FIND, FIX, FILL your LEADERSHIP

GAP

what you need to know,
and no one is telling you

CANDICE GOTTLIEB-CLARK

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DTS
PUBLISHING

For every leader who cares about the people on their team

and wants to help them thrive.

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SPECIAL INVITATION

This book has been a labor of love. While I have several other books already on the horizon (including ones on teamwork and emotional intelligence), this is the first and most important. It is the launchpad for the others. Self-aware leaders are the key to healthy teams and successful businesses.

As a leader, you have your struggles. You have your own story to tell and lessons to learn. For that reason, I am currently developing a workshop around this book to offer more direct guidance to leaders who want to be the best that they can be—who know they have gaps and who are looking for direct support in finding, fixing, and filling those gaps. In tandem with the workshop, I am creating a self-study guide. Both provide you with opportunities for deeper learning and self-exploration. They are a part of the FIND FIX FILL Future.

I'd like to personally invite you to stay in touch and continue with me on this journey of developing leaders. You can connect with me at CandiceGottliebClark.com/grow, Facebook.com/groups/FindFixFill, or LinkedIn.com/in/CandiceGottliebClark.

Thank you so much for your time and commitment to becoming a self-aware leader. I am thrilled to be a part of your journey and your success.

INTRODUCTION

When I began my career as a workplace relations specialist, I had a simple and audacious goal to change the world of work. To create a world in which coming to work was a positive experience.

As the product of divorce, I grew up in a single-parent household. My mother was the financial and emotional supporter of our family. While she was a dutiful employee and cared about her job, she worked for a man who was demanding and at times verbally abusive. She stayed at that job out of necessity, but she was miserable, and her anger and frustration spilled out into our family on a near-daily basis. My mother's unhappiness and perhaps her sense of helplessness stayed with me and ignited my passion for creating change in the workplace.

More than a decade later, after completing my master's degree in counseling and working in several public, private, and government institutions, I stumbled upon the field of mediation and was immediately enamored by it. I dove in headfirst, learning all that I could. I accepted two job opportunities that afforded me a way to practice and develop my mediation skills almost daily. Soon after, I began to envision a way to use those skills to make the change I wanted to see in the world—where I could help those in a workplace setting communicate better, voice and resolve their conflict thoroughly, and find positive and collaborative ways of working together. I began Dynamic Team Solutions, then known as Mediating Solutions, to answer my calling.

During my first years as a consultant, I was steadfast and laser-focused on addressing issues of conflict. When a client hired me, I began the engagement by meeting with the business owner or leader who would connect me to the individuals or team in turmoil. They would pass the baton, then get back to their work. I had access and independence. My role was to work directly with the individuals experiencing conflict—to help them uncover and resolve the issues undermining their ability to work well together. My goal was to create a more collaborative and cohesive work environment.

The mediation process allowed me to help the individuals in conflict. The participants reached new levels of awareness, built understanding, identified ways to work successfully, and moved forward together. The process also illuminated problems that were likely to interfere with long-term change. I became aware of the impact the conflict had on others in the organization, and more importantly, the influencing factors that were underlying the conflict. Those elements are routinely connected with company leadership. I often found a manager or leader's behavior was linked to the conflict I had been called in to resolve.

It was clear to me their involvement had not been intentional, but that did nothing to lessen the impact of their actions. Nor was there any hope for improvement if those leaders were not aware of their relationship to the issue. The problems would resurface, wreaking havoc with new people.

That posed an unexpected challenge. I had to ensure that the pertinent feedback reached the leader.

Not surprisingly, the employees I'd helped—even when they could identify the leader's role—were not given to engaging with their leader about it. The potential for career suicide was not very appealing. That meant it would have to be me. I would have to tell the person who had hired me that they were a fundamental part of the problem.

That created an obvious predicament. Not only would delivering the information be desperately uncomfortable, but it would also make me and my business vulnerable to several potential consequences. I could lose future business with the client, jeopardize the likelihood the client would refer me to others, receive negative feedback on social media or in professional settings, etc. I might also find the client reluctant to pay the balance of my fees.

Nevertheless, I understood that to create a positive work environment, I had no option but to inform the leaders of the unpleasant truth.

I quickly found this situation proved to be the rule, not the exception. After having survived a few very uncomfortable conversations, I realized I would need a strategy for making this conversation a lot less stressful.

I began engaging with my clients differently. Before taking on a project, during our "getting to know you" phase, I began to simply ask the leader, "If I find that some of the issues lead back to you, how do you want me to let you know?" Not only did that simple and direct question save the leader and me a lot of discomfort, it also built a readiness for me to hold those difficult conversations when the time came.

I was pleasantly surprised by the responses I received. Every leader I asked gave a willing and open response to my question. Many openly stated that they were sure they *did* have a connection to the issues. Approaching those leaders with the details of their culpability was still uncomfortable, but it was tremendously helpful. It laid the groundwork for sharing.

That was the first kernel of knowledge telling me I should write this book. Leaders wanted to know how they could lead and manage their teams better. They were open to hearing the information and to creating change. They were simply lacking in the information they needed. They were experiencing a feedback gap.

THE CONCEPT OF FIND, FIX, FILL YOUR LEADERSHIP GAP WAS BORN.

What you are about to read is not a research book filled with references to studies and authors. It is not a collection of the work of others, repackaged for your consumption. Rather this book is a reflection of my experiences in working with over 500 leaders and executives who needed support to address the chaos occurring in their work environments. It is a glimpse into their world, and perhaps yours, through the lens of a workplace and interpersonal relations specialist.

True, much of what I will teach connects to the work of giants in the fields of social and work dynamics. You will see references to Brené Brown, Adam Grant, Simon Sinek, James Clear, and others. Where *FIND, FIX,*

FILL is different is that it is based on real-world leaders who, while doing their very best, still made choices that created conflict, silos, loss of talent, and more.

As I teach you about the leadership gap, I will illuminate the common issues leaders face (FIND) and share strategies to shore up those gaps (FIX). I'll do this through several true stories. After those problems have been identified and resolved, I'll help build your arsenal of skills (FILL) to help you become the best leader you can be.

My hope is that these stories and lessons allow you to FIND, FIX, and FILL your own leadership gap. Once you have, you will be able to develop and lead a powerful, focused, engaged, and collaborative team—a team where the individuals don't simply want to come to work but who actively want to work *with* each other.

Through my stories, you'll see leaders who have been where you are or where you could soon be. The stories offer context and expose complicated circumstances; they paint the picture of the problems (such as poor accountability and teamwork issues) caused by leaders and explain why. They will help you to see how easy it is for a leader (perhaps even you) to make the wrong choice yet never be able to see it.

As a professional speaker, I often share these and other stories to illustrate a lesson, and the stories always resonate. Time and again, audience members come forward to share how familiar the stories are to them—how they identify with the characters or the lesson. Some have suggested it's as if I've been inside their company walls watching them or their leadership.

I believe these stories resonate because they are a product of our humanity and the universality of working relationships. They reveal our desires to do well, be liked, and please others, alongside the challenges we each face in seeing our own foibles.

Over the past twenty years, I have had the privilege of working with hundreds of companies and thousands of employees. I have spent countless hours interviewing individuals who are involved in conflict or are experiencing interpersonal tensions that impact their work. I have been privy to the challenging workplace circumstances these individuals face while maintaining objectivity as a workplace relations consultant. That has

allowed me to see and understand the causes of those tensions, for trends to become evident, and patterns of behavior clear.

As I share this hard-fought knowledge with you, you may see yourself in my stories. You may recognize similar qualities in your leadership. Great! You're in the right place. Mistakes are essential to growth. Rather than criticizing, shaming, or condemning, I will focus on building your awareness, developing your learning, and helping you create new strategies for change.

I've often been called an eternal optimist. I look for (and find) the bright side in every situation. While I consider myself to be realistic, I prefer to see opportunities, not limitations.

This continues even when I work with difficult people. I believe the best in them. Rather than accept that they are bad people, I work to understand what drives their behavior.

I COINED A PHILOSOPHY BASED ON THIS: VINDICATE; DON'T VILLAINIZE.

Even when working with someone who exhibits egregious behavior, I maintain a perspective that they have reasons I don't yet understand. I look to find *their* rationale—to gain an understanding of the drivers beneath their behavior. Being open-minded and seeking to find the good in others has allowed me to build trust with these "difficult" people. Trust is the starting point, allowing me to bring about change.

Throughout this book, I'll remind you: vindicate; don't villainize—to adjust your perspective so that you can see what lies beneath the surface.

WHAT I WANT FOR YOU

FIND. FIX. FILL Your Leadership Gap was written to help you become the leader you want to be—to allow you to create a positive work environment for yourself, your teams, and your company.

As you read, I will be taking you on a journey . . . or three. I will bring you along to explore the situations of three different clients I have served. I will share the problems, their causes, and lessons learned. While some of

the clients in the book know that they have been included, others do not. Regardless, to protect the privacy of all, I have changed the names and certain characteristics of the organizations to provide anonymity for the individuals and businesses described. While I have strived for accuracy in telling these stories, the passage of time has likely affected my memory of some of the specifics. But that in no way affects the stories or their lessons.

In Part 1 — The GAP — I expose why a leadership gap exists, how it grows, and how it leads to an ever-expanding abyss of information. You don't know what you don't know. Part 1 will help you recognize not only what causes the gap but how the gap impacts your success as a leader.

In Part 2 — FIND — I share three distinct leadership stories. I include the circumstances, situations, and aftermath. I bring to light the gap between what the leader intended and the actual outcomes of their actions. In some cases, I share my professional insights about what drove the behavior or about the individual fears or concerns governing the actions of those involved. You will get a glimpse into what I see and learn, what is revealed, and what is not. That is what I experience when working intimately with my clients on conflict issues.

In FIND, I will introduce you to the three attributes essential for healthy leadership: trust, role clarity, and conflict management. I will help you see how these attributes influence and inform a leader's success.

In Part 3 — FIX — I dissect each of the stories you read in FIND. I expand on each story, identifying the lessons that can be learned from them. This section provides detailed guidance on what to do and *not* do as you strive to FIX your leadership gap.

In FIX, I connect the attributes of trust, role clarity, and conflict management to the issues each leader faced, allowing you to bridge the learning with *your* leadership style. As you go through Part 3, you will begin to see how to FIX your leadership gap.

FIX is devoted to identifying the "What" and providing the "How." What did the leader need to know? What did the leader need to change? How did the leader incorporate those lessons to bring about change? How did their efforts make a difference? FIX will teach you what you need to change, allowing you to quickly improve the dynamics of your team and in your organization.

In Part 4 — FILL — I continue to fill your strategy bucket. Beyond the lessons you can learn from each story, I share insights that will help you grow as a leader. FILL will broaden your perspective for building trust and managing conflict. You will find your point of view continues to shift as I expose how the traditional paradigm of leadership has distorted the reality of your role.

FILL allows me to teach you where, when, and why to adjust or engage in different strategies to support your team and enhance your leadership. Beyond new insights, you will learn how to hit the Refresh button and reengage your team when things have gotten off track.

FILL continues to build your skills and competency as a leader so that you can create a strong, cohesive, and resilient team—a team that displays strong trust and great accountability and can support one another and catapult the business forward.

Finally, Part 5 — Other Lessons. Here, I attend to all the connecting points that didn't fit nicely into FILL. In "Other Lessons," I provide detailed step-by-step instructions for engaging in a difficult or critical conversation, allowing you to confidently engage with your team, peers, or leaders about challenging situations. In this section, I also expose how individual accountability is directly impacted by the attributes of trust, role clarity, and conflict management and how you can adjust the influence and, therefore, the accountability you see on your team.

I wrap up Part 5 by revisiting our three leaders, with the chapter, "Where are they now?" This closing section will not only provide you with closure on each story but will also act as a cautionary tale of what can happen when you do not FIND. FIX. FILL Your Leadership Gap.

Before you read on, I'd like to share an absolute truth about leadership. Having good intentions is never enough. If it were, you wouldn't be reading this, and I wouldn't have written it. This is not a book about intention; it is a book about reality. It is a book that offers lessons you cannot get elsewhere.

Whether you are a first-time manager, a seasoned director, a member of the executive team, or the owner of the business, this book is for you. Your readiness to examine your leadership and your willingness to grow and change will define your success and the success of those who report to you.

Your skills and awareness define your way of interacting with others. Your leadership determines the strength, capacity, and cohesion of your teams. You make a profound difference in the success of others and impact the survival of your organization. This book will build the awareness you need to lead with success.

You are probably familiar with the expression . . .

There are things that I know.

There are things that I know I do not know.

And finally,

There are the things that I do not know I do not know.

The first two statements reflect the information we can identify for ourselves. We can teach or share what we know. We can ask for help or seek to learn things that we do not know. These are areas of our awareness. It is that final statement, the *things I do not know I do not know* that leaves us in an abyss.

FIND. FIX. FILL Your Leadership Gap was written to help you see through the abyss of leadership and human relations. It sheds light on things you don't know but need to know to be an exceptional and self-aware leader. Let's get started. It's time to FIND, FIX, and FILL Your Leadership Gap.

PART ONE
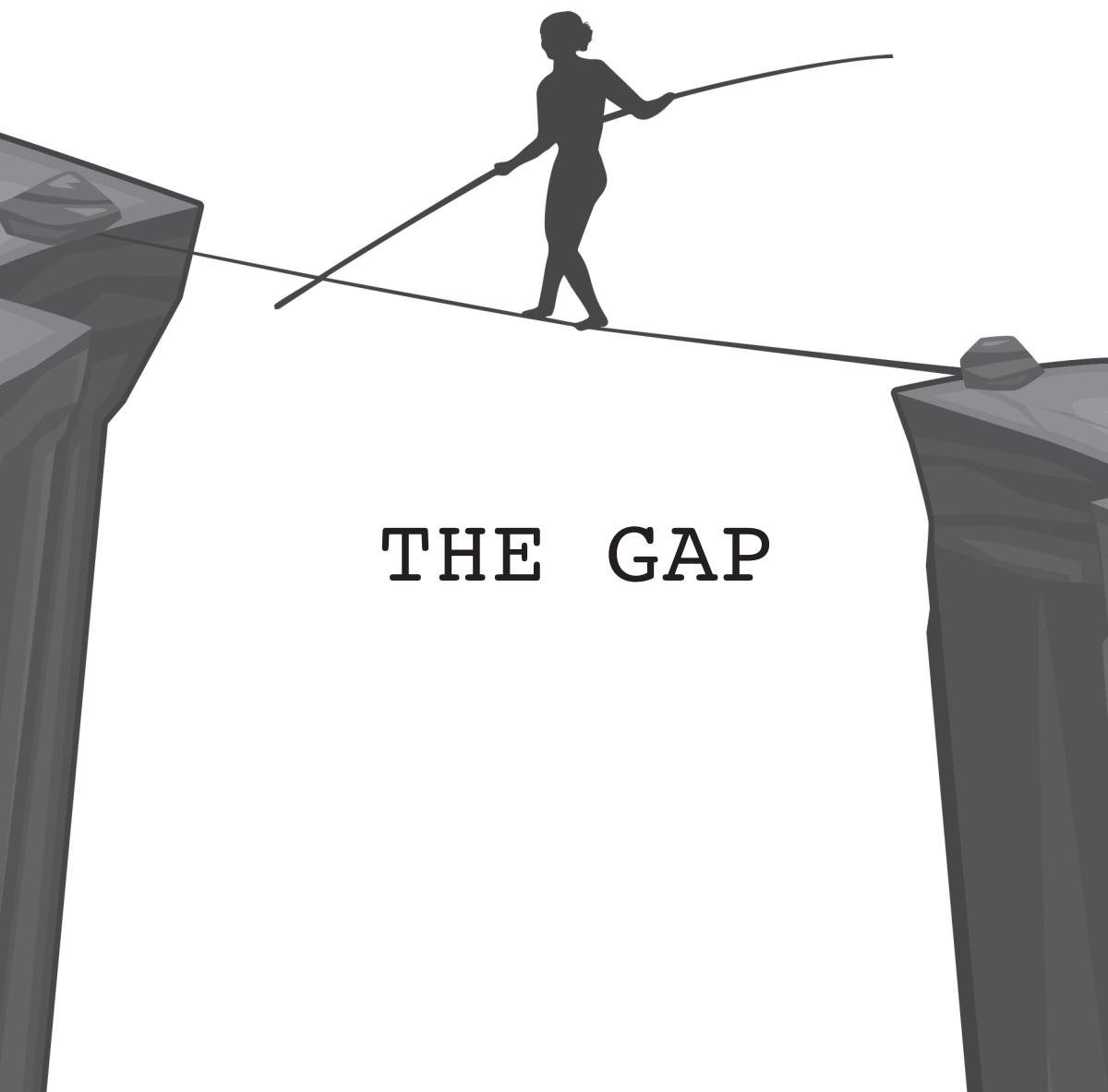
THE GAP

UNDERSTANDING THE GAP

None of us is an expert in leadership.
The practice of leadership is a journey, and we are all students.

—Simon Sinek

In my work with organizations, I have found one of the underlying challenges affecting all leaders is the feedback gap—the gap between what the leader knows and what she does not know. There is always a gap between what others share and what they withhold. It is in this space that information is lacking, and feedback is needed.

A gap exists for every leader—from the confident and self-assured leader to the leader who employs false bravado to convince others of his ability. Even humble and servant leaders, eager to support others and receive reciprocal feedback, experience a feedback gap as they, based on title or stature, are held up on a pedestal by those around them.

The truth is, we all rely on others to inform and guide us—to share their wisdom and offer their advice, but once you've become a leader, that essential guidance stops.

SOURCES OF THE GAP

Presumptions

Part of the feedback gap comes from the presumption that you, as the leader, know more than everyone reporting to you. The anticipated knowledge may come from your education and credentials, past work experiences, or simply your access to information. People unquestioningly trust in your commensurate ability and knowledge based solely on your title and background. They will hold fast to the idea that you know what you are doing or, at the very least, know more than they do.

Even among those who realize you don't know *everything*, there exists a resistance to pointing out the problems, correcting you, or offering enlightenment. The reluctance to share connects to fears of repercussion, the desire to save face, and our need for self-preservation.

Even those who *want* to provide help must carefully weigh the circumstances and potential consequences. Are they sure they are right? How can they be? Is it worth the risk? The inevitable reluctance to inform you creates a syndrome like the emperor's new clothes. Even when the whole kingdom sees you in all your naked splendor, only the fool or most naïve will inform you of those facts.

Likability

A well-liked leader will fall victim to the feedback gap just as quickly as the one without team support. Leaders with supportive teams are equally susceptible to a vacuum of information. I've seen this play out many times. The more your staff likes you, the *less* they want to point out your flaws. Instead, they find ways to work around your inadequacies, sometimes actively shielding you from feedback. They may do so to save your ego, but more often, their efforts are self-serving, intended to secure your position as their leader. They like you and want to continue to work with you.

The leader who is not well-liked will receive limited feedback for different reasons. These leaders lack a legitimate bond with their team. They are typically lacking in basic interpersonal and communication skills. Who is going to help someone they don't like? Who is going to be vulnerable in presenting feedback to someone they don't trust? The only feedback these

leaders will receive will come by way of an ambush, with the information being used to damage their career or undermine their success.

Self-Imposed Gaps

Leaders cause their own gaps as well. I have no doubt that there are things you are unsure of. Things you know you do not know. But whom do you tell? Do you share that secret with anyone? Your spouse? Best friend? Mentor? Most likely, you share your concerns with no one. Instead, you go it alone. You read books, listen to podcasts, and hope to make the right choices. But none completely fills your void. The gap persists.

Mentors and Peers

Peers and mentors are not reliable sources of feedback either. They are uncomfortable sharing their observations, do not feel they have the authority or responsibility to intervene, or do not want to hear reciprocal feedback about themselves. Some possess professional aspirations that limit their willingness to help you. They withhold feedback if they see you as competition or believe your weaknesses will help secure their own power or position.

The Top Brass

A leader's final hope for feedback may come from those who monitor their success. But this, too, falls short. Unlike an employee with several peers and a manager or supervisor overseeing their work and professional interactions, a leader is often alone to evaluate their own performance. There is a profound absence of oversight and no one to illuminate the blind spots. A Board of Directors, while often holding this responsibility, cannot provide anywhere close to the same guidance or feedback for an executive director or CEO as a manager would to their direct report. Not only does a board member rarely have the time or inclination to do so, but they also lack sufficient perspective to identify a problem. More to the point, a board is not typically interested in this level of oversight unless they are looking to remove the leader from the organization.

That points to the final barrier. Any leader with a survival instinct is motivated to cloud (hide) any gap of knowledge they possess from the board or other top brass overseeing their performance.

A Reluctance to Ask

Despite the prevalence of these gaps, few leaders take the necessary steps to close those gaps.

Leaders, while fully capable of asking for feedback from their teams, rarely do. Many wouldn't know what to ask or where they lack skill; it is part of the abyss. And let's face it: asking is not comfortable. It creates a perception of weakness. It suggests that others have more knowledge or could be more capable. Leaders don't ask for help because asking calls into question their ability to fulfill their role.

Every aspect of missed feedback creates a blind spot—a large, gaping hole in what a leader needs to know. This is not a motivation gap. In my experience, most leaders are motivated to improve. They just prefer to do it on their own terms. Books, podcasts, and other areas of self-improvement support this.

How, then, does a leader who is shrouded by gaps of knowledge and a lack of feedback become aware of what they need to know or how they need to change?

FIND. FIX. FILL.

Because we have blind spots, we need to engage others as a part of our ability to see. We need to invite others to share, provide feedback, and help us to become more aware. We need them to shine a light on that abyss.

This book will address the abyss. The chasm that occurs—and grows—out of the feedback gap, which all leaders have.

Our client, Episcopal Communities and Services (ECS), engaged with us to address their leadership gap. Their goal was to ensure their leaders could find their areas of weakness and opportunities for improvement.

A nonprofit organization that supports senior living communities, ECS emphasizes supporting their employees just as ardently as they do their residents. They believe in personal and professional development. At ECS, social accountability is the essence that underlies its core values.

Those robust and self-affirming efforts helped create a culture within ECS that is dedicated and caring. Leaders recognize that feedback is

connected to opportunity, so they routinely provide support, guidance, and feedback to their staff.

However, despite that dedication, the executive leaders were at a loss. Who could provide them with these opportunities? How could they grow and develop? How can they be the leaders their team members need if they lack insight into their own areas for growth? Who would be willing to share that information candidly enough for it to be of value?

The leaders at ECS saw the abyss. As described by their Vice President of Human Resources . . .

"As we were rewriting our business plan and vision for the next ten years or so, we concluded that we needed to make sure that our senior leadership team was a cohesive group and that we were all driving in the same direction.

"We like to think that we're all completely honest with each other and in our meetings, but people are not naïve. There's always a limit to what we're willing to say and do . . . so that it's not a detriment to ourselves. We know that when there's a reporting relationship, we're not going to get good data.

"That's why we chose to engage Dynamic Team Solutions in conducting a 360 evaluation for our team. It created a space where our team could talk to someone independently. A consultant met with each of us and asked the questions we hadn't thought of. Through that effort, we got feedback that we believe will be useful to each leader.

"We decided to take that initial feedback and use it as a baseline. It was not connected with a performance evaluation but instead was the opportunity for each of us to see how other people were seeing us. To identify the strengths and opportunities for making a change. We then explored our results as a whole

team to see where our gaps are and how we could work better together."

—Stacie Ocampo, VP of Human Resources, Episcopal Communities and Services

The leaders of ECS were replete with self-awareness. They recognized that they could not possibly identify what to change or why by simply approaching those on their team and asking.

It was clear that ECS was aware of the gap and ready to close it. But they were far from alone in this effort.

In all my work with businesses, I have never encountered a leader who didn't care about their team. Nor have I ever worked with one who intentionally created or allowed problems to occur. In many cases, it was the leader who sought my services or brought me in. Nevertheless, many leaders I have met—particularly those included in this book—made choices that created problems. But they did not do so with malicious intent. On the contrary, they did their best given the tools and knowledge available to them. Sadly, though, that is often not enough.

The leadership missteps discussed in this book are not intended to villainize any of these leaders but rather to vindicate them, to show how most leaders—indeed most people—might easily have made the same choices and taken the same steps.

Shame has no place here. Mistakes are not our focus. Instead, they are tools useful for illuminating opportunities for growth.

Accepting that you have a feedback gap, a blind spot, an abyss of knowledge is the first step toward fixing and filling that gap. The good news is you're not in this alone.

PATTERNS AND PREDICTABILITY

Marsha comes into the office at 8:15 a.m. She walks into her office, sets down her things, starts her computer, and leaves to get her first cup of coffee.

She passes Tyler on her way and gives him a cursory nod.

She returns a few minutes later and sits down at her desk to begin the day.

Tyler needs to speak with Marsha. There is a complication with the project he is running, and he needs her input. But Tyler waits.

Marsha is rarely in the office this early. She didn't engage with him beyond acknowledging his presence.

He presumes she has an early meeting to prepare for. He will need her to be focused when they speak. He decides the conversation can wait until that afternoon.

As the afternoon approaches, Marsha seems even less accessible. Tyler, aware that he cannot delay the conversation further, begs for a moment of her time.

Marsha, however, is fully engulfed in addressing another situation. She is distracted as she listens to Tyler's issue, then angered when she learns that

it was identified the day prior. The ensuing conversation between the two is stilted, fueled by frustration and a lack of time.

The input Tyler receives is superficial, and the exchange leaves both Tyler and Marsha unsatisfied and disappointed. The experience colors the profile each has created of the other.

We are all geared to notice patterns. Marsha's early arrival signaled to Tyler that there was a critical reason for it. He respected her reasons without knowing them. The pattern he saw was interpreted as: early arrival = work to do! However, Marsha's early arrival was not a deliberate effort to address a specific need. Instead, it was to get a jump on things—a commitment to stay ahead of the crises that always seemed to erupt in the mid-afternoon. Tyler's delay in sharing details of the problem before him meant she had an uneventful morning but an impossible afternoon—just what she had sought to avoid.

While Marsha and Tyler are fictional, their situation is not. Imagine for a moment the views each might now hold of the other.

Tyler's view: Marsha is impatient. Unconcerned. She doesn't recognize the gravity of the situation I've uncovered. She has no business being a manager or leader.

Tyler's view may extend to a rationalization that Marsha is trying to set him up for failure by offering limited help and guidance.

Marsha's view: Tyler is a slacker. He was in early when it was quiet and she was available, but he chose to wait until there was complete chaos in the office before bringing an important issue to me. She wonders, *Is he a bumbling fool, or is he trying to undermine me?*

Marsha becomes less trusting of Tyler and increases her oversight of his activities.

Marsha and Tyler illustrate the underpinnings of the struggle between leaders and their team members. There are patterns that exist. Patterns in the way a leader responds, communicates, and behaves toward her team. Patterns in the reaction or response she receives from her staff. Patterns equate to predictability. Tyler predicted, based on Marsha's early arrival and cursory greeting, that she had an important meeting to prepare for.

Being predictable can support fluidity among the team. Had Marsha needed the morning to prepare, this would have been helpful. Predictability

allows each person to know what is expected and how to perform. But it can lead to making the wrong assumptions. Patterns are not exact.

A secondary point for consideration is that predictability is not necessarily positive or constructive. A leader is just as given to developing patterns that create conflict, undermine teamwork, or interfere with productivity. Tyler may now recognize Marsha as resentful when he brings up an issue. Marsha may believe Tyler is attempting to sabotage her role as the leader.

We notice patterns in others, detecting commonalities in behaviors or responses. This allows us to make decisions and learn what to expect from others. But we don't all see patterns the same way. And most certainly, we do not readily see our own patterns.

Each decision you make, each action you take comes from reasons known only to you. The nuances of experience and thought impacting your decision-making are like an elaborate mosaic. For that reason, identifying your patterns is never easy.

While the experiences that validate your behaviors and actions are unique, they are still seen as patterns by others. In much the same way, I see past the idiosyncratic qualities of each leader and notice the common patterns—those which underlie their struggle and that of their teams.

My perspective is not jaded by past interactions, deep knowledge of the individuals involved, or concerns about the company's clients or deliverables. I'm focused on the people, the problems, and the patterns.

While I am always happy to work with businesses like ECS, whose goals are proactive, I have spent the bulk of my career helping those in the throes of chaos. Or, at the very least, who recognize that they are operating with a level of dysfunction that is not acceptable to them.

The issues they are facing often include concerns about team conflict, loss of talent, problems with accountability, and experiencing a persistent or growing number of complaints. Sometimes HR or company leaders recognize a pattern has developed or pinpoint a leader or team member who is commonly associated with the turmoil. Most have attempted to resolve these issues internally but to no avail.

These companies invite me into their vault. They share the depth of their struggles with me. They grant me access to people and information. They allow me to ask questions and probe for details. Far from being closed,

they hope I will find the source of the problems they are experiencing so that I may improve their situation. It is an honor to be trusted in that role.

The initial part of my process includes interviewing employees. I ask questions to learn about current issues and historical situations. I hear about the people they like to work with as well as those whom they avoid or struggle to engage with. I learn about the ways the team interacts and how the leader behaves. In short, I am given access to the emotional experience of working together.

Through the kaleidoscope of information I receive, I have come to recognize the fundamental struggles common among all leaders. These are consistent and familiar struggles, all arising from the same core issues: trust, role clarity, and conflict management.

The stories, comments, and situations I hear from both the leader and others always filter back to these core issues.

Note: The questions below are *not* ones I directly ask. Instead, they are the byproduct and reflections I have based on the answers I receive.

Trust – Does the leader trust his team? Does the team trust its leader? Do the team members operate with trust in one another? Does the leader find himself in the middle, managing tension between others?

Role Clarity – Is the leader fulfilling her job, her role? Is she holding her team accountable for their roles? Does each person know what is expected of them? Does each understand what they are (and are not) responsible for? Do they know how their work interconnects with that of others in the organization?

Conflict Management – Does the leader actively attend to issues that create conflict, or does he sweep issues under the rug? Does he look for root causes or engage in quick fixes? Does the leader, through action or inaction, *create* situations of conflict?

Like a three-legged stool, each of these three attributes—trust, role clarity, and conflict management—affects the other two. None occurs in isolation. Each lays an impact on the struggles of a team.

Ironically, complaints of the leader—about their team's commitment, accountability, work ethic, or drive—directly relate to these core issues. The struggle of the leader becomes the struggle for the team. Trust, role clarity

and conflict management are fundamental to the workplace experience. Understanding and altering your relationship with each of these qualities is the key to creating lasting change.

Sections FIND, FIX, FILL will expose each of these three struggles and provide guidance for strengthening each leg of the stool. As we move into Part 2 — FIND — the revelations will begin. I will share stories of three different leaders and their teams. I will expose the situations that led each to seek help, as well as the circumstances I encountered while working with the leader and individual members of the team. As we move through each story, you will better understand the impact and cross-related nature of the core issues I've described. You may see parallels to your situation or notice your own struggles in their stories. FIND is where we begin to identify the issues affecting your role as a leader.