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Derailed

THE SUMMARY

Thomas Nelson 2009

SECTION ONE: RUNNING OFF THE RAILS

Chapter 1: Derailed

All of us who work in organizations are the "engineers" of something, whether it is a team, a project, a department, or the mail room. Derailment in our jobs means we are off the rails and we cannot proceed in our present jobs, just as a derailed train cannot continue on its intended path. Whether it's business, law, medicine, ministry, transportation, education, consulting, the military, skilled trades, art, music, or anything else, we work according to some set of expectations or requirements. If we work for an organization, typically there are requirements about how many hours a week we work or that we complete the tasks given us by someone in authority. Even the most unstructured occupations still have tracks on which they run. An entrepreneur's boss is the customer. A failure to achieve the expected results in any work relationship can result in derailment.

Derailment and lack of success are different. Executives headed for derailment are often quite competent. They reach extraordinary heights in the corporate world through brilliance, hard work, strategic vision, and a track record of exceptional results. These individuals accomplish goals that exceed the capability of all but a talented few. To take the helm of an organization and routinely make decisions that impact many hundreds of thousands of shareholders, employees, customers, and vendors requires tremendous skill and confidence.

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Then something happens. The expectation falls short, and the plan to reach an intended destination goes awry or the expectation to fulfill perceived potential falls short. The assumed trajectory to move toward a high orbit more resembles one of those early rocket launches we see on the History Channel that start upward and quickly take a nosedive.

A governing board may fire a CEO for any number of reasons, but their required departure from the helm of the organization remains unarguable. Face-saving reasons for the leader's departure may be given (such as "Joe wants to spend more time with his family"), but in the inner sanctum of the boardroom where these decisions are made, the initiative of the governing body chooses to remove the person from their role.

Let me be clear that derailment resulting from fraudulent behavior of a leader is not the subject of this book. What ultimately caused the derailment of many individuals was a failure of character. The big lesson is that no matter how brilliant, charming, strategic, or commanding in presence a leader is, the consequences of a failed character are extraordinarily disabling and will bring down even the strongest among us. Similarly, if our character is inadequate, eventually we will miss the warning signals and slam into a parked freight train.

Some management experts emphasize the building and leveraging of our strengths in order to bring out the best in our capabilities at work. Peter Drucker wisely wrote, "Build on your strengths to the point that your weaknesses become irrelevant." While uplifting, such a perspective fails to fully address three realities.

First, the unvarnished truth is that some weaknesses are so disabling, they can disqualify us and their impact is so significant that they exclude us from participation in leadership. We must address these besetting weaknesses.

Second, a given strength can quickly and easily become a weakness. Some attributes serve an individual well at a lower level of an organization, but then become weaknesses when his or her responsibility spans the enterprises highest levels. Similarly, an overused strength can become a weakness.

Third, excessive stress compromises the performance of even the most resilient and sometimes drives us to give full expression to a flaw, which normally stays nice and tidy in the back rooms of our personalities.

You may be thinking that while the misfortunes of famous leaders provide great entertainment, it's not that relevant to you; you are not a CEO and don't even have any aspirations to be a senior leader in your organization. Regardless of our positions in an organization or what stage or level our careers, derailment can happen to all of us. It's just not as newsworthy when it happens to someone other

than the top dog. Most members of organizations who derail get off the tracks long before they reach the corner office on the top floor.

Note: This section contain a series of short biographies of corporate CEOs who have been derailed by personal choices, leadership styles, or character flaws. Although interesting, they do not add to the value of this summary.

SECTION THREE: **DERAILMENT IN SLOW MOTION**

Derailment is a Process

Derailment occurs in a predictable progression that those who derail seem to follow. Derailed leaders progress through five stages as they head toward their demise. Perhaps there's hope for us to learn about these escalating stages of derailment and stay on track.

Stage I—A Failure of Self-/Other-Awareness. Being self-aware gives us insight into our own desires, hopes, motives, feelings, and moods. Derailed leaders seem to often manifest a lack of self-awareness, as though they view themselves through a foggy mirror. Self-awareness is a prerequisite for managing ourselves well.

Derailed leaders also seem to lack awareness of and concern for others. This type of insight informs us as to the needs, desires, hopes, and moods of others that we might respond appropriately. It involves empathy, consideration, and general attentiveness to the interests of others. Derailed leaders seem oblivious to the impact of their behavior on others and of the resulting failure to build a strong, aligned team. They also fail to see themselves as others do and to take into account that others will relate to them on the basis of those perceptions. This type of interpersonal calibration requires understanding and humility.

Stage II—Hubris: Pride Before the Fall. As kids we didn't like the know-it-alls in our classrooms, and we don't like them in the workplace either. Hubris, or extreme arrogance, can be seen in the leader who believes he or she is the epicenter of an organizations success.

Reality dictates that no matter how bright and capable a leader might be, the work of the organization must be accomplished by trusted colleagues. A leader's inference that he or she is primarily responsible for the organization's success demonstrates blatant hubris. This very attitude suggests that the leader feels he is above everyone else and that he believes other people have less value.

Stage III—Missed Early Warning Signals. Otherwise talented leaders miss the warning signals represented by subtle but persistent feedback about their own inner states, others' diminishing

confidence in them, or the wrong direction in which they are leading the company. Early warning signals should have jarred their attention to avoid the danger ahead. Instead, leaders barrel ahead toward the inevitable crash. Board members, colleagues, and even the media provided signals that should have alerted them to hit the brakes before it was too late. They simply did not heed the warnings.

Stage IV—Rationalizing. In Stage III the leader ignored the feedback. In Stage IV the leader twists data to fit his view of the world. In an attempt to maintain his psychological equilibrium, the derailing leader believes he is right and must stay the course, despite many warning signals to the contrary. While a salvage operation might still be possible, the leader focuses solely on personal preservation. She deflects blame, denies responsibility, accuses others of jealousy or ambition—anything to avoid accepting personal responsibility. She assumes the role of victim. In this frame of mind, leaders can do some very stupid things.

Stage V—Derailment. The emissary comes to the leader's office and says, "I'm sorry… it's over. We all had high hopes for you here, but we need to help you leave in a way that preserves the company and maintains your dignity." This is the stage we read and hear about in the business media. We count the bodies and try to clean up the wreckage.

Probably on a less grand scale, we will face the same challenges. We do not have to be one of those slow motion train wrecks! We may never be in this situation involving cataclysmic meetings with boards or the loss of billions of dollars of stockholder value, but every day we will experience the need to stay on track.

SECTION FOUR: STAYING ON THE RAILS

What's Your Character Quotient?

Historically, psychologists labeled individuals with socially maladaptive behaviors as "character disordered." Their problems resulted from a defect in their "character." We all have a few loose nuts and bolts in our psyches, but some can be quite serious. Life is full to the brim with opportunities for good or evil—our character determines which way we go. While we are not discussing behavior in our jobs that sends us to jail, actions that marginalize us or get us fired emanate from the same well of character. We always become who we are. It may take time or stress or illness, but what's inside us tends to come out. Our character serves as the wellspring from which our behavior emerges.

It's not unusual for today's leaders to be charismatic and to have a penchant for celebrity. Many receive media training which tells them how to look good and sound good on the cable business shows. It's perfectly appropriate for a leader to learn to communicate effectively in the media, but character must outweigh charisma. Character is not about personal charm and appeal. Sound character works like a boat's ballast, so that when we encounter turbulence, we don't keel over and take on water. If we are top heavy and place more emphasis on having a vivacious personality,

dressing for success, or having a slick presentation than on having substance, we are eventually going to sink.

Character is not about intelligence. As David Gergen has pointed out, if intelligence and character were the same, Presidents Nixon and Clinton would have been two of the best. Neither controlled their passions. How does character guide a leader's behavior? As Os Guinness states so well: "Externally, character provides the point of trust that links leaders with followers. Internally, character is the part-gyroscope, part-brake that provides the leader's deepest source of bearings and strongest source of restraint. In many instances the first prompting to do well and the last barrier against doing wrong are the same—character."

A leader's character generally is revealed three ways.

Test #1: Does the leader have a strong moral / ethical guidance system that functions well in ambiguous situations? Most of us fail to see that we face tests of integrity in the work setting every day. We dwell in the "shadow lands," and the right decision may not be obvious in the dim light. Many choices presented to us in the shadow land are subtle, thus the right or wrong action is not immediately clear. These muted or even distorted choices appeal to some felt need, but often they are accompanied by an inner reservation that suggests this may not be a good choice. It just "seems wrong." Effective leaders learn to pay attention to and heed these subtle signals. Getting counsel from a trusted adviser often puts more light on the question.

Test #2: Does the leader make decisions just for expediency? Expediency by its very nature places performance over principle. Usually driven by self-interest, leaders who go for the expedient action rather than the right one show their overall lack of concern for others and a failure to observe even basic moral / ethical standards. An expedient act often compromises character.

Test #3: Does the leader handle adversity with grace? I have always liked Anthony Hopkins's line near the end of the movie *The Edge*, where he says, "We are all put to the test, but it never comes in the form or the point we would prefer, does it?" I don't know anyone who plans their adversity as it is not something we control. Perhaps that's why adversity is good for character. Its apparent randomness purifies our perspectives and reminds us of our humanity, meaning that our control is actually quite limited. Those who are trained by it are often better for it. Just as Hopkins becomes more resilient throughout the film, they are more resilient, better able to take on more difficult challenges and become more respectful of others.

The Real Deal

A failure at authenticity frequently contributes to derailment. The heart of the problem is a failure to let others see who we really are. Not engaging with others in a meaningful way is always a tip-off. When a leader is not out in contact with the ordinary folks, it conveys the "Wizard of Oz

Syndrome." There's some guy behind a screen who speaks with a loud thunderous voice, trying to control our lives. We know he's just an ordinary person trying to appear as someone he's not.

We all know people who do not seem authentic, and we have likely worked for some of them. Their manner or their inconsistency in how they acted with different people makes us a bit queasy. Such people, when they are talented, rise rapidly in organizations. They have great individual careers, but their damaged relationships with their subordinates inevitably undermine their leadership.

When we see people who actually are who they "appear" to be, we call them authentic. There's an alignment between the inner person and the outer person… between their beliefs, values, and behavior. "Authenticity" most often refers to things, like documents or paintings, implying that these objects are genuine, not counterfeit. Our trust in and value of an object ties directly to its authenticity or genuineness.

We use this same word to describe people. We trust someone who is authentic and distrust someone who has a lack of genuineness. Actually, the Greek origin of authenticity means "acting on one's own authority—entitled to acceptance as factual." It has been my observation that effective individuals frequently venture "self-authored" ideas, which reflect a person's true beliefs and convictions. I may disagree with their idea, but my respect and trust of the person rises when I feel I'm dealing with someone who is real, open, direct, trustworthy, and genuine.

Sometimes we hear someone described as an "empty suit." We wonder if that person has any real convictions. David Gergen wrote about how people feel about leaders who lack authenticity. He observes, "They are not sure they know exactly who is standing behind the public mask—some ask if he knows himself—and they become distrustful."

James Kouzes and Barry Posner's research for their book *Credibility* determined that an executive's credibility is the cornerstone of effectiveness. Our credibility results directly from our authenticity! It is the character dimension that affirms that we are a real person and that what you see is what you get. We become credible when we are authentic. We are taken seriously. We are viewed as trustworthy.

Here are some important aspects of being authentic that you can work on:

1. Get comfortable in your own skin—find out what you like about yourself.

2. Never, ever be arrogant.

3. Tell the truth.

4. Treat others with respect.

5. Build rapport with others by asking them questions about themselves, and then listen attentively.

6. Use self-deprecating humor. It personalizes you to others and makes you real.

7. Share your true beliefs and convictions with those you trust.

Lack of authenticity in any form has a high probability of derailing a career. Our credibility depends on developing and expressing clear beliefs and convictions.

Get A Hold of Yourself!

Effective self-management is heavily dependent upon good self- and other-awareness. A lack of self- and other-awareness is a common denominator among those who derail. The ability to manage ourselves and to manage our relationships is heavily dependent upon our perceptiveness of what's going on within us and with others. Self and other-awareness employs the ability to discern our own thoughts and feelings as well as the thoughts and feelings of others. Those who derail seem to lack this ability to discern.

Self-aware individuals pay attention to their emotions without being ruled by them. They observe the responses of others and are able to adjust their behavior to make their interaction more effective. They understand how to build on their strengths and observe their limits. They use feedback as a corrective mechanism.

Self-aware leaders reflect often on how they are doing and are more inclined to work in harmony with their values and priorities. Decisions are more thoughtful and well intentioned. Their direction is clear and founded on clear rationale. They draw this direction from the deep well of personal reflection. Those who derail tend to be unreflective, imperceptive, undisciplined, and impulsive.

Between self- and other-awareness and self-management, the one critical quality that intervenes is good judgment. Most derailments are self-inflicted and precipitated by poor judgment. At the root of all Emotional Intelligence (EQ) problems, judgment looms large for all of us trying to accomplish something of substance with our lives. Essentially, judgment accomplishes three things for us.

First, it helps us solve complex problems. Judgment helps us integrate knowledge, experience, intuition, and input from others to solve problems resistant to solution. Your baby may be on the other side, but don't jump into a raging stream if you can't swim!

Second, judgment performs an important regulatory role in our lives. How often have we wished we hadn't said something in a meeting? We all wish we could reel back in things we've said impulsively. Judgment helps us check strong emotions at the door, rein in impulsive urges, and keep our composure under stress. It helps us to anticipate consequences and to take precautions

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to avoid unintended consequences. Judgment provides us with tolerance for ambiguity, which so often accompanies corporate life. It has a calming effect when we're faced with daunting, seemingly unsolvable problems.

Third, judgment makes us more discerning in our decisions. Discernment makes us perceptive so that we're able to cut through the haze and see ourselves, others, and situations more clearly.

There is some really good news about this topic. Self- and other-awareness, judgment, and self-management can be developed. Routinely, I see people develop these qualities and become more effective at relating to others, monitoring themselves, and controlling errant emotions. To get better at self-management, here is some wiring that I've found helps:

1. Grow in self-awareness by proactively seeking feedback from multiple sources.

2. Find a wise and trusted advisor to help you interpret various work experiences and what you hear from others.

3. Be receptive to information about areas in which you are less than stellar.

4. Fine-tune your ability to connect with others—smiling, eye contact, attentiveness, asking good questions.

5. Work on empathy—focus on what others are telling you about their priorities and needs.

6. Conduct a 360-degree feedback exercise. Talk to your human resources representative about how to participate in this powerful feedback process.

7. Identify the circumstances under which you are likely to lose your composure—develop the early warning systems. Be diligent to anticipate and "get grounded" before you enter potentially problematic situations.

8. Wait longer to say something in meetings—write it down and test it for appropriateness before you say it.

The Star of Your Own Show

What place does humility have in the workplace, and what are the consequences of its absence? Author Jim Collins shocked the business world when his research surfaced that if you look at purely financial metrics, the most spectacularly successful leaders possess an odd combination of personal traits—extreme personal humility and intense professional will.

Collins further explained that these great leaders channel their ambition toward building their organization rather than personal aggrandizement. Individuals who knew the leaders described in Collins's research used words like "quiet, humble, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, understated, did not believe their own clippings." Leaders who had the most dramatic corporate performance possessed these qualities, along with a fanatical need to achieve results.

Conversely, the absence of humility often leads to derailment. Patrick Gelsinger, senior vice president of the Intel Corporation, indicated that "lack of humility is the big derailment issue." Michael Volkema, chairman of the board and former chief executive officer of Herman Miller, pointed out that lack of humility often manifests itself in the form of too much self-interest. Most work in the organization is done by teams, and he indicated that when someone takes excess credit, he will "get cut out from the herd pretty fast."

Humility is not about being self-deprecating or arrogant. It's about self-forgetfulness, remembering that in our jobs we're seeking to serve others. All jobs have a "That's why I'm here" factor. The "why" is usually to serve a customer or to provide information or resources to someone who serves a customer. Humility is about an accurate self-assessment. "My job is important, and I need to do it well," but it's also the freedom to not inflate who you are or what you are doing.

When I speak to groups of CEOs, I often ask them a question: "Who do you think is more powerful… you or the people in your organization?" First, it's very quiet, followed by a ripple of nervous energy. Finally, a brave soul or two say, "The people."

Whether a CEO is willing to admit it, there is a tremendous interdependence between a leader and the members of the organization being led. A leader will not be successful without the alignment and support of those people doing the work of the organization. In a way, it's quite humbling, because it seems inconsistent with the power a CEO expects to wield. It's like the old axiom, "If the leader didn't come to work today, everything would probably still get done; if the people didn't come to work today, nothing would get done."

Arrogance is presumptuousness, overbearing pride, and an unwarranted, exalted sense of self-importance. Arthur Levitt Jr. wrote that today investor communities are looking for CEOs "who are more likely to fly under the radar, eschewing personal acclaim in favor of team-building and corporate success." James Lindemann said that arrogance is most often seen in the form of self-promotion and entitlement. Most derailed executives believed "a particular job was owed to them."

Lest we think that arrogance is a foible only in profit-driven business settings, it has nothing to do with the level at which we work in an organization or the nature of the work we do. Some of the most humble individuals I know serve in nonprofit organizations, but there are others in religious or charitable groups who epitomize hubris and presumption.

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When I interviewed Mike Volkema, in connection with this book, I asked him how he spotted lack of humility early in a young executive's career. He said: "They are really out for themselves and don't have the best interests of the group or organization in mind. So it shows up in little things. It's not as overt as self-promotion, but their unwillingness to sacrifice on behalf of the team just demonstrates itself in a number of ways. The group quickly picks up on it and says this is all about you."

Lack of humility can be lethal to our careers. The following list will help you consider how to develop this vital quality:

1. Have an honest conversation with yourself about your own attitudes toward others. Do you feel smarter, more capable, or, in general, superior?

2. Be aware of self-promotion. Very few tasks are accomplished by individuals. We're highly interdependent in the modern organization.

3. Develop an attitude of gratitude by making a practice of recognizing others for their accomplishments.

4. Become more open to others and convey an interest in their opinions. Listen to what they have to say.

5. Be aware of how you may be perceived as aloof or withdrawn.

6. Get familiar with any non-verbal signals that you may be sending to others. For example, when we blow through pursed lips and tilt our heads sideways while casting our eyes upward, it's a powerful and dismissive gesture. Watch yourself in the mirror.

7. Ask a trusted advisor who's seen you in meetings or other interactions how you come across.

8. Try to develop an inner calibration for when self-confidence crosses over to arrogance. Pay attention to those signals.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the virtue of humility. When I speak to MBA classes at business schools, I often caution students about arrogance. Many of these very bright, competent young men and women feel that their new-found learning compels them to be strategically brilliant and full of corporate wisdom when they complete their degrees and begin their new jobs. Many will make huge contributions to their respective organizations, but arrogance and dismissiveness of those with less academic training will quickly mollify the value they bring. Humble competence is the fast track to the best executive suites.

An Amazing Ordinary Hero

Courage emanates from our resolute beliefs and core convictions. It follows that when we are not grounded at some foundational level in our beliefs and convictions, we will not be courageous. Absent any real beliefs and convictions, and the courage that rests on them, we become tentative, or worse, expedient. We then want to just get along and line up with the prevailing opinion.

Convictions reflect what we are convinced is true and noble. The problem is that some convictions address topics that do not rise to the level of meaningful importance. People getting really worked up about which beer is better always strike me as a bit superficial. A courageous act only occurs when we are convinced that something is true and truly important, rather than simply a preference.

Courage never exists in a vacuum. It results from our internalized beliefs and convictions about how our lives should best be directed toward some noble end. But we most likely have never faced the "Give me liberty or give me death" option in a real circumstance. Our daily lives tend to be much more focused on having a stable job, our families, our friends, lowering our handicap, sending our kids to college, hobbies, and our "stuff."

Jobs with opportunities to perform heroic acts involving great physical risk are rare. In some occupations, like firefighting, dramatic rescues are more a part of the normal job, but most of us go to the office or make sales calls or manage a group of people tasked with a goal to achieve. Still, courageous acts in the work setting occur far more often than we might think. I believe most people are capable of being courageous in a broader sense by making hard decisions, disagreeing with the boss, firing someone, giving a marginal employee a candid performance review, questioning someone's expense report, taking an unpopular stand, delivering bad news about the quarter's results, or thousands of other actions that require acting in the presence of fear, anxiety, or risk. Simply telling someone the truth can be a courageous act. Convictions give us the courage to venture a self-authored opinion and to have a thoughtful, well-founded set of ideas to offer even when those ideas go against a more widely held view or even the view of our manager.

A courageous act, by its very nature, means that we are moving against the resistance of someone else's deeply held view or that we are acting in the face of considerable risk. Whistle-blowers often lose their jobs. It is never easy to demonstrate courage in our jobs, because the stakes are often high. Our jobs certainly provide our livelihood, but they also provide our identity. The prospect of losing our jobs represents a threat to our security and our self-esteem. Telling the truth is sometimes not welcomed in an organization. We need to examine ourselves to discover our true beliefs and convictions about our jobs and the values of the organizations we serve.

The absence of courage shows up in a variety of expected ways, but also in some less obvious ones. Lack of courage shows up in many organizations as micromanagement, failure to empower others, risk aversion, over-control, and perfectionism. The absence of courage in our jobs can manifest itself

in behaviors serious enough to derail us. The absence of courage makes us tentative. Tentativeness makes us conflict avoidant, over-controlling, and cautious. We experience an excessive need for approval. The cure is to develop the courage of our convictions. Here are some suggestions for how it can happen:

1. Keep a journal about your experiences at work. Who do you admire? What inner convictions seem to guide them? What do they do that strikes you as courageous?

2. What are your convictions and bedrock beliefs? How clear are they? How confident are you that they will provide the needed foundation for courageous choices in tough situations?

3. Think about the influences that most shape your convictions. If it's primarily *People* magazine or *Entertainment Tonight*, consider a few alternatives. Try reading *Undaunted Courage* by Stephen Ambrose, *John Adams* by David McCullough, or the story of Esther in the Bible.

4. When you have to deliver tough news, being courageous is critical. Also, be savvy. Think about the timing and shape the message for the recipient. A trusted advisor can help you with this.

5. When you take a stand, make sure you have your facts right. The facts often help separate the courageous from the foolhardy.

6. Managers hate it when they have to do our thinking for us. Be sure to have several possible remedies for a problem, along with a recommended solution.

7. Be courageous but also be prudent about not throwing others under the bus. Stick to the facts and be solution oriented when in conflict with coworkers.

8. Be willing to exercise the "nuclear option" as a last resort. Quitting in protest, going many levels up the food chain, and being a whistle-blower should always be considered. Going straight to these extreme solutions gives us no opportunity to escalate the gravity of our protest, so starting with a less extreme option is probably prudent. Simply knowing that we're willing to "go nuclear" may fortify us for the more measured approach.

Peter Drucker said, "People who don't take risks generally make about two big mistakes a year. People who do take risks generally make about two big mistakes a year." When we look back on our lives, our hearts will be glad that we acted with courage.

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SECTION FIVE: **ON TRACK FOR THE LONG HAUL**

Five Critical Lessons Learned

The purpose of *Derailed* is to shed intense light on our vulnerabilities, the irregularities and small cracks and fissures that can cause us to derail, whether we are leaders, emerging leaders, or simply navigating a career. This chapter summarizes five critical lessons learned from the wisdom of others who have discovered the crucial principles for staying on track.

Lesson One—Character Trumps Competence

The glaring truth is that a leader is only as good as the character of the leader. While competence is absolutely essential, our character ultimately makes a greater impact on what we accomplish in our work and in our lives. Character as expressed in authenticity, wisdom, humility, and courage must ultimately form the substance of who we are if we want to have great impact.

Lesson Two—Arrogance is the Mother of All Derailers

While a failure of character can manifest itself in many ways, the most foundational and most self-destructive is arrogance. Just as humility seems to be at the epicenter of leadership effectiveness, arrogance is commonly at the root of a leader's undoing… and ours. Arrogance takes many forms. The most rudimentary is the self-centered focus that fosters a belief that I am central to the viability of the organization, the department, or the team. The resulting dismissiveness of others' contributions is inevitable. Aloofness, being critical, self-promotion, and not listening to others all tie into arrogance. Even when our achievements are modest, arrogance can exist. We need to be ruthlessly intolerant of this toxic character compromiser when we see it in ourselves.

Lesson Three—Lack of Self- / Other-Awareness is a Common Denominator of All Derailments

To stay on track, we have to be effective at monitoring our inner state which includes our thoughts, our feelings and our convictions. There may be a time to courageously fall on our sword, but it's usually not the time when most people do it. Lack of self-awareness, too little or too late, is the common denominator of all derailments.

Lesson Four—We Are Always Who We Are… Especially Under Stress

There will likely be a moment when we can choose substance over style, character over charisma, and wisdom over want. These choices set in motion a very different approach to life and work. When we set our faces in the direction of significance, we begin to be transformed from the inside out. If we will always be who we are, it pays to consider deeply who we want to become and to make choices consistent with that intention.

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Lesson Five—Derailment Is Not Inevitable. But Without Attention to Development, It Is Probable

Attention to our development means we must be constantly alert and self-aware and have a lifelong commitment to learn, to grow, and to prepare. It's also a recognition that, just as the mighty can fall, so can we at any stage of our career. One CEO with whom I spoke stressed the critical importance of dealing with potential derailment factors early in our careers while there is time to recover. "Once someone is in an organization too long, it's almost too late for them."

Habits of the Heart to Stay On Track

Habits are essentially patterns of behavior that, once established, are prone to continue. We all have them. Some habits are easy to form and are acquired with little thought, like eating ice cream. Habits that don't have an immediate or obvious payoff are more difficult. They are generally challenging to establish and must be intentionally formed. Personal discipline requires that we do certain things because we believe in their eventual value, like physical exercise.

The five habits we look at here are more the personal discipline kind. They require intentional and focused effort to habituate—to make a part of our established behavior—but the payoff is enormous. We stay on track!

The Habit of Openness

The first antidote to derailment is openness to feedback. Feedback has the potential to keep us on course in our careers. Feedback from a wise and trusted advisor can be more valuable than gold, but it requires openness on the part of the recipient. The senior leaders I consulted about staying on track felt particularly strongly about this topic. Leaders must follow their own compass while still being open and receptive to the wisdom of others.

When we're in a work setting, we need to check our defensiveness at the door. Please note that I'm not talking about working in an abusive atmosphere in which we might be harassed, demeaned, or threatened. Rather, we need to be constantly tuned into the "satellites" around us that provide information about how we're doing. Just because our boss may be clumsy at giving feedback doesn't mean the feedback is not valid.

Openness to feedback reflects our interest in being a learning, growing person. Openness involves an active desire to know how I'm doing and an abiding intellectual curiosity about how to be better. Individuals who want to grow and develop learn to welcome feedback from others, particularly someone they respect. They're able to separate the wheat from the chaff as not all feedback is accurate or even useful. Growing individuals incorporate accurate and useful feedback to promote constructive change.

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The Habit of Self- / Other-Awareness

A lack of self-/other-awareness is Stage I of the derailment process. Lack of self-/other-awareness is a common denominator among the derailed, so the cultivation of this crucial attribute is the second habit we need to stay on track. Accurate self-awareness requires that we become a student of ourselves. It's not about falling in love with our own image in a narcissistic way, but rather that we create an accurate and balanced view of who we are and what our capabilities and limitations are.

You cannot become fully aware when your own thoughts and feelings are the sole source of input. The true self also exists outside of us in the perceptions of others. This is why feedback is so valuable. Feedback from others is like a mirror that allows us to see ourselves as others do. One of the most important mirrors is people's facial expressions. There is a wealth of information in people's faces when we learn to interpret it correctly. When I coach executives, I sometimes show them photographs of people's faces and ask them to tell me how that person is feeling. "Reading others" is a critical skill.

The Habit of Listening to Early Warning Systems

The Third habit for staying on track is to cultivate personal early warning systems that tell us when we're at risk of derailment. Personal warning systems at work vary for different individuals, but I will briefly discuss several that likely apply to most of us.

Performance Management Feedback

Pay attention to formal feedback, such as your annual appraisal. Informal feedback such as comments made by your boss in passing merit special consideration. When your performance drops, it's particularly important to pay attention to how your boss interprets the problem. Your boss's indication that you dropped a ball should be a wake-up call.

Interpersonal Tension at Work/Low Pure Levels/Poor Communication

Conflict is a normal part of any workplace, but we should pay attention to unresolved conflict that festers. Tension with your manager or other key influencers tells you that some repair work may be needed. Conflict with colleagues or individuals in other departments may also be an important signal to heed. Similarly, when trust is low or you seem to have chronically poor communication with your manager or other key constituents, your attention should be galvanized. Pay attention to these early warning signals.

Stress

The specific warning systems that alert us to the fact that our stress level is about to "red-line" varies for different individuals. For some, it's physiological, like a headache or a tense neck or fatigue. For

others, it's emotional, like irritability, anger, discouragement, difficulty focusing, or lack of creativity. For me, I can always tell when a heavy travel week is starting to get to me. I start to notice my edginess. Someone talking loudly on his cell phone in a confined space like an airplane is always annoying, but when I feel like asking the person if he realizes how big a doofus he is, it says to me that it's time to chill. Any of these potential warning signals may indicate a need to mitigate the stress. The key is to monitor ourselves and to pay attention to our own signals or feedback from others. Exerting control over stress means that we do whatever is necessary to lower the stress level to one at which our performance is not compromised.

The workplace will always be a greenhouse for stress, so the key question is how do we mitigate it? The answer to this question must be determined individually. We need to know what raises and lowers our stress level while we're doing our job. "Know thyself," as Socrates opined. I know some people who go to the gym during their lunch break. A midday workout may not be your thing, but I guarantee you it's better than a three-martini lunch! An extreme solution for some is to change jobs. The essential takeaway is to have an early warning system and to intervene before you go off the cliff.

The Habit of Accountability

The leaders most susceptible to derailment refuse to have their opinions, decisions, and actions questioned. Insularity contributes significantly to derailment. Accountability means that, even if we're not required to answer to others because of our position or corporate policy or law, we intentionally place ourselves in relationship with someone who tests our motives and our actions.

In some leaders the appreciation for others can morph into a need to be appreciated by others. The excessive need for the approval of others predisposes a leader to make a popular decision versus the harder right decision.

Accountability means we are willing to have our decisions questioned, but we're not conducting daily tracking polls with fellow leaders trying to make the most popular decision. Self-aware leaders pay attention to their own need for the approval of others any time they make a significant decision. We are usually accountable to a manager, a team, or a board to achieve the stated objectives of our jobs. We need to keep our commitments, to take ownership of our assignments, and to pursue excellence in every aspect of our jobs. This responsibility to others should have a galvanizing effect on our behavior at work. A failure to be accountable leads to derailment.

The Habit of Resiliency

Resilience is about snapping back. It's about getting up and keeping going. Resilient people deal with setbacks more effectively. They handle adversity better. The resilient people I know still get frustrated, but they somehow don't carry that frustration into the future. I rarely hear effective leaders use hackneyed clichés, such as, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going." Their resolve

seems to come from deeper convictions about life and work. They have an inner confidence that says we will get through this. We will not be thwarted by these circumstances.

Resilience is the ability not only to bounce back from adversity but also to grow from it. The most successful business leaders encounter challenges, recover from them, and become stronger, more capable leaders and more developed people because of them. Research demonstrates that a critical factor in a person's resilience is the people in their lives. Personal and professional networks provide support, guidance, perspective, and new opportunities in the midst of challenging setbacks. A crucial action we can take to strengthen our resilience is to cultivate relationships within our family, our company, our profession, and our community.

Perhaps the most important contributor to resilience is clarity of purpose. Developing a clear sense of purpose gives meaning and context to our work and widens our perspective in our jobs. While we want to know that we are being paid fairly, we will almost always work harder for meaning than we will for money. Meaning also helps us persevere.

Leaders who want to bring out the best in the individuals they lead will pay particular attention to this powerful principle. We want those we lead to do more than just show up for work. We want them to gain an emotional commitment to their jobs. Meaning is what fuels the ownership we want our employees to experience in their work. Also, given the dramatic changes that many organizations have experienced recently, those we lead can tolerate a lot of adversity when they know that the value of their jobs transcends the turbulence experience at a given moment. The critical habits of the heart reflect the disciplines we must employ to stay on track. For these disciplines to become a part of who we are, we must do them intentionally. The payoff is becoming the person and the worker we each want to be.

Epilogue

It is my hope that this book will provide you with significant insight into who you are and how to be a person that stays on track. We need eight gigawatts of insight to be effective in today's workplace. We must keep intense light on our character as well as continue to become more and more competent at what we do.