

**HOW TO
LEAD
WHEN YOU'RE
NOT
IN CHARGE**

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I'll let you in on a leadership secret: people don't follow titles. They follow courage and integrity. That means true leaders become people of influence, regardless of their spot on an organizational chart. If you're ready to lead right where you are, Clay Scroggins understands—and *How to Lead When You're Not in Charge* can show you how to start.

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**HOW TO
LEAD
WHEN YOU'RE
NOT
IN CHARGE**

LEVERAGING INFLUENCE

WHEN YOU LACK AUTHORITY



CLAY SCROGGINS

 **ZONDERVAN®**



ZONDERVAN

How to Lead When You're Not in Charge
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*For those hungry to help others through
leadership, this book is for you.*

CONTENTS

Foreword | 11

Acknowledgments | 15

PART 1: UNDERSTANDING OUR CHALLENGE

Chapter 1: The Oddity of Leadership | 19

Chapter 2: Identity Crisis | 37

Chapter 3: Reclaim Kibosh | 63

PART 2: THE FOUR BEHAVIORS

Chapter 4: Lead Yourself | 89

Chapter 5: Choose Positivity | 111

Chapter 6: Think Critically | 131

Chapter 7: Reject Passivity | 149

PART 3: CHALLENGING AUTHORITY

Chapter 8: Challenging Up | 169

Chapter 9: Breaking Down Challenging Up | 189

Chapter 10: Your Next Chapter Starts Today | 211

Notes | 227

FOREWORD

Autonomy is a myth.

It's a myth passed from one generation of wannabe leaders to the next. Eventually, every leader is forced to come to terms with the reality that *everybody is accountable to somebody*. Like most life lessons, the sooner a leader embraces this, the better. Leaders who wrap themselves in the security blanket of "If I were in charge" or "When I'm in charge" as an excuse for poor performance and lack of initiative will most likely never be in charge. On the other hand, the real leaders in an organization will find a way to lead the charge until they are in charge. Ultimately, those are the folks great leaders put in charge.

I've been on both sides of this equation. I remember sitting in a restaurant with my leadership team the Monday after I announced to a ballroom full of folks that we were starting a new church. The six of us had worked together for several years. I smiled and said, "Congratulations, we are *they!*" You know, *they*—the folks everybody in management complains about. *We were they*. I'm not sure it had dawned on us that from that point forward we didn't really have anybody to complain about or blame.

That was twenty-two years ago. They are still *they* and they have gone the distance to build an extraordinary organization. They were prepared for the day they finally became *they*. I chose that particular team because they had led well in an organization that neither honored nor encouraged leadership. I'd watched 'em lead when they weren't in charge. So I knew

they were the group to put in charge. When you find people who can get things done in an organization conspiring against them, you've found leaders.

Why?

Great leaders leverage influence and relationships over title and position. When a leader is left with nothing to leverage other than title and position, the end is near. The best leaders lead like they're not in charge even when they are. The best leaders become *the* leaders by mastering the art of leading when they're not in charge. And that's why the book you're holding in your hands will be one of the most, if not the most, pivotal leadership books you'll ever read. If you want to build a leadership culture in your organization, you should make this book required reading for everyone on your team.

I've had the privilege of working with Clay Scroggins since he was a student at Georgia Tech. Clay has been an integral part of our organization for fourteen years. He started out as an intern. When he graduated from Tech with an industrial engineering degree, we hired him to lead our student ministry. His parents probably were . . . well . . . they're happy now.

Anyway.

Clay was our student pastor when my kids were in high school. So I was paying attention. When he was twenty-five, I asked him to start filling in for me on Sundays when I was gone or taking a break. When he was the whopping age of thirty, I asked him to step into the lead pastor role of the third-largest campus in our network of churches. Now Clay serves as lead pastor of North Point Community Church—my old job.

Clay was making a difference in our organization long before he was in charge of anything significant. Everything he

touched got bigger and better whether he was in charge of it or not. Several years ago, I asked him at the last minute to do the teaching at our bimonthly all-staff meeting. He chose to talk about what he had learned about leading beyond his title, position, and authority. It was amazing. I remember thinking, *I could never talk about this with any moral authority because I'm in charge*. My wife, Sandra, turned to me and said, "This needs to be a book!" I agreed but didn't mention it to Clay. Sometime later, he asked me if I thought this would be a good book topic. I said, "Absolutely."

So here it is.

This isn't theory. These principles and applications are organic. They are rooted in organizational reality. If you aren't convinced already, you will be. You don't have to be in charge to make a difference. You can lead without being in charge!

ANDY STANLEY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing these next few paragraphs has been my favorite part of this entire process. In Romans 16, the apostle Paul had a full-on chapter of his own acknowledgments and it just seems like a great idea for all of us. These are mine . . .

Thank you to my wife, Jenny. I still remember the first time we met. I thought you were pretty amazing then, but I had no idea. No matter where we go, I'm home with you. Thank you for allowing me the margin to write this book. You have been steadfast, loving, incredibly supportive, and in it with me from the first keystroke. It's you and me till the end! Thank you to our kids. I hope being pastor's kids offers more than it costs you.

Thank you to my parents and sisters. I had the greatest childhood I could've imagined. I just hope Jenny and I can create the same amount of love, stability, and joy you gave me. To Lee and Donna, your love for Jesus is creating a legacy that our children's kids will certainly benefit from. Thank you!

For the last two decades, our church has been a massive gift in my life. Andy and Sandra, thank you alone doesn't cut it. You have led our church with so much integrity, faithfulness, and humility. I'm in tears thinking about how much gratitude I have for both of you. And thank you to an amazingly gifted team of volunteers and staff who sacrificially lead every week. I've been trying my hardest to repay, but I'll never be able to match the gift you've been to me.

Thank you to those who were instrumental in helping me write this book:

- Ben Ortlip: You told me the key to writing was to begin the day by putting my face on the ground and begging

God to inspire me. If nothing else, you told me, it would cause the blood to rush to my head. That was fantastic advice and still makes me laugh.

- Suzy Gray and Belinda Randall: It's really difficult to work with people you don't enjoy, and this whole thing has been a blast for me because of you! You two are servant-hearted, smart, and so driven. Thank you.
- Ryan Pazdur: You've made this whole process so easy. Thank you for your patience, kindness, graciousness, and honesty.
- Justin Elam: On the morning of March 19, 2014, I was hurriedly trying to finish this talk for our all-staff meeting. You agreed to meet with me that morning and you gave me illustrations, one-liners, stories, and quotes that were so inspiring to me. I owe you a lot.
- Lane Jones: Thank you for telling me to be me when I was writing. That was huge.
- Matt Bevier: Thank you for reading a few of these chapters early on. Your words from across the world were bigger than you'll ever know.

Thank you to my bros Bryson and Brad. Most people let everyone know a few things, but we've chosen to let a few people know everything. I think it's just better that way. Thank you for being such a huge encouragement and inspiration to me.

Thank you to Megan Gross for keeping life organized and fun.

Thank you to our NPCC leadership team. Most of what I've learned about leading without authority, I've learned from each of you.

Oh, and thanks to Brad Jones. Is that what you were looking for?



Understanding Our Challenge



CHAPTER 1

THE ODDITY OF LEADERSHIP

I guess I've always wanted to be a leader.

Perhaps it started with the safety patrol in fifth grade. As if being the oldest in elementary school was not enough of an ego boost, our school selected a few of the most eager kids to serve on the team that patrolled the carpool lane. Something came over me as I put on that yellow hard hat and reflective sash. I had swagger. With just the slightest hand gesture, I could force two tons of steel to come to a complete stop. That's power.

Maybe it started when I entered the student government presidential race in tenth grade. For some odd reason, I was on this creative kick, trying to leverage popular hip-hop songs as my campaign slogans.

“Back that thing up” and vote for Clay. Thank you, Juvenile.

“Say my name, say my name” and vote for Clay. I see you, Beyoncé.

It's quite embarrassing now, but somehow it worked.

Or maybe it was when I subtly lobbied to be voted captain of the varsity baseball team. I was just good enough to make the team but not good enough to actually play. As disheartening as that was, becoming captain of the team seemed to be enough to satisfy my itch for leadership. “What happens in the dugout is more important than what happens on the field” became my stump speech.

Those were the moments I felt alive. Unfortunately, those times were few and far between. The rest of the time I was just another kid in class. When I had authority, I could lead. If I had no authority, I was just waiting my turn.

Sadly, through my high school years and beyond, I missed more opportunities than I took. I see that now when I look back on my first role in ministry as a student pastor. Our weekly event met on Sunday afternoons, but the best thing we were doing was mobilizing students to serve as small group leaders for kids during our morning services. Think about it. What would have helped you more as a student? Sitting in a class and listening to someone lecture you? Or actually leading your own group of younger kids and having to do some of the teaching yourself? The answer was as obvious then as it is now. Unfortunately, I didn’t have the courage to refocus our efforts and resources to encourage *even more* students to serve. Hindsight is 20/20, but the future doesn’t have to be so blurry if we wear the right glasses.

As I look back over my first few jobs, the common theme that has run through every one of them is regret. I regret the times I didn’t speak up. I regret the times I twiddled my thumbs, waiting for someone to tell me what to do. I regret feeling like a victim to the structure or hierarchy of the organization.

Life teaches us that the authority to lead and the opportunity to lead are a package deal. We think they go hand in hand like cranberry sauce and turkey. When we're given the authority to lead—a title, a uniform, a corner office—then, and only then, will we have the opportunity to lead. But that's just not true.

WAITING TO BE IN CHARGE

As we wait for the authority of leadership to present itself, are we supposed to just sit on the sidelines before we can attempt anything with even a resemblance to leadership? So it seems. Growing up, my perspective was that if you were in charge, you were naturally leading something. Parents were in charge and they seemed to be leading. The principal at school was definitely in charge. She seemed to be leading. Even the bus driver who was supposedly in charge of the bus yelled at everyone like he was trying to lead. The line leader in kindergarten was in charge, at least for the day. And what was everyone else in line doing? Just waiting until it was their turn.

Do you remember how that felt in school? I remember feeling so powerless, so helpless, and so impotent. I was one of thirty kids sitting in a row with a full bladder. Yet I couldn't relinquish one drop of urine without someone with authority leading me to the bathroom. The reality is that ninety-nine percent of my childhood was me being led by someone with authority. When someone else is telling you what to do, you don't have to lead anything. You don't even have to think. You just learn to put your mind in neutral and go with the flow. When someone else is leading you, it seems as though there is no leading left to be done. So you just wait.

No one likes waiting for a turn to lead—to be the one making the decisions—but we all know what it feels like. You have ideas, but you feel like no one will listen because you don't have the microphone. You're not *leading* the meeting; you're just *in* the meeting. When you tried to share your plan last time, you felt ignored. Or even worse, you felt like you were seen as a renegade or a thorn in the side of the one in charge. So you decide that maybe you're just better off if you quit trying.

They'll never listen.

It's going to be like this forever. I'll just shut up and go with it.

They just don't get it, and there's no sense in trying.

My first real job as an adult reinforced this. Though my desk sat on the seventeenth floor in a downtown Atlanta skyscraper like the rest of my team, everyone was eager to tell me what to do because his or her altitude on the organizational chart was higher than mine. And it seemed that the higher they were positioned on the chart, the lower the requested task was. I remember thinking, *I don't mind getting your dry cleaning, but I draw the line at picking up your snotty-nosed kid from daycare. Even I have my limits.* I moved through my younger years assuming I had to be in charge in order to lead. And until I was in charge, I just needed to wait my turn.

One of my small joys in life is grocery shopping. Ever since our kids were old enough to sit up, they fawned over the grocery carts that look like little cars. Those carts are to grocery shopping what the iPad has become for the family road trip. How did we ever live without them? Game. Changer. Our kids still love sitting in the driver's seat of the cart-car. They love the feel of the steering wheel in their hands. They love the power of having control of the cart.

But then there is that inevitable moment. That moment when the kids in the cart-car, happily driving along, suddenly realize the steering wheel doesn't actually work. I'm cruising in the grocery store with my kids and they're turning the steering wheel as the cart turns. Everything is working just fine. Suddenly, the kids notice the greatest aisle in the store—the candy aisle. Like Fourth of July fireworks, the bright colors and attractive packaging are putting on a show. So as quick as their little appendages can move, they aggressively begin turning the wheel. *Left, left, left, left.* But much to their chagrin, the cart doesn't turn. It keeps moving straight ahead.

That's when they turn and look up at you with that "How could this happen?" expression. It's that dejected look of disappointment that screams, "You tricked me. This wheel doesn't work. It does nothing. It's useless. Completely useless. Kind of like you as a parent, Dad."

And we learn, at an early age, that *having the steering wheel is the only way to lead*. And if that steering wheel is not attached to authority and power, it just doesn't work. That's what we're taught by our life experiences. If we want the cart to move, we must be in control. We learn that the little wheel we're handed is just a toy and doesn't actually work. We think we must be in charge if we want to lead, if we want to turn the cart in a different direction. We come to see positional authority as a prerequisite for effective leadership.

EMBRACING THE MYTH

Tragically, I had to land the job I had always wanted before I realized I had bought into this myth. For almost twenty years now, I

have attended and now work for a large network of churches. Just after turning thirty, I was given a pretty substantial promotion. I was asked to move to one of our larger locations and become the lead pastor of that campus. It was one of those moments when I thought, *Are you serious? I'm flattered, of course. However, I question your discernment because this job is huge and I secretly still want to be Puff Daddy's hype man.* Nonetheless, someone saw something in me that I didn't see in myself, and I'm forever grateful. The new role was literally a dream come true.

I stepped into that job as an eager young leader, ready to shape our church into what I hoped it could be. I had strong opinions about how we should operate to serve our community best. Unfortunately, over the years, I had drifted toward an unhealthy mindset, feeling like a victim whose ideas weren't valued or understood within the larger organization. I felt inhibited and constrained, like a tamed lion (or, at the very least, an eager meerkat) at the zoo, lying in my cage, having lost my ambition to lead.

I soon learned I was wrong, because as it turns out, the cage doesn't even exist.

At the time, I knew I wasn't leading to my full potential. But if you had asked me *why*, I would have played the victim and blamed the problems on the organization.

“They just have a way of doing things.”

“They're not open to change.”

“They just want me to fit in the mold, toe the line, and follow the rules.”

I realize this might be true of some organizations. Many, perhaps. But it was not true of *our* organization. I was working (and still am) for a man named Andy Stanley. He's the son of

a preacher, and he knows the frustration of feeling hamstrung by a large, fossilized organization. Andy has spent most of his life intentionally seeking to create a leadership culture where the people who are responsible for executing a decision are the ones with the authority to make the decision. I'll be the first to admit that our organization is not perfect, but we certainly aren't a place where those who want to lead and have gifts and ideas should feel frustrated and blocked. At North Point, if you aren't leading because you don't feel like you're in charge, it's no one's fault but your own. If our organization gravitates toward one end of the spectrum, it's toward freedom to lead and not high control.

I still remember the moment my excuses were exposed, and I realized I had been too focused on blaming others instead of actually leading. Thankfully, my exposure was less of a "Janet Jackson Super Bowl halftime show" moment and, instead, was more of a strong conviction of my need to change. It was a defining moment for me, drastically changing the way I thought about leadership. The story itself was not dramatic, but for some reason, it was exactly what I needed in order to see what I was not seeing.

I was meeting with Andy, who was now my boss, trying to explain why something we had done had not gone as expected—and why none of it was my fault. Our central organization had given our campus some content for a presentation, along with instructions for pulling it off, but it had not gone as planned. Again, they determined the direction and provided the curriculum. It was our job to execute. The question loomed large, like an elephant in the room: "*Why didn't this go well?*"

Confidently, passionately, and succinctly, I gave Andy three

good reasons. The information had come to us late, the work given to us was sloppy, and the presentation was less than creative. I think I might have used the word “lame” to describe it. My argument was airtight: blame, blame, blame. It was clear that we were the victims. The failure of the presentation had nothing to do with us; it was someone else’s fault. As I finished listing my reasons, I felt like Andy should probably be thanking us for doing our best with these less than great materials.

But that’s not what he did. Instead, he patiently poked and prodded for a few more minutes, asking me some good, tough questions. He asked, “So if you didn’t like the outline, why wouldn’t you just change it to make it great?” As he asked and I answered, I began to smell the stink of my polluted thoughts. Like a surgeon removing a cancer, Andy’s inquisition led me to a moment of insight. As we talked, I began to realize the problem was not with our organization at all. It was with me.

I could have sat there, confident I was a passive victim of the institutional machinery, blaming and making excuses all day long. Instead, I experienced a moment of deep self-awareness. The truth of a key leadership principle hit me like a ton of bricks. I bumped into it so abruptly that I sheepishly couldn’t wait to leave his office.

Leaders don’t sit back and point fingers. Leaders lead *with* the authority of leadership . . . or *without* it. The authority is largely irrelevant—if you are a leader, you will lead when you are needed.

My instinct to blame and deflect responsibility wasn’t about having authority or a lack of authority. After all, I now had a position of some authority in our organization, a seat at the table. But over the years, I had fallen into the trap of thinking, *If only I*

had more authority, I could fix the problems I saw. It wasn't more authority I needed. Instead, I needed to accept the authority I had and then use it wisely to cultivate influence and make things better. I had confused having authority with the responsibility of leading. I had not yet realized that we don't need authority to have influence. And I was reminded that I already had that. In fact, my hope is to convince you that you have it as well.

Perhaps you've experienced some of the same frustrations I've had as a leader. Or maybe you are not currently in a "position" of leadership in your organization, but you have ideas and vision for how things can be done better. If so, this book is written for you, for those who feel a calling to lead but are not in charge. We live in an authority-based culture where certain positions possess an inherent authority and responsibility. But we all know that positional authority alone does not equate to effective leadership. If a leader does not inspire confidence, he or she will be unable to effect change without resorting to brute force. Influence has always been, and will always be, the currency of leadership. This book is about how to cultivate the influence needed to lead when you're not in charge.

Influence has always been, and will always be, the currency of leadership.

SEEING IT EVERYWHERE

When I turned sixteen, I was hoping to get a brand-new whip (that's what rappers call a car) that would give me more cred with the ladies. Instead, my parents bought me an old, beat-up Volvo

240 DL. At first I was bummed, mostly because it reeked of Brut and mold. But after a few moments of pity, I remember thinking, *Well, it's one of a kind. If you can't be cool, at least be unique.* I'll never forget the first day I drove it to school. I pulled up to the stoplight, looked over my left shoulder, and saw the exact same car. Two minutes later, I passed another one. And as I pulled into the school parking lot, I counted six Volvo 240 DLs. *How could this be? I thought I would be unique! How could I have missed these cars in the past?*

Because I wasn't looking for them.

Once you become aware of something, you start seeing it everywhere. That moment with Andy was the flashlight I needed to expose the myth I had been carrying. As soon as the light bulb of leading through influence was turned on in my mind, I started seeing the truth of this principle *everywhere*. People lead all the time with little to no authority. Some of the most effective leaders—the people who have changed our world—led without formal authority.

Think about Martin Luther King, Jr. What was his title again? He was the copastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church and president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. While being the president of the SCLC implies some authority within the organization, that position alone doesn't give you the ability to effect change for all African Americans. But King wasn't bound by his position. He knew change would come about as the truth was brought to light and hearts and minds were exposed to a new paradigm, one that saw the worth and equal value of all people and did not judge them by the color of their skin. King led because that's what leaders do. They cultivate influence with a title or without a title.

Who put Nelson Mandela in charge of abolishing apartheid in South Africa? No one. But leaders do not need to be in charge to lead.

October 2 is now recognized as the International Day of Non-Violence. Why this day? Because that is the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi led a national revolt against one of the largest and most powerful governments in the world. But he had no formal position within the government. He has a title now, though, since India received its independence from Great Britain in 1947. Today, he's referred to as "the Father of the Nation."

These people didn't wait for a title to lead. And neither should you.

In his TED Talk "Why Good Leaders Make You Feel Safe," Simon Sinek explains, "Many people at the top of organizations are not leaders. They have authority, but they are not leaders. And many at the bottom with no authority are absolutely leaders."¹ Sinek is differentiating between authority and leadership and making the point that they are *not* a package deal. Leadership expert Jim Collins agrees. He writes, "For many people, the first question that occurs is, 'But how do I persuade my CEO to get it?' My answer: Don't worry about that . . . each of us can create a *pocket of greatness*. Each of us can take our own area of work and influence and can concentrate on moving it from good to great. It doesn't really matter whether all the CEOs get it. It only matters that you and I do. Now, it's time to get to work."²

Collins makes a great point here. Our focus doesn't have to be simply on persuading those in charge to effect change. You may be able to do that, and you may not. But what you can do is focus on your own area of responsibility and make it great. We need to avoid the trap of thinking we are passive victims with

nothing we can do. Each of us can begin to lead right where we are today. Collins continues, “Take responsibility to make great what you can make great. And let others do it in the areas that they can make great. And if the whole company doesn’t do it, you can’t change that. But you can take responsibility for your area.”

WIELDING THE GUN OF AUTHORITY

Maybe you’ve worked for people who have titles that give them authority over you, but they misunderstand why they have those titles. They’ve confused authority and leadership or misunderstood the way authority is intended to function in leadership. And they use their positions to make you feel small or to squeeze you for results, only to take the credit for your work. Or perhaps they shut down your ideas and won’t respond to suggestions. I call this experience “being under the thumb.” When others make us feel like we’re under their thumbs because they’re in charge and we’re not, it sucks the ever-loving life out of us.

Most of us know what that feels like. When people have to tell you they’re in charge in order for you to follow, you know instinctively that something has gone desperately wrong. When I was in college, I stumbled into an internship in the governor’s office in Atlanta. My job was far from glorious, but my seat was in the front row, so I witnessed lots of activity as the governor geared up to enact new policies. My desk was directly outside the conference room in the policy department where they debated and made decisions. I’ll never forget overhearing a particularly contentious meeting about the future of education in the State of Georgia. Voices in the conference room were growing louder

and louder. Suddenly, a loud banging on the table silenced the room. A solitary voice screamed out over all the others, “I am the governor of the State of Georgia! Listen to me!”

At that point in my life, I regrettably had not read many leadership books. I had never been to a leadership conference. I would have had trouble defining words like *vision* and *mission*. But even I knew that something had gone wrong. When someone has to pull out the gun of authority, something is broken. You only pull out the gun of authority when nothing else is working.

The gun will get people moving, at least for a time. If someone pulled the gun of authority on you and threatened your job, would it get you moving? Of course it would! We all want food to eat and a place to live. And in the conference room that day, the gun seemed to work. But pulling the gun cannot be a regular practice. No one wants to follow someone who is holding a gun to their back. That’s not leading. That’s pushing people around and forcing them to go where they don’t want to go. While there may be times when we need to do this, our goal is for people to *want* to follow us. Even Jack Bauer doesn’t want to come to work with a gun to his head every day. Especially when there is another, more effective way to bring change.

While we cannot entirely disconnect authority from the leadership equation, I don’t believe we should begin there. At one point during his ministry, Jesus warns his followers that they should not confuse a *position* of authority with a *call* to lead. Because they are in danger of getting this wrong, he abruptly makes a distinction between how he wants them to lead and the way things typically operate in the world. “Not so with you,” he says (Matt. 20:26).

What is the “not so” of leadership that Jesus refers to here? It’s the type of leader who seeks authority for personal gain. Instead, Jesus argues that the best leaders, the ones who align with his vision for leadership, will lead as servants who are aware of their responsibility and who answer to a higher calling.

Do you want to be a “not so with you” kind of leader? I hope so. I know what it looks and feels like to use the gun of authority to get people moving, but Jesus tells us there is another way—a better way. Even if you have authority and a position of leadership, an inspiring leader does not need to leverage that authority. “Not so with you” kind of leaders learn that there are more effective ways to cultivate influence and build trust. Jesus tells us this is a more powerful way to lead, one we can exercise regardless of the presence or absence of authority.

Earlier, I mentioned the examples of Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Mahatma Gandhi. These individuals effected lasting change with little formal authority. But this leadership principle isn’t just true for cultural and political movements—it’s also true within organizations. In a *Harvard Business Review* article titled “The Key to Change is Middle Management,” Behnam Tabrizi writes that mid-level managers are the lynchpin of change within an organization. He finds that these managers do not necessarily have the authority to effect change, but *they can still make change happen*. “A hallmark of the successful 32% was the involvement of mid-level managers two or more levels below the CEO. In those cases, mid-level managers weren’t merely managing incremental change; they were leading it by working levers of power up, across, and down in their organizations.”³

How do these mid-level managers effect change? Tabrizi says they work the levers of power in every direction. They don't have authority over their peers, much less their bosses or the other executives in charge of the organization. So how do they do it? Through influence. The lie we believe is that we must wait until we're in the leader's seat before we can have this kind of influence. But the good news is that influence can (and should) be cultivated *wherever* you are. If you're able to grasp this truth as a leader today, it can prepare you for the future. But if you fail to cultivate influence when you're not in charge, you will have no influence to leverage when you are.

Influence always outpaces authority. And leaders who consistently leverage their *authority* to lead are far less effective in the long term than leaders who leverage their *influence*. Practice leading through influence when you're not in charge. It's the key to leading well when you are.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT'S AT STAKE

That day, as I sat in Andy's office responding to his questions, I decided I would try to be a different leader. I decided I was done using my lack of authority as an excuse to blame others. For too long, my attitude and my responses to problems reflected passivity, a sense that I was a victim of my circumstances. I had believed the lie that leading meant waiting until I had the authority to do whatever I wanted. But that day, I realized that just wasn't true.

Believing the lie that authority was a prerequisite for leadership deeply affected my attitude. It affected the way I thought about myself and the challenges I encountered. It affected my

behavior as well. And it had a cost. For over a decade, while I was waiting for the authority to lead, I missed out on several opportunities I'll never get back. The fear of missing out (FOMO for those who love abbreviations) is not just a perceived fear—it can be reality. I really did miss out. I can't press rewind. I can't go back and try again. Those opportunities are now gone.

But even worse than that, waiting for the authority to lead slowly eroded the gifts of leadership that were inside me. Waiting didn't make me more of a leader; it made me less of a leader. And this is true for all of us, regardless of who you are. All human beings have a measure of leadership loaned to them. We may not immediately recognize it for what it is, but we each have the ability, as well as the opportunities, to influence others and effect change in this world. And the earlier we begin to fan the flame of the gift of influence, the more it will grow. Conversely, the longer we wait, mired in passivity and the sense that we are victims of circumstances and the decisions of others, the more likely we are to diminish and mute the leadership gifts within us. The more I sat back and watched things pass without taking initiative, the softer my voice became. Waiting for others to do something negatively affected the gift of leadership within me.

Each of us has a unique opportunity to create something *right where we are*. It doesn't require special authority or a fancy title or having the corner office. Even though I don't know you personally, I can guarantee you have an opportunity to create an oasis of excellence right where you are. Not only is it within you to lead, but it is possible for you to lead well! So don't shrink back until someone calls your number. But know that leading *without* authority is more difficult than leading with authority. It requires a level of self-awareness that few of us are ready to

develop. Because leading without authority means you need to have a clear understanding of your identity—who you are as a leader, apart from any titles.