

CHAPTER 1

UNLOCKING THE LEADER'S MINDSET

“If you don’t innovate fast, disrupt your industry, disrupt yourself, you’ll be left behind.”

— **John Chambers**, CEO of Cisco,
speaking at the World Economic Forum, 2015

Let’s play a quick game. Why are the numbers 480, 168, and 960 significant?

First, 480 is the number of minutes in an eight-hour day. That’s not much when you consider the avalanche of social media demands, meetings, and other battles for your attention. Recently, a CEO confessed to me: “If I get interrupted just once every five minutes, that’s ninety-six interruptions a day. It’s almost impossible to focus. My whole day is spent reacting to the latest emergency. Something has to change.”

Things got so bad that his wife responded to the chaos by throwing his cell phone in the washing machine. I do not recommend this as a coping strategy.

As for 168, this is the number of hours in a week. Today's breakneck work pace has greatly impacted how we think—for much of our 168 hours, we're struggling to focus on what really matters. According to a recent global survey by LinkedIn,¹ the online business network, a whopping 89 percent of people say they don't achieve their daily goals. We're distracted, our brains are tired, and we're having more accidents. I've witnessed this phenomenon firsthand. Once, I saw a person walk straight into a fountain because they were looking down at their cell phone. We now live in a "look down" world. A new study commissioned by Nokia, the communications and technology company, showed that the average person checks their phone 150 times a day and gets anxious after only ten minutes away from it.² Some people are even known to feel their phone vibrate when it's switched off!

If you paddle too hard, the boat capsizes. In a world of ever increasing overload, we must become more adept at cutting through the barrage of noise and battles for our attention. Our mindset is one of constant distraction. Psychologist Herbert A. Simon writes: "Information consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention."³

New research by YouGov, the market research organization, shows that only one in seven Americans wakes up feeling fresh every day of the week and a whopping one in four wake up mentally exhausted on four or more days.⁴ The Japanese have a word for this busy state, *karoshi*, which literally translates as "death from overwork." This is a fate we must avoid at all costs.

This all leads to the final and most humbling number—960. Nine hundred sixty months is the amount of time we may have on this earth

if we're lucky. The number translates to eighty years of age—29,200 days to be exact! When I discovered I'd already used up more than 500 of my 960 months, my mouth fell open in shock. Sadly, we spend so much of our precious time committing to a job we don't believe in or a career that leaves us feeling like a shadow of our former selves. Knowing the number of months we have left on this planet can help us clarify what really matters. It's time to upgrade your mindset for the age of disruption. Something sets it apart, makes it stand out, and gives it unique capabilities.

I call it the leader's mindset. Do I have your attention now? Good.

MINDSET IN MOTION

Jan Koum and Brian Acton are the founders of WhatsApp, the world's most famous messaging app. Its mission is to “empower people through technology and communication, no matter who they are, or where they live.”⁵

Their remarkable journey is a hallmark of courage, willpower, and relentless determination. In a *Guardian* newspaper interview, Acton describes the relationship as “yin and yang.” He says: “I'm the naïve optimist, he's more paranoid. I pay attention to bills and taxes, he [Koum] pays attention to our product.”⁶

Koum was born in a rural village outside of Kiev, Ukraine. At the age of sixteen, during much political strife and instability, his family made the agonizing decision to flee their country and move to Mountain View, California. Koum's father could not join them and was left behind. Koum told one interviewer: “I grew up in a society where everything you did was eavesdropped on, recorded, snitched on.”⁷ Koum's difficult childhood experience under Soviet surveillance undoubtedly influenced the design of the WhatsApp messaging service.

Koum and Acton are no strangers to failure and rejection. In the summer of 2009, Acton was looking for a job. For more than eleven

years, the Stanford computer science graduate had been working at Yahoo, the social networking business, in various engineering roles.

He used Twitter to share his news.⁸

7:06 PM, 20 MAY 2009

Networking with recruiters, venture capitalists, playing ultimate Frisbee.

8:39 PM, 23 May 2009

Got denied by Twitter HQ. That's OK. Would have been a long commute.

8:14 PM, 3 Aug 2009

Facebook turned me down. It was a great opportunity to connect with some fantastic people. Looking forward to life's next adventure.

Whatever you choose to believe, life is anything but predictable. Just five years later, in a miraculous twist of fate, Facebook bought WhatsApp for \$19 billion.⁹

To put the deal in perspective, at the time of purchase, the hotel chain Marriott International had over 120,000 staff, a twenty-two-year history, and a market cap of over \$15.4 billion.¹⁰ WhatsApp has only fifty-five employees, although I hear they are hiring.

How did this unlikely pair become two of the most successful entrepreneurs on the planet? The answer: they had harnessed the leader's mindset by having the brains to disrupt the technology industry, and the guts to disrupt themselves.

10X THINKING

Astro Teller is a British entrepreneur, scientist, and thinker who is widely credited as one of the pioneers of 10X thinking (10X). He heads up Google X, a futuristic lab responsible for hyper-ambitious projects such

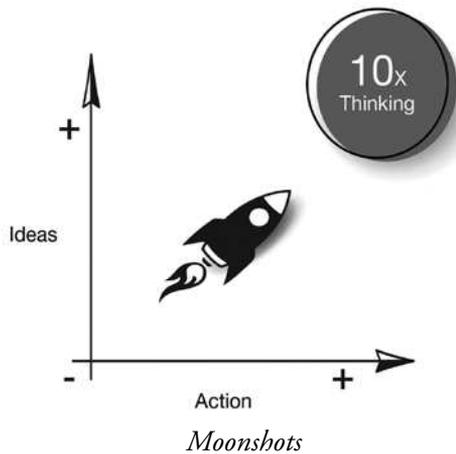
as Google Glass, Project Loon, a balloon-powered Wi-Fi network, and the infamous Google self-driving car. According to legend, his business card describes him as “Captain of Moon Shots”.

His story inspired me to embark on a journey to unlock the anatomy of a leader’s mindset at many of the world’s most exciting companies, from young startups to global giants.

Along the way, I uncovered some surprising insights about how the smartest leaders’ brains are wired differently than those of other business people. In an interview with *Wired* magazine, Teller explains the power of 10X thinking: “There are tests that you can apply to see if you’re thinking big enough. The easiest one, the mantra that we use at Google X, is ten times rather than ten percent better, you tend to work from where you are: if I ask you to make a car that goes 50 miles a gallon, you can just retool the engine you already have. But if I tell you it has to run on a gallon of gas for 500 miles, you’re going to have to start over. That causes you to approach the problem so differently that weirdly, counter-intuitively, it’s often easier to make something ten times better—because perspective-shifting is just that much more powerful than hard work and resources being thrown at problems via traditional, well-tried paths.”¹¹

Imagine leading your organization up to ten times better than you do

today or increasing your team’s success tenfold. 10X thinking is the golden thread that links all great leaders and is at the core of how to win in the age of disruption.



My challenge had been set. I wanted to answer the question: “What must you 10X in order to unlock the leader’s mindset?”

INNOVATION WAY

On a recent visit to Silicon Valley, it occurred to me that while it’s a place, it should mostly be seen as a mindset.

A mindset is a leader’s way of thinking: it’s their beliefs, attitudes, choices and assumptions that affect how leaders view the world and their work. Silicon Valley borders Cupertino, home of Apple, Inc., the world’s most valuable company, and Mountain View, the home of Google’s Googleplex headquarters. One road is aptly named Innovation Way. Leaders radiate optimism and genuinely care about what you’re doing. I call it passionate curiosity. Instead of asking, “What do you do?” they’ll ask: “How can I help and who do you know?” There’s a freedom to be yourself: nobody is waiting for approval or permission. It’s impossible to not feel hugely invigorated by the energy, ideas, and sheer determination to make things happen. This type of environment can have a big impact on the way you think, perhaps unlike anywhere else on the planet.

It’s no accident that Silicon Valley is a household name today all around the world. Its herculean rise is in large part due to 10X thinking from the “father of Silicon Valley” Frederick Terman¹² to, in more recent times, Y Combinator cofounders Paul Graham and Sam Altman.

These leaders have thrown out the rulebook on leadership: the leader’s mindset demands you to rethink assumptions about what is possible. Even if you achieve only 60 percent of a 10X goal, you will have grown your team and your business, and probably learned some important things about yourself along the way. I believe 10X thinking is central to a leader’s mindset and is about pushing people to think bigger, breaking out of those little boxes that we get trapped in. It’s about reimagining the future and asking if we started again today what would be different? We tend to associate 10X just with new ideas but it’s

possible to apply it to anything in your organization, from improving culture to how you scale more rapidly. I came to the conclusion that you can 10X any part of your leadership role when you choose the right mindset. For example, now I don't limit myself to just one mentor. I have multiple mentors. For me, this is the essence of a leader's mindset. It stops you from thinking small.

LEADERSHIP REWRITTEN

In 2016, the number of startup “unicorns”, small, fast-growing technology firms with valuations of more than \$1 billion, is at record levels.¹³ The big guys know that survival requires leading differently and continually finding new ways of doing things that the competition doesn't. CEOs are sweating in boardrooms up and down the country as young upstarts force them to completely rethink how they run their companies. Many are virtually asset-free: Uber, the biggest taxi company, does not own cars; Airbnb, the biggest provider of accommodations, does not own hotels; and Google, the world's most popular media company, does not own content.

Leadership is undergoing a seismic and long-overdue shift.

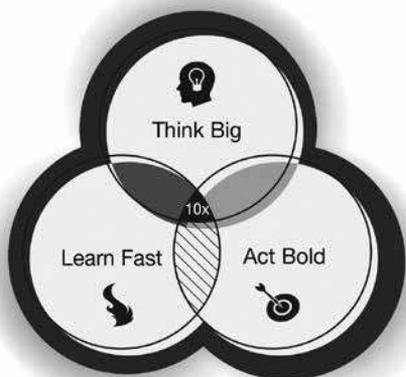
In many companies, there's a chronic leadership gap: teams are being overmanaged and underled. To progress, we must all become leaders of ourselves; this means we must make change happen and become a lifelong learner of leadership. Michael Raddatz, at fashion company Bottega Veneta, tells me: “In such a flat world where numerous opportunities arise, our challenge is to seize the ones that will allow you to become ‘you’. Leadership books always mention the importance of getting out of your comfort zone to reach new heights, both personal and professional. But how does one differentiate challenges from dangers? At the end of the day, you are the one and only person who can make the decision. These decisions have an impact on your mindset and your future. So I'm quite confident in saying that the leaders out there that inspire the

world are, before anything, great self-leaders; they have seized the right opportunities to be (or become) themselves and shine.”

In *The Leader's Mindset*, you will learn about “moonshots”, the revolutionary ideas that have the greatest impact on your leadership results. Unless you spend every hour of the day awake, it's a bad strategy to try to do everything. You must know what *not* to do. Clear thinking helps a leader remain focused on the “critical few”. The “critical few” is another way of saying the 80/20 rule. This clever rule of thumb says that 20 percent of anything drives 80 percent of outcomes. For example, 20 percent of your leadership actions will produce 80 percent of your results. Can you think of any others? Now that you know about this, you'll start seeing it everywhere. With limited time and resources, you must identify the critical few leadership actions that will give you the most leverage. This means thinking, acting, and leading in

a way that gets results and taps into the biggest sources of potential in yourself, and your organization.

There are three action-oriented mindsets you must 10X to win in the age of disruption. They are practical shortcuts for simplifying how we think, how we act, and, ultimately, how we lead.



The Leader's Mindset

1. Think Big Mindset (Future Shaper)

When was the last time you set a challenge for yourself that pushed you to deliver more than you thought was humanly possible? Most leaders

think about how they can lead better by 10 percent or 20 percent, not by a factor of ten. The leader's mindset is hardwired to think bigger and brighter, whether it's wiping out malaria in the next ten years (the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) or making space tourism a reality (Richard Branson and Elon Musk). These leaders have an eye on the future and can spot an unmet opportunity quickly before others. They're not afraid of change and enjoy bucking the norm. They are future shapers.

You don't have to be a CEO or run a startup to think big. It's about taking control of your vision rather than someone else hiring you to fulfill theirs. Get started, have a clear destination, fail fast, test ideas lightly and often, and know that those who shape the future hold two beliefs: (1) problems can't be solved with yesterday's thinking, and (2) you have the resources to achieve your goals.

Shaping the future starts with finding your "why", your leadership purpose. Leaders spend a lot of time on their mission statements. I see them on the walls of corridors and boardrooms everywhere, but most aren't living up to their aspirations or their purpose. This observation is backed up by Gallup, Inc., the leading management consultancy, whose research shows that "only slightly more than one-third of U.S. workers strongly agree that their company's mission or purpose makes them feel their job is important."¹⁴ This represents an enormous untapped opportunity for leaders everywhere, according to *Fast Company* writer Robert Safian: "Mission is the essential strategic tool that allows them to filter the modern barrage of stimuli, to motivate and engage those around them, and to find new and innovative ways to solve the world's problems. Their experiences show the critical advantages of building mission in your career and your business. Companies that find and then live by their mission often discover that it becomes their greatest competitive advantage."¹⁵

2. Act Bold Mindset (Risk Taker)

What is it that enables leaders to persevere through seemingly insurmountable challenges that at first seem to exceed our limits? Make a list of leaders you admire and who have made a difference in the world. They could be living or dead. The chances are they all have one outstanding quality in common: they are bold.

A bold mindset excels at speed, creativity, and decisive action. They are risk takers. It's not the only factor that drives success, but perhaps it is one of the most important in the age of overload. We all face the twin problems of deciding what to do and what to tune out. Creativity enables leaders to imagine different solutions to a problem and can help you "cut through the noise and focus on the signal," as high profile entrepreneur Elon Musk describes it. If you want to make an impact, you need to act boldly, especially when the going gets tough.

Adversity is a natural part of the leadership journey. I have discovered that at the core of a leader's mindset is an attitude, rooted in an ancient Nordic belief system called *sisu*. *Sisu* refers to "extraordinary determination, courage and resoluteness in the face of extreme stress or adversity."¹⁶ Every leader I have studied overcame battles that seemed insurmountable at the time and yet they did not give up.

At some point we will all open the door and face our own Mount Everest. It could be finding the strength to tackle a failure or bouncing back from a personal tragedy or setback.

Mine came when I was seven years old—a driver sped out of control, mounted a curb, and crashed into a shop where my family and I were standing. We nearly lost our lives. Ever since that day I've understood that part of the power of *sisu* lies in its hope-inducing nature. Hope is the sparkplug of all action, according to the world's leading researcher on hope, Dr. Shane Lopez.¹⁷ It's in that split moment that you have a choice either to accept defeat or push past

barriers. As the late British prime minister Winston Churchill once implored, “never, ever, ever give up.”

3. Learn Fast Mindset (Knowledge Seeker)

Today, business is inherently more complex than it has ever been. Yves Morieux, senior partner at strategy consultancy Boston Consulting Group (BCG), has developed an index to show how business complexity has increased sixfold during the past sixty years alone. And organizational complexity (number of procedures, structures, processes, systems, vertical layers, and decision approvals) increased by a factor of thirty-five.¹⁸ To learn fast, you must be interested in people and ideas, not just yourself. “Be savvy, flexible, learn from mistakes and collaborate with well-connected people,” writes Shane Snow, the author of *Smartcuts: How Hackers, Innovators, and Icons Accelerate Success*.¹⁹ Those who learn fast build diverse knowledge pools and tap into the wisdom of mentors to raise their game. They are knowledge seekers for whom questioning, experimenting and adapting is the norm.

FROM IDEA TO REALITY

Many of the ideas in this book come from my keynote talk “The Leader’s Mindset”. The talk helps leaders to think bigger, “see” things that are normally ignored, and find value in what’s missing. More than 5,000 people have attended, ranging from Fortune 500 leaders to founders of fledgling startups.

As a business educator and mentor, my work constantly takes me around the world. I’ve met leaders from all walks of life including a Duke, and spoken at or attended some of the best conferences on the planet, including TechCrunch’s Disrupt, GrowCo, Digital Life by Design, and TED. These encounters changed my life and provided me a rich insight into what it takes to think and act like a leader.

When you tap into the leader’s mindset, you’ll see more:

- **Significance.** Millennials are the first generation where a one-hundred-year life span and multiple careers will be common. They'll have to learn, unlearn, and relearn as some industries die and others become completely automated. Smiley Poswolsky writes in his book *The Quarter-Life Breakthrough*: "Far from me me me generation, ours is the Purpose Generation, a group who refuses to settle, because we know how great our impact is when we find work we care about."²⁰ Those who find their calling and match it with their strengths are happier and more successful. The leader's mindset begins with zero compromise on purpose. It demands that you believe in what you're doing and that your contribution is essential to the world.
- **Courage.** "There is no instinct like that of the heart," wrote Lord Byron.²¹ The best leaders shake up the status quo, deal with failure, and make tough decisions fast. Every big 10,000-person company wants to think like a startup: small companies have "can do" cultures, habits and ways of working that give them an edge over their much larger and cumbersome rivals. The leaders of tomorrow will have to find the intellectual courage to change their business models two or even three times in order to remain viable. The bad news is that they're probably not going to learn this new mindset at business school.
- **Ideas.** TED (www.ted.com) is the global community devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of influential eighteen-minute talks. Its mission is to promote "ideas worth spreading". New ideas that change the world matched with talent and energy are at the core of what leaders do best. The head of MIT's Media Lab, Joi Ito said in a *Wired* interview: "The biggest change that Moore's Law and the internet have caused is the decrease in the cost of innovation, and the decrease in the cost of collaboration and distribution. The amount of money, and the amount of

permission that you need to create an idea has decreased dramatically, whether it's Wikipedia, Yahoo, Facebook, or Google. They didn't have to ask for permission, and didn't even need to raise money to do it. They just did it. That pushes innovation to the edges so you no longer need money, power and control to innovate."²² Now you can prototype an idea and get it up and running faster than ever before.

When you tap into the leader's mindset, you'll see less:

- **SEP.** This stands for "somebody else's problem". It's endemic in many companies and is the opposite of the leader's mindset. You know the characters: blame throwers, energy suckers, silent assassins, and misery monsters that drag the whole team down. A SEP culture means avoidance: excuses, inertia, and lazy back covering. Like a disease that's airborne, SEP can contaminate a team, a company, and even you. The leader's mindset does more with less; the whole team must be resourceful in order to optimize the resources as far as they can and create a positive work environment. Everybody becomes a leader.
- **Wasted Talent.** A key, non-negotiable role of every leader is fueling the organization's growth by utilizing the best talent. One of the saddest truths for any organization is wasted talent—the moment when somebody mentally quits the job but continues to work. For those with the leader's mindset, it's about return on intelligence. This means using a team's unique strengths to do great work and making a difference beyond chasing profit.
- **Fear.** Fear can cause flight-fight or freeze behaviors and a hasty retreat from your biggest dreams, goals, and plans. Leaders give up and therefore guarantee their fate but also condemn themselves to fear's closest cousin: regret. Fear takes many forms, including fear of failure, fear of the unknown, procrastination, and doubt. Most of the biggest battles you'll ever fight will be

inside your own head: the battle for identity, the battle for truth, and the battle for purpose are three of the biggest challenges you'll have to confront in order to reach your best personal self.

It's easy to fall into negative thinking traps: *I can't do it. I'm not good enough. This isn't the right time. I'll do it tomorrow.* This toxic mindset keeps you locked in a state of helplessness that can rob you of your future leadership potential and become a barrier to change.

NEXT STEPS

The Leader's Mindset will help you to do great work and excel in a fast, volatile world. Every leader knows that they must disrupt the status quo or they'll risk becoming it; they must step into the unknown to create new things that have not been created before.

We must all take care to make the most of our 960 months. At best, many leaders are sleepwalking. We are the distracted generation, always stuck to our cell phone screens, our minds busy and exhausted from always being "on" 24/7.

You can choose to be a leader, a follower, or out of business. When you decide, something will happen at a cellular level: you will feel alive. The leader's mindset is not satisfied with just good enough. Being able to wake up excited in the morning to do meaningful work is the very foundation of personal wellbeing and happiness.

The Leader's Mindset is organized into four sections: "Think Big Mindset", "Act Bold Mindset", "Learn Fast Mindset", and a conclusion, "Final Thoughts, Hacks, and Shortcuts". Each section is useful on its own, but their convergence is the key to unlocking the leader's mindset within yourself and your organization. Remove one section and the journey slows down. Commit to all of them and change will begin to unfold.