

# FARTHER FASTER AND FAR LESS DRAMA

**How to Reduce Stress\*  
and Make Extraordinary  
Progress Wherever You Lead**

**JANICE FRASER and JASON FRASER**

FOREWORD BY ERIC RIES, AUTHOR OF *THE LEAN STARTUP*

\* Overwhelm, Chaos, Frustration, Waste, Indecision, Friction, and Bickering

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# Wide-Ranging Praise for Farther, Faster, and Far Less Drama



"An indispensable distillation of decades of experience helping teams, families, and organizations of all sizes make progress. In these pages Janice and Jason guide us through four simple leadership motions, connect theory to practice through engaging examples, and make them actionable by providing all the tools and frameworks you could hope for to tackle each of them in your own way."

**Martin Eriksson, Product Partner, EQT Ventures and Co-Founder, Mind the Product**



"The Frasers' practical framework is a panacea for anyone grappling with how to be an effective leader as we stagger into this confusing and complex era. I am so pleased to see the techniques that I have long admired in their work distilled so cleanly in this book."

**Edward Heatt, Senior Vice President, VMware**



"Farther, Faster, and Far Less Drama engages the potential of people to create new possibilities for organizations. With strategies that are easy to enact and tools that are simple to use, this book is an essential tool for me as both a coach and a leader. Whether you work in the private or public sector, having this by your side will help you thrive in even the most daunting circumstances."

**Tyrome Smith, Director of Strategic Partnership, Common Mission Project & formerly Innovation at National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency**



"I met Janice and Jason at the beginning of my product design career . . . They taught me how co-creation trumps selling ideas, that the best ideas emerge when we amplify the quieter voices in the room, and that leading with less ego leads to far greater impact. Farther, Faster, and Far Less Drama is for leaders, yes that's you, who want to make an impact with empathy and authenticity."

**Leslie Yang, Senior Design Manager at Lyft**



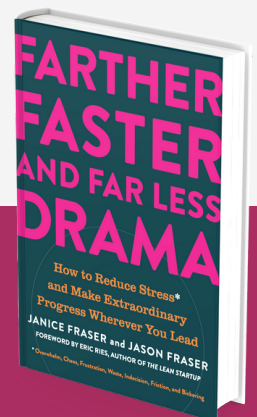
"In a world where things move fast and get complex while you are trying to slow down and focus, the Four Leadership Motions proposed in Farther, Faster, and Far Less Drama are the effective easiness you were looking for. They give everyone a 'common horizon to head toward,' filled with empathy that speaks from experience, humility, and community."

**Alejandra Dancuart, Senior Product Owner, Colectivo23**



"Janice and Jason Fraser have spent decades teaching folks how to be leaders, and they know which skills can deliver impact. This book is filled with priceless examples, tangible frameworks, and (my favorite) homework!"

**Deldelp Medina, Executive Director, Black and Brown Founders**



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# Wide-Ranging Praise for Farther, Faster, and Far Less Drama



"Janice and Jason Fraser have helped me think in new ways about **how I can unlock potential to create breakthrough performance** and accelerate progress with sales teams and customers . . . Their work enables leaders to eliminate distractions to help teams execute with speed and precision, in environments of extreme uncertainty, when you have a fraction of the information you'd like to have, but need to make decisions and deliver outcomes fast. Farther, Faster, and Far Less Drama grounds these enabling tools with insight, humor, and humility."

**Keith Salisbury, Chief Revenue Officer, ASAPP and Former Navy SEAL**



"This is the book I wish I had fifteen years ago as I started building my first company, or even five years ago as I started building my family. Janice and Jason Fraser have written **an exceedingly practical guide to making decisions** and pursuing progress with tactics and tools that apply to every dimension of life."

**Christina Wallace, Senior Lecturer, Harvard Business School and Author of The Portfolio Life and New to Big**



"It is incredibly useful both for **'elite' leaders of large organizations as well as for 'regular' leaders**—those of us who don't have high-powered corporate positions or huge responsibilities."

**Meg McLaughlin, Deputy Director, Presidential Personnel Office, President Barack Obama (Retired)**



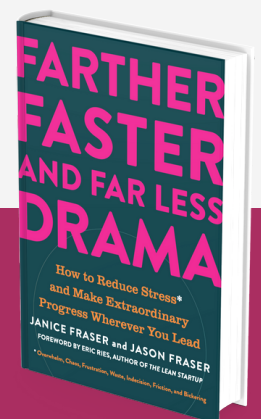
"This book is the actionable how-to manual for the modern leader I've been waiting for. The authors give us permission to swap out the outdated, cookie-cutter 'old boys club' methods and swap \*in\* a more **inclusive, collective, intentional way of leading** – for the rest of us."

**Family Howe, Executive Director, American Association of Corporate Gender Strategists**



"Farther, Faster, and Far Less Drama provides leaders with tools and techniques to **unleash the full creativity of the organization.**"

**Gene Kim, Wall Street Journal Bestselling Author of The Unicorn Project, The Phoenix Project, and DevOps Handbook**



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# FOREWORD

By **Eric Ries**

**O**ver the last decade, Janice Fraser and I have trained entrepreneurs working in the Mission District of San Francisco, in the United States federal government, and at some of the world's largest companies. In all of these contexts, we worked together to help foster innovative thinking in the service of whatever goal or progress was at hand. We acted as guides in the creation of unique systems that helped each individual company or institution make the best possible use of the talents, resources, and time available.

At the heart of each of those processes was a basic framework from which to begin—the Lean Startup™ method, which I pioneered in 2011. Now, I'm honored that Lean Startup makes an appearance in the far-reaching new framework the Frasers have created for making iterative progress. Its four principles serve as a foundation for making incremental, information-based decisions about what to do next in every aspect, not just of business, but of life. They center on honesty, compassion, and thinking long term about where you're heading and where you want to land. Janice and Jason's goal is to help create alignment across all of the areas that make up our daily existences, which together add up to how we move forward in the world: work, home, and the personal passions that provide psychological sustenance to us as humans. Their systems, which draw on their engagement with clients ranging from the military to startups, individuals, and government,



combined with interviews with leaders of all kinds, work as well for leading a team as they do for figuring out how to buy a car. As the Frasers say, these are tools for everybody. Understanding your own motivations, strengths, and pitfalls is also part of the process.

Perhaps most importantly, they lead to actionable outcomes, whether you're facing a work issue, an educational choice, or your grocery list. *Farther, Faster, and Far Less Drama* challenges you to start tackling your own life even as you're still reading it. It's packed with exercises and organizational methods, culminating in a clarifying decision-making tool called the 2×2 that the Frasers have used with Navy SEALs and startups and in deciding where to go for dinner in San Francisco. Each tool is tied to considering the needs and abilities of all stakeholders in any given situation, whether they're your kids, your colleagues, or—in the case of one pretty compelling story the Frasers tell in these pages—the rock star whose clear statement of purpose about playing the guitar helped solve a financial crisis at his company once the employee to whom he articulated it considered it from a different perspective. That the Frasers then go on to show how this same method, called cascading intent, worked equally well for them when they needed to buy new kitchen gear, and then again how it can work in a business context, tells you everything you need to know about the wide-ranging applications of their book.

The best frameworks, as I've learned over the years, are flexible. They provide structure without limitations, and they can be used as a basis for change at multiple levels. They serve as engines for transformation. In a world in which everything feels at once chaotic and up for grabs, Janice and Jason Fraser have cleared a path for anyone ready to start sorting it out in order to make the most of the opportunities at hand. We can't predict what's next, but we can get organized to make sure it's more equitable on every level. A collective, collaborative future is the best future for everyone. This book is a great way to get started on the work of building it.

# INTRODUCTION

**W**e are not special or extraordinary. We're regular people. We're saying this right now, at the very start of this book, because we want to emphasize that regular people do extraordinary things.

Although we're regular people, we've lived a life beyond our wildest dreams. This may have been a failure of our imagination, but it also points to our essential humanity. Growing up in the Midwest, living decidedly middle-class lives, attending public universities, navigating the challenges of one crazy family of origin, and building our careers in fits and starts as we learned what truly mattered to us, we had what we considered to be fairly "normal" lives.

But over time, we built teams and companies where we led in practical, ambitious, and humane ways. We focused our energies on creating projects that inspired us and taught smart people how to collaborate effectively, all of which propelled us toward a life full of meetings at the White House and client-funded trips to Peru. So today, we eat extraordinary for breakfast.

As such, we've spent a lot of time with founders, think-tank members, corporate executives, and other assorted big shots. Many of them embody the stereotypical Capital-L Leader: the visionary, chest-thumping, self-aggrandizing lone wolf who issues edicts and rejects input. You know the type. They may have been regular people once, but their ascent to power totally rewired their egos. Capital-L Leaders like Steve Jobs and Jack Welch have shaped our world for centuries, making invaluable contributions to

business, government, art, culture, and science. But now, we believe their time is up.

The solitary hero stories of these leaders do not provide realistic or useful models for the rest of us. (Especially when the rest of us aren't all cis, heterosexual, white dudes.) Sure, the Old Boys Club has done some great things, but obviously at great cost. In today's world of climate change, transphobia, artificial intelligence, racial reckoning, pandemics, political polarization, and other destabilizing forces, the leaders we need are NOT alpha individualists. The Capital-L Leadership school of changemaking is becoming less relevant by the minute.

Fortunately, there are alternatives that enable absolutely anyone to lead with compassion and humility while making meaningful progress on big ideas. We've developed (or, more accurately, discovered) one of those alternative approaches, and that's what this book is about.

This is a "Take the elevator back down and bring the next leader up" leadership book.

This is a "Well, that just happened" leadership book.

This is a "Nevertheless, she persisted" leadership book.

This is a "Get 'er done" leadership book.

This is an "If you want to go fast, go alone; but if you want to go far, go together" leadership book.

In these pages, you'll find tools that the two of us have used for decades to help all kinds of people—including Navy SEALs and startup CEOs, high school administrators and software engineers—make progress in their professional *and* personal lives by solving hard problems with grace. What you're about to learn will help you do the same, all while amplifying your passion and empathy in ways that can transform your life for the better. You'll get access to tools and build lifelong skills that will help you set bolder goals and achieve them in less time, with less drama, and less hassle. You will find out how to make complex problems more manageable, even in overwhelming circumstances. Even if you're not a cutthroat titan of industry, political wunderkind, or cis/het white dude. (But also if you are.)

In short, you'll be equipped and prepared to lead from wherever you sit in your workplace, community, friend group, and home.

Speaking of home, we want to circle back to our own lives for a moment. In addition to being filled with rewarding and challenging work, our lives are also filled with friends and family, particularly our amazing children. We get paid to teach our tools and techniques to corporate teams and government branches, but we also use those tactics at home. Much of what we share in these pages was conceptualized at work, but refined within our community and family, helping us understand and connect with our son and daughter in deeply valuable ways. In the chapters that follow, we'll talk about how that's played out for us and how it might benefit you and your life. **We do this in part because we believe that leadership isn't just for the boardroom, courtroom, and war room; it's also for the living room.** Good leadership undergirds strong families.

We want to underline that we have permission from our children to share aspects of their stories, and they have read and approved everything we've written about them. We have a family history of talking openly about our experiences in the hope that it will normalize the complexity of "real life" and help others navigate their unique challenges. We won't be giving you the filtered, Instagram-ready version of our backstage life. We'll give it to you straight.

Our hope is that our radical honesty will help you see how these methodologies have worked for us and prove to you that they're effective on tricky, deep-seated problems. This system functions elegantly across work and family and life. Truly, this is holistic, transformative work that will affect everything from your relationships to your speech patterns to your life choices.

We've also come to believe that the tactics outlined in this book are fractal in nature: each subunit has the same shape as the larger whole. Every tiny interaction is a facsimile of a group interaction, which is a facsimile of an organizational interaction, which is a facsimile of a community interaction. In other words, what you do one-on-one has the same shape as what you do in meetings and groups. How you think and behave on a micro level is reflected on a macro level. So if you are intentional and mindful as an individual, that intentionality and mindfulness will reverberate throughout your entire life. When you choose to be honest and collaborative as a leader, honesty and collaboration will infuse everything you do.

Big promises, we know. Luckily, we've used every element of this method in our own lives for more years than we care to count. We worked out the kinks long before we decided to cram it all into a book and share it with you, so we know we're giving you the good stuff.

Now, in terms of the book itself, here's how it works. The core of our method is a simple but transformative set of four principles: Orient Honestly, Value Outcomes, Leverage the Brains, and Make Durable Decisions. They form the structure of the book, and you'll see them pop up many times throughout the text. They are guiding ideas that anyone can practice—at the office, the PTA, the rebel alliance, the DEI council, the board of directors—anywhere you want to go farther, move faster, and (please god) reduce the drama. Each section of the book addresses one of these principles.

The principles are put into practice when you adopt certain behaviors and mindsets, which we describe for you throughout the coming chapters. To make it easy, we'll supply you with various tools to use across situations and settings. And we'll sprinkle in some charts and graphics so this web of ideas is clear.

So why capture this method on paper at all? Why are we codifying and sharing our work *right now*? **Because seeing the collateral damage of ego-driven leadership made us want to equip the emerging generation of humble, practical, everyday leaders.** Human existence is becoming increasingly complex, and the old guard is struggling to keep up. Right now people need mentors, CEOs, managers, teachers, guides, supervisors, directors, and family members who understand nuance and strive for effective, agile collaboration. “My way or the highway” leaders are starting to alienate their own colleagues, stirring up needless drama and fear along the way. In a world that is downright bewildering, everyone from business consultants to stay-at-home parents wish for ease and simplicity. We wrote this book so that everyday leaders could rise up and fill the void that will soon be left by their Capital-L predecessors.

We'd like to acknowledge that we have told a big lie in this book. At the time of writing, best practice calls for diversifying the names of examples, which we have done. At the same time, we want to acknowledge that it is not an accurate representation of the world as we have experienced it, in

which women, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA leaders are not promoted, elected, or rewarded in proportion to their numbers or contributions. Despite what you see here, we don't actually exist in a magical bubble that has achieved equity. But we wish to, so we have diversified the names, with the hope that everyone can better see themselves as the hero of this book.

Life is hard, it moves fast, and everything is constantly changing. Much as we'd love to, we can't alter any of that, for you or for ourselves. What we *can* do is equip you to thrive in the face of this hyperdynamism, just as we've done in our own lives. We can share our methods for leading collaboratively and conscientiously, so you can make progress, regardless of what surprises might pop up next. In our experience, nothing keeps overwhelm at bay quite like trusting yourself to handle the unexpected. (And more so when you know that you can trust your family, team, and company to handle the unexpected together, even when you're not looking.)

The world around you might constantly be in flux, but you don't have to be. You also don't have to be an infallible, all-knowing leader to create meaningful change in the world. With the insights you'll gain from reading these pages, you'll be empowered to make efficient progress with less stress—every single day.

## Chapter 1

# LIFE, NOT WORK/LIFE

**R**eady for a harsh truth? Your problems aren't unique. Undoubtedly, they *feel* special and utterly specific to your situation, but what we've learned over several decades of leadership work is that all problems are human problems. The technical challenges or goals-in-process might vary, but the hang-ups and holdups always stem from interpersonal dynamics, snarled communication, and decision-making. We've seen the same frictions crop up in the White House and at nascent tech startups. We've taught the same skills in massive global corporations and in our own home, and they've worked equally well in both contexts. Whether it's the Navy SEALs or the neighborhood watch, we can guarantee they're struggling with the same challenges around clarity, problem-solving, and mutual understanding. Because we're all a lot more similar than we'd like to admit.

This is good news. If the problems you face at work, at home, or inside your own mind aren't so unique after all—if, in fact, they have shared underpinnings—that means you can address them using a single set of methodologies, mindsets, and tools. You can use the contents of this book on everything in your life, and make it all easier to manage. We designed it that way on purpose. We knew we needed to find a method that could be used with any group of any size in any context, and still be transformative. We wanted it to work everywhere, all the time.

And it does.

To be clear, though, we're not saying that people are problematic, or bad, or obstacles that need to be overcome. In fact, that's a problem we've got with Capital-L Leaders: they often treat people like assets instead of living, breathing beings with important perspectives. Humble leaders know that we succeed together through aligned action, and grounded leaders are collaborative to their very core. But even humble, grounded, collaborative leaders get dragged to meetings that could've been emails, and struggle to articulate their desired outcomes. Even everyday leaders with amazing teams or families can be challenged by creating clarity, solving thorny problems, or fostering mutual understanding.

Enter 4LM—the Four Leadership Motions, a deceptively simple set of leadership behaviors and mindsets that enable progress. It's the life-navigation method you never knew you needed. But *we* knew you needed it because, frankly, **every adult human needs better ways to deal with the unknown and unpleasant**. We've seen how challenging it is to move ourselves forward as individuals. And once you get a bunch of people together and they *all* have to make progress collectively? It gets complicated. Fast. No matter where you lead from or what kind of group you're leading, you need a way to manage those complications and make everything you do easier, simpler, and more effective. The Four Leadership Motions can help.

## THE FOUR LEADERSHIP MOTIONS IN A NUTSHELL

The core of 4LM is a set of principle-driven behaviors that help you navigate a wide variety of complex circumstances. It creates clarity around both individual and shared goals, helps people to articulate and agree to parameters, and gives everyone a common horizon to head toward. We have honed it over many years and through many experiences, and it's become part of how we approach every challenge and problem.

The Four Leadership Motions are to the right:





The order in which we present them in the book enables us to show how the motions build on one another. But they work in any combination, alone, and as a stepwise process. Each can be transformed into a question that you can ask yourself whenever you feel frustrated or lost, when you need to make decisions or lead a discussion. (Are we Oriented Honestly around our current situation? Is this the best way for us to Leverage the Brains available to us?) Each motion forms one part of the book with multiple chapters and tools to help you use them, so here they are in brief:

1. **Orient Honestly.** Get real with where you are now and where you are going, including the ugly bits that make this moment challenging.
2. **Value Outcomes.** Place more value on what you want to achieve than on the activities you have planned. Instead of creating outputs, measure your progress toward shared outcomes, and continuously strive to improve how you work as a team.
3. **Leverage the Brains.** Involve the right people and ensure they can all participate fully and equally.
4. **Make Durable Decisions.** Focus most on making a decision that all can live with, rather than going it alone, aiming for perfection, or striving for consensus.

We've organized this book around these four motions so you can see how they relate and interconnect. In our own lives, these principle-driven motions offer grounding when we feel stress and guidance when we feel stuck. They've helped us through loss, transitions, disagreements, and apathy, as well as guiding us through joyful life events and decisions. These principles are like the duct tape of human existence: versatile, reliable, and surprisingly strong in the face of resistance.

## **GREASING THE RAILS, NOT CUTTING CORNERS**

We understand the temptation to take shortcuts and compress timelines, and we're eager to promise that the Four Leadership Motions will help you move

faster. But we want to be very clear before diving into the details: This system is about reducing unproductive complexity and friction, so that you can set bolder goals. **This system won't make people's jobs easier; it will make progress easier, so you can accomplish even the hardest things.**

The Four Leadership Motions are not less work. By excising the waste, this method helps motivated people accomplish more because you've greased the rails. In this way, it can feel more demanding rather than less. The amount of waste caused by people doing a lot of activity for zero benefit is shocking. This method shifts attention to different parts of the work in order to reduce wasted time (and social capital, patience, money, energy, and activity). This can be exhilarating but also exhausting, so we encourage rest. **Successful leaders nap**, then get up and run some more. Let's say that again: successful leaders nap!

We want to introduce 4LM right now because the pace of change is slower today than it will ever be for the rest of our lives. Sit with that for a few moments. Our world is simpler now than it will likely be again for generations. COVID, racial and economic inequality, splintered families, government upheaval, educational gaps, sexism, and climate change are just a few of the disrupters of our day-to-day lives, and others are already cresting on the horizon. We're in for one hell of a century, and we need your leadership.

These forces are at work on us right now, and they're pushing us to be more flexible and adaptable. We need to be able to respond to unexpected macro and micro changes effectively, mindfully, and calmly, yet most of us have never thought about how to do that. Perhaps you've been doing fine with it all so far, but you don't have a system and you don't really know how you've done it; you just feel lucky (and maybe tired). Probably you've used some of the tools we have included, and the benefit of this book will be to lay it out as a system for easy recall when you need it. The leadership and life-living models that have historically been available to us simply will not work for the fast-changing, more inclusive future.

## THE MYTH OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE

This is ostensibly a business book, aimed at business leaders who do business things. But the traditional approach to business writing omits so much. Not everyone has a “jobby job,” as our friend Kim calls it. She’s the person you hire when you need to set up design practices in your consulting company. Like so many of us now, Kim alternates between high-powered leadership roles and independent consulting. This is what is starting to be called a “portfolio career,” in which multiple elements are brought together to craft a legitimate, high-performance, high-impact work life. And beyond “business,” people who lead work in all sorts of contexts: public sector, nonprofit sector, hybrids, music, and the arts. Our friend Jill is a leader in her faith, as a stay-home mom, and really anywhere she goes. For a decade, though, she was a professional touring musician. The idea that we will have a “business” job for decades, where we will work our way “up” until we reach our ideal “level,” simply doesn’t apply for most people.

**So we no longer believe in work/life balance: It’s all just life. And we need to know it’s a life that we want to live, filled with security, confidence, love, and meaning.**

The idea that we turn “off” life when we turn “on” work is outmoded. What happens to us at work, the choices we make at work, how we lead at work—all of this impacts our macro and micro quality of life, and the nature of the world we live in. We need to see what has worked for leaders like our mentor and friend Wanda Brown. She’s a very successful salesperson, coach, and leader. She can’t help but lead wherever she goes, and she makes it look easy, even in unlikely circumstances. We have spent more than a decade studying what makes it possible for humble leaders like Wanda to get so much more done with so much less drama. In her story (see page 12), we can find so many of the lessons that we present in the book.

The tidal wave of urgency in our shared world is a problem that decision-makers must face. And as it turns out, we’re all decision-makers: from choosing whether to freeze our eggs to choosing a vendor for a marketing campaign. Our ability to make informed, levelheaded, leaderly decisions is becoming increasingly vital. Despite everything we’ve just said about choice complexity, we don’t see easier decision-making as the true goal.

**Progress is the goal.** But in order to make progress, we need to get better at making decisions more easily and quickly, because decision-making is hard, and it's not your fault.

## WANDA BROWN: MAKING PROGRESS HAPPEN

*Wanda Brown spent her career in high-stakes business-to-business sales. She taught us to approach business relationships “on a completely level playing field, psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, and to let everything flow from that position, which is one of integrity.” She taught us that it is possible to make a good living without compromising our principles. She also taught us a great deal about love, marriage, and lifelong commitment. We are deeply grateful to Wanda for sharing a chapter of her leadership story with us.*

A large part of leadership has to do with showing up. You just show up. In 1974 I met my dear wife, Phyllis. She died in 2020, after forty-six amazing years together. We felt from the beginning that we would be out in every circumstance in which we felt it was relatively safe to do so, which means I've been an out lesbian for almost fifty years. (We were so crazy, madly in love with each other, there was no way we could hide it anyway.) This decision meant that we showed up for things. We spoke up. We marched in Washington, D.C.; in San Francisco; and Portland, Oregon; and Minneapolis and St. Paul and everywhere. We wrote letters to the editor (back when people did that). We were interviewed, and on television, and in the press.

We said yes. Leaders have to be prepared to say yes. You do so in such a way that you can still have a somewhat relaxed life without getting burned out, which is a high risk, as you know.

Eventually we settled in our little town of River Falls, Wisconsin. We were still new to that town when the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan started. Phyllis wrote a letter to the local newspaper editor condemning the wars, which prompted an economics professor at the University of Wisconsin to contact her and ask, “What should we do?” And Phyllis

said, "Well, we should have a Peace March." So we started one. We showed up.

The March started out with maybe half a dozen people, and gradually we collected more and more. Every single week we marched. And then the counter protesters showed up on Main Street hollering and waving American flags. So we thought we should carry American flags, and we did, and the March grew bigger.

That winter was bitter cold. It was below zero sometimes and snowing and blowing, but we just kept on showing up. We met amazing people while we were all bundled up and marching together and talking, and eventually somebody started saying, "You know, we're all Democrats. Isn't there a Democratic Party around here? How come we never hear about it?"

There was a Democratic Party, and bless their hearts, they were folks older than I am now meeting in the basement of the town building under very bad fluorescent lighting. They didn't even have coffee or cookies! They were just this group of folks who had been gathering to talk with each other since God was a baby. So we started going to their meetings, and they were so happy to have us; no one under the age of fifty had been at their meetings in forever.

After a while, I spoke to an older guy who'd been the chair of the Pierce County Wisconsin Democratic Party forever. And I said to him, "Would you like me to take over as chair?" "Yes," he said. "But it's a big job. A bigger job than people realize." I said, "That's okay. I'll toss my hat in the ring." And I did.

We had a great big holiday potluck in December at someone's big, beautiful, full house. And I gave a speech. And the heart of the speech was, "Now is the time! Now is the time! If you've never stepped up before, now is the time!" That's how my chairmanship of the Democratic Party in our little town in Wisconsin began.

So my point is, if you want to lead, you have to be prepared to say yes when the time is right. Just say yes.

## MAKING DECISIONS: THE STRUGGLE IS REAL

Do you remember that hazy period in the middle of COVID lockdown, after the toilet paper shortages, after we learned to sing “Happy Birthday” twice while washing our hands? There came a period when time stopped and every day blended into the next. Do you remember how feeling utterly unmoored made simple tasks feel impossible? That wasn’t just fear or fatigue messing with you; it was your brain short-circuiting. In her 2020 article for CNN, neuroscientist Daphna Shohamy wrote, “In a world reeling from the coronavirus pandemic, mundane decisions can feel as difficult as existential ones. The real issue isn’t about something as minor as a meal choice, but about understanding how, as so many decisions are taken away from us, we can feel paralyzed in the face of those we still need to make. Your brain does not distinguish between consequential and trivial decisions now. The line between them is blurred by uncertainty.”<sup>1</sup>

Most of us were lucky enough to move past that untethered confusion, but its aftereffects lingered. Even a year or two later, choices felt more onerous and confusing than they used to, because our templates were shattered. In the COVID “before times,” our lived experiences were useful templates for effective decision-making. But in a post-pandemic world, some facts we knew for certain are completely out of date today. We are constantly trying to process new inputs instead of relying on our knowledge of how things used to work, and this is exhausting. *So* exhausting. We were starting from zero on so many fronts, even as we wrestled COVID under control, and that’s why our thinking went from fast to slow even around the simplest decisions.

Some things have settled down since then; others remain complicating factors in our lives. Some have resolved; others lurk in our minds and continue to make every choice feel strange and burdensome. Decisions were always tough, but living through a global pandemic has made them that much tougher.

Even if you haven’t examined this issue head-on, you’ve likely felt its impact. And, of course, you already knew that human life is hard and complex in general, or you wouldn’t have bought this book in the first place. But you might not be aware of all the ways in which it’s hard and complex, the unavoidable constraints that make it feel even harder and more complex than

it should be. While we don't want to load you down with discouraging information about the nature of decisions, we do want you to feel validated in your struggles to make good decisions.

And since understanding a problem helps us move toward meaningful action, we're going to talk about why collaborating, making choices, and forging ahead can feel so challenging, even when we're not suffering from COVID Brain.

## WHY IS CHOOSING SO HARD?

As humans, we love having the freedom to choose, and yet actually making choices has become increasingly difficult. We have more options than ever to select from, and "choice fatigue" is a very real phenomenon. Voices around and within us shout about priorities, urgency, and speed, causing us to freeze up instead of move forward. Our time is limited, so even if we'd like to take a couple of weeks to mull over a decision, we rarely have that luxury. Our resources are also limited, forcing us to make choices we might not otherwise make. Most of us juggle a variety of roles and responsibilities, splitting our focus and splintering our attention.

What's the most important and severely restricted resource impacting this process? Our brains.

The prefrontal cortex is the part of the human brain involved in planning, executive function, decision-making, and reasoning. What most people don't realize is that this crucial piece of our minds is really quite small. When we see diagrams of the brain, the prefrontal cortex appears to encompass the front fifth of the entire brain, but it's only a few millimeters thick. It's just a wrapper around other sections of the cerebrum. Neuroscience author David Rock says that if we define the capacity of the prefrontal cortex as equivalent to a single cubic foot, the rest of the brain's capacity would be equivalent to the entire Milky Way galaxy. And our brains task that single cubic foot with making *all* our choices and decisions. No wonder we struggle, and our brain has developed some effective hacks.

In order to ease decision-making, we (humans) instinctively try to get ideas out of our heads. We write them down, we record them into our phones,

we discuss them with friends or team members. We do our best to hold as little as possible in our overtaxed and scarce prefrontal cortices, and yet that tiny sliver of brain matter is where all choice-related thought happens. Physiologically speaking, we have very little capacity in our neurological centers of choice and reason. Our capability for holding even a handful of ideas or options there gets exhausted really, really easily.

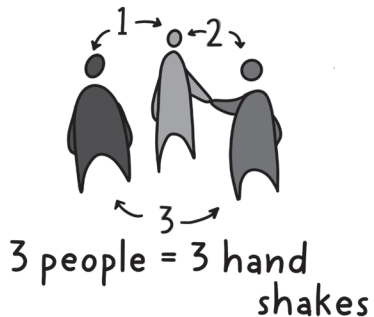
Add other people to the decision-making mix, and our brains start to malfunction in other ways. Entering into conflict with other people—as we often do when making collective decisions—lights up the same areas of our brains that register physical pain. In the brain, belonging (and threats to belonging) are actually understood and aligned with physical safety. Because of this discovery, UCLA professor and social neuroscience researcher Matthew Lieberman says that Maslow had it wrong, and that feelings of belonging are more essential to our survival than even food and shelter.<sup>2</sup> Our desire to feel like we belong is ferociously strong, and the drama associated with being forced to argue, cajole, and debate with other people in order to reach consensus is (literally) neurologically painful.

Some of these factors crop up even when we're making decisions solo. However, when choices require consensus from a large group of stakeholders, the process becomes considerably more difficult and exhausting.

## TOO MANY HANDSHAKES

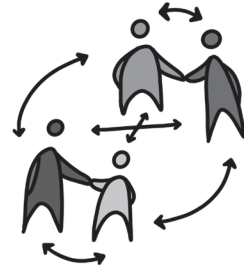
To understand why this is, let's walk through an exercise that we use in our leadership trainings.

Imagine that one of us—let's say Jason—is standing on a stage with four volunteers. Three of them stand together, while one stands off to the side. Jason says to the three, “I want you all to shake hands with each other as though you're meeting for the first time. And as you do, count the handshakes.” Between Person 1, Person 2, and Person 3, we arrive at a total of three handshakes.





Then, Jason brings in that fourth person, and asks the group to do it all again, counting handshakes as they go. When the handshakes are counted, we've gone from three to six. We've only added one person, but we've doubled the number of handshakes.



**4 people = 6 handshakes**

We use this exercise to illustrate the complexity of communication overhead, and it comes with a handy formula:  $\text{Handshakes} = n(n-1)/2$ , where  $n$  is the number of participants in the group. As you add people, the number of individual relationships increases:

- 3 people = 3 relationships
- 4 people = 6 relationships
- 5 people = 10 relationships
- 10 people = 45 relationships

This matters because:

1. People only make decisions when, among other things, they agree to stop talking.
2. People stop talking when they feel understood. Not when you actually understand them, but *when they perceive that they have been understood*.
3. Understanding happens between individuals in a group, not just between one individual and the rest of the group.
4. The more individuals involved in making a decision, the more understanding needs to be driven out, and the harder it is to come to a durable decision.

This comes up at meetings in workplaces around the world on a daily basis, but it also applies outside the office. Say you're at a conference with a large group of people and everyone wants to head out together for dinner. Getting that group to make a choice about where to go can feel absolutely

impossible! Coming to agreement on where to go and how long to stay and what route to take among eight or ten people with individual ideas, opinions, and needs is an absolute nightmare. That's  $n(n-1)/2$  wreaking its interpersonal havoc. That's the overhead around decision-making. This overhead slows you down and limits what you can accomplish.

**This is not a problem to be solved, but an interpersonal dynamic to be navigated.** And we'll give you plenty of tactics for navigating it effectively and with minimal drama in the chapters to come. For now, though, since we're just exploring the reasons why decision-making feels hard, remember this: it's not your fault. This is a naturally occurring complexity that arises in all groups, no matter how skilled they are or how well they work together. Making large group decisions is just plain hard, especially in the high-pressure environment of a workplace.

On top of all this, the culture we've cultivated around meetings is often both toxic and counterproductive. So, when we gather to make a group decision, that's when things *really* get hairy.

## MEETINGS ARE A WASTE OF TIME, PATIENCE, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Back in 2010 we founded LUXr, a Lean Startup coaching and training firm for early-stage companies. Over its four years of existence, the LUXr accelerator program served more than fifty startups in San Francisco and New York, and our team taught thousands of entrepreneurs in workshops around the world in places as diverse as Bangkok, London, and west Tennessee.

One of the teams we coached through LUXr was a group of four men who created an app that allowed people to find their families during and after natural disasters. Sort of a "find my phone," but for people and families. The app was inspired by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the company had already won a major prize from Google for innovation when they came to us to help them develop it into a successful business. The founders were all roommates, all the same age, and they argued constantly. Bickering and jockeying for the mic, talking over each other, not listening. They weren't making efforts to understand each other; they were only making efforts to sell their

own individual visions. They all behaved as if they had the right to continue talking until they personally were satisfied.

After several weeks of stalled progress, we sat them down and said, “We love you guys and love what you’re trying to accomplish, but if you don’t stop bickering and move forward, you’re not going to get what you want out of this company.” By that time, they’d lost weeks of time in useless meetings and damaged some of their relationships with each other. They’d mistaken arguments for communication and conflated having meetings with making progress. In the weeks that followed, the team gave our collaboration tools and advice an earnest try and began to accelerate their progress. The happy ending to that story is that the team course-corrected and eventually went on to a successful IPO.

Larger organizations have different symptoms. In big companies, the most telling evidence that meetings are essentially bankrupt is the prevalence of “pre-meetings.” This is the phenomenon where key participants have smaller meetings in advance of a larger, planned meeting to build support for whatever they’ll be presenting, sometimes orchestrating multiple conversations with each person before bringing them all together. Their goal: to make sure nothing surprising happens at the meeting.

When people create multiple levels of meetings before actually coming together face-to-face to say, “Yes, we agree to this thing,” it’s equivalent to staging the outcome. When we pre-sell our position in advance of a meeting, we can’t benefit from the range of thoughts and insights that other humans might bring, literally, to the table. (Spoiler: That’s Leveraging the Brains.) Instead of harvesting the best thinking, pre-meetings stymie important conversation and trap wisdom in silos. They don’t allow for the necessary discussion, what Harvard researcher Linda Hill calls “creative abrasion,” to unfold when we meet as a group. And why? Because we fear what might happen if we fail to control the outcome. And rightly so. It’s often a sh\*t show. The problem we’re trying to solve with this behavior is real, but the pre-meeting solution has its own costs.

Of course, encouraging creative abrasion is contrary to human nature. We just pointed out that our brains desperately avoid anything that threatens relationships, makes us feel unsafe, or endangers our feelings of belonging. So how can we create an environment where conflict feels positive and

productive? How can we make teams (or families) feel so safe that productively challenging each other's ideas just naturally happens?

We experimented with this question continuously at LUXr. Each week, we tried to stage the environment to predispose positive social dynamics, so that people could challenge each other in nonthreatening, maximally productive ways. When we did that, the right conversations happened simply because of how we'd set up the environment and the conditions. We found that managing the details of how participants would interact—everything from the color of the sticky notes to the size of the pens participants use—could improve the quality of conversation. By controlling the context, we can let go of trying to control the outcomes and make more progress with less pain. We can create space for the challenging but very necessary phenomenon of creative abrasion. Some meetings will always suck, but the ones you lead can suck a lot less. (We'll tell you more about that in chapter nine.)

The moral of *this* chapter isn't just that making decisions is hard. It's that making decisions is hard, **and that's not your fault**. It's also not the fault of your obstreperous teen, your naive new hire, or your opinionated PTA cochair. As a leader, you must cultivate compassion around the decision-making process for yourself and for everyone else. Every morning, people everywhere wake up and try to make choices that move us forward in our lives. At work and at home, we struggle to do that because of neuroscience, social dynamics, and relationship complexity. Now that you know what's gumming up the works, you can start to adopt new mindsets and behaviors that will help make tough decisions feel easier. For you and for the people you lead.

Because as a leader, you can't just apply these ideas to your own decisions; you need to guide others toward more effective processes and mindsets. It's not your fault that making decisions is hard, but it is your responsibility to do what you can to make the process less painful. It is your job as a leader, in whatever context, to help those around you navigate the interpersonal dynamics of choice.

The world is changing stupidly fast, decisions are hard, people are abundant, and work/life balance is a myth. If we're going to be effective, we need simple strategies that we can use anywhere, anytime. Each of the four parts of the book from here will introduce you to a principle and provide you

with tools. The Four Leadership Motions are stated as one-line instructions for what to do right now: Orient Honestly. Value Outcomes. Leverage the Brains. Make Durable Decisions. Any one of them can be useful in virtually any situation. But let's start with knowing where you are right now, and what makes this moment complicated. We call that Orienting Honestly.

## Workshop with Janice: CHOOSE ONE CHALLENGE

1. Make a random list of ten things that are bothersome in your life. Any ten things; they could be family, they could be work, they could be anything. Don't worry about the order. Don't worry if they're "right." Just make the list and don't judge or overthink what you write. If you're a fan of sticky notes, use them. Write one thing per sticky note. (This is how we do it. Sticky note + Sharpie Fine Point = Brains on fire.)
2. Now read through your list and pause at each one. As you pause, ask yourself, "How important is it to fix this?" If you're like me, they'll all seem monumental and looking at the list may give you a bit of a panic attack, so create focus. As you go through the list, draw a line through five of them. (Or crumple up five stickies.) You should have five items remaining that are pretty darn important. I like stickies for this because you can sort them into piles and rearrange the piles. If you need help choosing which five to eliminate, try thinking, "Just for today, I'll pause to think about solving five of these." The just-for-today part is what makes it manageable. Tomorrow you can think about everything else, but today, let yourself focus.
3. Number the remaining items one through five in terms of urgency. (One is the most urgent, five is the least urgent.)
4. Now circle the item you marked as number one. If you're using stickies, set all the rest aside and look at just this one. Rewrite that item on a fresh sheet of paper and make it a sentence that declares an intention. I chose the sticky marked "talk track," which is my term for what communications professionals might call a messaging platform. Strategic communications is three parts strategy, one part people leadership, and one part showmanship, so it's a daunting task for me. I tend to put it off and then wing it (I'm good at improvising), but it's an approach fraught with drama. So, I write, "I will create my talk track for the next six months."

If you were to make progress on this single problem as you read this book, would that feel like a valuable use of your time? If not, choose the next item/sticky and ask the same question. What's one thing you can do to move that forward today?

Part 1

# ORIENT HONESTLY





## Chapter 2

# THE FUNDAMENTALS: POINT A & POINT B

**J**anice has a saying: “Figure out what’s true and make that a good thing.” It’s connected to the tool behavioral psychologists call “Radical Acceptance.” It means that no matter how unpleasant an underlying truth might be, you’re better off if you do the work to uncover it, look it squarely in the face, wrestle yourself into accepting it, and then find a way to thrive nonetheless.

In August 2020, startup founder Devin began working the bid for a large military contract for the U.S. government. By the time February of 2021 rolled around, she was getting antsy. She knew that government work is slow and process-intensive, and that her proposal would need to be reviewed by multiple parties—these things take time. On top of all that, Devin knew that the department she hoped to work with was waiting for Congress to approve the annual budget. Yet she was still feeling anxious. She understood all these pieces of information intellectually but was still acting as if she could make it go faster. She was twisting herself in knots, convinced that if she just did or said the right thing to the right person, her bid would get approved. Devin thought that if she searched hard enough, was good enough, she’d find a tactic to speed up this glacial process. She wanted to have more power in the

situation than she actually did, she believed she could manipulate the outcome through her actions, and in this way she was not being honest with herself. In retrospect, it's easy to see, but in the moment, there was an illusion of control, and it created a huge load of stress and self-doubt.

Working alone, Devin had lost sight of which thoughts were plain facts, and which thoughts were her own assumptions, wishes, and beliefs. It helped to talk with an advisor and separate unchangeable facts (congressional budget approval) from the wishes that something could be different (finding a way to speed up Congress). Once she saw her thoughts laid out this way, Devin became unstuck. Orienting Honestly meant accepting the uncomfortable truth that this approval was out of her control. It meant recognizing where she was in the present moment, with full and complete honesty, instead of subtly retouching her situation to make it more palatable.

Once she did that, her action plan for getting the federal government money became very simple. She needed to keep in touch with her top five contacts, talk to them every week or two to stay on their radar, and wait until the budget was approved and the wheels of the federal government began to turn a bit more swiftly.

Before she Oriented Honestly, Devin's action plan was, in essence, "Try to squeeze juice from a tennis ball." After she Oriented Honestly, her action plan was, "Build my relationships with key contacts while focusing on other projects." There was no persuasion work to be done, and no way to accelerate the process. It was still a tense time, but it flowed much more easily. She won the contract (and then some).

One of the ways we may inadvertently sabotage ourselves as leaders is to obscure the truth about our own circumstances. We may do this to make ourselves feel more productive or comfortable or in control. We may do it because we don't want to make waves. We often lie to ourselves about our current circumstances without even realizing we're doing it. If we move forward under the premise of that lie, we are far more likely to be moving in the wrong direction.

And that's why Orienting Honestly is so crucial.

It can be painful to recognize that we haven't made as much progress on a personal goal as we'd believed. It can be equally disheartening to admit that the team we lead is happy and chummy, but they're not actually aligned on

anything important. But what's the most painful and disheartening of all is realizing how badly we've misjudged our starting point when we've already charged seventy-five steps ahead. Admitting a miscalculation, retracing steps, and redoing work is far more demoralizing than taking the time to Orient Honestly early. (And reorienting often so that you can make adjustments along the way.)

Defining our current situation fully and honestly brings clarity; and *lack of clarity* is a pernicious roadblock to progress. When people struggle to understand their current circumstances or fail to articulate a shared goal, activity grinds to a halt. When we refuse to Orient Honestly, we do things without understanding why we're doing them. We mistake activity for progress. Mistake arguing for collaborating. We spin our wheels instead of moving forward.

Over the years, we've discovered that honestly and clearly defining where we are right now *and where we would like to go* makes progress exponentially easier. This method for Orienting Honestly can be put into practice across the gamut of situations using a simple technique that we call Point A and Point B. In this chapter we'll teach you how to identify and articulate them both. We'll show you how to notice your current state (including complications), then directly, boldly, and without over-specifying, describe a desired future state. And we'll explain how learning to define and articulate Point A and Point B will change your life for the better.

## UNDERSTANDING POINT A AND POINT B

The Point A and Point B concept is exactly what it sounds like: "We're here now, and we want to be over there, so we will need to take these steps to get there." It's a simple metaphor, and when you examine it, it can reveal so much about how we mess up.

Imagine you are an airline pilot who is based in Denver. You need to get a plane full of antsy passengers to Albuquerque, so you request a flight plan. If the plan you're given shows you how to get from Miami to Albuquerque, you can't possibly retrofit it to work: Miami is on the opposite side of the country and farther south than Denver, so you'd have to go ridiculously far

out of your way to even begin using this set of directions. A flight plan with the same destination city but the wrong departure city cannot be put into action. This is why you need to have a sense of *where you are right now* before you start setting goals and taking action.



Now, if you're given a plan that shows you how to get from Denver to Cincinnati, you're equally screwed. Cincinnati is nowhere near Albuquerque, and even if you flew there, you'd need to get an entirely new flight plan to get from Cincinnati to your intended destination. This is why you need to have a sense of *where you would like to go* before you start setting goals and taking action.

You need both. We cannot emphasize this strongly enough, good people. You need a Point A and a Point B to Orient Honestly and identify the outcomes you want to enable as a leader. It may sound simplistic, but we're willing to bet that you've made most of your life's most important decisions without identifying those two guardrails. If you begin defining Point A and Point B before you take action, the decisions you make and actions you take will immediately become more informed, comprehensive, and cohesive.

### **What Makes a Good Point A?**

When you sketch out Point A, your point of departure, you need to be brutally honest about it. Point A describes the farthest edge you've reached and includes any associated disorder or messiness, because those issues are critical data points that reveal the complexity of your situation. This is the hardest piece to get right and the part that's easiest to gloss over, but we believe it's where your best insights can come in.

Point A describes your current situation honestly but succinctly. Do your best to write that out word for word in a few sentences. (It'll be too long, but that's okay; allow yourself to do a brain dump now so you can

sharpen your focus later.) As you write this first draft, be sure to capture two things:

- Your hardest won, most durable markers of progress (Situation).
- Your points of tension, messiness, and uncertainty (Complication, see sidebar on pages 44–46 for more on this).

Here's an example: "Since COVID, our company has been tasked with releasing Software Product X in eighteen months, but the current plan is three years. We don't know how to change our plan, and some people think it's impossible." It's short but descriptive and includes both salient details and overarching concerns. Can you spot the complication in this Point A statement? (Hint: It has to do with the timeline.)

Here are a few more true-life examples:

- **Business Development:** "We need to decide whether to enter into a deal with Microsoft, and our strategy team has presented great arguments both for and against."
- **Compensation Cycles:** "We have a fixed amount of money to award in pay increases this year, and it's not enough to give everyone what they deserve."
- **Vacation Planning:** "We haven't taken a proper vacation in years, and we don't know how to carve out the time and money, or whether there's a destination that will satisfy everyone."

If your initial draft is longer than two or three sentences, wordsmith it until it's fairly brief, true, and *not* wishy-washy. You want it to both represent the essence of the current circumstances and capture the tension that those circumstances are causing. This tension point suggests and represents the work to be done.

With Point A nailed down, you can move on to identifying the desired outcome. What is Point B? Where do you want to be, how do you want the team to behave, what would be an ideal end-state for the entire company? With Point B, you're not necessarily devising a solution, you're setting a singular outcome for a finite period of time that is achievable yet ambitious.

## What Makes a Good Point B?

This is the very simple statement of what you want to achieve, feel, or experience after making mindful changes or taking strategic action. Since you can create a Point A/Point B set for a single hour-long work session or an entire year's worth of life, Point B may be narrow or broad. But just like Point A, it should be honest and succinct. Do your best to write it out word for word in a few sentences (as you did with Point A). If you're establishing a Point B for a single working session, we have found that it *always* helps to start with the words: "At the end of our time today, we will have accomplished\_\_\_\_\_."

Here's an example Point B to accompany our Point A from above: "At the end of our two hours today, we will have at least FIVE BIG IDEAS that could enable us to release Software Product X in eighteen months vs. thirty-six months. These concepts should enable us to remake the overall release plan."

Here are a few more true-life examples:

- **Business Development:** "At the end of this week, we will have made a decision about whether to accept the Microsoft offer."
- **Compensation Cycles:** "By the end of this working session, we will have three lists: people who must get a pay increase (due to pay equity issues), people who are not getting one, and the 'maybes,' who we will discuss next week."
- **Vacation Planning:** "By the end of the family call on Sunday, we will know how much time and money each person wants to spend on a vacation together."

Your Point B should be specific enough to guide your actions, but not so specific that it points you toward a single possible outcome. A well-formulated Point B is flexible, more like a destination city than a destination address. It guides you in the right direction without putting too many parameters around where you'll end up.

Not sure your Point B is spot-on? Try asking yourself, "If I were to accomplish this, would it have been a good use of my time?"

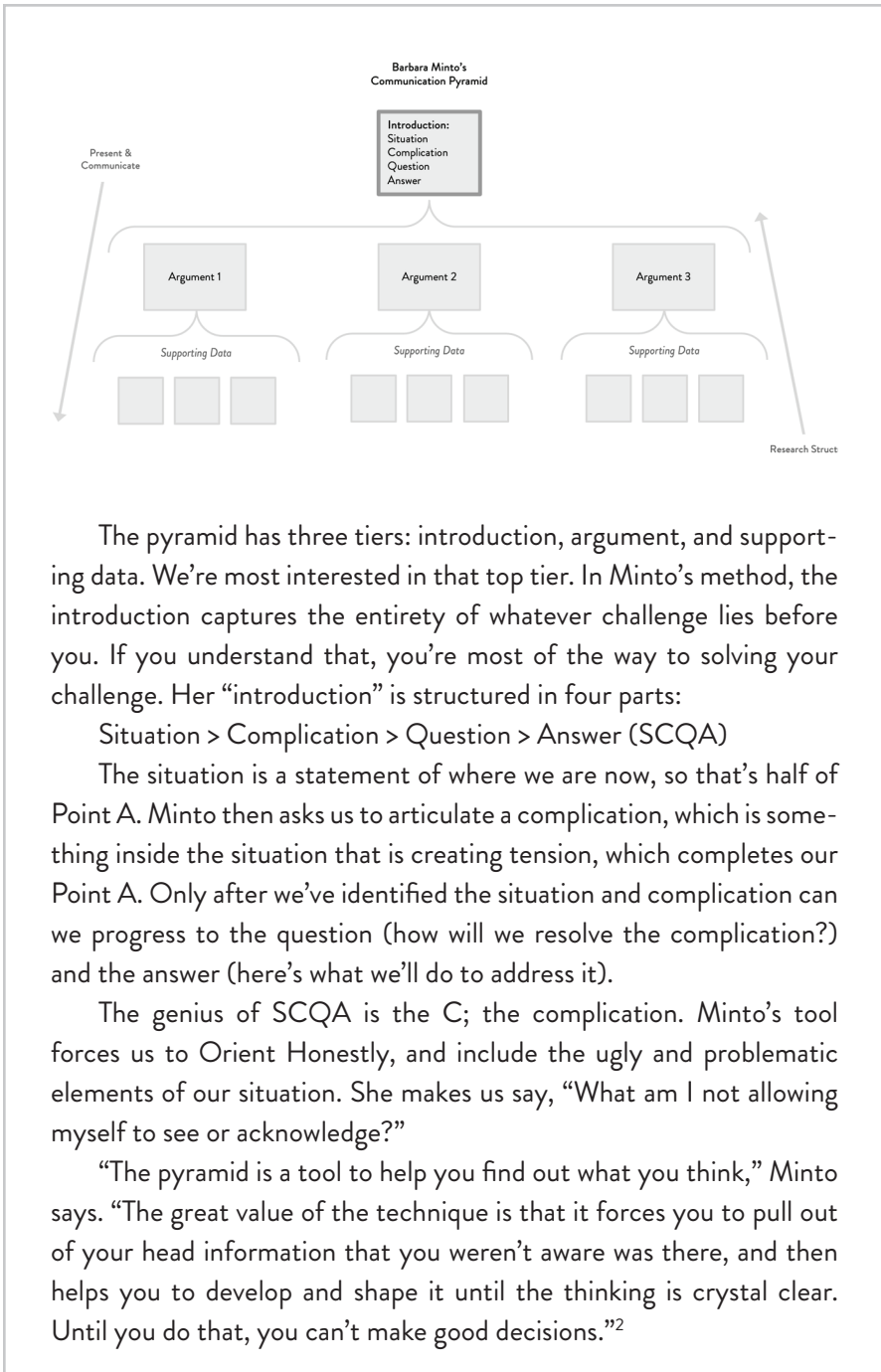
Let's walk through an example scenario that shows someone refining their Points A and B to be as effective as possible. Say Amir is considering

quitting his job. He's highly valued as an employee, paid well, and doing work that he thinks is valuable, but the management structure has become dysfunctional and oppressive. Defining Point A as "I don't know if I should quit my job or not" would be a mistake. It's a true statement and a good starting point but isn't specific enough. A good Point A is a short, accurate statement that reveals the tension behind the current stuck point. Point A should succinctly capture the messiness and clarify the complications. Something like, "There are many things I love about my work, and I feel like I'm doing valuable work, but the management situation is making me unhappy, and I don't see it resolving anytime soon." That is Amir's Point A. It explains why he's conflicted about leaving. Perhaps there's a simpler way to say it ("I'm not happy with how I'm being managed . . ."). But most times, our thoughts aren't clear from the start. So let's keep it messy and find clarity as we move forward together.

Point B is a statement of what will be true once Amir has resolved the complication in Point A. If we think of Point A as a problem, defining Point B means asking, "When this problem is solved, what will it be like?" It's envisioning a future state and describing it. Something like, "I'll be happy at work" is a good start, but it's not specific enough. It needs a little more definition and an achievable time frame. "In three months, I will be happy to go to work in the morning," is a solid Point B for Amir to use. And it gives him enough flexibility to consider staying at his job and making changes or finding a better position elsewhere.

## SITUATIONS AND COMPLICATIONS

Legendary business consultant Barbara Minto worked at McKinsey & Co. for just ten years, but during that time she completely transformed how the consultancy operated.<sup>1</sup> While there, she created the Minto Pyramid Principle for communications. Her method is a series of steps that helped everyone at McKinsey to think more clearly, solve problems quickly and successfully, and as she intended, they also came to write better.





## OUTCOMES VERSUS OUTPUTS

We use Point A/Point B thinking all the time, and we help all of our clients do the same because it refocuses attention on outcomes. Most of us have been trained to set goals and urged to make them concrete and measurable. These are almost always framed as outputs: writing a book, hitting a sales goal, losing a certain number of pounds. While outputs have their place in our lives, the Four Leadership Motions emphasize outcomes instead: not just “writing a book,” but expressing your ideas in a way that impacts the world. Not just “hitting a sales goal,” but positioning the company for continued growth. Not just “losing a certain number of pounds,” but taking steps to improve your overall health. This is why Point B is always an ideal end-state instead of a single achievement: Point B is an outcome.

When we orient around outcomes, we define what we want to have, change, or be, and put loose parameters around that; we decide on an ideal end-state that could come to pass in a variety of ways. When we decide that only one output (loss of weight) will satisfy the outcome we want (better health), we strap on a pair of blinders and refuse to see the vast universe of other possibilities that could also contribute to getting us what we want to have, change, or be.

Let’s see how this plays out in the example of Amir and his misery at work.

Remember that Amir is highly valued as an employee, paid well, and doing work that he thinks is valuable, but the management at his workplace has become dysfunctional and oppressive. Initially, he was just wondering if he should quit his job: quitting would be an activity. Just because he quits this job doesn’t mean he’ll find a better one, or get hired right away, or be happier in his working life overall. What Amir actually wants is to manage, mitigate, change, or get away from the dysfunction he’s facing in his role. What he wants is less stress, less drama, less conflict. Which is why we recommended his Point B be defined as “In three months, I will be happy to go to work in the morning.” That outcome still has specificity and can direct his actions but encompasses many possibilities. Amir still might quit, since he could end up happier going to work at a different company. But now he has alternatives—he could change roles, have productive conversations with his supervisors, create

a new project for himself, or build more social support among his colleagues. With a Point B/outcome that describes the ideal future state, Amir has the opportunity to explore how he will reach that state. He can be creative in how he problem-solves and decide what he wants to have, change, or be, instead of just choosing a single output and embracing it without looking back.

<b>Outcome (Choose One as Point B)</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Outputs</b>
Be happy going to work in the morning  Have less stress, drama, conflict  Manage or mitigate the dysfunctional situation	Quit job/company Find a new situation  Talk with supervisors  Build relationships with coworkers	New job & company  New role at same company  New project with different team  Support within current role

What about at home, where frictions often feel simpler and more concrete? Yep, even there we need to consider the differences between outcomes and outputs and do our best to focus on the former. Let's walk through another example. In this case the "team" is a family of five: two parents, an adult daughter and her spouse, and a teenage son. They have just completed their annual summer vacation, and it is time to begin planning the next one. They were a little bit bored this summer and have decided to go someplace new. As they work on discussing and planning together, there are many factors to consider. We'll start with these:

- Everyone having fun together
- Research destinations
- Top 10 list of destinations
- Be ready to fly on travel day
- Pack suitcases
- Plane tickets and Airbnb reservations
- Something for everyone
- Set up Google Doc to capture things each person likes to do

- Destination guide
- Not spending too much money
- Family Zoom call to discuss costs
- Travel budget

Some of these items are activities that *link* outcomes to outputs, or vice versa. Since we know that outcomes are ideal end-states and outputs are concrete goals, here's how we'd categorize everything on the list:

Outcome	Activity	Output
Everyone having fun together	Research destinations	Top 10 list of destinations
Be ready to fly on travel day	Pack suitcases	Plane tickets and Airbnb reservations
Something for everyone	Set up Google doc to capture things each person likes to do	Destination guide
Not spending too much money	Family Zoom call to discuss costs	Travel budget

We have an entire section later in the book on Valuing Outcomes since it's one of our Four Leadership Motions, but we wanted to introduce the concept here since it is so intertwined with the creation of a helpful, productive Point B. It's easy to conceptualize Point B as a goal, accomplishment, or output because that's what we've been taught to do our entire lives. At school, at work, in our hobbies, everywhere. Goal-setting is very sexy, but it's also problematic because *you can set a goal without being honest with yourself*. You can set a goal without taking stock of your resources or understanding anything about where you are, right now, in this moment. You can quit jobs over and over again without doing any sort of self-reflection and be totally dumbfounded when you aren't any happier at your new jobs! Point B must be framed as an outcome because when it's an output, there's a very real chance

that you will arrive there having failed to address what was wrong in the first place.

A good Point B can't be formulated by focusing solely on the future. It requires reflection, introspection, and Honest Orientation around present circumstances. And that kind of inward-looking evaluation is something that most leaders must learn to do as individuals before they can do it in group settings.

Most leaders need to practice on themselves first.

## START WITH YOURSELF

Remember earlier in the chapter when we said that learning to identify Point A and define Point B is guaranteed to change your life? Here's the part where we explain why that is.

Understanding where you are and articulating where you want to go will give you clarity and agility that most people crave but lack. And, as you've just learned, these two linked practices can be applied to everything from business decisions to personal goal-setting, colossal questions to mundane issues. When you learn to think in terms of Point A and Point B across circumstances, you'll be a positive force wherever you lead.

That said, if you want to transform anything—a situation, team, or family—you need to start with yourself. Not because you're broken and need an emergency makeover, but because practicing transformational tactics as an individual will make you more trustworthy and insightful when you apply them with others. Even more important, though, is the reality that incorporating the 4LM principles and practices into your relationships and personal experiences will make your life easier. And we mean exponentially easier.

By embracing this system, you'll be able to understand your present circumstances with crystal clarity and orient yourself toward improving them. You'll know when to ask for help and who would be in the best position to support you. You'll be able to make tough decisions more easily and trust that you've chosen wisely. You'll worry less about the things that don't matter and focus confidently on the outcomes that do. We promise that mastering

Point A and Point B can make every relationship, choice, conversation, and progress-blocking situation simpler and less stressful.

Especially when you have the courage to apply it to yourself. Especially when you acknowledge that being a great leader starts with learning to lead yourself effectively.

Because, after all, you are the center of the universe. No, really. We are each the axis around which our personal worlds and identities revolve. We bring ourselves to work, to school, and into our own homes. We insert ourselves into an immense variety of situations every day and navigate them all using our experiences and skills. We may adjust our behaviors, speech, and attire to suit the audience or context, but we're still fundamentally ourselves. How we show up in various aspects of our lives is an expression of who we are as individuals, and that affects every relationship we cultivate. So if we want to be more effective at work, in our careers, in our personal lives—really, anywhere across the board—it makes sense to work on ourselves first, because that's our point of greatest leverage.

When we think about situations outside of ourselves, it's a lot easier to make objective observations, identify the facts, and describe the complications dispassionately: "Sales were down in Q2 and our earnings call is two weeks away," or "My dog has a strange cough and started vomiting—maybe it's because the air quality is poor and we just changed his food." (That one's a true story for us right now.) But when it comes to our internal lives, figuring out Point A gets much trickier, because our minds are masterful at keeping secrets: Why does that person at work irritate me? Why can't I finish the memoir? Why do I wake up with the same worry spinning through my head in the middle of the night? Why am I afraid of public speaking? Why do I still bite my fingernails? For most of us, it takes a few visits with a therapist to get answers to questions like these.

Even worse than keeping secrets, our minds *lie to us* all the time. ("I'm a terrible housekeeper." "I'm not qualified for this job." "If I were a better person, I'd have a better relationship with my mother.") Often these lies originated from messages we received early in life—from toxic parents, well-meaning but misguided adults, playground bullies. It's not necessary to understand their origin. Somewhere in our minds, though, we know that this self-talk is

neither kind nor factual, and probably we have a lot more answers than we think we do.

So the first step in leveraging the Four Leadership Motions for your own benefit is to find better ways to Orient Honestly. The first step is to start with yourself.

## THE BENEFITS OF USING POINT A AND POINT B

Honestly? The benefits are both innumerable and totally specific to each person who uses the Point A to Point B structure. This system is so flexible it can be used at home and at work, with your colleagues and with your family. It can be applied in complex situations and simple ones and can help make seemingly complex situations feel simpler. When you use it to conceptualize personal struggles, it can shed light on thorny issues and bring both clarity and relief. When you use it in groups, you'll reach understanding and alignment faster and be able to tackle projects with a shared sense of purpose.

And now that you recognize A and B as an underlying structure that exists in human life, you'll begin to see it everywhere. Hopefully, you'll also begin to see where it is missing and would be helpful.

For example:

Topic	Point A	Point B
Medical	“I haven't been sleeping well for the past few years. My doctor and I have tried a number of treatments, and they haven't made a big difference.”	“By the end of the next month, I will find at least three nontraditional options that I can try next. If they don't work, I'll go in for a sleep study.”
Money	“We have built up \$30,000 in credit card debt in the past year, and it's starting to feel scary. We don't know how to turn it around.”	“At the end of this weekend, we will understand what we spent all of the money on.”

Mental Health	“It seems like I’m angry all the time and I pick fights with my partner. I love my partner and want to make it work.”	“In six months, I will have figured out how to settle my temper and let go of some of the anger.”
Groceries	“We have noticed that if we don’t do grocery shopping on Saturday, we end up eating a lot of take-out food during the week. We want to enjoy Saturdays, which makes it hard to find time for grocery shopping.”	“By Friday night, we will have an experiment to run this weekend that will allow us to get the grocery shopping done and still enjoy our Saturday.”

Start by attuning yourself to discord and friction in your daily life. At any point in a given day, when you find yourself worrying, stuck, angry, or unsure, pause and frame up your situation in terms of Points A and B. What is a clear and honest way of describing your current state, including any complicating factors? When the complicating factors are resolved, what would the future look like instead? Even if there’s no one else around and the conflict is entirely internal, simply articulating what’s happening now and envisioning what you’d like to happen next will bring greater clarity and ease.

This practice is beneficial at the neurological level, too. Doubt and confusion are dealt with in the prefrontal cortex, which, as we’ve learned, is a remarkably small part of the brain that is responsible for a remarkably long list of mental processes. When you know something is wrong but cannot articulate or identify it, you’re sucking up precious bandwidth in your over-taxed prefrontal cortex.<sup>3</sup> By pursuing and creating clarity for yourself, you free up room in your mind for other matters. In essence, learning to describe Point A is good for your health.

On top of that, learning to utilize the Point A and B framework positions you to achieve outcomes that are desirable and deliberate. You arrive there faster than you would using a less transparent and clearly defined system for decision-making. And perhaps most importantly, you make progress with *far* less drama! We are all drowning in drama spurred by anger, fear, loyalty,

and other interpersonal dynamics, all of which are aggravated by our hyperdynamic world. If we can turn down the volume on the drama, we will all be happier, and our lives will be easier.



## Workshop with Janice: POINT A AND POINT B

1. Pull out the challenge you defined in our chapter one workshop. At this point, it will probably be helpful to choose a notebook (or, if you're using sticky notes, a section of the wall) that will serve as your project work area. Because this is now a project. I want you to make progress, and I want it to be easier than it has been in the past to do so.
2. Write out your Point A as a complete sentence or paragraph. Describe your hardest won, most durable markers of progress. Also list or describe your points of tension and messiness (situation and complication). As you write, ask yourself, "Am I telling the whole truth here? What am I not letting myself see clearly?"

You'll recall that I'm working on my own challenge right alongside you. I need to figure out my talk track for the next six months. So here's my Point A:

*My business has a range of external stakeholders, and each one seems to need a different kind of information and insight from me. New customers, existing clients, and startup founders are all affected by recent changes in my business focus. I like improvisation and tend to trust my judgment in the moment to know what to say, so I often put off planning strategic communications. But I can see that they are becoming confused, and I fear that this may affect the size and frequency of future contracts.*

It's more detailed and tells the messy story that is truer than the short one-liner I shared before. All these pieces of the puzzle are relevant, though, so it's good to see it laid out in front of me.

3. Now write out your Point B. Often this is the simpler, easier part to write. Aim for an outcome that's achievable in one to three months. (Bigger than a breadbox, smaller than a pickup truck.) Here's mine:

*Point B: In thirty days, I'll have a prioritized understanding of my most important stakeholders and the kinds of things they need to know in order to feel confident.*

4. Read the whole thing—everything you've written about Point A and Point B—and understand the problem, with all its complications. Have some compassion with yourself. If it were a simple fix, you'd have done it already.

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Together, Janice and Jason Fraser have coached teams and delivered their workshops to organizations around the world, including startups, governments, non-profits, mom-and-pop shops, venture firms, and top business schools. Janice built a storied career as a Silicon Valley startup founder, product manager, and confidante for entrepreneurs and enterprise executives alike. Her hobbies include healing generational trauma, challenging the patriarchy, and icing migraines. Jason leads a team at VMware of more than sixty product managers and designers who work with the Department of Defense and other government clients to build mission-critical software. He can say “thank you” in more than twenty languages, holds a fifth-degree black belt in Choy Lay Fut Kung Fu, and has published more than 1,600 chocolate reviews on Twitter and Instagram.

Jason and Janice split their time between San Francisco and Minneapolis, where they live with a derpy dog, a bitter cat, and a very tall college student.

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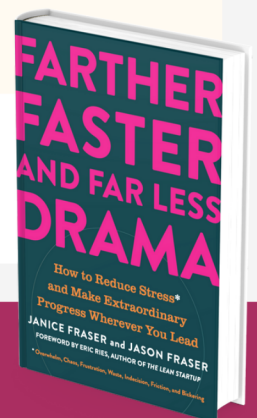
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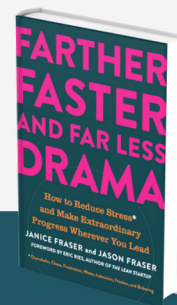
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