

YOUR LEADERSHIP

# EDGE

LEAD ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

ED O'MALLEY  
AMANDA CEBULA

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CHAPTER 9  
MANAGE SELF

# *Choose Among Competing Values*

Leadership is a clash of values. Not just between what you value and what I value. Leadership is a clash of your own values. Leadership is about elevating one thing we care about over something else we also value.

**What are values? And what does  
it look like when they compete?**

Ask someone their values, and they will likely say such things as: family, faith, community, freedom, achievement, courage, hope, education, loyalty and love. These values are personal and bring positive feelings. Walk into a company and you might see their corporate values on the wall. Things such as teamwork, customer satisfaction, innovation, etc. Personally and professionally, these feel-good, positive ideas get named “core values.” But simply proclaiming core values does not make them so.



*Your actual  
core values  
are revealed  
in your behavior.*

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

- ▶ An organization that lists “innovation” as a core value but doesn’t do anything to encourage new ideas values innovation in name only.
- ▶ The founder of a technology company who says he values creativity and input, but his lack of support for projects initiated by designers other than himself, and his inability to share airtime at staff meetings, tells a different story.

A real clue is what gets corporate support. For instance, does the sales staff always get the best training and perks? If so, the organization clearly values sales over other things. If you want to figure out what you value, look at your calendar, your checkbook and the people you spend time with. The same is true for a company, organization or community.

As you attempt to make progress on your challenge, you may need to negotiate a clash of values.

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**WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT  
CHOOSING AMONG COMPETING VALUES?**

Watch the movie or musical “Les Miserables.”  
Pay close attention to the value conflicts Marius  
considers in the songs “A Heart Full of Love,”  
“One Day More” and “Empty Chairs and Empty Tables.”

## HERE ARE EXAMPLES OF WHAT THAT NEGOTIATION LOOKS LIKE.

- ▶ A corporate team hasn't met its goals for the year. The organization values both accountability and harmony. The performances of a few members are holding the team back. Raising that issue and mobilizing people to address it will generate conflict. *Leadership in this situation means choosing accountability over harmony.*
- ▶ A middle manager's unit is stuck in a rut. The manager values everyone playing by the same set of rules but also values creativity and ingenuity. One of her subordinates is a creative genius but stretches the manager's patience by bending rules and norms. The subordinate comes in late and leaves the office for a coffee shop, claiming she works better there than in a cube. *Leadership in this situation may be about choosing creativity over rules.*
- ▶ A college student is struggling to find a job after graduation. Her father feels he needs to help by calling colleagues and friends and lining up interviews. But he also values her independence and ability to make her own way. *Leadership here might mean choosing to value independence over employment.*

How will you lead if you avoid conflict instead of raise the heat?

How will you lead if you avoid blame instead of explore tough interpretations?

How will you lead if you don't do anything that could fail instead of act experimentally?

### Get Off Autopilot and Choose

Once, during a seminar, a man told Ed he cared about what his colleagues were discussing (they had been talking about the company's biggest challenges) but he was swamped and just didn't have time to work on those issues. Ed's response: "We have all the time in the world for the things we value most. It looks like you really don't value those things your colleagues are talking about. You would find time to work on them if you did."

# *Lessons from History*

## THE SUBMISSION OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN TIANANMEN SQUARE

Chinese university students, at significant personal risk, organized pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989. They occupied the square for seven weeks, peacefully protesting the authoritarian practices of the Chinese Communist Party and demanding reform.

As the days went on, most believed it was only a matter of time before the Chinese military would end the demonstration. Martial law was eventually declared and thousands of troops mobilized. All media were removed as troops began to roll into the square. An exact death toll is not known, but it is believed several hundred students were killed.

Chinese students faced brutality and death, choosing to elevate democracy and civil rights over personal safety.

The man was taken aback. He wasn't consciously choosing to not make progress on those important challenges. Rather, he was on autopilot. Choosing among competing values is the opposite of autopilot. It's one reason leadership is so rare.

Consciously choosing one value over another doesn't necessarily feel good. But it is necessary if you want to mobilize others to tackle tough challenges. Exercising leadership requires a level of awareness — some call it “mindfulness” — not typical of the average person. But you can develop this awareness through practice.

The bottom line is this: You are in charge of your own values and can influence the organization's values. But this only happens if you are aware of what they really are. Get off autopilot and lead.

### How can we be more conscious of the values informing our choices?

- ▶ **Reflect in writing.** Explore the values underlying our behaviors and actions.
- ▶ **Ask yourself, “Why do I think I did what I just did? What value was behind it?”** For example, if you just curtly ended a conversation with a colleague, was it because you (1) value another project more, (2) don't ever value that person's contributions, or (3) are stressed about something else in your life.
- ▶ **For 10 days, log how you spend your time.** Record hours spent sleeping, working on different projects, enjoying family, exercising, etc. Then ask a friend or colleague to look at it and, just based on the data in the log, articulate what you value.
- ▶ **Ask someone who works with you regularly to list your values (good, bad and indifferent) based on the way you interact with others.**



## **How do we choose among competing values when exercising leadership?**

- ▶ **Consciously!** Choose which values to elevate and which to sacrifice.
- ▶ **Articulate the values at play in a given leadership challenge.** Then imagine what life would be like if you had to sacrifice one or the other. Are the losses acceptable? Thoroughly imagining the loss may make it easier to stomach.
- ▶ **Once in a while, accept that your values may be in conflict.** Awareness is everything.
- ▶ **Embrace your contradictions.** Don't fool yourself. You value noble things such as faith and family, yes. And your behavior suggests you value other things too. Don't fight it. Don't judge.



I really want to go far in my company. My assigned mentor tells me the way to do that is to “work hard, keep my head down and don’t rock the boat.” But the boat needs to be rocked. We aren’t creating the best products, and I’m afraid sooner or later our customers will figure that out and go elsewhere. How do I “go far” and “rock the boat”?

- WASHINGTON (A WANT-TO-BE BOAT-ROCKER)

Dear Washington,

You seem to value your career prospects on one hand and what’s best for the customer and by extension the company on the other. Those values are in conflict. Recognizing that clash is the first step. You’ll notice that one of the values is about you and the other is about something bigger than you. Human beings tend to elevate themselves over the greater whole.

Leadership happens when you do the opposite.

Our advice? Start small. Don’t write a manifesto. Start testing all the assumptions embedded in the “keep your head down and don’t rock the boat” mantra. Is it folklore or truth? Float a nonthreatening idea for improvement by your manager and gauge the reaction. Collect and, again in a nonthreatening way, share data that tell the story about the company’s declining quality.

Those around you might think you are nuts. But our experience is that the one who has the best interest of the organization in mind — even over their own best interests — usually is rewarded in the long run.

Your company needs you to exercise leadership!

Onward!

P.S. Regarding the “work hard” part of your mentor’s mantra: That sounds right as long as it is within reason. Read the Take Care of Yourself section of this book.