



## Collaborative Leadership

In all human endeavors, leadership is the great variable. But the elements of effective leadership are no mystery. It's a practice—a practice of repeatable routines. We have never had better technologies for measuring and mapping performance. We have never had better tools for modeling our built environments and our natural environments.

What we lack isn't information or technology; it's leadership.

## Bringing People Together to Get Things Done

I used to think effective self-governance was 10 percent policy and 90 percent follow-through. I was way off. Through teaching and reflection, I realize now for the first time—or perhaps remember for the first time—that today governing is 10 percent policy, 40 percent follow-through, and 50 percent leadership.

We live firmly in the Information Age. So much information, so much opportunity for progress, and such a crucial need for collaborative leaders—leaders with the ability to *bring people together to get things done*.

This book presents a lot of great examples to assist and inspire you on your own journey, but progress is not a simple paint-by-numbers exercise. Progress is a collaborative enterprise. There is an alchemy required—especially in the context of the Information Age—for maintaining the precious consensus necessary to get difficult things done. It requires a human element more powerful than technology or management prowess. That element is called leadership.

As one of my own college students observed, “You can have all the great technology you want, but without leadership, it doesn’t amount to a hill of beans.”

So very true—A+.

## Two Essential Questions

When I was elected mayor in 1999, my city, Baltimore, had become the most violent, addicted, and abandoned city in America. At one of our first community meetings in a hard-hit neighborhood of East Baltimore, citizens assembled with me, their new mayor, to talk about crime, public safety, justice, and racial injustice—no easy topics.

There was tension in the air. A fear about what might be.

A little girl came up to the microphone.

“Mr. Mayor,” she said, “my name is Amber, and I am twelve years old. And because of all the addicted people and drug dealers in my neighborhood, there are people in the newspaper who call my neighborhood ‘Zombie Land.’ And I want to know: Do you know that they call my neighborhood Zombie Land? And are you doing anything about it?”

Her questions are the two essential questions for all leaders today:

Do you know? Are you doing something about it?

The questions she asked were really questions she’s asking of all of us. Behind all our data, there are people—living their lives, shouldering their struggles—who deserve a government that works.

The great promise of effective governance in the Information Age is not so much that the data allows us to manage the masses, but rather, it allows us—if we care—to see the needs and dignity of every individual person.

It’s not about the technology.

It’s about our relationships.

It’s about knowing, and about caring.

It’s about seeing and understanding the connections between people, places, and things.

And it’s about leadership.

In Silicon Valley, people who keep trying new things—even though they sometimes fail—are called innovators and entrepreneurs. In government, people who try new things and fail are fired or voted out of office. Therefore, public administration has developed a very slow, cautious, and risk-averse approach to embracing new technologies. Over the course of time, this has created a tyranny of “the way we have always done it” in public service.

But in most big cities across America today, call centers and customer service guarantees have become the new normal. In some places, historic data is being combined with predictive analytics to pre-deploy tow trucks to the places where minor accidents most frequently happen at rush-hour, or to deploy police patrol cars to the tiny squares on the map where crime most frequently happened during the same eight-hour shift over the prior ten years.

A new generation of leadership is changing the old mindset. And a sharp contrast is emerging between old and new.

The old way of leadership was characterized by closed structures—hierarchy, bureaucracy, command and control, and information tightly controlled at the top. The new way of leadership is characterized by open structures—common platforms for collaboration, open data, and timely, accurate information shared by all.

This new way of leadership is entrepreneurial, performance-measured, and interactive. Authority is increasingly based not on the old law of “because I told you to do it,” but on the new law of “because I can show you it works.”

This new way of leadership is not effortless. It requires work. It requires a different kind of discipline. Most of all, it requires a relentless commitment to bringing people together in short regular meetings focused on the latest emerging truth of what is—truth about conditions on the ground and the actions being taken to change those conditions. And the purpose of laying down a repeatable pattern of recurring meetings is not simply to have meetings, or to “ooh” and “ah” at pretty maps, but to figure out better ways to coordinate, communicate, and cooperate to produce better results.

This new way of leadership also requires will at the center of the collaborative endeavor. The will—and the courage—to follow the evidence wherever it might lead. The will to try new things to see if they work to deliver better results. But first, it requires the will to begin, and the will to persist.

Therefore, the first rule of this new way of leadership is simple: **Start and don't stop.**

### Rule #1: Start and Don't Stop

Most people fail at standing up a performance management system by simply deciding not to start. Good intentions get overwhelmed by the crisis of the day. Plans to implement a performance management regimen get pushed to the back burner by the pressing problems of the moment—the inauguration, the transition, the midterm elections, re-election.

Somehow, the need to stand up new systems never seems as urgent as the need to get through the week or the day.

I once met with the newly elected mayor of a city who had inherited some great tools from his predecessor for measuring performance and delivering better service. But the newly elected mayor had convinced himself that a big fiscal fix needed to be accomplished before he could start any regimen of regular performance management meetings. As every super-busy day passed, so too did the golden time of transition—that short period of “new beginning” that every newly elected administration must institutionalize new systems and new practices.

In some places that golden time can last a whole year; in other places, just a few short months. The

average is about six months. As cleared fields naturally revert to forest, big bureaucracies naturally revert to “the way we’ve always done it.” The field of dreams can quickly become overgrown by a culture of excuses.

In one of my favorite quotes about the spark of human creativity, William Hutchison Murray writes:

“Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth, the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events

## Beware the Culture of Excuses

Beware of the “red flags of poor leadership.” Don’t let these excuses go unanswered.

“What we do can’t be measured.”

“We are too busy to have that many meetings.”

“We don’t have the staff to collect all those numbers.”

“We don’t like to make our people uncomfortable in front of others.”

“We are already doing that.”

“We could find out, but it would take months, and we’d have to pull all our people off all their other work.”

“We don’t like to blame/embarrass our people here.”

“We tried that, and it didn’t work.”

“That just wouldn’t work here.”

“We don’t have the time/money to do that here.”

“We only hold meetings when we need to here.”

“It’s different here.”

(Beware any answer that ends with “here.”)

issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way. I learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now."

In chapter 7, I will lay out some straightforward steps for standing up your own performance management regimen—collecting data, benchmarking current performance, building out a permanent room for meetings, etc. But there is one foundational step required before you do any of those things, and it is this:

Set a date for the first meeting, and begin.

Recent history is littered with many well-intended mayors, governors, or other government executives who let their senior advisors and senior staff talk them out of beginning. Sometimes, the mayor becomes convinced that other priorities need attention first. The budget crisis (there is always a budget crisis), the pension crisis (there is always a pension crisis), the union negotiations (there is always the next round of union negotiations). It's not hard to convince an over-scheduled mayor that all these important things need to be tended to before a new performance management system can be implemented.

Other executives become convinced by their own staff that "we are already doing that," or (for whatever host of political, cultural, or equally dubious reasons) "it's different here," or "that just wouldn't work here." (See the sidebar, "Beware the Culture of Excuses.")

Still other executives allow themselves to become convinced that they don't have time "for that many



*Collaborative leadership. Presence. Location. A working meeting in the midst of the Great Recession of 2009 with mayors from across Maryland—at their headquarters, not mine: the offices of the Maryland Municipal League.*

meetings,” when the truth is that a cadence of short, regular meetings focused on strategic goals is a time-saver. It eliminates the need for a whole raft of single-topic meetings, budget planning meetings, crisis management meetings, personnel meetings, and other meetings that masquerade as getting things done. And let’s not forget how much time is wasted setting up those one-off, single-subject meetings, and corralling different people onto the same date and time on the calendar.

It’s easy to be super-busy in government; getting important things done is hard.

In most governments, communication, coordination, and collaboration are unnatural acts between non-consenting adults.

Good leaders insist on repeatable routines: a rotation of short, regularly-scheduled meetings. It saves time. It drives performance. It makes effective collaborations not only more likely, but, as a practical matter, it makes them unavoidable. A cadence of short, regular meetings—with agendas, and after-action memos—focused on the big strategic goals is how big organizations achieve important goals. These are the practices and disciplines that hold everyone mutually accountable to one another for progress.

So, start and don’t stop.

A relentless and repeatable pattern of short, regular meetings isn’t about “increasing the frequency of the beatings.” It’s not about embarrassing or berating people. It’s about setting a cadence of accountability for progress. It’s about focusing on the trajectories for progress and measuring the daily path of that progress to the goal. It’s about focusing on the leading collaborative actions that drive progress and deliver better results. It’s about seeing what works.

And all this makes possible the second rule of this new way of leadership: **Lift up the leaders.**

## Rule #2: Lift Up the Leaders

In any large organization, 10 percent of people are natural leaders, go-getters, and high achievers. On the opposite end of the bell curve is a very different group—the natural slackers.

That leaves 80 percent of us in the middle. Left to our own inclinations, the 80 percent of us in the middle will naturally lean back toward the behavior of the slackers. The great leadership challenge is to get the 80 percent in the middle to lean forward, not back; to lean forward in ways that follow the example of the leaders. The difference between an organization that rocks back and an organization that leans forward is the difference between nation-leading progress and business as usual.

How do you get the 80 percent to lean forward rather than back?

Good leaders do this by lifting up the leaders within the organization for all to see, and they do this by creating a culture of collaboration where hard work and achievement is recognized by all. The two are really just different ways of understanding the same essential practice.

Good leaders keep a compelling scoreboard from week to week so that everyone can see who is achieving the best results. This means making sure every team can see how well they are doing compared to all the other teams in a given endeavor, whether trash collection boroughs, building inspection zones, or police precincts. Put a map up on the wall so everyone can see it; shade it according to performance. Rank teams by objective criteria of performance.

Praise the leaders. Ask them how they did it. Tell them well done, and make sure everyone in the room hears the praise.

In our own work or team experiences, we’ve all known what it is like to be part of an organization or endeavor that totally lacks a collaborative culture. We describe these gray, lifeless situations as “not a fun place to work.” Situational ignorance, mission-blur, blame, revenge, retribution, closed-mindedness,

dishonesty, one-way communication, a lack of acknowledgment, and a refusal to listen: these are the human failings—made worse by poor or absent leadership—which undermine collaboration and teamwork.

But most of us have also seen and experienced—if sometimes only briefly—what it is like to work in a collaborative culture. To experience the joy of a shared sense of purpose, to receive acknowledgment of a job well done, and to feel the satisfaction that comes from working with others and “spending one’s energies on work worth doing.”

The Chinese have a saying: “Rivers and mountains may change; human nature, never.” While the technology of measuring and mapping performance is a great enabler of creating a collaborative culture, the real driver is human nature. Collaborative cultures are brought into being and sustained by good leaders who understand how to harness human nature for higher achievement.

#### *Most people work best against deadlines.*

Jack Maple, the great New York Police Department savant of human nature and performance management, once tutored me on the underlying rationale for holding CompStat meetings in two-week intervals. “People work against deadlines,” he said. “Do you want your organization to reduce crime one percent every year, or one percent every two weeks? Do you want people to work together to make the city one percent cleaner every year, or one percent cleaner every two weeks?”

A repeating pattern of short, regular meetings creates a cadence of accountability. It creates a steady work rhythm for achieving progress against last week’s numbers. It creates a tempo of work against short, regularly recurring deadlines. (Refer to chapter 1 for more information.)

Small things done well make bigger things possible.

#### *Most people like to be left alone at work.*

Most people like to be left alone at work. I like to be left alone at work, too. But we call it “work” for a reason. Poets and artists get to work alone; the rest of us must work with others to be successful.

Unless the leader insists on it, communication, coordination, and cooperation don’t just happen naturally across big organizations. Good leaders make these things happen. A good leader shows up herself in the center of the circle to make sure that it happens. And please understand when I say “circle,” I am not only speaking metaphorically and operationally; I am speaking literally. There is a reason King Arthur had a round table—it worked. Meetings should be arranged for a conversation with people facing one another, not for a concert or lecture. When people are facing one another, they are far more likely to bring their “A game” to the problem-solving dialogue.

Given the shortness of time, the molehill of resources, and the mountain of complex challenges, there is no way to make progress in the face of tough challenges unless people work in thoughtful, collaborative ways with each other. One meeting every two weeks to focus just on public safety, or just on solid waste, or just on health, or just on housing is not a waste of time. It is essential time.

A repeating pattern of short, regular meetings creates the possibility for increasingly more effective collaborations. It allows tactics and strategies to be more quickly assessed and adjusted based on the latest emerging truth, the latest emerging evidence, and the most recent experience. It allows the best practices to emerge. And over the course of time, it lifts up the most effective tactics and strategies, and the most effective leaders.



## Practical Advice to Future Leaders

The National Governors Association once asked me to share with an incoming group of Republican and Democratic governors the ten most practical pieces of wisdom that have served me best in governing. Almost all of them were collected from other servant-leader practitioners, most who were experienced executives. And all these things can be applied by leaders across the entire span of government.

1. The things that get measured are the things that get done.
2. Goals and deadlines are the x-axis and y-axis of all human endeavor.
3. Small things done well make bigger things possible.
4. A graph moving in the right direction is the most beautiful achievement in self-governance. The pace of progress is variable and it's negotiable, but the direction of progress is not.
5. Effective leaders make themselves vulnerable. Own the goals of the government you run and the people you lead—no one else will.
6. Whether a large human organization moves forward to achieve meaningful goals depends in large part on whether its leaders and achievers at every level are recognized by the chief executive and by their peers.
7. Timely, accurate information about performance and outputs *must be shared by all*—most importantly, it must be shared with the citizens you serve.
8. Communication, coordination, and collaboration are unnatural acts between non-consenting adults. Effective leaders create and enforce data-based routines of communication, coordination, and collaboration throughout their government. This is the cadence of accountability that only you can set.
9. "People make progress; common platforms make it possible." The geographic map of your community, city, or state is your common platform. All information systems must be based on the map.
10. We are not here to make excuses; we are here to make progress. Repeat this mantra over and over again—especially to yourself.

*Most people do their best to honor commitments they make in front of a group.*

It is important to always have a stenographer or note-taker at performance management meetings. It is important to produce follow-up memos itemizing commitments made during these regular meetings. And it is even more important to have your colleagues and co-workers witness those commitments.

It is much harder to ignore a request for help or information from a colleague that you are going to be sharing coffee with the next morning. For all the benefits of the internet and open data, there is no substitute for the integrity that comes from face-to-face dialogue and commitments openly made in the presence of all.

We are all busy, *and yet*, we all need to find better ways to operate as a team.

A repeating pattern of short, regular meetings—well-prepared and well-led—promotes a culture of mutual accountability. It promotes a culture of truthfulness and integrity in communications. And it promotes a culture of reciprocity and understanding within the group.

As a leader, after you start this process by setting the date for the first meeting, you can never allow the process to stop. As surely as the law of gravity—if you stop pushing the rock up the hill, it will most certainly roll back down. The hardest things to institutionalize in government are new systems that require constant work and tending. They are also the most important things to institutionalize when it comes to making lasting impacts and generational progress.

And this leads to the third rule of new leadership: **Lead with real-time awareness.**



*Preparing for hurricane landfall in the Situation Room of the State Emergency Operations Center. Timely and accurate information shared by all is key to emergency operations management. Short, regular meetings where responsible partners have the permission—and responsibility—to speak up and to ask questions throughout the emergency allow you to save lives by staying inside the turning radius of the event.*

### Rule #3: Lead with Real-Time Awareness

I was once invited by the superintendent of our United States Naval Academy to address the entire brigade—all 4,000 of them—on the question of leadership, and specifically, the question of whether good leaders, *born or made*?

The answer, of course, is “Yes.”

As it is with artists and athletes, good leaders are both born and made. All of us have some intrinsic leadership ability and we are all given different opportunities to hone those abilities over the course of our life and work experiences.

We might see the virtues of leadership—vision, future preference, courage, honesty, and integrity—as intrinsic to a person’s character and upbringing. But the disciplines of leadership are things that can be taught and learned with experience. These disciplines include: the ability to articulate a vision, the willingness to take responsibility for the success of the mission, and the combination of courage, wisdom, and humility necessary to change tactics and strategies in pursuit of the vision.

In the Information Age, there is another essential discipline required for collaborative leadership, and that is to lead with a real-time awareness of the latest emerging truth. If there are no secrets anymore, why not embrace the new reality and make it work for your team?

### The True Power of Leadership

Leaders can no longer sit high atop a pyramid of command and control where information is tightly held and hoarded. In fact, pretending that you can hold information from the public today is a fatal mistake. But, with a radical commitment to openness and transparency, leaders can put themselves firmly in the center of the latest emerging truth. Leaders can give themselves and their people the clearest, most up-to-the-minute, and most holistic picture of what is happening, and what is being done about it—real-time information about where, when, and why. It is the clarity and immediacy of knowing that allows the leader to focus their team and their collaborative circle—whether cabinet, division chiefs, command staff, or citizenry—on the latest emerging truth.

It is what battlefield and naval commanders call “situational awareness.”

It is what New Age philosophers call “awareness.”

And it is what citizens call “being on top of it.”

The latest emerging truth is not a secret to be controlled but a power to be shared.

Effective leaders today must be more situationally aware than ever before, and they must be more present than ever before. Therefore, effective leaders put themselves routinely in the center of the collaborative circle and as close to the first outflow of the latest information—information about what is happening where and when. Effective leaders take up this position with total responsibility for what is. They hold this position even as they keep one eye focused on the next horizon. And all this means maintaining a commitment to openness and transparency that the old norms of politics would consider unwise or electorally risky.

This is the new positional advantage of effective leaders in the Information Age—knowing immediately what is happening where and when. Being among and with—at the center of the collaborative circle. And it is from this position closest to the latest emerging truth, that a good leader has the ability to exercise certain essential powers—powers that, even in the Information Age, are uniquely reserved to the leader.

## Baltimore, Believe

In 2001, a commercial aired simultaneously on all the television stations in Baltimore. It was paid for by the private dollars of principled Baltimore business leaders. It began with the words of a little boy living life in a very hard-hit neighborhood in Baltimore.

“My grandmother says we’re all part of one big fire. I don’t know if that’s true, but I know there’s a fire inside me.”

So began our very public campaign to awaken Baltimore’s truer sense of self—to tap the fire inside—and to call upon the power of that spirit to confront the violence of drugs and drug addiction that was killing 300 to 350 of our young men—and, increasingly, our children—every year.

That jarring and disturbing commercial of the reality of drug violence and addiction in our city signaled the very public start of Baltimore’s campaign—of Baltimore’s fight—to “Believe.”

You see, the day the campaign launched, Baltimore held the tragic distinction of being at or near the top of all the wrong lists: most violent, most addicted, and most rapidly abandoned major city in America. The beginning of that campaign was not a feel-good moment. There was nothing happy about that opening ad. The ad ended with that little boy’s sister being gunned down on an innocent errand to the corner store, her young body lying lifeless in a pool of blood. I got a lot of calls from civic boosters and business leaders asking, “Why on earth did you run those?” But the ads that followed called upon all of us citizens to not only believe, but to act. Join the police department, get someone you love into drug treatment, mentor a child. The response was broad and deep.

From those days forward, Baltimore began to change for the better. Over the course of ten years, Baltimore achieved the biggest overall reduction of crime in any major city in America—bigger than New York or Los Angeles. In 2011, Baltimore, for the first time in more than three decades, reduced homicides to fewer than two hundred. Drug overdose deaths were driven down to all-time lows. Juvenile shootings were driven down 70 percent since 2007.

By 2012, Baltimore City public schools were posting their highest graduation rate—with an unprecedented 20-percentage-point gain in four years—and second-lowest dropout rate since we began keeping records.

In that same period, Baltimore’s population decline slowed to a rate not seen since the 1950s. And notwithstanding the difficult recessionary years, Baltimore was rebuilding again, neighborhood by neighborhood, from the inside out.

These successes were not easily won. Too many Baltimore City police officers gave their lives for the hope of that safer city in which we called upon one another to believe. We never made perfect, and the mission was never totally accomplished.

But, together, we moved in the right direction. And to the cynical birds in the rafters who would like to dismiss Baltimore's achievements across three mayoral administrations as merely part of a national trend, think again. If you think smarter policing, better drug treatment options, youth interventions, and strong public funding don't matter, just look at other cities where crime is rising. (See chapters 4 and 5.)

Thinking back, it is hard to explain to young, new homeowners in growing neighborhoods like Canton, Bolton Hill, or Woodberry just how badly we had allowed apathy and acceptance of the status quo to destroy our belief in one another; how badly we had allowed our collective culture of cynicism to keep us from even trying. All the "smart" people knew that "it's just Baltimore—there's nothing you can do about it."

After years of shrugging our shoulders at the addiction and violence, our city came together in the Believe campaign to admit we had a problem; together, we started doing something about it.

Thanks to President Bill Clinton and Maryland's congressional delegation, we put two hundred more police officers on our streets. Thanks to the city council, we started paying them a lot better. Thanks to Governor Parris Glendening, we did what Mayor Kurt Schmoke had been urging for years and doubled funding for drug treatment. Religious leaders helped us recruit hundreds of volunteers to serve as mentors to city kids. And you know what? All that stuff, together, actually works.

Baltimore embraced the stark, white-and-black call to "Believe." The campaign took on a life of its own. Street vendors found people wanting to buy and wear Believe T-shirts. People placed bumper stickers on their cars. Believe trash cans rolled into once-forgotten neighborhoods. The Believe-mobile, sponsored by M&T Bank, toured the city and set up a lighted sound stage for neighborhood kids to play concerts while police closed the streets to the drug trade and opened them to the good people who lived there.

There was one big reason we ran that campaign: to challenge one another to believe—in ourselves, and in the fact that we are still the people whom Frederick Douglass and John Unitas loved. A people who believe that, together, we can make our city a safer place, a better place for kids to grow up.

### *The Power to Set a Shared Vision*

Only the leader can set a shared vision. Others may inform the vision. Ideally the vision reflects the shared ambitions or needs of an entire people, but the leader must set the vision, own the vision, and make it clear to all that she or he will do whatever it takes within ethical bounds to pursue the vision. An important part of this is the willingness to set goals with deadlines.

In my administrations, I had many well-intended staff and advisors who begged me not to set goals with deadlines. Whether it was crime reduction or reducing pollution that flowed into the Chesapeake Bay, the traditional political wisdom holds that declaring a public goal with a deadline is politically risky to the point of being irresponsible. Concerned staff or cabinet secretaries would often ask, “What if we don’t hit the goal?”

I would ask in return, “What if we do?” (This back-and-forth could go on for several rounds.)

Their concerns and fears were not only for their own jobs; they were also for mine. But there is only one way to know whether something is achievable, and that is to try. The difference between a dream and a goal is a deadline.

### *The Power to Convene*

When it comes to pulling people together regularly in a collaborative pursuit of big goals, no one can make this happen but the leader. If you don’t pull your team together, they will not do it on their own. And you might try to delegate the responsibility, but those meetings will soon cease to happen. In an age of information overload and multitasking carried to a level of compulsion, the power to convene is more essential than ever.

This one can be challenging. There are so many requests for time on a leader’s calendar.

I have frequently heard it said by executives and their executive staffs, “We don’t have time for that many meetings.” To that time-worn excuse, I ask: “How much time do you have for meetings?” Sometimes the retort comes that “we only hold meetings when we have to.” To which I ask, “How would you know when you have to?” Seriously? Do we wait until bad or tragic things happen? Do we wait until operational failings are so bad that they make it into the paper or blow up on social media?

When it comes to achieving the most important goals, no one else has the authority to convene the group except the leader. Just as no subordinate has the power to set the vision, no subordinate has the power to convene the team. This is not a function that can be delegated. The power to convene belongs to the leader.

### *The Power to Focus*

As hard as most people work all week long, it is amazing how little time most organizations take to focus the collective experience and wisdom of the team on achieving the most important strategic goals. Only the leader can make this happen. Busy-ness is not effectiveness; don’t be fooled. Effectiveness requires focus—the sort of focus that solves the puzzle. The sort of focus that deepens awareness and understanding. The sort of focus that encourages the team to ask more questions.

Good leaders constantly return focus to the most important goals of the mission.

As our own CitiStat process in Baltimore matured into its second year, I noticed a difference emerging between departments based on the leadership of the individual department heads. Most came to appreciate the value of a focused hour with the mayor’s command staff to untangle impediments to progress and find better ways forward. But some department heads would come to CitiStat meetings as if it were a biweekly quiz rather than an active search for better ways to get things done.

When the questions about performance, cause and effect, or lack of improvement were asked, the red flags of poor leadership would fly—more excuses than answers.

“We don’t have the staff to collect all those numbers.”

“We could find out, but it would take months, and we’d have to pull all our people off all their other work.”

But when Joe Kolodziejski, the head of the Bureau of Solid Waste, showed up to City Hall with his team for his biweekly CitiStat meeting, it was clear that his department had spent some time, effort, and imagination since the last meeting focused on overcoming their big challenges. It was clear that operationally, the leader of Solid Waste pulled his team together on a regular, daily basis to focus on their important strategic goals; to ask more questions; to work the problem; to think.

Good leaders use their power to focus the team’s imagination on achieving goals.

### *The Power of Presence*

There is no substitute for the presence of the leader in the center of the collaborative circle. Being among and with is not a luxury, it is a necessity. This is not to say the leader is able to make every single meeting. But she or he attends enough of them, so their presence is always felt. And when she is physically present, the leader is so entirely awake, aware, responsible, prepared, and “here, in the moment” that everyone in attendance understands intuitively the importance of the focus, the importance of the mission.

As mayor and as governor, I quickly learned there was no substitute for my own personal presence—even if only for a portion of a meeting. To praise a job well-done. To return focus to the larger goal. To admonish or push when communication and collaboration seemed to break down. To spur the team forward when the rough patches were hit.

But I also learned there were surrogates for those times when I was not able to be 100 percent present. One was to have a chief of staff or chief of operations who was always a driving force in center of the circle. Making all understand the trust and the constant, timely flow of communication between the two of us was presence by proxy. Thank you notes for a job well-done was another way of being present. Writing notes with follow-up questions in the margins of the executive briefing memoranda that accompanied any CitiStat agenda was another way to show presence. Showing up for a few minutes to observe a short portion of the meeting, if only from the back of the CitiStat room before rushing out of the building for another event, was another way.

Being aware of progress to goals and being aware of barriers to achievement. Understanding the changing dynamic of a problem, whether it’s a rash of burglaries, a weather event, or a spike in overdose deaths. Knowing who the high achievers are and lifting them in front of others.

These are all ways a good leader exercises the power of presence.

### *The Power of Belief*

If you believe you can or you believe you can’t, you are probably right. This is true of individuals, and it is true of organizations that take their cues from the leader. Tell your team you trust them, you are proud of them, you need them, and you are counting on them. Remind your team of the smaller accomplishments that make the next big thing possible. And before and after all those things, tell them you believe in them and you believe that together you will succeed.

One of the easiest beatdowns in public service is the tyranny of low expectations. How many times have we heard people snicker or mutter phrases like “close enough for government work?”

## Using Your Eight Drivers to Overcome Today's Challenges

**Presence** is really a baseline—or foundational—energy, one that drives all traits and functions necessary to live your best life. It also drives the other seven drivers. When you live in the present moment, you understand that everything is connected. Irrelevance is gone. Everything matters. You absorb every bit of life because you are highly focused. You think more clearly and efficiently. You act with more integrity and clarity. You are unburdened by unproductive thoughts of the past or future. You worry less. You fear less. You are infinitely more creative.

**Openness** is the second key driver of your best life. Many, if not most of us, have learned through difficult life experiences to resist “what is.” But resisting “what is” causes more pain and drains our energy. Opening to “what is” becomes liberating and energizing. When you’re open, you constantly seek to widen the net for possibilities, and resist nothing. In your best life, you are curious, you are a font of ideas and creativity, and you see possibilities everywhere.

**Clarity** is the third driver of your best life—clarity in thoughts, emotions, and behavior. We have all, at least on occasion, thought, emoted, or acted out of anger, rage, envy, insecurity, guilt, greed, or some other fear-based stimulus. But when you are clear, you find it easy to define every element of who you are, both to yourself and to others. You are people oriented, open-hearted with a genuine love for people. You see the good and the potential in everyone, instead of a threat. You have healthy, empowering relationships with others.

**Intention** is the fourth driver of your best life. In every moment, each of us can choose intention or neglect, intention or disempowerment. While many of us constantly say or think “I hope” and “I want” and “I’d like,” few of us sincerely believe we can bring about a desired result. Practicing intention, which involves a discipline of expressing your desired result in great detail, regularly visualizing it as a current reality, offering exchange for it, starting a “conspiracy” of people focused on helping you achieve your intention, and, ultimately, detaching from it, significantly helps you to achieve the results you want in your life.

**Personal responsibility** is the fifth driver of your best life. We live in an era where personal responsibility has been replaced by blame and litigation. These are fear-based responses. Personal responsibility is complete ownership of “what is,” as distinguished from openness, which is the unbounded willingness to consider every element of “what



is.” When you learn to own “what is” on every front and create the energy that results when you can say, “I am completely responsible for every positive and negative element that exists in my life,” you will see a dramatic improvement in the integrity with which people view you, your courage, and your personal relationships.

**Intuition** is the sixth driver of your best life. Each of us was gifted with a powerful source of inspiration—a knowing, an intuition—that is embedded in this omniscient energy that binds everything that is. But fear often causes us to abandon it too quickly in favor of a “safer” route supported by “facts” or the opinions of others. In doing this, we abdicate the crucial role that active intuition plays in life. The skilled and liberal use of intuition enables your ability to make good decisions in all areas of your life, adapt to uncertainty and changing conditions, and interact with others in a highly empathic, supportive way.

**Creativity** is the seventh driver of your best life. If you want your best life, when you truly appreciate that life is binary—there is only creation and destruction, growth and decay, life and death—it is pretty easy to decide that you want to be on the side of creation, growth, and life. The key then, is stoking your creativity in every possible way so that you remain aligned, and not at odds, with life itself. Fortunately, every person has the potential to be a powerful creative force. When you tap into that creativity, you become highly energetic, you see possibilities instead of barriers, you see a better life for yourself and everyone around you, and you see a path for achieving it.

**Connected communication** is the eighth driver of your best life. In the complex, adaptive system in which we live, where everyone is interconnected, and relationships are paramount, communication is essential for survival. Better communication is a function of increasing the connection in your communication. “Connected communication” is an intensely powerful energy—a driver—deep within each of us. The system of connected communication, from clear expression of a purposeful message by an empathic speaker to an empathic listener, fuels your ability to be supportive of and inspiring to others and have productive, empowering personal relationships.

### Conclusion

The solution to our worsening societal woes, and conversely our best societal life, is in leadership. Leadership at the societal level begins with leadership of the self. Each of us living our best individual life will flow into our best collective life. It is just a matter of accessing powers—drivers—with which we are already endowed.

—David M. Traversi, author of *The Source of Leadership*

But you will never find an effective leader in any walk of life or in any human endeavor who accomplishes anything difficult and meaningful—whether it is a Super Bowl victory, a winning election campaign, or making a city safer, cleaner, and healthier—without first instilling in his team a belief that they can win.

Belief of the leader is a powerful force in the group dynamic. There are tools that can amplify that belief, but there is nothing that can substitute for it.

## The Art of Collaborative Leadership

One of the quirky side benefits of serving as a governor or mayor is that at least once a month a new book on “leadership” lands on your desk—a complimentary copy sent by a publisher, author, or promoter.

I found most of them useless.

But the one I use in my courses is not. It is *The Source of Leadership: Eight Drivers of the High-Impact Leader*, by David M. Traversi. It is practical, real, and good—a description which also applies to the young Americans I’ve had the honor to teach at the University of Maryland, Boston College Law School, Georgetown University, and Harvard University.

Traversi’s “eight drivers of leadership” are *presence, openness, clarity, intention, personal responsibility, intuition, creativity, and connected communication*. All these drivers are important, but “presence” is the driver which makes all the other drivers possible. (See the sidebar “Using Your Eight Drivers to Overcome Today’s Challenges.”)

Knowing what these qualities are is one thing. Developing them within yourself and others is another. Calling them forward in a big organization is yet another. These are the soft skills. The skills to be practiced and improved upon with every important and passing day. They are the skills that come together in a mix and balance unique to every leader.

In a brilliantly insightful address to US Army cadets at West Point in 2009, Professor William Deresiewicz said on the subject of “solitude and leadership”:

“... the great books, the ones you find on a syllabus, the ones people have continued to read, don’t reflect the conventional wisdom of their day. They say things that have the permanent power to disrupt our habits of thought. They were revolutionary in their own time, and they are still revolutionary today. And when I say ‘revolutionary,’ I am deliberately evoking the American Revolution, because it was a result of precisely this kind of independent thinking.

“Without solitude—the solitude of Adams and Jefferson and Hamilton and Madison and Thomas Paine—there would be no America.”

And so it remains with the practice of leadership today. The eight drivers are important, but doses of solitude and deep reflection are essential too.

So start and don’t stop.

Lift up the leaders.

Lead with real-time awareness and from the powerful silence of your own heart.

# Learn & Explore

## Leadership Forum

Watch a video of my presentation at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy in 2017.

## NewDEAL Leaders

The NewDEAL (Developing Exceptional American Leaders) is a national network of state and local leaders working to expand opportunity for all Americans in the changing economy.

## Baltimore Believe TV Commercial

Watch the original 2001 video that signaled the very public start of Baltimore’s campaign—of Baltimore’s fight—to “Believe.”

For links to these and other examples, exercises, and resources, visit [SmarterGovernment.com](http://SmarterGovernment.com) and click chapter 3.

**Answering Critical Questions about Critical Infrastructure**  
 WHERE are the bridges? WHY are bridges in need of repair? HOW can projects be objectively prioritized?  
 WHAT is the government spending on bridge repair projects?

Deficient Bridges | Strategic Bridges | High Traffic Bridges | Prioritization | Costs and Spending

**Where are the MOST TRAVELED BRIDGES?**  
 The U.S. DOT Federal Highway Administration includes both recent estimates and predicted future daily traffic data for bridges in the National Bridge Inventory. Explore the map to see which bridges are the most traveled.  
 Source: FHWA

**LEGEND**  
 Average Daily Traffic  
 • Fewer than 20k cars per day  
 • 25k - 75k  
 • 75k - 170k  
 • More than 170k cars per day

**BENSON BRANCH**  
 This bridge was built in 1985.  
 Average Daily Traffic  
 Current estimate from 1998  
 Future projection for 2015

**Bridge Repair Costs Across Major Cities**  
 Explore the cost of rehabilitation of major infrastructure components in various major US cities.

*With Esri's Bridge Infrastructure Maps app, you can visualize structurally deficient bridges in your city and easily compare bridge repair costs across several cities at once.*