

“*The Five-Week Leadership Challenge* will spur you into action and help you write your own leadership story.” —**PATRICK LENCIONI**
CEO of The Table Group; bestselling author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and *The Advantage*



THE
WEEK
LEADERSHIP
CHALLENGE

*35 Action Steps to Become the Leader
You Were Meant to Be*

PATRICK R. LEDDIN

Foreword by **STEPHEN M. R. COVEY**

CONTENTS

Foreword by Stephen M. R. Covey	xiii
Welcome to the Challenge	xv
WEEK 1: GAIN PERSPECTIVE	1
Day 1: Clarify Focus	5
Day 2: Engage People	9
Day 3: Rethink Failure	13
Day 4: Find Guides	19
Day 5: Seek Balance	23
Day 6: Think Differently	28
Day 7: Enjoy the Journey	34
<i>Week 1 Wrap-up</i>	38
WEEK 2: DISCOVER PURPOSE	41
Day 8: Excavate Purpose	45
Day 9: Understand Meaning	49

Day 10: Uncover Problems	53
Day 11: Assess Talent	57
Day 12: Explore Passion	61
Day 13: Close Doors	65
Day 14: Go All In	69
<i>Week 2 Wrap-up</i>	73
WEEK 3: DETERMINE PRIORITIES	75
Day 15: Recognize Strategy	79
Day 16: Avoid Addictions	83
Day 17: Choose Wisely	88
Day 18: Be Boring	94
Day 19: Ask Customers	99
Day 20: Create Momentum	103
Day 21: Own the Room	107
<i>Week 3 Wrap-up</i>	111
WEEK 4: CREATE PLANS	115
Day 22: Encourage Ownership	119
Day 23: Spur Imagination	124
Day 24: Understand Relationships	129
Day 25: Remain Open	134

Day 26: Let Go	138
Day 27: Play to Win	142
Day 28: Hit Pause and Engage	147
<i>Week 4 Wrap-up</i>	152
WEEK 5: INSPIRE PERFORMANCE	157
Day 29: Understand Inconsistency	161
Day 30: Practice Abundance	165
Day 31: Forgo (Some) Happiness	170
Day 32: Address Elephants	176
Day 33: Unleash Excitement	180
Day 34: Feed Cravings	184
Day 35: Be a Tough Act to Follow	188
<i>Week 5 Wrap-up</i>	192
The Journey Continues	197
Appendix A	199
Appendix B	203
Index	205
About the Author	213
Acknowledgments	215

FOREWORD

There are some business books that you quickly skim over during a long flight and then never touch again.

This is not that book.

The 5 Week Leadership Challenge is truly a leadership workbook, which dares and inspires the reader to improve themselves throughout the journey. Patrick serves as an excellent guide; his stories capture your attention and welcome you into his family as he takes you through his personal leadership journey. We follow him on his adventure as he moves from jumping out of airplanes in the army to starting his own consulting firm and to finding his balance between work and his wonderful family.

The most amazing facet of the book is that real and powerful leadership lessons are woven gracefully into the stories. In one moment, you are following Patrick along as he hikes up Mount Kilimanjaro, and then suddenly you realize what the leadership lesson of the story is—just as Patrick brings it up. The result is a brilliant moment of serendipity in each chapter as you realize your own growth as Patrick learns along with you.

Throughout my extensive research on the value and impact of trust, I have seen time and time again the power of stories. Learning from the experiences of others allows us to feel their emotions, empathize with their highs and lows, and see just how our behaviors impact the lives of those around us. In fact, the very act of sharing one's own stories authentically lends itself to creating a high level of trust between the storyteller and the reader.

XIV FOREWORD

As you read through *The 5 Week Leadership Challenge*, you will undoubtedly be inspired by Patrick's level of transparency and continual desire to get better. I believe you'll also feel that Patrick not only understands you as a reader but that he trusts you, too—and, in turn, I believe that you'll be inspired to reciprocate that trust.

You will not only learn how Patrick has improved over the course of his career, but you, too, will be challenged to get better as a leader. Patrick is an innovative storyteller who openly welcomes you into his life and allows you to learn from both his failures and victories. He openly confronts reality and invites you to do the same. At the end of each chapter, Patrick provides you with challenging self-reflection questions and tasks, allowing you to apply the lessons to your life immediately while also ensuring a lifetime of value.

Don't rush through this book in a weekend—it's called *The 5 Week Leadership Challenge* for a reason. Instead, work through the book as it's intended, taking each chapter as a daily ritual to improve yourself as a leader. This way of learning is more of a process than a onetime event. The result will be not only greater learning but far greater application and impact in your life.

I am lucky enough to have known Patrick throughout most of the time period of the book. He has always innately understood the power of trust and how it truly is the one thing that changes everything.

I invite you to let the insights you'll glean from his wonderful book change you, too.

Stephen M. R. Covey
New York Times and # 1 *Wall Street Journal*
bestselling author of *The Speed of Trust* and
coauthor of *Smart Trust*
November 23, 2020

WELCOME TO THE CHALLENGE

The escalator ride from the first floor allowed me to better appreciate the impressive lobby in the downtown Beijing hotel. I knew the grand ballroom was located somewhere on the second level, but navigating the facility was proving a bit tricky, as was asking for directions, given my rudimentary understanding of Mandarin. Fortunately, the signage guided me to the correct room. I opened the door and was immediately taken aback by the sight of hundreds of chairs standing ready for the audience's arrival.

A few hotel employees were milling about in the front of the room conducting last-minute sound checks and adjusting the angle and clarity of the presentation projectors. They greeted me warmly and oriented me to the stage by showing me where to place my laptop, how to affix and operate the wireless microphone, and asking me what I needed to feel comfortable. In all honesty, feeling comfortable was not likely to happen. I asked for a glass of water in response to their hospitality and as a half-hearted attempt to calm the butterflies that were starting to take flight in my stomach. One person scurried off to find the water and the others went back to what they were doing prior to my arrival.

Taking a deep breath, I set out to settle my nerves by reviewing the agenda and mentally walking through my presentation. I knew my topic well, having recently delivered my message in cities throughout the United States and Europe, but there were a couple of aspects about today's situation that concerned me.

XVI WELCOME TO THE CHALLENGE

Prior to that week, I had never spoken to an audience in China, especially an audience consisting of several hundred businesspeople. I didn't want to speak too quickly or be lost in cultural translation. I felt that under normal conditions, I could overcome these hurdles, but what really concerned me was why people were coming that day. They weren't there to see me. I was essentially the opening act for a much bigger name who was going to take the stage as the session's main event. Let's face it, few people are excited to see the opening act.

Thinking about this reality, I pictured thousands of emails flying through Beijing cyberspace in the weeks leading up to the event, each inviting the recipient to attend a business conference in the grand ballroom of an iconic hotel to listen and learn from one of the greatest business minds of our time. The main speaker's name would then appear in large font followed by the names of his bestselling books. For many, that information alone would be enough to secure their attendance. Those who needed a bit more information or decided to read the entire message would eventually come to the words "and Dr. Patrick Leddin" in a much smaller, less grandiose typeface.

Now, don't get me wrong. I actually didn't mind being the lesser name on the day's agenda. In fact, I was honored to be there. I had respected the keynote speaker for years and personally looked forward to hearing him speak that day. What concerned me was the conversation I'd had with him the previous day when he arrived in town. Sitting in a small conference room, the two of us discussed the plan for the event. It was my understanding that I was to speak for approximately forty-five minutes about how to effectively lead yourself and others in today's world. He would then take the stage and speak for the remainder of the morning. The split made sense to me and likely aligned with the expectations of the crowd. However, he saw the session unfolding much differently.

"I'd prefer you speak for a bit over two hours and I will do about a thirty-minute talk with fifteen minutes for questions and answers," he said, adding that he thought my message would truly resonate with the audience. I was flattered by his kind words, but expressed concerns with audience expectations. I can't remember how the rest of the conversation played out other than him being amazingly convincing. At some point I agreed with his request. That night, I sat down at my computer to revise my presentation to adjust for my extended time slot. I added stories about my personal experience leading teams in the army, at a publicly traded company, and at my own startup. My intent was to use the stories as a means of conveying various principles of leadership through personal

narratives. I knew that past audiences had found similar stories useful and I hoped that the next day's attendees would also.

I didn't sleep much that night; morning came quick and before I knew it the grand ballroom was filling with people. I was pacing a groove into the backstage carpet.

At the top of the hour, the host took the stage and greeted attendees in Mandarin. The crowd was energized by his words. As he finished his comments, he quickly transitioned into English, introduced me as the first speaker, and asked the audience to give me a warm welcome. I stepped onstage, shook his hand, and as the applause tapered off, I began my presentation. The next 120 minutes were a whirlwind as I spoke to the packed room about how to effectively lead yourself and others. I told them about my own experiences leading others. I shared what I did well and areas where I struggled. I also shared my observations of others doing the same.

Despite my misgivings, the audience's reaction was better than I had expected. When I took the stage, I was merely hoping to keep them engaged and share a few useful pieces of information to make their own leadership journey more successful, but as I wrapped up my two-hour presentation, it was clear that the room was engaged and genuinely interested in what I had to say. In fact, after the main speaker finished his presentation and opened the floor up for questions, I was called back onstage as many of the questions were for me.

Later that day, the main speaker and I were sitting in the back seat of a car heading across town. He turned to me and asked, "Where do you get all of your stories?"

His question that afternoon and the response of the audience that day convinced me that stories are powerful—especially when sharing a story helps someone to change their behavior, improve performance, or achieve what matters most to them. Stories play a large role in my Vanderbilt University classroom, helping students move from concept to practice. The leadership stories that you will read over the next five weeks will allow you to move closer each day to becoming the leader that you mean to be. There are thirty-five leadership stories, one for each day of the next five weeks, along with accompanying actions steps, questions for you to answer, and a small challenge.

The thirty-five days are grouped into five weeks, each with a distinct theme. In the first week—Gain Perspective—you will explore ten leadership mindsets. I start with these, because how you think about leading yourself and others will directly

influence your actions and results. Understanding these mindsets and assessing your own thinking in each area will be key to your success.

In week two—Discover Purpose—you will work to uncover the reason why you choose to lead. By the end of the week, you will craft your leadership purpose statement. Leadership can be very rewarding, but it is also tough. Knowing why you lead will serve as a source of energy to draw from when times get tough—and they will get tough.

The third week is Determine Priorities, and the fourth week is Create Plans. In those weeks, you will have the opportunity to draft a few key priorities for yourself and the plans you will follow to move your priorities from thoughts to results.

The fifth and final week is Inspire Performance. You will explore how to perform at the highest level, both as an individual and as a leader of others.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I wrote this book with the expectation that you would complete a lesson every day of the week, Sunday through Saturday. However, as I've shared the 5 Week Leadership Challenge with other people, I've seen that many people like to do them in four- or five-day increments each week. (Appendix A provides you sample schedules that you can follow.) In all honesty, I'm less concerned with the plan you create for yourself than I am that your plan is realistic and doable. Also, I've had people go through the 5 Week Leadership Challenge with other leaders, acting as accountability partners to one another. They do the daily reading on their own, but get together weekly to discuss progress. That can be very powerful. If you choose to work through the content with other leaders, I've created a plan that you can follow in Appendix B.

Each daily challenge has space below it where you should take notes and write down your thoughts. Use this book as a journal that you can revisit time and again. You'll get the best results by dedicating fifteen to twenty minutes each day to the 5 Week Leadership Challenge.

One last thing before we start. If you find yourself asking the same question that the keynote speaker asked me when we were China—where all of my stories come from—they come from my time as an officer in the army, a project manager at KPMG Consulting, a senior consultant at FranklinCovey, and the

owner of two businesses, Wedgewood Consulting Group and Leddin Group. They stem from my time as a professor at Vanderbilt University and from the extensive traveling that I've done for work and fun. Most importantly, they derive from nearly thirty years of marriage to my spouse, Jamie, raising two amazing kids, Alex and Clay, and working with a wide range of team members, leaders, and friends.

Enjoy the journey.

Patrick

WEEK 1

GAIN PERSPECTIVE

What did I get myself into?

That was the question that kept running through my mind. I was thirty-four years old and married with two children. The business my spouse, Jamie, and I had started a few years earlier was rapidly growing with offices in three states, an amazing team of employees, and an increasing list of clients. The daily demands of work and home were abundant. Yet after much discussion, research, and reflection, I had decided, with the full support of my team, clients, and—most importantly—family, to sell our house, move from Florida to Kentucky, and pursue my doctorate at the University of Kentucky. I knew it would be five years of schoolwork, while running our business and using what little time wasn't consumed by the first two demands to maintain my personal relationships.

The acceptance letter had arrived a few months earlier. We sold our home, said goodbye to our friends, drove to our new town, and moved into a hotel waiting for

2 THE 5 WEEK LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

our new house in Louisville to be ready. It had been an exciting adventure. Now the excitement was in the rearview mirror and I was dealing with the reality of being back in school. I sat down in a coffee shop across the street from my hotel with a coffee in one hand and the details of my first homework assignment in the other. It was clear that I was going to be working into the wee hours of the morning. I read the first paragraph of the assigned reading three times. After the third pass, I still didn't understand what the author was saying. She was using language that was all foreign to me. It was English, but it was written for academics and I read business articles. Clearly, this wasn't going well. I felt in over my head and I wasn't sure what to do about it.

That night, I went back to our hotel room. As I climbed into bed, Jamie whispered in the darkness, "How'd the studying go?"

I responded, "I think I made a big mistake. Maybe we shouldn't have done this."

Fortunately, her face was hidden in the shadows of the dark room, so I was unable to see her nonverbal response. Years later, she informed me that her initial reaction was shock and concern. But her words conveyed something else. In that moment, Jamie said exactly what I needed. She calmly said, "Let's just take it one day, one work meeting, and one class session at a time. You are going to make it through the program. Plus, no matter how hard it gets, let's promise to make no decisions until the end of each semester."

Her answer was brilliant. Why? Because she put everything in perspective. While my mind was racing to all that I had before me, she reassured me and told me to calm down. She didn't say that it wouldn't be tough; she just counseled me to take it as it comes and not to borrow trouble. Jamie reminded me that when you are in the throes of the day-to-day, you can lose perspective, allow your emotions to drive decisions, and do something you will later regret.

Five years later, I graduated. Our business was still growing. My relationships were still intact.

Perspective matters.

It especially matters for you as a leader.

It is through the lens of perspective that you determine what is important, choose your behaviors, meet the needs of those you serve, and deliver meaningful results. Arguably, everything that you do as a leader flows from your mindset, and spending time to gain perspective is critical to successful leadership. That's why the first week of the 5 Week Leadership Challenge focuses on perspective. Perspective allows you to better understand why you

choose to lead in the first place, how to think about leading others, and where to put your best energy.

Over the course of the first week, you will explore ten leadership mindsets. Are these the only mindsets? No. However, they are ten of the most critical, and each requires your time, energy, and best thinking. By the end of the week, you will be able to assess yourself against each of the ten mindsets and develop concrete steps to better understand what it means to accomplish goals with and through others.

If you are just starting to lead others, this will be a rare opportunity to consider what it means to think like a leader and to assess your willingness to embrace these mindsets. If you are bit further in your leadership journey, this is a chance to take stock of your progress to date and determine if some of your thinking is leading you astray. For all of us, it's a rare time to step back, assess where we stand, and gain fresh perspectives to help us to more effectively lead others.



CLARIFY FOCUS

Many years ago, I was a paratrooper in the United States Army's 82nd Airborne Division. I was paid to jump out of perfectly good airplanes. My first nighttime jump took place at 2:00 a.m. in the skies above Fort Stewart, Georgia. That night, some 1,500 paratroopers jumped from twenty-two airplanes cruising at 800 feet (243 meters) above swamps and pine trees.

I found nighttime parachute jumps to be particularly exciting. The standard practices of preparing to exit the aircraft came with an extra bit of exhilaration. When the jump doors opened, the glow of sunlight that entered the cabin during daytime operations wasn't present, leaving everyone to rely on the glow of the green "go" light to guide much of their movement to the exit. Additionally, the ever-present roaring winds and booming engines that filled your ears during every jump were accompanied at night by the enthusiastic shouts of your fellow troopers yearning to get out the door. Something about nighttime jumps made everyone more eager and you could hear it in their shouts. It was an assault on your senses. Then, after clearing the airplane door and looking up to check your parachute, all of the sound goes away. In a matter of seconds you go from crammed on the plane with an excited group of fellow paratroopers to floating in solitude through the stillness of the night.

On that summer night of my first nighttime jump, I went through the standard procedure of ensuring my parachute was in working order and checking to see if any fellow jumpers were too close. All looked good with the parachute and,

6 THE 5 WEEK LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

although I could see other parachutes floating around me, none were near enough to raise concerns.

All seemed fine, until I realized it wasn't.

As I peered toward the approaching ground, I saw a dark patch of trees a few hundred feet below my feet. Way off to the left was a much lighter area produced by the soft sands of the drop zone. The problem was that I was moving further into the dark area with no chance of avoiding it. Unlike parachutes used in many other scenarios, the ones used in large airborne operations afford the jumper little ability to steer or change direction. It makes sense under these conditions because you don't want to have 1,500 people with steerable parachutes going every which way in the night sky. That is a recipe for an in-air collision. That said, I would have appreciated something a bit more maneuverable that night. As I approached the trees, I braced for impact knowing I had no choice but to plow into inevitable danger. I raised my arms in front of my face, put my knees together, tucked my chin, and hoped for the best.

In this situation, I was a prisoner of circumstance. I couldn't control where the planes flew, when I jumped out the door (the plane's green light and fellow troops pushing from behind saw to that), the strength of the prevailing winds, or the type of parachute I was using.

Over the past twenty-five-plus years, I've worked with individuals, teams, and organizations who suggest they, too, are at the mercy of bad work situations and have little or no control over their careers. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's true that we can't control everything, nor should we try. However, we have far more choices available to us than we usually believe exist if we simply choose to lead ourselves.

Let's face it—things aren't always going to go well. Sometimes you will land in the trees. Your trees probably aren't hundred-foot Georgia pines that get in your way, but they can be organizational processes that annoy you, IT systems that are overly cumbersome, a person whose behavior is upsetting, or many other sources of concern. These trees seem to pop up whenever you try to lead others to accomplish goals that matter. You can't avoid every problem, but you can learn from each setback, brush yourself off, and get back on track as quickly as possible. You can also learn to focus your energies on what you can do in the moment.

If you don't like the results you are currently achieving, do something about it. If you are disappointed in your team's performance, step up and help out. If you are unhappy with your choice of career, don't settle. Take a positive step in the

right direction—today! Time is ticking. Your parachute is much more steerable than you think. Choose to avoid the trees and accomplish what matters most to you, to those you lead, and to those you care for the most.

As I hung from the limbs of the trees by my parachute harness, I couldn't see my hand in front of my face in the pressing darkness. My training taught me that I could deploy my reserve parachute and climb down. I decided to go that route, but first I wanted to see how secure I was in the tree. I tugged on my parachute risers and slipped a few inches. Suddenly, I found myself standing safely on the ground. Although I assumed I was high up in the tree, I was only six inches from the ground. It was my only jump in the army where I landed on both feet.

My takeaway from that jump is to always be willing to take a calculated risk, focus on what you can control, and go for it. You might be surprised when you land on your feet.

DAY 1: CLARIFY FOCUS

Today's Thought

You may not be able to move the trees, but you can choose how to deal with them.

Today's Questions

1. What trees tend to occupy too much of your time and energy?

2. What trees do you see in the work lives of your team members that are occupying too much of their time and energy?

3. How might you remove some of those trees?

Today's Challenge

Pick one of the trees that you listed above that is occupying too much time and energy in your life and let it go. Don't talk about it. Don't think about it. Just let it go.

Praise for *The Five-Week Leadership Challenge*

“*The Five-Week Leadership Challenge* isn’t just a leadership book, it’s a self-development workshop great for both new and experienced leaders. If you want to improve your team’s performance immediately, read this book.”

—DORIE CLARK

Author of *Reinventing You*; Faculty at Duke University’s Fuqua School of Business

“Having spent a lifetime working with the best leaders in the world, I’m convinced that the lessons in *The Five-Week Leadership Challenge* can help you to achieve positive, lasting change in your life.”

—MARSHALL GOLDSMITH

New York Times #1 bestselling author of *Triggers*, *Mojo*, and *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There*

“Patrick’s work embodies beautiful storytelling that encourages us to consider how to best capture our own ‘story’ by reflecting on the diverse experiences of our lives with the objective of continuous learning and growth.”

—ANNE CHOW

CEO of AT&T Business; co-author of *The Leader’s Guide to Unconscious Bias*

“Packed with immense substance on leadership, while also being highly entertaining . . . this book hits the mark on how we can digest and apply the most important leadership principles in today’s world.”

—PRAKASH RAMAN

Former Executive Development at LinkedIn; CEO of Raman Consulting

“This book offers a step-by-step guide for you to work on yourself and the impact you want to make . . . a real plan for becoming the leader you want to be.”

—KAREN DILLON

Former Editor of *Harvard Business Review*;

New York Times bestselling co-author of *How Will You Measure Your Life?*



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