

# Introduction

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**As a leader you have a profound opportunity. As a result of your vision, perseverance and character, you can touch a life and make the world a better place.**

*– Brad McRae*

I invite you to try the following test. Test yourself first and then try it with your friends and colleagues. List 10 well-known Canadian recording artists, 10 well-known Canadian athletes, and 10 well-known Canadian leaders you admire. Time yourself or ask someone to time you. You have one minute for each list.

Whenever I try this test in my leadership classes, almost all of the people who take this test do a significantly better job of identifying Canadian recording artists and athletes than identifying Canadian leaders they admire. This reinforces my premise that Canadians under-recognize, under-acknowledge, and under-appreciate their home-grown leaders.

In this book we will learn the secrets of a cross-section of contemporary Canadian leaders. The people I profiled in the book had to meet six criteria. They had to make Canada and the world a better place and they had to have used their leadership skills to have done so. In addition, they had to have a proven track record and have come from diverse backgrounds in the private, public and volunteer sectors. By examining a diverse group of leaders, the universal principles underlying their ability to lead became clearer. Lastly, they had to have developed higher-order leadership skills and be able to use multiple skills simultaneously.

Every year there are thousands of articles and hundreds of books written on leadership. One of the most frequent questions I was asked by people who knew I was writing this book and from the publishers that I submitted the manuscript to was – “Why another book on leadership?”

This book differs from other leadership books in three significant ways. Most business books deal with leadership in the American context. Even though Canada and the United States look similar on the surface, there are major underlying differences in how we view ourselves and what we believe makes an ideal leader. The American leadership model is based on an individual’s accomplishments, while the Canadian model is both more collaborative and more inclusive. Secondly, Canada needs strong Canadian role models. The in-depth interviews with the contemporary Master Canadian Leaders highlight Canadian role models we can all learn from. Thirdly, the reader will learn how to become a more masterful leader by completing the assignments and exercises that are integrated into the book. The exercises and assignments are critically important because research has demonstrated that leadership is learned more than it is taught. Research from the Center of Creative Leadership states that 50% of what we learn about leadership is based on experience, 20% is based on mentoring, 20% on failure and hardship, and 10% from formal education.<sup>1</sup>

Doing the research for this book has convinced me that true leadership is about wisdom, character and seasoned judgment and that it cannot be taught. It can only be learned in a manner that is similar to good parenting. For example, I was a “perfect” parent – before I had children. However, my children have taught me more about life than I could ever have taught them. In the same way, the examples of the Master Leaders in this book will profoundly change

how you look at leadership in general and your own leadership competencies in particular.

I also began to realize that there were special or defining moments where the true strength of the leaders I profiled shone. As Winston Churchill said:

There comes a special moment in everyone's life, a moment for which that person was born. That special opportunity, when he seizes it, will fulfill his mission – a mission for which he is uniquely qualified. In that moment, he finds greatness. It is his finest hour.

In their book, *Leaders: The Strategies of Taking Charge*, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus state, “Leadership is like the abominable snowman, whose footprints are everywhere but who is nowhere to be seen.”<sup>2</sup> I disagree. Leadership is somewhere to be seen and one of the best places to see it is in Canada. The most effective lessons in leadership often come from great leaders themselves. This book provides you with the opportunity to study and learn about leadership from in-depth interviews including:

- Rick Hansen, who became Canada's abilities awareness leader for his work in promoting accessibility, employability and a sense of community for people with spinal cord injuries, in addition to becoming a master fundraiser by raising over \$178 million to help find a cure for spinal cord injuries. Rick is also the driving force in establishing the \$48 million International Collaboration on Repair Discoveries (iCORD), a new spinal cord facility in Vancouver;
- Annette Verschuren grew The Home Depot Canada from 19 Canadian stores to over 179. In 2006, Annette was chosen to head Home Depot operations in Asia, and is currently transforming Home Depot's operations in China;

- David Johnston, who as president of the University of Waterloo, continues to help transform the UW, its students and faculty, surrounding communities and the ancillary cutting-edge high-tech industries into one of the more formidable brain trusts in the world; and
- Cora Tsoufidou, who transformed Cora's Restaurants from a single diner in Montreal into a national, coast-to-coast chain of 92 restaurants. In addition, Cora's philanthropic goal is to make sure every Canadian child starts the day with a healthy and nutritious breakfast.

The Master Leaders I interviewed freely shared the wisdom they have painstakingly gathered. Their insights provide the basis for the leadership skills and strategies that are examined in this book. Through in-depth interviews, you will learn about the experiences and challenges these leaders faced, and how they have been able to transform their own lives and the lives of their organizations and communities.

Along with the focus on the development and practical application of leadership strategies and skills, this book contains specifically designed exercises; each one carefully constructed to help you develop and enhance your leadership skills and strategies. By actively involving yourself in these exercises, you will be able to see yourself improve.

However, for this to truly be a book about Master Leaders, we should start with a definition of mastery. For our purposes, "Mastery" is defined as the possession of consummate strategies and skills at the highest level of proficiency. As the following example illustrates.

Pamela Walsh became the President of the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1999. Like all public college systems, CNA was dependent on funding, but at that time, Newfoundland and Labrador's population was decreasing. A decreasing population meant fewer students and fewer students meant less revenue. Pamela's creative solution was, that if more students could not come to the college, the college would go to them.

Enter Qatar, a small, oil-rich nation in the Middle East that was looking for training in the fields of oil and gas, business and medical technology. The Qataris looked at programs in community colleges in the United States and Canada. In the end, they chose the college system in Canada because it was more closely aligned with their applied technological and business needs.

Once the Qataris had decided on the Canadian college model, the short list of competitors was narrowed down to four: the British Columbia Institute of Technology, the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, and the College of the North Atlantic. How could Pamela Walsh and the College of the North Atlantic compete against three of the best community colleges in the country?

Pamela rallied everyone, from clerical support staff to the vice-presidents, to become involved in trying to win the contract. She said, *“Even if we don’t win the contract, working together to try to win will be good for the college.”* One of the ideas that came out of a brainstorming session was to contact a seamstress in Portugal Cove, a small coastal community near St. John’s, and ask her to make a copy of the Qatari flag. The Qataris arrived in late May shortly after a major snow storm. The desert-living Qataris thought they had just landed at the North Pole – but a North Pole with the Qatari flag flying over it! When the Qataris were invited for tea, they remarked that Newfoundland was not that different from their home, except that at home the flag flew over sand and in Newfoundland it flew over snow. This was the start of Pamela Walsh’s and the college staff’s efforts to build a strong relationship with their Qatari counterparts, and the world famous hospitality of the Newfoundlanders did not go unnoticed.

The Qataris were also impressed that CNA had developed strategic relationships with industry and government, and had put into place an accountability framework, which included surveying recent graduates about their level of satisfaction with their education, the employment they had secured, and the remuneration they were receiving. The Qataris also wanted all of the programs

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**Winston Churchill**

that would be delivered in Qatar to be certified to North American standards. The problem with this request was that the agencies that certified the programs in North America had never certified international programs before. Pamela rightly said that she could not promise this, but that she would do everything in her power to make sure that the programs were certified.

In the end, the College of the North Atlantic won the contract to set up and deliver world class college-level training in Qatar. I asked Pamela Walsh about her reaction when she heard that the college had won the contract. She said that she was at the airport in Stephenville and everyone at the airport was excited because 10 of the staff in the college's head office had just won \$10 million in Lotto 6/49™. Pamela then received a telephone call telling her that CNA had won the contract to set up a campus in Doha, the capital of Qatar. Pamela let out a scream of delight. Everyone at the airport assumed that Pamela was one of the million dollar winners. Pamela was not one of the lottery winners, but she told me that she was happier than if she had won the lottery because winning the contract with Qatar afforded CNA an opportunity to grow by developing an international campus and CNA's staff now had an amazing opportunity to work abroad. Winning the contract also provided funding to put into place a state-of-the-art management information system both in Newfoundland and in Qatar. Lastly, winning this contract infused CNA with a sense of pride and a "can do" attitude.

Did CNA win the contract because of the flag? No. Did the flag help? Absolutely. Did the College of the North Atlantic win the contract because of Pamela Walsh's leadership, negotiating and presentation skills or her decision-making, opportunity-seeking, risk-taking and team-building skills? I would argue that Pamela Walsh and the College of the North Atlantic won this 10-year, \$500 million dollar contract because of a seamless convergence of all these skills.

In this example, Pamela Walsh, like all of the other Master Leaders I profile in this book, demonstrated proficiency and mastery, which are also known as higher-order skills. Incidentally, at the time of this writing, the contract is valued at over \$1.7 billion, and growing.

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## Higher-Order Skills

The concept of “higher-order skills” was developed by Francis Robinson. To explain this concept, Robinson used the analogy of learning to swim for pleasure versus preparing to swim in the Olympics. In the former, the person is learning “regular-order” swimming skills such as learning to swim and breathe at the same time. In the latter case, the person is developing “higher-order” swimming skills – that is, skills which are “based on scientific research”, in this case, on how to reduce the resistance of the body in the water and on how to obtain the most powerful forward push with the least effort.”<sup>3</sup>

Let’s assume that our swimmer will be competing in the 400-metre freestyle and that she has just been assigned a new Olympic-level coach. One of the first things her coach would do is perform a differential diagnosis. The coach would ask our athlete to swim the full length of the pool, using only her arms. The coach would then ask her to swim the same distance using only her legs to propel herself through the water. The coach would then ask our athlete to swim the length of the pool using both her arms and legs.

What is the coach doing? He is looking at the relative contribution of the upper body and the lower body to the total effort. In most cases, the average swimmer uses his or her kick to remain horizontal in the water. Olympic swimmers, on the other hand, need to get six to ten percent of their forward motion from their kick. By careful measurement, the coach in this case was able to determine that our athlete was only achieving a four-percent forward thrust from her kick.

The differential diagnosis made it clear that this was a major part of the swimmer’s stroke that needed improvement in order to become a world-class competitor. In other words, we all need to know which skills are working well and which skills are most in need of improvement, because we are only as good as the weakest skill. The same principle applies to improving leadership skills. An accurate differential diagnosis will help you improve your skills.

It is important to note that the idea of higher-order skills includes making improvements not only in areas where one is weak, but also continuing to improve in areas where one’s skills are strong. For example, let’s suppose that you are an excellent listener, but need improvement in self-control while dealing

with people who appear to be rigid. Most people would assume that one would make the most gains by learning one of several self-control techniques, such as perspective management. However, you might make an equally profound impact on your leadership skills by improving your already excellent listening skills. Two things are very valuable to remember about developing higher-order skills. First, it is a proven method of development. Secondly, it reminds us that too many people put artificial ceilings on what they do well instead of developing those competencies to the fullest extent possible.

However, there can be no improvement without salient feedback. At this point, let's return to the swimming analogy to illustrate the concept of salient feedback. Salient feedback is feedback that is so compelling and personally meaningful that the person who receives the feedback will do everything that is humanly possible to change his or her behaviour. For example, let's assume that our athlete has worked exceedingly hard, both in the pool and on dry land, to develop strength in her lower body. This has resulted in an additional six-percent increase in her forward motion in the 400-metre freestyle. Along with upper-body strength-building and improvements in her technique, this has placed our swimmer among the top 10 400-metre freestyle swimmers in the world. However, she has never ranked better than a fifth-place finish, which is well outside contention for a medal. Her coach has completed another differential diagnosis, which shows that the front-arm extension of her stroke into the water needs to be a fraction of a millimeter longer and the same is true for the follow-through extension at the end of her stroke.

Although our swimmer understands this concept and has seen it demonstrated by her coach and other world-class swimmers, she just can't see that she needs to improve because she thinks she is already doing it as perfectly as possible. The coach then videotapes the swimmer. In freeze-frame, slow-motion, the coach is able to show her exactly where her arms enter and leave the water as opposed to the place where her arms *ought* to enter and leave the water. Seeing her stroke on the television monitor has acted as salient feedback for the athlete. The feedback had so much impact on our swimmer that she changed her stroke and is now in contention for an Olympic medal.

The three important elements that provide for the development of higher-order skills are:



1. An accurate assessment (differential diagnosis) of the relative strengths of the skills that make up the whole.
2. Salient feedback that is so accurate and personally meaningful that it helps us change our behaviour in the desired direction.
3. Eliminating artificial ceilings on our best skills so we can continue to develop them to the fullest extent possible.

In the above example, we looked at the development of higher-order skills in swimming the 400-metre freestyle. The rest of this book will both expand the theory of higher-order skills and illustrate it with examples of Canadian Master Leaders. However, higher-order skills by themselves are not enough. Master Leaders also have to make higher-order decisions about where and when to apply their higher-order skills.

## Higher-Order Decisions

The leaders I interviewed became Master Leaders because they made seminal decisions that forever changed themselves and their organizations such as:

- Louise Arbour indicting the world's first sitting president of a nation for crimes against humanity;
- Canada Post's decision to benchmark itself against the best postal systems in the world, then setting aggressive targets for improvement, and for the first time in its history paying its unionized members a bonus for achieving set performance targets, and
- Bombardier's decision to build the C-Series jetliner during one of the worst downturns in aviation history. Not only will Bombardier be competing against its traditional rivals, the new 100- to 130-seat plane will compete directly with Boeing and Airbus – the world's two largest manufacturers of jet airliners.

But higher-order intentions and decisions without higher-order commitment remain unfulfilled dreams and aspirations.

## Higher-Order Commitment

Perhaps no other Master Leader in Canada demonstrates higher-order commitment better than Stephen Lewis. Working 18 hours a day and giving hundreds

***The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.***

**Vince Lombardi**

of speeches each year, Stephen Lewis has become the world's conscience for the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa. In these efforts, "Lewis never stops. At an age when most people are coasting into retirement, the 67-year-old Lewis is working longer and harder than ever before, doing a job that not even Sisyphus would apply for. His mission: to get the rest of the world to pay attention to the more than 25 million people in

sub-Saharan Africa who have HIV/AIDS. With 2.3 million dying a year, *Africa experiences the equivalent of a tsunami a month.* [Emphasis added]"<sup>4</sup>

Twenty million African children will become orphans by 2010 unless the world intervenes. Recognizing this, Stephen started the Stephen Lewis Foundation in response to the world's governments' lack of support and funding for initiatives to combat the pandemic. At the time of this writing, Lewis' foundation has distributed and committed more than \$28 million to over 300 community-level initiatives in 15 sub-Saharan African countries.<sup>5</sup>

The foundation pays for the most basic necessities of life and death such as bars of soap, towels, blankets and funerals. It also supports local initiatives, such as buildings for orphan care, home-based palliative care, schools for orphaned girls, and a support group for grandmothers who are raising their grandchildren. In short, the foundation pays for everything from awareness and prevention programs to coffins. The foundation strategically focuses on the areas of greatest need. As Stephen Lewis states:

*The work of the Stephen Lewis Foundation means that for people living with AIDS, or orphans or grandmothers, life has been made bearable for many who would otherwise have languished in*

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*isolation and despair. We've worked at the grassroots in over three hundred projects in fifteen countries, and we have a good sense of how to make an impact.*

*But two things happened along the way that are changing our approach. First, it became clear that the big funders involved with AIDS — from the Global Fund to the Gates Foundation to the World Bank — are making a magnificent contribution to the purchase of drugs, the creation of laboratories, the repair of health systems, the replenishment of healthcare workers, the search for a vaccine. But not a lot of the money gets to the ground ... to the grassroots communities that need it most.*

*Second, it became equally clear that investment at community level has had a huge impact. Over the last five years, in project after project, we saw lives and hope restored.*

*We began to think to ourselves that if only we had greater resources to invest, we could help to subdue the pandemic at community level; we could take the lessons we've learned and apply them across the board. This is not meant to be grandiose: it's simply meant to recognize that with enough money, we're on the precipice of creating major change right across the continent.*

*So we're taking the next dramatic step in the evolution of the Foundation. We're launching a campaign called Turning the Tide. We're going to try to raise enough funds to support all the worthy proposals that come to us — putting into operation, at country level, scores of additional projects. Our goal is to raise \$100 million the next five years to fund hundreds more grassroots organizations in sub-Saharan Africa.*

*We believe to the depths of our being that it's possible to Turn the Tide in this way. What we need are the numbers, and the*

*broadening range of experience, to show everyone that it can be done; that at the grassroots, where people live and die, such energy and prevention and care can be unleashed and employed that the pandemic is reversed.*<sup>6</sup>

For his continuing leadership in this area, Stephen Lewis was selected as *MacLean's* first annual Canadian of the Year<sup>7</sup> and he has not slowed down one iota since that time. In terms of his ability as presenter, Stephen Lewis is not only one of the best in Canada; he is one of the best in the world, because he is a master of eloquence in addition to being a Master Leader and a master negotiator. Stephen Lewis is truly one of our Canadian Leaders who is making a difference that makes a difference.

As this example points out, higher-order leadership is built upon the base of higher-order intentions, higher-order commitment, higher-order decisions and higher-order skills. Each leadership challenge will require a different set of higher-order skills. For example, in one situation the leader may need higher-order communication skills, while in another, higher-order creativity, while in a third, higher-order marketing, or a deft combination of all three.

Higher-order intentions, commitment, decisions and skills are necessary but not sufficient conditions to achieve significant and lasting results. There are always obstacles or resistance to overcome. Therefore Master Leaders must have higher-order follow-through. Master Leaders use the judicious combination of each of these factors to achieve success beyond what might be thought possible. Their real-life examples are used throughout this book to bring the seven strategies of Master Leaders to life.

Research by the Conference Board of Canada concluded that leadership development is more important than ever as we will need to accelerate the development of leaders in the private, public, not-for-profit and volunteer sectors as baby boomers retire in increasingly large numbers. Therefore, the purpose of this book is to help you:

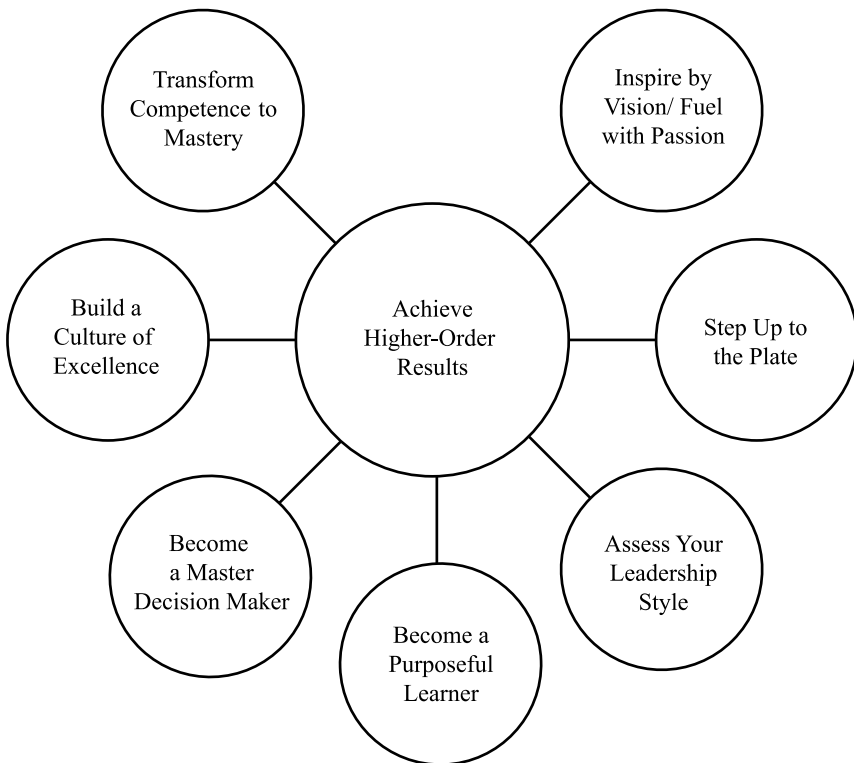
- identify the skills and strategies Master Leaders develop and utilize,
- develop your own leadership skills and strategies to the highest degree possible, and

- assist others to develop their leadership skills and strategies to the fullest extent possible.

## The Master Leadership Model

All of the interviews I conducted and all of the studies I have read can be summarized in the seven strategies listed in Figure I-1. Mastery is being able to use the right leadership strategies combined with the right higher-order skills such as higher-order intentions, decision-making, risk-assessment, execution, commitment and follow-through for each specific leadership challenge.

**Figure I-1**  
**The Master Leadership Model**



You can use this leadership model to help you develop your own higher-order leadership skills, competencies and strategies, and in turn, to help others in your organization do the same by completing the specifically designed exercises included in each chapter. Following is a brief description of the seven higher-order leadership strategies that will be explored in detail in the rest of this book. In subsequent chapters you will meet the Master Leaders I profiled and they will illustrate how these strategies and skills are applied in real life Canadian examples<sup>1</sup>.

### **STRATEGY 1: Inspire by Vision/Fuel with Passion**

No amount of leadership skill can save a leader if he is taking his organization in the wrong direction. Master Leaders have a clear, meaningful and compelling vision for the future that engages their organizations to take positive and decisive action. This chapter examines:

- How Master Leaders develop their vision,
- How Master Leaders articulate their vision,
- The critical difference between a motivating vision and one that isn't, and
- How Master Leaders turn their vision into reality.

### **STRATEGY 2: Step Up to the Plate**

Over and over again, the Master Leaders interviewed for this book demonstrated their willingness to step up to the plate, take the risks and take on responsibility to get the job done. In this chapter, you will learn how Master Leaders use determination, persistence, courageous patience and focus to achieve higher-order results. We will also see how Master Leaders use Jim Collins' concept of

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<sup>1</sup> In the interests of flow throughout this book, I have made every effort to alternate "he" and "she", where necessity demands a singular pronoun be used. However, please note that this is meant to refer to both women and men in these cases, and in no way is meant to suggest that sex is determinate of whether one can become a Master Leader or not.

the Flywheel – starting with small wins, and then increasing the momentum with each additional win until the organization develops the momentum necessary to carry it – not to – but past its goals.

### **STRATEGY 3: Assess Your Leadership Style**

This chapter will help you identify some of your most important competencies and skills as a leader and formulate specific ways to improve them. We will examine two ground-breaking studies which analyzed the four factors and eight critical differences between effective leaders and their average counterparts and then give you an opportunity to rate your ability on each of these characteristics. We will then look at a process that will help you assess how others see your current abilities and highlight areas where improvement is desired.

### **STRATEGY 4: Become a Purposeful Learner**

Groundbreaking research at the Center of Creative Leadership investigated how Master Leaders became purposeful learners. What makes this study fascinating is that the researchers were able to quantify the sources of learning. The research demonstrates that 50% of what leaders learn is learned from experience. Twenty percent is from good, bad, and flawed bosses/mentors; 20% is from failure and hardship, and the last 10% of what is learned stems from formal education. While formal education only accounts for 10%, it can be an incredibly important percentage if the education relates to the overall learning goals and objectives of the individual in question. Each of these four lessons is important, however, compound learning – which works just like compound interest – takes place when the lessons are learned in combination with other lessons.

### **STRATEGY 5: Become a Master Decision Maker**

Master Leaders are master decision makers and in this chapter we examine how Master Leaders make crucial decisions. Reading this chapter will sharpen your understanding of how accurate and viable decision-making paid off for the Master Leaders interviewed in this book. Working through the exercises provided will help you become a more masterful decision maker.

## **STRATEGY 6: Build a Culture of Excellence**

Three critically important questions that Master Leaders continually ask themselves are:

- How am I growing the organization?
- How am I growing the people?
- How am I growing the culture?

The one factor that most leaders do not pay enough attention to is developing a culture that will help their organizations grow and succeed long after that particular leader has moved on. In this chapter we look at how the Master Leaders profiled in this book developed seven different types of cultures and/or combinations thereof. This chapter also challenges you to look at the type of culture you are building as a leader in your own organization.

## **STRATEGY 7: Transform Competence to Mastery**

The final chapter examines three critical differences between being competent and being a master: 1) Master Leaders set “tipping point” goals; 2) Master Leaders use compound learning to transform their skills from competency to mastery. Compound learning gives a Master Leader the advantage of integrating new experiences and lessons with their existing knowledge, which leads to exponential growth. To help you capitalize on the power of compounded growth, this chapter covers seven critical methods that will help you become a life-long learner, including the concept of salient feedback – feedback that is so personally meaningful that we actually change our behaviour, and 3) Master Leaders have the ability to apply multiple skills sets and strategies simultaneously.