

A network diagram consisting of numerous orange dots connected by thin orange lines, forming a complex web. The background is split into a white top half and an orange bottom half, with the network diagram spanning both.

THE LONG-DISTANCE LEADER

Rules for
**REMARKABLE
REMOTE
LEADERSHIP**

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and **WAYNE TURMEL**

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INTRODUCTION

Principle comes first; action thereafter.
— Todd Stocker, speaker and pastor

The best place to start is at the beginning. We don't want you to search for or try to surmise the premise of this book.

Our premise:

Leading a team at a distance is first and foremost about leadership, and the principles of leadership haven't changed—they are principles. What has changed is that people are working in different places and perhaps at different times. Given those changes, how we apply the timeless principles of leadership in this new world matters a great deal—for the team members working at a distance, for you as their leader, and for the organization that you all serve.

This book is about both the principles and the nuances that matter so much.

While there are adjustments we need to make to lead in a world with more distance between team members, there is far more that won't change. We plan to show you the principles and nuances and help you recognize the difference.

This premise leaves us with a few things to clear up before we begin in earnest.

What Is Leadership?

More is being written about this topic than ever before, and still we need to set the context, since the words "leadership" and "leading" are both in the title of the book. Here is what we believe:

Leadership is present when people are choosing to follow someone toward a desired future outcome.

So . . .

You are only leading if people are following.

There is a lot in those two short statements. Let us unpack it a bit more by sharing some truths and myths about leadership.

Leadership is complex. In visiting with leaders from NASA (a.k.a. rocket scientists), Kevin asked which was more complex—rocket science or leadership. The response was swift and simple—leadership was the clear and decisive winner. The group explained that in the world of building rockets, they can determine a right answer; they know the equations and formulas. They explained that if they put the right numbers into the right formulas at the right time (and check their math), they will get the right answer.

But as a leader, you are dealing with people—and people are inherently more complex. And the issues, while perhaps not as dramatic as sending a rocket into orbit, are far more dynamic and are seldom black and white. Leadership isn't easy or simple. And, like rocket science, it is something that requires study and practice to become skilled. And when we add the complexity of leading people in different locations, it becomes even more complex.

Leadership is an action. Leadership is typically considered a role or a person, i.e., "They are the leader." While the dictionary says "leadership" is a noun, "leading," the actions that define leadership, is a verb. Leadership is not really something that we have or possess; it is something that we do. When you think about leadership, think about actions and behaviors. The point of this book is to answer the question: What are the actions and behaviors that will help you help your teams (specifically remotely) get better results?

And if leadership is an action, that means it isn't a title or position. You are a leader when people follow you—if they aren't following, you aren't leading. The actions of others aren't guaranteed by a job title, the color of your desk, or the size of your office. A title that proclaims you a leader doesn't make you a leader any more than calling a lion a zebra creates black stripes.



**IN VISITING
WITH LEADERS
FROM NASA
(A.K.A. ROCKET
SCIENTISTS), KEVIN
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DECISIVE WINNER.**

Think of it this way: chances are you have observed or worked for a person with a leadership position who wasn't really leading. Alternatively, you know people who don't have or don't want the position, but people choose to follow them anyway. It is action, not titles, that makes leaders.

Leadership is a responsibility. When you were placed in or accepted a formal or informal role of leadership, you received a significant amount of responsibility. This may seem obvious if your title is president, CEO, or business owner, but your responsibility is massive as a first-level leader too. Think about it this way: outside of people's closest family and friends, you as their boss are about the most influential person in their life. You have an impact on their pay, their work environment (even if you aren't sitting in the same location), the level of stress they experience, the amount of satisfaction they find in their work, and a hundred other things.

People are looking to you. If you are leading, people are following you. You have a responsibility, therefore, for more than yourself and your own results. You must make sure that the direction you are headed is a useful and valuable one too. You can try to ignore this responsibility, but it won't change the significance of the role.

And while it is a responsibility, it isn't a power grab. The behaviors that lead to others granting you "power" don't come from you simply wanting it. They come from your relentless focus on serving others. If you try to grab power or claim authority, you aren't leading. When you lead in the ways we will discuss throughout this book, much "power" will likely be granted to you.

Leadership is an opportunity. Nothing positive happens in the world without leadership. The opportunity to make a difference is huge and exciting. Whether you are thinking about the difference you can make for your team, your customers, your organization at large, or the communities where you work and live, or even if you're thinking about changing the world, it all requires leadership.

When you exhibit the behaviors of leadership, you are actively trying to create new results that will make a difference in the world. Few things hold greater opportunity than this. Always remember that you have an opportunity to make a difference. Helping you make that difference with a far-flung team is a big reason why we wrote this book.

Leadership isn't a gift from birth. Leadership skills aren't doled out in the genetics of some while others are left wanting. All of us are given a unique bundle of DNA that can allow us to become highly effective, even remarkable leaders. Do some people have innate strengths that help them as leaders? Of course, but so do you—even if they are different strengths. None of that matters,

though, if we don't do the things to use those strengths and do the things to improve in areas that are harder for us. Few things are sadder than unfulfilled potential. Leadership success isn't nearly as much about genetics as it is learning and improvement.

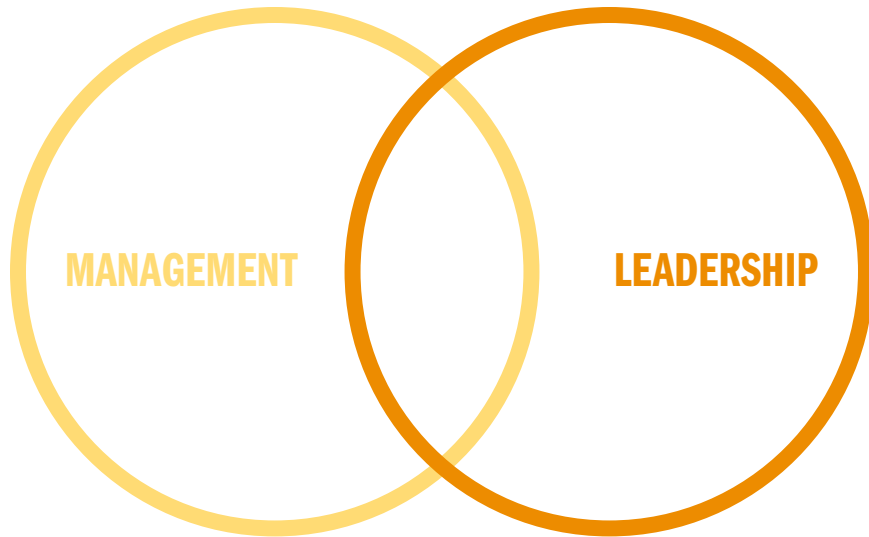
Leadership isn't management. The skills of management are focused on things: processes, procedures, plans, budgets, and forecasts. The skills of leadership focus on people, vision, influence, direction, and development. Both are valuable skill sets, and it is likely you need all these skills to be successful in your role. While not downplaying the management skills, recognize you are reading a book titled *The Long-Distance Leader*, not *The Long-Distance Manager*, and our focus will be on leadership throughout this book. The differences are clear but not distinct: think of the skill sets as overlapping circles, as seen in *Figure 1*. We need to exhibit both sets of skills, but great leaders aren't necessarily great managers and vice versa.

To further make the point on the difference between leaders and managers, consider these lists.

Some Skills of Management

- Coordinating
- Planning
- Forecasting
- Budgeting
- Sourcing
- Directing
- Maintaining
- Problem solving
- Setting objectives
- Being tactical
- Focusing on the business
- Creating incremental improvement
- Doing things right
- Attending to details
- Focusing on processes

Figure 1



Some Skills of Leadership

- Collaborating
- Coaching
- Guiding
- Communicating
- Team building
- Creating change
- Providing vision
- Supporting
- Encouraging
- Setting goals
- Being strategic
- Creating purposeful disruption
- Doing the right things
- Thinking (and talking about) the big picture
- Focusing on people

While neither list is comprehensive, notice that all the behaviors in both lists are important, and to be at your best, you will have capability at all of them. Hopefully, though, the two lists make our point that the skills are different. This book will dive into some of the skills on the leadership list but few on the management list.

Remember, this book is about leading at a distance, which means we will talk about some critical leadership principles to provide context for what changes are necessary when leading remotely. This book isn't a complete treatise on leadership, so if you are looking for that, you are reading the wrong book.

With this solid foundation, we are ready to get started. Let's start with what we have learned, and are learning, about Long-Distance Leaders.

Pause and Reflect

- What are your beliefs about leadership?
- What is your personal balance of skills between management and leadership?



2

**HOW WE GOT TO
LONG-DISTANCE
LEADERSHIP**

RULE 2: ACCEPT THE FACT THAT LEADING REMOTELY REQUIRES YOU TO LEAD DIFFERENTLY.

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

– Henry the IV, Part 2 by William Shakespeare

Being a leader has never been a simple task. The struggle to be effective, to achieve your (and your organization's) goals, and help the people you lead reach their destination is constant. It's a challenge, and you've accepted, so get on with it.

Patty is one of those leaders. She's worked with the same team for three years, with everyone in the same location, and a big part of everyone's social activity revolves around work. Two years ago, people were allowed to work from home if necessary—snowstorms, sick kids—but now half the team is out of the office at least three days a week. There is no plan, no standardized processes, and her training has always involved face-to-face communication over everything else. Also, she's not terribly fond of technology and relies too much on email. As a result, she's holding off communicating until everyone's all together, but that is leaving some people out of the loop or with information that isn't timely. It's frustrating, and she has asked us, "How did this happen?"

It's easy to discount the challenges of the way the workplace works today, especially the impact of distance and technology-enabled communication, and just focus on what has always made leaders effective. After all, Genghis Khan ruled half the known world and never held a single WebEx meeting. The sun never set on Queen Victoria's British Empire, yet there's no recorded instance of a single conference call. It's not like others haven't done it before us, and there is no reason we can't do it more effectively, productively, and with less stress. Discounting or diminishing the problems doesn't change the fact that there's been a fundamental change both in the way people work together and how leaders are expected to communicate. As Patty has noticed, and her company has yet to address, this change has had a profound impact on leadership behavior, attitudes, and results.

When Genghis had to communicate an order, there were real live people in front of him, professional clerks who carefully wrote down his words and then passed those commands on down the line. When you need to communicate change order to your project team, how often do you stare out at a sea of empty desks (or the strangers in the Starbucks where you are working) tapping out instructions on your phone, wondering if the team will understand and heed the directive?

It may have always been lonely at the top, but now we're literally, physically, by ourselves much of the time. When Queen Victoria grumbled, "We are not amused," the person she was scolding stood in front of her and knew she meant it. They couldn't slough it off with an "LOL" and a shrug emoji.

In fact, the world of work has changed a lot in the last quarter century or so. Here are some of the ways it used to be:

- *The number of managers, team leaders, and others who sent their own written correspondence was very low.* Above a certain level in most organizations, letters and documents were created by assistants, clerks, or other trained professionals. At the very least, such communication was checked by someone else before going out into the world. You didn't (and couldn't) simply hit "send" or "reply all."
- *Email didn't exist for most people.* Some of us can remember our first email accounts. We couldn't access them except by computer (usually at work), and there was no guarantee that your intended audience had access to that tool either. Now it's probably the number one form of business communication (and the most complained about).
- *Most business communication that wasn't face-to-face was done on the telephone.* Less than fifteen years ago, the percentage of time people spent talking on the telephone outweighed the time spent reading and writing email significantly. Now the time spent on those activities has reversed, and the trend continues.
- *Most team leaders, supervisors, and managers had the people they worked with in a single location, or within easy physical reach.* Only leaders at the regional level and above in large companies had to worry about managing people remotely. Leadership development and training assumed a lot of face-to-face contact. That may not match your reality today, and most leaders say they haven't received sufficient (or any) training in the real dynamics of leading remote and hybrid teams.

And there is more that has changed over that twenty-five years . . .

- Today, according to Project Management Institute, 90 percent of project teams have at least one member (usually more) who aren't co-located with the rest of the team.
- An increasing number of project teams and task forces are made up of people who don't report to the same manager. The leaders of these matrixed teams must influence and lead people without being their boss or having traditional reporting relationships.

THE LONG-DISTANCE LEADER

- Today, nearly 80 percent of white-collar supervisors have at least one direct report who works in a different location—at least part-time. This includes everyone from colleagues on the other side of the world to a team member who has decided to work from home one day because of the weather. Either way, they aren't sitting within arm's reach of you or each other.
- Social media and electronic communication have changed how information (or disinformation) spreads, and how quickly. It used to be that responding to a request took at least enough time to dip the quill in ink and handwrite a response, drop it in an envelope, and ship it across the ocean. Or the person communicated with you directly.

The important thing about all these numbers is that it drives home how much things have changed in terms of how we do our jobs. There are two major repercussions for leaders as a result:

- The communication methods that enabled us to succeed (if we've been around for a while) have changed. You may be terrific in a face-to-face meeting . . . but how many of those will you have today? Maybe you're a great listener, but if Bob in Dallas only communicates with you through email, that strength is negated, and it begs the question whether the two of you are really working as effectively as you could and should.
- The notion of a leader's sense of isolation is no longer simply emotional. You're not only lonely because you have the sole responsibility for decisions, or the weight of authority, or feel responsible if people lose their jobs—you're often actually physically alone.

First, you need to cut yourself some slack. After all, if you've been doing this job for a long time, the things you're expected to do and the tools you're expected to use have changed considerably in a short period of time. If you're new to the role of leader, chances are the people who mentor and teach you aren't familiar with working the same way you do. This is still largely uncharted territory.

Before, when you made a decision, asked a question, or gave direction, you looked in the other person's face, or at least heard their voice. You could tell if you were understood or if they agreed with what you were saying. You had real-time feedback so you could coach, answer questions, or change course quickly. If you needed answers, you got them immediately. You even occasionally got a smile or a "thank you" that made you feel good. These are just some of the real emotional rewards that can come with being an effective leader.

But now, some of the rewards may be missing. Like Patty, it feels as if you're working in the dark, unsure what's happening, operating largely on faith (even when you don't have much), and doing it all in ways we and our predecessors have never done before.

HOW WE GOT TO LONG-DISTANCE LEADERSHIP

One of our clients put it this way: "Managing has always felt like herding cats. But now I'm trying to herd cats by email."

Before we get caught up in how things are different and how much things have changed, let's take a breath. The truth is that while there have been significant changes to the way we lead, the act of *leadership* itself hasn't really changed all that much.

This is a first-order change, not a second. What's the difference? A first-order change means we need *to do the same things but in a different way*. We need to do something faster, smarter, using different tools, but the task at hand is fundamentally the same. A second-order change implies what we're doing doesn't work at all, and we need to do something completely different.

Here's an example. Let's say one of your team members is chronically late to work. There are plenty of ways you can help them address this problem: they can leave home fifteen minutes earlier, change their route to work, or even agree to stay fifteen minutes later each day so they're putting in the same amount of work. Those are all first-order changes.

If those solutions don't work, you might work to accommodate their needs, or suggest they find a new job. That's a second-order change: how you're doing things isn't working, so you need to change what you do.

Being a Long-Distance Leader may feel radically different from how you've worked in the past. Maybe you were more comfortable when you shared an office space with your coworkers or got to see them face-to-face more often than you do now. Those changes may be creating emotional stress that impacts your productivity and how effective you can be.

What you do may not be the problem, but *how* you do it may well be. In the next section, we'll share a model that helps illustrate that fact.

THE LONG-DISTANCE LEADER

Pause and Reflect

- What has been the biggest change in the way your team works over the last year? If you're new and don't have a good answer, what is the biggest change you've noticed from the way your previous bosses handled the job?
- Have you noticed any changes in your leadership behavior because of working separately from your people? If so, what are they?
- What is the most stressful part of leading people who work apart from you?
- What is working well? What do you know for sure is not working well?

¹Andrew Filev, "The Future of Remote Teams: How to Fine-Tune Virtual Collaboration" (paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2012—North America, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada), <https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/remote-teams-tune-virtual-collaboration-6022>.

²Bureau of Labor Statistics, "American Time Use Survey—2016 Results," news release no. USDL-17-0880, June 27, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/atus.pdf>. See also Alina Tugend, "It's Unclearly Defined, but Telecommuting Is Fast on the Rise," New York Times, March 7, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/08/your-money/when-working-in-your-pajamas-is-more-productive.html?_r=0.

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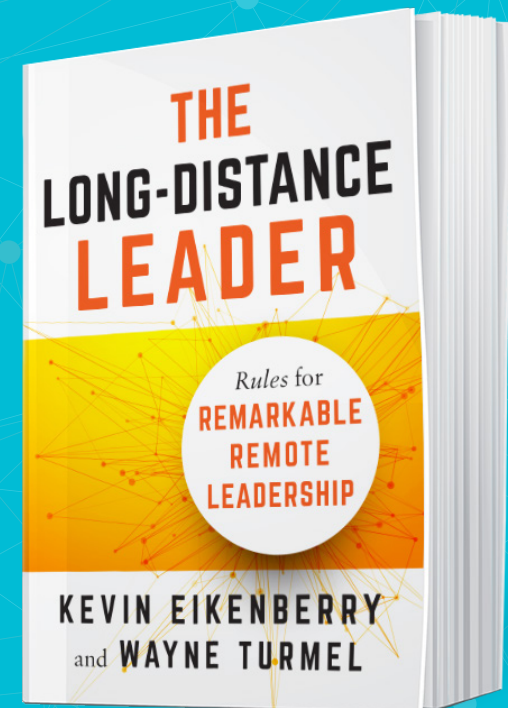
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