

# LISTEN LEADER

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1.

## Low Ceiling

In different parts of the world, each of our teams were threatening to walk out on us. While the people working with us believed in our mission and in us, we were not getting leadership right, and there were problems. Luckily, the individuals on our teams cared enough to be in our faces, demanding we make changes in how we were leading things, and if we didn't, we could end up losing everything. This was jarring enough for us to learn the hard way how to be real leaders, leaders that people *want* to follow.

The authors of this book didn't meet each other until over a decade later. Our chance encounter showed us how the roads we'd walked, and those we'd nearly walked away from, were shockingly similar. From our synchronistic meeting, we learned how to be better human beings by connecting with some of the best mentors in the world. Through that we've learned how to guide as exceptional leaders.

The symbol of the top of a hill will always be our reference point. When we met, each of us thought we were at the top of the hill in our own work. The fact was that we were at the top, but it was the wrong hill. When we met, we were attending a leadership retreat in India, and somehow, we both ended up with the wrong directions for the event that night. Consequently, we were separated from our group and ended up at the top of a moderate complexity climb (the top of a hill), while our colleagues were on the rooftop of our luxury hotel watching the sunset.

We were lost. It was nighttime, and it was quickly getting cold. We were green tourists in a country where our hotel manager had warned us to never be out after dark alone, especially as women. Even though we had not found reasons to talk to each other in the first couple of days on the ground, all we had at the top of that hill was each other. This "accidental meeting" was actually a gift, because we have since become great friends and leadership partners. When we first met, however, we didn't see eye to eye at all.

There in the dark, we had a decision to make—and fast. Were we going to let our egos and ingrained competitiveness get in the way of a joint-effort rescue? Or would we practice the leadership skills we were already learning about at the retreat, and work together to get back to our group safely? In that moment, it was no longer about dominance or judgment, it was about connecting so we could find our way down.

We looked at each other and said, “There must be a reason this is happening,” and began walking down the hill towards the dark village. On the way, we encountered fire ceremonies and groups of men in prayer. They invited us into a temple lit up with tiny clay dishes of burning coconut oil, then handed us plastic cups full of sweet hot chai. The rooms were filled with smokey incense and the men were singing. It was such a relief, to find the comfort and warmth of being with compassionate people.

What were the lessons of that first meeting and the years that followed? We have since gained a deeper realization and understanding of the transformation true leadership can bring, as well as how important it is to get it right. We had endured healthy and unhealthy conflicts, fears, and transparency, and at the end of the day, we both felt heard. There was a safe space for us to disagree, find creative solutions, and find a deeper, stronger truth. After working with rockstars, finance wizards, healthcare systems, Fortune level CEOs, and startups for the past 20+ years, we’ve come to realize what everyone wants and how to get it.

At the core it’s about knowing our own why and being leaders that people *want* to follow. We want you to be self-aware leaders too. Being a leader means making choices and interacting with people in ways that let us sleep peacefully and fulfilled at night. We all want to be happy in our relationships, have positive impacts, and evolve in our organizations. We all want to be successful in every facet of our lives. In order to do this as leaders, we must reflect trust, inclusion, full presence, and the ability to make decisions. Leaders need to ask for help when they need it, and inspire and guide not just their colleagues, teams, and families—but also themselves.

This book contains the answers we’ve learned from deep truth and understanding as leaders. It’s everything we’ve learned through our differences, failures, and corrections. We now have concrete knowledge of what absolutely works and what can propel you into the future, right now. Your authors had to let go of what we’d been taught about “how to be bosses” versus pursuing elevated, open leadership. There we began to learn about inclusion, optimized lifecycle, and culture, as well as how to obtain joyful relationships in our lives.

In this book you will learn about eight simple practices, that which we call The Eight Tenets of Exquisite Leaders. It is our passion to improve the lives of people who are leaders at every level all over the world. When we talk about every level, we are talking about people in old corporations learning new ways, start-up founders with purpose aligned with profit, and people of every culture, gender, identity, age, and belief system. This is for every person who aspires towards leadership. We unleash the keys to

equality and being truly present, and not just through affirmative action, but through right action and an understanding of real belonging.