

Journey Mindset

7 Proven Leadership Principles for
Living a Richer, Fuller Life

Are you struggling with the destination/journey challenge? You have a clear destination for your career and the drive to get there, but you've forgotten how to enjoy the ride of your life along with way?

Nearly every leader I know faces this dilemma. And when our ambition goes into overdrive, it seems like everything—and everyone—else around us suffers.

I was in this same spot several years ago and understand these struggles at a very real and personal level. Don't get me wrong—you can get a lot done when you're a driven soul. But your professional pursuits can't be all you're about. There's so much more to life. And if you're missing it, something needs to change.

After too many years of focusing only on the destination, I've discovered a new way to live and lead that has made all the difference. It starts with a journey mindset.



In this guide I share 7 proven practices that will inspire you to:

- Accelerate toward your goals while being fully present on the journey
- Become a more selfless leader who creates opportunities for others
- Navigate uncertainty with greater confidence
- Develop stronger relationships with those you love
- Reach the higher calling of leadership — and of course
- Enjoy the ride.



Step 1: Be an explorer

Be an explorer – Those who are willing to be explorers will make the most of life’s adventures. Melissa Holbrook Pierson, a passionate biker and author of *The Perfect Vehicle*, believes you can divide the world into two groups: “Those who do, those who don’t; those who would love to, those who would never dream of it if they had all eternity.”

We have to embrace risks. If we totally avoid them, we’ll get much less from the experience and we’ll miss reaching some pretty fabulous places.

Taking risks as a leader often requires a counter-intuitive approach. Just like counter-steering to navigate a motorcycle, you have to steer left to turn right. Having a journey mindset as a destination leader frees you to take risks and innovate so you can stay ahead of your competition.



Action Steps

Unlock your limits — Don't become a prisoner to your perceived limitations. It's up to you as a leader to think about the potential of your business, not just what it looks like today. When you're too busy working in the business, you're not working on it. The more you can lift your head up from your work and look over the horizon, the more astute you become at connecting the dots and finding opportunity.

This is an essential skill of a leader: it's "Leading Through the Turn" at its finest. Obviously, you get better falling behind others who are.

Stay loose — When something comes along that's a threat to the business—a new competitor or a low-cost alternative—a first instinct is to wave it off, dismiss it, or stiff-arm it. However, rather than wasting time and energy defending the threat, it sometimes can be better to take a counterintuitive approach and figure out how to leverage the threat to your benefit. You might find ways to work with the competitor or develop new products or solutions that build off the low-cost alternative.

Take the time to listen to your intuition. I'll admit, this isn't easy for results-driven leaders, because it requires slowing down and focusing on things other than the pressing issue of the day. However, taking the time to do this helps clear your head and frees you to see things in ways you otherwise couldn't.

Create a culture of try — You must empower your team with a "let's do it" mentality. Ultimately, you want a culture that's not afraid to fail—it's afraid not to try. This is part attitude, of course, but it's also part process. In other words, leaders first have to inspire people to try new things, encouraging them on the front end and rewarding effort regardless of the outcomes. That doesn't mean all failures are "OK," but employees should have a clear vision for what's acceptable and what's not so they aren't walking on eggshells.

I'm a big fan of leading through asking. One way to create a culture of try is to ask yourself and your team "how might we" questions.

- How might we do this differently?
- How might we make this a better product or service?
- How might we increase revenue this quarter?



Step 2: Scrap the map

Scrap the map—go with the detours in life. I learned a lot about both planning as well as detours when I started riding a motorcycle. No matter how much you plan a trip, you never know how things will actually play out, and many times you need to take some different roads before reaching your destination. More often than not, these unplanned routes allow you to discover new and interesting places you hadn't expected but fully enjoyed—maybe even more so because they were serendipitous. The unpredictability is part of the fun—if you are journey-minded.

Action Steps

Embrace your entrepreneurial spirit — Embracing your entrepreneurial spirit helps you refocus your energy and lead with an eye toward the future rather than the past. But you must be willing to listen to the relentless voice in your head that says, this needs to exist. That voice becomes the source of inspiration that compels you to take the road less traveled, and it is the decision to take the leap that defines the entrepreneur.

Learn wherever you are; apply wherever you go — Enthusiasm and passion can go a long way to overcome lack of experience. Be the most enthusiastic person you know even when you don't have it all figured out and you'll go farther faster until you do. This will help you stay optimistic and determined—especially when things get really tough.

Focus on relationships; results will follow — Wherever you go, you need a support system, even if you have to build it from scratch, and many times you do. These relationships—both the friendships and the business connections—can fuel you along the way and help you find a better path forward. No doubt these relationships can make the journey sweeter and richer.

A few ways to do that...

- Join your local chamber of commerce and/or other community organizations.
- Get involved in a cause that stirs your passion—whether it's a non-profit or a faith-based organization.
- Have lunch or coffee outside of work hours to visit with those on your team or within your organization just to build relationship.

Chart the best course you can—and keep on going. While you need an idea of how you'll reach your destination, you can't map out everything. So you chart the best course you can and keep going on no matter what detours you encounter along the way. When you are an explorer with a journey mindset, you fully anticipate that you'll end up in places you hadn't planned, but you are nimble enough to course-correct as you go.

Step 3: Dare to be yourself

Dare to be yourself – Only when we are our authentic selves will we perform at our best. Too many times we try to be what others want us to be. You can't expect to find and fulfill a purpose if you're not true to yourself. To attempt to be something drastically different keeps you from finding true joy in the journey.

Being different is attractive and makes you stand out from the crowd. The trick is: You must be you. If you try to be something you're not, people will recognize it pretty quickly, and there is nothing less desirable than a fake. Know yourself. Dare to be yourself. And be sure others have a clear idea of who you are, too.

Action Steps

Find the authentic you — As you explore your leadership style, you may begin to feel as though you aren't precisely any one style, but rather a combination of several. The most effective leaders switch between various styles as the situation demands. We all have different strengths that manifest themselves at different times, and we should constantly evolve as a leader.

People follow people, not titles — Learning to lead comfortably in your own skin will help you grow as an authentic leader. You need to spend time with people, especially on the front lines so they can get to know you, because a relationship built on transparency results in respect and trust. In other words, they need to know who you are as a person and why you make the decisions you do, not just what the decision is. Letting people in is a way of allowing you to both lead and learn.





Listen, learn and repeat — The best leaders have an accurate picture of their true strengths and how they are perceived by others. Some of this, of course, comes through formal performance reviews and 360 assessments, but much of it comes during the daily course of life when people provide feedback on the fly.

However, you might consider building a personal board of directors, and filling it with a diverse group of people. Your board could include someone in a position you aspire to be in, someone in other parts of the industry that are unfamiliar to you, someone in a totally different industry, and someone who can feed your spirit by helping you in your faith journey.

These are people who know you personally, so they know what makes you tick, and they are also people who will be brutally honest. Make a list of those people and ask for their help as you continue your leadership journey.

Find passion in your work — If you aren't passionate about your work, it will show. This doesn't mean you're passionate about every task and assignment. Maybe you aren't passionate about filling out an expense report, right? But part of finding your leadership style is finding your passions and how they connect with the work you do. People will feed off your passions regardless of how your personal style expresses them. When other people see your passion in your leadership style, they are naturally encouraged to find it in their own approach to work, which, of course, makes them happier and more productive.

Step 4: Be a learning leader

Be a learning leader—don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer, but you must do whatever it takes to find out. Be coachable; you don't have to know it all. In fact, you can't know it all, so learn as you go. It's tempting as a leader to say "We've tried that before we're not going to go there." But you need to be open to new ideas and perspectives. Be curious. Ask people what do you mean by that? Bring me something and I'll be willing to consider it.

Action Steps

Admit you don't know — Then go find the answers. Have you ever felt like the challenge before you as a leader was so great that you might not be able to lead effectively through it? One of the worst feelings a leader can have is self-doubt. Oftentimes, doubt can stem from one thing: lack of knowledge about what to do in this specific situation. It's OK not to have all the answers, but you must do whatever it takes to find out.



Develop a plan to strengthen your business — By developing a plan that addresses your most pressing needs, you will find more clarity on how to move forward. Pick three to four things that are most important. For me it was Operations, Growth, People, and Culture.

Other examples might be:

- Technology
- Sales
- Profitability Leadership Development

Once you determine your list, discuss it with your team and get their input and ideas. After that, you're ready to chart the best course to move forward. →

Step 5: Celebrate success

Celebrate success—experience real-time joy, live in the moment. Research shows that celebrating small wins can be critical to long-term success and employee happiness. In the life of a leader, risks and setbacks are so common that celebrating small markers of success can boost morale and refuel you for the fight ahead. Doing so is key to having a journey mindset. It means you can take some time to stop, look around, and appreciate the beauty of where you are, no matter what might happen tomorrow.



Action Steps

Be mindful and intentional in how you praise your team —

Recognition is a powerful motivator, and what leaders praise is noticed by everyone. Try to spotlight the behaviors you want to encourage. Performance is at the top of the list, of course. But if praise is solely performance-based, you'll breed a performance culture. It will no longer matter how employees achieve results as long as they're achieving them. This kind of focus can diminish the meaning and impact of your values, which will hurt your company's ability to succeed long-term.

Publicly acknowledge small wins —

Doing so helps you live out values of open communication and results. It yields better morale, a great sense of meaning, and subsequently, a higher level of employee retention. This is something that I've seen in my own company yield a turn-over rate in the low teens, half of the industry average.

Step 6: Be a leader who releases

Be a leader who releases. Focus on what only you can do and give the rest away. As a leader, you may know how to do lots of things, but that doesn't mean you need to regularly do them all. What should you give away? All of the good stuff – power, authority, credit, recognition, relationships, information, resources, knowledge, you name it. Everything you've worked so hard to get! And that's the challenge. That's why so many leaders hit the wall at this point and can't push through. But only by releasing and empowering others will you have the opportunity for exponential success—achieving goals far greater than you can do on your own.

So what things should you do after you've given the good stuff away? The things only you can do and that bring the greatest value to the business. Pull out a notepad and pen and start jotting ideas down—things only you can do that are unique to your role as a leader. Once you've done that, make a commitment to be a leader who releases to others with one hand while reaching out to grasp new opportunities with the other.

Action Steps

Create a new job for yourself — Write out your new job description. What are the big picture things your team and company really need from you? Is it developing a detailed growth plan for the business, nurturing your workplace culture or even having a strong financial plan for long-term growth? Whatever it is, write it down and stick to the plan.

Empower your team — Make a list of the projects or responsibilities you are willing to give to your team. Once you've written it down, share it with each person, sign and date it. Then make the transition happen.

Coach for the win — Stay close enough to coach your team through the early stages of assuming responsibility. Resist the temptation to take something back at the first stumble. Instead, provide feedback and offer support so your team can course-correct, gain confidence and continue moving forward in their new role.



Step 7: Enjoy the ride

Enjoy the ride – It sounds a bit cliché to say we should “enjoy the moment,” but like many clichés, it’s rooted in truth. The reality is, many of us find this cliché easier to dismiss than to live. It’s great to have ambition, but it can’t be all you’re about. We all know and studies tell us – we can’t work all the time. We have to find the “off” switch and do something other than work to keep ourselves grounded, and live a whole life. That means making time for the things we love in life—things that bring you pure joy just in the doing.

What do you love? Have you been making time for this in your life, or have you put that aside for years because you didn’t think you had the time or money? How much more would you enjoy the ride of your life with these things in it?

Action Steps

First, look at your family — I found one of the ways leaders can enjoy the journey the most is to look first at our families. There was a time when my husband and I both spent so much time at work that we found ourselves spending brief periods of “quality time” with our kids. Then we realized it was more important to spend lots of “sloppy quantity time” with them. Ironically, the more time we spent with them, the more we found quality in our time together.

Work to live — There is pure joy in truly savoring life itself, regardless of whether we’re at work or at play. We find joy at work by loving what we do and doing it to the best of our ability. There is satisfaction that comes from a hard day at work, even if the end goal was not accomplished. It’s easy to think that that if you don’t cross everything off your to-do list and accomplish what you have set out to get done, then you have wasted the day. You must find joy in whatever comes your way. Even if it prevents you from a timely arrival at some pre-established destination, you’ll realize that you:

- Helped an employee
- Solved an unexpected problem
- Addressed a client’s immediate and unplanned need

You’ll realize you have found joy in your work. You have worked to live.

Live out your hobbies — Life is meant to be experienced, not accomplished. Accomplishments are great, but it’s the experience, not the results, that bring the real joy. Life and work can be that way, too. If someone asked you what your hobbies are what would you say? If you have an answer, great! If not, think about what those might be and schedule time to do them on a regular basis.



I'm Elise Mitchell, a three-time CEO, leadership strategist, executive coach, business consultant, author, wife and mom. My passion is helping high-performing leaders achieve more.

Over the past 15 years, I've coached, consulted and trained leaders from a wide variety of industries ranging from non-profits to Fortune 500 companies. My goal is to inspire and equip you to lead at your best.



What would you like to change?

Every leader has gaps holding them back. I work with clients to help them strengthen their leadership, resolve pressing business problems, and get the results they want.

This is achieved through three core services:



Leadership Development

Customized programs that equip you and your team to manage complexity, think more strategically and mobilize others



Business Advisory Services

Guidance and tools to help you address challenging business issues, from driving change to planning an exit strategy



Executive Coaching

Inspiring, results-oriented coaching using neuroscience and business insights to help you achieve your most important goals