

Leadership & The Feminine

Introduction: "An Excess of Patriarchy"

Q: *"What do the Enron Corporation, the Catholic Church and the Bush Administration all have in common?"*

A: *"An excess of patriarchy."*

Matthew Fox, Asheville NC, 2003

"An Excess of Patriarchy"

What's "an excess of patriarchy"? And why are men, like Matthew Fox and you, attacking it?

These are important and relevant questions in 2004 A.D.

"An excess of patriarchy" means any form of culture - family, school, religion, business, state, nation or association - that is unbalanced toward the Masculine (not the same as male) and thereby short changes the Feminine (not the same as female).

The distinction between the psychological qualities Masculine and Feminine and the biological genders male and female is complex, not widely understood and still being debated across the world. I don't want to get into that complexity or debate, so in this book, male and female will refer to whether we're biologically men or women, and Masculine and Feminine will refer to traits and behaviors historically associated with men and women, but in fact available to us all. This bears repeating:

Male & Female are biological identities. We are either men or women.

Masculine & Feminine are culturally labeled psychological qualities available to all.

Since cultural conditioning guides men toward Masculine behaviors and women toward Feminine behaviors, the psychological can appear to be as fixed as the biological, but this is more coincidence than cause-and-effect. While it does appear men tend more toward the Masculine and women more toward the Feminine (even the sons of the most active Feminists generally prefer trucks to dolls), it's silly and erroneous to extrapolate this to mean we are single-dimensional. We all have a huge range of both Feminine and Masculine potentials, and the greatest part of our maturing is to discover and claim our full selves. At its heart, that's what this book is about.

As an American born in 1938, every form of culture I've participated in has suffered from excessive patriarchy, and so have all those who shared those cultures with me, women and men alike. It took me a long time to detect the sickness around me because, being male, I'd bought into the brainwashing that patriarchy was good for my gender. That was as stupid as believing Shane, The Lone Ranger or any of the other isolated male heroes of my childhood actually lived lives a human being would want. Of course, the women of my era were just as trapped. Imagine trying to live up to Doris Day, the eternal virgin, when your hormones are raging (in real life, Doris was married four times). I've been coming out from under those layers of conditioning for over 60 years, and I'm not done yet. But I'm sure having more fun than when I was taking them seriously, and I'm much better for those around me in the world. Just ask my kids.

I think about my kids and grandkids a lot. Including in-laws and significant others, they add up to about a baker's dozen, and not much has changed for them. It doesn't seem to me that their Rappers or Matrix clones are any improvement on my Cowboys, and I doubt the eternal whore is any better than the eternal virgin as a model of wholeness for my daughters and granddaughters. My hope is that this book will help make it easier for them to claim all of themselves sooner than I did. It's the best legacy I can think of to leave them.

What Does an F/M "Balance" Mean?

It seems like "balance" means having equal amounts of both qualities - is this what you strive for?

Most people have this question at first. I did. "Balance" can mean equal weight on both sides of a scale, and it can also mean being in a stable state or equilibrium. I'm using it to mean the personal equilibrium we've established between our Feminine and Masculine qualities at a particular moment in time. There's no suggestion that any balance is better than any other and no implication that any balance is fixed or permanent. Only you can know what your balance is at any time and whether it's one that will work well for you in your situation. One of the purposes of this book is to help you know both those things as clearly and completely as possible.

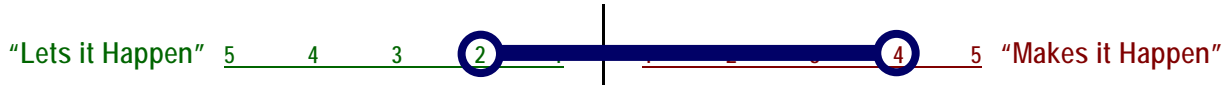
What do I "strive for" in my personal F/M balance? Like pretty much everything else, I want the balance I develop to help me be true to myself and effective in the world, to help me be both authentic and successful. This means taking a number of things into account - my own nature, where I am in my life, the work I choose, the leadership roles I take on, the relationships important to me and what I value spiritually. This is intensely personal and uniquely individual work, and no one can know better than you what's right for you. What we can do is help each other see ourselves and our options more clearly so we can make the best choices possible.

What's Your Current F/M Balance?

The best way to understand anything is to experience it personally. What follows is a simple exercise to help you think about the differences between our Feminine and Masculine aspects. Give it a try, but don't take it too seriously. It's just to get you started. We'll do more in-depth work later...

Feminine/Masculine Quick Assessment Scale[©]

The qualities in green (left) are some of those available through our Feminine and those in red (right) are some of those available through our Masculine. You can do a quick assessment of a Feminine/Masculine (F/M) balance by circling a number on each side and connecting them with a line as shown:



Since we all have both Feminine and Masculine, there's no option to circle zero for either. (You can learn about your own M/F conditioning by noticing where you wish the numbers were higher or lower.)

FEMININE QUALITIES

"Lets it Happen" 5 4 3 2 1

Uses Intuition 5 4 3 2 1

Focuses Inwardly 5 4 3 2 1

Collaborates 5 4 3 2 1

Opens to Possibilities 5 4 3 2 1

Nurtures 5 4 3 2 1

Is Flexible 5 4 3 2 1

Listens 5 4 3 2 1

Flows 5 4 3 2 1

Supports 5 4 3 2 1

Responds 5 4 3 2 1

Is Gentle 5 4 3 2 1

Values Relationship 5 4 3 2 1

MASCULINE QUALITIES

1 2 3 4 5 "Makes it Happen"

1 2 3 4 5 Uses Reason

1 2 3 4 5 Focuses Outwardly

1 2 3 4 5 Directs

1 2 3 4 5 Drives for Results

1 2 3 4 5 Challenges

1 2 3 4 5 Is Firm

1 2 3 4 5 Speaks

1 2 3 4 5 Plans

1 2 3 4 5 Evaluates

1 2 3 4 5 Initiates

1 2 3 4 5 Is Tough

1 2 3 4 5 Values Achievement

Our F/M Balances Are Fluid, Situational & Adjustable

I'm naturally a "1" in "Listens" and a "5" in "Speaks." In other words, I love to talk and find it difficult to attend others for very much of the time. I have honored such a nature (as many teachers and consultants do) by choosing a career that valued my speaking the greater part of the time. To make sure my students and clients got enough air time, I'd have them discuss in pairs and small groups. This seems to work well for all of us.

But if I maintained my "Listens 1 - Speaks 5" balance in all situations, I learned (painfully) I'd probably also have to forego on-going, intimate relationships. Experience has taught me such continuing intimacy requires a minimum of "Listens 2 - Speaks 4," at least in the context of the relationships. There were periods in my life where I enjoyed being on my own, and there were other times when I wanted connection. For the last fifteen years I've grown consistently more and more toward connection, and, with that growth, have worked at, and become, a more of a listener and less of a speaker in my family relationships. But not that much has changed in the larger world; I'm still pretty much "Listens 1 - Speaks 5" in that ball park, and I make that work by enjoying a lot of solitude, writing and a doing a little teaching and consulting. This works fine with me, and, it seems, with the world.

It's our overall F/M balance that needs to fit us, not the balance we have in any particular situation. I doubt I'll ever do better overall than "Listens 2 - Speaks 4," but, if I make sure I get enough "1-5" between my solitude, writing and teaching, then I can do some genuine "3-3" with my family. So do think you have to change yourself. That's very hard work. Instead, know yourself and then manage your situations so you honor yourself and get what you want in the world. That's what this book will help you do.

It's Story Time

It's time for a story. Why a story? Because a major element of "excessive patriarchy" is over-reliance on the Masculine preference for rational thinking. I think we all suffer from this affliction (if you're reacting incredulously at this point, you've probably got the disease, too), and, if so, you can find it hard to believe intuition, a Feminine preference, is as necessary as reason. It might help to know Einstein thought intuition might be even more important:

***"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift
and the rational mind is a faithful servant.
We have created a society that honors the servant
and has forgotten the gift."***

When one of our greatest intellects says we're over-balanced toward the rational, we probably are. Relying only on our rational, Masculine minds to investigate this problem is like relying only on the Attorney General to investigate the President who appointed him. If we truly want to know what's going on, we'll have to experience "excessive patriarchy" through our Feminine (just as if the problem were "excessive matriarchy," we'd have to experience through our Masculine). But we don't

gain real experience by only reading precise, linear definitions. If we did, we'd have no need for all that wonderful physical, emotional and spiritual equipment we've been so extravagantly outfitted with. Still, words can be used to bring experience alive physically, emotionally and spiritually. This happens when we share our stories...

Since we first gathered around in fire circles to keep the night at bay we have told stories. Stories that celebrated the conquests of the day sometimes became tales of heroes of the tribe. Stories, long before writing was invented, were the tribal memory; told repeatedly around the fire, they bore the tribal wisdom from one generation to the next.

Stories about animals, things, heroes, and gods explained the world in ways that made it more predictable and safer. Stories imbued the world with magic, giving people hope where circumstances seemed to say there was none. Stories held out the possibility that deeds would be remembered, the prospect of immortality.

But perhaps the most important use of stories was for teaching generations of leaders their responsibilities and in providing a guide that they could use to see past momentary threats to the tribe. At times when wise leadership meant the difference between life and death, between survival and extinction, stories offered insight. Often, the meaning was not to be had on the surface of the story, but lay in its symbols, which are the language of the human unconscious...

David Swords writing on leadership, New Orleans, 1993.

So this will be a book of stories. I hope these stories will echo in your experience as they do in mine. As we live these stories together, we'll find connections to our own experience, connections that will make us all more effective - and joyous - in our leadership.

"Goddammit, Donna, This Could Go on Forever!"

This is a story that started out being about women and men and ended up being about Feminine and Masculine. My wife, Donna, and I were reading two books together at the time. One was Deborah Tannen's Please Understand Me which was about how men and women use communication differently. She was suggesting that men use communication primarily to get stuff done and women use it primarily for relationship. To illustrate the difference, she told about an interchange between a husband-and-wife driving home after party. The wife asked, "Do you want to stop for a drink?" the husband, taking this as a task and the task being a request for information answered, "No." As many men would, he felt good. Task encountered, task completed. On the other hand, the wife found this interchange very unsatisfactory. Her question had not been a simple request for information; it had been the beginning of engagement about what they would do together next. For her it had been an overture to engagement that had been abruptly dismissed.

Donna and I recognized ourselves in this story, and the recognition helped us. We had consistent experience of missing, and irritating, each other on this dimension of task versus relationship. Tannen's book gave us a way to talk about it, and I was now able to regularly ask, "Have I related

enough today?" Usually Donna's answer was still, "No," but having our difference out in the open helped us both make some small adjustments and our life a whole lot better.

That was one of the Vermont winters we spent living in a motor home in the south, and one of the things we were doing was going through Harville Hendrix' book Getting the Love You Want. (I find the title awful, but it contains a lot of useful exercises for couples to do together.) We were at the part where it was time to practice Reflective Listening. This is where one person tells the other something important to him or her, and the other listens both to the words and the feeling and then reflects both back so the other can see what's been communicated. It's a simple practice, and I'd taught it for years.

On this particular afternoon, we pulled into lovely Alabama State Park, build a campfire and opened a bottle of champagne. Life didn't get much better than this - "No place to go, no thing to do..." We decided to do some Reflective Listening with Donna starting as the speaker and me as the listener. She took a few minutes to tell me something important or her, and I listened carefully. (When listening is a task, I can do it very well.) Then I reflected what she'd said back in both content and tone, and I knew I had captured it perfectly. I'm waiting for her to nod and say, "Really well done, Bill" and it's now my turn to speak.

This is not what happens. She starts talking again, elaborating even more on what she's just said. "Okay," I think, "I can do this." I listen carefully again, reflect it back in both content and tone and wait for the nod. She starts talking again! I listen and reflect again. No nod, no "Good job" - she starts talking again! This is when I jumped up, pounded the table and said, "Godammit, Donna, this could go on forever!"

And in that instant I saw myself and how unbalanced toward the Masculine I'd become. Here I was in a lovely setting with my best friend with nothing to do but enjoy being together - and what had I done but define our relating as a task to get over with! It was so absurd that we both burst out laughing! We've told this story at least a hundred times over the last fifteen years, and it's become part of our relationship. About her starting to talk again over and over, Donna says, "Well, it just felt so good to be listened to that I kept finding more and more to say." She still does, and while I don't sustain my attention nearly as long as her most intimate friends do, I appreciate greatly how important this ability is. On the "Listens" dimension I've moved from a "1" to a "2" and have aspirations of perhaps making it to "2½" or maybe even a "3" before my time here is up. If someone as unbalanced as I can do this, there's hope for all of us.

Excessive Patriarchy Stunts the Feminine in Both Women & Men

Leadership is not over-balanced toward the Masculine because it's primarily Masculine in nature; it's distorted in that direction because we were all raised in families, schools, businesses, churches and nations that all were unbalanced toward "excessive patriarchy." And it's not just men who are inhibited in the use of their Feminine; many women are just as blocked. Consider this story from Bill Sadler's The Third Age, an eighteen year research project that documents the lives of three dozen people who made extraordinary successful transformations from their Second Age (20-45) into

their Third age (45-80). This is the story of a surgeon named Barbara as she reflected on her life at fifty-four:

Barbara was very autonomous as a young adult and went through several transformations before she uncovered a fuller femininity after turning fifty...

“I’m changing and continually discovering things in my self that amaze me. One major thing I’ve discovered as a woman is a kind of balance of feminine and masculine elements within myself in a way I never knew possible. My journey has been to go to the edge, and as I do I find amazing dimensions to myself.”

After years of medical practice, she had begun to feel burned-out, angry, bitter, and even resentful. Her career had been outwardly successful but increasingly dissatisfying:

“I felt terribly trapped in medical practice and couldn’t see any way out. Clients were demanding more and more, and then they would turn on you. I would put in horrendous hours and feel I was really caring for them, and they would file malpractice and say I was deliberately trying to hurt them. It felt so unjust, and it seemed like people were trying to own me.

“I entered medicine in part because I wanted to be totally independent. In medical school I was nearly a stereotype of a male: aggressive and very competitive. In those days you had to be like that to succeed as a doctor and as a single woman in a nearly all male society.”

While battling with mixed feelings, she discovered that she had a malignant melanoma. She believed that her body was sending her important message. Feeling betrayed, stuck, and filled with doubts about the course of her life, she sensed that the cancer was a self-destructive way of reacting to her situation. Surgery eliminated the cancer. Reassessing her life and changing her medical practice and lifestyle addressed possible contributing factors... She also uncovered and released a hidden part of our personality to achieve greater balance:

“A major development in my midlife has been to become aware of my feminine side. Recovering a balance—between control and caring, being intellectual and emotional—is one way of viewing how I got out of the trap. I become a much more feeling person. I’ve realized that feelings have a very important part in medicine. You start with knowledge, but in your interaction with patients you need compassion. An emotional level of interaction is perhaps most important in treatment. By discovering my feminine side and expressing it in medicine and with friends, I’ve been experiencing inner movement, an awareness of being feminine and vulnerable.”

Barbara revealed that by becoming a doctor, she had deliberately undergone an identity transformation, repressing feminine qualities and adding masculine ones:

“I used to be tougher than tough. I would never show emotions; I thought that would be a sign of weakness. Now I allow my emotions to show. The biggest risks for me are letting people see who I am. I wanted to be well thought-of and would act to please people. I still want to be well-thought-of, but I’m more concerned to express how I feel as openly as honestly as possible....”

In her fifties Barbara began reshaping her identity as a competent woman, creatively balancing qualities that she had once thought incompatible. Through her adaptation to a very stressful situation, perhaps the most difficult in her life, she became more inwardly complex. In defining a new self, she has changed her definition of success, reaffirmed the girl within, and above all enlarged and revised her feminine self-image. She has become more of a woman than she ever had been.

Barbara, a very successful woman in a male world inhibited her Feminine in order to succeed in that world. In her Third Age (more on this in Chapter 9), she realized she needed to open to and develop her Feminine in order to claim her wholeness.

Once More With Feeling: Feminine/Masculine ≠ Female/Male

The point of Barbara's story is that "The Feminine" is not just for women, and "The Masculine" is not just for men. For most people, it's initially difficult to keep the psychological qualities (Feminine and Masculine) separate from biological gender (female and male). I considered creating new words for the qualities that were less confusing, but only briefly. Feminine and Masculine are the words Carl Jung chose to describe these psychic constellations, and what's good enough for Carl is good enough for me. (To help keep this separation clear, Feminine and Masculine are capitalized throughout the book.)

Separating Feminine and Masculine from gender is one of the hardest parts of this work, especially if your conditioning imprinted you to believe Feminine means "weak and needy" and Masculine means "dumb and boorish." To become whole, we have to develop both our Feminine and Masculine resources. While it may seem obvious qualities like "responds" (Feminine) and "initiates" (Masculine) are equally available to both women and men, our cultural conditioning can make this hard to remember...

*I met a man who lost his mind
In some lost place I had to find.
"Follow me," the wise man said,
But he walked behind."*

Leonard Cohen, "Teachers"

Cohen's words about a man who both "lost his mind" and "walked behind" offer a good example of how our conditioning can limit our development. The song describes a male who has a highly developed Feminine and uses it very successfully as a cornerstone of his teaching and leadership. This may have come naturally to him, but more likely it took a great deal of work and pain on his part, especially if he grew up in one of the world's more macho cultures. How many places in the world do you know where a man is respected for "losing his mind" and "walking behind"? Neither come easily to men (and women like Barbara) raised to believe their worthiness depends on being assertive, rational and in control.

Neither Our Feminine Nor Masculine Is Superior

Sometimes when I tell these stories, people think I'm saying Feminine qualities are superior to Masculine qualities. Nothing could be further from what I intend. Our Feminine and Masculine qualities are complements, not adversaries. Like our right and left hands, they are partners that work together to help us make the life we want.

Then why not focus on "excessive matriarchy" as well as "excessive patriarchy"?

"Excessive Patriarchy" Is Our Present Direction of Error (D→E)

We're talking about a "Direction of Error" here, not right or wrong. Direction of Error (D→E) is a simple concept that's served me well for the last thirty years. I found it in a conversation with one of my early mentors. He wore an expensive watch and was very proud of its accuracy.

"I check this every day against the Naval Observatory clock," he said. "I'm exactly six seconds fast."

"So why don't you set it back six seconds?" I asked.

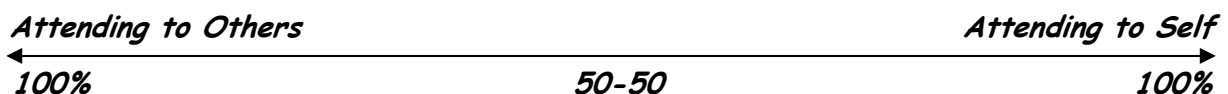
"You don't have to be right on," he said, "if you know which direction you're off in and how far."

This is how the notion of D→E came into my life. One of the great things it's done is help me stop trying to be perfect (and right) all the time:

"I don't have to be perfect if I know how imperfect I am - and in which direction."

To get the benefits of using D→E, you have to be willing to trade in righteousness for humility. Righteousness doesn't want to accept being imperfect; it wants to notice how imperfect everyone else is and judge them for it. If you aren't willing to see and laugh at your own absurdities, D→E won't work for you. But let's say your absurdities (like mine) are so blatant you've been tripping over them all your life, and some of the time you even think they're funny (humor and humility go together). If so, you're ready for D→E. Here's how to use it:

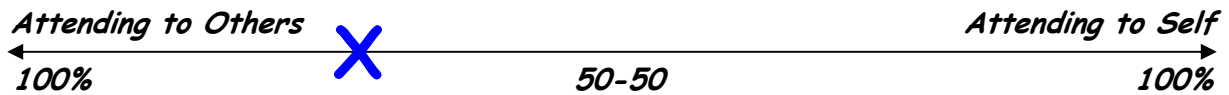
CHOOSE A SPECIFIC DIMENSION TO FOCUS ON - It's important to make D→E very specific in terms of both content and situation. (You don't want to fall in the masochistic trap of having a global D→E like "Good/Bad"). For example, let's take the Feminine/Masculine dimension of:



Most of us look at this dimension and immediately know what our D→E is (whether we generally attend too much to others or overly focus on ourselves - think Fleetwood Mac's *"You give yourself*

away" versus Sinatra's "I did it my way"). But we need to be careful. Self-perception is not the most reliable of realities.

GET HONEST FEEDBACK FROM THOSE WHO KNOW YOU WELL - Be sure and test whatever conclusions you come to with intimate friends and family. An easy way to do this is to draw a diagram like the one above and put an **X** on it where you think your general D→E is:



Show your diagram to five or six people you trust and listen to what they say. You may simply get confirmation that affirms your self-perception, or you may get surprised. Either way you learn and understand yourself more fully. And the surprises can be pleasant, too, showing you've developed in ways you like more than you thought.

KNOWING YOUR D→E HELPS YOU COMPENSATE FOR YOURSELF - If your diagram looks like the one above, you probably "give yourself away" to others more than is good for you. This is my partner's D→E (mine is the reverse - I could use more Feminine on this dimension). If she says she can't find her car keys, I think, "Well, I surely don't know where they are," and go on about my business. If I say something about having lost my keys, she jumps up and helps to look for them. Knowing her D→E has made a noticeable difference. Even though her first response is still to jump up, she quickly catches herself and says something like, "Oh, right - they're your keys, aren't they? Let me know if you really need my help," and then goes on about her business. Knowing your D→E on different dimensions makes life easier and more productive, not to mention a lot more fun.

But sometimes just knowing your D→E isn't enough. If the imbalance is significantly inappropriate to your situation, it can become destructive, even deadly. In our time the "excessive patriarchy" D→E in our leadership is literally what's killing us and our planet. For all our sakes, we each need to rebalance our Feminine and Masculine in ways appropriate to the high-tech, inter-dependent world we live in today.

Why It's So Important to Create a New Balance for a New Time

I was one whose unconscious was imprinted with obsolete images of maleness. Born in 1938, my hero and primary model for manhood was John Wayne, and that archetype went unchallenged in me until the middle sixties. By 1970 other possibilities for being male (like Dustin Hoffman as Ben in "The Graduate") had become so prevalent that Life Magazine's July cover story focused on how the model for American maleness was shifting. But even with the help of a changing culture around me, it took another thirty years of psychological renovation to integrate my Feminine and Masculine qualities to support the person and leader I now want to be and the kind of life I now want to live. I don't want this to take nearly so long for my children and grandchildren, and that's the biggest reason for my passion about this subject and this book.

There's another reason that looms large as well. Our world can't much longer survive the over-balance toward the Masculine "hunter-warrior" that was so valuable when physical survival was at stake every moment. We've created a world where we *can* feed everyone, where we *can* provide health care for everyone, where we *can* educate everyone, but only if we can learn to collaborate instead of continuing our obsolete habits of suspicion, competition and conflict. A major part this evolution is for each of us to integrate our Feminine and Masculine in ways suitable for our time. Then we will bring the leadership we truly intend to our loved ones, our enterprises and our world.

So, Is This Book for You?

Investing in a book involves not only money; but commitment of time, and that's the scarcest resource most of us have these days. Of course you should ask, "Why should I make such an investment in this book?" The purpose of this introduction has been to help you answer that question. This book will show you how to choose, achieve and continually adjust a balance of Feminine and Masculine that supports who you are as both an individual and a leader. If any of the following describe you, your investment in this book will be well worth your while.

- You'd like to help bring the Feminine and Masculine into a healthier balance for yourself, your loved ones and the world;
- You want to see your own and others' current balance of Feminine and Masculine more clearly, particularly how these function out-of-awareness at different levels of the unconscious;
- You want to know what unique balance of Feminine and Masculine will help you both be truer to yourself and more effective as a leader in the world;
- You want to create a personal balance of Feminine and Masculine that will release and support the leader and person you naturally are and want to be.

Yes, this is a serious book about a serious subjects - leadership, personal integrity and a joyous life. But it is also a funny book: irreverent, profane and down home. It will use the foibles of my 66 years on this earth to illustrate one person's bumpy journey to a healthier integration of his Feminine and Masculine. There'll be no "teacher" here, just another stumbling learner who's spent a whole lot of time on the road and has stories to tell about it. Actually, I'm not a writer but a talker. Talking is by far my easiest and most natural medium. I've told these stories orally for forty-plus years in workshops, seminars, retreats and almost any other format you can think of. Long-time friends have been after me to put them in written form, and I've finally succumbed. Don't look for exquisite prose or literary prowess here. We're going to be earthy, occasionally raunchy (reality often is) and lighthearted. We're here to make our lives delightful and amplify that joy to the world through our leadership. If you're looking for a put-your-nose-to-the-grindstone-and-shape-up-your-life-and-leadership book, this is definitely not the one for you. But if you've got a sense of humor about yourself and the world, if you know you've got a contribution to make through your leadership, and if you want to have a lot of fun while you're making that contribution, you're in the right place.