

**UNSHAKABLE
LEADERSHIP**

UNSHAKABLE LEADERSHIP

A Map For Unlocking
Strength, Strategy, And Success



JANET KENDALL WHITE



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UNSHAKABLE LEADERSHIP

A Map For Unlocking Strength, Strategy, And Success

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Preface

Leadership is not a destination; it is a lifelong journey of growth, discovery, and resilience. This book is the culmination of decades spent in the trenches—coaching executives, facilitating leadership development, and helping organizations navigate the complexities of an ever-changing world. It is built on hard-earned experience, practical application, and a deep passion for learning.

I am, at my core, a learning junkie. I have spent years studying leadership in all its forms, drawing insights from the greatest minds in the field—researchers, thought leaders, and practitioners who have shaped our understanding of what it means to lead effectively. Their work has influenced my own, and this book stands on the shoulders of those who came before me.

Yet, leadership is not just theory—it is action. Every concept, tool, and technique in these pages has been tested in real-world scenarios, refined through trial and success, and adapted to meet

the needs of modern leaders. I have seen firsthand what works, what doesn't, and what makes a lasting impact.

This book is not about quick fixes or trendy leadership fads. It is about building the kind of leadership that endures—leadership that is rooted in emotional intelligence, clear communication, and the ability to navigate complexity with confidence. Whether you are an emerging leader or a seasoned executive, my goal is to provide you with practical strategies that elevate your leadership and help you build a more resilient, high-performing team.

As you embark on this journey, know that you are not alone. Leadership is not a solitary endeavor—it is a shared experience of learning, adapting, and growing. I invite you to engage fully, apply these insights to your own leadership practice, and continue the lifelong pursuit of becoming the leader you were meant to be.

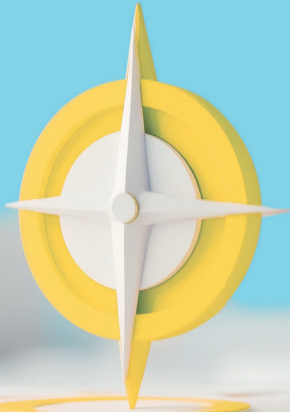
Let's get started.

Janet Kendall White

Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

PART I

Leading Through Turbulence: Strategies For Uncertain Times



You may think that expenses like rent, cost of goods, or technology have the biggest impact on your bottom line. According to a survey cited by PeopleKeep,¹ US businesses that experience turnover also see nearly \$2 trillion in lost productivity costs. This only tracks costs from when the employee actually leaves, and that employee is most certainly not at 100 percent productivity all the way up until that departure point.

Following a period of growth in prior years, US employee engagement experienced its first yearly decrease in ten years, falling from 36 percent of workers being engaged in 2020 to 34 percent in 2021.

This downward trend persisted through 2022, with only 32 percent of full-time and part-time employees at organizations now showing engagement, while 18 percent demonstrate active disengagement. Active disengagement rose by two percentage points since 2021 and four points since 2020.

The proportion of engaged versus actively disengaged workers in the US stands at 1.8 to 1, down from 2.1 to 1 in 2021 and 2.6 to 1 in 2020. This represents the smallest ratio of engaged to actively disengaged employees in the US since 2013, nearly ten years ago. The highest ratio on record was 2.7 to 1 in 2019.²

Gallup assesses employee engagement through surveys of random working population samples, examining specific workplace factors that correlate with various organizational outcomes, including profitability, productivity, customer relations, employee retention,

workplace safety, and overall well-being. Throughout 2022, Gallup administered quarterly surveys to the working population, comprising random samples of approximately 15,000 full-time and part-time US workers each quarter. The findings presented represent an average of these four quarterly results.

The survey evaluates various workplace factors, including how much employees agree on having clear expectations, access to growth opportunities, and feeling their perspectives matter at work. Simply put, engaged workers are committed to and passionate about their roles and the organization. Actively disengaged workers are dissatisfied and uncommitted due to unaddressed workplace needs.^{3, 4, 5}

Employees are now expecting more from their leaders. They want to feel heard, appreciated, and rewarded, which they have always wanted—now, that’s nonnegotiable. The leaders of the past can no longer rest on their laurels. No matter how long you have been a leader, there is now an urgency to reflect on your own development and level up your leadership game.

CEOs are well aware of the need for a strong workforce. “C-suite leaders believe that a hybrid model, where a number of employees work together on site some of the time, will increase competition for top talent. Around 40 percent of CEOs globally also expect this model will lead to improvements in worker productivity as well as an increase in innovation capacity—long-standing goals for many CEOs.

“Yet survey responses indicate concerns that these benefits will come at the cost of the kind of relationships that build strong

and successful working cultures over the long run. A majority (61 percent) believe a significant shift in corporate culture will be required for hybrid work to work well in their organizations.”⁶ The question then becomes, what are you shifting and why?

To have a high-performing hybrid work model, there needs to be more focus on how leaders show up and communicate. Management skills now need to be more attuned to the nuances of these hybrid groups. Over 85 percent of CEOs and senior executives believe the model necessitates greater emphasis on modern leadership effectiveness.

To retain top talent, organizations are re-recruiting their teams, offering a compelling new vision, and recognizing the dedication shown during challenging times. However, if you are asking who opened the barn doors after the horses escaped, you are too late. Employees have been sharing their discontent with leadership for a long time. The new focus should be to do a checkup from the neck up. And that checkup starts with you.

Employees have been sharing their discontent with leadership for a long time. The new focus should be to do a checkup from the neck up. And that checkup starts with you.

This book is designed to assist you with your checkup. Leadership has moved into a new era. If you are not preparing to invest in your leadership skills and move into this new era, it won't just leave you behind—it will run you over.



Employees Are Refusing To Return To What Was— And So Should You

If there's one thing that's certain in business, it's uncertainty.

STEPHEN COVEY

The pandemic has irrevocably altered the work landscape. Employees have experienced the flexibility, autonomy, and balance that remote work can offer, and there's no turning back. The old paradigms have shifted, and leaders must embrace this change to foster a resilient and engaged workforce.

The past several years have continued to bring about profound changes in how we work, think, and live. The pandemic acted as a catalyst for many of these transformations, accelerating trends that were already underway and highlighting the need for adaptability and resilience. As we move forward, these changes will continue to shape the future of work and society.

I have introduced the following five new realities into the conversation. These have forever shifted the methodology of how and where we work. I have identified these critical modifications from research done over three decades, including training several thousand participants in my programs and assessing over two thousand using the Everything DiSC assessment.

The first step to leveling up your leadership game is to understand how the playing field has been forever altered. These new realities need to be taken into consideration because your employees have changed their expectations of your skills.

New Reality Number One: Remote Work And Hybrid Models

Shift To Remote Work

Following the pandemic, we have seen a sudden and widespread shift to remote work. Many companies adopted remote work policies almost overnight, leading to a reevaluation of traditional office environments. If there is now a desire to shift back to in-office working, be sure to fully explore the rationale for this shift. In addition, it is critical to communicate the why and the how behind coming back to work in the office.

Another area that can cause this modification to go off the rails is inconsistency in the adoption of remote or in-office work environments. Nothing is worse than one manager following corporate policies regarding in-office engagement and requiring their employees to return to the office, while some or all of the remaining managers decide to let employees work remotely. Be consistent with changes.

Studies have shown that in-office workers tend to have an environment that supports creativity and produce at a higher rate, not because they are not at home, but because there are more opportunities for collaboration.⁷ Economics is driving a push for remote work, and technology supports it. However, if your projects have better results when everyone is in the room, then discuss why and how the in-office environment will work in the new normal.

Leaders navigating hybrid environments are operating in a landscape filled with ambiguity. With limited visibility into team workloads and workflows, and fewer chances for spontaneous, two-way conversations, many struggle to maintain a clear sense of progress and control. At the same time, they face the challenge of fostering cohesion, collaboration, and camaraderie—hallmarks of in-person work—while also promoting the flexibility and autonomy that remote work provides. As a result, their ability to lead effectively is under pressure. This has led to a growing emphasis on developing strategies specifically designed for leading in hybrid settings.⁸

Hybrid Work Models

As pandemic restrictions lifted, many organizations transitioned to hybrid work models that blend remote and in-office work. Whether individuals were involved in shaping this shift or not, it has had a significant impact on workplace culture, communication practices, and the measurement of productivity. However, emerging research indicates that hybrid models often yield the lowest productivity outcomes compared to fully remote or entirely on-site arrangements.⁹ Managing both remote and in-person meetings

with a video component can be tricky at the best of times. It is easy to only focus on the people in the room.

Other studies have shown that individuals who participate virtually in a hybrid meeting tend to share less, have less impact on the group, and miss opportunities to showcase skill sets that could aid their career growth.¹⁰ This does not mean that hybrid work models should be abandoned, but understanding the ramifications and costs of this modification and taking measures to alleviate the issues are important.

Leadership Takeaway

Set clear, measurable goals and give employees the trust, responsibility, and authority to meet them.

New Reality Number Two: Technological Advancements

Acceleration Of Digital Transformation

During the past several years, businesses accelerated their digital transformation efforts to support remote work and digital customer interactions. Cloud computing, cybersecurity, and AI saw increased investment. Things are moving very fast, and even when you feel that you have caught up today, you may already be behind for the world of tomorrow.

Be comfortable when adopting technology, even if you're initially bad at it. And it's also OK not to "keep up;" you don't need to, but you do need to continue adapting. In fact, according to TechJury, the compound annual growth rate for AI is projected

to be just over 42 percent by 2027.¹¹ That means advancements are not slowing down anytime soon.

Collaboration Tools

In recent years, the adoption of tools like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Slack has become ubiquitous, transforming how teams communicate and collaborate. These collaboration tools are important, even if all of your team members are in one physical location. The tools act as a notetaker and, with the use of AI, can even summarize and outline critical points of the meeting, including agreed-upon action items.

Leadership Takeaway

Technology is a tool; make it your friend to the degree that it will help with day-to-day tasks. Don't worry about getting ahead of the curve, you won't, and you don't need to. Remember, you have to be bad at it before you are good at it. If you have avoided technology in the past, you can no longer get away with that today.

New Reality Number Three: Mental Health Awareness

Increased Focus On Well-being

The pandemic highlighted the importance of mental health, with increased awareness and initiatives to support employee well-being. Companies began offering more mental health resources and flexible work options to reduce burnout.

Empathetic leaders are now needed to understand what employees might be experiencing. There still needs to be caution.

Leaders who were not so good a couple of years ago stand out as some of the worst leaders in today's world.

Burnout And Stress

Remote work blurred the boundaries between personal and professional life, leading to higher levels of stress and burnout.¹² This has prompted discussions about work-life balance and the need for mental health support. This blurring of lines can enable leaders to provide support, allowing employees to take care of themselves. However, even with knowledge of your employees' situations, you will still need to offer some tough love.

While leaders may focus solely on removing negative factors, they also need to create a positive environment. Dr. Steve Swavely, a well-known leadership neuropsychologist, shared insight based on his book, *Ignite Your Leadership*.¹³ "Leaders need to now pay attention to the environment they create. And they have control to produce an environment that increases well-being, reduces burnout, limits stress, and builds engagement."

Leadership Takeaway

No one is asking you to suddenly become a therapist. What is now expected of you is to understand the impact of stress on mental health and get familiar with new approaches to helping your employees with potential burnout. If you believe employees are the business lifeblood, which they are, you need to protect that resource.

New Reality Number Four: Global Political And Social Changes And Unrest

Political Uncertainty

The past few years have seen significant political changes and uncertainties, including the rise of populist movements, geopolitical tensions, and policy shifts. These factors have affected global markets and business strategies. We sometimes experience only nasty conflict instead of productive conflict. Divisiveness needs to be rallied against.

What leaders should navigate in today's world is to understand that external change may be affecting employees and still keep the internal environment supportive and safe for diverse opinions that are shared in a respectful, constructive way.

Social Movements

Movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have brought issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion to the forefront. Companies continue to focus on creating inclusive environments and addressing systemic inequalities regardless of the initials attached to it.

This means creating a culture of inclusion, no matter the political persuasion. Model the behavior you want to see and keep a neutral work environment. As a leader, you must learn to have your personal beliefs and the beliefs of your team members coexist in the workplace.

You can share enough of yourself without being controversial and without taking away from the safe environment that you create. Your employees should be able to know who you are, especially

through the lens of business. Your beliefs and values make you a unique type of leader. Those values have created the experiences that have made you this leader in this moment.

Your values and character as a leader will always be important. They affect how you lead and how others follow. You need to be aware of those aspects in your leadership and ensure there is an environment that is safe for people to fully engage with their team on the work at hand and to hold a safe crucible for diverse ideas and opinions.

Leadership Takeaway

Help your employees find and build common ground. That starts with you. Model engaging the communication and behavior you expect from others. Keep the priority focused on the business of business.

Keep the priority focused on the business of business.

New Reality Number Five: Economic Shifts

Economic Disruption

The pandemic caused economic disruptions that have continued through to the current volatility. This includes job losses, changes in consumer behavior, and shifts in global supply chains. Companies continue to have to adapt to these changes quickly to survive.

Being adaptive to uncertainty can help your employees shift as well. They are looking at you for guidance, and resilience and

calmness are traits that can be adopted by your employees to keep the company running.

Gig Economy Growth

There has been a rise in gig and freelance work as individuals seek more flexible and autonomous working arrangements. Platforms like Uber, Upwork, and Fiverr have grown in popularity. As a leader, you will have to manage non-employees at some point in your career. How much you make those contractors a component of your team will depend on how crucial their role is in the project and organization.

Culture will affect how well these 1099 workers are treated by the rest of the team. Have you explained their role and responsibilities to the rest of the group? Sharing this information can help others understand how that worker benefits the project and the team dynamics.

Leadership Takeaway

If the economic ground your employees are standing on shifts, you can be sure the same will happen to the ground your business is on. By providing strong and consistent leadership, you are also providing a safe harbor for your employees. Employees are looking for your calm guidance and level head now more than ever. Are you providing that?

How have you modified your leadership to accommodate the changes these new realities create in yourself and others?