

J JOSSEY-BASS

True North

**Discover Your
Authentic Leadership**

Bill George
With Peter Sims
Foreword by David Gergen



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

True North

Warren Bennis

A WARREN BENNIS BOOK

This collection of books is devoted exclusively to new and exemplary contributions to management thought and practice. The books in this series are addressed to thoughtful leaders, executives, and managers of all organizations who are struggling with and committed to responsible change. My hope and goal is to spark new intellectual capital by sharing ideas positioned at an angle to conventional thought—in short, to publish books that disturb the present in the service of a better future.

BOOKS IN THE WARREN BENNIS SIGNATURE SERIES

Branden	<i>Self-Esteem at Work</i>
Mitroff, Denton	<i>A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America</i>
Schein	<i>The Corporate Culture Survival Guide</i>
Sample	<i>The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership</i>
Lawrence, Nohria	<i>Driven</i>
Cloke, Goldsmith	<i>The End of Management and the Rise of Organizational Democracy</i>
Glen	<i>Leading Geeks</i>
Cloke, Goldsmith	<i>The Art of Waking People Up</i>
George	<i>Authentic Leadership</i>
Kohlrieser	<i>Hostage at the Table</i>
Rhode	<i>Moral Leadership</i>

J JOSSEY-BASS

True North

**Discover Your
Authentic Leadership**

Bill George
With Peter Sims
Foreword by David Gergen



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Copyright © 2007 by Bill George. All rights reserved.

Published by Jossey-Bass

A Wiley Imprint

989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741—www.josseybass.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-8400, fax 978-646-8600, or on the Web at www.copyright.com. Requests to the publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, 201-748-6011, fax 201-748-6008, or online at www.wiley.com/go/permissions.

Readers should be aware that Internet Web sites offered as citations and/or sources for further information may have changed or disappeared between the time this was written and when it is read.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Jossey-Bass books and products are available through most bookstores. To contact Jossey-Bass directly call our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at 800-956-7739, outside the U.S. at 317-572-3986, or fax 317-572-4002.

Jossey-Bass also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic books.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

George, Bill (William W.)

True North : discover your authentic leadership / Bill George with Peter Sims ;
foreword by David Gergen. — 1st. ed.

p. cm. — (Warren Bennis series)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7879-8751-0 (cloth)

1. Leadership. 2. Organizational effectiveness. I. Sims, Peter. II. Title.

HD57.7.G4582 2007

658.4'092—dc22

2006100386

Printed in the United States of America

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
The Authors	xi
Editor's Note	xiii
by Warren Bennis	
Foreword	xvii
by David Gergen	
Introduction: True North	xxiii
Part One: Leadership Is a Journey	1
1. The Journey to Authentic Leadership	3
2. Why Leaders Lose Their Way	27
3. Transformation From "I" to "We"	43
Part Two: Discover Your Authentic Leadership	65
4. Knowing Your Authentic Self	67
5. Practicing Your Values and Principles	85
6. What Motivates You to Be a Leader?	103
7. Building Your Support Team	117
8. Staying Grounded: Integrating Your Life	133

Part Three: Empowering People to Lead	151
9. Leadership with Purpose and Passion	153
10. Empowering People to Lead	169
11. Honing Your Leadership Effectiveness	185
Epilogue: The Fulfillment of Leadership	201
Appendixes	
A Research Study on Development of Authentic Leaders	205
B Authentic Leaders Interviewed for <i>True North</i>	209
C Leadership Exercises for Each Chapter	219
References	241
Index	247

Acknowledgments

True North is the result of collaboration with my coauthor, Peter Sims, and my colleagues at Harvard Business School, Diana Mayer and Andrew McLean. They have been tireless in their dedication to exploring with me how people develop as authentic leaders, to interviewing these leaders, and to assessing their inputs. Peter, in particular, has proven to be a true collaborator; he has provided exceptional understanding of the next generation of authentic leaders and of the meaning and impact of authentic leadership. Diana did a superb job in interviewing leaders across the United States and sharpening our thinking. Andrew led the research methodology, keeping our team on track with proper protocols and knowledge of other leadership research studies. We also received very valuable insights and guidance throughout the entire process from Warren Bennis, our executive editor, as well as from Susan Williams and Byron Schneider at Jossey-Bass.

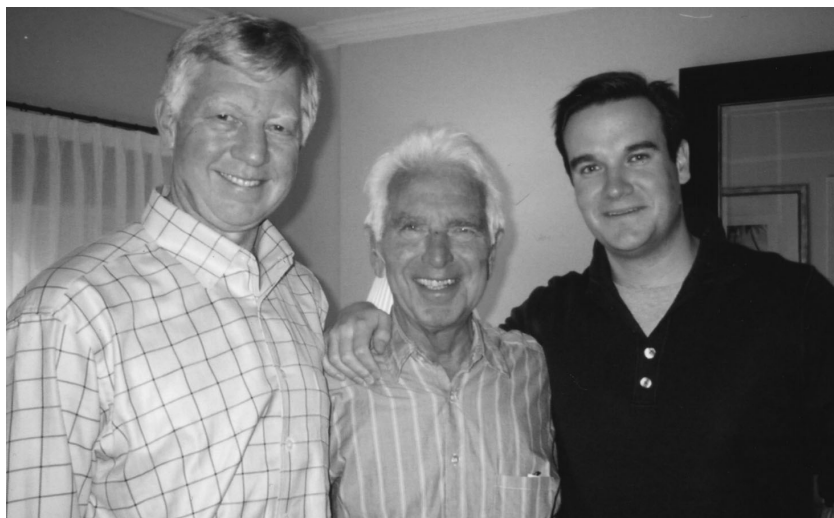
We are especially grateful to the 125 leaders who offered their personal stories and their perspectives on leadership during the interviews, and their willingness to share with the current and future generations of authentic leaders and all those who want to understand leading from the leader's inside point of view. Without their openness, this book would never have been possible.

During the editing process, John S. Rosenberg, Jean Martin, Jeff George, Penny George, Grace Kahng, David Gergen, Carolina Helmick, Doug Baker, Chi Nguyen, and Matt Breitfelder were especially insightful in sharpening the text and the writing. Richard Sheppard did outstanding work on the graphic designs. We also

appreciate the inputs of Bill Buzenberg, Charlie Dimmler, Paula Goldman, Daisy Wademan, Ryan Frederick, Ron Sonntag, Michal Petrzela, Matt Cain, Bryan Droznes, Kathleen Kelly, Jeannette Lager, Renée Will George, Jon George, Christopher Gergen, Daniel Salvadori, Julian Flannery, Scott Starr, Fawzi Jumeau, Ori Brafman, and Gigi Sims. Special thanks go to Carol Mierau, my assistant at Medtronic, and Kathy Farren, my assistant at Harvard, for all their efforts on the book and research project. My colleagues at Harvard—Nitin Nohria, Jay Lorsch, David Gergen, Joe Badaracco, Lynn Paine, Srikant Datar, Ronnie Heifitz, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Howard Stevenson, Joe Bower, Scott Snook, the members of the Leadership and Corporate Accountability teaching group—and my MBA students at Harvard have been especially helpful to me in my understanding of leadership and in support of my efforts, as have Peter's colleagues at Stanford, Charles O'Reilly, Joel Peterson, and Beth Benjamin.

None of this would have been possible without the unwavering support, encouragement, insights, and patience of my wife, Penny, from whom I have learned so much about people and leading them.

To all of you, Peter and I are deeply grateful.



Bill George, Warren Bennis, and Peter Sims

The Authors

Bill George was chief executive of Medtronic, the world's leading medical technology company, from 1991 until 2001 and chairman of the board from 1996 to 2002. Under his leadership, Medtronic's market capitalization grew from \$1.1 billion to \$60 billion, averaging 35 percent a year. Currently, he is professor of management practice at Harvard Business School and serves on the board of directors of ExxonMobil, Goldman Sachs, and Novartis. He has also served on the board of Target Corporation.

He is the author of the best-selling book *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets of Creating Lasting Value* (Jossey-Bass, 2003). He has made frequent appearances on television and radio, including *The Today Show*, *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*, CNBC, *Bloomberg News*, and public radio. His articles have appeared in *Fortune*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Harvard Business Review*, and numerous other publications.

He has been named one of the "Top 25 Business Leaders of the Past 25 Years" by PBS, "Executive of the Year—2001" by the Academy of Management, and "Director of the Year—2001–02" by the National Association of Corporate Directors. He is currently a trustee of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and World Economic Forum USA and has been board chair of Allina Health System, Abbott-Northwestern Hospital, Greater Twin Cities United Way, and Advamed.

Earlier in his career, he was an executive with Honeywell and Litton Industries and served in the U.S. Department of Defense. He has been executive-in-residence at Yale School of Management.

He received his BS in industrial engineering from Georgia Tech and MBA from Harvard University, where he was a Baker Scholar, and an honorary doctorate from Bryant University.

Peter Sims helped found the London office of Summit Partners, a leading global investment firm, and established “Leadership Perspectives,” a course at the Stanford Graduate School of Business while he was a student there. He also served previously as part of the Deloitte Touche Tomatsu Global Strategy Team.

Sims has served as a member of the President’s Visiting Committee at Bowdoin College and on the board of directors of Summer Search. He received his MBA from Stanford and an AB, *magna cum laude*, from Bowdoin. He lives in San Francisco.

Editor's Note

As the world becomes ever more dangerous and our problems more complex and dire, we long for truly distinguished leaders, men and women who deserve our respect and loyalty. Instead, we have suffered far too much bad leadership in recent years. The business media have exposed one scandal after another—criminally greedy CEOs, boards that do little more than rubber-stamp executive whims, companies willing to trade customers' lives for profits, and corrupt and partisan political leaders. Too many of our so-called leaders have functioned best as subjects of the brand of satire perfected on television by Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert.

But Bill George and Peter Sims's *True North* is about a very different kind of leader, the kind that we can be proud to follow. In this ambitious and important book, one of America's most respected corporate leaders and his talented younger collaborator show that ethically grounded leadership is not only possible, it is often the most effective leadership of all. It is an optimistic message that falls on grateful ears.

To write their guide to authentic leadership, George and Sims interviewed 125 leaders in many arenas. The authors chose men and women whose leadership appeared to be grounded in their character. The subjects range in age from twenty-three to ninety-three and have distinguished themselves in corporate life, as entrepreneurs, as social innovators, in political life, and in the study of leadership itself. Some, like statesman and former Bechtel head George Shultz, have contributed in many fields. Some, like Starbucks founder Howard Schultz and educator and frequent political

commentator David Gergen, are household names. Others are less well known but have quietly made important contributions to our lives, including young Wendy Kopp, founder of Teach For America. Financial entrepreneur Charles Schwab, Avon CEO Andrea Jung, Amgen head Kevin Sharer, philosopher of design David Kelley, Judy Vredenburg of Big Brothers, Big Sisters—all the leaders who appear in *True North* offer firsthand insights into the nature of authentic leadership and the way to develop it.

One of the revelations of *True North* is how critical these leaders' personal stories are in shaping their leadership. Time after time, those interviewed describe a turning point in their lives—a crucible, I call it—that transformed them into the leaders they are today. These tales of how they became the people they are reveal their most deeply held values, their most passionate beliefs. Howard Schultz recalls how, as a child of seven, he was forever changed by the news that his delivery-man father had slipped on a sheet of ice and broken his ankle. The accident lost Schultz's father his job and the family its health insurance and economic security. That experience led Schultz to create a global business, one built not on lattes and frappuccinos but on the conviction that every worker deserves respect and health care.

"Those early memories are with me all the time," Schultz tells the authors. "I wanted to build the kind of company my father never had a chance to work for, where you would be valued and respected, no matter where you came from, the color of your skin, or your level of education. Memories of my father's lost health care led to Starbucks' becoming the first American company to provide health insurance for every employee, including part-time workers."

Such autobiographical stories continue to inspire the leaders who lived them, keeping their moral compasses pointed toward True North. The tales are inspiring for readers as well and marvelous to read. Novartis Chairman and CEO Daniel Vasella's story is a saga of Dickensian proportions. It begins with the Swiss-born Vasella's achingly lonely childhood, filled with physical pain and

emotional loss. At the age of eight, he was struck with tuberculosis and meningitis. He was sent away to recuperate for a year—a year in which his parents never visited him. As a teenager, he joined a rowdy motorcycle gang that drank too much and fought too quickly. But Vasella and the other leaders of *True North* are not defeated by their struggles and setbacks. Instead, they learn from them and find their futures in them.

In his gang, Vasella recognized his own ambition and began to fashion a career in which he had more control. He went to medical school and later rose to the top of one of the world's leading health care companies. Today his leadership is grounded in his personal knowledge of poverty and ill health. "As CEO," Vasella told the authors, "I have the leverage to impact the lives of many more people. I can do what is right, based on my moral compass. At the end of the day, the only thing that matters is what we do for other people."

There are more than one hundred such stories in this fascinating, important book. Some are funny, some are cautionary, all are compelling. After a friend of mine read *True North* before publication, he noted how different it is from most business books. Instead of simply telling readers how to get ahead, *True North* offers a practical five-part program for developing their best selves and shows how authenticity and integrity shape great leadership. My friend wants to give the book to his children to read.

As CEO of medical-device giant Medtronic, Bill George was known as much for his integrity as for his business success. Now on the faculty of the Harvard Business School, he (with coauthor Peter Sims) has written a worthy successor to his best-selling *Authentic Leadership*. Building on that book's wisdom, *True North* goes even further, revealing just how powerful authentic leadership can be—and, best of all, how to achieve it.

Warren Bennis
Santa Monica, California
October 2006

*This book is dedicated to my wife, Penny,
my faithful partner for the past thirty-seven years,
who has helped me stay on course to True North, and
to our sons, Jeff and Jon, and our daughters-in-law, Renée and Jeannette,
who represent the best of the new generation of authentic leaders.*

Foreword

Growing up in the shadow of a great university, I always believed that the smartest person made the best leader. That was only natural in an academic family where my dad was a professor of mathematics and two of my older brothers became professors of medicine and psychology. Our family and friends placed great store in intellectual achievement, so I just assumed that smart people were the best at most things, including leadership. Boy, did I have some things to learn.

Moving to Washington in my late twenties, I began my education in the real world in earnest. Over a period of some three decades, I had the privilege of serving as an adviser to four presidents in the White House and working alongside leaders in government, the press, business, and other fields. Many of them were outstanding individuals, and I shall always cherish their friendships. They also taught me a lot about leadership. Yes, there is no substitute for ability: to lead others, you must know what you are doing, have deep curiosity, and develop keen judgment. Competence counts. But what ultimately distinguishes the great leaders from the mediocre are the personal, inner qualities—qualities that are hard to define but are essential for success, qualities that each of us must develop for ourselves, and qualities that are explored here in these pages with great clarity and insight by one of America's most authentic leaders, Bill George. This is a gem of a book that will guide you on your own journey.

To illustrate the importance of you embracing your own True North, let me tell you a bit more about what I discovered along the

way. In the early 1970s, coming out of law school and then the navy, I went to work for Richard Nixon and stayed in his White House for three and a half years, ultimately running his speech-writing and research team. My mentor, Ray Price, helped me to understand that Nixon was one of the most complex men to reach the presidency. He had a bright, luminous side that to this day has me convinced he was one of the best strategists the country has ever elected. Nixon could figuratively go up on a mountaintop and see twenty or thirty years into the future and then decide how the forces of history should be nudged to favor America's national security. Thus his trip to China and a good many other initiatives. If that were all there was to Nixon, he would have become one of our better presidents.

Tragically, Nixon also had another side that was dark, bitter, and twisted. The longer one worked with him, the clearer it became that he had inner demons that he had never conquered and perhaps never understood. But the resentments and furies that poured forth caused no end of harm: he set up teams inside the White House to pursue his enemies in national security, real and perceived, and those teams eventually focused their efforts on electoral politics. The crimes that were committed in his name inevitably seeped into the public arena, and eventually the whole enterprise collapsed. He became the architect of his own demise—a prime example of a man who had all the makings for the presidency but failed because he never developed what it took inside himself.

In the years that followed, I worked for Jerry Ford and then Ronald Reagan in the White House. Neither had any pretenses of being as smart as Nixon, but each one turned out to be a better leader, especially Reagan. Ford knew exactly who he was, understood his weaknesses as well as his strengths, and—because he was so well anchored—was comfortable in appointing people he thought smarter than he was to the cabinet. Within the brief time of his presidency, he assembled one of the best cabinets in modern times. While he stumbled more than once, he looks better and bet-

ter through the rearview mirror—a man of integrity who brought honor to the White House and healing to the country.

Reagan, like Ford, had figured out who he was and liked it. He didn't just feel comfortable in his own skin; he felt serene. Reagan not only had a compass for his life but a compass for his political beliefs, and he communicated both with a contagious optimism that stirred people across the land. Whether or not one agreed with his policies, it is pretty clear that he was the best leader in the White House since Franklin Roosevelt. Reagan didn't pretend to be the smartest man to serve, but he was smart enough. Ultimately, however, a key to his success was how closely he fit the description that Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. once applied to FDR: "A second class mind but a first class temperament."

Dial forward for a moment to Bill Clinton, the fourth president I've been privileged to serve. Most Americans now recognize that Clinton is truly gifted: he has mental and verbal capacities that far exceed almost everyone else on the public stage today. More than once, I had the same experience with him in the Oval Office as others: during an engaged conversation with three or four people, he could simultaneously be talking back and forth while also quietly filling out a *New York Times* crossword puzzle. More impressive, he sought out information and perspectives across the spectrum—not just his partisans but many others, especially those who traditionally lack a seat at the tables of power such as blacks, Hispanics, and women. He had what I have called "360-degree leadership"—an increasingly important quality for every leader in today's complex world—and it enormously enhanced his judgment. In the end, he made some excellent policy choices.

Yet, as the country knows in excruciating detail, Clinton also had cracks in his character that came to haunt him. From what I saw he was working hard to repair those cracks and didn't quite make it; I always felt that if he had come to the presidency a few years later in life, he would have been a more integrated, whole person whose arc would have been higher. In *Eyewitness to Power*, a book I published in 2000 (and in terms that show how closely my

own views of leadership are aligned with those of Bill George), I wrote sympathetically,

Instead of a struggle between light and dark [as with Nixon], my sense is that Clinton's central problem has been the lack of an inner compass. He has 360-degree vision but no true north. He isn't yet fully grounded within. . . . [He] isn't exactly sure who he is yet and tries to define himself by how well others like him. That leads him into all sorts of contradictions, and the view by others that he seems a constant mixture of strengths and weaknesses.

His critics, of course, have much harsher assessments. This is not the place to settle those arguments. What is clear to everyone is that Clinton had so much promise and that, mostly because of those cracks, his presidency fell achingly short of what might have been. Even as it was, I continue to believe that he was a better president than his critics will ever concede. In the years since leaving the White House, let us note, he has also become more authentic in the sense that Bill George means here—and as a result, he is doing great good deeds for mankind.

What does all this add up to? Simply this: ability matters to a president, but inner qualities matter even more. As historian David McCullough wrote in assessing the leadership of Harry Truman: “Character is the single most important asset of a president.” I would add this thought: that character without capacity usually means weakness in a leader, but capacity without character means danger.

Bill George and his talented younger collaborator in this book, Peter Sims, make a persuasive argument that the journey toward authentic leadership—that finding and pursuing your own True North—is the key to leadership in all fields, whether in business, government, or the nonprofit arena. I agree. Over the past decades, I have had the opportunity to observe and sometimes counsel leaders who have been in every walk of life, some young and some old, some women and some men. For all of them, the authenticity that Bill and Peter talk about here is essential to their success as leaders.

And certainly no one knows better than Bill, whose own life story is a model for others. He is now devoting much of his energy to teaching and helping rising young leaders, and I have watched with awe as he has talked to students at Harvard about authentic leadership and their eyes have lit up.

What he says here, drawn upon the life experiences of the 125 leaders he and Peter have interviewed, is just the sort of thoughtful, practical wisdom that every aspiring leader needs. They have written not only an important sequel to Bill's earlier, acclaimed book, *Authentic Leadership*; they have also written an invaluable guide to self-discovery that will serve generations to come. I wish you a good read—and a good journey.

David Gergen
Cambridge, Massachusetts
October 2006

Introduction

True North

What is *your* True North?

Do you know what your life and your leadership are all about, and when you are being true to yourself?

True North is the internal compass that guides you successfully through life. It represents who you are as a human being at your deepest level. It is your orienting point—your fixed point in a spinning world—that helps you stay on track as a leader. Your True North is based on what is most important to you, your most cherished values, your passions and motivations, the sources of satisfaction in your life.

Just as a compass points toward a magnetic pole, your True North pulls you toward the purpose of your leadership. When you follow your internal compass, your leadership will be authentic, and people will naturally want to associate with you. Although others may guide or influence you, your truth is derived from your life story, and only you can determine what it should be.

Discovering your True North takes a lifetime of commitment and learning. Each day, as you are tested in the world, you yearn to look at yourself in the mirror and respect the person you see and the life you have chosen to lead. Some days will be better than others, but as long as you are true to who you are, you can cope with the most difficult circumstances that life presents.

The world may have very different expectations for you and your leadership than you have for yourself. Regardless of whether you are leading a small team or are at the top of a powerful organization, you will be pressured by external forces to respond to their needs and seduced by rewards for fulfilling those needs. These pressures and

seductions may cause you to detour from your True North. When you get too far off course, your internal compass tells you that something is wrong and you need to reorient yourself. It requires courage and resolve to resist the constant pressures and expectations confronting you and to take corrective action when necessary.

Sara Lee CEO Brenda Barnes says: “The most important thing about leadership is your character and the values that guide your life.” She added,

If you are guided by an internal compass that represents your character and the values that guide your decisions, you’re going to be fine. Let your values guide your actions and don’t ever lose your internal compass, because everything isn’t black or white. There are a lot of gray areas in business.

When you are aligned with who you are, you find coherence between your life story and your leadership. As psychologist William James wrote a century ago, “I have often thought that the best way to define a man’s character is to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which . . . he felt himself most deeply and intensively active and alive. At such moments, there is a voice inside which speaks and says, ‘This is the real me.’”

Can you recall a time when you felt most intensely alive and could say with confidence, “*This is the real me*”? When you can, you are aligned with your True North and prepared to lead others authentically. Professionally, I had that feeling from the first time I walked into Medtronic in 1989 and joined a group of talented people dedicated to the mission to “alleviate pain, restore health, and extend life.” I felt I could be myself and be appreciated for who I was and what I could contribute. I sensed immediately that the organization’s values were aligned with my own.

The Leadership Crisis

An enormous vacuum in leadership exists today—in business, politics, government, education, religion, and nonprofit organizations. Yet there is no shortage of people with the capacity for leadership.

The problem is that we have a wrongheaded notion of what constitutes a leader, driven by an obsession with leaders at the top. That misguided standard often results in the wrong people attaining critical leadership roles.

There are leaders throughout organizations, just waiting for opportunities to lead. In too many organizations, however, people do not feel empowered to lead, nor are they rewarded for doing so. The purpose of *True North* is to enable you to discover your authentic leadership so that you can step up and lead while remaining true to who you are.

During my time as chairman and CEO of Medtronic in the 1990s, I witnessed firsthand many of the wrong people being chosen to run corporations. Under pressure from Wall Street to maximize short-term earnings, boards of directors frequently chose leaders for their charisma instead of their character, their style rather than their substance, and their image instead of their integrity.

When problems surfaced at Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Andersen, Tyco, and dozens of other companies, the severity of the leadership crisis became painfully apparent, creating a widespread erosion of trust in business leaders. This may surprise you, but I am not so concerned with people who broke the law, such as Jeff Skilling, Bernie Ebbers, Richard Scrushy, and Dennis Koslowski. Our legal system has proven quite effective in dealing with them.

What concerns me are the many powerful business leaders who bowed to stock market pressure in return for personal gain. They lost sight of their True North and put their companies at risk by focusing on the trappings and spoils of leadership instead of building their organizations for the long term. Many of those who failed walked away with enormous financial settlements.

The result was a severing of trust with employees, customers, and shareholders, as public trust in business leaders fell to its lowest level in fifty years. In business, trust is everything, because success depends upon customers' trust in products they buy, employees' trust in their leaders, investors' trust in those who invest for them, and the public's trust in capitalism.

Learning from Authentic Leaders

In large part the leadership vacuum has resulted from a misunderstanding of what constitutes an effective leader. During the past fifty years, leadership scholars have conducted more than one thousand studies in the attempt to determine the definitive leadership styles, characteristics, or personality traits of great leaders. None of these studies has produced a clear profile of the ideal leader. Thank goodness. If scholars had produced a cookie-cutter leadership style, people would be forever trying to emulate it. That alone would make them into personas, and others would see through them immediately.

The reality is that *no one can be authentic by trying to be like someone else*. There is no doubt you can learn from their experiences, but there is no way you can be successful trying to be *like* them. People trust you when you are genuine and authentic, not an imitation. As Dr. Reatha Clark King of General Mills said, “If you’re aiming to be like somebody else, you’re being a copycat because you think that’s what people want you to do. You’ll never be a star with that kind of thinking. But you might be a star—unreplicable—by following your passion.”

Amgen Chairman and CEO Kevin Sharer, who gained priceless experience working as Jack Welch’s assistant in the 1980s, saw the downside of GE’s cult of personality in those days. “Everyone wanted to be like Jack,” he explained. “Leadership has many voices. You need to be who you are, not try to emulate somebody else.”

Since turning over the reins of Medtronic to my successor in 2001, I have focused on this leadership crisis by helping develop the next generation of business leaders through teaching, mentoring, writing, and speaking. In 2003 I wrote *Authentic Leadership* to challenge the new generation of leaders—from new CEOs to young leaders just embarking on their careers—to lead authentically.

The feedback I received from readers of *Authentic Leadership*, including many CEOs, was that they had a tremendous desire to be authentic leaders. Many people asked: “How can I become an authentic leader?” Author Jim Collins raised a similar question in

Good to Great, asking, “Can you learn to become a Level 5 leader?” His conclusion: “I still don’t know the answer.”

With the assistance of coauthor Peter Sims and my colleagues Diana Mayer and Andrew McLean, I set out to get definitive answers to the question. We interviewed 125 authentic leaders to learn the secrets of their development as leaders. They were open and honest about how they developed their leadership and candidly shared their life stories, including their greatest personal struggles, failures, and triumphs. Many said they had never granted such a personal interview before. These interviews constitute the largest in-depth study ever undertaken about how business leaders develop.

The leaders we interviewed ranged in age from twenty-three to ninety-three, with no fewer than fifteen per decade. They were chosen based on their reputations for being authentic and our personal knowledge of them. We also solicited recommendations from other leaders and academics. After the interviews, we assessed each leader against the dimensions of authentic leadership described in this book.

Our interviewees are a diverse group of women and men from an array of racial, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds and nationalities. Among them are Dick Kovacevich of Wells Fargo, Andrea Jung of Avon Products, Chuck Schwab, founder of Charles Schwab & Co., and Narayana Murthy, founder of Infosys. Half of them are CEOs, and the other half includes a broad range of nonprofit leaders, midcareer leaders, and young leaders just starting on their journeys. (For more on our research methodology, see Appendix A. A complete list of the interviewees is shown in Appendix B.)

After interviewing these leaders, we believe we understand *why* academic studies have not produced the profile of an ideal leader. *Leaders are highly complex human beings, people who have distinctive qualities that cannot be sufficiently described by lists of traits or characteristics.* Leaders are defined by their unique life stories and the way they frame their stories to discover their passions and the purpose of their leadership.

Reading through three thousand pages of transcripts, our team was startled to see that these leaders did not identify any universal