IMPACT PLAYERS

How to Take the Lead, Play Bigger, and Multiply Your Impact

LIZ WISEMAN

MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL

VALUE BUILDING: DO THE JOB THAT'S NEEDED

Impact Players work where they are most needed and get seen as utility players

IMPACT PLAYER	STAKEHOLDER		⩳ IMPACT PLAYER ⩴	
DOES	GETS	DOES	GETS	CAN NOW DO
Operates independently and stays on the agenda	Greater reach and progress on strategic initiatives	Reinvests	Seen as a partner not an employee	Take on bigger projects and leadership roles

IMPACT PLAYER	ORGANIZATION		⩳ IMPACT PLAYER ⩴	
DOES	GETS	DOES	GETS	CAN NOW DO
Responds quickly and flexibly to problems and opportunities	A culture of agility and service	Recognizes and offers opportunity	A reputation as a utility player	Contribute value in a variety of roles across organization

▶ THE PLAYBOOK

This playbook is for anyone who wants to increase the impact of their work and implement the mindsets and practices necessary to DO THE JOB THAT'S NEEDED. It contains Smart Plays—concrete practices and exercises to help you develop the habits of Impact Players. It also includes Safety Tips to help you experiment with new behavior without doing damage to your effectiveness, reputation, or relationships.

ORGANIZATION · LEADER

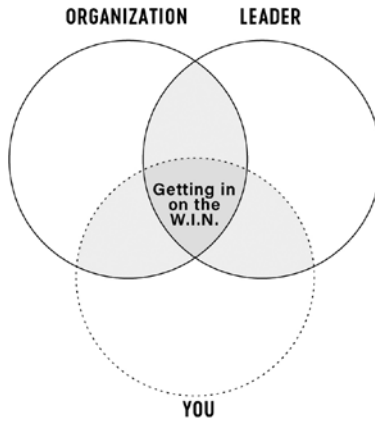What's Important to the ORGANIZATION · **Double W.I.N.** · What's Important to Your LEADERSHIP

1. Identify what's important to your organization:

What are the top-level strategic objects for the year?

What projects receive the most visibility and funding?

What does the most senior executive talk about?

Select the top three. ⟶

2. Identify what's important to your leader(s):

What do they spend time on or talk about?

What are they emotional or passionate about?

How are they measured?

Select the top three. ⟶

3. Identify what's important to both your boss and organization that is urgent right now:

What has momentum?

What would get funded?

What would get your client or boss promoted?

This is the W.I.N.

ORGANIZATION · LEADER

Getting in on the W.I.N.

YOU

What is one of your stakeholder's top 3 priorities to which you can make a material contribution?

How does your work help solve this problem or accomplish this objective?

Smart Plays

1. **Find the double W.I.N.** A quick way to get onto the agenda is to look for a double W.I.N. (What's Important Now)—something important to the organization that's also important to your immediate boss (or stakeholder).

2. **Get in on the W.I.N.** Once you've established a double win, look for an opportunity to contribute where your capabilities overlap with the W.I.N. Maximize your impact by identifying a W.I.N. that is one of your stakeholder's top three priorities.

3. **Talk up the agenda.** Make the connection between your stakeholder's agenda and the work you are doing right now. Let them know that you are the *how* to their *what*. Craft a short statement that captures how your work will help them achieve the priorities on their agenda. For example, "I'm aware that increasing customer retention is our top priority, and I'm creating profiles of our various customer types so we can better understand their requirements." A great statement will communicate two messages: (1) "I get you," meaning "I understand what is important to you," and (2) "I've got you covered," meaning "I am making this happen." Begin your interactions, such as emails, presentations, and one-on-one meetings, with one of these statements so your stakeholders know that what is important to them is important to you.

4. **Practice "the naive yes."** Dealing with messy problems often requires working outside our comfort zone and beyond our current capabilities. Being underqualified can feel intimidating or overwhelming, and it is easy to say no to the added uncertainty and just do your current job. Try practicing "the naive yes" by agreeing to a new challenge before your brain kicks in and tells you it's not possible, or as Richard Branson said, "If somebody offers you an amazing opportunity but you are not sure you can do it, say yes—then learn how to do it later!" Once you've said yes, learn quickly by admitting what you don't know and asking intelligent, informed questions. Project the image of "intelligent learner"—someone with high self-confidence but low situational confidence. This lets your stakeholders know that you are in rookie mode but are capable of learning quickly.

Safety Tips

1. **Take out a permit.** While venturing out to address messy problems, you don't want to be forgotten by others. And if something goes awry, you want people to know where you are and why you left your post. Like a hiker who checks in with the authorities and indicates their destination before venturing into dangerous backcountry alone, you should obtain a permit. Agree with your manager about (1) where you are headed and why and (2) what parts of your core job you need to continue to do well.

2. **Stay connected and drop pins.** A leader's agenda can change as quickly as backcountry weather. When working in the white space between formal organizations, check in frequently with your team and your boss. Once you venture out, occasionally "drop a pin," much like a hiker using a satellite tracker to alert others to their current position. Don't just update others on your work; find out how their priorities are shifting so you can stay on the agenda.

3. **Maintain some distance.** Having empathy for one's leaders and staying aligned with the priorities of the organization are sound practices. However, taken to their extreme, such practices can lead to blind followership and become extremely dangerous. History is replete with examples of faithful followers who failed to question unethical orders and crimes committed by victims who sympathized with their captors. As you serve, be mindful to maintain the psychological distance and independent thought needed to question the wisdom and ethics of any directive. In addition to the other ethics criteria, you might ask yourself: "Will I regret doing this when I'm no longer working for this person or organization?"

Coaching tips for managers: You can find coaching practices to help your team members do the job that's needed in "The Coach's Playbook" at the end of chapter 8.

STEP UP, STEP BACK

THE PLAYBOOK

This playbook contains tips for aspiring leaders to exercise and strengthen the assumptions and habits necessary to STEP UP, THEN STEP BACK.

Smart Plays

1. **Listen for white noise.** Listen for ambient problems—low-grade, persistent problems where the organization can make marked improvements with a little bit of leadership and focus. What is everyone complaining about but not doing anything about? Where are there seemingly small inefficiencies that are repeated and add up to a large waste over time? What problems have staff members become numb to that might be shockingly obvious to a new customer or a newcomer on staff? Do the calculations, create transparency, and build a makeshift team that can fix it once and enjoy the benefits over time.

2. **Fill a vacuum.** Look for situations that lack clear leadership. Don't wait for a transformational moment or a chance to change the course of history; provide leadership in everyday moments, including these two all-too-common leadership vacuums:

   - **Unclear meetings.** It is estimated that 63 percent of meetings have no planned agenda. You can provide much-needed clarity by suggesting the group agree on intended outcomes for the meeting. This

can be done by asking, "What is the most important thing for us to accomplish during this meeting?"

- **Unsung heroes**. Most employees express a need to be recognized by their boss, peers, and clients; however, according to a Glassdoor survey, only two-thirds of employees said that their bosses showed them enough appreciation. You can fill this leadership void by speaking up up to recognize the contributions of your peers or collaborators, especially those who work behind the scenes. Elevating the contributions of others gets them the credit they deserve and engenders the trust you need to lead without authority.

3. **Invite yourself to the party.** To step up and take the lead, sometimes you'll have to invite yourself into the room where things are happening. But don't be a creepy interloper who appears without warning, takes up a seat without contributing, or hijacks the agenda. Rather, let the meeting organizer know why you'd like to be included and what value you offer. Once there, make a meaningful contribution to the agenda at hand and conduct yourself so you are sure to get an invite next time. Last, if you plan to arrive uninvited, be sure you have at least one strong, credible supporter in the room.

4. **Act the part.** An easy step to becoming a leader is to start acting like one right now. As Amy Gallo of *Harvard Business Review* wrote, "If you want to become a leader, don't wait for the fancy title or the corner office. You can begin to act, think, and communicate like a leader long before that promotion." When you act the part, demonstrating the characteristics and attitudes needed to lead, you increase your chances of being cast into the role later. Emulate the positive leadership qualities you see demonstrated by the leaders one and two levels above you. Get started by picking a leadership trait from any of these sources and start practicing it: (1) one of your boss's best leadership qualities (e.g., asking good questions), (2) a positive characteristic of someone who was recently promoted into a managerial role (e.g., innovative thinking), (3) one of your organization's stated leadership or cultural values (e.g., collaboration).

5. **Pass the baton.** To build leadership credibility, show your colleagues that you can follow as well as you lead. Perhaps you've been holding

onto a leadership role too long and should pass the baton to a new leader. Is there a project or initiative that you've successfully led that would benefit from "fresh legs" or "new eyes?" Is there a colleague or team member who is capable of stepping up and leading the work during the next phase? As you make the handoff, don't just transfer the work, transfer authority. Go further by letting the rest of the team know that this person, rather than you, is now in charge. Lastly, quickly find an opportunity to visibly support their leadership.

Safety Tips

1. **Share three things**. To avoid stepping on toes, let your peers and colleagues know that although you are stepping up to lead, you come in peace. Build trust by sharing three essentials: (1) *share your intent:* let people know what you are trying to accomplish and how it will benefit others; (2) *share power:* create opportunities for others to lead pieces of the work, or let them know the leadership role will rotate; (3) *share the spotlight:* make heroes of the people you are leading. When others win, too, people will follow.

2. **Cover your bases**. Though you may not wait for management approval before taking charge of a situation, you do want to keep your management informed. Before chasing after a discretionary project, ensure your boss knows you've got the bases covered on your core job. Check in regularly to let them know what you are working on and how it's going. Additionally, "inviting yourself in" doesn't mean you should surprise a meeting leader with your presence; rather, check with them first and suggest how your attendance can benefit the outcome.

3. **Pick your battles**. In stepping up to lead, avoid overcommitting. As with community volunteerism, overzealousness can dilute one's impact and lead to burnout and disillusionment. Take charge selectively, saving your strength for battles in which momentum and organizational support are on your side. When you choose your causes wisely, you will be viewed as a leader, not a rabble-rouser.

Coaching tips for managers: You can find coaching practices to help your team members *Step Up and Step Back* in "The Coach's Playbook" at the end of chapter 8.

FINISH STRONGER

THE PLAYBOOK

This playbook contains tips for aspiring leaders to exercise and strengthen the assumptions and habits necessary to FINISH STRONGER.

Smart Plays

1. **Draft a Statement of Work (SOW).** It's easier to finish a job well and completely when you've started with a clear remit. But you don't need to wait for your boss or client to provide clear direction; you can define the Statement of Work yourself. Create a shared vision of the work by documenting: (1) *the performance standard:* what a great job looks like; (2) *the finish line:* what a complete job looks like; (3) *the boundaries:* what's not part of the job. Start by capturing what you've already heard, then use your judgment to fill in what's missing. Lastly, review this with stakeholders to add anything they think is missing and to confirm mutual expectations. You might say, "Here is what I think success looks like. Where am I off?" Once you have agreement, you have a clear Statement of Work and can take ownership for its successful completion.

2. **Negotiate the necessities.** Be clear about what you need to be successful, such as information, time, access, guidance, and resources. Be sure to negotiate this support at the outset of the work, before you'll need it. You don't need a formal negotiation, just a mutual

understanding. Try a simple "if/then" statement, such as: "If I am to be able to do [this thing you need from me] then I will need you to do [this thing I'll need to be successful]." By using if/then logic, you accomplish two important objectives: (1) reminding your stakeholder what you stand ready to deliver and (2) making them aware of what you need to deliver successfully.

3. **Reframe obstacles as challenges**. The way we characterize a situation changes how we respond. When we view unexpected obstacles as problems, solutions elude us. After all, problems, by definition, lack solutions. When we reframe obstacles as challenges, we engage our mental faculties and become energized for the contest. To reframe obstacles as challenges, start by assuming every workday or project (or boss!) will be full of obstacles, so you aren't surprised when they surface. And when they do, reframe them as (1) an intellectual puzzle begging for a solution, (2) a character test requiring patience or humility, or (3) a physical challenge requiring pacing and endurance.

4. **Add a surprise**. When you complete a project or another piece of work, do something a little extra, above and beyond the original request or remit. Doing something extra doesn't need to involve a Herculean effort. It could be as simple as highlighting the key points when you forward a report to your manager. The best surprises will be (1) something unexpected, (2) something that supports their agenda (see chapter 2), and (3) something that doesn't distract you from other mission-critical work. Ask yourself: What's a small extra they aren't expecting but would be delighted by?

Safety Tips

1. **Know when to let go**. If you suspect you are working on yesterday's priorities, engaged in an unwinnable battle, or headed for a Pyrrhic victory, ask yourself: (1) Is this still relevant, given changes in the larger environment or market? (2) Is this still important to the organization and my leadership? Is this on the agenda (see chapter 2)? (3) Is this something we can still be successful at, even if we finish strong? If the answers are no, it might be time to let it go. But don't abandon the work without getting clearance from your leader(s) or stakehold-

ers, and be sure to let them know what you will do instead to stay on the agenda—or let them direct you as you pivot to a higher-priority project.

2. **Vent with intent.** It's perfectly reasonable to want to share your frustrations with your manager. And it's healthy for managers to acknowledge the challenges their team members face. But there's a proper way to whinge and moan: keep it infrequent, brief, and focused. If you need to let off some steam, vent a little, but don't release ownership. Let your leaders know what actions you are already taking and be clear whether you are looking for sympathy or solutions.

Coaching tips for managers: You can find coaching practices to help your team members finish stronger in "The Coach's Playbook" at the end of chapter 8.

Chapter 5

ASK AND ADJUST

THE PLAYBOOK

This playbook contains tips for aspiring leaders to exercise and strengthen the assumptions and habits necessary to ASK AND ADJUST.
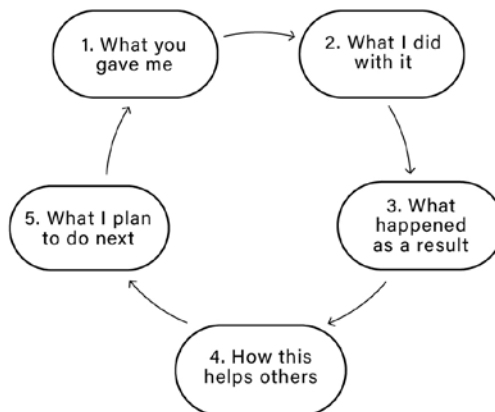
Smart Plays

1. **Ask for guidance, not feedback.** Because feedback is associated with evaluation rather than improvement, people tend to get better feedback in both quantity and quality when they ask for advice or guidance rather than feedback. Instead of asking people for feedback on your performance, ask for information and insights that will help you do the task well. Use questions such as: "If I want to do *X* really well, what advice do you have for me?" "What insights do you have that would help me do a better job next time I do *X*?" "What should I do more of?" "What should I do less of?" "If I did just one thing differently next time, what would you suggest?"

2. **Walk it off.** Even for the most confident learners, feedback can still hurt and inflict injury on our ego. Much like an athlete, we can shake off the sting of a minor injury by walking it off. The following tactics can help you create some space between receiving and responding to feedback and will help prevent overreaction.

   - **Take a reset walk.** Literally, walk it off and clear your head.

- **Talk it out.** Talk through what you hear with a friend or colleague before responding.
- **Assume positive intent.** Consider the best intentions of the person giving you feedback. Assume that they are on your side and are helping you improve your work.
- **Regroup.** Ask for time to process the guidance you've received and come back with a plan. Be sure to show appreciation for the feedback.
- **Be authentic.** Admit that your initial reaction is to feel defensive. Let them know that you intend to understand and act on their insight and will process it as soon as your amygdala calms down and you can lower your defenses.

3. **Circle back.** Don't leave people wondering what you did with the feedback or guidance that they gave you. Show its full effect and give an account of what you've done with their investment in you. You can close the loop by saying: (1) This is the guidance you gave me, (2) This is how I acted upon it, (3) This is what ensued, (4) This is how this experience benefited me and others, and (5) This is what I plan to do next.

When you close the loop, others can see how their investment in you yielded success and continues to accrue benefits for you and others, and they'll be more likely to make further investments in you.

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1. What you        2. What I did
   gave me            with it

5. What I plan     3. What
   to do next         happened
                      as a result

        4. How this
        helps others
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Safety Tips

1. **Help others speak up.** People at all levels can feel uncomfortable offering someone else corrective guidance. Try making it safe for others in these ways.

   - **Invite.** Let them know that to hit the mark, you need to know where you might be missing the mark.
   - **React.** Don't get defensive, don't make excuses, don't retaliate. Just listen and ask clarifying questions.
   - **Respond.** Thank people for their insight and let them know how it will help you hit the mark.

2. **Publicize your progress.** For starters, let people know what you've done as a result of their individual feedback. Take it further by making your general learning a matter of public record. Let your colleagues know (1) what you are hearing from internal or external customers, (2) what insights you've gleaned, and (3) what adjustments you are making based on those insights.

Coaching tips for managers: You can find coaching practices to help your team members ask and adjust in "The Coach's Playbook" at the end of chapter 8.

MAKE WORK LIGHT

VALUE BUILDING: MAKE WORK LIGHT

Impact Players make hard work easier and get seen as leaders and no-nonsense players

IMPACT PLAYER	STAKEHOLDER		≷ IMPACT PLAYER ≷	
DOES	GETS	DOES	GETS	CAN NOW DO
Is easy to work with and helps others	A time rebate, allowing them to lead rather than manage	Reinvests in Impact Player	Treated like a deputy and gains leadership experience	Step into leadership roles with ease

IMPACT PLAYER	ORGANIZATION		≷ IMPACT PLAYER ≷	
DOES	GETS	DOES	GETS	CAN NOW DO
Creates a low politics, high productivity environment	A culture of collaboration and inclusion	Recognizes contribution and offers opportunity	A reputation as a no-nonsense player others want to work with	Be included in important initiatives

THE PLAYBOOK

This playbook contains tips for aspiring leaders to exercise and strengthen the assumptions and habits necessary to MAKE WORK LIGHT.

Smart Plays

1. **Get to the point.** People who are easy to work with are usually easy to understand. They get to the point and express their ideas clearly. If you want to sharpen your point, try any of these techniques:

   - Write your point out as if it were a 140-character tweet.
   - Add an executive summary to your written reports or oral briefings. This could be a paragraph with the key points or just a single sentence with the conclusion. When delivering your report, start with the executive summary and then add detail as needed.
   - When forwarding a long email chain to a leader (or any other colleague), provide a summary of the idea exchange included in the email chain. Then add your question or request.
   - Score a three-pointer by summarizing your thoughts (or a larger conversation) in three clear points.

2. **Play your chips wisely.** Before an important meeting, give yourself a budget of "poker chips," where each chip represents a comment or contribution to the meeting and is worth a specific number of seconds of talking time. Use your chips sparingly, weighing in when you have an insight that is:

   - **Relevant.** Is this issue immediately relevant to your boss or stakeholder? If it isn't on the specific agenda for the meeting, is it something that is on their broader agenda (one of their top three priorities)?
   - **Evidence based.** Is the insight based on data or other evidence? Are you presenting a balanced point of view with data that also tells the other side of the story?
   - **Unique.** Is your point additive to what has already been said, or is it just restating a point that has already been made? Do the ideas or insights reflect your unique role, perspective, or skills?
   - **Succinct.** Is your point concise and clear? Some people may need to play their chips more sparingly, while others may need to dispense their ideas more liberally. Either way, a chip—whether a physical chip in your pocket or an image held in your mind—serves as a talisman, reminding you to contribute intentionally and valuably.

3. **Discover your native genius.** If you aren't clear about what

your native genius is, you can get a rapid 360-degree perspective by sending an email or text to six friends or colleagues. Make it easy for them to respond by using this template:

Hi. I would appreciate your input. I'm trying to better understand how I can use my "native genius" at work, meaning what I do naturally, easily, and freely. From your perspective, what do you see as my natural genius? If you need a prompt, here are a few questions to get you thinking:

- What do I do better than anything else I do?
- What do I do without effort?
- What do I do without being asked?
- What do I tend to do better than people around me?

Thank you. Your input will help me understand how to contribute at my fullest.

4. **Create a User's Guide to You.** If you feel as though you are being used like a hammer when you're actually a Swiss Army knife, you might need to let your team know how best to use you. Create a User's Guide to You that includes: (1) Native genius: What does your mind do easily and freely? (2) Uses: What are various ways your native genius could be applied at work? (3) Instructions and care: What type of information, feedback, and support do you need from others to do your best work? (4) Warnings: Where do you tend to get stuck or derailed, and how can people help you stay on track?

Safety Tips

1. **Communicate your native genius.** When communicating your native genius, remember to:

   - **Clarify your intent.** Explain what is meant by "native genius"—it's people's natural brilliance or gift, what they do easily and freely and extremely well. Let people know that you really enjoy and excel at

work that draws on your native genius and that you are eager to use it to contribute in more significant ways.

- **Don't be a prima donna.** Don't demand to work only within your native genius. Just because you have identified your native genius, doesn't mean that you shouldn't have to work in areas that you aren't naturally good at or particularly interested in.
- **Give it time.** When asking someone to consider additional ways to utilize your native genius, give them time to think. Try to break up the conversation into several steps: (1) share your intent, (2) discuss your native genius, (3) discuss new applications for your talents.
- **Make it a two-way street.** In addition to discussing your native genius, take the opportunity to recognize and be interested in the native genius of others on your team, including your boss.

2. **Prevent overexposure.** Most everybody wants to be treated as a whole person, not just an employee; however, everyone has a different comfort level with mingling work and personal life. If you are someone who is comfortable talking about your personal life, use these safety measures: (1) share only what you would be willing to share publicly, (2) share but never inquire (this allows others to reciprocate voluntarily), (3) continue only if your sharing is appreciated and reciprocated. If a colleague doesn't reciprocate, it might be a sign of an unwelcome gift.

3. **Ensure your help is helpful.** You don't want to be the party guest who arrives early and offers to help with last-minute preparations but requires so much instruction, attention, and validation that you become an encumbrance or nuisance. Try these three tips to ensure your offers to help are a blessing, not a burden: (1) Instead of asking, "What can I do to help?" ask, "Would it be helpful if I did [this thing] for you?" (2) Instead of asking, "How do you want me to do it?" ask, "Are there any specific requirements I should know about, or should I just use my judgment?" (3) Let the person know what you did and to tell you if they want you to do it differently.

Coaching tips for managers: You can find coaching practices to help your team members make work light in "The Coach's Playbook" at the end of chapter 8.

Chapter 8

BUILD A HIGH-IMPACT TEAM

THE COACH'S PLAYBOOK

This playbook outlines a set of coaching practices to help your team develop the assumptions and habits of Impact Players. The first section is organized by the five practices of Impact Players. It also offers tips for leading inclusively and maximizing the contribution and impact of your entire team, including teams working remotely.

Practice 1: Do the Job That's Needed

Elevate the job. Job crafting is a technique that encourages employees to shape their own roles, but it can also be used to help employees reframe their work and connect their actions to a higher purpose. You can help people on your team develop a Service Mindset by asking:

- Who benefits from your work?
- How would their lives or work suffer if your work wasn't done?
- In what way do they benefit? How does this benefit our larger community?

You can find additional resources in the work of Amy Wrzesniewski or Tom Rath's book *Life's Great Question*.

Elevate a value. Identify one of your leadership values or one of the organization's cultural values that is particularly important to you, such as transparency, and elevate it to the status of sacred value—something you'd go to war

over. Let people know why it's important to you and the business (e.g., "We need the brutal facts to make sound decisions").

Provide context. Remind people how the current work or conversation fits into a larger objective. Explain what you're doing now and why it matters. Think of this as the equivalent of providing a "You are here" marker on a trail map.

Share the agenda. Instead of telling people what to do, describe the most important outcomes. Describe (1) what success looks like, (2) what a completed job looks like, and (3) what is off limits.

Spot opportunities. Knowing what's theoretically important is like being able to identify a bird species in a field guide—impressive but not useful. Help people spot important opportunities the way a master birder teaches others to spot a species in the wild, when it's in motion and out of clear view. Call out W.I.N.s in real time and help people see what's important now.

Issue permit. Give people the confidence they need to venture beyond their formal job boundaries by giving them formal permission. This permission can operate like a permit given to a hiker, who checks in with the authorities and registers their destination before venturing into dangerous backcountry alone. Agree on (1) where they are headed and (2) what parts of their core job they need to continue to do well. You can also help people step up and take a leadership role by letting them know a particular issue would benefit from their unique capabilities or perspective—that it has their name "written all over it."

Practice 2: Step Up, then Step Back

Focus on what's in their control. To help people reinforce the belief that they have the power to improve a situation, help them see what they do have control or influence over. When facing frustrating or challenging situations, ask coaching questions such as:

- What can you control in this situation?
- What is beyond your control?
- Where do you lack full control but might have influence?

- What is the best way to influence the situation?

Additionally, managers can help model this mindset during staff meetings, ensuring that team conversations focus on problem solving within the team's sphere of influence and don't devolve into blame-and-complain sessions.

Exercise choice. Encourage a spirit of volunteerism and stewardship on your team by allowing staff members to sign up to work on projects led by others, rather than being assigned to or even chosen for those projects. Exercising their ability to choose where they can contribute best will strengthen their willingness to lead and enlist the support of others.

Deputize your team. I was once a passenger on a very small aircraft flying between two remote islands in Central America. Before takeoff, the sole pilot turned to the four passengers behind him, gave the obligatory safety briefing, and then matter-of-factly announced, "If you see anything unusual or alarming during the flight, please let me know." We laughed, but when he didn't, we realized we had been deputized as copilots. We stayed alert. Likewise, you can deputize your team and let them know to watch for problems, be ready to take charge, and perhaps even make a citizen's arrest as needed.

Expand your guest list. When Alan Mulally was the CEO at Ford Motor Company and leading a massive transformation at the then-troubled automaker, he asked each senior executive to include a more junior manager or employee as a guest during key executive meetings. Having onlookers present encouraged full transparency and good leadership behavior on the executive team. It also created more leaders across the company who understood the business agenda. Try expanding your guest list by including lower-level contributors in key discussions. Though they may be silent observers during the meeting, the perspectives they gain will help them later operate like leaders, not bystanders.

Offer immunity to initiators. When people take initiative, they are bound to make mistakes, break some minor rules, or simply do things differently than you would. Responding with correction may improve their work, but it will likely reduce their initiative next time. You can prioritize progress over perfec-

tion by overlooking minor infractions for those taking charge and moving in the right direction.

Practice 3: Finish Stronger

Recall past moments of resiliency. Research has shown that having experience with obstacles (whether in childhood, personal life, or the workplace) helps an individual become more resilient in the future. You can help people deal effectively with new challenges by having them remember those experiences and reflect on how their past approaches apply to their current challenges. Ask questions such as these to build mental muscle memory:

- What similar challenges have you faced in the past?
- What did you do that helped you overcome those challenges?
- Which of those strategies or tactics could help you resolve this current challenge?

Reframe obstacles as challenges. Use an exercise from the Stoics called "Turning the Obstacle Upside Down." Ask an individual to identify every "bad" aspect of a challenge. Then ask them to turn those upside down so each bad aspect can become a new source of good, specifically a source of personal growth. For example, an unreasonable client is an opportunity to learn scope control.

Define the W.I.N. Instead of giving people detailed instructions for their job, make sure they know the fundamental job to be done. When you delegate, provide clarity by articulating "the three whats" of a successful operation. These are: (1) *the performance standard:* what a great job looks like; (2) *the finish line:* what a complete job looks like; and (3) *the boundaries:* what's not part of the job.

Focus on the finish line. According to Heidi Grant, "Great managers create great finishers by reminding their employees to keep their eyes on the prize and are careful to avoid giving effusive praise or rewards for hitting milestones along the way." Encouragement is important, but to keep your team motivated, save the accolades for a job well—and completely—done. Ap-

plaud milestones, but focus on what's left to be done rather than how much has already been done.

Get out of the way. When people are struggling to cross the finish line, managers tend to intervene by adding extra force to help people push past the obstacles. However, there may be an easier way. As organizational psychologist Kurt Lewin suggested, greater gains can often be made by reducing the restraining forces. And, often what most holds people back is too much management intervention—too much direction, too much input, and too much feedback. Instead of helping people drive forward, try simply getting out of their way. You might find people move faster and can go further without excessive management.

Practice 4: Ask and Adjust

Build trust. When the leader expresses trust in team members, it bolsters the their self-confidence, increases their ability to learn and adapt, and opens a pathway for reciprocal feedback. Find ways to express each of these forms of trust, not only through your words but also through the responsibilities you entrust to each individual.

- I believe you—I trust your integrity.
- I believe in you—I trust in your abilities and your capacity to learn.
- I believe you have my best interests in mind—I trust your intentions.
- I believe you can handle this—I believe you can learn and adapt.

Give feedback. Providing rich feedback is an essential part of a leader's job. To make it easier for people to receive feedback, treat it as helpful information people need to do their jobs well rather than a personal performance appraisal conveying either criticism or praise. As Kim Scott argues in her book *Radical Candor*, you may give difficult feedback if the person you're giving feedback to knows that you care personally for them. Be direct, because the best feedback is radically candid. Use these tips from *Radical Candor* to provide direct, helpful feedback:

- Be clear about how you intend to help and state your intention to be helpful.
- Be precise about what is needed and what doesn't work.
- Build a trusting relationship by establishing a consistent pattern of action in good faith and by spending a little time alone with each of your direct reports on a regular basis.
- Solicit criticism and give praise before giving criticism.
- The way you ask for criticism and treat it when you get it goes a long way toward building trust—or destroying it.

Rebuild confidence. Confidence, once lost, can be difficult to regain. Several years ago my mother and I were working on a project together. At one particularly difficult point in the process, her confidence was shaken and she became reluctant to make decisions. Of course, I knew she was extraordinarily capable and could handle these challenges, so I called her to set her straight. I affirmed my belief in her and her ability to be successful. She appreciated my effort but said, "You can't give me confidence. Only I can give myself confidence." It's true; we can't gift other people confidence. However, we can create conditions that allow people to rebuild their own confidence. You can reestablish a pattern of success by rescoping the work to create a series of wins:

1. Start with smaller blocks of concrete work that provide easy wins.

2. Celebrate these victories, but don't overdo it.

3. Add a layer of more challenging blocks.

4. Keep expanding the scope and complexity of the work until the individual's confidence matches the size and complexity of the work that lies ahead.

Practice 5: Make Work Light

Invite others in. We can use our influence or relative privilege to make it easier for others to feel like they belong; in fact, it may be our very uniqueness that breaks through a stereotype and opens a pathway for others to belong as well. According to an article in *Harvard Business Review*, leaders and col-

leagues who serve as fair-minded allies not only increase inclusion for others but also buffer them from the exclusionary behavior of others. Leaders can help each team member see that they matter to a group by discussing each person's native genius as a team. Focus on one team member at a time, inviting others to describe what they see as the person's natural brilliance.

Celebrate the assist. If you want team members to actively help one another, make heroes of the people who provide "the assist." In athletics, an assist is a contribution by a player that helps score a goal (and is recorded in the official statistics). So don't just recognize the individuals who score goals (e.g., make big sales or release new products), recognize those who set them up for success.

Don't tolerate difficult behavior. "The culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate," wrote Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker. As a leader, if you tolerate high-maintenance behavior, you will breed it across a team. If you want a low-maintenance team, define what it means to be easy to work with, then reject and redirect high-maintenance behavior. Instead of indulging people as they complain about their colleagues, ask them to resolve the issues directly with the other party. If someone sends you a long, rambling email, ask them to resend a brief one. If someone is making long-winded presentations, ask them to begin with their key points and then provide detail only as requested. If someone is dominating meetings, ask them to play fewer chips in order to give their colleagues an opportunity to play their chips too.

Multiplier Leadership Practices

A number of the leadership practices in *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter* will help you develop the Impact Player mindset on your team and create an environment where everyone contributes at their best. See appendix E in *Multipliers*, revised and updated edition, for additional guidance.

1. **Give 51 percent of the vote.** To encourage someone to take full ownership, put them in charge by giving them majority vote on a particular project or issue.

2. **Give it back.** When someone brings you a problem that they are capable of solving, play the role of coach rather than problem solver. And if someone legitimately needs help, jump in and contribute, but then make sure you clearly give the ownership back.

3. **Talk up your mistakes.** When you let people know the mistakes you have made and what you have learned from them, it makes it safer for them to acknowledge and learn from their own mistakes.

4. **Make space for mistakes.** Create a safe space where people can experiment by clarifying the areas of work where there is room to take risks versus the areas where the stakes are too high to allow failure.

5. **Identify native genius.** To get your team members' best, identify their native genius—what they do easily and freely. Discuss it with them, and identify ways it can be better utilized on the most important work.

APPENDIX A:
BUILDING UPWARD CREDIBILITY

We asked 170 leaders (from first-line managers to senior executives) what their team members did that most frustrated them and eroded value. These are nearly guaranteed to be credibility killers and are listed below:

CREDIBILITY KILLERS

Aka Fifteen Surefire Ways to Alienate Your Boss

1. Give your boss problems without solutions.
2. Wait for your boss to tell you what to do.
3. Make your boss chase you down and remind you what to do.
4. Don't worry about the big picture; just do your piece.
5. Ask your boss about your next promotion or raise.
6. Send long, meandering emails.
7. Bad-mouth your colleagues, create drama, and stir up conflict.
8. Surprise your boss . . . with bad news . . . at the last minute . . . when nothing can be done.
9. Ask to revisit decisions that have already been made.
10. Leave out inconvenient facts and the other side of a story.
11. Blame others for your own mistakes.
12. Agree to your boss's face but disagree behind his or her back.
13. Tell your boss that something is not your job.
14. Listen to your boss's feedback, then ignore it.
15. Show up late to meetings, multitask, interrupt others.

CREDIBILITY BUILDERS

Aka Fifteen Ways to Earn Trust

IMPACT PRACTICES	Do the Job That's Needed	Step Up, Step Back	Finish Stronger	Ask and Adjust	Make Work Light
1. Doing things without being asked		✓			
2. Anticipating problems and having a plan to solve them	✓				
3. Helping your teammates					✓
4. Doing a little extra		✓			
5. Being curious and asking good questions				✓	
6. Asking for feedback				✓	
7. Admitting your mistakes and fixing them fast				✓	
8. Bringing good energy, having fun, making others laugh					✓
9. Figuring out what to do for yourself	✓				
10. Finishing a job without having to be reminded to do so		✓			
11. Cooperating with your boss				✓	
12. Being willing to change and take smart risks			✓		
13. Getting to the point and telling it to your boss straight				✓	
14. Doing your homework and coming prepared				✓	
15. Making your boss and the team look good				✓	

APPENDIX B:
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

Q: I'd like to have more impact in my work, but this is all a little overwhelming. Where do I start?

Like any professional development effort, you should begin by knowing where you currently stand. The assessment available at ImpactPlayersQuiz.com can help you understand if you are making the impact you'd like and pinpoint where you may need to take action to increase your influence and impact. But don't stop with a self-assessment—start a conversation with your stakeholders to get their perspective and guidance. Use the Impact Player framework to discuss which mindsets and practices are your current strengths and which need purposeful strengthening.

Additionally, your efforts will likely have the greatest effect as you focus on the mindsets and behaviors that are the most learnable. According to the top coaches we surveyed, these include:

MOST LEARNABLE MINDSETS	MOST LEARNABLE BEHAVIORS
Growth: I can develop ability through effort.	**Seek feedback:** Seek feedback, correction, and contrary views
Belonging: I am an important part of a team.	**Offer help:** Offer help and support to colleagues and leaders
Proactivity: I can improve the situation.	**Influence others:** Get others involved through influence rather than authority
Resilience: I can overcome adversity.	**See the big picture:** Understand the big picture instead of just doing my piece.

Focusing on these mindsets and behaviors will help you generate quick wins and build momentum, but you will achieve the most sustained improvement by working on the master skills at the foundation of the Impact Player Mindset. You may want to revisit "Master the Underlying Beliefs and Behaviors" on page 207.

If you are still wondering where to start, try a simple two-part vision exercise. When things are most chaotic or frustrating, look for two things: (1) the other party's perspective (e.g., your manager's, your client's, your collaborator's) and (2) the opportunity to add value, which is clearer once you see your stakeholder's perspective.

Q: How many of these practices do I need to embody to be considered an Impact Player?

The high-impact contributors in our study typically had three or four of the Impact Player practices at which they really shone (on average 3.17 out of 5), according to their managers, but they lacked major deficiencies in any of the five practices. Though you do not need to follow all five of the practices, one significant problem area can quickly erode a lot of other value. Despite being strong in several of the five Impact Player practices, you can quickly descend to under-contributor status by being bad at just one. For example, consider those who are stellar leaders, finishers, and learners but are high maintenance and difficult to work with. People will likely avoid working with them, and they will soon find themselves on the periphery of the most important work. Their strengths will be underutilized and grow cold in the shadow of their weakness.

The message in the data is congruent with a principle we see in leadership skills as well: you don't need to be stellar at everything, but you can't stink at any one thing. You are more likely to earn a reputation as an Impact Player if you (1) build a strong core by getting good at three of the Impact Player practices; (2) develop one practice into a towering, visible strength—something you become known for; and (3) eliminate any signs of under-contributor behavior. Neutralizing a weakness and building just one towering strength will help you tip the scale. But be-

fore you jump in, you might want to assess your current standing using the assessment tool we've created, which you can find at ImpactPlayersQuiz.com. This assessment will help you pinpoint your strength as an Impact Player and spot the decoys that might be keeping you from contributing at your fullest.

Q: Can the Impact Player Mindset be developed, or are some people just born with it?

You've likely heard someone ask, "Are leaders born or made?" The same question could be asked of high-impact contributors. Were they born with these characteristics? Did they absorb these lessons at home as they observed their mother or father at work? Or were these practices acquired in the workplace, taught by mentors, or learned in the school of hard knocks?

Certainly, some had a head start. For example, Zack Kaplan watched his mother start as a receptionist, learn fast, step up, take responsibility, and eventually become the CEO of her company. However, Zack was shy and reserved all through high school. Being proactive and taking the lead was something he learned to do in the workplace. When Fiona Su began her career, tenacity and strength came naturally, but developing empathy and learning to see through the eyes of her colleagues came after she received some tough feedback that she was smart but "a bull in a china shop." Parth Vaishnav, the software engineer who was called in to resolve a complex, cross-product bug, began his career focused on his own work. He began really considering the broader impact of his work only after he was blasted with some harsh feedback (and choice swear words) from the product architect after he uploaded code and broke a larger code set.

Yes, some people have an early advantage. They may have had the right role models, mentors, and managers or a conducive environment, but it is never too late to start. Be sure to set yourself up for success by starting with the mindsets and behaviors that are most learnable (see the first question: "Where do I start?")

Q: Can the Impact Player Mindset lead to workaholism or burnout?

There was a strong work ethic among the high-impact contributors in our study, but it wasn't workaholism, the compulsive need to work incessantly. Each Impact Player profiled in this book has found their own work/life equilibrium. Some work much more than their peers, while others work no more hours than their colleagues. All the Impact Players we studied, however, work more *intensely* and *intently* than others. They work intensely in that, while at work, they work wholeheartedly and energetically. They work intently in that they put great thought into their approach to their work.

There is a danger that some people may interpret the Impact Player Mindset as a justification for working harder or longer or asking others to do the same, which will likely lead to burnout. However, you don't necessarily need to work harder to increase your impact. In fact, the opposite may be true: people who have impact and influence tend to want to work harder because their work is fulfilling.

If you want to contribute at your fullest, don't just work harder; rather, strive to do work that is more valuable, be more influential, and maximize your impact. If you have a strict limit on the amount of time you can spend working, work as diligently as possible during that time. When you combine these two approaches, you will avoid burning out because your work will give you energy, not sap it.

Q: What if the Impact Player Mindset isn't valued in my company or by my management?

Every organization has a unique culture and set of values. Part of being impactful is discovering what is valued inside your organization, by your stakeholders, and by the leaders to whom you are accountable. Use the Find the Double W.I.N. and Get In on the W.I.N. Smart Plays on page 59. If the practices in this book aren't valued by your manager, find out what is. Ask: What's important to you? What are the dos and don'ts of working with you? Remember that when you work on the agenda that's valued inside your organization and in the way that creates greatest value for your leaders, you earn respect and increase your

influence—which affords you the latitude to bring *your* values to the equation.

If you are able to create a situation that jives with your values, stay and help shape an environment where others can thrive, too. If not—or if you have a boss with questionable values—leave if you can.

But don't just look for the right company or role; shop for a boss who values impact over activity. If you are unable to make a change, check out the strategies in chapter 8, "Dealing with Diminishers," in my book *Multipliers: How the Best Leaders Make Everyone Smarter*, revised and updated edition. Whatever you do, don't stay physically but quit mentally.

Q: I want to share the Impact Player framework with my team. How should I do it?

Most managers will want to share the ideals and insights from this book with the teams they lead. However, if you do, take an approach that favors dialogue over dissemination. Broadcasting the ideas over email en masse without inviting dialogue is a surefire way to cause resentment and rejection. For example, one CEO of a start-up company read an early copy of this book and sent an enthusiastic companywide email announcing five practices for being successful at the company. The employees didn't understand what had precipitated the email, and those who had been working the hardest felt unappreciated, not praised. Similarly, using the framework to label others will also shut down learning.

If you want to create interest and sustained impact, share the ideas rather than inflict them upon someone. Start a conversation, perhaps with a book discussion in your team. Talk about the Impact Player Mindset as a mode of thinking that we tend to move into and out of rather than as a classification of individuals. Be introspective, considering the ways in which you personally are striving to be an Impact Player but falling short. Discuss the decoys that seem productive but actually reduce impact. Talk about the framework as a set of habits that will require constant attention for people to shift, but be aware that

some individuals will be frustrated because they lack the sense of agency and control needed for the ideas to feel within reach. Most important, remember that these discussions will have their greatest impact when, as leaders, you are as committed to your own self-reflection and awareness as you are to the development and improvement of your team. For suggested discussion topics and additional guidance, check out Impact-PlayersBook.com.

In addition to discussing these ideas as a team, you can use the framework to set the right expectations and give people permission to deviate from more traditional ways of working. Look for inflection points when people are getting started, for example, new-hire induction, project kickoffs, or transfers between departments. Additionally, these practices can be incorporated into hiring criteria, leadership models, talent development programs, and inclusion strategies.

Q: Are Impact Players similar to classic superstars (for example, a programmer who is considered to be a "10× developer" or a salesperson who's called an "elephant hunter")?

These distinctions refer to people who are extremely talented and whose productivity is much higher than that of their peers. Such players can be extraordinarily valuable but for different reasons than Impact Players are. These superstars can also come at a cost because, although they deliver results, they can be extremely difficult to work with, resistant to feedback, and even dysfunctional to team play. Yet organizations are often willing to deal with them because they are so good at what they do, which is often the same reason why diminishing managers are tolerated at even many of the most respected organizations.

Though this type of contributor certainly exists and provides value, it is important to note that the vast majority (if not all) of the individuals described in our interviews with managers did not fit this profile. They were not prima donnas or lone wolves. They were talented, influential contributors who also knew how to play on a team. They typically made the entire team better as well.

There is a difference between a team of all-stars and a champion

team, and there is a growing body of research that shows that a team that works well together can triumph over a collection of talented individuals. For example, Dave Ulrich, a leading HR thought leader, wrote, "Our research (The RBL Group and University of Michigan) found that the capabilities of an organization have four times the impact on business results than [*sic*] the competence of individuals. For example, teams with individuals who work well together as a team will outperform a team of individual all-stars that don't work well together."

Being a solitary superstar may be a pathway for success for the über talented and can be an effective approach in a number of settings, but the Impact Player profile builds collective strength and provides a playbook for the rest of us.

Q: Is an Impact Player the same as a high performer?

No. Our study was not a comparison of high and low performers; it was a study of people doing high-value, high-impact work as compared to equally smart, capable people who were contributing in less valuable, less impactful ways. There are many people who are performing their jobs well but may not be having a significant impact. Likewise, the concept of under-contribution is different from that of low performance. There are many reasons someone may be performing at low levels—it may be a function of low ability, low effort, or any number of extenuating circumstances (both systemic and individual) may interfere with someone's ability to work in productive ways. In summary, we were not trying to understand why people perform poorly but rather wanted to understand the reasons smart, capable people contribute below their ability level.

Q: Why did you focus only on the difference between Impact Players and Contributors? What about the under-contributors you studied?

Our study looked at three levels of contribution: (1) *high-impact contributors:* those doing work of exceptional value and impact; (2) *typical contributors:* the vast majority of people, who are doing solid (if not great) work; and (3) *under-contributors:* smart, talented people play-

ing below their capability level. In this book, I chose to focus on the differences between the top two categories because I believe that understanding the differences between good and truly great will provide the greatest benefit to the largest number of people. Further, the mindsets that lead to under-contribution are often complex and may call for deeper psychotherapeutic treatment.

Though this book focuses on the difference between high-impact and typical contributors, the research did show clear patterns of beliefs and behaviors for the individuals identified as under-contributing. A summary of the assumptions and practices of all three mindsets—Impact Player, Contributor, and under-contributor—can be found at ImpactPlayersBook.com.

WANT TO TAKE THE LEAD AND MULTIPLY YOUR
IMPACT?

Start by taking the Impact Players Quiz!

≥ **ImpactPlayersQuiz.com** ≤

This quiz will help you will discover where you currently stand and pinpoint actions that can increase your influence and impact.

Find additional resources for you and your team at:

ImpactPlayersBook.com

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