

THE INNER LEADER'S JOURNEY TO SCAFFOLDING PURPOSE & AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP



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Leadership in today's world isn't about position or title. It's about awakening to our essential nature and bringing that awareness into everything we do. This is the journey of the inner leader. It's a path that's as crucial as it is misunderstood.

The inner leader path is the journey we all must take in the 21st century.

— Dee Hock, founder and CEO emeritus, Visa¹

In a world fixated on doing and getting immediate results, the concept of an "inner leader journey" often falls on deaf ears. It's a path that doesn't make sense to many. It seems too intangible and perhaps even irrelevant in the face of a business world focused on getting things done. However, as Albert Einstein, Stephen Covey, Eckhart Tolle, and many other luminaries teach us, true transformation begins with a change in our consciousness.²

In its purest form, leadership is not about titles, strategies, or even actions. It's an expression of our authentic selves. It's our essence beyond our ego. When we operate from this place of deep awareness, we naturally inspire others. It's about embodying a state of consciousness that others can sense and resonate with. The most powerful leadership doesn't come from doing, but from being. It's not about becoming a better leader, it's about letting go of the obstacles that prevent our natural leadership qualities from shining through.

This journey of inner leadership is not one that can be fully understood intellectually. It must be experienced. Often, it takes exposure to someone already on this path for others to awaken to its profound impact and possibilities.

Despite its transformative potential, the inner leader journey remains a path less traveled. As Joseph Jaworski and other luminaries in this field have observed, many resist this journey due to comfort with familiar leadership paradigms, fear of the unknown, and societal conditioning that reinforces ego-driven approaches.

The vulnerability required and the need to surrender control often conflict with traditional notions of leadership. The journey demands we confront our deepest fears and step into our true power, which can be profoundly uncomfortable, but this discomfort is precisely where growth occurs. The path of inner leadership may be challenging, but its potential for personal and organizational transformation is unparalleled. As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, embracing this journey becomes essential for those who aspire to lead with authenticity, wisdom, and lasting impact.

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For 13 years, I've been on this journey. I didn't start with a clear destination or the realization that I had started on an inner journey. I just knew that something in the way we approach leadership and organizational change wasn't working and set out to find a better way.

As I share my journey, it's important to realize that what comes next is not a roadmap or a set of steps to follow. The inner leader journey has no fixed path. It unfolds differently for each person and organization. I offer these waypoints as reflections from my journey. I hope they spark insight for you on your unique path. They are not prescriptions; they are invitations to explore your own inner landscape of leadership.

We're going to explore how this inner journey can scaffold purpose for yourself, your team, and your organization. We'll look at how it can transform not just how you lead, but who you are as a leader. And we'll consider why this matters now, in an age of AI and rapid technological change.

Rather than focusing on external challenges, inner leadership is about accessing a deeper intelligence and leading with conscious awareness and authenticity. It's about seeing our evolving world as part of our unfolding consciousness.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward.

— Steve Jobs³

Steve Jobs's iconic 2005 commencement address at Stanford University highlighted the importance of trusting one's journey even when the path isn't clear. As I reflect on my journey, I'm reminded of Jobs's wisdom. I can see how each step, each encounter, and each realization has been a dot in a larger picture that only now comes into focus. My journey began in 2009 when I left my corporate career, driven by a desire to address the persistent issue of failed organizational change initiatives. This decision marked the first dot in what would become a transformative path.

Just as Jobs encouraged the graduates to have faith that the dots would somehow connect in their futures, my journey unfolded through a series of 13 meaningful steps that, looking back, form a coherent narrative (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. The inner leader path (source: LeaderONE)

1. BE A CATALYST TO CHANGE SOMETHING BROKEN IN THE WORLD

Reflection: The journey begins with recognizing that the world is calling for healing and that we are the ones to answer that call. This realization can be the spark that ignites the quest for inner leadership.

Personal experience: Throughout my 40-year career in corporate America, I noticed that many change initiatives aimed at enhancing organizations failed to bring genuine or lasting change. In 2009, after playing a key role in driving yet another corporate change initiative to a significant achievement, I saw all our progress vanish with the arrival of a new leadership team. Disheartened by this pattern, I resigned without having another job lined up, determined to find a way to change this.

Purpose connection: This recognition can scaffold purpose by aligning our actions with a greater cause, providing a foundation for meaningful leadership.

Question: How does my journey of addressing organizational change resonate with your own experiences or desires to make a difference?

2. THERE'S GREAT POWER IN SMALL STEPS ALIGNED WITH A LARGER PURPOSE

Reflection: Small actions aligned with a larger purpose can lead to significant improvements.

Personal experience: Unsure of where to start, I created a list of 70 ideas and discussed them with colleagues. One idea stood out: interviewing experts and asking them, "What improvement strategy or tactic has worked the best for you?"

Surprisingly, most of them shared insights that went beyond their well-known areas of expertise and shared something much deeper. This interview series (and later book) was called *5 Minutes to Process Improvement Success*.⁴

Purpose connection: These small, aligned actions scaffold purpose by creating tangible progress toward our larger goals, reinforcing our sense of direction and impact.

Question: Reflecting on your own journey, what small actions have you taken that unexpectedly aligned with a larger purpose? How did they unfold?

3. PARTICIPATE IN THE EMERGING FUTURE BY SHARING YOUR INSIGHTS

Reflection: Publishing or sharing insights is not just about contributing to a conversation. It's about participating in the collective consciousness. Your participation itself will shape you and your consciousness in unexpected ways.

Personal experience: In the summer of 2012, Cutter Consortium issued a call for papers on the topic of blending agility with structured standards. I saw this as a chance to share important insights gained from discussions with leading experts and practitioners in the field. My central argument was that the ongoing debate persists because our collective focus is misplaced, and we must ask better questions. This idea was contrary to the prevailing opinions and practices at the time, and I was initially doubtful it would be accepted for publication due to its controversial nature.

To my surprise, not only was the article published in the next issue of *Amplify*, it garnered support and positive feedback from many people. Moreover, it opened several unforeseen opportunities for me.

Purpose connection: Sharing insights can scaffold purpose by connecting our individual experiences to collective growth, amplifying our impact and clarifying our role in shaping the future.

Question: How has sharing your insights shaped your growth? What possibilities do you see in your experiences for contributing to your field or community?

4. HARNESS THE POWER OF INTENTION

Reflection: Drawing from what I've learned about the power of intention, this waypoint stresses the importance of aligning one's deepest values with one's actions. This sets the stage for a journey of authentic leadership.

Personal experience: In 2012, I came across *Do You QuantumThink?* by Dianne Collins, a book that reshaped my perception of reality.⁵ Collins illustrates that by actively embracing new thought patterns, we can profoundly alter our reality. This insight is grounded in the quantum concept that the observer's viewpoint significantly influences the reality observed.

My transformative journey progressed in 2014 with *Synchronicity: The Inner Path of Leadership*, by Jaworski.⁶ Jaworski highlights the crucial need for aligning our deepest values with our actions, asserting that such alignment forms the essence of genuine, authentic leadership. It's through our intentions that we enact this alignment.



Purpose connection: Setting clear intentions can scaffold purpose by providing a conscious framework for our actions, ensuring they align with our deepest values and aspirations.

Question: How have your intentions, whether conscious or unconscious, shaped your leadership journey so far? What insights does this reflection offer you?

5. THE MAGIC OF SYNCHRONICITY

Reflection: When we step into the unknown where there is no path, the universe delivers to us moments of synchronicity. We begin to recognize the interconnectedness of our paths and the universe's role in guiding our journeys.

Personal experience: In 2009, leaving the traditional corporate world marked the start of an unexpected journey for me, with the right people and opportunities naturally aligning on my path. For example, I met Jaworski in 2014, and he introduced me to the concept of synchronicity in leadership. Jaworski's idea that our lives are influenced by meaningful coincidences, urging us to see them as integral to a vast, interconnected universe, profoundly resonated with me. His teachings revealed that these synchronistic events were not happenstance but crucial markers leading me to a deeper leadership understanding and increasing my capacity for impactful change.

Adopting Jaworski's outlook, I embraced synchronicity, seeing it as a powerful force that has guided me to live more authentically and purposefully, with a leadership style rooted more in who I am than what I do. This approach both propelled me forward and deepened my alignment with my core values, transforming my professional and personal life.

Purpose connection: Recognizing synchronicity scaffolds purpose by revealing the interconnectedness of our journey, reinforcing our sense of meaning and direction in leadership.

Question: How have unexpected events or encounters influenced your path? What might these experiences reveal about your journey toward authenticity and purpose?

6. CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER

Reflection: True leadership is found in the power of dialogue — not just as a tool for communication but as a means of connecting deeply with others and the emerging reality.

Personal experience: True leadership is deeply embedded in the power of dialogue, transcending conventional communication to foster profound connections and reveal new realities. My pivotal experience at a workshop led by Jaworski, inspired by theoretical physicist David Bohm's insights, transformed my understanding of dialogue. Bohm says dialogue is not merely a way to exchange ideas, it's a transformative process that facilitates a collective exploration, allowing truth and shared understanding to emerge spontaneously without preconceptions.

This workshop illuminated the essence of genuine dialogue: creating a space where participants can collectively uncover insights beyond personal biases through openness, listening, and suspending judgment. Bohm's vision of dialogue challenges us to engage deeply, enabling leaders and participants to co-create a future aligned with our shared human experience. In essence, true leadership involves facilitating spaces for collective wisdom to guide us, leveraging the transformative power of dialogue to navigate complexities and co-create harmonious futures.

Purpose connection: Engaging in meaningful dialogue can scaffold purpose by co-creating shared understanding and collective wisdom, enriching our leadership vision.

Question: How have meaningful conversations shaped your leadership journey? What have these experiences taught you about creating spaces for collective wisdom?

7. THE JOURNEY TO A FORWARD-THINKING WORKPLACE

Reflection: Learn to embrace the relentless forces of change to create innovative leadership and transformative workplace cultures.

Personal experience: In 2016, I embarked on an insightful journey with the launch of "Forward-Thinking Workplaces," an interview series in which I engaged with pioneering business and thought leaders through six foundational questions. This exploration led me to author another article for *Amplify*. That article, titled "A Forward-Thinking Workplace,"⁷ sheds light on innovative approaches to leadership and organizational change in the face of today's relentless challenges.

Through this work, I aimed to uncover deeper understanding and strategies for creating workplaces that are not only adaptive but thrive on change, contributing to the evolution of leadership from within. This experience underscored the importance of forward-thinking leadership in navigating the turbulent waters of constant change, complexity, and disruption. The forward-thinking approach offers a path toward transformation that moves from the inside out.

Purpose connection: Embracing change can scaffold purpose by keeping our leadership relevant and adaptive, ensuring our actions remain aligned with evolving needs and opportunities.

Question: How has your understanding of what makes a forward-thinking workplace evolved through your experiences? What personal insights have you gained about fostering innovation and embracing change?

8. A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF HOW THE MIND WORKS

Reflection: Discovering a new understanding of how our mind works is crucial. This knowledge empowers us to lead from a place free of distraction and ego with greater insight and capacity to listen more deeply.

Personal experience: Most people are trapped by their own thoughts and sense of self. Our perception of the world is shaped by our upbringing, past experiences, and emotions. This isn't a personal failing; it's the result of societal conditioning from a young age. Nevertheless, a part of our identity transcends the confines of the mind. Liberating ourselves from the dominion of thought is essential for flourishing and achieving enlightened leadership in today's world.

WE CAN CREATE SPACES FOR OURSELVES & OTHERS

My transformation in this regard was profoundly influenced in 2016 by Michael Neill's *The Inside-Out Revolution*.⁸ Neill's insights are rooted in Sydney Banks's "Three Principles," which articulate a new understanding of how the mind works.⁹ When I achieved this understanding, my mind quieted significantly and opened new pathways of understanding. Although there are many avenues to this kind of breakthrough, my experience through Neill's work stands out as a pivotal moment in my personal development. Engaging with the teachings of Tolle alongside Neill and Banks can steer your journey toward a deeper, more expansive existence beyond the conventional thinking mind.

Purpose connection: This understanding can scaffold purpose by freeing us from limiting thought patterns, allowing for more authentic and impactful leadership.

Question: How have you explored an expanded understanding of your own mind and how it might influence your leadership approach? What shifts have you noticed in yourself if you've explored this area?

9. GUIDING LIGHTS ON THE PATH

Reflection: Throughout our journey, we encounter guides and mentors whose wisdom profoundly influences our path. These people provide us with the knowledge, tools, and encouragement needed to navigate the trials and transformations of our quest.

Personal experience: Marilyn Jacobson, author of *Turning the Pyramid Upside Down*, was a pivotal guide in my journey.¹⁰ Our paths crossed when a publicist reached out to me, requesting a review for Jacobson's newly released book, which profoundly resonated with me.

Our connection deepened through a serendipitous meeting at a conference where I discussed her work in one of my presentations. It was through Jacobson that I discovered Jaworski's work, which had a significant impact on my personal development and my professional endeavors.

Purpose connection: Mentors and guides scaffold purpose by offering wisdom and perspective, helping us refine and elevate our leadership vision.

Question: How have mentors or guides influenced your inner leadership journey? What unexpected lessons emerged from these relationships?

10. EXPANDING HORIZONS IN THE SPACE BEYOND BOUNDARIES

Reflection: We can create spaces for ourselves and others that help us expand beyond conventional boundaries. When we listen and learn from each of our unique perspectives, we transcend our existing boundaries.

Personal experience: In the spring of 2020, as the pandemic brought the world to a standstill, I found myself questioning the relevance of my work in the face of unprecedented global change. My pause was interrupted when I learned about the passing of Jacobson, whose wisdom had guided me through many challenges. Her death prompted me to go back to her teachings, and to my surprise, I found her insights more pertinent than ever in our upended world.

Sharing these revelations with my mailing list, accompanied by a visual representation of her concepts, resulted in an unprecedented wave of feedback and support. The experience inspired me to begin writing and creating designs about all the people, ideas, and events that had influenced my inner journey.

Purpose connection: Expanding our horizons can scaffold purpose by broadening our perspective, allowing us to envision and pursue more impactful leadership goals.

Question: How has expanding your own horizons changed your perspective on leadership? What personal boundaries have you transcended, and how has this impacted your journey?

11. EMBRACING THE UNKNOWN

Reflection: Stepping into the unknown with no expectations can lead to unexpected growth and innovation. By embracing uncertainty, we open ourselves to new possibilities and tap into our innate creativity

Personal experience: The response to my writing on my journey with the inner leader and the designs I was crafting caught me off guard. It fueled my desire to dive deeper, even though I was unsure about my ability to sustain this creative endeavor. Venturing into design using simple shapes was new territory for me. Initially, I was at a loss for words and ideas for creation. Each week presented a moment of confrontation where, in sheer frustration, I would throw my hands up, faced with no idea what to write about or create.

Four years and more than 200 articles and 300 designs later, I sit down to create with the same admission: I start with nothing. Somehow, my most compelling pieces emerge from this void as

though by magic. As author Marianne Williamson suggests, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate [but] that we are powerful beyond measure.... We are all meant to shine, as children do,” underscoring the immense potential that lies within embracing our own light and journey into the unknown.”

Purpose connection: Stepping into uncertainty can scaffold purpose by fostering adaptability and creativity, essential qualities for purpose-driven leadership in a changing world.

Question: How has embracing uncertainty shaped your leadership journey? What has it taught you about yourself and your approach to challenges?

12. A NEW ITERATION OF SELF, PURPOSE & LEADERSHIP

Reflection: The inner leadership journey often leads to profound moments of personal evolution that reshape our understanding of leadership and our purpose and place in the world.

Personal experience: LeaderONE represents the pinnacle of my efforts over the past 13 years, weaving together the entirety of my work into a vision to transform leadership and the workplace. We’re not just about adapting to change or implementing best practices; we’re about reinventing ourselves and activating leadership across every level to pioneer the future.

At LeaderONE, we encourage people to embark on an inner odyssey to lead with vision and achieve breakthrough success, leveraging a blend of innovative strategies and personal growth. People begin a leadership journey that champions innovation and prepares them and their organizations to navigate and shape the 21st-century landscape with confidence and purpose.

Purpose connection: These transformative iterations scaffold purpose by continually aligning our leadership with our evolving self-understanding and the changing needs of our world.

Question: How have the various experiences in your journey come together to shape your current understanding of leadership? What unexpected connections have you discovered?

13. THE QUEST FOR SELF-DISCOVERY

Reflection: The inner leader journey is about discovering our true purpose and essence and how it connects to the larger tapestry of life.

Personal experience: I've discovered that true leadership is the manifestation of our deepest truths. It's estimated that upward of 90% of people in the Western world are stuck in their thinking mind and mind-made sense of self. As a result, true self-discovery remains elusive.

In the relentless noise of the external world and our own minds, the real challenge is silencing the mind's clamor to uncover the clarity and wisdom that lie beneath.

Understanding that we are the awareness behind our thoughts (rather than the thoughts themselves) is pivotal for authentic leadership. It calls on us to let go of our mind-made sense of identity and embrace our true essence. The journey toward authentic being involves personal transformation and redefining leadership in a rapidly evolving world. It is a call to forge a future where leadership stems from our deepest connections and collective wisdom.

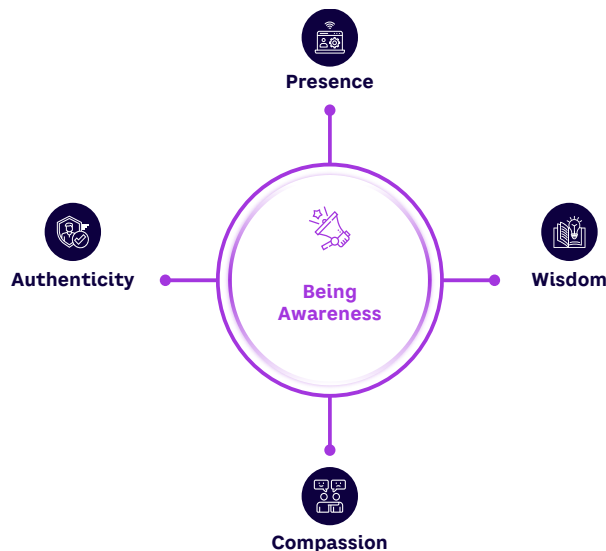


Figure 2. Leadership rooted in inner awareness interconnects presence, authenticity, wisdom, and compassion, all emanating from a core of Being Awareness (source: LeaderONE)

Purpose connection: Self-discovery scaffolds purpose by revealing our authentic self, providing a solid foundation for genuine, impactful leadership.

Question: How has your quest for self-discovery influenced your leadership style? What inner wisdom has emerged that surprised or challenged you?

UNLOCKING YOUR INNER LEADER FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE

The narrative I've shared redefines purpose-driven leadership for the 21st century from an inner perspective. It's a paradigm rooted in self-awareness, interconnectedness, and the limitless potential of the human spirit.

But the path doesn't end there; it calls on each of us to step forward and apply these insights to our own lives. An understanding of purpose as an emergent quality of authentic being (rather than an external goal to be achieved) is at the heart of scaffolding purpose through the inner leader journey. It reinforces the idea that true leadership and purpose stem from our deepest connections and collective wisdom, as we've seen throughout the waypoints of this journey.

Figure 2 illustrates how leadership rooted in inner awareness interconnects presence, authenticity, wisdom, and compassion, all emanating from a core of Being Awareness. This visual representation reinforces the concept that true purpose isn't found externally but emerges naturally as we align with our authentic selves.

I invite you to consider this final question: how will you awaken your inner leader to forge a future that reflects not just your own potential and purpose but the collective potential of all humanity?

Let these waypoints assist you in illuminating the way toward transformative growth and impact. Guided by our shared insights, let's embark on this transformative path together, forging a new leadership paradigm for our time.

SCAFFOLDING PURPOSE THROUGH THE INNER LEADER JOURNEY

As we reach the end of this exploration, it's important to remember that the waypoints I've shared are not a map for you to follow. The path of inner leadership is as diverse as the individuals who embark on it.

As I reflect on my 13-year journey, I realize that each step, encounter, and insight has been a crucial part of scaffolding my purpose, even when I didn't explicitly recognize it as such. The inner leader path, as articulated by Jaworski and experienced in my own life, provides an insightful example of scaffolding purpose in a way that is authentic, transformative, and deeply meaningful.

This journey has taught me that purpose isn't something we find externally or force into existence. Instead, it emerges naturally as we align with our true nature, embrace synchronicity, engage in meaningful dialogue, and courageously step into the unknown. It's a process of continuous unfolding: each experience builds upon the last, creating a sturdy scaffold that supports our growth and impact in the world.

For organizations and leaders looking to scaffold purpose, the lessons from the inner leader journey offer several valuable insights:

- Embrace synchronicity and remain open to unexpected opportunities.
- Cultivate deep, meaningful conversations that allow collective wisdom to emerge.
- Continuously expand your understanding of yourself and the world around you.
- Be willing to step into the unknown and trust in your innate creativity.
- Align your actions with your deepest values and truths.
- Recognize that true leadership comes from within and is about who you are being, not just what you do.

By following this path, we can create workplaces and leadership paradigms that are not only more effective and innovative but also more fulfilling and aligned with our shared human potential. The journey of scaffolding purpose through inner leadership is ongoing, always inviting us to deeper levels of awareness, authenticity, and impact.

As we navigate the complexities of the 21st century, may these waypoints guide us toward a future in which purpose is not a statement on a wall but a lived experience that transforms individuals, organizations, and, ultimately, our world.

You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever — because believing that the dots will connect down the road will give you the confidence to follow your heart, even when it leads you off the well-worn path, and that will make all the difference.

— Jobs¹²



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Bill Fox, founder of LeaderONE.org and Forward Thinking Workplaces, champions a vision that transcends traditional leadership and transformation paradigms. He envisions a future where technological advancement and personal growth harmoniously coexist, with leaders driving innovation while cultivating self-awareness for the greater good. Mr. Fox guides leaders to transform their approach through inner wisdom. Author of *The Future of the Workplace* and curator of global thought leader conversations, he explores key insights like the power of intrigue over problem-focus and creating impactful workplaces. Mr. Fox believes great leaders are built from the inside out. Through writing and workshops, he awakens the inner leader, demonstrating how to harness technology while staying connected to human values. He can be reached at bill@billfox.co or via LeaderONE.org.

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It's what we believe makes *The Difference*.

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