, a small slot-shaped valley in its floor known as the Challenger Deep, reaches a depth of 11,034 meters below sea level. At this point, if Mount Everest were dropped into the trench, its peak would still be over 1.6 km underwater.

As people, we tend to look outward and upward to the achievements we hope to realize.

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

The journey down ... the journey within ... is equally important.

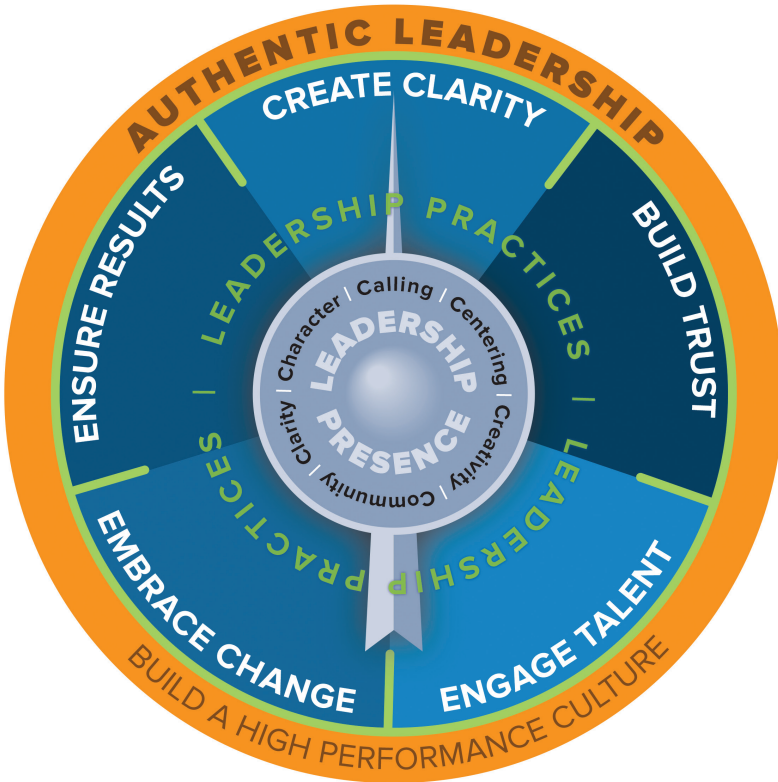
By looking within ourselves to identify our authentic values, passions, and strengths, we open the door to our greatest potential for meaning, fulfillment, and true success.

By diving down to the bottom, we learn the fundamental truths to help us reach our greatest heights.

Are you ready to take the journey?

Compass

*David's key concepts for navigating
the pathway to authentic leadership.*



The journey toward authentic leadership is a process that involves continually strengthening the core elements of leadership *presence* (center of the compass) and utilizing this as the foundation of leadership *practices* (middle layer).

Achieving alignment between presence and practices, while striving for continual improvement in all areas, is the key to advancing as an authentic leader and driving a high-performance organization (outer layer).

Core Elements of Authentic Leadership *Presence*

1. **Clarity:** Living in Alignment with Your Values
2. **Character:** The Courage to Face the Demands of Reality
3. **Centering:** Knowing Your Worth Away from Your Work
4. **Calling:** Where the World's Need Meets the Soul's Desire
5. **Creativity:** Awakenning the Artist Within
6. **Community:** Connecting with Your Tribe

Core Objectives of Authentic Leadership *Practices*

1. **Build Trust:** The Power of Assurance
2. **Create Clarity:** The Power of Focus
3. **Engage Talent:** The Power of Internal Alignment
4. **Embrace Change:** The Power of Possibility
5. **Ensure Results:** The Power of Accountability

PART I

Finding Your Pathway

Introduction

“Mountains are not stadiums where I satisfy my ambition to achieve, they are the cathedrals where I practice my religion.”

Anatoli Boukreev, mountaineer



I have enjoyed hiking and climbing in the mountains all my life. On this day, at the summit of Mount Yamnuska, in Banff National Park, about an hour's drive from my home in the Rocky Mountain foothills, I am looking out onto the broad horizon, reflecting on many things.

I am thinking about the adventurer and writer Allan Hobson. At the age of 29, he set out to realize his greatest childhood dream,

to reach the highest point in the world. It took him ten grueling self-guided and self-organized expeditions to high altitudes, including three expeditions to Mount Everest, to achieve his dream at age 39 by standing on the summit and taking in the view from the top of the world.

Allan had a parallel dream—to one day also reach the deepest point of the ocean. It's a remarkable fact that both the highest and lowest points on Earth are almost the same distance from sea level. No person has ever touched both. Allan wanted to be the first. At the age of 42, he was diagnosed with leukemia and found himself at a new bottom. Cancer became his new challenge and depth to explore.

As I sit on this mountain, reflecting further, I am thinking about my brother, who, a year ago died peacefully in his living room. A successful and dedicated rural physician and anesthetist, Hal had just flown to Vancouver, joining his colleagues across the country to receive the Canada Family Physician of the Year Award for the province of Alberta, when he had a seizure in his hotel room. A few days later, the diagnosis was delivered—a grade III anaplastic astrocytoma—an aggressive, inoperable tumor intersecting three lobes of his brain. The ensuing months led me through a journey with Hal he called his “Adventure with Astrocytoma”—providing a renewed awakening to the power of caring.

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. This time with Hal heightened my profound and precious realization that the life we have today won't last forever. And as such, paradoxically enables 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.

As I rest on the summit of this 2,200-meter limestone mountain, looking down the sheer 500-foot face, I think of my father. A picture

of him sits on my desk at home doing a one-handed handstand near this very spot, at the top of Mt. Yamnuska (as a young man he was a nationally ranked gymnast). He loved coming up here and hiking in the area over much of his youth. From here I can see the next valley over, where Hal and I used to climb ice falls with a pick and ropes. As I think of my family and the early experiences that shaped my life, my mother also comes to mind, as I reflect upon the sacrifices she made in her life for the sake of her children and the wisdom I gleaned from her. My thoughts also turn to my wife, Val, and my daughters and grandchildren who have been an endless source of enrichment and learning, fueling my development as a husband, father, grandfather, and human being.

The milestones of my professional life also enter my thoughts. Over a progression that began with marriage and family therapy, then shifting to providing counsel for leadership and organizational development, including speaking engagements to many hundreds of people every year, I have come to not only appreciate, but truly cherish the openness of thousands of individuals from all walks of life, who have shown the courage to share with me their struggles and desire for improvement.

My thoughts linger over one recent experience, representative of many hundreds I have encountered over the years, when an executive in one of my leadership development programs called to ask me if I would take him on as a coaching client. The presenting problem was that his 360-degree feedback came back with low scores in how he was relating to people. "I've always gotten by with an ability to deliver results, but interpersonal skills have never been my strength," he said.

"So, why work this now?" I asked. There were several moments of silence, followed by an awkward inarticulate expression of a man in some discomfort. "I suppose it started with my son," he responded, leading into the story of how his son ended up on a psychiatric ward of a local hospital after a suicide attempt. This man was certainly not the cause of his son's choices. However, the ordeal exposed a failure he had long ignored in relating to and truly being there for the people who mattered most in his life—including his own son and family. As he learned to understand and acknowledge this through subsequent

counseling with his son, this issue was rooted in the experience of growing up with a father who, though he built a successful business, was likewise absent and emotionally unavailable. “After working with my son, I have gained a new perspective on my life, and I want to change.”

Many catalysts drive our collective desire for positive change. Often, they begin as challenges. As we overcome them, they transform into fresh opportunities for enlightenment and personal growth. I have seen this time and again in the experiences of hundreds of leaders I have coached and counseled over the years. They may have endured the challenges of addiction, divorce, illness, a job or business failure, death of a close family member, or many other challenges both personal or professional.

By learning to go through the hard stuff, with courageous acceptance, honesty, curiosity, and support, these horrific experiences can be, in the long view, transformative. It is from here, in the bottom of the chaos, that we can discover the truth, wisdom, gifts, and love that are sustaining and indestructible. It is from our lowest points that we can emerge as better people and better leaders.

I know this also from my own experience. As I reflect on many formative experiences and defining moments that have shaped me into the person I now am, I consider the triumphs and the failures, the challenges and the suffering, the victories and the defeats. While the successes have been, without a doubt, life-changing, it is in the healing of the traumas and the wounds, the facing of the illnesses, the grieving in the losses, and ultimately the reconciliation of all these, that have ultimately made me who I am today.

Taking this time for respite and mindfulness here in the mountains, during an important time of reflection, renewed awakening and balance in my life. I am more aware than ever of a powerful common thread that ties together many of the stories I have both listened to and experienced throughout the years.

There is a universal truth I have come to see very clearly: our greatest capabilities lie not so much in being able to control the outcomes of our life, but rather to tap into the power of our own authenticity to help us meet challenges, become better people, and make a mark on the world that has meaning and impact.

For those of us committed to personal development, including strengthening our leadership capacity, dedicating ourselves to better understanding and developing this power of authenticity is essential work. While we must all find our own pathway, we can gain inspiration and insights from others, to provide us with guideposts along the journey.

The culmination of three decades of connecting and communicating with people from all walks of life has led me to the conclusion that there is a certain kind of inner work necessary in the development of a leader.

It starts with your life story ... knowing where you came from, who you are, and the experiences that have shaped you along the way. It continues with learning and reflection, taking time to understand and connect with your true nature, as your life is shaped by new experiences, connections, and opportunities.

Often our greatest periods of development come in the course of dealing with adversity—for example, facing up to ordeals such as a job loss, an illness, death of a loved one, a failure, or a business going under. I have come to learn that whatever the experience, when we face these challenges honestly, without blame or becoming a victim, we can use these moments as opportunities for positive transformation—to gain insight on what we truly value, and ultimately, help bring us closer to identifying and embracing our life's true work. When we ask ourselves, "How has this experience—along with my response to the experience—helped shape me into the person I am meant to be?" we come to see this value more clearly.

Through strengthening our connection with the innermost part of ourselves, we are able to connect with and lead in accord with our true nature. This journey into the depths of self-discovery, it turns out, isn't just a personal adventure. It's a transformational voyage that will amplify your impact in the world through a stronger leadership presence.

As I stand here on the mountain, I have never been more convinced that while many search externally for opportunities and answers in our lives, the "journey within" is the essential pathway we must embark upon if we are to truly reach our full potential. It is a

journey that provides us with the opportunity to see life from a new perspective and unlock the hidden potential that lies within each of us, at the source of our authentic selves.

As I look back on my own journey, and those of the people who have touched my life, I am struck with the profound awareness that all forms of achievement and leadership development are realized with much deeper impact when they come from a place of authenticity. Our tendency is often to look outward when striving to achieve more—to climb the metaphorical corporate ladder or mountain of success. But the moment we realize the most important journey is within is the moment our journey truly begins ...

Traveling Tips

While there is no one formula for developing authenticity, just as there is no one right way to lead, the intent of this book is to offer learnings and insights that can serve as guideposts to help you on the journey.

First, a few “traveling tips” are in order.

- **Respect and Trust Yourself.** Your journey to authentic leadership requires that it be uniquely your own. No one can prescribe the shape your leadership is meant to take. The paths to growth and expression of the authentic self are as unique and numerous as the human expression itself. Everyone is unique, and our needs change over time. You may not relate to some of my experiences, or you may be in a different life stage. Each of us has to do the work of discovering and awakening authenticity in our own unique way. The value of another’s experience is to share and shine a light, not to tell us how or whether to proceed. Relax and enjoy the learning process, even in the moments when you might be uncomfortable with the new insights. Take what fits and leave the rest.
- **Festina Lente.** This advice from the Roman emperor Augustus means “make haste slowly.” Be patient with yourself and those around you. Living life authentically requires perseverance and persistence. The journey of authenticity requires remembering that anything worth doing is worth doing slowly, and

that *direction* is more important than *velocity*. Aim for progress rather than perfection. Expect to succeed, but over the long haul. There are no quick fixes here. Be gentle with yourself. Small, steady, incremental steps are more important than huge leaps, especially when the leaps are followed by colossal crashes and disappointment.

- **Be a Student, but Not a Follower.** Socrates said, “Wisdom begins with wonder.” Choose curiosity over the familiarity of certainty. Give yourself permission to explore those areas that you find uncomfortable. It’s the terrain outside your comfort zone where growth lies. One of the qualities of authenticity is the willingness to be open and receptive. *Openness*, however, is not necessarily the same as *agreement*. Everything you read here needs to be weighed and debated in your own conscience, matched against your own experience and perceptions, then integrated with your own being before calling it your truth.
- **Sit While the Credits Roll.** Many people seem to be in a hurry to get out of a theater after a touching movie. Maybe it is the discomfort of being in another world and coming back to reality, or maybe they were not touched at all, or perhaps they just had an appointment to get to. Regardless, deepening your presence means allowing life to touch you as you sit with the credits and the subsequent stirrings. Give life the opportunity to move you and shape you. We all need to be moved before we get moving. If something stirs you or even irritates you as you read, sit with it. Write about it. Talk about it. Meditate about it. Resist the tendency to shift too quickly to your next experience. The journey to authentic living is through the heart. Learning to be still when discomfort surfaces can be a vital way to access your authentic self.
- **Make it Real by Reaching Out.** Find an ally, a trusted confidant, to share the insights that come to you. Get feedback from people who will help you see your blind spots and be honest with you. Be honest with yourself and with others as you share your reflections, reactions, and learnings. Authenticity is a lonely journey, but it can’t be done alone. Growth requires

a combination of self-awareness and risk-taking. Sharing your awareness with others as you practice new ways of being, beyond what is familiar to you, is what makes it real.

- **Become Attuned to Your Inner Compass.** Above all, follow the mantra: “To thine own self be true.” The more honest and aligned you are with your true self, that you will come to know more deeply in this book, your essential self that resides below the surface of the impulse of immediate emotions, the more you will become attuned to your ‘inner compass’ that without fail, will point in the direction you are meant to follow. Your inner self—your true nature—is what holds all the secrets to making your journey to develop authentic leadership a positive and successful one. With this compass as your guide ... let the adventure begin!