MAKING MEETINGS MATTER

How Smart Leaders Orchestrate Powerful Conversations in the Digital Age

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INTRODUCTION

T hank you for picking up *Making Meetings Matter*. If you are like most of us, you spend way too much time in bad meetings and other conversations at work that go nowhere.

How long has it been since you were in a meeting you felt was totally unproductive? Have you ever wished you had a Star Trek pocket communicator you could command to "Beam me up, Scotty" just to get away from yet another meaningless meeting? How long has it been since you *led* a meeting like that?

Be honest; it's happened to every one of us.

Do you spend time in meetings thinking about the "real work" you are not getting done, or holding your smartphone in your lap and sneaking a peek at your e-mail inbox to see what's going on out there in the real world? Or have you ever sent a surreptitious text asking a colleague to call you out of a meeting for some fake crisis or phone call from a "client" that just can't wait?

Well, I've got a simple message for you: *it doesn't have to be that way*.

This book is dedicated to the proposition that meetings can be meaningful, productive, and even fun—all at the same time.

Here's why that is so important.

Not only has the world changed in the last twenty years, but the nature of work itself has changed too. Yet many organizations are still operating as if their employees just came from the farm to the city and need to be told what to do as they take their place on the assembly line. We're still applying nineteenth-century

industrial-age management practices in a twenty-first-century age of networked knowledge.

As a result, millions of people are unhappy at work, organizations are operating well below their potential, leaders like you are frustrated, and almost everyone feels stressed out. In spite of the recent uptick in the economy, no one I know believes things are working the way they should be.

At one level the problem is simple: the world has changed, but the way we lead and engage people has not. There is a terrible misalignment between the work and the workforce, on the one hand, and our leadership models and practices, on the other.

As *Fast Company* founder Alan Webber pointed out over twenty years ago, conversation is at the very heart of knowledge-based work. Yet most of us don't recognize how dependent we are on conversations for learning, for making sense of our experiences, for building relationships, for innovation, and for sorting out how we feel about ourselves and our work.

My basic goal is to enhance organizational performance, but my passion is to improve the daily experiences of those millions of people who feel unhappy, disengaged, and under-utilized at work.

The beauty of the way knowledge-based organizations operate is that the more engaged—and the more respected—workers are, the more productive they are, and the happier their customers are as well. And almost all successful organizations today are knowledge-based; even retail stores and factories depend on people who are well-educated, computer-literate, and self-directed.

The best way to improve the work experience—and to enhance productivity, increase engagement, and make work fun again— is to change the way all those meetings are designed, led, and experienced.

You've heard all about low employee engagement and excessive employee turnover as organizations struggle to create attractive work environments and opportunities for satisfying work.

The best, most effective way of addressing those serious organizational challenges isn't by attacking them directly. It is by rethinking and transforming those millions of meetings and other corporate conversations that take place in hallways, offices, and conference rooms around the globe.

Too many of us don't know how to talk to—make that "talk *with*"—each other about things that matter. We don't know how to listen thoughtfully, and we don't know how to blend diverse insights, ideas, and experiences into coherent and creative solutions. Frankly, we aren't very good at encouraging others to engage with us in meaningful conversations.

Let me amend that: most of us already do know how to talk with each other. We do it all the time at home, at social gatherings, in pubs and coffee houses, and wherever we meet each other *outside* the workplace.

Curiously, however, we don't seem to have the right conversational mindset at work. We may have a conversational *skillset*, but we don't use it effectively to draw out the latent talent, ideas, and insights that are locked inside the heads of our fellow employees.

In my experience, most team and meeting leaders seem to believe their primary role is to tell their staff what to do.

But *telling* isn't leading. Yes, part of the role of a leader is to articulate a compelling vision of the future, and to guide the team towards that goal; but in a world that's swimming in information and filled with knowledgeable people, leadership is really about enabling collaboration and group decision making on a grand scale. That means engaging people in meaningful conversations. As my friend

David Isaacs likes to put it, collaboration is the art of blending a collection of individual intelligences into a *collective intelligence*.

We Need New Rules—and Cool Tools—for the Digital Age

A senior Japanese technology executive and I were speaking about the future of work. In typical American overstatement I blurted out "Technology is changing everything!" He responded immediately, "Then we have to change everything about the way we manage."

I think about that exchange often, because at the time I thought he was exaggerating (and of course I knew I was). But now, in hindsight, I don't think either one of us realized how insightful that conversation was.

As I have already suggested, the world has changed so much that we have to change the way we lead organizations, teams, and especially the conversations we engage in on a daily basis. In this book I propose a number of "rules" for generating engaging conversations and productive meetings.

Some of them, especially those that take digital technologies into account, are new, but many have been around for decades. I will also suggest several new—and very cool—tools that can make your conversations soar.

However, this is not a book about technology. I have no desire to see technology replacing thoughtful leadership or meaningful conversations. Yet in this world of networked knowledge, where we connect with others halfway around the world as easily and inexpensively as with our colleagues across the hallway, we have become highly dependent on technology to make those connections come alive. So it is important that we apply technology thoughtfully.

Like any other tools, collaborative technologies are only as helpful as we choose to make them.

Strength in Numbers

If there is one foundational principle I want you to embrace, it is this: *No one—no single individual—is smarter than everyone.*

I first heard that assertion from former business executive and author Rod Collins, and I will be forever grateful to him for that wonderful way of capturing such an important idea. We are far more capable as members of a cohesive team or a collective "hive mind" than we are as individuals. There is strength in numbers. It does take a village. We can accomplish so much more together than we can separately.

One more time: the way we work has changed, fundamentally and forever. Technology has transformed the way we access and publish information, as well as the way we communicate with each other and form relationships. But that's only the beginning: work itself has changed as well, and so have the people doing that work.

As Father John Culkin, SJ, of Fordham University, suggested many years ago in a conversation with Marshall McLuhan, "We shape our tools and then our tools shape us."

Except that, as I believe, habits built during the industrial revolution have become so ingrained that most organizational leaders don't seem to recognize how much the world has changed. They are failing to take advantage of the new tools that are reshaping how we communicate, how we work, and how we learn. Worse, their beliefs and attitudes are actively preventing their organizations from thriving in this new age of networked knowledge.

Father Culkin wasn't wrong; he just didn't realize how long it would take for these new tools to reshape us.

Don't let yourself be, or remain, an industrial-age leader. From this day forward embrace the new economy, take advantage of the new tools, and come with me on an exciting journey into the future of work.

We must learn all over again how to enable constructive conversations in this age of networked knowledge. But let's go way beyond merely *rethinking* those conversations. Until we *transform* the way we engage with each other at work we are doomed to continuing anger, frustration, and subpar organizational performance.

Your Leadership Opportunity—and Your Obligation

As an organizational leader you have an incredible opportunity— and an equally important responsibility. What you do and say on a daily basis affects the lives and the careers of everyone you come in contact with, to say nothing of the impact you have on your organization's performance and its ultimate success or failure in the marketplace.

Your opportunity—and your responsibility—is to create a social, technical, and physical environment that enables your staff to thrive, and to contribute their ideas, insights, and experiences to your organization. The best way I know to accomplish that noble end is to ensure that all your conversations at work are respectful, focused, candid, and collaborative. If you would like to watch a brief video commentary about the ideas in this book, please go to http://www.makingmeetingsmatter.com/overviewvideo.

Now, let's get to work.

Chapter 1

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Employee engagement is at an all-time low. According to a 2013 Gallup survey, more than 70 percent of the workforce is not engaged. In the average company about 20 percent of employees are *actively* disengaged, which Gallup defines as either wandering around in a fog avoiding all work responsibilities, or in some extreme cases deliberately undermining their co-workers' success.

As a result of the recession over the past several years, workers are more bummed out, burned out, and stressed out than ever. A survey by Right Management at the depth of the Great Recession found that 83 percent of the workforce intended to look for a new job when the economy improved and another 9 percent were networking to explore possibilities. That means you could be at risk of losing more than 90 percent of your workforce!

We are in the middle of a fundamental revolution in the way we live, work, communicate, collaborate, and learn, and the workforce is voting with its feet. The economic recovery is presenting capable workers with more options, and they are taking advantage of them.

What's going on? In this opening chapter I argue that the way we live and work has changed so dramatically in the last twenty years that our basic leadership beliefs and practices are no longer appropriate. We have information and tools at our disposal that were unheard of, and even unimaginable, just a few decades ago.

But the way we are trying to manage is still mired in nineteenth-century assumptions about people, technology, economic value, and social well-being. The dominant "Command-and-Control" mind-set of most executives is out of sync with the world as it now operates.

And that misalignment shows up most prominently in the millions of corporate meetings that take place every day. If you can learn to talk with your staff and colleagues more respectfully, more candidly, and with more curiosity, you will not only feel better about your work experiences, you will also learn more, be more creative, and generate more value for your customers and shareholders.

The Misalignment between Work and Leadership

There are at least four reasons for this misfit between the work and the workforce, on one hand, and the dominant style of "Command-and-Control" leadership, on the other:

- Technology has fundamentally changed the way we communicate, learn, and make sense of the world we live in.

- The nature of work itself has changed as we transition from an industrial economy to an information and knowledge-based one.

- Our social values and expectations have evolved. Today we value different kinds of things and experiences than we did forty or fifty years ago. Many of us today have ambitious goals for our lives, our friendships, and our global community—goals that seem increasingly difficult to attain.

- Most leadership development and training programs continue to teach "Command-and-Control" techniques; we are not preparing leaders adequately for the new conditions they face every day at work.

This new world makes most of us hungry for a new kind of work experience, and for a new kind of organizational leader, because so many of the leaders we know do not seem aligned with this new reality. You want your experiences at work to be enriching, remarkable, and memorable yet most of the time they are anything but.

You want to work with and for people who don't just tell you what to do but rather enable you to do what you do best. You want to feel successful, valued, and respected for who you are. And you want to make a difference.

The good news is that there are many living examples of organizations that do work that way and that create fun, engaging, and incredibly productive work environments. I want to make sure you know about them, and that you understand not only how they work, but why they are so successful.

The bad news is that organizations that are thriving in these new conditions are still few and far between. Far too many organizations and their leaders are still operating as if it's the 1950s.

The Way We Were

Some of us can still remember when our families sat down in front of the big box in our living rooms that brought us the six o'clock evening news. Here in the United States we shared that experience with our neighbors near and far; most of the country absorbed the news at the same time, and it all came from one of the three major television networks.

Conditions were relatively similar in other countries. As I understand it, at one time in England there was the BBC and nothing else.

We also relied heavily on printed newspapers and magazines that were delivered to our front doors in the morning or evening, or with the daily mail. Time and Newsweek were the primary, and almost the only, source of national news.

Most households had one telephone somewhere in the front hall or living room; but it was only used for short, functional conversations with neighbors and nearby relatives (calls were billed by the minute, after all). Once a year we might call a distant grandparent for a short "Happy Birthday" or "Happy Holidays" message; long-distance calls were prohibitively expensive and the sound was often tinny and full of static.

In short, we didn't have much choice in how we got our information or stayed in touch with out-of-town family and friends. Our world was relatively limited.

And the way we worked was very similar.

Those of us who worked in an office typically commuted to a downtown business district or a suburban office park. Most people stayed with one company for many years (often an entire career). Both my father and my grandfather retired from the companies they joined right after they graduated from college; and both of those companies were large, stable, and relatively successful over many decades (although both have had serious ups and downs in the last decade).

That world of the twentieth century clearly reflected the values and assumptions of the industrial era; that the goal of an organization was mass production (accompanied, of course, by mass consumption). Drive costs down by driving volume up; produce as many widgets as possible at the lowest possible cost.

Everyone was focused on figuring out the most efficient way to produce and sell those products. Reliable, reproducible processes were the end goal.

Most social structures and community activities were just as stable. Many of today's senior executives grew up in the same town where they were born: their friendships began in kindergarten and lasted at least through secondary school. Neighborhoods were incredibly homogeneous, and expectations of career opportunities were shaped largely by the socioeconomic class and the community one was born into.

There was a strong sense of stability in that world. Yes, there was a sense of progress and a desire to climb the economic ladder, but most change was linear and incremental. Our sense of what was possible was almost as limited as our choice of television stations.

The leadership culture in too many organizations today still reflects that era: There are hidden assumptions that information is scarce, that the job of managers is to tell their subordinates what to do, and that power comes from being in control.

Technology Has Changed All That

Today, of course, all that has changed (or most of it, anyway). We now have access to incredibly powerful personal computing devices; most of us work in offices, not factories; and our basic social norms and values are profoundly different than they were five or ten or twenty years ago—to say nothing of six months ago.

There are at least three very profound ways that our information access and personal communications have changed in the last decade—three realities that most of the world takes for granted today, but that are absolutely unprecedented in human history.

First, with a relatively inexpensive computer and an Internet connection, **anyone can access almost any information almost**

anywhere in the world—and at almost no incremental cost. Granted, digital data is only part of the information that matters. Nevertheless, you can find almost anything you want whenever you want it, with very little advance planning, somewhere online. Just type your question or topic into your favorite search engine, and start digging.

Second, **you can connect and converse with almost any other person, almost anywhere in the world**, again at almost zero incremental cost. And you have an incredible array of ways to connect. Landline phones still work, and e-mail is essentially free and easy. Cell phones are everywhere (though they do have a basic fixed cost, the incremental minutes are relatively cheap). And don't forget all the other communication channels that are readily available, many of them completely free once you have online access: Skype, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, Flickr, Facetime, Pinterest, Periscope, Blab, and more.

And third, **anyone with a computer and an Internet connection can publish almost anything on a global basis**. While no one has an accurate count of how many blogs there are globally, the three major blogging platforms (Tumblr, Wordpress, and Blogger) together had over 300 million accounts at the end of 2014.

And then of course there is YouTube and other video platforms. YouTube's video library grows by one hundred hours *every single minute of every single day*—that's over 144,000 hours of new video per day! And over 6 *billion* hours of video are viewed every day (that's almost an hour per day for every person on earth). Yes, viewing recorded video isn't exactly a real conversation, but it certainly is an increasingly popular means of communicating ideas.

It is all too common to hear people lamenting that all this social media is replacing in-person conversation, and that young people especially seem to have lost the art of conversing. While there

may be some legitimate cause for concern, coffee houses and neighborhood bars are more popular than ever. There appears to be plenty of animated conversation within our society; it just doesn't seem to happen in the workplace very often.

So far I haven't even mentioned the 500-plus channels of cable television that are available here in the United States alone, and most of that video content is now available on the Internet as well.

Admittedly, much of what is published or uploaded isn't the least bit interesting to many of us. But it's there to be read or viewed or listened to. This explosive growth in the amount of information and communication being sent out and received is nothing short of staggering. There is no question we're having an unprecedented global conversation; but most of these global "conversations" (using the term in its broadest form) take place *outside* the workplace.

Work Itself Has Also Changed

The basic experiences we have at work today are also very different from the past and we produce value in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago.

Early in my career I worked for a large mid-western textbook publishing firm. I have never forgotten a conversation with one editor, a brilliant, well-educated woman, who told me in tears that she had just been docked a full week's vacation.

My friend was supposed to be at her desk and at work every morning at 8:30 a.m.; her supervisor had been tracking her arrivals and had documented that over the past twelve months she had accumulated almost forty hours of tardiness (ten minutes one day, five minutes another, and so on). It apparently made no difference that she almost never joined the parade out the door at precisely 5 p.m.; in fact she regularly worked an hour or two beyond 5 p.m. to meet her deadlines. And she often took work home at night.

Docking her vacation time might have been an appropriate disciplinary action if my friend had been working on an assembly line somewhere and was being paid by the hour. But she was a former secondary school teacher with a master's degree who was being paid a decent salary to collaborate with a college professor on a high-school math book.

Knowledge workers are different, and they work differently from assembly line workers. If you think about it, that's obvious. But in my experience an incredible number of supposedly intelligent organizational leaders don't seem to understand how different knowledge-based work is.

Knowledge is not a "thing" that you can hold in your hand, or even describe. It doesn't have weight, or color, or smell. There are all kinds of knowledge. There is information, or data, and "facts" about the physical world. There is an understanding of how physical objects behave, or interact with each other; how one thing can cause another, or how one chemical interacts with another (for example, how detergent neutralizes acidic juices).

There is also knowledge about patterns in nature, or in human relationships. The sun rises and sets on a predictable cycle; summer follows spring; water freezes at thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit. Some so-called "knowledge" is more tenuous; and when it is based on opinions or beliefs that do not have any basis in reality it can be downright dangerous.

But what makes knowledge really different from physical things is what you can do with it (and what you can't). For example, if I have one hundred dollars and give you half of it, now you have fifty dollars and I have fifty dollars. But if I have a special recipe for roasting a chicken and I share it with you, now we both know how to cook a delicious meal. I haven't given up anything, but now there are two of us who have the same knowledge (in fact, I probably gained some credibility and gratitude for sharing my special recipe

so willingly). Furthermore, once information has been shared it can't be taken back. Once I've told you that recipe I can't "untell" you.

Our economy's growing dependence on information and knowledge as the source of value has profound implications for how we form teams, collaborate, and manage both work and workers.

We bring our individual experiences, expectations, and learning and communication styles to the work we do; work is now an expression of who we are and what we care about.

It's no longer about putting in eight hours on the assembly line and doing the exact same things your peers are doing (over and over and over again).

In the industrial era most organizations were seeking workers who had mastered a common core of skills and who were capable of "tending" the machines on the assembly line; workers were essentially replaceable because each station on that assembly line required the same skills and the same behaviors no matter who the individual worker was.

But when a knowledge worker joins a team the very nature of the team changes—its capabilities, its collective mindset, even its norms and expectations. Each of us is a unique individual who brings a unique combination of experiences, knowledge, and skills to work.

But there's even more to this social and economic transformation we are experiencing. Along with all the new technology and the transformation of work itself we are also undergoing a dramatic shift in social values and expectations.

New Social Values and Expectations

The best way I can describe how social values and expectations are changing is with a personal story. When my son, who is now an accomplished web designer, was in his late teens he informed his mother and me that he didn't want any job where he had to wear a tie. As he put it, "I don't want to work fifty weeks a year so I can take a two-week vacation doing what I really care about." In his mind, "work" meant being a wage slave at some large corporation doing what you were told to do and he was having none of it.

Today my son CJ works forty to fifty hours a week (for himself), but he does it on his own terms. He lives in the mountains. During the winter he often takes two or three hours in the morning to ski, and then stays at his desk until 7 or 8 p.m. In good weather he takes a spin on his mountain bike almost every day, and he's bought a small sailboat that he loves to get out on the water at sunset during the summer. He's living a wonderfully balanced life, earning a decent living, and happier by far than many more affluent technology entrepreneurs who are putting in seventy- or eighty-hour work weeks.

CJ's experience and his values remind me of a classic parable that's well worth repeating in its entirety. I found this version (there are many variations) on the website www.financialmentor.com (which interestingly enough is focused on helping clients retire successfully).

Here's the parable of the Mexican Fisherman and the Investment Banker:

> An American investment banker was taking a much-needed vacation in a small coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. The boat had several large, fresh fish in it.

The investment banker was impressed by the quality of the fish and asked the Mexican how long it took to catch them.

The Mexican replied, "Only a little while."

The banker then asked why he didn't stay out longer and catch more fish?

The Mexican fisherman replied he had enough to support his family's immediate needs.

The American then asked "But what do you do with the rest of your time?"

The Mexican fisherman replied, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take siesta with my wife, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos: I have a full and busy life, señor."

The investment banker scoffed, "I am an Ivy League MBA, and I could help you. You could spend more time fishing and with the proceeds buy a bigger boat, and with the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats until eventually you would have a whole fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to the middleman you could sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You could control the product, processing, and distribution."

Then he added, "Of course, you would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City where you would run your growing enterprise."

The Mexican fisherman asked, "But señor, how long will this all take?"

To which the American replied, "Fifteen to twenty years."

"But what then?" asked the Mexican.

The American laughed and said, "That's the best part. When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You could make millions."

"Millions, señor? Then what?"

To which the investment banker replied, "Then you would retire. You could move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take siesta with your wife, and stroll to the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos."

I don't think you need me to tell you the point of that story.

The Changing Cultural Landscape

While my son and the Mexican fisherman may not be fully representative of today's cultural norms and expectations, their mindsets exemplify something that many of us feel: there is something missing, and out of order, with the world that evolved out of the industrial-age emphasis on large organizations and climbing the corporate ladder as the ultimate evidence of success.

There is a growing level of disaffection and frustration with the work experience today. Just look at the titles of some of the most recent popular business books:

- *Why Work Sucks*, by Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson

- *The Shift*, by Lynda Gratton

- *Management Shift*, by Vladke Huptic

- *The Work Revolution*, by Julie Clow

- *Rebooting Work*, by Maynard Webb

- *Mavericks at Work*, by William C. Taylor and Polly Labore

- *The Fifth Age of Work,* by Andrew Jones

- *Coming Alive: The Journey to Reengage Your Life and Your Career*, by Ruth Ross

(You can find more information about each of these books, and links to their pages on Amazon.com, in the Resources and Notes section at the end of the book)

There are also many formal and informal organizations and virtual communities that are dedicated to transforming the workplace so it more accurately and more appropriately reflects the new social values.

For example, Josh Allan Dykstra and several colleagues have formed a virtual community called **The Work Revolution** (www.workrevolution.org) that describes itself as a "movement and advocacy group that promotes human and meaningful work for everyone."

There are also several centers of influence on college and university campuses that are seeking to transform the way organizations are governed and led, and the way future organizational leaders learn about how to create value.

Take a look, for example, at the Center for Positive Organizations at the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan (http://positiveorgs.bus.umich.edu/). That center's mission is: "to inspire and enable leaders to build high-performing organizations that bring out the best in people. We are a catalyst for the creation and growth of positive organizations."

And I have personally been involved in launching **The Great Work Cultures** community (www.greatworkcultures.org), a

group that seeks to connect the multitude of disparate and diverse groups like the Work Revolution, and to create a "big tent" that connects and promotes many of the individual groups that are calling for new ways of working.

Great Work Cultures has a simple but profound credo:

> Great Work Cultures is dedicated to unleashing the power within human organizations. We hold that the primary purpose of an organization is to create value for all the people it serves.
>
> We believe in:
>
> • Collaboration over control
>
> • Human Experience over bureaucratic rules
>
> • Networks over hierarchies
>
> While the items on the right have value, we value the items on the left more.

Those ideas have had a major influence on my own thinking, and have helped me find a voice for expressing the insights and beliefs I have developed from over thirty years at work in the corporate world.

There is lots of attention being paid these days to generational differences, and to Millennials as representatives of a vague but vastly transformed future. Some observers and pundits find that future exciting and encouraging, while others find it depressing.

No matter what you think about that future, by 2020 close to half of the workforce will be what we currently call "Millennials"— people born between about 1982 and 2004 (that definition comes from researchers Neil Howe and William Straus, the authors of another important book on the future of work titled *The Fourth Turning*—see Resources and Notes for more information).

Certainly there are massive differences between the work and personal experiences that younger workers have had growing up, and the experiences that those of us "of a certain age" with gray hair, or no hair, can recall. However, when the Millennials dominate the workforce in 2020 they will range in age from about twenty to thirty-eight years old.

It's safe to assume that most of the older Millennials will be married, raising children, and just as preoccupied with many of the same kinds of parenting, social, and environmental issues that we older folks fret about today.

But no matter how old you are, you are painfully aware of issues and challenges in other parts of the world. Although there are obvious ethnic and regional differences, jet airplanes, television, and the Internet have combined to create a truly global village.

Technology has connected us with each other and with other "neighborhoods" in the global village in ways that we are still struggling to understand.

On the one hand, we often seem to depend more on e-mail and text messages today than on real-time personal conversations, whether they are face-to-face or by telephone (or Skype, or any of the many other online collaborative technologies that we now use on a daily basis).

On the other hand, we are more aware of natural disasters and other events both tragic and celebratory no matter where in the world they occur. And the workforce of today and tomorrow has grown up during a time of immense and sometimes violent political conflict all over the world (including right here in the United States). I believe this awareness of the fragility of life has driven many people back to basics; family, friends, nature, art, and recreation have become increasingly important to the quality of life.

Of course, our relative affluence and general good health (in spite of the twin epidemics of obesity and diabetes) have also enabled us to pay more attention to the higher-order aspects of life like self-esteem and self-actualization.

It seems clear that our general awareness of the injustices and suffering in other parts of the world, along with other global challenges, directly impacts our attitudes toward authority figures and our expectations about how we want to be treated in the workplace.

Moreover, the boundaries between the workplace and that bigger world are far more porous than they have ever been. It's now incredibly easy to sit in your office at work and exchange e-mails or phone calls with family members, caretakers, medical care professionals, investment advisors, and your car mechanic. You can order books, DVDs, home furniture, food, and clothing online, or pay your bills, during your lunch hour.

Of course you can also read and respond to your work e-mails from your living room, the airport, the train station, or in bed just before you turn out the light. The workplace isn't an isolated, insulated environment any more and your employees are part of a wide network of relationships and commitments that affect the work they do every day—just as their work affects their personal lives.

Why is this important? Because our experiences outside of work have a far more direct impact on how we work and how we relate to our colleagues today than they ever did in the industrial era. It used to be that punching the time clock at the start of the work day meant turning off your personality and your individuality.

Now, it's just the opposite. Your employer and your work colleagues depend on you to express yourself on the job. That's what knowledge work is all about: sharing ideas, being creative,

and applying your unique knowledge to the task at hand.

People now come into work expecting to be part of a community, to be listened to, and to be respected and recognized for what they know and what they do. After all, that's what they experience with their family and friends; why should it be any different at work?

Rethinking Leadership

For at least the last 150 years (and actually well before that) leadership has meant being in charge. Leaders took command and exercised control because they knew more than their subordinates, or they had more power. Originally, of course, power meant physical strength, or control over powerful resources, like armies or ships, and weapons.

For over a century most organizational leaders have embraced the concept of "Scientific Management" generally credited to Frederick Taylor, who first applied time-and-motion analysis to work in the early 1900s. Taylor argued that the job of managers was to *think*, and the job of workers was to do. Anyone who challenged a manager's directions was viewed as insubordinate.

It is becoming very clear that the management practices that worked very well in an era of mass production are essentially inappropriate for this new era of mass collaboration—an economy in which economic value and competitive advantage come from collaborative innovation, creativity, and working with customers to address and solve problems, not from low-cost commodities.

We know intuitively that organizational direction isn't established or implemented by single individuals, but the media and the dominant business schools continue to foster the myth of leadership as a direction-setting and deciding activity engaged in by a very few highly capable individuals.

That may have been somewhat true during the industrial era. But it's patently false and dangerously misleading in the twenty-first century. As author and former business executive Rod Collins likes to point out, power today comes from being connected, not from being "in control."

My friend David Isaacs told me recently that, in his twenty-plus years of showing organizations how to achieve higher levels of consciousness and effectiveness, every organization he has worked with has already had within it all the knowledge and talent it needed to succeed. Unfortunately, however, many organizational leaders don't know how to tap into the diverse experiences, knowledge, and skills that are abundant all around them.

Today anyone charged with leading knowledge workers or accomplishing a knowledge-generation task must come to grips with a new role: enabling sense-making and problem-solving through collaboration. The skills that are critical for team leaders today are those related to encouraging dialogue and debate, fostering open and candid conversation, and guiding or coaching (not controlling) their staff towards high-quality solutions.

I am convinced that the Command-and-Control culture, which remains prevalent in so many organizations today, is the primary reason we have such low levels of employee engagement and such high levels of employee turnover (even in the soft economy we're still fighting to get out of).

Furthermore, that Command-and-Control mindset drives most of those frustrating meetings you experience almost every day. Too many leaders still see their job as directing the activities of their subordinates, not as drawing out (and benefiting from) the incredible diversity of skills, experiences, and ideas that those people have to offer.

Think about this for a moment: when you were in college did your professor ever tell you where to read the homework

assignment or what time to write the term paper? No, of course not. There were classes you could choose to attend, and there was a required exam, but other than that, you were treated as a responsible adult fully capable of making your own choices about where, when, and how to study.

Some of us took advantage of that freedom and blew off some of our classes or even entire courses. But most of us learned how to make the choices that gave us both a good time and a good education.

So what happens when newly-hired recruits walk into a corporation? They're told in so many words, "Be in that seat at 8:30 a.m. and stay there until 5:30 p.m. — and in the meantime, be creative." That is almost exactly what was said to my former business partner Charlie Grantham on the day he started work at a very large, well-known telecommunications company.

Tragically, however, most formal leadership training and development programs still operate from a perspective that defines a leader as the person "in charge." Corporate leaders are still seen as all-powerful and in command. The popular business magazines continue to feature stories of CEOs and other senior executives depicting them as wise, visionary, benevolent individuals who sit above the fray and look out into the future, sharing their magical insights with the masses.

But Command-and-Control is the wrong way to manage creative talent or produce innovative outcomes. We need to reinvent leadership as an activity that blends and leverages the capabilities that every single individual brings to the workplace every single day.

Looking Ahead

That's my sense of what's going on today and what's wrong with the way most organizations are being led and managed. But

while I've hinted at my vision of what's possible, I haven't spelled it out in any detail. In Chapter 2 we'll look at several examples of how effective knowledge-based organizations operate. These stories will help you understand what's possible when an organization's leaders discover the power of tapping into the talent that is so abundant in every organization. I am convinced that when you change your mindset about the meetings and other conversations that take place every day in your organization you will transform the culture, and that in turn will transform your business outcomes.