

**DIVULGACIÓN**

**Adela Balderas**

# **REINVENT YOUR LEADERSHIP**

## **12 KEYS TO TEAM MANAGEMENT**

**2<sup>nd</sup>**  
edition



**esic**



## **Reinvent Your Leadership**

12 Keys to Team Management

Madrid, 2024

Adela Balderas

# Reinvent Your Leadership

12 Keys to Team Management

(2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

Translation by TISA., S.A.



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*Reinvent Your Leadership: 12 Keys to Team Management*

Adela Balderas

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To the amazing people in my life  
with infinite gratitude.

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## **Foreword to the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition by Eduardo Gómez Martín**

**M**y thanks go to Adela Balderas for inviting me to write the foreword to *Reinvent Your Leadership: 12 Keys for Team Management*. It has been an opportunity for me to continue to reflect on the leadership needed to navigate the present lack of certainty and the speed of the processes of change.

In fact, the first thought was precisely greater thinking is needed. We need to think together –while respecting all opinions, with the strength of our convictions and drawing on science to solve the challenges facing Humanity (with a capital “H”). Our leaders need large doses of humanity (lower case) to see beyond their needs, interests, and ambitions.

Academia is the most appropriate place to think, discuss and to be a beacon for new ideas. Knowledge may also be generated elsewhere, but academia is the only place that provides the scientific method with an institutional framework. Essentially, it acts as a hinge between pure and applied knowledge by means of a close and ongoing relationship with the business world.



The second is that such people need a structure of thought and action anchored in human values to first lead themselves in order to then lead others. The leader required to manage today and build tomorrow has a capacity for self-analysis. Their main benchmark is a sound scheme of values guiding their behaviour. They are able to recognise their successes and, above all, to learn from their mistakes. Should that be so, the mistake will not be a failure, but will lead to the following success.

The third reflection refers to leadership models, which have greatly evolved in the last century. We have shifted from the strong leader able to win battles by clear orders and vision (leading by *potestas* and sympathy or fear) to the leader capable of rallying teams through persuasion, purpose and motivation (leading by *auctoritas* and empathy). *Soft skills* have gained ground over *hard skills*, although leadership requires both.

*Soft skills* are the most in-demand today and will be tomorrow. Why? Because it does not matter what change comes, provided we have people able to face it humanly, openly and ethically. They all refer to our most human side; the one that the world needs at a time when we are facing the greatest technological evolution ever experienced by *Homo sapiens*. We must harness artificial intelligence to make humans better, to improve ourselves inside and out.

The greatest leader in history, Jesus Christ, demonstrated the enormous power of *soft skills*. He did so at a time when, conversely, power came from the ability to impose by force. Jesus preached by word and example and built a leadership that is still going strong today. He displayed his huge ability to communicate for beliefs, ideas, and behaviour to transform the world.

We are also moving from vertical to horizontal leadership models. Vertical ones are based on hierarchy. Horizontal ones are based on service. However, both share the need to establish a vision, a common goal. Leadership has changed here as well, as the goal in hard models is usually a conquest, while it is a collective journey in soft ones.

The leader-in-chief is primarily concerned with achieving victory (the goal), while the leader-in-service is more focused on the morale of victory.

People are at the centre. Leaders are at the service of their team and organisation, to whom the former provides a story in which they can feel they also play a leading role. The narrative nurtures relationships to be governed by the acceptance of responsibilities attributed in a climate of mutual respect. Relationships must create a safe space to exchange information and opinions with the emphasis on sincerity, transparency, and empathy.

All these reflections lead me to the following question: how should business schools teach new leadership models? First, by adapting to them and studying their evolution. The way of teaching has remained unchanged for many centuries, millennia even. Schools have always sought to transform people, mainly by passing on knowledge and research. The world around us is fast changing and uncertain. We must teach people how to transform to adapt to the demands of a time that – in terms of knowledge – is ever shorter.

Academic institutions need to teach students resilience, which is resistance combined with learning. Resilience requires adaptability, along with agility so that change does not leave people behind.

Teaching how to communicate better (“communicate strategically, using your head and heart” is one of the twelve principles discussed by Adela Balderas in her book) is also necessary. Communicating better requires improving listening skills and developing empathy. Rationalism has presided over educational models since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, emotions are often more powerful than reasons. We therefore have to learn to manage emotions, which are essential to our lives. The basic principle for managing emotions is to recognise them, to learn to detect them and to see how they affect you and how other people are affected by them (“to put yourself into someone’s shoes, first remove your own” is the ninth principle of Adela’s work).

Communicating empathically necessarily requires a collective vision. Academic institutions must take a holistic view of human

needs, including ambitions. We must teach our students to manage their ambitions in order to achieve possible futures, those in which the goals are within reach of their abilities or at least very close. Therefore, a lifelong learning system is designed.

Leadership requires commitment. First, commitment to people. If your team does not feel it, it is very difficult to get them involved. Second, commitment to goals. Leaders make decisions and engage people in action. And third, commitment to the consequences of their actions. Leaders are able to evaluate and to let themselves be evaluated. Consequently, they must be able to accept, analyse and draw conclusions from failures or setbacks. Trial and error are fundamental in these uncertain times, as we do not know what the future will be like, but we must know what we want it to be like. That is the only way to move in the right direction.

In short, leaders need three letter Hs. The first is the H of *heart*, since leaders have to feel passion for what they do every day. The second is the H of *habit*, an essential virtue to remain in a state of constant learning, to build from the bottom up, and to feel and make people feel as equals. And the third is the H of *harmony*, the ability to agree on sounds from different backgrounds, maintain balanced relationships and orchestrate consensual solutions.

Let us look for these and many others in Adela's book, enjoy reading it and draw useful conclusions for ourselves and for those who relate to us. As leadership today requires a great dose of generosity.

EDUARDO GÓMEZ MARTÍN  
General Manager of ESIC Business & Marketing School

## **Foreword to the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition** **by Joxe Mari Aizega**

**R**ight from the start, the Basque Culinary Center has built and nurtured an ecosystem of initiatives with the aim of developing the economic and social potential of gastronomy. It is a project based on and for people. The university culinary school seeks to train and prepare professionals, the leaders of the future. The bachelor's degree in Gastronomy and Culinary Arts, the different master's degrees and programmes for professionals provide students with interdisciplinary training and, above all, with the vital skills and personal values for their professional career.

Educating professionals and preparing them for the future is no easy task. It requires an understanding of the present and future challenges of the sector, along with an educational model that puts into practice and develops these skills and values on a daily basis.

We understand that the school will produce the professionals who will help transform and develop the gastronomy of the future. Passionate professionals, committed to excellence, to innovation and, in short, to society. Professionals who are team players, with a critical spirit, resilient, with the ability to adapt and innovate; and,

above all, professionals who are inspirational leaders of teams and individuals.

I met Adela Balderas in the early days of the Basque Culinary Center almost 10 years ago. She gave a seminar which several members of the centre attended. It was the first contact with a great professional and a better person. She gradually became involved in more programmes and different activities, not only in the field of training, but also in initiatives around the “life” of the Basque Culinary Center. Adela took on the coordination of our first master’s degree, namely, the Master’s Degree in Restaurant Innovation and Management, which we continue to offer every year; thanks to which many groups of professionals have specialised in restaurant management and innovation.

Professor Balderas has always been a beacon and a permanent source of energy. That energy has driven the different groups of students on the master’s degree to be motivated, committed, and engaged with their learning. Her tireless enthusiasm is infectious and affects not only the students, but also the people involved in the project. That can be seen in each master’s degree: the learning process culminates at the graduation ceremony, where the affection, attention, and energy that Professor Balderas shares with and inspires among her students is contagious.

During the complex pandemic period, all sectors and activities had to respond to an unforeseen situation which made it impossible to carry out our usual activities in the way we had been doing.

The crisis, the transformation, and the impossibility of providing training as previously have driven us to create, to rethink, to transform, to return to ideas and concerns that we had written down in logbooks or stored in computer folders and turn them into transformation projects. The crisis as an opportunity to improve and innovate.

This is also the backdrop, as the author herself points out, to this book by Professor Balderas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred us to take new paths, to return to concerns and to find solutions. This book by Professor

Balderas on leadership and the management of people and teams is therefore most welcome.

This project embodies Professor Balderas' enthusiasm, closeness, and passion, as well as the reflections and experience accumulated over many years of working in different types of organisations in a variety of sectors.

This combination of passion and experience makes it a magnificent, accessible, easy book, which is both profound and inspiring. The many reflections in these twelve recipes, these twelve themes, I believe, will be useful for anyone interested in one of the most complex and exciting of tasks: leading teams of people.

Enjoy!

JOXE MARI AIZEGA  
General Manager of the Basque Culinary Center

## **Foreword to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition by Luis Alonso Pastor**

**I**t is a great honour to write the prologue to this second edition of Adela's *Reinvent Your Leadership: 12 Keys to Team Management*, a book that is the outcome of her extensive expertise and experience in leadership. Beyond her academic accolades – including research fellow at the Institute of Population Ageing at Oxford University and her PhD in Business Administration with International Mention from the University of Deusto, along with her collaborations with leading institutions such as the Basque Culinary Center, Oxford, MIT and Harvard –, what is really striking about Adela is the way she incorporates her great human sensitivity when defining a new style of horizontal and empathetic leadership. Any traditional definition of leadership falls short when trying to describe a person of the ilk of Adela Balderas Cejudo. To know her is to enter a world of kindness, intelligence, persistence and unwavering positive energy. Adela is an exceptional friend, a tireless collaborator, and a leader in the truest and most contemporary sense of the word: a leader who uses empathy to reinvent herself and her leadership every day. Someone with so many exceptional qualities in one person is hard to find. Adela is an innate leader, and her ability to take

care of detail is unsurpassed, but at the same time she possesses the rare quality of understanding the chaos in the lives of others, and provides support and understanding to those around her. This helps people to move forward and projects to blossom. Adela not only focuses on empowering leadership, but also on empowering those around her.

In *Reinvent Your Leadership*, Adela shares twelve fundamental keys for leading teams effectively. These pages not only contain valuable knowledge but are also brimming with the positive energy and exceptional nature of the author. Adela shows us that an authentic leader must present themselves as they are, nurture and nourish the talents of their team and communicate with wisdom and empathy. She guides us on a journey of self-discovery, where mistakes become learning and emotions fuel leadership in unimaginable ways. Leadership combined with empathy stands out here as one of the great values of the new team leadership, and contrasts with traditional, authoritarian, and insensitive leadership. Empathy demands adaptability. Adela wisely reminds us that “effective leadership needs to adapt, rethink and re-examine itself constantly and with no shortcuts”. A true leader cares about others, puts themselves into the other person’s shoes before passing judgement, while removing their own (prejudices) first. The new leader that Adela describes understands that the team is the key to success. She believes that disagreement is an opportunity, and that reciprocity is the very essence of effective leadership. As an epilogue, this book leaves us with an invitation to reflect on how to apply these pointers to our own lives and leadership. Adela ends the book leaving us with a profound sense of how to “be what you want to receive”. I can only commend Adela’s magnificent work and her commitment to creating leaders who truly make a difference. These pages will take you far beyond conventional leadership theories. So, immerse yourself into this book and get ready to discover the power of authentic and effective leadership under the guidance of an exceptional author, friend, and leader: Adela Balderas Cejudo.

LUIS ALONSO PASTOR  
City Science Group, MIT Media Lab



## Introduction

My mother always insisted on the importance of thanking people. As a tribute to that deep-rooted legacy, I want to start this second edition by thanking everyone who has contacted me to share their experiences of *Reinvent Your Leadership*. My thanks must go to so many of my students, to the alumni who have contacted me and crossed my path again; to so many people I love and admire who have touched my soul. And a special thank you to every reader who picks up this book.

There is an intense and pressing need to adapt and to understand; to be authentic in the face of the anguished cry in this world of filters; to humanise in the age of artificial intelligence; to listen to the planet; to genuinely understand what is different; to enjoy the driving desire to live; and to learn to savour the little things. This schedule-driven time that seems to strive to make us forget what is essential; time that speeds up everything it touches, like a broken antique clock whose hands are spinning unchecked.

Professional and personal leadership become critical factors in this scenario.

Personal leadership entails making informed decisions – not always an easy task–, learning lessons from mistakes, overcoming the self-imposed barrier of guilt, and approaching challenges with the eyes of an explorer. All of this is woven together with the effort and tenacity of someone in charge of their own destiny.

In this second edition, I have revised and expanded ideas and perspectives covered in the original book; new research has been incorporated, and practical tools and activities added that reflect the latest trends and challenges on the leadership landscape, and which can be the basis for further development.

I hope to help and inspire reflection and action. This second edition does not only continue our previous conversation, but also offers an open door to new horizons and new possibilities.

I recommend you set off on this journey cautiously, seeking only to show what you feel, but determined to share what you are still learning and driven by the desire to contribute.

“Hardships often prepare ordinary people  
for an extraordinary destiny”.

C. S. LEWIS

*Serendipity*. There is something magical about the letter and spirit of this term. Serendipity is a finding, a discovery that occurs by chance, accidentally. It is linked to the world of science, to a new door suddenly opening when searching for something and close scrutiny reveals the evolution of what is happening there. The origin of the word is attributed to *The Three Princes of Serendip*, the fairy tale that recounts the adventures of three princes endowed with a strange gift of making discoveries by accident and sagacity; that fascinated Horace Walpole and he coined the term *serendipity* in 1754.

In reality, much more lies behind that serendipity than attempts; there is intuition, effort, innovation and a large dose of patience. This book is - and said with utmost humility - serendipitous, an internal discovery, that is both fortuitous and instinctive; as if by accident, although it was always there in reality.

Internal dialogues are always extremely challenging in complicated times. This book emerged from the need to share, to convey beyond words. I decided to start with the strength of courage mixed with eagerness; and guided by a sense of responsibility; with the modesty of someone who is well aware that – even though the perfect formula, just like the potion of a great magician, is nothing more than an illusion –producing a roadmap for team manager could be more than inspiration, it could help.

We are immersed in a far-reaching technological revolution. We bear scars from global situations that leave us perplexed. And yet, despite the indelible marks left by complicated periods, it is and must be important to look ahead, feel that it is time to rethink, to regenerate, to reinvent ourselves and to reconcile with our present in order to face the future. Understanding that people who are prepared for the nature of those changes are those who will be able to forge their way, face vicissitudes, and to stay ahead of the uncertainty beyond the labels of the different leadership models, but without losing sight of or forgetting history or the people who research each model; not mere examples, but overriding truths, seeking to articulate and put into words ideas that represent ways of understanding, ways of life.

Each of the twelve chapters in this book focuses on those people who genuinely care about their teams; people who move people, regardless of the company, of its size, sector or of their position; from communication to anticipation, and without forgetting discord, empathy, resilience and generosity.

A leader has many and varied characteristics. These qualities evolve, transform, adapt, become as flexible as a reed that bends in the face of the unexpected and almost never perfect storm. And there are several aspects that always hold true: the leader is admired, speaks sincerely, with hard truths rather than unbearable doubts, involves and seeks participation and cooperation rather than satisfied and complacent followers. In short, they are people who scrutinise signals, who genuinely care about people. Socrates said: “The noblest way is not to be crushing others, but to be improving yourselves”. This book has been written with the intention of contributing and helping to reflect; in order to

seek that perfection of ourselves that has more to do with courage, hope and determination on the path travelled than with being a model of excellence. The fruit of an evolution, like a timid serendipity.



Source: Prepared by the author.

*LOGBOOK - In each chapter you will find two types of activities: some are more reflective, others more hands on. I suggest you keep a logbook to record everything you work on in this book; a logbook especially for you. Protect it carefully from the weather and keep it at hand so you can consult it whenever you think is necessary.*

## Move forward in a calm, but agile way

“My great mistake, the fault for which I cannot forgive myself, is that one day I ceased my obstinate pursuit of my own individuality”.

OSCAR WILDE

Spanish Royal Academy Dictionary definition (2014):

### **Uncertainty**

1. Lack of certainty.

Steering a ship is no simple task. We are constantly navigating rough, unpredictable waters and, sometimes, even ones that overwhelm us. Nonetheless, we seek safe environments. Even in the midst of the storm, we endeavour to gain control – either over the situations or the emotions we experience –, as we need to connect with our present, to know and value the aspects that give meaning to our purpose in life.

Fear, insecurity and anguish will continue to exist as long as we have to navigate through turbulent waters; we must therefore become aware of adversities in order to thwart them, and progress step by step in the fight to recover the sense of our being and wanting; along with the deep conviction that opportunities – that we have often not even contemplated or imagined – lie behind the challenges.

Every year, words, expressions and neologisms emerge and take over our most banal conversations, only to sometimes disappear or go out of fashion as quickly as they arrived, in the same way as the latest colour scheme. Even though *uncertainty* – a word full of contradictions and terms – is there each time we embark on a voyage with no land in sight, it has become particularly prevalent in the current climate. The definition given by the Spanish Royal Academy is “the lack of certainty”. As simple as that; as concise as that. Direct.

In turbulent times, uncertainty takes centre-stage; more as a sense of unease and vulnerability than as a mere word. These are uncertain times, times of bewilderment, vulnerability and of questions about what is to come. They are also times of reflection, opportunities, creativity, transformation and challenges. We feel a pressing need to anticipate what is to come; we yearn to know the unexplored paths. It is like walking forward, where one step leads naturally to the next; yet this seemingly simple act fills us with a feeling of emptiness, of helplessness, of being unwelcome. We are enveloped in a feeling of intense dizziness teetering on the edge of an abyss of uncertainty.

Accepting and living with uncertainty involves freeing ourselves from the incessant search for certainty, enjoying and delighting in the journey, focusing on the present, and accepting that we are responsible for finding our anchor points. The daunting waves forge skills because “a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor”, as the popular saying goes; just one of those sayings of folk wisdom encapsulating so much sense and intuition.

We have long argued for a pressing need to leave our comfort zone, to flee from that comfortable complication-free state of mind and whose routine even overwhelms us, without our being really aware or

daring to take steps for fear of losing it. And at a time like the present, remembering our comfort zone seems to give that warm feeling of returning home after a time away; we may believe that our happiness is linked to that “better the devil you know”, a happiness that may be due to the lack of adversity than the existence of events.

Losing our comfort zone professionally speaking complicates and alters the scenario. As the sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman would say, “we are facing a new precarious, changing, unstable and accelerated reality where the only thing that will always be stable is change”. The pace of evolution, however frantic it may be, drives us to adapt to new habits and customs, to stride ahead even if we do not know where the next step will take us.

Leaders in this frightening yet intriguing uncertainty strive to understand and consider the direction to be taken. And the first step is to understand that it is pivotal to move forward with a new outlook, from a different perspective and to manage from a new approach. Being aware of all the elements that can set the bar is extremely important in a world in constant and rampant evolution, a world in which disruption and breaking with the past seem to have become commonplace, and where the unexpected can suddenly happen. The current climate means that leadership is influenced by a huge challenge for which it is more important than ever to prepare.

There are many schools, models and theories of leadership; yet it is very complex to define and explaining the ingredients for leadership success is even more difficult. Even though all the definitions share common themes of influence, change management and the importance of cooperation, knowing how many of these ingredients and when to incorporate them is almost uncharted territory, because it is not just up to you.

Doing things differently means learning to adapt to a changing world. Knowing and learning from the past helps to understand the present and look to the future. “Those who do not learn their history are condemned to repeat it”, goes the much-quoted phrase, but first attributed to Napoleon Bonaparte.

Our current context – this world that is both amazed and frightened by technological advances, that believes that the much-discussed climate crisis is here and is already an emergency, that is aware of the pressing need to take care of talent; this world struck by the clamour for well-being and mental health – needs and is demanding a new style of coherent and humanist leadership beyond mere principles and rules. Otherwise, we will not be able to speak of leadership, but rather of authority and power.

We are increasingly searching for people to inspire, guide and stimulate us. We do not want to be managed, but to enjoy the freedom to become involved in the project in a different way, to feel part of it, that we are contributing and also growing; aware that a true leader cares about the learning and growth of their team, of its members.

The current environment seems to be pushing towards a leadership style marked by haste and acceleration, with a constant sense of resolving urgent situations. However, leading with deliberate, yet agile calm can help to elucidate the way forward. Tolerance of uncertainty is precisely the ability to deal with the lack of certainty and immediate results.

## **Leading calmly**

So how do I lead? How do I lead calmly? Where do I start? What steps do I need to consider? There are certainly many things to consider, but the most important thing is to return to the start, to self-knowledge. Self-knowledge as the source of an intensive learning process is the cornerstone and will determine us as leaders. Lone rangers do not get far. The often-cited proverb “if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far go together” are not just words: it does not seem to make sense to carry on like a lone ranger struggling against the odds to find our bearings in a northerly direction. We must never lose sight of certain values: What is our mission? How far do I want to go? For what purpose? These questions – which we sometimes do not ask ourselves for different reasons: insecurity, lack of confidence, overconfidence... – shape the puzzle.



This self-awareness and self-knowledge will help us to pinpoint and enhance our strengths while acting on our weaknesses. That should always be without fear as knowing what our limitations are will allow us to move forward; connecting dots, experiences, insights, foundations, and so on will allow us to see further.

In his biography of Leonardo da Vinci, the American journalist, writer and biographer Walter Isaacson wrote something that strikes me deeply: “the ability to make connections across different disciplines - arts and sciences, humanities and technology - is a key to innovation, imagination and genius”.

He goes on:

“In fact, Leonardo’s genius was a human one, wrought by his own will and ambition. It did not come from being the divine gift [...] of a mind with so much processing power that we mere mortals cannot fathom it. [...] His genius was of the type we can understand, even take lessons from. It was based on skills we can aspire to improve in ourselves, such as curiosity and intense observation”.

A time of connection, of reflection, and of calm prior to action is needed to connect different things; that attentive look at the discordant that discovers unforeseen ideas.

Our day-to-day lives are a never-ending eternal duality between our angels and our demons: choosing to stay in our current job or taking a risk to pursue our dream; taking the plunge or staying in our post; settling into the present situation or challenging it; exploring a new strategy or sticking to the one we already know.

Decision-making requires reflection based on a considered view and internal balance. Adapting from the resources at our disposal is key, but knowing those resources and fostering being and feeling well are therefore essential. Our frenetic pace often prevents us from doing the most important thing: taking care of ourselves in order to be able to care. Emotional well-being is closely related to our actions. Balance – optimal serenity – is a determining factor in preventing problems and making the wrong decisions. It is not theory, it is not digression, it is science. And if leaders do not take care of themselves, we can ask

whether they will be able to care, to ensure well-being, and to have the necessary sensitivity to understand the importance of health at all levels.

“If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable”, said Lucius Annaeus Seneca (65 BC). That is why our daily struggle must focus on finding self-control, knowing where we are heading, managing bad times and feeling empowered to make coherent decisions to find a state of harmony. It is understandably frightening to look inward. Failure to do so is synonymous with wrong decisions.

We often are faced with suddenly needing to resolve issues that involve important actions. Leading calmly but in an agile manner means stopping to think about the imminent steps, analysing and evaluating the current context, the dynamics of the team, identifying what we can really offer and, from there, defining thoughtful solutions, looking to the future, without losing our sights on the mission, and avoiding the pitfall of being trapped in the short term.

## **Human and imperfect**

There is a very personal anecdote I long considered to have been something terrible, almost shameful, and which I could not even put into words. It only led to piercing, incomprehensible pain, and I was aware it was deeper than a mere anecdote.

I had the opportunity to fulfil a dream but had no inkling of how it would turn out. It was my first trip to the University of Oxford in my research career. I could not have been more excited and fortunate to have the privilege of being there and forming – even if only a tiny – part of its knowledge. Indeed, that was what how I felt: extremely insignificant, paralysed by fear, unable to convey what I want to say or to understand what was happening to me. Each day was more complicated than the last. It was not a challenge, or the bar set high, it was gruelling. Days passed. I had a meeting with my mentor, Dr. George W. Leeson, whom I had long admired. The meeting lasted 20 minutes. My preparation was meticulous as I knew that first impressions and every

word count; it reflected my deep respect for the place, for the tradition, for the knowledge and the air breathed in an age-old institution.

Dr. Leeson wanted to know my progress on the research project, and I had to keep to the stipulated time. I was really nervous, and nothing seemed to be going well right from the start. I was rushed, unconvincing, and failed to convey what I really wanted to say, despite the intense preparation beforehand. I was engulfed by the surroundings and was thrown by the weight of the academia that I so respected and admired. I was overwhelmed by being surrounded by the same walls where leading academics had won Nobel prizes and that I was expected to be up to their standard. All I felt was of being in the wrong place, as if I had slipped through a crack in the system.

The second meeting was to take place the following week. The preparation was both intense and stinging, as if failure was hard on my heels. The second meeting was the same as the first, with a painful feeling of helplessness, of losing my very essence. That was how I felt almost every day in team meetings and even when I was walking around Oxford. I was unable to enjoy it, just struggling through and always with the feeling that somebody would “notice” that I was not good enough to be there, that I was effectively a gatecrasher.

Almost by chance, as so often in life, I was later able to put a name to what had been happening to me: *the impostor syndrome*.

It is that terrible feeling of not being sufficiently capable, competent, or good enough, of being where you are by luck and not by merit, of never being up to the task. Identifying it was a real breakthrough for me, marking the end of a cycle and I felt liberated. I was able to understand and recognise that it had happened to many other people; people I deeply admire, with successful professional careers and brilliant academic achievements: people we consider to have triumphed with a devoted following, and, who, nevertheless, experience a lack of self-esteem in their day-to-day lives. Identifying it was a breakthrough for me, but it still did not feel as if things had turned fully around. I was definitely still dreading the following meeting. And the time of that third, dreaded meeting arrived. Dr. Leeson, with extraordinary

empathy and aware that I was suffering, suddenly interrupted me and said: “Adela, just a moment. There is something you must remember. You do not have to impress me; you have to impress yourself”. That marked the start of a crucial journey for me; another way of working, of teaching and of being.

I now tell and share this story with my students. That may be to try and spare them the consequences of a lack of self-esteem; or as a personal challenge to overcome and verbalise the past. Perhaps both. Whenever I tell it, a shiver runs down my spine and I always feel uncomfortable. I can tell from their knowing looks, that they are sharing with me that they have also experienced it... I can tell without their needing to vocalise it. My students are surprised when I tell them that it also happens or has happened to people across the board: from the world of technology to great chefs, actors, musicians... to name a few. People of the ilk of Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, Paco de Lucía, Meryl Streep, Natalie Portman, David Bowie, Emma Watson, Lady Gaga and Michelle Obama have all felt it. I never cease to be amazed by that ever-growing long list.

The impostor syndrome first came to light in 1978 following the publication of the article “The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention” by Dr. Pauline R. Clance & Dr. Suzanne A. Imes. Dr. Clance pointed out that “Most people who experience the Impostor Phenomenon (IP) would not say, ‘I feel like an impostor’. Yet, when they read or hear about the experience, they say, “How did you know exactly how I feel?”

And there is certainly a great deal of research to be done on this syndrome.

Allow me one more anecdote.

I cannot forget the impact when I read Maya Angelou’s first powerful autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings for the first time*.

Maya Angelous had a thousand and one trades: writer, cook, poet, waitress, singer, actress, dancer, journalist, African-American civil rights activist, Grammy Award winner, Emmy nominee, and recipient

of more than fifty honorary degrees. That is only a brief summary of her intense career, and nothing compared to her profound struggle, tenacity, and unwavering strength shown throughout her life. Maya Angelou perfectly captured how it feels to suffer from this syndrome – so accurately that I feel a terrible uneasiness, an uncontainable fear –: “I have written eleven books, but each time I think ‘uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody and they’re going to find me out”.

There is nothing more I can add, except that living with this feeling is deeply painful.

We are constantly trying to impress others for reasons of ego, image or fear of prejudice. Self-knowledge in this desire to dazzle plays a crucial role in approaching things calmly and with the agility to move forward, while knowing where we are going and being highly aware of our weaknesses, but keeping focused on the path we must follow.

Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century starts with impressing ourselves without needing to hide imperfections. Achieving this means embarking on the journey as naturally as possible. As knowing how to interpret our emotions involves asking ourselves uncomfortable questions.

A senior manager of a multinational company once told me that “It is so easy to look the other way and to ignore all our principles”.

Years later, I elsewhere had the opportunity to meet someone who has had a real impact on me, and, undoubtedly, inspired and helped me. Our first meeting was when we appeared on the same stage. That person is Sir John Whitmore, a British racing driver, the pioneer of coaching and creator of the renowned GROW model (2010). I was impressed by his way of looking, moving and interacting with the utmost and authentic humility, along with his social and environmental awareness long before those issues had come to the fore. After his journey of self-knowledge, his discourse went beyond concern for people and delved into the damage we can do to the planet.

Current issues such as sustainability or the need for business ethics in line with today’s society pose unprecedented challenges to companies

in order to assume new responsibilities in the face of struggles such as global warming or the importance of greater social commitment. The current situation does not leave much room for the luxury of being irresponsible.

Although crises tend to favour short-term thinking, they can also serve as a reminder to business leaders that there is an extraordinary opportunity to change the rules of the game, to bring about relevant changes and to contribute to the evolution of the paradigms that brought us here.

Regardless of company size, today's leaders have a responsibility to look forward from a systemic perspective, embracing everything that is happening around them and being concerned with more than just the immediate future. Environmental sustainability and a focus on well-being must not just be passing trends, but fundamental principles guiding business operations. They must become the norm that underpins business conduct, beyond mere fads.

We feel vulnerable as we embrace the responsibility not only to protect our planet, but also to root that virtuous practice in the very fabric of those close to us. This task becomes even more pressing as the red warning signs become ever more frequent. It is up to each of us to look at the future from a responsible perspective and it is crucial to internalise that altruistic outlook.

Sir John Whitmore's vision went beyond simply observing the environment and its surrounding context; it was the outcome of a deep personal journey of self-knowledge. He understood self-knowledge to be an essential source of a deep learning process, that has a crucial influence on our ability to lead. Whitmore argued that the challenge is that performance will be minimal in scope and potential unless we raise both our own awareness and that of those with whom we collaborate.

It is amazing how complex this self-knowledge is, how complex this "looking inside us" is. We ignore many aspects of ourselves, and, on occasions, we fear or do not know how to value them. Therefore, it is essential to reach this knowledge, to reach this level of understanding

that helps and guides us to know, strengthen and value our skills and competencies.

## The art of getting to know each other

“Know thyself” is one of the most famous aphorisms of Greek antiquity, and appeared on the portico into the temple of the god Apollo in the city of Delphi in Greece in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Over time, many authors have adopted and adapted this phrase, which has led to some variations.

In 1995, the psychologist Daniel Goleman stated: “Self-awareness — recognizing a feeling as it happens — is the keystone of emotional intelligence”. Known worldwide for his book and theory *Emotional Intelligence*, he popularised in 1995 and to this day the groundbreaking idea that it is not IQ or theoretical and technical training, but emotional intelligence that is decisive for success in management.

However intelligent and capable a company manager may be, they can fail due to a lack of self-awareness. If they are unable to recognise their own emotions, talents, and potential, they will find them difficult to manage and to understand those of other people.

The combination of wisdom and technical knowledge, of the environment and the organisation, is essential. And that wisdom is a fusion of intelligence and choosing the moment, seeing, and perceiving the opportunity for action, and always calmly but in an agile way.

As Daniel Goleman pointed out, the rules of the business game are changing, and we are judged by new standards. It is no longer just our skills and experience that matter, but the way we manage both our own and others’ involvement. “Leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading people to work toward a common goal”, says Goleman.

It is time to raise our awareness, to question ourselves in order to evolve, to develop openness skills, to mobilise and inspire others in the search for results beyond the immediate. But above all, it is a time for reflection and action.

## Time for reflection

- Everyday frustrations aside, what aspect of your job causes you the most dissatisfaction?
- What is the issue that is always on your mind and that worries you the most?
- If you had to set a purpose in life, what would it be?
- What is your mission?<sup>1</sup>
- <sup>1</sup> The mission is the purpose of life, i.e. what you want to achieve in life, expressed in a concrete and specific way.
- What is your vision?<sup>2</sup>
- What are your values? What are your company's values? Is there consistency?
- What do you want to achieve in the short- (three months), medium- (six months) and long- (fifteen months) term? List three goals that are achievable and realistic.
- At work, how much of the time are you positive and how much of the time are you negative? Analyse yourself over the course of a day and not down your most recurring thoughts.
- How would you define yourself in three words?

In this time of reflection, if you want to know more about the impostor syndrome told in first person, I encourage you to watch this video of Michelle Obama.

Follow this link or scan the QR:  
[https://youtu.be/dumm\\_XfHkmY?si=fqv\\_giVp5VeAPmvF](https://youtu.be/dumm_XfHkmY?si=fqv_giVp5VeAPmvF)



<sup>1</sup> The mission is the purpose of life, i.e. what you want to achieve in life, expressed in a concrete and specific way.

<sup>2</sup> The vision is a more emotional part, where you define your values and how you will apply them to fulfil your mission.



And enjoy these seven minutes with Maya Angelou:

Follow this link or scan the QR:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aHvTWvKIPHo>



## Time for action

In the following three activities you will learn about the Impostor Syndrome Test that Dr. Clance developed to help people determine whether or not they have these characteristics. It is in its original version. Take note of the results.

On the one hand, there is an activity called My identity: your public identity, how other people see you, and on the other hand, professional fulfilment using the GROW model. It is essential that you write down your conclusions from the answers.

## Test Clance IP Scale

Follow this link or scan the QR:  
<https://paulineroseclance.com/pdf/IPTestandscoring.pdf>



### Activity 1: My identity

This exercise and its answers will probably surprise you at first. Ask two relatives, two friends and two colleagues (who are part of your team or supervise your work) about your three greatest strengths and your three areas for improvement. Ask them to reflect on it and send their response to you (WhatsApp, email...).

### Activity 2: GROW Model

**G** - Goal

**R** – Reality

## O – Options

## W - Will

The second activity uses the GROW model, created by Sir John Whitmore in the 1980s, to move towards achieving your goals. The key is that the three goals you set in the first reflection exercise are not only SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound), but also motivating, inspiring and challenging.

After defining your goals, move forward in the GROW model.

- **Goal.** First ask yourself what you want. It is very important to plan your goals in a positive way.
- **Reality.** The second step is to define your current situation. Diagnose what separates you from your goal, what prevents you from achieving it and what obstacles you encounter.
- **Options.** Third, assess the different options: which one is most within your reach, what steps would you have to take to achieve it? Always have a plan B and even a plan C in mind.
- **Will.** You end by assessing your will and determination to achieve your goals and your commitment. Remember: a goal without a plan is not a goal but a wish.

It is important to go through the model step-by-step until you have your action plan. However small the steps may seem to you; they will be large when seen from a distance. Do not forget to note down your progress and set a date for checking how you have moved forward.

Figure 1.1. GROW model



Source: Sir John Whitmore (2010).