

INTRODUCTION

LEADING INTO THE FUTURE

GUIDED BY
SCIENCE FICTION LEADERSHIP STORIES



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INTRODUCTION

*“There comes a point in your life when you need to stop reading
other people's books and write your own.”*

Albert Einstein

“Let's see what's out there.”

Captain Jean-Luc Picard, Star Trek: The Next Generation

1.1. Where Are The Great Leaders?

With so many books, frameworks, and training programs focused on leadership, it would be easy to assume the world is full of strong role models, highly engaged teams, and workplaces where people feel valued and aligned around a shared purpose. In reality, however, that vision has not yet been fully achieved, at least not consistently and not everywhere.

Let us begin with a brief review of recent data on employee engagement. Gallup's global research¹ offers several concerning insights. While the full report contains extensive information, I will highlight a few examples that illustrate the current state of leadership and its impact in organizations. See Figure 1.

- **United States:** 33% of employees are engaged, 50% are not engaged, and 16% are actively disengaged.
- **Germany:** 15% of employees are engaged, 68% are not engaged, 17% are actively disengaged.
- **France:** 7% of employees are engaged, 75% are not engaged, 18% are actively disengaged. (Yes, only 7% of French employees feel engaged at work.)
- **UK:** 10% of employees are engaged, 79% are not engaged, 11% are actively disengaged.
- **Japan:** 6% of employees are engaged, 70% are not engaged, 24% are actively disengaged. (Japan and Hong Kong report the lowest engagement levels globally.)
- **Global best—El Salvador and Uzbekistan:** 41% of employees are engaged, 49% are not engaged, 10% are actively disengaged.

¹ Gallup, *Global Indicator: Employee Engagement*, Gallup, 2023.

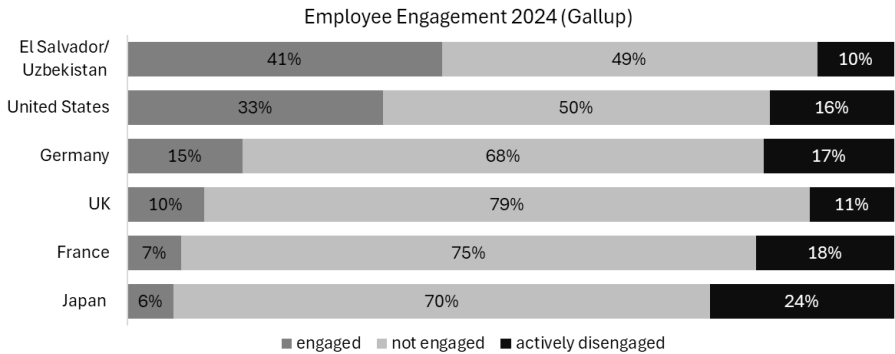


Figure 1: Global Employee Engagement Levels according to Gallup¹

These numbers are concerning already but Gallup also estimates that low employee engagement leads to global economic losses of up to 8.9 trillion US dollars, approximately 9% of global GDP.² That is not just a leadership challenge but a global economic crisis.

In a large meta-analysis, Gallup found that highly engaged businesses experience 78% lower absenteeism, 63% fewer safety incidents, 32% fewer quality defects, and 23% higher productivity.²

According to Gallup's research, 70% of the variation in engagement across teams can be attributed to a single factor: the manager.² This reinforces that better leadership is not optional. Instead, it suggests a significant, untapped potential that could transform organizations and economies alike.

Mark Miller in ***Uncommon Greatness*** calls this a "global leadership crisis." He writes, "A large number of leaders are not meeting the demands of the moment. As a result, they are jeopardizing the future of their organizations and the world."

He aligns with Gallup's conclusion that leadership is a critical factor in improving engagement, performance, and economic outcomes.

There are already many leadership books on the market. But the continued lack of engagement shows that there is still untapped potential and plenty of room to keep the conversation going.

² Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace: 2024 Report*, Gallup, 2024.

As you will learn throughout this book, even the best messages need to be shared more than once. Sometimes, they simply need to be told in a different way to sink in.

In the following section, I will share how this realization inspired me to create a different kind of leadership book, one that uses an unexpected lens to explore leadership principles.

1.2. Why This Book

That new lens turned out to be a combination of two lifelong passions: leadership and science fiction.

Leadership has always fascinated me. I see it as both a responsibility and a calling to become the best leader I can possibly be. I have always felt a deep motivation to strengthen my leadership skills by constantly learning, improving, and refining my approach.

Over the years, that motivation grew into something of an obsession. I have read (or listened to) hundreds of books on leadership, management, personal development, you name it. In addition to reading them, I took notes, built my own messy leadership notebook, and experimented with the ideas. Some concepts worked well for me when tested and became part of my style. Others, despite sounding great in theory, simply did not fit. But through all of it, I have grown.

Let me be clear. I do not claim to be the best leader, nor do I believe there is a single “perfect” way to lead. However, I have worked persistently on my own growth, because leadership matters to me and I want to do right by the people I lead. If you are reading this because you care about becoming a better leader too, then I believe I can offer something useful for your journey.

Writing a book has been on my lifetime achievement list for a long time. Not only because I love leadership and reading, but because I have learned so much from others and I would like to “pay it forward.”

With so many strong leadership books already available, my goal was to create something distinct. Some of my favorite books bring leadership lessons to life through storytelling. The masters of leadership storytelling

are Patrick Lencioni and Mark Miller, whose books I have read over and over again. But simply copying their style did not feel right.

Then, a different idea emerged. What if I combined my leadership obsession with my love for science fiction?

It felt like the perfect match. After all, my first leadership role model was not a CEO or a bestselling author. Instead, it was Captain Jean-Luc Picard from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. And just like that, the concept for this book was born.

In this book, I will use science fiction short stories to illustrate and explain leadership principles in a way that is engaging, unique, and hopefully memorable. I will focus on the leadership elements that I believe matter most. Every chapter will reference insights from great leaders, include stories from my personal work experience, and provide practical, meaningful advice for current and emerging leaders across all levels of an organization.

At first, the idea of blending leadership lessons with science fiction might seem a bit unusual. But the more I developed it, the more I realized that it creates some possibilities.

Projecting leadership principles into the future allowed me to imagine a world where technology removes some of the challenges that hold leaders back today. In this amplified setting, we can explore what leadership looks like when those obstacles no longer exist, making it easier to illustrate and more believable than in a traditional business context.

Science fiction, used as exaggeration, allows us to stretch leadership concepts to their limits. We can imagine the ideal and see how transformative great leadership can truly be. It encourages us to think bigger, beyond current limitations, and opens the door to new ways of leading.

Some of the futuristic technologies featured in these stories may appear far-fetched. Who knows? Perhaps they will one day serve as blueprints for real AI- and technology-supported leadership tools. Other elements may be much closer to reality than they seem, reflecting trends and shifts that are already beginning to shape today's workplace.

For me, this approach became a powerful way to explore leadership principles. Rather than starting with problems, I began with possibilities. I built an ideal world, then brought the discussion back to our own reality by asking: How can we achieve something similar, even without advanced science fiction technology?

The answer, I believe, lies in great leadership.

I could not find another book that combines leadership insights with science-fiction storytelling. Maybe there's a group of leaders out there who, like me, also happen to be science-fiction fans. If that includes you, I hope this book feels like it was written with you in mind. Welcome aboard.

But if science fiction is not your favorite genre, that is also perfectly fine. There is no previous knowledge needed to gain something from this book. Just bring your curiosity and an open mind. Together, we will explore leadership from a new perspective.

1.3. How To Use The Book

Each chapter is dedicated to one element of leadership. We will explore Purpose and Vision, Clarity, Communication, Trust and Respect, Recognition, Empowerment, People Development, and Cohesive Teams.

While each chapter highlights a specific concept, leadership is never one-dimensional. The themes are closely connected, and you will see natural linkages and references across chapters, even if they are less prominent than the main focus. Especially within the stories, leadership concepts inevitably overlap and cannot be viewed in isolation.

I recommend reading the chapters in order, as the structure is designed to build logically and progressively. After that, feel free to return to any chapter whenever needed, whether to revisit a story, reflect on a concept, or apply the action items.

All chapters follow the exact same structure. Let me explain what you can expect from each section.

Quotes

Like many leadership books, each chapter in this one begins with a quote or two. While that may not be the most original approach, I have always appreciated how a well-chosen quote can set the tone or prompt reflection.

You will find a mix of insights from some of my favorite leadership thinkers. And yes, there are also several from Captain Jean-Luc Picard.

Feel free to turn it into a small challenge: Is the quote from Lencioni or Picard?

I hope these selections will spark your curiosity and set the stage for what each chapter has to offer.

The Story

Before we dive into the theory, each chapter introduces its leadership theme through a science fiction short story that brings it to life. Some stories lean fully into science fiction, while others are simply set in futuristic work environments. I hope you enjoy the variety.

My goal was to create narratives with real tension and a meaningful storyline. That said, the leadership lesson remains the central focus of each story. If the stories feel heavy on leadership concepts, then that is entirely intentional. For anyone seeking a fast-paced space opera, I recommend John Scalzi's *The Collapsing Empire*.

This book is not a full-length science fiction novel. It is a leadership book that uses science fiction to unlock imagination and insight.

From Story To Practice

Following each story, the chapter transitions into its nonfiction part, with this section serving as the bridge between fiction and practical insight. It explores the core leadership concepts illustrated in the story and asks the essential question: What can we learn from this and how does it apply to the real world?

What We Know from Literature

In this section, I highlight insights from some of the most impactful leadership books I have read. These sources provide context, depth, and a broader perspective on the topic at hand. If you prefer to focus on the stories and practical applications, you may choose to skim or skip this section and continue directly to the next part of the chapter.

The Reality Today

Here I share relevant data about where we stand and connect the topic to real-world challenges I have encountered throughout my career. It includes personal experiences, patterns I have observed across organizations, and a few persistent issues that have frustrated me over the years.

Bridging the Gap

We continue with practical ways to address the challenges discussed earlier. I draw from my own experience as well as from approaches I have seen succeed in other teams and organizations. Unlike many leadership books that assume you can transform an entire company, the guidance here is grounded in realism. Whether you are an experienced manager, a team lead, or an emerging leader without formal authority, the ideas are designed to be actionable within your circle of influence regardless of your position on the org chart.

Time for Action and Main Takeaway

By this point, I hope the chapter has inspired you to take action. This section offers a practical step-by-step guide that you can apply in the coming weeks. These steps are designed to be realistic, focused, and immediately useful in your day-to-day leadership practice wherever you are on your leadership journey.

Finally, I have tried to condense the essence of each chapter into a main takeaway to be used as reminder for each topic.

I hope you find this book both enjoyable and useful. If it helps you adopt even a few new leadership practices that strengthen your impact, then it has served its purpose.

1.4. How I Used AI

Given the ongoing debate around AI in creative work, I would like to take a moment to explain how I used it and where I did not.

Every story, argument, and piece of advice in this book is rooted in my own experiences, observations, and beliefs. I used AI tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini at different stages of writing: from brainstorming and organizing my thoughts, to editing drafts, to experimenting with cover designs. Most importantly, AI supported me in refining language and finding the right tone, especially since I am not writing in my native language.

I am sharing this because I believe that the future of leadership, like the future of writing, will be shaped by how we use technology, with intention and transparency. And because you deserve to know how this book was created.

This book was written by a human. Me. And I had support.