

# Unlock Behavior, Unleash Profits

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Developing leadership behavior  
that drives profitability  
in your organization

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**LESLIE WILK BRAKSICK, PH.D.**

*Second Edition*

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## Foreword to the Second Edition

WHEN I FIRST MET LESLIE IN 1998, I was corporate officer and President of the technology company of a Fortune 10 corporation. I was immediately struck by her intense interest in the details of our business—after all, we were getting together to talk about creating behavioral change. And it is this marriage between her deep understanding of Behavioral Science, and her knowledge of the business world, that characterizes her work, and this book.

Behavioral Science can be as complex as the human condition itself, but like any complex system, human behavior is driven by a few simple principles. This book is about that simplicity, and how to harness it for greater productivity. It is about doing, and the practical implications in a business context.

Behavior is probably the most powerful, and yet least understood aspect of leadership—the pivotal link between strategy and results. In retrospect, it is sobering to reflect that for most of my own career, I had assumed that with clear objectives and thoughtful strategy, the behaviors required for effective execution would follow automatically.

It was only when faced with the challenge of fundamentally refocusing a large technology organization that I started to look for answers to questions about the changes in behavior that would be required, and how they could be effectively sustained.

CLG's approach, which is the subject of this book, uses simple analytical techniques to pinpoint critical behaviors, and identify the antecedents and consequences that cause these behaviors to be sustained. The emphasis on coaching and feedback, and the techniques this book employs to encourage specific behaviors, have

huge collateral benefits in creating a positive, feedback-driven culture across the whole organization.

The book draws on practical examples from CLG's experience with its blue-ribbon roster of clients. These enliven and transform what would otherwise be a dry behavioral text into an experience the reader can share. Most importantly, the process starts and ends with business purpose.

I have worked with Leslie over a period of several years and have experienced first-hand the transformation of a large organization using these concepts. Their impact is profound, and the business results impressive. It is now refreshing to find a book that deals with this subject in such simple and practical terms. The reader will discover that the essence of creating fundamental organizational change is as simple as "ABC"!

Let me add my thanks to Leslie for her insights, which have had such a positive influence on the working lives of so many like me.

Grand Cayman,  
Cayman Islands  
February, 2007

W.R.K. Innes, D. Eng.

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*Dr. Innes dedicated nearly four decades to a Fortune 10 company, performing international, executive, and leadership roles.*

*CLG (The Continuous Learning Group), co-founded by the author of this book, is a consultancy that specializes in strategy execution through the application of Behavioral Science.*

## Preface to the Second Edition

**T**HIS BOOK IS FOR LEADERS: business managers and executives, parents, clergy, coaches, administrators, HR professionals, teachers—anyone who has influence over the actions of others—anyone who wants to make a difference in their lifetime—anyone who is blessed with the responsibility of leading others.

As leaders, our behavior profoundly influences those around us. Thus, it is our responsibility to equip ourselves to fulfill our leadership role well. Leadership is something you cannot delegate.

I wrote *Unlock Behavior, Unleash Profits* for leaders who are interested in understanding why people do what they do—and who want to make the workplace and the organizations to which they belong positive, productive, and profitable for all involved.

I chose to update the original book (2000) with this revised edition because I saw such dramatic changes in the world and in the workplace over the past seven years—with many more changes right around the corner.

For the first time in our lifetimes, our workforce will soon be dominated by a generation of people who are not committed first and foremost to the companies for which they work. They are a workforce that will work, on average, for six different companies in their lifetime. They will move company-to-company for a promotion or something more that they want, regardless of their satisfaction levels with their current employer. However, they will not relocate their family for a promotion, unless it is desired by the entire family.

This is a generation that is seeking reciprocity in their employee-employer relationship—and they expect to be well-led and developed during their tenure with a company. They are well-

educated, well-traveled, and will have their pick of where they'd like to work. *For the first time in our lifetimes, there will be greater need for managers/leaders than there will be people available to fill those positions.*

All of these things, on top of the amazing pace of change and technology advances, and the ever-increasing competition and pressure from Wall Street, put tremendous pressure on companies to be more thoughtful in how they select, lead, manage, and retain talent. Leaders in these organizations have to be much more thoughtful about the role of people and behavior.

This book is all about leadership—and about behavior—and the science that underlies what great leaders need to engage fully: the behaviors of the organizations they lead. In this edition, the case studies and stories are plentiful—and the honesty of leaders interviewed is humbling and educational.

Choose to maximize your effectiveness as a leader, manager, parent, spouse, partner, colleague, and friend. Read this book—and put the concepts into practice in your own life. There is no greater personal reward than knowing you have *unlocked behavior and unleashed profits*—in your life, or in the lives of others. Go for it. It will change your life.



# Great Execution Depends on—*Behavior*

*“I was CEO almost three years before I really had my arms around the role. I had been deluded into thinking I was doing a good job, because I was directing things. I had no role model for the ‘soft stuff’ that the CEO was supposed to do.*

*“The biggest challenges were much less about business and strategy—but rather about providing leadership in the right way; knowing what to get involved in and what not to; and understanding the implications of what I said and did. I grossly underestimated the importance of my own leadership behaviors, and of coaching and encouraging other leaders.*

*“It became clear that, if I kept doing the same stuff, I would get the same results. I needed to change, to do things differently. It’s hard to learn new behaviors when you have a big ego and a strong track record of success!*

*“Four years ago, I would have called myself a good CEO, because back then, I didn’t know better. Today I know better—and can honestly say: I am a very good CEO.”*

*—Chairman & CEO, Fortune 100 Company*

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**L**EADERS WANT TO BE SUCCESSFUL—not just through their own eyes, but in the eyes of others. And by definition, the success of leaders is determined by their ability to get things done through others. In the opening quote, what the leader learned that made him a “very good CEO” was that *his behavior was the catalyst that could either switch off or turn on the right behaviors in his organization to achieve their key business goals.*

If you’re like most leaders, you want to make a difference in this world and in your lifetime, and you are likely involved in a variety of important leadership roles where what you do and say really matters. I also imagine that experience has taught you the hard realities of the workplace: leaders do not always lead well. Good people do not always work hard. High performers do not always get paid more. Angry people do not always quit their jobs and go elsewhere. Great places to work may not be profitable and may not survive. And fairness seldom operates at work.

Reading this book and mastering its contents will help you understand why people do what they do—and how to “unlock” and dramatically change your own leadership behavior—to accelerate your progress to maximum effectiveness. This book will help demystify why others do what they do (or don’t do what they are supposed to). You will learn how to focus your own leadership behaviors and those of others.

### **WHY IS THIS LEADERSHIP BOOK UNIQUE?**

There are thousands of leadership books out there. What makes this one different? Most leaders have never learned a practical approach to understanding why people do and say the things they do—and how to “unlock” their behaviors to bring out the best in everyone, which leads to superior performance—both individually and organizationally.

And in any organization, *nothing can improve until people change their behavior.* There is a science devoted to behavior, and that science underlies what is taught and described in this book. It will seem simple and it is easy to learn, but when put into practice it becomes a profound, life-changing approach to leadership.

## THE SCIENCE OF BEHAVIOR—AND THE LINK TO RESULTS

The science of behavior relies on honest, direct, useful communication, based on objective observation. It is very much a teaching and coaching approach, in which the leader's goal is the success of every employee. The science is easily learned and is replicable.

While many leaders may find the idea of “soft” people skills too squishy, the empirical nature of Behavioral Science provides the tools to cut through many soft factors, such as personality and motivation. For a so-called “soft” people skill, the science of behavior is really quite hard.

Part of the rigor of Behavioral Science is that it gives you an early indicator (leading indicator) of whether you are on target. When you select the right behaviors to measure, you gain the ability to predict—early—whether you will achieve results, and if not, Behavioral Science helps you correct the course.

When you implement an organizational change, you need measures of success. In business, the dominant measure is P&L, but P&L comes too late—you need the early indicator that behavioral measurement enables. The unlocking of specific behavior that is linked to end results clearly correlates to the unleashing of profits, as our company has shown in decades of client engagements.

### SO, WHY THE TITLE: “UNLOCK BEHAVIOR, UNLEASH PROFITS”?

In so many organizations, people's behavior is “locked.” This means that their behavior is constrained by cultural norms and people

#### *The Science of Behavior . . .*

explains *behavior*: why we do what we do, say what we say, or don't act at all. Behavioral Science has the same properties as other natural sciences like chemistry and biology: careful observation, data collection, reliability of occurrence, replicability, measurability, laws, and rigor.

B. F. Skinner, Ph.D., has been the focal point for modern-day behavioral scientific philosophy and research, which began in the 1920s. Since his day, the science has matured through eight decades of research, and today we focus on its application in organizations.

The behavioral approach is now the most powerful and enduring way to achieve sustainable business results. Thus, we need its reliable, replicable technology for managing behavior and implementing change.

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systems. These constraints act to keep people doing their jobs at *minimum* acceptable levels of performance. People in such performance-constrained organizations—whether a team, a department, or the entire corporation—feel “locked” or stuck, and their performance is compromised as a result. Often, this minimum performance becomes acceptable and expected, and so the organization chugs along—adequately.

However, locked behavior becomes an insurmountable problem when the organization goes to implement a new strategy or to make a big change that requires people to alter how they work—to exhibit new behaviors to get new performance. These locked behaviors become big obstacles to implementation, keeping people from embracing the new way.

But there is good news: anyone who heeds the lessons in this book can become one of those great leaders who implements change well. You can help your people become completely engaged in “new ways” if you understand behavior, and care enough to lead your people well and coach others to success.

So, the purpose of this book is to reveal how to *unlock behaviors* in your organization, so you can *unleash profits*—not only monetary, but also the vast wealth of talent and capability that is trapped within the people in your organization.

### HOW DOES “LOCKING” HAPPEN?

Behaviors become locked as the result of unintended consequences—despite leaders’ good intentions. Many organizations unwittingly reward the wrong behaviors and discourage the right behaviors, thus undermining their hard work for success. For example:

**One client needed *strong teamwork* across salespeople in different business units to drive top-line growth, cross-selling, and meet the new purchasing and distribution requirements of their largest customer. But, the company did not alter its sales incentive system—which was tied to *individual performance* only—thus discouraging any acts of teamwork or collaboration.**

**The results were competition between business units and finger-pointing among individuals. Top-line growth was negatively impacted, and customer requirements were not met. What teamwork?**

***The company had unintentionally locked the employees' behavior and leashed profits by not altering sales incentives (consequences) tied to their behavior. They expected people to do the right thing no matter what—but failed to realize that the company also had an obligation to align its reward structure with what it was asking of its employees.***

Often the conflict is more subtle: it is the experience employees have when they observe the difference between an organization's vision and stated values, and what they see actually practiced and encouraged every day. This clash between words and actions weakens commitment and causes distrust of leaders and of the company as a whole.

This is where unintended consequences begin, driving performance down, not up. The organization gets less than what its individuals are capable of giving—and the employees experience less satisfaction from a work environment that has the potential to be so much better. When an organization locks its people's behaviors, everyone suffers—individual employees, managers, top leaders, customers, and shareholders.

*The thing I want to inspire and excite you with is that employees' discretionary performance can be unlocked by leaders . . .*

*. . . who understand the effect of unintended consequences on their people, and how to change that . . .*

*. . . and who understand how to positively motivate the behaviors of others to get things accomplished.*

You will get back from employees (and others) the very level of performance that your leadership actions produce. This cause-and-effect relationship between your actions and people's response is almost entirely under your control. You can become a great leader if you want to, and are willing to learn and use the methods in this book. The choice is yours.

## “DISCRETIONARY PERFORMANCE”— TAPPING THE POWER WITHIN US ALL

*Discretionary performance is that extra level of performance we exert when we want to do something, as opposed to when we have to do something.* Discretionary performance is happening when we perform above-and-beyond, “at our own discretion.” It’s the difference between *compliance* (do it only because we have to) and *commitment* (do it because we really want to).

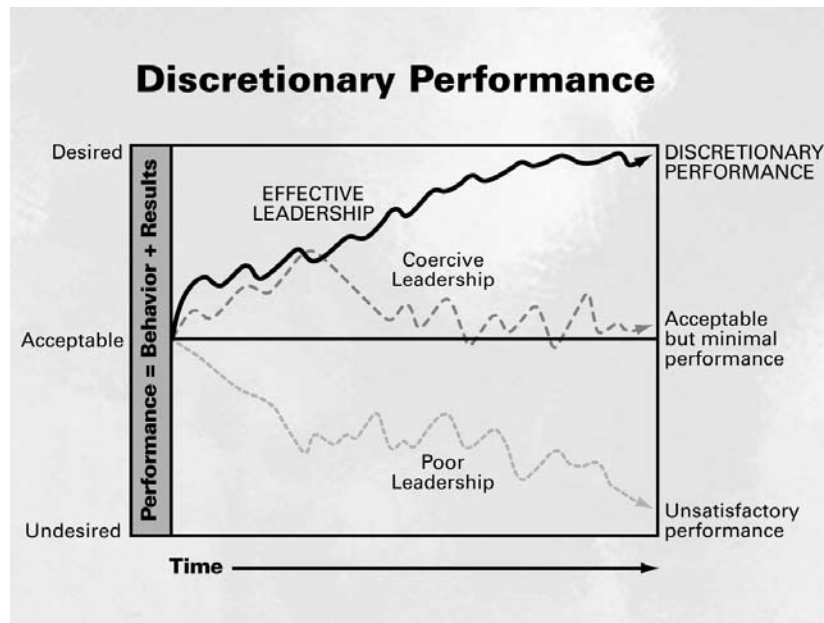
When you unlock behavior, you’ll be a delighted witness to daily acts of discretionary performance. You will have tapped into the deepest center of humans that leads them to *want to* do things, without any apparent incentive or motivation.

Developing discretionary performance in employees is especially critical today. The unquestioning loyalty of past generations has all but vanished. Today’s workforce seeks engaging work environments that are reciprocal and mutually respectful. Unlocking behavior and tapping into the discretionary performance of all employees is Job One for leaders who want their organizations to win.

A simple fact is that discretionary performance will occur only when the right behaviors are encouraged and people actually become “winners” because those behaviors lead to winning results. The following figure illustrates the three types of leadership and the impact each type has upon performance:

- ***Effective leadership, which earns discretionary performance.*** This top curve is the one we all want: outstanding discretionary performance, where people perform at peak levels for sustained periods. This is the result of effective leadership that truly “unlocks” employee behavior.
- ***Coercive leadership (“do it because I said so”), which earns minimal performance.*** This leadership style may get improved performance in the short term, but ultimately creates a work place of fear-driven compliance. People do just enough to get by. Either their performance is just acceptable enough to avoid getting fired, or they carefully achieve the goals set by leaders, but never go beyond. Either way, coercive leadership cannot propel the organization to greatness.

- *Poor leadership, which earns unsatisfactory performance.* Eventually, the unsatisfactory performance comes visible to all stakeholders, and the leader exits or the organization collapses.



Effective leadership, superior execution, and engaging work environments all depend on your leadership words and actions. *Your behavior—everything you do and say—is the key to tapping discretionary performance in yourself and your people.*

### **CASE EXAMPLE—HOW FOCUSING ON BEHAVIOR MADE THE DIFFERENCE**

Here is a memorable experience retold by one of our clients, Brian, who retired as President of a major oil company when it was acquired by a larger peer enterprise. Brian explains how some workers unintentionally taught him a great lesson in leadership: about the impact that his leadership behavior has on results, and about tapping into the discretionary performance of his people.

**An experience changed my life some years ago. I ran a refinery in England. Times were tough, and the entire**

management team labored to save the plant from closing. We frantically bailed the boat.

It was the hundredth anniversary of our UK operations, and someone decided we should celebrate. Our Board provided money for a celebration for a thousand people—£30 each (roughly USD\$60)—so we had £30,000 to spend on this celebration.

Honestly, I was more interested in whether there was even going to be an organization next week, than in a celebration! So, I delegated the celebration planning to a small group of blue-collar workers. I gave them the £30,000 and said, “Organize something—have a good time.” And I went back to bailing the ship.

So what did the celebration team do? They organized an event equivalent to a county fair in the United States! About 50,000 people came. It was beyond belief! They leveraged that £30,000 and probably got the value of about £1,000,000.

Frankly, we would not have put this little team in charge of £2.50 in their daily work. Yet, here was this group, left to their own devices without any interference or direction from management, and they ran this magnificent event. I mean, it was just incredible!

So my management team and I analyzed this experience to understand how these people had accomplished this tremendous task. It was obvious that they succeeded more than we thought possible, because they were able to exercise their full capabilities. At work we had boxes and barriers all around them.

Ever since this experience, I’ve been trying to figure how I can tap people’s capabilities like that. Why was this team so successful?

- They succeeded because they owned the project, including the consequences of their decisions.
- They had encouraging feedback from their peers, who would evaluate their success using criteria they all understood. (You only celebrate a hundredth anniversary once, and their friends and their families were going to be very rough on them if the event had fallen short!)
- I unwittingly encouraged their behaviors, by simply getting out of their way. I was too busy to deliver any discouraging

consequences, intended or unintended! I am positive that if I'd had more time, I would have told them that their plans were unrealistic!

This team had put forth great *discretionary performance*—the effort people *want* to contribute above and beyond what is normally required to keep their jobs.

So: if we always were to manage this way, would it encourage people's continuing discretionary performance? If I were to ensure that employees saw the direct link between their efforts and what they could achieve, then either got out of the way or encouraged them, would it lead to more discretionary performance?

I believe the answer is unequivocally “yes.” That's why I'm a leader committed to creating the conditions that encourage these behaviors! It's not always easy, because I have lots of old behaviors that I need to change myself. But I am committed to getting there—for the success of my organization, my people, and myself.

### Takeaways from Brian's Story . . .

1. People often have capabilities that are buried or hidden on the job. Our job as leaders is to encourage them—and to create an environment where their capabilities are brought out.
2. The work environment is primarily defined by management, and maintained by the encouraging/discouraging consequences that people experience. Oftentimes, this work environment unintentionally inhibits discretionary performance and “locks in” minimally acceptable performance.
3. Brian's management instructions (“organize something—have a good time”) were very general, compared to the highly specific consequences to the employees of success or failure (expectations of their peers, family members, and community members, Brian's evaluation of their performance, etc.). This demonstrates the power of specific consequences.
4. Brian could have been an even more effective leader if he had pinpointed the behaviors needed for success and created encouraging/desirable consequences. In this story, he did neither, so it's doubtful his people felt like they were “led” by Brian in any meaningful way as they pulled together the event.

5. **The Bottom Line:** You can unlock behavior and unleash profits in your organization by creating an environment that supports the right behaviors and removes barriers to discretionary performance.

## TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS BOOK

We are quite serious when we say that what you read in this book can change not only your leadership but your life. Here are four “behavior facts” that are crucial to every leader’s success:

1. ***Your behavior—and everyone’s—is a response to the environment you work in.*** As a leader, you respond to what the corporate environment tells you to do. Your people respond exactly the same way. A truism is that “every organization is perfectly designed right now to produce the results it is getting right now.” If you like these results, then you don’t need to change the environment. But if you don’t like these results, you must change the environment—and you have the power to do so as the leader!
2. ***Your leadership behavior profoundly and directly affects everyone within your organization.*** You directly influence the environment of the many people below you. You do this primarily through your direct leadership behavior—what people experience from you daily.

Executives in particular—but all leaders to some degree—often underestimate the impact upon others of what they *do* and *say* (and of what they *don’t* do and say). People *watch* and *listen* to leaders very closely—every word and nuance. Leaders need to be mindful of the behavior they demonstrate—and the impact it has on everyone. You also influence how corporate policies, procedures, recognition systems, etc. are used.

In short—you establish and drive your own “corporate culture,” which either locks or unlocks behavior (more on corporate culture in Chapter 7).

3. ***Leaders have both an economic and moral imperative to unlock behavior in their organizations.*** The economic imperative: companies that excel at managing people—at engaging their workforce—far outperform competitors. The moral imperative: people *want* to be engaged in what they do—countless surveys prove this. People contribute more and enjoy

work more if their gifts are recognized, leveraged, and appreciated. Leading well and engaging people’s hearts and minds really matters—and leading well can be learned, practiced, and mastered.

4. ***Powerful behavioral tools are at your fingertips for improving your own leadership behavior and unlocking everyone’s performance.*** If you heard there was a proven approach for retaining high-potential employees, wouldn’t you want to know it? What about a proven way to improve manufacturing cycle time by 70%, or ways to improve customer satisfaction by 25%, or reduce unplanned shutdowns by 40%—wouldn’t you want to learn how? How about specific behaviors you can do that would result in your being a markedly better parent, spouse, and friend? Wouldn’t you want to know about them?

These are not idle claims. What you will learn from this book is based on decades of research and successful deployment in major corporations—all fully documented.

Ultimately, it all comes down to behavior. As a leader, using these proven behavioral tools, you can create the right work environment—one that engages people’s hearts and minds. Further, you will personally enjoy becoming an even better leader whose organization consistently creates superior results.

### The IMPACT™ MODEL

Our company has worked to capture our learnings about behavior into a simple, memorable tool that people can easily use wherever they are. The result is the **IMPACT™ MODEL**—our process for how leaders align and manage critical behaviors. This is the model you can call upon whenever you face a situation where you need individual behavioral change.

This book has been organized around the **IMPACT MODEL**. In the chapters ahead, we will lead you through a



demonstration of just how and why this model works.

Its four steps are purposefully easy: **Identify & Measure** your target results, **Pinpoint** the critical few behaviors needed, **Activate & Consequence** those behaviors, and **Transfer** fluency to sustain the behaviors.

In chapters 2–6, we step through the **IMPACT MODEL**. After reading these chapters, you'll be able to use the **IMPACT MODEL** yourself—skillfully. You will be able to determine the behaviors you want in your organization that will consistently produce desired results. You will know how to arrange the work environment to encourage those behaviors up and down the organization. And you will know how to change your own leadership behaviors to make things happen while engaging people's hearts and minds.

We hope that you will augment your existing leadership skill set with these incredibly powerful behavioral tools, and reap the rewards we have seen so many other leaders come to enjoy.

On a larger scale, we've used these same basic tools to change how organizations behave—organizations of 350,000 or 35,000 or 3,500 or 350. We've learned that this larger organization change task requires something beyond the **IMPACT MODEL**, so our companion **MAKE-IT™ MODEL** addresses challenges of organization-wide behavior change. Chapter 7 presents this model. You will see that the **MAKE-IT MODEL** for organization behavior change has at its core the **IMPACT MODEL** for individual behavior change.

In Chapter 8, we will visit the oft-overlooked issue of sustainability and transfer of new skills/capabilities to your company's culture. It is not enough to get the behavioral changes rolling; we must ensure they are sustained for the long haul.

### **Applying Your New Skills**

Finally, in Chapter 9, I will show how these new skills can help you with a range of common and important leadership challenges, including:

- Achieving sustained/predictable top-line growth
- Improving customer loyalty, retention, growth

- Boosting innovation across your organization
- Effectively and rapidly integrating cultures and organizations following mergers/acquisitions
- Excelling at executing your strategies
- Boosting employee engagement/retention
- Smoothing leadership transitions and accelerating the new leader and team to hit full stride
- Ensuring that strategic talent management truly results in well-developed leaders

Embedded in each of these topics is the consistent challenge—to *get different results, you must behave differently*.

The science of behavior can be learned by everyone in your organization, thus creating a common framework to quickly figure out how to engage people and get discretionary effort. The behavioral tools and the **IMPACT MODEL** can be learned and applied by all levels and all functions within your organization.

## **CASE EXAMPLES THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK**

Throughout this book are case examples and success stories from our clients—some of the most-respected leaders and companies in their industries. We include them to illustrate how these companies and leaders have personally demonstrated that these behavioral tools work. Their stories show how they have used these tools and the success they’ve generated. Some are genuinely inspiring, because they portray how leaders used these behavioral tools to vanquish seemingly unconquerable challenges.

Whether you lead a corporation, a small business, a school, a community group or a Little League team, you will see yourself in these examples, and discover how to be more effective in everything you do and say.

## **A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT . . .**

Successful leaders may well see aspects of themselves in this book and say, “This is what I’ve been doing for most of my career! I just

never had it laid out so clearly.” If you are one of these people, congratulations! You already know that what you do and say makes all the difference in unlocking people’s behavior. Please keep doing it! The world needs more leaders like you. Pass your “book of wisdom” on to others, so they can quickly learn the lessons that you carry so naturally in your head—so they don’t have to learn by trial and error.

For newcomers, this can be an eye-opening, even startling, journey. You may end up looking at the world very differently. Many who take this journey become energized to learn new approaches to leading, managing—and perhaps even to conducting their personal relationships and/or how they parent.

If you take these lessons to heart, you will approach issues with new eyes, new understanding, new confidence—and a new degree of effectiveness.

The science herein gives you a framework and a toolset. The analysis gives you insight. The stories give you context, enjoyment, and faith. So, let’s begin . . .