

RICHARD WINTERS

**YOU'RE
THE
LEADER**

NOW WHAT?

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INTRODUCTION

Your colleagues are seated around the table, and all eyes are on you as you enter the conference room.

You face a complex challenge, and everyone has a different view of the key factors as well as how to proceed. Nevertheless, it's up to you to move things forward. How you make this decision will affect the way you and your colleagues work together, the success of your organization, and potentially whether you succeed or fail as a leader.

You take your seat and begin, projecting confidence and authority as you address the assembled team.

“Thank you for coming, everyone. We have a big challenge before us and limited time to discuss our options. I'd like to hear from everyone here. What do you think we should do?”

With that, the discussion begins to circle the table, with each person giving their best advice. Several of your colleagues make stirring, eloquent statements about the problem as they see it and their solution of choice. You make sure to keep your eyes on each speaker, nodding and acknowledging each contribution.

Then, finally, the meeting circles back to you. You pause for a moment, and say, “Thank you all for sharing your thoughts. I appreciate your experience, your different perspectives, and your insights. However, after careful consideration, I've come to the conclusion that you're all incorrect. We will proceed with my plan.”¹

You Are Not Alone

If this process for decision-making sounds familiar, rest assured, you're not alone. Perhaps you have made decisions like this. Perhaps you were a participant in a meeting where you volunteered your opinion, and your ideas were summarily shot down.

Leadership plays out this way every day, in every industry, in teams and organizations of every size. No matter what the problem at hand may be, the solution is usually driven by *fiat*—the decision and orders of the leader—or at most by a consensus of only a few.

A top-down process for decision-making by edict may work fine in predictable situations or during times of crisis. But when it comes to making strategic decisions in complex and unpredictable environments, the all-too-familiar method of reflexive decision-making breaks down and delivers poor results. Our expertise and our power to decide get in the way of optimal outcomes. This occurs not only when we lead groups of people, but also when we have one-to-one conversations with colleagues.

Complex Challenges

Think of the complex challenges you face:

- Perhaps you are the product manager. The technology team and the marketing team disagree on the key features for a new and innovative product. This project is vital to the future success of your organization. How do you bring the two sides together to establish a collaborative workflow that sets the strategy, road map, and feature definitions for the product?
- Perhaps you are the chief executive officer of a technology startup. Your colleagues look to you for advice and guidance

about promotion, burnout, career opportunities, disruptive interactions with colleagues, and a litany of other complex personal and organizational challenges. How do you approach your colleagues during these one-to-one conversations to help them achieve their best?

- Perhaps you are the chief medical officer of a hospital. An influential physician approaches you in the hallway to confide that the cardiology group is considering leaving the hospital to work with the competition unless a new cardiac catheterization suite is built. Meanwhile, the existing suites are underutilized, and procedures aren't starting on time. How do you work with the cardiology group to strengthen the partnership and consider mutually beneficial options?
- Perhaps you are the incoming chair of an academic department. While traditional aspects of the department are thriving, new technology and changing environments threaten future success. How do you respect the current power structures and processes, yet move forward with bold and forward thinking?
- Perhaps you are a talented and busy executive sitting in yet another meeting, discussing important issues, though nothing ever seems to change. You feel burned out. How do you push for transformation?

Each strategic challenge involves different perspectives, volatile environments with high stakes, dynamic and ambiguous information, and unpredictable outcomes. These situations are complex. During these times your checklists are inadequate, and your organization will not fly with the smooth precision and predictable steps of an aircraft. These are times when your expertise and best practices are insufficient, and the problem to be solved is a challenge to even define.

What This Book Offers

Whether you are the boss and you call all the shots, a servant leader who empowers others to decide, or an individual without a “title” seeking to make a difference as you sit in yet another meeting, this book will provide you specific tactics to improve your effectiveness in one-to-one conversations and as you lead large teams and organizations.

You will learn the specific techniques I use when coaching leaders and facilitating teams at Mayo Clinic.² You will draw on the collective wisdom of colleagues, develop leaders, and achieve results. You will learn to lead in a way that decreases burnout, promotes individual well-being, and sparks engagement.

My hope is that this book both entertains you and helps you achieve results. I will introduce you to leadership thinkers, and I will share mistakes I've made and lessons learned while coaching effective leaders and facilitating effective teams.

Read this book through from start to finish, or pick it up to find a tactic or a process you can use as you face the specific challenges of the moment. The chapters of this book will give you frameworks to guide you and your colleagues through complex challenges. They will prompt you to action.

The first half of the book provides tactics for effective leadership, while the second half lays out the framework for addressing complex situations, as follows:

Part One: Effective Leadership Tactics

1. **Recognize the Limits of Your Expertise.** You are a decision-making machine. As you move throughout your day, you make quick decisions. This is both a feature and a

bug. We think of leaders as deciders who know what to do. But our best leaders recognize when they need to step outside their immediate perspectives to question their initial instincts. These leaders use a deliberate decision-making process to overcome the limitations of expert analysis.

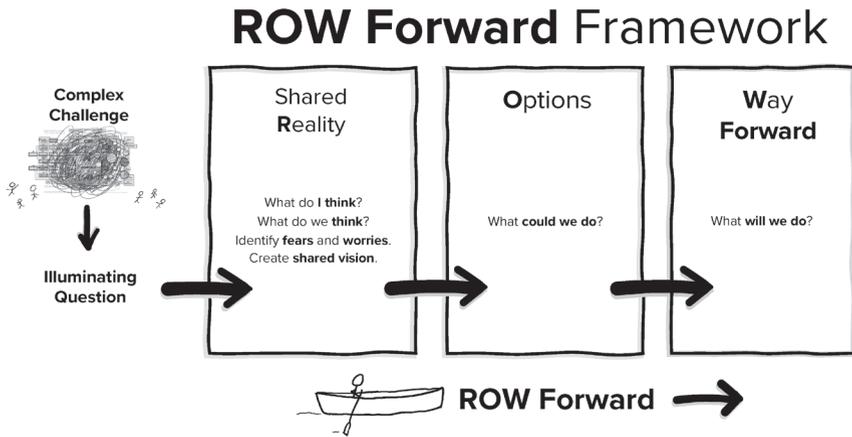
2. **Map Your Decisions.** Your success as a leader depends on developing individual and organizational strategies that recognize and adapt to complexity. Decisions fall into one of five domains: clear, complicated, complex, chaotic, and confused. You will learn to quickly identify and tailor your decision-making process to the decision domain you're operating in.
3. **Step Up to the Balcony.** Each of us has blind spots in our perspective of the world. We are trapped within the biases of our own stories, our need to be right, our seeking of agreement, our sense of control, and our ego. You will learn how to "step off the dance floor" away from your reflexive reactions and "step up to the balcony" to broaden your perspective and make better, more informed decisions.
4. **Understand Burnout and Well-Being.** You will develop an understanding of the specific drivers of burnout and recognize burnout's negative effects on both the personal and professional lives of colleagues. You will learn specific individual, interpersonal, and organizational actions you can take to recognize and improve the Six Dimensions of Psychological Well-Being.
5. **Amplify Engagement.** There are eight specific leadership behaviors proven to decrease burnout and increase

satisfaction in the workplace. You will learn specific behaviors—the DRIVERS of engagement—to more effectively develop, recognize, inform, value, engage, respect, and supervise colleagues. You will learn how to model the specific values-based behaviors that build organizational culture.

- 6. Lead During One-to-One Conversations.** Your colleagues are independent thinkers. During one-to-one conversations, effective leaders put aside their expertise. They focus on promoting the organization's strategy and on listening, understanding, and helping colleagues develop their own perspectives and solutions. You will learn the “five hats”—the different approaches of teacher, mentor, coach, supervisor, and sponsor. You will gain the conversational tactics that help colleagues develop the skills, behaviors, and reasoning needed for success. You will learn how to dynamically change your conversational approach to meet the needs of colleagues in the moment.

Part Two: Lead in Complex Situations

- 1. ROW Forward.** This framework addresses complex challenges. You work with colleagues to develop a shared **reality** and vision, and then to generate multiple **options** for how to proceed; and then you lead the **way forward**. You may apply the ROW Forward framework in a matter of minutes or hours, or to facilitate multi-day retreats.
- 2. Document Your Perspectives.** Effective leaders carve out time and space for uninterrupted thinking about complex challenges. They clarify their thinking and avoid proceeding



impulsively. You will learn a specific six-step process of recognizing and considering complex challenges.

3. **Create a Shared Reality.** Effective leaders bring colleagues together to help them look around blind spots. They tap into the experience of those inside and outside of the room as they seek to build collective wisdom. You will learn to use a predictable process to bring the diverse and at times contentious perspectives of colleagues together in a manner that adapts to the context, intensity, and time frame of your challenging decisions.
4. **Identify Fears and Worries.** You and each of your colleagues have fears and worries about what might occur as you face a complex challenge. Effective leaders shine light on these worries and bring them to the forefront of decision-making. They know that unacknowledged fears undermine efforts.
5. **Create a Shared Vision.** The mission and values of organizations are frequently stated but often disregarded or forgotten. Effective leaders authentically infuse the mission

and values of their organization into their decision-making. You will learn a process to clarify intention and mitigate perceived risks as you authentically energize and align your colleagues toward a common purpose.

6. **Generate Multiple Options.** After creating shared reality and vision, effective leaders and their colleagues brainstorm multiple options for how they might respond to their complex challenges. You will learn how to choose the best options for ways to move forward. You will also recognize how to predict and defuse the challenging situations that arise when individuals disagree, attempt to block forward movement, or when the decision is not unanimous.
7. **Champion the Way Forward.** The most dangerous moment in the decision-making process happens when everyone walks out of the room and heads back to their routine. Will the decision survive? You will learn several specific practices to ensure that tasks are completed, key learning is re-incorporated back into the decision-making process, and insights are channeled to create further success for yourself and your team in the evolving complex environment.
8. **Now What?** You will convert ideas to action as you identify specific steps you will take to become a more effective leader.

A Caveat

We need leaders who are independent thinkers. There are times when a leader needs to make decisions despite the perspectives of colleagues. In these situations, a group's common sense may lack

vision. A fear of the unknown may prevent a team from finding the fortitude needed to adapt to the changing environment. An effective leader provides the strength and the determination to nudge colleagues through the discomfort of change.

Whether you are a leader who prefers to make the final decision, or you favor collective decision-making, my goal is to help you figure out how to effectively leverage the different perspectives of your colleagues—to look behind your own blind spots—as you decide.

Why Lead?

This book is meant to be more than a collection of steps or boxes to check off in the leadership process. Instead, as you move through the pages, think not just about *how* to lead, but also *why* you lead.

Lead to align with a purpose. Lead to engage in a mission. Lead to bring your values to fruition. Seek to increase engagement and the success of those around you. You have an opportunity to improve the lives of your colleagues, your organization, and the people you serve.

Change and challenge are constant. Whether you face a corporate team, a group of investors, or your customers, a structured approach will help you to help them. Together you'll find the way forward and you will be the leader your team needs in the moment.

This book will guide you through those times when colleagues disagree, emotions run high, the environment is turbulent, and it's time to do something. It's for those times when you look at yourself in the mirror and you think, "You're the leader. Now what?"

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