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~ Matthew Kelly, New York Times bestselling author of *The Dream Manager* and *Off Balance*



PEOPLE-FIRST LEADERSHIP™ SERIES

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# Ignite!

The 4 Essential Rules  
for Emerging Leaders

**SAL SILVESTER**

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# “Ignite!” Book Excerpt

The 4 Essential Rules for Emerging  
Leaders

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## Igniting the Potential of Emerging Leaders

Here is what I know about you: I'll bet you are smart and successful, maybe even a rising star in your organization. You're considered the go-to person on your team. You're so good at your job—as an engineer, financial analyst, customer-service representative, software developer, nurse, sales representative—that people are taking notice, and something is about to rock your world.

*You are about to get promoted.*

The problem is, if you are like many other new or recently promoted managers, you feel thoroughly unprepared and out of your element. Perhaps even a bit scared.

And with good reason. Like so many who have greatness thrust upon them, this is all new and unfamiliar to you. How you handle the often-rocky transition to managing people will affect not only your future, but also that of your company. As a front-line leader, your actions have a direct impact on your team members' level of engagement, productivity, job satisfaction, morale, and commitment, more so than any other factor in your organization.

According to the Gartner Group, people don't leave their organizations. They leave their managers. Suddenly...that's *you*.

Just thinking about what's at stake can be overwhelming—especially since in most organizations, new managers don't receive a bit of leadership training before being dispatched to the front lines.

We often hear that leadership is about charismatic people who inspire others through the force of their personality. Or that leadership is an innate set of characteristics magically bestowed upon the lucky ones at birth. Or that you have to join the Army and complete Special Forces training as a rite of passage into the discipline and godliness of leadership.

*None of that is true.* The essence of leadership is about employing key skills and behaviors on a consistent basis. The good news? These skills and behaviors can be learned. *Seriously.*

That's right, leadership can be learned. And guess what? *It's not too late.* You can learn these skills and become an effective and influential leader, starting today.

This book provides rising stars like you with a practical model that can be implemented immediately to help ignite your leadership potential. You'll learn the four essential rules to live by that will enable you to generate commitment from your team members.

**This book is not just for emerging leaders.** It's also for senior leaders to whom the emerging ones report, and who play a key role in developing the next generation of leaders. In the best organizations, they're busy coaching, teaching, and imparting the experiences that help promising candidates to develop and eventually take on more senior roles. That not only helps the organization deepen its bench strength, it

enables senior leaders to focus on more strategic roles as they relinquish some of the day-to-day challenges of running the business.

Good leadership isn't something you can memorize, like the multiplication tables. How then can you learn about and embody this allegedly mythical, magical set of qualities?

The best teaching tool I know of is the learning parable. It's a story about a fictional person with real-life business and leadership challenges that illustrates all the essential elements of what you're trying to learn. In the first part of this book, you'll meet Ben Turner, the main character in our learning parable. Ben is a technology expert in the Professional Services Department at BCO-Tek, a \$150 million software development company with more than one hundred employees based in Boulder, Colorado. Ben likes his job fine just the way it is, and greets the unexpected news of his promotion as he would a sudden case of the flu. But now, if Ben can't figure out how to get his team members moving in the same direction, not only will his career prospects diminish, his company will lose critical customers to the competition.

Although Ben is a fictional character, stories like his are playing out within large and small companies across the nation in increasing numbers—with potentially devastating effects on the bottom line as companies put their trust in newly emerging leaders who aren't quite ready for prime time. Ben's story illustrates the pitfalls and possibilities of leadership at every turn, but it is more than just a story. It incorporates for the first time the **People-First Leadership™** model as developed from my twenty-plus years of experience as an Army officer and an executive



at Accenture, and in the field on hundreds of client engagements as a management consultant at my company, 5.12 Solutions.

In the second section of this book, I outline a powerful and actionable four-point leadership model that will give you all the tools you need to elevate your effectiveness and gain the commitment of your people. I'll take you step by step through the four-part **People-First Leadership Model** illustrated by Ben's story so that you can understand and implement the key skills and behaviors required of *all* leaders, whether emerging or senior. This is the same model I use with my clients in person, and I want to share it with you.

People first.

**Sal Silvester**  
**January 2012**  
**Boulder, Colorado**

Part



## **Ben's Climb: A Leadership Story**



## The Same Old

At 9:07 a.m., the last person finally strolled into the conference room, but at BCO-Tek, this was normal. People counted on meetings never starting on time. The key was to arrive late enough not to have to wait too long for the others, but not so late as to be the last one in.

Ben Turner was the acknowledged master of the game of late-but-not-too-late. He had arrived at precisely four minutes past the hour. Despite his five-foot-nine stature, his technical knowledge and fast pace were intimidating. He loved to rock climb on weekends and hit the gym weekdays, but at work he was all business. As a result, Ben had developed a reputation as the go-to technical guy, and it wasn't uncommon for Stephanie, the VP of Professional Services, to solicit his advice. Even members of the executive team often consulted him.

BCO-Tek started out as a two-person software development shop in the garage of one of the founders. After struggling over what to call the company, they named it after their hometown of Boulder, Colorado. At first, they took on small web-based projects for local banks, but over time, they developed a product that helped financial institutions consolidate investment data

for their customers. In just ten years BCO-Tek had grown to over \$150 million in annual revenues and more than 150 employees. Its modern downtown office had sweeping views of the foothills to the west of Boulder, and its open design gave off a vibe of simple sophistication.

Professional Services was responsible for customizing and implementing client solutions. Along with Ben, his department consisted of Angela, Jen, Kevin, and John. Ben had been with BCO-Tek almost since its inception, and had several unspoken privileges that came with being the No. 9 person in the company; just having a rank within the Top 10 was its own status symbol.

Angela was the newest, youngest, and greenest member of the team. She had already been in the room since three minutes to nine when Ben waltzed in, which was how you could tell she was new. She had come straight from the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado, and the standard "on-boarding" process had done little to prepare her for the real culture at BCO-Tek—including being late-but-not-too-late—but she could barely contain her excitement over starting her first "real" job, and interacting with so many smart and interesting people. The possibilities for her at BCO-Tek seemed endless.

"Hey, Angela," said Ben. "What's the status on the conversion error issue?"

She had hopped up from her chair to bounce over to greet him, but halted mid-bounce at his right-down-to-business tone, and froze in confusion. "Oh, right," she said, her eyes darting away. "I didn't realize it was due this early. Heh, guess I should have had more coffee!" She shot back to her seat and quickly scribbled a Note to Self. She was relieved to see Kevin and Jen arrive.

Kevin was lanky with a light complexion and reddish-blond hair, and as a senior consultant was only a few years junior to Ben. He had been with the company almost four years and could figure out just about anything, from product code and back-end database to networking issues. He placed his iPad directly in front of him, taking an extra three seconds to make sure it was perfectly aligned with the edge of the conference table.

Jen had joined BCO-Tek two years earlier after finishing her graduate work in English literature. It was unusual that someone with an arts degree would end up in a technical role, but she was a natural, a stable team member who could always be counted on. She was reserved but consistent, and happiest when she could work with others to accomplish a task.

At seven minutes past the hour, the team manager walked in. John had been with BCO-Tek only ten months, after several years with one of the big consulting firms. He certainly knew how to run a project, yet relied heavily on Ben for a lot of the technical aspects. He always opened his meetings with a dose of small talk, followed by a quick informational update on whatever project was in play, but today was different. No small talk, no chitchat. "I have an announcement to make," he said, and Ben shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Folks, I'm leaving BCO-Tek," said John. "I'm giving my two weeks' notice as of today."

There was a brief, stunned silence.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," said Ben. "Are you just gonna slip out the back, Jack, make a new plan, Stan, without filling us in?"

The outburst was not unusual for Ben. He had never been shy about challenging almost anyone in the organization, especially in situations where he felt control slipping away.

"It's been great working with you guys, but this is a big opportunity for me," John began, but Ben interrupted.

"What about the Q-Bank project?" he said. "We're right in the middle of it." Q-Bank was a recently acquired client that had switched over to BCO-Tek's platform from a competitor's, and it was critical that the implementation go smoothly. Ben didn't doubt that John had his reasons for leaving, but it would mean that Ben's already heavy workload was about to get a lot worse. How would he meet the deadlines with a new team leader first getting acclimated?

"Nothing to worry about," said John. "I've already created a transition plan and gone over it with Stephanie."

Ben didn't find that as reassuring as John probably meant it to be.

"When Stephanie's back from her management offsite, she'll follow up with everyone," John continued. "Meanwhile, well, I just wanted to deliver the news personally."

Jen was the first to recover. "Congratulations, you!" she said.

"All the best in your new gig," echoed Kevin.

"Yeah, ditto," said Ben. "But seriously, about Q-Bank..."

"Relax," said John. "All in good time."

Ben was not relaxed. He was feeling a little ill. He did a quick deep-breathing exercise, but it didn't seem to help. Then he told himself they'd probably pull in someone from Engineering to act as team leader in the interim.

*Anyway, he thought, I'm sure Stephanie has it covered.*



# The People-First Leadership™ Model

## Overview

**People-First Leadership™** is both a set of principles that leaders can implement and a philosophy of leading. The principles were outlined in our parable at a high level by Stephanie, the vice president and Ben's boss, and are laid out in much more detail in this section of the book. This philosophy is one that I developed over the span of my career as I noticed that successful organizations put their people first and, as a result, are able to create a sustainable competitive edge.

As you transition into your role as leader, you may be tempted to look for a "silver bullet" to make things easier. I believe that the answers are more practical and that you should focus on your people first by doing the following:

- Lead by Example
- Align Your Team
- Build Cohesion
- Engage and Cultivate



Focus on these four factors and you'll ignite your potential as a leader, along with the potential of the people who report to you.



For additional tools and templates on how to best implement each of the four factors, go to our website at <http://www.512solutions.com> and click on Free Resources.

Let's explore these four factors in greater detail.

## People-First Leadership Factor 1: Lead by Example

Have you ever respected any leaders whose words did not match their actions? Have you ever had respect for a leader who preached personal values, yet behaved differently?

The fundamental component of **People-First Leadership™** is to Lead by Example. This is the core component that will either establish your credibility or kill it. Just remember: *Lack of credibility will prevent you from earning commitment and trust from your team members.* Without that, there is no leadership.

To determine where you are as a person who Leads by Example, ask yourself the following question:

*Would you work for you?*

Think about it. Would you respect yourself based on the behaviors you exhibit today? Would you find yourself credible? Would you be committed to *you*?

Leading by Example has nothing to do with charisma, or with being a public hero. It is not dictated by the traits you were born with. It is simply about personal alignment.

**People-First Leaders™** generate commitment as they Lead by Example by focusing on the following actions:

- **They go first.** Leaders never ask others to do something they wouldn't do themselves.
- **They model the behaviors they want to see in others.** This might mean demonstrating your competency. Or like Ben Turner, coming in on a Saturday morning when you expect others to do likewise. You might even have to show up earlier and stay later, or be first to contribute before asking it of others. There are many ways to lead by example, and thousands of opportunities for it every day.

- **They are clear about their personal values, and act accordingly.** Our values aren't something we check at the door when we step into the workplace. They follow us around and exhibit themselves in subtle ways. They have an impact on our every behavior. When leaders aren't clear about their personal values, they tend to say one thing and act very differently.
- **They know themselves.** Effective leaders understand how their personal style affects the people around them—peers, team members, managers. They understand why they respond to others the way they do. **People-First** leaders have a deep sense of self-awareness and like to explore, challenge, and learn about themselves and their emotions.
- **They seek self-improvement.** There is no one destination in leadership development. Finishing a two-day course or a nine-month program doesn't mean you have arrived. Being an effective and impactful leader requires that you constantly develop and learn, always seeking self-improvement.

### **Mistakes Leaders Make**

There are two common and costly mistakes leaders make that can result in a loss of credibility and trust.

#### **MISTAKE 1: Getting caught up in the Popeye Syndrome—"I am what I am."**

The implied message here is: "I am the way I am and if you don't like it, who cares?" We saw Ben exhibit this behavior when he conducted his meetings without involving his team members, and when he resolved Angela's issues without asking for her input or engaging her in the problem-solving process.

The trouble with the Popeye Syndrome is that it's ineffective. It assumes that things don't change and circumstances don't change, and that all individuals need exactly the same things from their leaders. None of this is true. Leading by Example requires leaders to know who they are while being constantly in search of self-improvement. They also must have a keen sense of the individual needs of each team member.

**MISTAKE 2: Leading by e-mail (or by texting, project management tools, online chat, or other technology) instead of Leading by Example.**

Technology is a lovely thing. It makes your job and your life easier in hundreds of ways. However, it can also be used as a smokescreen to avoid difficult conversations, or to dispatch delicate communications bluntly. Leaders make this mistake when they provide feedback by e-mail, delegate by e-mail, and reset expectations by hitting the Send key...often with the team member sitting in the very next cubicle! In the story you read, this was Darryl's tendency as he found comfort in keeping difficult conversations at a digital distance. You might remember how he provided one of his people with a written warning via e-mail instead of in person, and you probably noticed his overreliance on "collaboration tools" to assign tasks and set expectations.

Leading by Example means being out there as a leader, getting in the mud with your people. It's about being visible and available by walking around each day, showing up at functions, being in the mix. If your team members work remotely, make sure you connect with them by phone every other day, and in person once per quarter. You can't go first or model the behaviors you want to see in others from behind a high-tech computer monitor.

**Tips for Making the Transition from Peer to Manager**

Making the transition from peer to manager can be challenging. The change of status and responsibility almost always affects both professional and personal relationships. In Ben's story, we saw the pitfalls inherent in two very different leadership styles.

Ben was dominant and overly concerned about losing control. Someone like Ben can Lead by Example by shifting from the behaviors in the left column to those on the right:

Ben's Old Behaviors	People-First Leadership Behaviors
Micromanaging tasks and people	Setting clear expectations, providing necessary support, following up at regular intervals
Communicating aggressively	Communicating assertively by being direct yet professional
Withholding knowledge and relevant information	Being transparent, communicating what is known and not known
Being overly focused on tasks and results	Recognizing and encouraging those who contribute to the results

Meanwhile, Darryl was timid and preoccupied with being accepted. New managers who struggle with similar issues can Lead by Example by shifting from the behaviors in the left column to those on the right:

Darryl's Old Behaviors	People-First Leadership Behaviors
Being vague about what he is requesting	Being assertive by providing direct and specific expectations
Adopting hands-off style for fear of imposing	Providing specific direction and proactively following up
Worrying about what his people will think of him	Focusing on what is right for the team and the business
Avoiding conflict and difficult conversations	Encouraging challenges to ideas, providing timely feedback, demanding excellence

As a new leader, you must understand that you will be called upon to do many things, and that leadership often requires a balance of what can seem like opposing characteristics. To effectively Lead by Example, a leader must balance courage with humility. Courage is defined as boldness or bravery, and when it comes to leadership this means having the boldness or bravery to do the right things—especially when the right things are difficult to do! It takes courage to go first, give people direct feedback, and conduct difficult discussions regarding performance. It takes courage to lead people through change, to deal with conflict head-on (instead of letting it simmer beneath the surface), and to share an opposing viewpoint in a meeting where everyone else is thinking alike.

Stephanie was a courageous leader. She dedicated a large portion of her time to coaching and supporting Ben and Darryl, and to handling difficult conversations with them head-on.

On the flip side, successful leaders must also be humble. Humility is defined as a lack of vanity or self-importance, and in reference to leadership it means setting aside individual ego and agendas to focus on team objectives. It means pushing problem-solving lower in the organization, giving up some control and decision-making, and empowering people to do their jobs. We saw Ben develop the characteristic of humility when he changed his leadership style to be more inclusive in meetings.

**The Results: When leaders lead by example, it results in credibility and trust.**

Credibility is when your people respect what you say and what you do, even when they disagree with your decision. They have faith in your competence and confidence in your capabilities.

Trust is when your people are able to rely on you. Have confidence in you. Respect your character.

Today, I challenge you to consider the following:

- Are you Leading by Example both personally and professionally?
- What do your actions say?

- What does your lack of action say?
- What do your words indicate?
- Are you asking others to do things you would not do first?
- Are you the first to step onto the field of battle and the last to leave?

For additional tools and templates on how to best implement the Lead by Example factor, go to our website at <http://www.512solutions.com> and click on Free Resources.

People-First Leadership Factor 1: Lead by Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Align your actions with your words.</li><li>• Go first. Never ask others to do what you wouldn't do.</li><li>• Credibility is the foundation of respect and trust; it is earned when actions are aligned with words.</li><li>• Walk around every day. Leading by e-mail is not Leading by Example.</li><li>• Get clear on your personal values and align them with team and organizational values.</li><li>• Communicate assertively, not aggressively or reluctantly. Balance courage with humility.</li></ul>

## About the Author



Sal Silvester is founder and president of **5.12 Solutions** (five-twelve), an organizational development company based in Boulder, Colorado. Senior leaders call on Sal and his team of talented facilitators to help them ignite the potential of their people, resulting in a highly engaged workforce, reduced turnover, and organizational ability to capitalize on business opportunities. Sal's unique perspective on team and leadership development comes from twenty years of experience as an Army officer and an



executive at Accenture, and in hundreds of client engagements through the company he founded, **5.12 Solutions**.

A graduate of the U.S. Army Ranger and Airborne schools, Sal is passionate about rock climbing, ice climbing, and mountaineering, and has traveled the United States and South America in pursuit of the ultimate climbing adventure. He has competed in six marathons and is an Ironman Triathlon finisher.

Sal's *People-First* electronic newsletter and Sal's Blog (<http://www.512solutions.com/Blog>) both focus on helping ignite the potential of leaders and generating team member commitment.

To learn more about Sal and 5.12 Solutions, visit <http://www.512solutions.com>.

## 5.12 Solutions

### About 5.12 Solutions



5.12 Solutions helps organizations ignite the potential of their people, enabling them to accelerate business results and become employers of choice. Learn more at <http://www.512solutions.com>.

**People-First Leadership™ Development Program:** Are your emerging leaders prepared for roles that will directly impact business results? This nine-month program is designed for people who are considered high potential and are potentially future senior leaders within your organization, and we know it will ignite their performance.

**The Senior Leadership Team Development Program™:** Is your management team struggling to achieve its highest level of effectiveness, and as a result missing out on opportunities? This 6–9 month program is designed for management teams that want to make a major shift in how they work together.

**The Team Acceleration Program™:** Are your teams struggling with communication breakdowns and unnecessary conflict, and as a result wasting precious time and energy? This 6–12 month program is designed for new and existing teams that want to make a significant shift in how they communicate and collaborate, enabling them to achieve the results they were meant to achieve.

## **Getting “Ignite!”**

<http://happyabout.com/ignite.php>)

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"I believe the time to change is now. *Ignite!* sets leaders on course to make a significant difference in themselves, their people, and their teams."

- Marshall Goldsmith, million-selling author of *New York Times* bestsellers *MOJO* and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*

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Meet Ben Turner. He's a rising star and the go-to guy on his team. Something big is about to rock his world—and possibly not for the best.

He's about to get promoted.

The problem is, Ben's unprepared. Out of his element. Even a bit scared. And with good reason, because his handling of the often-rocky transition to managing his former team will affect not only his future but his company's as well.

*Ignite!* begins with a learning parable that illustrates the pitfalls and possibilities of one man as he navigates the unfamiliar and challenging new territory of corporate leadership. But the book is more than just a story. Part II incorporates author Sal Silvester's People-First Leadership™ model that gives new leaders all the tools they need to elevate their effectiveness and ignite their potential.



Author Sal Silvester draws on years of experience as a veteran Army officer, former executive at Accenture, management consultant, and mountaineer to help emerging leaders ignite their own potential and that of the people they lead.

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